

February 21st, 2025

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend a meeting of the

Mid and East Antrim Neighbourhoods and Communities Committee

to be held on **Tuesday, 25th February 2025 at 6:30 pm** in **Council Chamber, The Braid,
1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena** and via remote access.

Yours sincerely



Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Agenda

1 NOTICE OF MEETING

2 APOLOGIES

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members and Officers are invited to declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, including gifts and hospitality, they may have in respect of items on this Agenda.

4 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION

4.1 Presentation from NI Ambulance Service on Defibs - circulated

[!\[\]\(de95854c7ee024cfadc48187bbb781b2_img.jpg\) *NIAS Presentation to N&C Committee February 25.pdf*](#)

Page 1

4.2 Letter from DfI – Proposed APB, No. 6 Burleigh Walk, Carrickfergus - circulated

[!\[\]\(c50c8b7b2cc2cf9ff925edec0ee94c0d_img.jpg\) *Letter to MEABC 6 Burleigh Walk Carrick.pdf*](#)

Page 14

[!\[\]\(9c2e8d1b5bd77cb5c9f83b7a9cff79fd_img.jpg\) *APB Burleigh Walk.pdf*](#)

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4.3 Letter from DfI – Revoking APB 17 Station Road, Larne - circulated

[!\[\]\(f1c5da15572e3e09d343161be98f508d_img.jpg\) *M&EABC Revoking the existing legislation 17 Station Road Larne.pdf*](#)

Page 16

[!\[\]\(eabd9f9ababee93effadc3b380fe65fd_img.jpg\) *Station Road Larne.pdf*](#)

Page 18

4.4 Overview of Community Planning Structures - circulated

[!\[\]\(291e070cef6c4d5e78fefe4696ef53be_img.jpg\) *Overview of Community Planning Structures.pdf*](#)

Page 19

[!\[\]\(f507db636256ac11a5525ef93ec6b8d7_img.jpg\) *Appendix 1 Putting People First 2022 Update.pdf*](#)

Page 26

[!\[\]\(066cb4a00c9d9f40edb6f87372ec6f08_img.jpg\) *Appendix 2 Review of Community Plan - EOS Community Consulting.pdf*](#)

Page 42

[!\[\]\(b9742ff0bb3da904abeeee81c2bcb456_img.jpg\) *Appendix 3 Membership of Strategic Alliance.pdf*](#)


Page 53


4.5 Good Relations Action Plan 2025/26 - circulated

[!\[\]\(1adebd97b172010e8ebc985144647a7c_img.jpg\) *Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026.pdf*](#)

Page 55

 *Appendix 1 Commissioning Letter.pdf* *Page 58*

 *Appendix 2 Draft Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026.pdf* *Page 66*

 *Appendix 3 Good Relations Audit and Strategy 2022 2025.pdf* *Page 103*

4.6 Active Travel Consultation Response - circulated

 *Active Travel Consultation Response.pdf* *Page 129*

 *Appendix 1 - DfI MEABC Priority Routes.pdf* *Page 133*

4.7 Fuel Poverty Strategy Consultation - circulated

 *Consultation Response to Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy.pdf* *Page 139*

 *Appendix 1 Fuel Poverty Strategy Stakeholder Engagement Report Dec 2024.pdf* *Page 142*

 *Appendix 2 Consultation on a Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy Dec 2024.pdf* *Page 183*

 *Appendix 3 Mid and East Antrim Draft Response to Fuel Poverty Strategy.pdf* *Page 248*

4.8 Public Health Agency Corporate Plan Consultation - circulated

 *PHA Corporate Plan Consultation.pdf* *Page 277*

 *Appendix 1 Consultation for the Draft Strategy.pdf* *Page 280*

 *Appendix 2 MEA Consultation Response.pdf* *Page 305*

4.9 Ban on XL Bully Type Dogs Update 4 - circulated

 *Ban on XL Bully Type Dogs Update.pdf* *Page 329*

 *Appendix 1 - DAERA Letter to NILGA dated 12 December 2024 .pdf* *Page 332*

 *Appendix 2 - DAERA letter to NIDAG dated 13 December 2024.pdf* *Page 334*

4.10 Registration of Skin Piercing Business - circulated

 *Registration of Skin Piercing Business.pdf* *Page 336*

4.11 Safety Standards and Alarm Regulations for Private Rented Properties - circulated

4.12 Ulster History Circle Partnership - circulated

📄 *Ulster History Circle partnership.pdf*

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4.13 Pilot Mid and East Antrim Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme - circulated

📄 *Pilot Mid and East Antrim Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme.pdf*

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5 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

6 TABLED QUESTIONS

Closed Committee - In accordance with Council policy, representatives of the Press will not be in attendance for this section of the Meeting.

7 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION – CLOSED COMMITTEE

7.1 Lough Neagh Partnership 2025/26 Funding Request - circulated

📄 *Lough Neagh Partnership Funding Request 2025-26.pdf*

Not included

📄 *Appendix 1 - Lough Neagh Partnership Activity Report.pdf*

Not included

7.2 Tourism Marketing Strategic Update - circulated

📄 *Tourism Marketing Strategic Activity Update.pdf*

Not included

📄 *Appendix 1 - Tourism Marketing Action Plan 2024-2025 Progress Tracker.pdf*

Not included

7.3 Shared Island - Coast-to-Coast Capital Investment Scheme 2024 - circulated

📄 *Shared Island Coast-to-Coast Capital Investment Scheme 2024.pdf*

Not included











📄 *Appendix 1 Shared Island Coast-to-Coast Funding Application Interpretation Concept Proposals.pdf*

Not included

📄 *Appendix 2 Shared Island Coast-to-Coast Funding Application - Gantt Chart.pdf*

Not included

7.4 Dunfane Playing Fields - circulated

 <i>Dunfane Playing Field, Ballymena Asset Review and Options for Development.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 1 Folio Map Dunfane Playing Fields Ballymena.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 2 Map showing location of Dunclug High School.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 3 P&R Report from October 2021.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 4 Minute Extract from P&R October 2021.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 5 Minute Extract from Full Council November 2021.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 6 Option 1.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 7 Option 2.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 8 Option 3.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 9 Projected Costs for Option 3.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>

8 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – CLOSED COMMITTEE

Open Committee

9 FORWARD PLAN FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - circulated

 <i>NC Committee - Forward Plan Template v26.pdf</i>	<i>Page 348</i>
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Michael Allen

NIAS

Community Resuscitation Team Manager



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



The Community Resuscitation Strategy for Northern Ireland (2014)

To increase survival for those who suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, to the highest level that can be achieved across Northern Ireland.



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



Objectives:

1. Raise public awareness of the importance of early recognition of an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, and the importance of early intervention;
2. Encourage members of the public to intervene in the event of an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest;
3. Increase the availability of, and access to, appropriate and effective CPR training provision across Northern Ireland;
4. Achieve high uptake of CPR training;
5. Make the most efficient use of the resources available to support community resuscitation training
6. Improve the availability of, and access to, the automated external defibrillators that are in place across Northern Ireland, and
7. Enhance the capacity of information systems to capture and provide key data on out-of-hospital cardiac arrest and patient outcomes



'Community Resuscitation Strategy for Northern Ireland (2014)'. The aim is to increase survival for those who suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest by having more people in the community trained to perform CPR and to use an automated external defibrillator.

- **Community Education**
- **Education Authority LifeSaver Training**
- **Public Access AEDs**
- **GoodSAM / CFRs**
- **Research**



CRT - What do we do?

- Community Engagement
- Community CPR Training & AED Awareness
- Chain of Survival Awareness
- Support, assist and train Community First Responders (CFRs)
- Promote GoodSAM
- COL Education For Schools
- Promote The Circuit
- Engage with other agencies to promote resuscitation strategies
- Survivor stories



OHCA Facts & Figures

- There are 1,400 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests (OHCAs) in Northern Ireland each year.
- Less than 1 in 10 people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in Northern Ireland.
- Every minute without cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillation reduces the chance of survival by up to 10 per cent.
- Early CPR and defibrillation can more than double the chances of survival





The Chain of Survival

7



- 1) Recognising cardiac arrest and phoning 999
- 2) Providing good quality CPR
- 3) Sending a willing by-stander to get the nearest AED
- 4) Continuing CPR until advanced care has arrived

Main Aim:

8

To Increase Out-Of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Survival to discharge rates within Northern Ireland



Less than **1** in 10

8%



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust

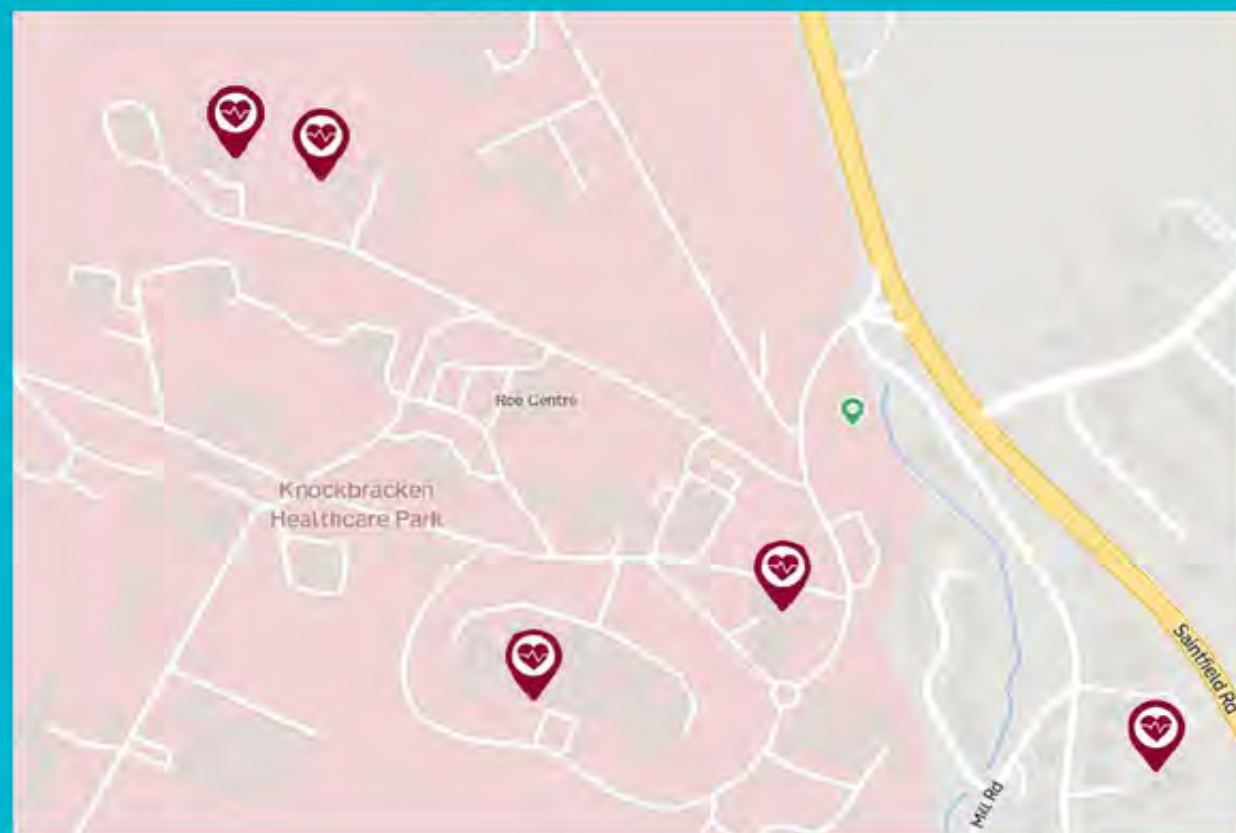
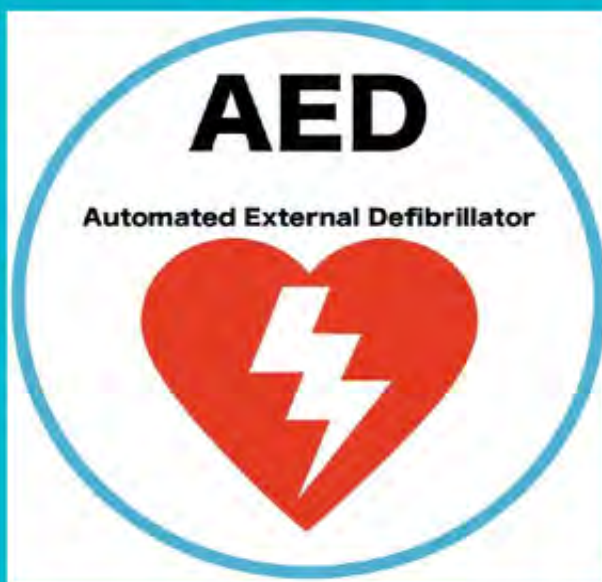


Chance of Survival from Cardiac Arrest



Public Access Automated External Defibrillators (AED) On The Circuit (As at 13/2/25)

3752



Mid & East Antrim AEDs

267 AEDs on The Circuit

259 registered guardians

83.7% emergency ready (208/51)

148 Unlocked, 111 Locked

150 24/7 Access. 109 Limited

91 AEDs unchecked for 3 months



Actions Required:

- Ensure AEDs are registered and accessible
- Increase guardian engagement
- Promote importance of early CPR
- Encourage training/awareness sessions
- Increased education
- Multi agency approach
- Ensure a sustainable model for the future



CONTACT US:

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Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Department for

Infrastructurewww.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
The Braid
1-29 Bridge Street
Ballymena
BT43 5EJ

Traffic Management Section
County Hall
182 Galgorm Road
Ballymena
BT42 1QG
Telephone: 0300 200 7899
Textphone: 028 2566 2527

Email: dfroads.northern@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Your ref:

Our ref:

23rd January 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Re. Accessible Parking Bay – Lay-by adjacent to No.10 Burleigh Walk, Carrickfergus

DfI Roads is proposing to introduce an accessible parking bay in the lay-bay adjacent to No. 10 Burleigh Walk, Carrickfergus. Only vehicles displaying a valid Blue Badge will be permitted to park in this bay.

Before proceeding with the drafting of the appropriate legislation, I would appreciate receiving any comments your Council may wish to make regarding this proposal.

A location plan is attached for your information.

Yours faithfully

John McQuillan
Traffic Management



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Thursday 23 January 2025 10:33





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Infrastructure

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Infrastructurewww.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
The Braid
1-29 Bridge Street
Ballymena
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County Hall
182 Galgorm Road
Ballymena
BT42 1QG
Telephone: 0300 200 7899
Textphone: 028 2566 2510

Email: dfroads.northern@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Your ref:

Our ref:

03rd February 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Re. Revocation of Accessible Parking Bay – 17 Station Road, Larne.

DfI Roads is in the process of revoking the existing legislation for an 'Accessible Parking Bay' to the front of house number 17 Station Road, Larne. The original applicant is now deceased, and the accessible parking bay is no longer required.

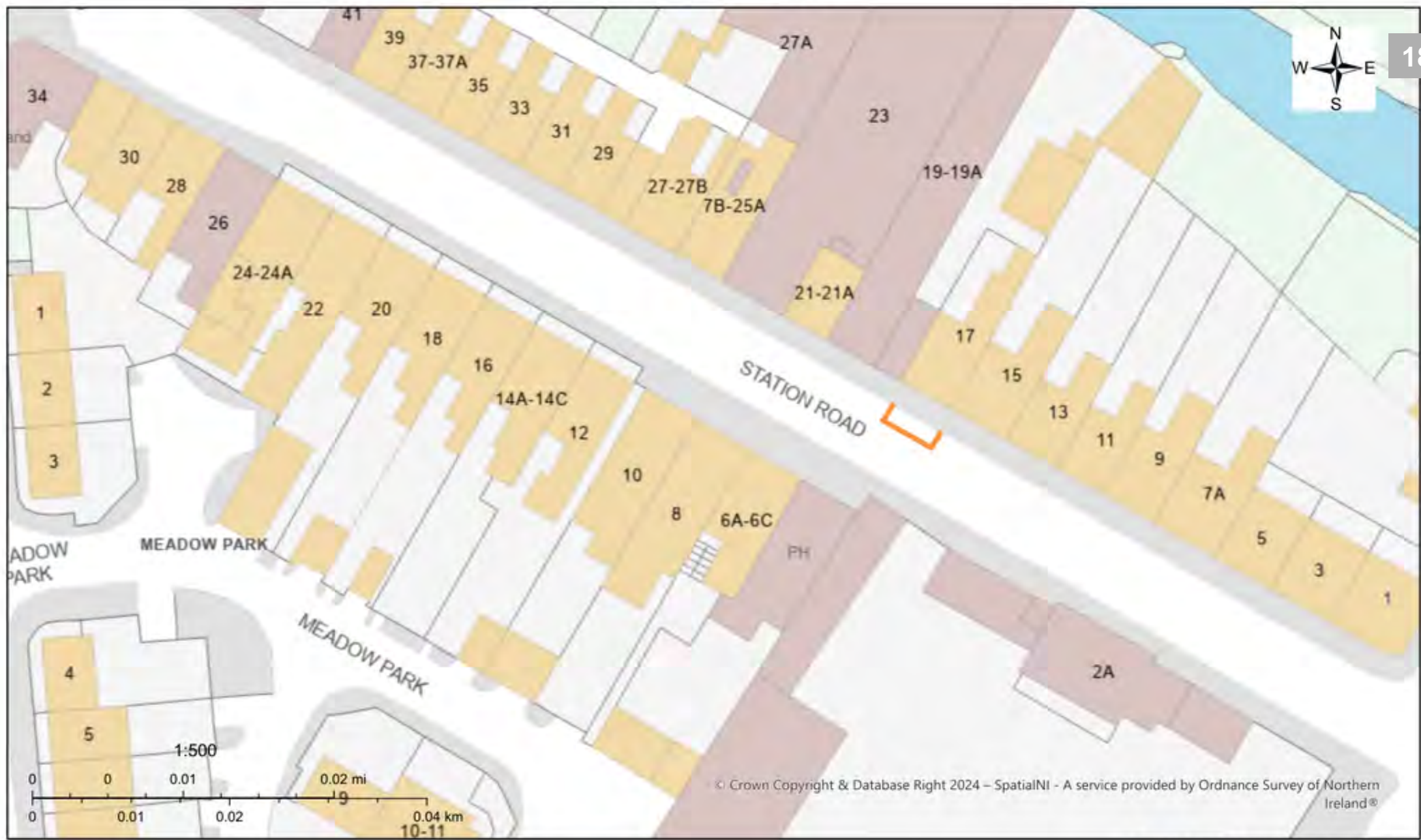
Before proceeding with the drafting of the appropriate legislation, I would appreciate receiving any comments your Council may wish to make regarding this proposal.

A location plan is attached for your information.

Yours faithfully

Aidan Mc Hugh

**Traffic Management
Northern Division**



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Tuesday 4 February 2025 10:26





Council/Committee: Neighbourhoods and Communities
Date: 25 February 2025

Report Title: Overview of Community Planning Structures
Publication Status: Open

Author: Janet Shearer, DEA Manager (East Antrim)
Approver: Philip Thompson, Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members on Mid and East Antrim's Community Planning structures and activities.

2. Background

- 2.1 Community Planning was a new statutory duty for councils, introduced in 2015 as part of the reform of local government.
- 2.2 Community Planning, as described in the DoE Guidance, Community Planning Foundation programme, is "a process led by Councils in conjunction with partners and communities to develop and implement a shared vision for their area, a long term vision which relates to all aspects of community life and which also involves working together to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to peoples' lives".
- 2.3 Mid and East Antrim's Community Plan, "Putting People First" was developed as a long-term strategy for the area and all its citizens. It was based on a thorough analysis of needs and priorities and opportunities for addressing them. The Plan generated a 10–15-year vision for improving social, economic and environmental well-being. The process involved public, private and community sectors working together to make a real difference to people's lives. It adopted an 'outcomes-based approach' with collaborative gain as the main driver.
- 2.4 In 2022 the community plan was reviewed to reflect the current priorities post-covid and taking cognisance of the cost-of-living crisis. These priorities will be the main focus for collaborative delivery for the next 4 years.



2.5 The four themes within the community plan are:

- Good Health & Wellbeing
- Progress in Education & Employment
- Community Safety & Cohesion
- Tourism & the Economy

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. The Strategic Alliance is the key overarching strategic partnership body for community planning. It is in effect the board by which the various partners, communities and agencies meet and make the required overarching decisions.

3.2. Strategic Alliance Remit

- To exercise the strategic leadership by developing and communicating the vision, purpose and intended outcomes of community planning for citizens and service users in Mid and East Antrim.
- To drive the aims of community planning in Mid and East Antrim and to exercise strategic leadership.
- To agree strategic objectives for community planning within the Borough.
- To approve strategies and action plans proposed by the thematic groups to meet the strategic objectives.
- To assume overall accountability for performance monitoring and reporting.
- To secure, approve and allocate departmental, agency or statutory partner resources, to enable delivery of the community plan.
- To champion partnership working and lead by example.

3.3. Strategic Alliance Membership

The Strategic Alliance membership is made up of statutory partners as outlined in the legislation and additional relevant local and voluntary partners who work towards the achievement of the MEA shared vision.

3.4. Council Representatives

Mayor and Deputy Mayor along with Chair of the four Standing Committees (Ald Adger, Cllr Lyness, Cllr Armstrong, Cllr Donnelly, Cllr Mc Keen and Ald Reid) plus the Chief Executive and Director of Community of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. The graphic below illustrates the community planning structure for Mid and East Antrim.



NB Committee name has changed to Neighbourhoods and Communities since time of publication.

3.5. Community Panel Representatives

There are currently 5 community panel members represented on the Strategic Alliance (Brian Holmes, Ballee and Harryville Community Enterprises, Briege Conway, North Antrim Community Network, Deborah Neill, Larne Community Development Project, Ivy Goddard, Interethnic Forum, Norman Worthington, Bann Maine West Community Cluster). Please note that there is a current review of the community panel and this membership will be examined as part of that review.

3.6. Statutory members

- Education Authority NI
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust
- Public Health Agency
- Strategic Planning and Performance Group (Dept. of Health)
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Invest NI
- Tourism NI
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Sport NI
- NI Water
- Northern Regional College
- Libraries NI
- Youth Justice NI



- The Consumer Council
- Translink
- Transport NI
- Patient and Client Council

3.7. The Strategic Alliance currently meets twice per year – September and March. The date of the next meeting is **Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 2.00pm (Microsoft Teams)**.

3.8. **Community Panel Remit/Update**

The Community Panel provides community representatives the opportunity to input into all parts of the community planning structure. The Community Panel has six members who sit on the Strategic Alliance. The members also participate in the thematic groups and delivery groups. This ensures that the community has a voice in all aspects of community planning. The Community Panel meets quarterly and reports to the Strategic Alliance twice per year.

3.9. Currently, the Community Panel is under review.

In the past and during previous reviews there was opinion expressed that the panel was perceived as a Council panel as it was facilitated by Council staff. The review of the Community Plan indicated that there was scope to allow the panel to be run by the community which would give them more ownership and more of a voice in the community planning process.

3.10. North Antrim Community Network who have been involved in the community panel and in community planning generally since the outset is undertaking this piece of work with the panel members. The review will refresh the membership to ensure representation across the Borough. It will also look at the remit and purpose in line with the reviewed priorities of "Putting People First". This should be complete by 31st March 2025.

3.11. **Thematic Groups Remit/Update**

There are four Thematic Groups which meet quarterly: -

1. Good Health & Wellbeing chaired by Hugh Nelson, Northern Health and Social Care Trust)
2. Progress in Education & Employment chaired by Jim Dunbar, Education Authority)
3. Tourism & the Economy co-chaired by Colin Johnston, Managing Director of the Galgorm Collection and Noel Mulholland Head of Michelin Development UK, Michelin Tyre Public Limited Company
4. Community Safety & Cohesion, chaired(until very recently) by Uel Boyd, Chief Inspector, PSNI. It should be noted that Chief Inspector Boyd is currently moving on from Mid and East Antrim and Officers are working to ensure a replacement Chair is secured.



3.12. Membership of the Thematic Groups is made up of statutory and community partners and remains open to interested stakeholders. The remit of the Thematic Groups is to agree the actions to ensure the outcomes and priorities of the community plan are delivered on and reported on.

3.13. Currently we are reviewing the actions in line with the new priorities outlined in the 2022 review of the community plan. We have currently reviewed the actions under the four Thematic Groups are Officers are preparing updated implementation and delivery plans in advance of the march Strategic Alliance.

3.14. Examples of some of the actions agreed are:-

<p>Good Health and Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Raise awareness of and promote the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing Framework. o Improve and educate accessibility to affordable and nutritious food. o Raise Awareness and Promote Benefits of Physical Activity. o Making the Borough welcoming and accessible to all regardless of age or ability.
<p>Progress in Education & Employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Ambassadors Programme This involves running awareness campaigns telling personal stories targeting specific groups – over 50, those with additional needs etc. mentoring and coaching. o Raising Aspirations This would be aimed at primary school-aged children. It would be based on getting children to think of potential career paths based on the Primary Futures model.
<p>Tourism & the Economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Living Over the Shop Mapping exercise to be undertaken. Concentrate on a specific area. Scope where there is demand for units o Develop Visitor/Tourism Hubs in Local Communities Agreed to concentrate on specific areas – Larne, Carrickfergus and Gracehill, Ballymena o Develop coordinated plans for each area to include Economic Development (Go Succeed), LMP etc. o Develop a community tourism experience programme for each area.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Establish links between hoteliers/tour operators etc. o Events to drive night-time economy o Community Study visits o Use of volunteers
Community Safety and Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Welcoming Places including work on promoting personal safety o Supporting our most vulnerable through projects including the Support Hub and the Loneliness network

3.15. We have had extensive consultation and are now meeting to ensure that actions are achievable within the timeframe and have a relevant action lead to drive the actions forward. Once this work is complete (by March 2025) we will then return to quarterly meetings. These meetings will be to ensure that actions are being delivered, and outcomes are reported to inform the next Statement of Progress which is due in November 2025.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial implications – A small operational budget of £10k per year which will be supplemented in 25/26 with a £15k budget to assist in the statutory requirement to deliver a Statement of Progress.
- 4.2. Human Resources – All staff within Community Planning & Development section have community planning integrated into their day to day delivery. Certain core projects do have specific officers leading on them e.g. DEA Officer Alison Kane leading on the Loneliness Network and DEA Officer leading on Fiona Surgenor the Autism work. Janet Shearer as DEA Manager leads on Community Planning and Good Relations. Janet oversees the ongoing operational aspects of community planning delivery.
- 4.3. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan – The Corporate Plan reflects the priorities within the community plan "Putting People First".

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Elected Members consider the update on the Strategic Alliance.



6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. Elected Members are asked to

- (i) note the overview of the structures in place to progress community planning within Mid and East Antrim Borough.

7. Appendices / Links

- Appendix 1 Putting People First 2022 Update
- Appendix 2 Review of Community Plan – EOS Community Consulting
- Appendix 3 Membership of Strategic Alliance

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

The Mid and East Antrim Community Plan 2022 Update

[www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/
communityplanning](http://www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/communityplanning)



Introduction

Review of Putting People First

Putting People First is an ambitious document which accurately reflects the context of Community Planning in 2014-2017 when plans were being developed. In 2021/2022 a review of the Community Planning priorities and outcomes for the Mid and East Antrim area was undertaken.

The review of Putting People First in 2021/2022 is timely. Not only have the partnership structures developed and solidified, but the global pandemic has changed the landscape in which community planning is delivered.

In focus groups conducted as part of review process, it was commented that the response to the Covid 19 crisis was community planning as it should be. It was a range of agencies working together to address a common and pressing concern. It involved the reallocation of human resources, the redirection of financial resources and the concentration of effort

Cross Cutting Priorities

- The review identified a number of recurring themes which are not so much issues to address as they are ways of working. The plan includes a number of cross cutting themes which represent key considerations which will underpin all activity undertaken through community planning.

Tackling Poverty

- The Covid 19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the livelihoods of individuals and families across Northern Ireland and the Borough. When this is coupled with rising costs of living, rapidly escalating fuel costs and inflation, the numbers of households finding themselves financially insecure is increasing also. Mid and East Antrim has one neighbourhood renewal area and two areas at risk prior to the pandemic but anecdotal evidence to date indicates that poverty is impacting families across the whole of the Borough. Poverty and deprivation can be a significant barrier to achieving the ambitions of Putting People First, but conversely, Putting People First has the opportunity to tackle some of the root causes of poverty through its actions.

on a single issue. In addition to taking on board the feedback from the audit, this review is also cognisant of the learning from what happened during the pandemic and the opportunities that exist to build on its success.

Having reviewed Putting People First, the Statement of Progress and the implementation plan, it is clear that the plan offers a comprehensive approach to addressing some of the starkest needs and potentially fruitful opportunities facing the Borough. As a result of the review, some of the themes and outcomes have been consolidated and actions re-prioritised.

This review was approached from a people-centred perspective, intending to highlight where community planning can really make a difference to people living in the Borough. Measuring and evidencing the answers to 'what did we do?' and 'how well did we do it?' is significantly more straightforward than answering 'is anybody better off?' however we know that people are, and that more people could be.

Prioritising the most vulnerable

- The issue of inclusion was raised frequently throughout the review, and it was in regard to a spectrum of people, but in particular people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties whom it was felt had been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the resulting exclusion. In addition, 'people at risk' were identified including people from BAME backgrounds, young people and older people. Planned community activity should be viewed through the lens of how it will benefit those who are the most vulnerable in the Borough. This will enable a focus on those who can be the most 'better off' as a result.

Addressing the inequalities in our Borough

- The plan currently includes "our borough has health equality for all" as an outcome under Good Health and Wellbeing. Given that there are so many social determinants of health and wellbeing such as deprivation, living environment, access to employment and so on, given that addressing inequality is a cross cutting theme, this commitment will also respond to feedback which asked for fairness in how resources and support are allocated between rural and urban areas and between different towns in the Borough.

Valuing the views and contribution of our residents

- The intent of the partners in the Strategic Alliance was clear when it entitled the community plan "Putting People First". The plan acknowledged that the greatest asset in the Borough of Mid and East Antrim is its people. It also acknowledged that it is a plan to benefit the people of the Borough. Currently there is a disconnect between those involved in the community planning structures and other groups and residents. There is a sense in the feedback received through the consultation process that the community feel they aren't engaged in the decisions that affect them.

The pandemic response has clearly demonstrated the importance of the community and voluntary sector in the area. Without local groups and local intelligence, those who were most in need would not have been identified or supported. Post pandemic there are connections and relationships which the community planning partnership should nurture going

- forward. We recommend that time is taken by all agencies to engage with residents, to give time and space to co-design processes which will ultimately result in a better quality of service delivery.

Valuing our environment

- Paradoxically Our Environment as a theme was the least prioritised, however measures to address climate change, environmental awareness and the importance of respect for the local and natural environment were points which were made throughout the consultation responses.

We believe that valuing our environment as a cross cutting theme will enable the community planning partners to make climate change commitments at an organisational level and to support the improvement of local environments at a community level. The environment is a key success factor in all four of the revised themes.

Wider Strategic Context

Since Putting People First was published in 2017, the strategic and policy context have seen some significant changes, some key aspects of which are noted below:

- The covid pandemic and subsequent recovery plans
- Welfare reform
- New Mental Health Strategy 2021 to 2031
- Belfast Region City Deal
- Draft Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland
- Development of an anti-poverty strategy
- Draft programme for government
- Towards a Programme of Support for Community Planning (the Gallagher Report)
- Embedding a Wellbeing Framework in Northern Ireland, Carnegie Trust UK

It is testament to the foundations of Putting People First that it remains in alignment with the wider policy context and priorities. These new and emerging strategies may add impetus to areas of work the Strategic Alliance was already considering.

The Mid and East Antrim community planning themes and outcomes following review

Our Vision: Mid and East Antrim will be a strong, vibrant, safe and inclusive community, where people work together to improve the quality of life for all.



The community planning partnership



Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service



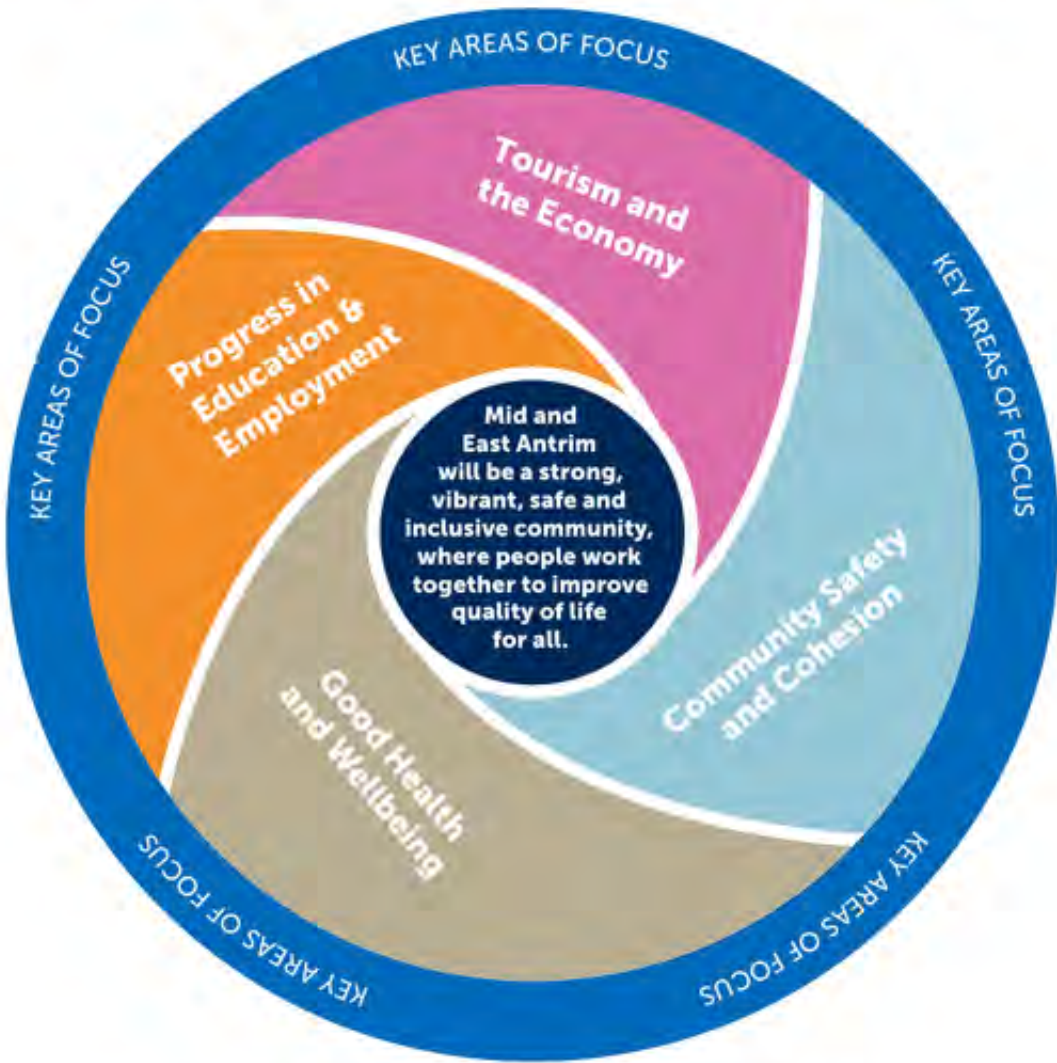
Patient and Client Council
Your voice in health and social care



We have a **Community Panel** which has a key and unique role in providing community representatives the opportunity to input into all parts of the community planning partnership structure. This group represents the community voice for Mid and East Antrim Borough.

The updated plan

As a result of a period of consultation and review of the community plan - there are now four themes for the work of the Community Planning Partnership - these are our new priorities. They are the key areas we will focus on now and during the remainder of the plan. They are:



These four community planning themes are not isolated or stand alone. There are many connections, overlaps and

interrelationships between them. Indeed, it is only by making these connections and through the total combined contribution

of all of the themes that our ambitious goals for Mid and East Antrim will be realised.

Tourism and the economy

Our Borough is a leading and competitive place to start and grow business. Our Borough is a destination of choice.



The community planning process has identified four strategic priorities for the theme of 'tourism and the economy'.

We support local businesses and those which can demonstrate social value.

Our Borough has first class facilities and attractions

We support entrepreneurs to start up and existing businesses to grow.

Our towns and village are attractive and vibrant.

Good health and wellbeing

Our citizens enjoy good mental and physical health and wellbeing.



The community planning process has identified three strategic priorities for the theme of 'good health and wellbeing'.

Our citizens are physically active more often.

Our citizens enjoy easy access to our Borough's natural environment and heritage.

Our citizens have access to information, activities and advice to support their physical and mental wellbeing.

Progress in education and employment



We have a skilled workforce able to adapt to the changing economy. Our Borough provides opportunities for all and supports people to achieve their full potential.

The community planning process has identified five strategic priorities for the theme of 'progress in education and employment'.

We have skills development programmes targeting areas of high growth or need.

We provide a range of education pathways to employment.

We value lifelong learning.

We reduce or remove the barriers to our people achieving their potential.

We encourage entrepreneurship and vocational training.

Community safety and cohesion

Our Borough has vibrant, inclusive and cohesive communities.

Our people feel safe in their community. Our older people are live healthy, active lives in their community.



The community planning process has identified seven strategic priorities for the theme of 'community safety and cohesion'.

We have activities and events which welcome everyone.

We value and respect the environment we live in.

We have programmes in place to address their greatest concerns.

We proactively remove barriers to their participation in community life.

We proactively support and include the most vulnerable and the most excluded.

We have programmes in place to address their greatest concerns.

In our Borough there are networks and services in place to support them to age actively and healthily.

Making community planning work in Mid and East Antrim

The partnership structure

The Community Planning Partnership structure for Mid and East Antrim was designed with the involvement and engagement of the community planning partners, including the community and voluntary sector and a wide range other public sector organisations.

The membership of the Community Planning Partnership includes the designated statutory partners set out in the legislation, community representatives

and a range of other groups and organisations. This has established a broader partnership which will be integral to the ongoing development and delivery of the community plan.



Who sits on the partnership?

Representatives of the community have been involved throughout the community planning process in Mid and East Antrim.

The community is represented by the Elected Members, as well as by nominated representatives of community organisations from across the borough (The Community Panel).

As well as Council and community there are **12 partners** who must by law be involved in community planning, they are:

- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Education Authority
- Health and Social Care Board
- Invest NI
- Libraries NI
- NI Fire and Rescue Service
- NI Housing Executive
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust
- Police Service for NI
- Public Health Agency
- Sport NI
- Tourism NI

In Mid and East Antrim, these partners decided that a number of other organisations could also make a valuable contribution to the community planning process and were added to the partnership - they currently are:

- Galgorm Resort and Spa (on behalf of the tourism sector in the borough)
- Michelin (on behalf of the business sector in the borough)
- NI Water
- Northern Regional College
- Patient and Client Council
- Sustainable NI (on behalf of the environment sector in the borough)
- Translink
- Transport NI
- Department of Justice
- Department of Education
- Department for Communities
- Consumer Council

Together, all these groups and organisations form our Mid and East Antrim 'Strategic Alliance'.

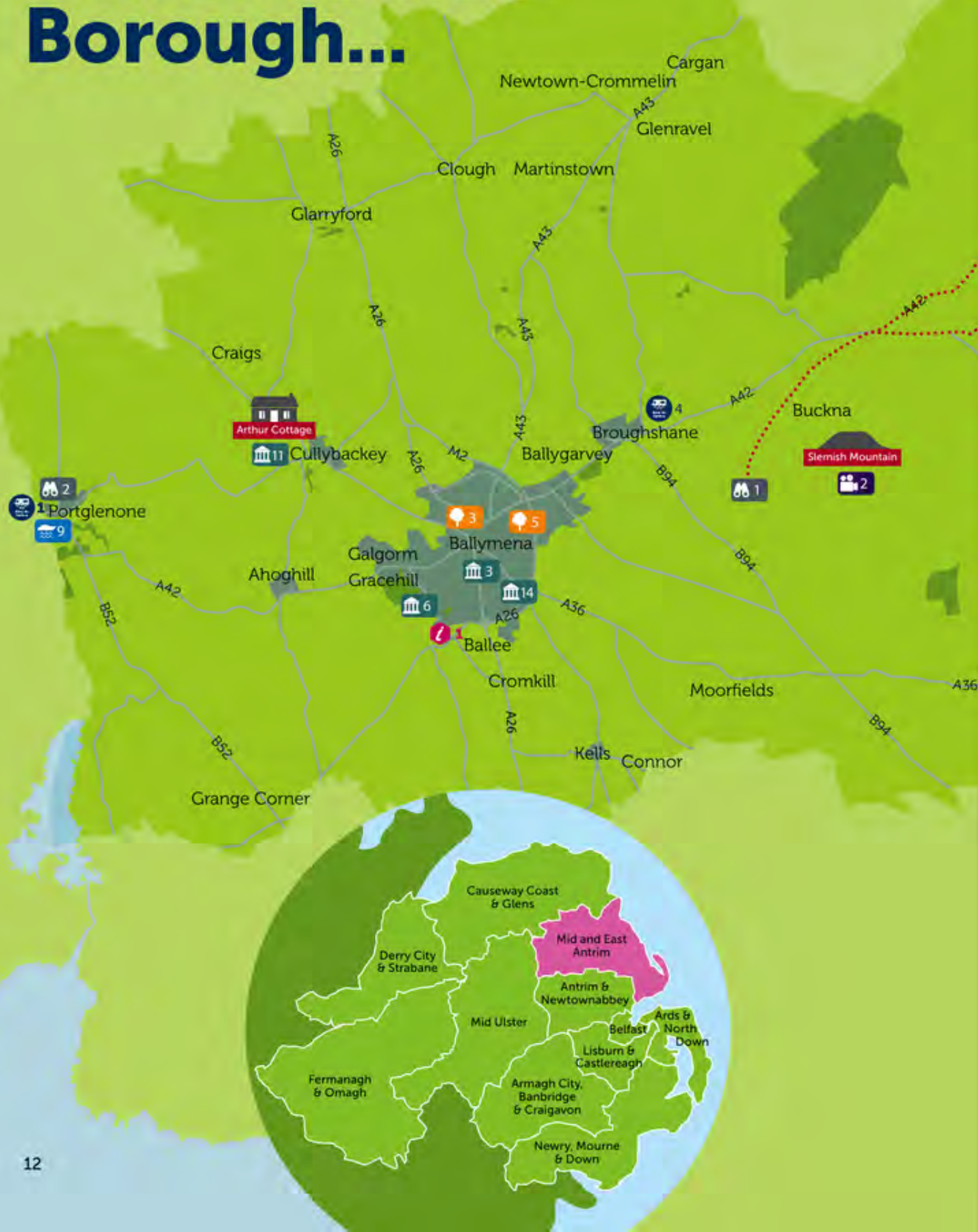
Section 75 partners

Where available, individuals and organisations who represent the interests of the Section 75 groups, as contained within the Northern Ireland Act, will be included as members across the Community Planning Partnership structure.

Please note

This plan has been screened in relation to the "Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulation (NI) 2004". It has been determined that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required as the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects. Other strategies and plans that may go on to support the delivery of the community plan will be subject to any required environmental assessment.

Our Beautiful Borough...





Visitor Information Centres

- 1 Ballymena
- 2 Carrickfergus
- 3 Larne

Aires de Service

- 1 Portglenone Marina
- 2 Carrickfergus Harbour Carpark
- 3 Bentra Golf Course
- 4 Houston's Mill

History & Heritage

- 1 St Nicholas' Church
- 2 Templecorran Church
- 3 Mid Antrim Museum
- 4 Carrickfergus Museum and Civic Centre
- 5 Larne Museum
- 6 Gracehill Village & Museum
- 7 Inver Museum
- 8 Olderfleet Castle
- 9 Carrickfergus Castle
- 10 Glenarm Castle
- 11 Arthur Cottage
- 12 Andrew Jackson Cottage and US Rangers Centre
- 13 Flame Gasworks
- 14 Harryville Motte & Bailey
- 15 Knockagh Monument
- 16 The Gobbins

Natural Assets

- 1 Slemish
- 2 Portglenone Forest
- 3 Glenarm Forest
- 4 Gleno Waterfall
- 5 Woodburn Forest
- 6 Black Arch

Parks

- 1 Carnfunnock Country Park
- 2 Marine Gardens, Carrickfergus
- 3 Peoples Park, Ballymena
- 4 Diamond Jubilee Wood
- 5 Ecos Centre Nature park
- 6 Dixon Park, Larne

Game of Thrones®

- 1 Game of Thrones®, Cairncastle
- 2 Game of Thrones®, Shillanavogy
- 3 The Steensons Economusee, Glenarm

Beaches & Marinas

- 1 Portmuck Beach
- 2 Browns Bay Beach
- 3 Drains Bay Beach
- 4 Ballygally Beach
- 5 Carnlough Beach
- 6 Carrickfergus Marina
- 7 Carnlough Harbour
- 8 Glenarm Marina
- 9 Portglenone Marina

Causeway Coastal Route

Additional Scenic Routes



Putting People First

Contents and Summary

Putting People First remains a document which is reflective of the needs and priorities of the residents of Mid and East Antrim. The current review, coupled with the emergence from the pandemic, provided the Strategic Alliance with an opportunity to streamline the plan, to focus on those who are most in need and most

vulnerable, and to deliver collaborative actions that benefit residents. The changes contained in this document are not onerous, however we are of the view that they will enable the Partnership to make an even greater, and more visible and tangible, difference in the Borough.

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4	The community planning partnership
5	The updated plan
6	Tourism and the economy
7	Good health and wellbeing
8	Progress in education & employment
9	Community safety and cohesion
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Our Vision

Mid and East Antrim will be a strong, vibrant, safe and inclusive community, where people work together to improve the quality of life for all.



Mid and East Antrim
Borough Council
1-29 Bridge Street
Ballymena
BT43 5EJ

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communityplanning@midandeantrim.gov.uk

[www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/
communityplanning](http://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/communityplanning)

#ourMEA



Review of Community Planning Priorities
for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Prepared by Eos Community Consulting
March 2022

Confidential Draft



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Confidential/Draft



Introduction

Putting People First is an ambitious document which accurately reflects the context of Community Planning in 2014-2017 when plans were being developed. Partnerships were new, the task in hand was unclear, corporate and operational plans were already in place within partner organisations and yet community planning partnerships were tasked with developing plans and actions to transform the quality of life in communities.

Whilst across all of Northern Ireland's local authorities every effort was made to develop collaborative plans and to try to avoid the inclusion of "business as usual" it was impossible to disregard existing strategies, plans and programmes which were already in place and seeking to address many of the very same issues which were highlighted as priorities for community plans.

Unsurprisingly the first iteration of community plans, Putting People First included, have an abundance of outcomes, indicators and actions. At the time, with partnerships in their infancy, this was the only way to ensure that all partners had a stake in the success of community planning. The review of Putting People First in 2021/2022 is timely. Not only have the partnership structures developed and solidified, but the global pandemic has changed the landscape in which community planning is delivered.

In focus groups conducted as part of the audit and review process, it was commented that the response to the Covid 19 crisis was community planning as it should be. It was a range of agencies working together to address a common and pressing concern. It involved the reallocation of human resources, the redirection of financial resources and the concentration of effort on a single issue. In addition to taking on board the feedback from the audit, this review is also cognisant of the learning from what happened during the pandemic and the opportunities that exist to build on its success.

This report considers a number of elements within Putting People First and in community planning practice, and makes recommendations accordingly.

Putting People First

Having reviewed Putting People First, the Statement of Progress and the implementation plan, it is clear that the plan offers a comprehensive approach to addressing some of the starkest needs and potentially fruitful opportunities facing the Borough. Whilst it may appear nuanced, this report makes recommendations to consolidate some of the themes and outcomes, to move what have previously been identified as outcomes into actions and indicators, and to re-prioritise the proposed actions. The aim of this reshuffling of the plan content is two fold – to streamline a complex process to enable delivery of actions which make an impact; and for that impact to be tangible in local communities and for the residents of Mid and East Antrim.

We have approached this review from a people-centred perspective, intending to highlight where community planning can really make a difference to people living in the Borough. Measuring and evidencing the answers to "what did we do?" and "how well did we do it?" is significantly more straightforward than answering "is anybody better off?" however we know that people are, and that more people could be.

Themes

Currently Putting People First has five themes, each with its own vision, a number of outcomes and an action plan to achieve the outcomes:

- Good Health and Wellbeing



- Community Safety and Cohesion
- Progress in Education
- Sustainable Jobs and Tourism
- Our Environment

Operationally, five themes make for a complex delivery system. The nature of a community plan is that, to quote one consultee "there is nothing that's not connected". Issues in communities do not lend themselves to alignment with particular departmental strategies, communities are complex places where needs vary, infrastructure is changeable, and it takes a variety of interventions to "turn the curve".

Feedback as part of the audit shows that the public agrees that all of the five themes remain either a priority or very important, and there was no suggestion that anything was missing.

That said, examination of the current themes and their related action plans leads us to suggest that there is scope to consolidate the existing themes in a way which will could work better operationally.

- **Good Health and Wellbeing**

More than 90% of survey respondents identified Good health and wellbeing as "should be a priority" or "very important", and two thirds of respondents ranked good health and wellbeing as either their first or second priority for community planning effort in the next four years. As we emerge from the pandemic and move into a period of recovery, there will be new challenges in terms of physical and mental health and wellbeing.

- **Progress in Education and Employment**

43.5% survey respondents identified progress in education as their first or second priority. Review of the implementation plans for Progress in Education and Sustainable Jobs and Tourism identified significant synergies between the proposed areas of focus. The themes of removing barriers and achieving potential were common to both, as were a number of the key partners. We consider that rewording this theme provides an opportunity for greater synergies and greater benefits through community planning actions.

- **Community Safety and Cohesion**

Safe and inclusive communities continue to be valued by those who responded to the survey with almost 40% identifying this as their first or second priority. Whilst it is not recommended that the title of the theme is changed, it is recommended later in this report that the scope of the theme is broadened.

- **Tourism and the Economy**

26.9% of respondents had the previous theme of Sustainable Jobs and Tourism as first or second in terms of their prioritisation of effort, however tourism clearly plays an important part in the economic prosperity of the Borough. Currently there is limited appreciation for the benefits tourism brings to the Borough with those who did comment identifying that visitors go to attractions but do not spend much time or money in the local villages or towns. If tourism and economy were brought together under one theme, there is greater scope for the wider ripple effects of tourism development to be seen.



Cross Cutting Priorities

The review and audit identified a number of recurring themes which are not so much issues to address as they are ways of working. It is recommended the plan include a number of cross cutting themes which represent key considerations which will underpin all activity undertaken through community planning.

- **Prioritising the most vulnerable**

The issue of inclusion was raised frequently throughout the audit, and it was in regard to a spectrum of people, but in particular people with disabilities and people with learning difficulties whom it was felt had been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the resulting exclusion. In addition, “people at risk” were identified including people from BAME backgrounds, young people and older people. We recommend that planned community activity should be viewed through the lens of how it will benefit those who are the most vulnerable in the Borough. This will enable a focus on those who can be the most “better off” as a result.

- **Addressing the inequalities in our Borough**

The plan currently includes “our borough has health equality for all” as an outcome under Good Health and Wellbeing. Given that there are so many social determinants of health and wellbeing such as deprivation, living environment, access to employment and so on, we recommend that addressing inequality is a cross cutting theme. This commitment will also respond to feedback which asked for fairness in how resources and support are allocated between rural and urban areas and between different towns in the Borough.

- **Valuing the views and contribution of our residents**

The intent of the partners in the Strategic Alliance was clear when it entitled the community plan “Putting People First”. The plan acknowledged that the greatest asset in the Borough of Mid and East Antrim is its people. It also acknowledged that it is a plan to benefit the people of the Borough. Currently there is a disconnect between those involved in the community planning structures and other groups and residents. There is a sense in the feedback received through the consultation process that the community feel they aren’t engaged in the decisions that affect them, or that the community organisations aren’t taken seriously.

The pandemic response has clearly demonstrated the importance of the community and voluntary sector in the area. Without local groups and local intelligence, those who were most in need would not have been identified or supported. Post pandemic there are connections and relationships which the community planning partnership should nurture going forward. We recommend that time is taken by all agencies to engage with residents, to give time and space to co-design processes which will ultimately result in a better quality of service delivery.

- **Valuing our environment**

Paradoxically Our Environment as a theme was the least prioritised, however measures to address climate change, environmental awareness and the importance of respect for the local and natural environment were points which were made throughout the consultation responses. We suggest that valuing our environment as a cross cutting theme will enable the community planning partners to make climate change commitments at an organisational level and to support the improvement of



local environments at a community level. The environment is a key success factor in all four of the revised themes.

Outcomes

In addition to recommending that the themes are consolidated, we recommend that the outcomes, of which there are currently 19, are streamlined also. This will enable the Strategic Alliance to focus on priority areas but also will provide the opportunity to redistribute existing efforts into contributing towards clearer and more easily measurable outcomes

Good Health and Wellbeing

Our People enjoy good mental and physical health and wellbeing

- Because they are physically active more often
- Because they enjoy easy access to our Borough's natural environment and heritage
- Because they have access to information, activities and advice to support their physical and mental wellbeing

Progress in Education and Employment

We have a skilled workforce able to adapt to the changing economy

- Because we have skills development programmes targeting areas of high growth or need
- Because we provide a range of education pathways to employment

Our Borough provides opportunities for all and supports people to achieve their full potential

- Because we reduce or remove the barriers to our people achieving their potential
- Because we value lifelong learning
- Because we encourage entrepreneurship and vocational training

Tourism and the Economy

Our Borough is a leading and competitive place to start and grow business

- Because we support entrepreneurs to start up and existing businesses to grow
- Because we support local businesses and those which can demonstrate social value

Our Borough is a destination of choice

- Because we have first class facilities and attractions
- Because our towns and village are attractive and vibrant

Community Safety and Cohesion

Our Borough has vibrant, inclusive and cohesive communities



- Because there are activities and events which welcome everyone
- Because we proactively support and include the most vulnerable and the most excluded
- Because we value and respect the environment we live in

Our people feel safe in their community

- Because there are programmes in place to address their greatest concerns
- Because we proactively support the most vulnerable or at risk

Our older people are live healthy, active lives in their community¹

- Because there are networks and services in place to support them to age actively and healthily
- Because we proactively remove barriers to their participation in community life

Structures

In our assessment there are aspects of the current structures which are more effective than others.

Strategic Alliance

The recent statement of progress identified that the Strategic Alliance meetings had an average attendance rate of 37% of those invited. We would suggest that this figure should be cause for concern, implying as it does that there is consistent commitment by only around one third of partners. The strategic connectivity which the Strategic Alliance can foster is vital to the effective delivery of the community plan, if the plan includes areas of focus for which key strategic partners are not present, then progress in effecting positive change will always be difficult.

Community planning is a collaborative endeavour. It is therefore important that the outcomes and related actions provide the opportunity for significant collaboration. Ideally this collaboration serves both the operational needs of the partners and provides significant added value to the beneficiaries. However, collaboration and partnership working slows progress too. The greater the number of organisations involved, the more levels of approval that are required.

Community Panel

There is room for improvement in the role played by the Community Panel and how this connects to the wider community planning structure. There is real potential for this group to bridge the perceived gap between communities and the community plan but currently this does not appear to be the case. It is our understanding that the community panel represents the community voice for Mid and East Antrim Borough yet feedback implies that the community feels it does not have a voice or that its voice is not heard.

A review of the terms of reference for, and/or membership of, the panel might be useful to ensure that the panel in its current form is able to provide the voice for the community. Clarity around the expectations of members of the panel is required also. The panel is an ideal conduit of information

¹ We recommend that older people as an area of focus is shifted from health to community. An ageing population is not a health issue, it is a community asset and clearly articulating the role of older people in this theme reflects that



into and out of the community planning structures, but for this to be effective the information shared should be pertinent and should be directed towards where it can be actioned.

As part of this review the Strategic Alliance might consider reorganising how it engages with the community to reflect the new DEA structures within Councils and the Community Clusters which the council is establishing. It would seem an opportune time to review the representativeness of the community panel across the Borough.

Thematic Working Groups

Thematic working groups can be very effective in the initial planning and actions planning stages, particularly when the members are decision makers within their organisations. Once the initial action plans are developed however thematic working groups can slide into a pattern of meetings focused on updates, declining attendance and increasing frustration as progress slows. The feedback from some of the thematic groups was that they struggled to find the added value of the community planning activity. There was concern expressed by some that the scope of themes was so wide that by the time updates were presented there was no time left for development. Concern was also expressed around changing personnel and membership leading to a loss of "corporate knowledge" about the community plan, its intentions and its actions.

Thematic Chairs Group

This strategic connectivity between the themes is an important aspect of the successful implementation of Putting People First. By definition, any structure which involves 25 public and private sector organisations will be unwieldy and challenging to navigate. Information flows will be patchy and it will be difficult. The thematic chairs group is an excellent way to mitigate this. As decision makers in their own organisations and experts in their themes, they have the potential to be instrumental in overcoming some of the challenges to delivery.

Operational Board and Performance Management Group

Neither the Operational Board nor the Performance Management Group have been implemented as envisaged when the plan was developed. The roll out of community planning has not been detrimentally impacted by the absence of either group, in fact it is likely that had these groups been in place it would have diluted the attendance of partners even further. However, either or both of these groups if they had been established might have been the catalyst for more externally focused accountability and communication which might have mitigated some of the concerns expressed by external stakeholders about the community planning process. The issue of communication is addressed later in this report.

Wider Strategic Change

Since Putting People First was published in 2017, the strategic and policy context have seen some significant changes, some key aspects of which are noted below.

- The covid pandemic and subsequent recovery plans
- Welfare reform
- New Mental Health Strategy 2021 to 2031
- Belfast Region City Deal
- Draft Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland
- Development of an anti-poverty strategy
- Draft programme for government



It is testament to the foundations of Putting People First that it remains in alignment with the wider policy context and priorities. These new and emerging strategies may add impetus to areas of work the Strategic Alliance was already considering.

Communication and Awareness

It is difficult to challenge the perception that Putting People First is the Council's plan - as opposed to the plan for the Council area - when so many of the actions are Council led. Whilst we understand the origins of this, we would suggest that it is to the detriment of a wider understanding of community planning. The action planning process in 2017 prioritised actions which could be delivered quickly and which involved at least three partners, however it may be the case that in the effort to deliver quickly, the community planning identity was lost.

It was clear through the focus groups that there is a lack of awareness and appreciation of what has been delivered as a result of community planning. This is due in part to people struggling to differentiate between what they perceived as "business as usual" and the perhaps more collaborative way in which this business is now conducted. We suggest that part of the solution to this lies in a Communications Strategy and Action Plan.

The communication networks and channels available to the community planning partnership is nothing short of significant. Across the partners there are ways to communicate with all schools, all sports clubs, all registered community groups, all registered youth groups, all housing associations and tenants' groups. The potential of this communication platform is vastly underutilised by the Strategic Alliance. A small number of agreed core messages, a reciprocal agreement around social media post tagging and sharing, and a twice-yearly e-zine shared with all contacts and awareness of Putting People First and what it is achieving will increase exponentially.

Re-prioritisation of Actions

As part of the review we considered the implementation plans for each theme. The documents provided identified how actions were prioritised into short, medium and long term. We recommend that the actions lists are reviewed with a fresh lens which takes account of the new environment in which community planning is being delivered. We would suggest that there are actions which it is now appropriate and pertinent to escalate up the list or to increase the focus on. These include the following:

Good Health and Wellbeing

- Creating a network of navigators within communities
- Support and encourage the shared use of facilities within the public sector estate

Progress in Education and Employment

- Skills Forum
- Education and support for employing vulnerable people (previously a Health and Wellbeing action)

Community Safety and Cohesion

- Build Civic pride and celebrating community success
- Build on existing support to assist newcomer pupils (previously a progress in education action)
- Environment champions to encourage environmental responsible behaviour



Tourism and the Economy

- Energy efficiency
- Buy Social
- Urban and Rural Regeneration and town centre revitalisation

There are also actions which are either the responsibility of a single organisation or which include many factors which the partners cannot influence and as such we suggest they are removed, or consolidated with others to design a more strategic multi-partner initiative.

Regional Strategies/Initiatives with a Community Planning dimension

Several of the regional policy developments referenced in the previous section include opportunities for action which readily lend themselves to being community planning actions. Such opportunities are collaborative in nature and community in focus, and we recommend that the Alliance consider the following actions in the next 4 year period:

- Initiatives to tackle poverty such as development of sustainable social supermarkets
- Enabling and Empowering local communities to respond to local issues through the community resilience model
- Protecting those most at risk of exploitation by addressing addiction
- Developing a model of community development and engagement which empowers communities to participate in the community planning process
- Explore neighbourhood agreements as a mechanism to engage statutory partners and local communities in resolving issues in DEAs

Community Involvement

The Community Panel plays an important role in the community planning structure, however moving forward, we suggest that representation of the community should be progressed to active engagement/involvement of the community. We recommend that where possible the Strategic Alliance adopts a co-design approach to development of actions. Not only will this address issues of community buy in, it will also increase the chances of success and increase awareness of the community planning activity.

The new DEA model lends itself particularly well to co-design as it has a local focus and can draw on local networks and relationships. It also has a council officer with community development skills as a lynchpin to the process. This approach would make community planning more real and tangible at a local level and enable appropriate focusing of resources in response to local need.

Partnership commitment

It is understood that all public sector agencies are under considerable budgetary pressure. It has also become apparent over the past five years that the theory of "bending the spend" i.e. the reallocation of existing resources is less readily achievable than the designers of community planning might have anticipated. However, there are ways in which community planning partners can actively participate in community planning with little or no investment required:



Social Value Clauses are identified as an action under Tourism and the Economy. Whilst this currently applies to above threshold contracts, partners could commit to inclusion of social value as a consideration in all community planning related commissioning

Climate change policies are required of all public bodies, so the partnership could make a collective statement on its commitment to net zero, renewable energy etc

Meetings within the community planning structures could be better utilised for the sharing of information and expertise between partners. Each of the partners has access to an immense network of groups and individuals who can both inform and benefit from community planning actions, however the opportunities this presents have not been maximised as yet.

Conclusion

Putting People First remains a document which is reflective of the needs and priorities of the residents of Mid and East Antrim. The current review, coupled with the emergence from the pandemic, provides the Strategic Alliance with an opportunity to streamline the plan, to focus on those who are most in need and most vulnerable, and to deliver collaborative actions that benefit residents. The changes recommended in this report are not onerous, however we are of the view that they will enable the Partnership to make an even greater, and more visible and tangible, difference in the Borough.

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Strategic Alliance Membership 2024

NAME	REPLY
Alan Moore, NI Water	
Alison Russell, CCMS	
Anthony Carleton, DfC	
Archie McKay, NIFRS	
Brian Cassidy, NIHE	
Brian Holmes, Ballymena South Community Cluster	
Breige Conway, Northern Area Community Network	
Cara Toner, HSCNI	
Chris Conway, Translink	
Colin Johnston, Galgorm	
Colin Woods, DfI	
Craig Fairless, NRC	
David McQuitty, DoI	
Deborah Neill, Larne CDP	
Deirdre Watson, Translink	
Des Gartland, Invest NI	
Enda Sheridan, Translink	
Esther Dobbin, Tourism NI	
Gillian Kearney, PSNI	
Heather Williamson, DfC	
Hugh Nelson, Northern Trust	
Ivy Goddard, Inter-ethnic Forum	
J McGrillen, Tourism	
Jennifer Welsh, CE, Antrim Area Hospital	
Jim Dunbar, EANI	
John Cassidy, NIHE	
Kevin Bailey, PHA	
Kim Keys, Libraries NI	
Lisa Carson, PHA	

Louise Clarke, NIHE	
Maria Davison, DfC	
Morena Wickham-Thomas, PSNI	
Noel Mulholland, Michelin	
Norman Worthington, Bann Maine West Community Cluster	
Noyona Chundur, Consumer Council	
Orlagh Watters, Sport NI	
Paul Brush, Education	
Richard Pengelly, Chief Executive, EANI	
Sarah Simpson, Translink	
Shauna Collinson, EANI	
Simon Sloan, DfC	
Sorcha Hassay, DfC	
Steve Blockwell, NI Water	
Uel Boyd, Chief Inspector, PSNI	
William Warke, Consumer Council	
Ald Mrs B Adger, MBE, Mayor (Chair)	
Ald P Reid	
Cllr M Armstrong	
Cllr M Donnelly	
Cllr B Lyness	
Cllr G McKeen	
Valerie Watts	
Phillip Thompson	
Janet Shearer	
Catherine Black	



Council/Committee: Neighbourhoods and Communities
Date: 25 February 2025

Report Title: Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026
Publication Status: Open

Author: Janet Shearer, DEA Manager (East Antrim)
Approver: Philip Thompson, Director of Operations

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Elected Members for the Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026.

2. Background

- 2.1. Annually, The Executive Office (TEO) invite Council to make submissions to secure funding for the delivery of an agreed Good Relations Action Plan and associated programme and staffing costs.
- 2.2. In December 2024, the Interim Chief Executive received the Commissioning Letter from TEO, attached at Appendix 1, inviting Council to make application for funding to the District Council Good Relations Programme 2025-2026.
- 2.3. Council had been asked to submit an Action Plan that is structured around making a significant contribution across each of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy's four key priorities:-
 - Children and Young People
 - Shared Community
 - Safe Community
 - Cultural Expression
- 2.4. Assessment of the Action Plan will take place in March and TEO advises they will endeavour to issue letters of offer as early as possible in the new financial year.
- 2.5. Funding is offered at 75% and is contingent upon an additional minimum matching contribution of 25% from Council.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The deadline for submission of the 2025-2026 Action Plan was 24 January 2025, as outlined in the Commissioning Letter. TEO are aware that there was insufficient time given for the Action Plan to be approved



through Council's Committee structure and ultimately ratified by Council. In 2024-2025, the allocated budget was £177,549.85 at 75%, which represented a 35% cut in budget. There is no confirmation to date as to whether the budget will be resumed in 2024-2025, but TEO have advised to submit a budget based on the 2022-2023 year (£365,000.00) and that it should be flexible and scalable according to funding offered. TEO agreed to a draft plan being submitted subject to Council approval.

- 3.2. Following positive assessment and confirmation of budget by TEO, allocations for 2025-2026 will be agreed with Council. The Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026, attached at Appendix 2, is based on the evidence of the Good Relations Audit and Strategy, attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.3. The Plan has been developed in direct response to issues within the relevant audit documents and contains a number of projects and initiatives which aim, through an outcomes-based approach, to address key good relations issues within the Mid and East Antrim Borough. In addition, it has attempted, where possible, to have connectivity with the Policing and Community Safety Action Plan, Putting People First and Council's Corporate Plan.
- 3.4. The Action Plan follows the strategic lead of the "Together: Building a United Community" Strategy, based on the four themes as listed above. It also includes a Good Relations Grant Scheme; whereby constituted groups can apply for up to £2,500 100% funded.
- 3.5. The 2025-2026 indicative budget is as follows: -

	100% Costs	75% from TEO	25% from Council
Total Costs	£365,744.76	£274,308.57	£91,436.19
Total Programme Costs	£162,300.00	£121,725.00	£40,575.00
Total Staff Costs	£203,444.76	£152,583.57	£50,861.19

- 3.6. The table above shows the total cost of the Action Plan 2025-2026 which has been submitted in draft to TEO, pending approval from Council. The 75% is the anticipated grant from TEO and 25% represents Council's required contribution which totals £91,436.19.
- 3.7. As in 2024-2025, TEO has moved towards a more significant focus on outcomes based accountability, and as such, they have developed a number of T:BUC outcomes, project level outcomes, and pre and post evaluation model. Officers have attempted, within the Action Plan and



where possible, to connect these with the anticipated projects.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial implications - Through the submission of the Action Plan 2025-2026, Council has the opportunity to secure 75% of funding from TEO towards the cost of delivery and associated staffing and administration costs. Council will match fund in the amount of £91,436.19 which equates to 25% of total budget. The required contribution from Council is accounted for in the estimates process 2025-2026.
- 4.2. Human Resources – The Good Relations Action plan will be delivered through the District Electoral Area team.
- 4.3. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan - This piece of work would sit within the community planning theme of "Community Safety & Cohesion".

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Council consider the draft 2025-2026 Good Relations Action Plan for delivery as per funding allocated by TEO.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Council is asked to
 - (i) approve the Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026, which has been submitted to The Executive Office in draft format, for the purposes of securing 75% funding of the overall costs for that period.

7. Appendices / Links

- Appendix 1 Commissioning Letter
- Appendix 2 Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2026
- Appendix 3 Good Relations Audit and Strategy 2022-2025

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28 November 2024

Dear Ms Watts

COMMISSIONING LETTER: APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING FROM DISTRICT COUNCILS FOR THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME 2025-2026 ACTION PLAN

Action

I am writing to invite Mid and East Antrim Council to submit an application for funding under the Executive Office's (TEO) District Council Good Relations Programme (DCGRP) for the period 2025-2026.

Background

TEO recognises the value in achieving local solutions to local issues and regards the DCGRP as an important vehicle for promoting reconciliation and building a united community. It is one of our key means of delivering effective good relations interventions.

The significance of the DCGRP is noted in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy which states that the DCGRP 'is an important link between the high level strategic priorities outlined through this strategy and delivery of



community relations locally.' This has been reinforced through the Executive's commitment to the full implementation of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy in the Stormont House, Fresh Start and New Decade, New Approach agreements.

2025/26 Funding

You are now being asked to submit an Action Plan for 2025/26, which will include a section for each funded programme assessing the potential for the project to develop over the next funding cycle, **by 24 January 2025**.

The Action Plan will be assessed, revised where appropriate, and an allocation agreed with each Council for the 2025/26 year subject to a **satisfactory assessment and availability of budget**.

Match Funding

TEO will fund 75% of eligible expenditure under the DCGRP with councils required to provide match funding of 25%. We will endeavour to issue initial letters of offer to each council as early as possible in the new financial year.

Opening Budget Position 2025/26

Our opening budget position for 2025/26 has not yet been confirmed. The 2024/25 Programme operated within a challenging budgetary environment and at present the budget position for 2025/26 is not known. Therefore, we would ask that you formulate an Action Plan that, where possible, is scalable and can be revised as necessary to reflect the finalised budget position once this has been confirmed.

Programme Finance

It is extremely important that Programmes are delivered in a financially efficient and responsible manner.

It is critical that all deadlines for the submission of claims are met, including all deadlines and conditions of acceptance detailed in the Letter of Offer. It is very important that the final claim for each funding cycle is submitted **no later than 12 weeks after the end of the Programme.**

Councils should only bid for a level of resource they feel confident they will be able to claim in full over the course of the delivery period.

Councils should ensure they have sufficient resources and appropriate organisational structures in place to deliver the level of Programme for which funding has been requested.

Evidence Based Interventions

It is extremely important that evidence of need from your Good Relations Audit, previous Action Plan outcomes, and other sources are used to ensure that the highest good relations needs in your Council area are targeted and prioritised in your Plan.

We expect you to show how the Action Plan will lead to positive good relations outcomes for the hard to reach, marginalised and isolated members of the community, and how it will tackle challenging and difficult issues that would benefit from the application of local good relations interventions.

We also expect you to show how the project has been designed and planned, how it will recruit participants, and how it will work in partnership with any other group(s).

We have also included a table for recording how the programmes link to Section 75.

Key Priorities

District Councils are asked to submit action plans that are structured around making a significant contribution across each of the T:BUC strategy's four key priorities.

Each individual programme in your Action Plan should contribute to one or more of the four key aims of the T:BUC Strategy:

- Our Children and Young People
- Our Shared Community
- Our Safe Community
- Our Cultural Expression

Outcome Focus

The process for the collection, collation, analysis and reporting of outcomes continues to develop. Councils are now able to access the outcomes from their activity as soon as participants have completed their feedback returns, use this information to inform current and future good relations delivery, and to identify good practice in delivery going forward.

Every project funded through the Action Plan should be sufficiently resourced to enable every direct participant the opportunity to complete a feedback return in relation to their engagement with the project.

Projects should, where applicable, refer to the previous outcomes achieved, and note how these outcomes have been used to inform the proposed design and

delivery of the project in 2025/26. New projects should refer where possible to previous outcomes achieved using similar methods of delivery or types of activity.

Value for money

Councils should prioritise their proposed activities in the Action Plan and set out good relations activities that clearly demonstrate value for money.

Submission process

Detail on what this process entails is provided in the table below:

Documentation required	Deadline for submission
2025/26 DCGRP Action Plan (Appendix 1)	24 January 2025
2025/26 DCGRP – Chief Executive covering letter (Appendix 2)	24 January 2025
Latest available Good Relations Audit	24 January 2025
Job Descriptions (showing current salary scale) for funded posts	24 January 2025

Guidance

Guidance has been included at the start of the action plan template to assist with completion.

Complementarity

For each project in your application, you should note where planned DCGRP provision complements work being carried out through other funded schemes or by other organisations, to achieve positive good relations outcomes. This would include, but is not limited to, activity in your wider community plan, PCSPs and

other complementary funding schemes e.g Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF). Any additional expected outcomes alongside good relations outcomes should also be documented – for example, any qualifications delivered as part of a project that participants could achieve.

For Councils involved in the Urban Villages Initiative (a headline action under the T:BUC Strategy) the Plan should also demonstrate through specific actions how it can complement the activities being led by the Urban Villages Initiative.

Peace Plus

Council led projects under the EU Peace Plus Programme should be considered. The Peace Plus programmes note the importance of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy in providing a strong NI policy context for the Peace programme. This is reflected in the broad alignment between Peace Plus themes and the strategy's four key priorities. The European Commission will expect Peace programmes to complement the policy objectives of Northern Ireland and Ireland. The Executive Office similarly considers that it is vitally important that you consider and detail in your Action Plan specific opportunities to create synergies between the Peace Plus Programme and actions to ensure these are delivered.

T:BUC Trees

The T:BUC Trees initiative seeks to provide opportunities for people from all backgrounds to learn more about the environment, and make positive contributions in this regard, in a shared good relations context. All Councils have held T:BUC Trees events previously and we would encourage Councils to build on this delivery in 2025/26.

Social Value...

Councils are encouraged to consider the concept of Social Value when drafting their action plans. Social Value derived from a public contract is the positive



legacy created through its performance. This legacy can include a more diverse workforce, fewer single use plastics in the environment, and more cohesive communities. By including social value in procurement councils, suppliers, and brokers can work together to:

- Create job opportunities for people who face barriers to work.
- Invest in skills development and educational attainment.
- Support Social Enterprises and new businesses.
- Support Voluntary and Community organisations.
- Promote equality and diversity.
- Reduce our carbon footprint.
- Improve mental health and wellbeing.

Application submission

Please submit electronic copies to: district.councilGR@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

The closing date for receipt of electronic copies for the 2025/26 Action Plan and supporting documentation set out above is **4pm on 24 January 2025**.

The final decision on the level of funding offered will be determined when we have assessed the action plans submitted by each council and when our opening budget for 2025/26 is confirmed.

The assessment of the action plans will take place during February and March 2025. Officials may be in touch with your Good Relations Officers to discuss and clarify aspects of the action plan during this process. As I noted above, we will endeavour to issue letters of offer as early as possible in the new financial year.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this letter please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9037 8720.



Yours sincerely

J McCormack

Julie McCormack

Acting Head of District Councils, Camps and Planned Interventions (DCI)





The
Executive Office

DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME

2025/2026 ACTION PLAN

District Council: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Chief Executive Officer: Mrs Valerie Watts (Interim Chief Executive)

DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME
2025/2026 ACTION PLAN

Section 1

1.1 Programme information

Number of programmes	8
Name/role/contact details of all staff responsible for programme management	<p>Janet Shearer, DEA Manager Larne and Carrickfergus (Leading on Good Relations and Community Planning)</p> <p>Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Carrickfergus Town Hall 11 Antrim Street Carrickfergus BT38 7DG</p> <p>Tel: 028 9335 8312 Email: janet.shearer@midandeastantrim.gov.uk</p>

1.2 Financial information

Name/contact details for staff responsible for financial management of programme	<p>Janet Shearer, DEA Manager Larne and Carrickfergus (Leading on Good Relations and Community Planning)</p> <p>Tel: 028 9335 8312 Email: janet.shearer@midandeastantrim.gov.uk</p>
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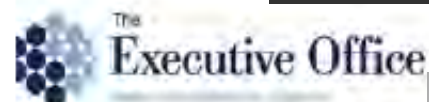
	100%	75%
Total cost	£365,744.76	£274,308.57
Total programme costs	£162,300.00	£121,725.00
Programme costs breakdown		
Children and Young People	£9,000	£6,750
Shared Community	£6,000	£4,500
Safe Community	£44,300	£33,225
Cultural Expression	£103,000	£77,250
Total staff and other expenses costs	£203,444.76	£152,583.57
Staff cost breakdown		
Job title and % of role focussing on GR (Job Descriptions to be forwarded to TEO along with completed Action Plan)	1x Manager @ 50% - £31,411.59	£23,558.69
	7x DEA Officers @ 35% - £135,357.48	£101,518.11
	3x DEA Admin Officers @ 35% - £36,675.69	£27,506.77
Other expenses breakdown e.g. travel, stationery, phones etc please give details	£0.00	£0.00

1.3 Claim deadlines

It is extremely important that all claims for expenditure are made promptly and that full expenditure is claimed for within six weeks of the end of the financial year. The claim deadlines for 25/26 are as follows:

- Quarter 1 to be with TEO no later than end of July 2025
- Quarter 2 to be with TEO no later than end of October 2025
- Quarter 3 to be with TEO no later than the end of January 2026
- Quarter 4 to be with TEO no later than 11th June 2026

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Section 2

2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
ACTIVE TOGETHER	MEA01
2.03 KEY WORDS	Youth, Sport, Art, Diverse, Rural, Urban, Shared
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>Year 7 is an important transitional year for primary school children as they prepare to move to post primary schools where they are likely to encounter more diversity than they have in primary school. They will be travelling to different parts of the Borough to attend school, often through unfamiliar communities and areas. This Year 7 programme focuses on the use of sport and physical activity to bring children from different backgrounds together. In addition to the physical activity element the programmes will include age appropriate workshops and activities on the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity and difference • Hate crime • Health and wellbeing • Pro-social behaviour <p>This programme will also incorporate the T:BUC Trees initiative by including education about the environment as part of the GR workshops.</p> <p>Recruitment for the programme will focus on those areas/schools where there is the least diversity of communities or race. As such it will support those young people who will have had less exposure to cultural and community diversity.</p> <p>Sport participation was positively related to pro-social behaviour, subjective health, well-being, and sense of coherence - Examining the relationship between sports participation and youth developmental outcomes for socially vulnerable youth, Super, S. 2018</p> <p><i>Physical activity can improve an individual's social skills and problem-solving abilities... children and adolescents who actively participate in physical activities develop better prosocial behaviours and fewer interpersonal problems, A series of studies illustrate that an association probably exists between physical activity and prosocial behaviour in children and adolescents (Influence of Sports Activities on Prosocial Behaviour of Children and</i></p>

DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME
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	Adolescents: A Systematic Literature Review (2022)			
	This programme will contribute to the following indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community 			
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeastantrim.gov.uk			
2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£9,000			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£6,750			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	300	Indirect	600
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£30.00			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021 ('Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Children and Young People			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	Feedback provided to the Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identified that there are limited opportunities for meaningful engagement between communities and too few opportunities for people of different religious backgrounds to meet and build relationships. Feedback also indicated that this is compounded by continued segregation in education.			

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	<p>Many respondents also noted that younger generations interact more naturally across communities and suggested that opportunities for this type of engagement foster understanding from an early age and were both welcome and effective.</p>
<p>2.15 Complementarity-include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc</p>	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - "Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted"; "Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves" (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 2 - Thriving and Peaceful Communities Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both - Rural and Urban</p>

DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME
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2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
COMMON GOOD	MEA02
2.03 KEY WORDS	Shared, Youth, Adults, Seniors, Fac
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>This programme represents the continuing evolution of the Safe Space Programme, which has been delivered in collaboration with the PCSP since 2019.</p> <p>This programme builds on previous successful detached youth work which engaged disaffected young people from across the Borough who are at risk of becoming involved in hate crime, sectarian or anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>The programme uses a strengths based model and combines group work on issues such as EDI, good relations, and drugs and alcohol with one to one mentoring support.</p> <p>The programme will continue its multi-agency approach which includes representatives from PCSP, GR, Department of Justice, PSNI, Elected Representatives, Education Authority Youth Service, the YMCA. As the programme has developed, it has supported local community and church groups to engage with local young people and provide appropriate services in their community.</p> <p>The detached youth worker team will work agilely, establishing programmes of work in both known hotspots (identified by the PSNI) and in areas where need is identified during the year. Target locations will include trains, parks, town centres, underpasses, leisure centres, and community centres. It will proactively target harder-to-reach young people who may be at risk of becoming involved in sectarian, racist activities or anti-social behaviour with the ultimate aim of providing routes into positive social activities.</p> <p>Whilst these are specific areas of note we will also work to identify ad hoc areas of concern and utilise the multi-agency approach to regularly review any changes in hot spot areas for example in response to incidents such as that which took place in Broughshane prior to Christmas. The programme is also cognisant of seasonal concerns</p>

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in coastal areas where the demographic of the population changes in the summer months each year.

Whilst the programme will have a co-design approach with young people, the core of the programme will include the following themes: creating a sense of belonging to the community, good relations, consequences of involvement in racist or sectarian behaviour and restorative practices.

The programme benefits from sustained partnership working with the PCSP and Youth Service Providers (EA Youth Service, etc.), the Drugs Task Force and the Town Centre Wardens, the Town Centre Development Manager, and the Departments of Council which deliver sports and arts development and the community and voluntary sector.

A report by Pivotal published in October 2023, found that 66.5% of 14 to 25 year respondents reported that young people still feel the impact of the troubles today.¹

In addition:

Young people aged 16 to 24 years in the UK may also be feeling more disconnected from their communities, with a decrease in those agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood between 2014 to 2015 (57%) and 2017 to 2018 (48%). Young People's Wellbeing in the Community 2020.

This programme will contribute to the following indicators:

- % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background
- % People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (MEA)
- % people who have a sense of belonging to their community
- % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society

¹ Youth solutions for building better communities in Northern Ireland, Pivotal Public Policy Forum NI (2023)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of incidents with a hate motivation 			
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeantrim.gov.uk			
2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£30,000			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£22,500			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	500	Indirect	1000
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£60.00			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Safe Community			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	The Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identified a need for initiatives which would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create culture of respect for everyone Create opportunities to bring people together, learn about backgrounds and culture. Create opportunities to share in relationship and confidence-building ways Feedback also highlighted the importance of providing young people with opportunities and choices and to teach young people about the importance of inclusivity. Education was seen as key to long term change and of 226 respondents, 18% identified education as the means to improve relationships within and between religions and racial backgrounds. The comments included support for development of integrated			

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	<p>education as well as strong support for identifying and delivering education programmes to increase understanding and challenge stereotypes.</p>
<p>2.15 Complementarity-include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc</p>	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - "Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted"; "Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves" (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 2 - Thriving and Peaceful Communities Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p> <p>The draft peace plus action plan includes a co-designed youth programme, however the focus is on young people who are already engaged in youth provision and not detached youth.</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both rural and urban</p>

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<p>2.01 PROGRAMME NAME</p>	<p>2.02 CODE</p>
<p>INTEGRATE</p>	<p>MEA03</p>
<p>2.03 KEY WORDS</p>	<p>Shared, Youth, Adults, Seniors, Diverse</p>
<p>2.04 Programme Summary</p>	<p>Experience has shown that the out workings of racial tensions and concerns require an immediate and effective response to mitigate wider community unrest.</p> <p>The Programme is a focused piece of work centred on addressing hate crime, reducing misconceptions and supporting specific needs of the communities as identified by the Racial Equality Strategy.</p> <p>This programme continues to work with the Multi-Agency Group (MAG) established to respond to racial tensions and concerns for example seasonal Roma community workers in the Ballymena area, refugees and migrants moving into the area or other similar issues, as needs arise.</p> <p>In the past the GR Team, the Inter-Ethnic Forum and NHSCT worked through Agencies Supporting Ethnic Minorities (ASEC) to develop a toolkit model for interventions. We will continue to use this toolkit as required.</p> <p>The MAG will continue to meet, fact check and put in place ad hoc programming that can be pulled together swiftly to de-escalate tensions and help to resolve issues.</p> <p>In 2025/26, we will continue to include but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of cultural awareness workshops with churches, schools and young people • In partnership with the EA and PSNI, facilitation of workshops on hate crime • Facilitation and delivery of support clinics in partnership with statutory agencies raising awareness of Housing, Education, Waste Disposal, Health Matters, Personal safety, Hate Crime, Road Safety & Laws. <p>We continue to build on existing work, in partnership with PSNI, on the Borough wide No Hate Here Initiative.</p>

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	<p>It will continue to offer support and assistance to the Agencies Supporting Ethnic Communities group. This element is a tendered programme.</p> <p>This programme will contribute to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community • % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society • % people who value the contribution of other cultures • Number of incidents with a hate motivation 			
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeastantrim.gov.uk			
2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£14,300			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£10,725			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	100	Indirect	300
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£143.00			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Safe Community			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	Between April 2024 and September 2024 there were 45 race incidents and 31 race crimes recorded in Mid and East Antrim. Both figures represent and			

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	<p>increase on the same period in 2023 (by 15 and 5 respectively)²</p> <p>How favourable people feel towards people from a different ethnic group from themselves has been on a downward trend since 2015 and in the period 2021-2023 it was at its lowest with 58.5% of MEA residents feeling favourable or very favourable³</p> <p>Since 2019 there has been a reduction in the percentage of people in Mid and East Antrim who think that the culture and traditions of people from different minority ethnic groups add to the richness and diversity of NI society. In 2019/21 it was 19.7% dropping to 17.2% for 2021/23⁴</p> <p>The Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identifies the need for initiatives which would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create culture of respect for everyone • Create opportunities to bring people together, learn about backgrounds and culture. • Create opportunities to share in relationship and confidence-building ways. • Highlight the cultural gifts people have and show what they can offer to the community. <p>The audit also identified a need to raise awareness of the value of new residents in the Borough in terms of the diversity they bring. The audit feedback acknowledged the need for local organisations which offer practical support, language exchange, and cultural orientation for newcomers while providing opportunities for existing residents to learn about different cultures, addressing feedback about the need for better integration support.</p>
<p>2.15 Complementarity-include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc</p>	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027)</p>

² <https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics/hate-motivation-statistics>

³ NI Life and Times Survey

⁴ NI Life and Times Survey

	<p>We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People’s Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - “Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted”; “Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves” (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending)</p> <p>Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p> <p>The draft peace plus action plan includes programming which aims to develop cultural competence and confidence by supporting professionals and communities in increasing their understanding of other cultural norms so that they can improve how they deliver their services or activities. Providing support to refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers to engage with their local community including for example ESOL Classes, recreational and social opportunities, advice and signposting</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Urban</p>

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2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
REGIONAL INITIATIVES	MEA04
2.03 KEY WORDS	Shared, Youth, Adult, Senior, Trees
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>Participation in the Regional Initiatives enables Council to champion a wide range of programmes, and to engage with people who might not usually participate in good relations activity. The breadth of programming aims to appeal to as many residents of the Borough as possible and will include, but not be limited to, participation in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holocaust Memorial Day (January) • International Women’s Day (March) • Good Relations Week (September) <p>Participating in regional initiatives provides the opportunity to celebrate the rich culture and history of the Borough and to facilitate events which have mass/public appeal. Such events highlight the existence and success of good relations programmes and provide the opportunity to widen engagement and participation.</p> <p>In Mid and East Antrim these will include events which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire curiosity - celebrating diversity, raising awareness of other cultures and heritages • Inspire creativity - use the arts such as music, storytelling and drama to explore different traditions • Inspire confidence - provide opportunities to meet and engage with people from different cultural backgrounds <p>Such events provide a public showcase which illustrates the Council’s commitment to the Borough having a strong, vibrant, safe and inclusive community, where people work together to improve the quality of life for all. It also provides the opportunity for the involvement of local groups/ agencies as they promote GR in their local communities.</p> <p>This programme will incorporate the T:BUC trees initiative in terms of activities to encourage awareness of environmental issues.</p>



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	<p>The established role of events as vehicles for bringing people together also creates social value. Encouraging social contact can lead to enhanced individual wellbeing, but also shared benefits that result from building better connected and more resilient communities. This leads to a range of benefits including increased levels of trust, reduction in conflicts, better integration of isolated people and, ultimately, better support networks.⁵</p> <p>This programme will contribute to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background • % People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (MEA) • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community • % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society • % people who value the contribution of other cultures • Number of incidents with a hate motivation 			
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeastantrim.gov.uk			
2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£6,000			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£4,500			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	600	Indirect	1200
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£10.00			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB

⁵ The Social Value of Community Events: a Literature Review, Spirit of 2012 (2021)



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2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Shared Community			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	<p>Almost one in three residents of Mid and East Antrim believe that there is more racial prejudice in Northern Ireland now than there was 5 years ago.⁶</p> <p>The Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identifies the potential value of a series of community cultural events or festivals. These regular seasonal events would celebrate different cultures, featuring food, music, and traditions from all communities. This addresses multiple suggestions about celebrating multiculturalism and making diversity more visible, while creating positive alternatives to divisive events.</p> <p>41% of respondents to the audit survey agreed or strongly agreed that in their area there are often events which bring people together. 62% agreed or strongly agreed that where they live there is a sense of community and pride.</p>			
2.15 Complementarity- include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - "Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted"; "Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected"</p>			

⁶ NI life and times survey

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	<p>and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves" (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both Rural and Urban</p>

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2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
CELEBRATING CULTURE SAFELY	MEA05
2.03 KEY WORDS	Sin-ID, Youth, Adult, Shared, Trees
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>This programme will facilitate MEA’s Beacon programme. The Beacon programme is proving to be hugely successful, with 9 beacons in July 2024. This is 1 in 4 of the 35 bonfires held in the Borough and is an increase of 6 in the past 4 years</p> <p>By moving from bonfires to beacons, communities are recognising the environmental impact of burning toxic material which is in keeping with the TBUC trees initiative. They are also ensuring safe celebrations and ensuring that offensive materials are not included in the bonfire.</p> <p>The focus of this programme is keeping people safe, promoting respect for residents, and creating greater community cohesion in local communities. The programme focuses on creating family focused events, and minimising the negative impact which can be caused by some cultural celebrations on the natural and built environment and people’s health and well-being.</p> <p>An established working group includes partners from the NI Housing Executive, the PSNI, NIFRS, the Department for Infrastructure (Roads), NI Environment Agency, NI Electricity, and a number of Elected Members along with Council staff. This group meets regularly and works collaboratively across a number of aspects in relation to cultural celebrations.</p> <p>*NB this is a single identity programme</p> <p>This programme will contribute to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community • % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	<p>Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeantrim.gov.uk</p>



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2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£60,000			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£45,000			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	1800	Indirect	3600
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£33.33			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Cultural Expression			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	<p>The Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identifies the following:-</p> <p><i>"Do something about bonfires, flags, sectarian murals etc to make towns more inclusive and welcoming. Do not let politics and religion dictate council policies."</i> (survey respondent)</p> <p>Feedback in the audit acknowledges the need to continue with slow improvement and progress being made and that the council needs to help communities break down political barriers and run projects throughout the local community and break that divide</p> <p>41% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in their area there are often events which bring people together. 62% agreed or strongly agreed that where they live there is a sense of community and pride.</p>			
2.15 Complementarity-include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First</p> <p>Community Safety & Cohesion</p> <p>Progress in Education and Employment</p>			

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<p>Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc</p>	<p>Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 2 - Thriving and Peaceful Communities Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both Rural and Urban</p>

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2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
EMBRACE	MEA06
2.03 KEY WORDS	Shared, Art, Diverse, Trees
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>The Embrace programme was developed from a number of cultural diversity events, which took place across the Borough. The Good Relations team worked in partnership with Council departments such as Parks, Arts and Events and external partners such as Artsekta, Inter-Ethnic Forum (Mid and East Antrim), local libraries etc. to develop activities.</p> <p>In 2025/2026 the programme will include a series of activities and events to raise awareness of the diverse cultures in our Borough as well as newcomers, asylum seekers etc.</p> <p>Activities may include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ #embrACE Celebration - small world café events ▪ #embrACE Talking libraries ▪ #embrACE Cultural Diversity activities. <p>Where appropriate activities will be linked to wider national awareness raising campaigns such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Race equality week (February) ▪ International day for the elimination of racism (March) ▪ World Refugee day (June) <p>Connection will also be made as appropriate to cultural festivals including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese New Year (February) • Diwali (October) • Holi (March) • Eid ul Fitr (March) <p>Arts based activities can bring people together for meaningful dialogue and build understanding in a way which is not considered threatening. They provide the opportunity to involve groups and individuals who might not otherwise engage in intercultural activities. Programmes such as Embrace provides a gateway for local organisations and individuals to form positive contacts which can act as a foundation for further connection.</p>

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	<p><i>Gaining a greater understanding of different cultures and multiculturalism - Understanding motivations and benefits of attending a multicultural festival Lee, IS & Huang, S 2015</i> <i>The motivations of festival visitors...learning new things, socialisation, and family togetherness (Lee et al. 2004; Thompson & Schofield 2009).</i></p> <p>The established role of events as vehicles for bringing people together also creates social value. Encouraging social contact can lead to enhanced individual wellbeing, but also shared benefits that result from building better connected and more resilient communities. This leads to a range of benefits including increased levels of trust, reduction in conflicts, better integration of isolated people and, ultimately, better support networks.⁷</p> <p>This programme will contribute to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community • % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society • % people who value the contribution of other cultures • Number of incidents with a hate motivation 				
<p>2.05 Contact details for programme staff</p>	<p>Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeantrim.gov.uk</p>				
<p>2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)</p>	<p>£8,000</p>				
<p>2.07 Total TEO contribution</p>	<p>£6,000</p>				
<p>2.08 Total target no. of participants</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">Direct</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">800</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Indirect</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">1600</td> </tr> </table>	Direct	800	Indirect	1600
Direct	800	Indirect	1600		
<p>2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme</p>	<p>£10.00</p>				
<p>2.10 Targeted participant background analysis</p>	<p>67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas.</p>				

⁷ The Social Value of Community Events: a Literature Review, Spirit of 2012 (2021)

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	'Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Cultural Expression			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	<p>Feedback to the 2022-2025 audit suggested that there is a lack of opportunities for meaningful interaction between different groups, with too few regular opportunities for people to meet and share experiences.</p> <p>Audit comments also identified the role of social media in amplifying racial tensions by spreading divisive attitudes and negative stereotypes about newcomers to the community.</p> <p>Specific comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate those to not feel threatened by those who want to make a new life here • I think creating sub communities within communities is destructive and resists integration and mingling. Mixing communities would be nice. • More information for those who maybe set in there [sic] ways to educate people on other cultures to stamp out ignorance and to break stereo types • Opportunities to appropriately identify and engage with those of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. • Organise more events that reach out to people from different cultures that bring people together and build a sense of community. • Concentrate on diversity - promote it, have inclusive events for all ages 			
2.15 Complementarity-include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p>			

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	<p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People’s Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - “Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted”; “Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves” (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both Rural and Urban</p>

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2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROJECTS	MEA07
2.03 KEY WORDS	Shared, Art, Diverse, Adult
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>Exploring shared history is extremely useful in identifying what we, as individuals, have in common. This can be done in a range of ways through museum programmes, arts, cultural and heritage events through online programming and the virtual medium.</p> <p>By making our shared history more accessible to local people, and dispelling myths and misperceptions that may exist, we can build a more cohesive and shared society.</p> <p>We will continue to support events such as The Royal Landings, shared heritage music events and other small world café events, whilst also working with the Museums Service, Parks Officers, the Arts Officers and DEA officers to identify programmes that meet local need.</p> <p>As with other programmes we will continue to develop a partnership approach that encourages GR and cultural diversity to be embedded and mainstreamed not only within Council but across a range of activity providers across the Borough.</p> <p>This will include the development of a number of projects and programmes which will not only explore the diversity of the two main traditions within the Borough but also incorporating other traditions where possible in recognition of the complexity of our shared history and identities.</p> <p>This programme will contribute to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background • % People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (MEA) • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community • % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % people who value the contribution of other cultures 			
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeantrim.gov.uk			
2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£5,000			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£3,750			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	1000	Indirect	2000
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£5.00			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Cultural Expression			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	<p>The Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identifies the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council needs to help communities break down political barriers and run projects throughout the local community and break that divide. Make plans to welcome people into the Borough who are from a variety of religious backgrounds and none. This stops it being about 2 opposing sides and creates a natural curiosity Create culture of respect for everyone Create opportunities to bring people together, learn about backgrounds and culture. Create opportunities to share in relationship and confidence-building ways. 			

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<p>2.15 Complementarity- include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc</p>	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - "Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted"; "Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves" (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p> <p>The draft Peace Plus action plan includes a programme entitled 'who do we think we are?' which explores local history and heritage and will use a variety of creative media to explore this. The proposed GR programme will act as both a gateway into and an opportunity for showcasing of the outputs of this proposed programme.</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both Rural and Urban</p>

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2.01 PROGRAMME NAME	2.02 CODE
GOOD RELATIONS SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME	MEA08
2.03 KEY WORDS	Shared, Art, Diverse, Adult, Trees
2.04 Programme Summary	<p>Historically the small grants programme has been very successful in supporting grassroots good relations activities. The small projects supported are in response to local need and delivered through trusted local organisations. Being rooted in their local communities in this way increases the impact of the activities.</p> <p>One of the most important aspects of the grant programme is the need to maintain a rolling programme to enable support to both existing and emerging groups as well as ensuring the ability to respond to new and emerging opportunities or challenges.</p> <p>This Grants Scheme is open to constituted groups offering a 100% grant [up to £2,500] for one or more projects and applicants must clearly demonstrate how the proposed project(s) will meet the T:BUC key theme, Our Cultural Expression.</p> <p>Groups will also be encouraged to participate in the T:BUC Trees initiative and details of this will be included in the guidance notes as well as any promotional materials.</p> <p>Historically, a wide variety of community led projects have been supported through the scheme including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross community initiatives for young people and for the wider community • Cultural celebrations • Shared history projects • Projects that promote good relations within and between communities. <p>In order to raise awareness of, and participation in, this programme we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver awareness raising sessions in each DEA to encourage relevant spread of applications. • Provide additional mentoring in areas of need or areas with low submission rates to support development of relevant, and creative ideas for



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	<p>application. This will help improve the quality and reach of successful projects by increasing the number and diversity of applicants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Showcase a number of short stories of successfully delivered GR projects. ▪ Liaise with our Council communications colleagues to produce online materials to promote the activity being undertaken as part of the Grant Scheme. ▪ Encourage and rate more highly collaborative DEA based applications. ▪ Provide advice to support the application process <p>To encourage uptake of the programme in areas of low uptake, DEA officers will work across their localities to determine areas of greatest need and opportunity. Working to encourage and develop local partnerships between groups on the ground to support uptake and subsequent submission of relevant applications. DEA officers will also provide additional mentoring to design and develop potential projects on a collaborative basis. Accessibility will be supported through a 50% advance payment to enable cash flow and identification of a designated support officer (usually the DEA officer) in the Council during implementation of the project.</p> <p>In 2022-2023 year we had 15 applications, compared to 7 in the previous year which demonstrated over 100% increase.</p> <p>For the past 2 years the Council's GR action plan has not included a small grants element / the small grants budget has been significantly reduced. The impact of this has been minimised by the availability of funding in Ballymena and Carrickfergus through the Shared Housing Programme. It is relevant that shared housing programmes have a 5 year period for support and also that there are no shared housing developments in Larne. Reinstatement of the small grants programme is a vital part of ensuring equitable support across the Borough for community led good relations activity and also to avoid emerging gaps in support as the shared housing programme winds down its funding.</p>
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	<p>This programme will contribute to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background • % People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (MEA) • % people who have a sense of belonging to their community • % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society • % people who value the contribution of other cultures • Number of incidents with a hate motivation 			
2.05 Contact details for programme staff	<p>Janet Shearer 02893358312 / 07762105915 Janet.shearer@midandeastantrim.gov.uk</p>			
2.06 Total budgeted cost of programme (100%)	£30,000			
2.07 Total TEO contribution	£22,500			
2.08 Total target no. of participants	Direct	500	Indirect	1000
2.09 Budgeted unit cost of programme	£60			
2.10 Targeted participant background analysis	<p>67% PUL 20% CNR 13% Other Religions / No Religion However this may vary slightly between DEA areas. 'Religion brought up in' Census 2021</p>			
2.11 Name and post code of Programme HQ	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT42 1AB
2.12 Names and post codes for main areas of programme impact	Location	Carrickfergus	Postcode	BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ
	Location	Larne	Postcode	BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ
	Location	Ballymena	Postcode	BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
2.13 T:BUC Key Aim	Our Cultural Expression			
2.14 Link to good relations audit	<p>The Good Relations Audit 2022-2025 (pages 10-16) identifies the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council needs to help communities break down political barriers and run projects 			

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	<p>throughout the local community and break that divide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to share in relationship and confidence-building ways. • Practice and preach tolerance. • Look for common ground beyond religion • Clear information that we welcome and support others. Dispel myths about those who want to come here
<p>2.15 Complementarity-include links with other Strategy's e.g. Peace Plus, Urban Villages, MEDF etc</p>	<p>Community Plan - Putting People First Community Safety & Cohesion Progress in Education and Employment Good Health and Wellbeing</p> <p>Programme for Government (draft 2024-2027) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law and each other We have a lasting peace, ensuring a stable and harmonious society for all</p> <p>Cross Departmental Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2029 - Outcome - "Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted"; "Children and young people have a central role in creating a society in which diversity is respected and where people of all backgrounds are acknowledged and feel valued. But they cannot do it by themselves" (pg90)</p> <p>Peace Plus Local Action Plan (Decision pending) Theme 2 - Thriving and Peaceful Communities Theme 3 - Building Respect for all Cultural Identities</p>
<p>2.16 Impacted Communities – Urban, Rural or both</p>	<p>Both Rural and Urban</p>

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Section 3

Action Plan Programme Outcome Summary Table 2024/25

Programme name (2.01)	Code (2.02)	Key Aim (2.13)	No. direct participants (2.08)	Total Cost (2.06)	Total TEO Contribution (2.07)	Post Codes (2.11)
Active Together	MEA 01	Children and young people	300	9000	6750	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
Common Good	MEA 02	Our safe community	500	30000	22500	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
Integrate	MEA 03	Our safe community	100	14300	10725	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
Regional Initiatives	MEA 04	Our shared community	600	6000	4500	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL

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Celebrating Culture Safely	MEA 05	Our cultural expression	1800	60000	45000	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
Embrace	MEA 06	Our cultural expression	800	8000	6000	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
Cultural and Heritage Projects	MEA 07	Our cultural expression	1000	5000	3750	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL
Good Relations Small Grants Programme	MEA 08	Our cultural expression	500	30000	22500	Carrickfergus BT38 7DA - BT40 3NQ Larne BT38 9BF - BT44 0LQ Ballymena BT41 1AA - BT44 9QL

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Section 4

T:BUC Strategic Outcome

	C&YP	Shared community	Safe community	Cultural Expression	Council Total	TEO Total
Total no. of programmes	1	1	2	4	8	8
Total no. of direct participants	300	600	600	5,200	6,700	6,700
Unit cost of programme activity	£30	£10	£73.83	£19.81	£24.22	£18.16
Total Council cost of programmes	£9,000	£6,000	£44,300	£103,000	£162,300	
Total TEO cost of Programmes	£6,750	£4,500	£33,225	£77,250		£121,725

Annex A to be completed to cover the Section 75 categories for each programme.

APPENDIX 1

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ANNEX A

Section 75 Categories												
Programme Name	Programme Number	Persons of Different Genders	Persons of Different Religious Beliefs	Persons of Different Political Opinion	Different Racial Groups	Different Age Groups	Persons of Different Marital Status	Persons of Different Sexual Orientations	Dependants		Disabilities	
									Persons With	Persons Without	Persons with	Persons without
Active Together	MEA01	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Without		Both	
Common Good	MEA02	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Without		Both	
Integrate	MEA03	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both		Both	
Regional Initiatives	MEA04	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both		Both	
Celebrating Culture Safely	MEA05	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both		Both	
Embrace	MEA06	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both		Both	
Cultural and Heritage Projects	MEA07	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both		Both	
Good Relations Small Grants Programme	MEA08	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both		Both	

DISTRICT COUNCIL GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME
2025/2026 ACTION PLAN





**Mid & East
Antrim**
Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim

Good Relations

Audit and Strategy

2022 - 2025

February 2022

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Context and Background

Mid and East Antrim Borough covers an area of just over 400 square miles and stretches from Carrickfergus, Larne and Carnlough on the Coast in the east to Portglenone in the west.

With a population of 139,443 residents, it is an area which enjoys and benefits from vibrant urban and rural communities, many of which are supported by active community and voluntary groups.

The Council area is composed of seven District Electoral Areas or DEAs which enable the Council to identify and respond to need on a more localised basis. The DEAs and the areas they include are outlined in the table below.

District Electoral Area	Composite Wards
Ballymena	Academy, Ardeevin, Ballykeel, Braidwater, Castle Demesne, Fair Green and Park
Bannside	Ahoghill, Cullybackey, Galgorm, Grange, Maine and Portglenone
Braid	Ballee and Harryville, Broughshane, Glenravel, Glenwherry, Kells, Kirkinriola and Slemish
Carrick Castle	Boneybefore, Castle, Kilroot, Love Lane and Victoria
Coast Road	Cairncastle, Carnlough and Glenarm, Craigyhill, Gardenmore and The Maidens
Larne Lough	Ballycarry and Glynn, Curran and Inver, Islandmagee, Kilwaughter and Whitehead South
Knockagh	Burleigh Hill, Gortalee, Greenisland, Sunnylands and Woodburn

Good Relations is a legal requirement that places an onus on public bodies, including local Councils, to 'promote positive relationships between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group'. (Section 75:2)

The results of the 2021 census, which would provide a more accurate profile of the population of Mid and East Antrim are not yet available, however on Census Day in 2011:

- **0.96%** were from an ethnic minority population and the remaining **99.04%** were white (including Irish Traveller);
- **19.34%** belong to or were brought up in the Catholic religion and **72.88%** belong to or were brought up in a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' religion; and
- **71.36%** indicated that they had a British national identity, **9.19%** had an Irish national identity and **29.43%** had a Northern Irish national identity.
- **3.5%** were born outside Northern Ireland

Residents from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are a small but growing part of the population of Mid and East Antrim, and whilst Brexit has impacted significantly on the

numbers of migrant workers who live in the area, there are still numbers of individuals and families from Eastern Europe living in the area.

Each Council is tasked with producing a three-year strategy and yearly action plan developed after a process of identifying and prioritising local good relation needs. They reflect the concerns raised by residents across the Borough and include indicators which will assist in measuring the difference made. The Council acknowledges that whilst there are concerns which are common to villages and neighbourhoods across the Borough, there are also “hot spots” and areas where issues are more acute. The Council is committed to retaining a flexible and agile approach which will enable it to respond to variances and changes in local need yet still contributing to the outcomes and ambitions of the plan for the Borough.

The Council is cognisant of the important role that it plays in supporting delivery of and complementing the good relations work of other agencies and groups throughout the Council area and embedding the ethos of good relations in other Council strategies such as community planning, and Policing and Community Safety initiatives which partner agencies are taking forward.

The strategy reflects the Council’s commitment to working collaboratively and to supporting members to embed good and emerging practice into the work of both Council and also key partner programmes.

Council’s District Electoral Areas (DEA) officer team will work to deliver this programme collaboratively, encouraging the development of partnership projects to maximise the impact Council can have in addressing the concerns of local residents. The DEA team sits within Council’s Community Planning and Development Service department.

The Council is aware of how good relations issues and priorities can vary between areas. By working closely with local stakeholders to identify solutions that best meets the needs of each individual area DEA officers will ensure that delivery of good relations programmes is responsive to local needs and reflects local priorities at the DEA basis.

The purpose of this Good Relations strategy is to articulate the Councils commitment to promoting and enabling inclusion and cohesion in the Borough.

Strategic context

Four key documents set the strategic direction for Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan. These documents set out the priorities at a Northern Ireland and Borough level to improve the lives of local residents.

Programme for Government

The draft framework for the programme for government which was consulted on in 2021 contains nine strategic Outcomes which, when taken together, will set a clear direction of travel for the NI Executive and provide a vision for the future of all citizens.

Relevant priorities for the Good Relations Strategy:

We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect

This Outcome is about tackling inequality and discrimination, increasing trust and respect, promoting understanding, ensuring that a person's background or identity is not a barrier to their participation in society. We want to address the legacy of the past and create space for sharing between traditionally divided and new communities.

Key priority areas include:

- Inclusion and tackling disadvantage – tackling the issues that lead to inequality and disadvantage in terms of welfare and poverty and providing support where it is needed in both urban and rural communities
- Rights and equality – promoting and protecting the rights of individuals to ensure we are recognising and respecting diversity, ensuring everyone feels included
- Legacy - Delivering for those affected by the legacy of the Troubles, seeking to promote a shared and reconciled future for all, and recognizing and valuing the achievements of the peace process to date.
- Tackling Sectarianism, Racism, Building Respect and Identity - Tackling the issues of the past and ending sectarianism. Promoting, protecting and providing education on the rights of individuals across our public services to ensure different values and identities are respected and welcomed in society.

Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other

This outcome includes emphasis in the need to promote understanding of different cultural identities to help build respect for each other.

Key priority areas include:

- Address Harm and Vulnerability Supporting and putting protections in place for those who are vulnerable, meeting the needs of those who have experienced serious crime, including the complex needs of children, and delivering for victims and survivors. (Department of Justice, Department of Health)
- Tackling Sectarianism, Racism, Building Respect and Identity - Supporting safe and resilient communities, building respect for cultural identities and rights of individuals, providing integrated and shared education, addressing hate crime, tackling sectarianism, ending paramilitary activity and addressing the harm and vulnerabilities caused by it.

People want to live, work and visit here

This outcome includes emphasis on providing opportunities and spaces where people feel respected and safe.

Key priority areas include:

- Tackling Sectarianism, Racism, Building Respect and Identity Supporting safe and resilient communities, building respect for cultural identities and rights of individuals, providing shared/integrated education, tackling sectarianism, ending paramilitary activity and addressing the harm and vulnerabilities caused by it.

Together: Building A United Community

“a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.”

Launched in 2013, Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) is the Northern Ireland Executive’s Good Relations Strategy. It provides the overarching structure through which the Executive Office’s District Council Good Relations Programme (DCGRP) part-funds Mid and East Antrim Borough Council’s Good Relations Programme. Council’s Good Relations programme receive 75% of their funding through The Executive Office (TEO) with the remaining 25% covered by the Council.

Within the T:BUC strategy, there are four key priorities, each incorporating a number of strategic aims and outcomes.

Our Children and Young People;

Shared Aim: to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations.

Strategic outcomes:

- Improving attitudes of children from different backgrounds
- Young people engaging in bringing the community together

Our Shared Community;

Shared Aim: to create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone.

Strategic Outcomes:

- Increased use of shared space and services
- Shared space accessible to all Our Safe Community

Our Safe Community;

Shared Aim: to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety

Strategic Outcomes:

- Reduce the prevalence of hate crime and intimidation
- A community where places and spaces are safe for all

Our Cultural Expression

Shared Aim: to create a community, which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

Strategic Outcomes:

- Increased sense of community belonging
- Cultural diversity is celebrated

Putting People First: The Mid and East Antrim Community Plan¹

The Community Planning Partnership has 21 partners who have agreed a vision for the Plan in 2030 which is:

Mid and East Antrim will be a strong, vibrant, safe and inclusive community where all people will work together to improve the quality of life for all

Following the review of the Community Plan, it is now structured around four strategic themes

- Good Health and Wellbeing
- Progress in Education and Employment
- Tourism and the Economy
- Community Safety and Cohesion

The theme of Community Safety and Cohesion has the following outcomes:

- Our people feel safe in their community and have a sense of belonging to the area
- Our Borough has vibrant, shared and cohesive communities
- Our borough has structured arrangements to support those most at risk of becoming involved in crime

¹ Putting People First is currently under review which may lead to a revision of the strategic themes and outcomes.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Corporate Plan 2019-2023

The Corporate Plan includes five strategic themes however it is currently under review as it moves towards the end of its intended timeframe.

- Sustainable Jobs and Tourism
- Good Health and Wellbeing
- Progress in Education
- Community Safety and Cohesion
- Our Environment

Under the theme of Community Safety and Cohesion, the outcomes are:

Our Borough has vibrant, inclusive and cohesive communities

- Because there are activities and events which welcome everyone
- Because we proactively support and include the most vulnerable and the most excluded
- Because we value and respect the environment we live in

Our people feel safe in their community

- Because there are programmes in place to address their greatest concerns
- Because we proactively support the most vulnerable or at risk

Our older people are live healthy, active lives in their community

- Because there are networks and services in place to support them to age actively and healthily
- Because we proactively remove barriers to their participation in community life

Development of Strategy

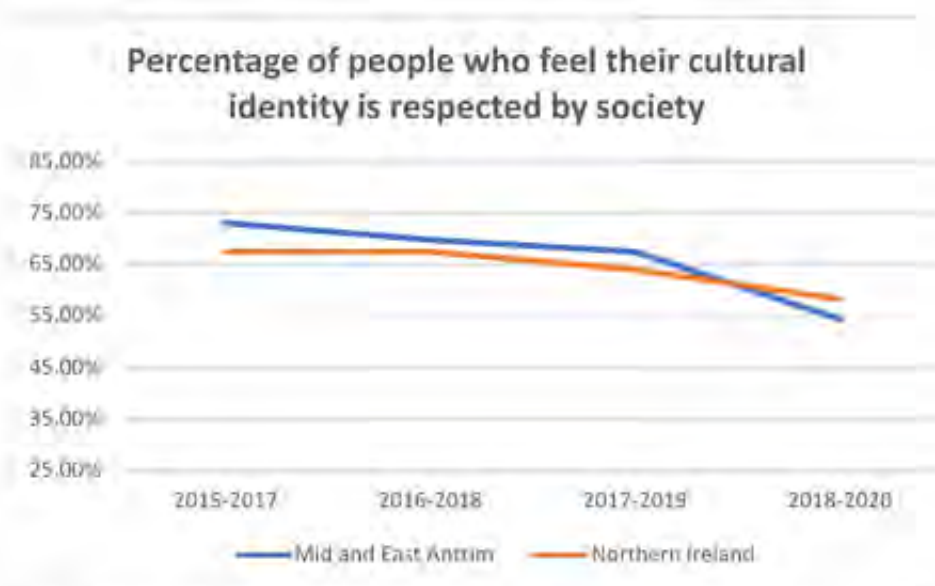
The development of this strategy and action plan was a process which sought to combine statistical evidence with narrative information collected through a variety of qualitative and participatory methods. The development process which contributed to these audit findings and strategy was made from an extensive range of sources through consultations carried out between October 2021 to January 2022, and included:

- Focus groups with representatives of community organisations in each District Electoral Area (DEA)
- Public workshops – both online and in person
- An online residents survey
- Focus groups with older people and people from a BAME background
- A young people's survey
- Distribution of consultation postcards through community centres, networks and organisations across the Borough

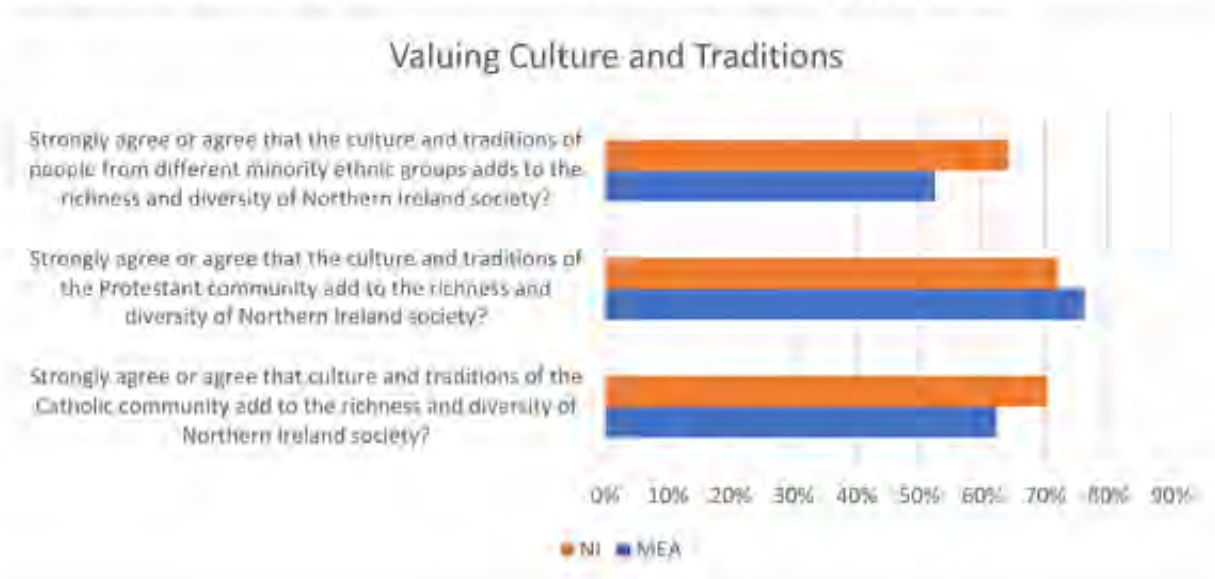
Good Relations in Mid and East Antrim

Key Statistics

As part of the T:BUC strategy, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency identified a series of Good Relations indicators which could track change over time in developing more united, cohesive communities. These are grouped under the four priorities of the T:BUC Strategy, and are the indicators of progress for good relations programmes across Northern Ireland. The following section considers the statistics relating to some of these indicators in Mid and East Antrim.

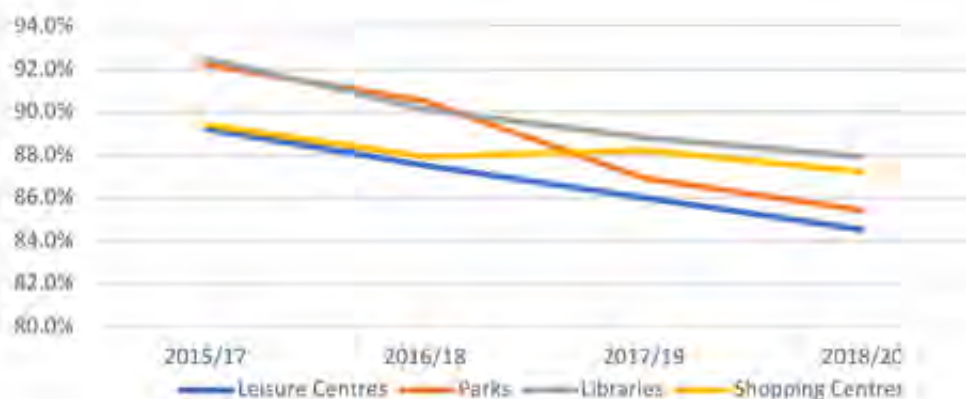


The NI Life and Times survey asks about whether individuals agree that different cultures and traditions add to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland society. The figures for Mid and East Antrim and Northern Ireland are illustrated in the graph below.



Whilst the graphs below show a downward trend for Mid and East Antrim, and a slight upward gradient for Northern Ireland, the two sets of data are more or less converging for 2018/20. 87.78% of respondents from Mid and East Antrim feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood which is again slightly higher than the Northern Ireland figure of 86.3%.

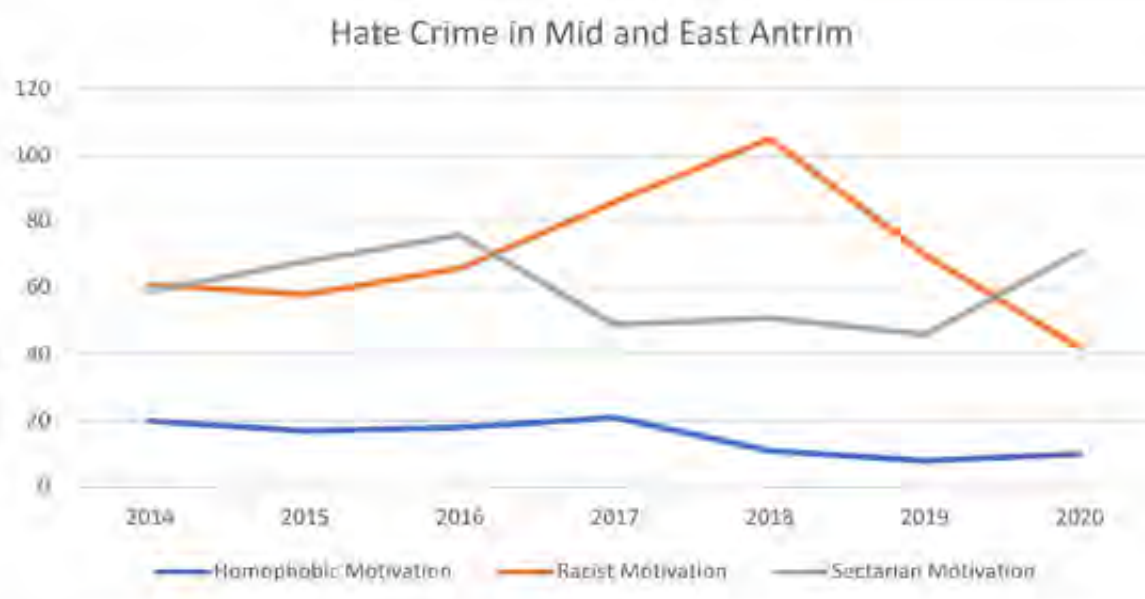
% People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (MEA)



% People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (NI)



At its peak in 2018 the number of racist incidents in Mid and East Antrim was equivalent to 9% of the incidents in the whole of Northern Ireland. In 2020, incidents with a sectarian motivation in Mid and East Antrim accounted for 8% of all incidents in Northern Ireland.



Feedback from Residents

Community Safety and Cohesion is one of four priority areas in Putting People First, the community plan for the Borough of Mid and East Antrim. In response to the online survey carried out as part of the audit to inform the Good Relations strategy, 42.6% respondents stated that community safety and cohesion should be a priority for the Council and its partners in the Mid and East Antrim area. A further 43.1% considered community safety and cohesion to be very important.

The survey asked residents to consider a number of aspects of where they lived that could be considered indicative of a vibrant or inclusive community.

41% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that in their area there are often events which bring people together. 62% agreed or strongly agreed that where they live there is a sense of community and pride.

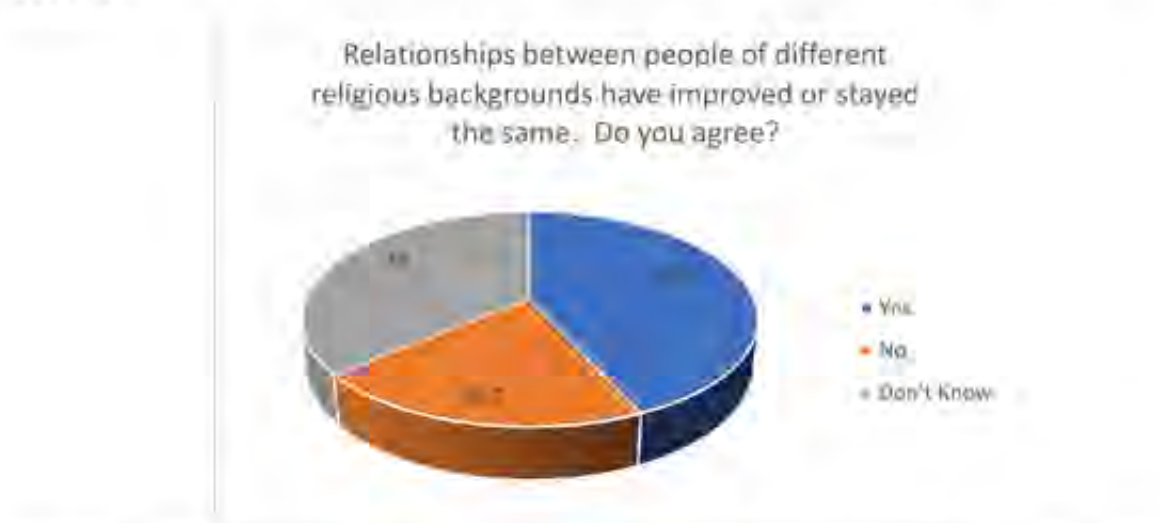
63.7% respondents stated that they live in an area where there are people from other backgrounds and countries, and 57% said they lived in an area where people are safe and welcome no matter what their background.

When asked to consider what would make their community more inclusive, comments included:

- Educate those to not feel threatened by those who want to make a new life here
- I think creating sub communities within communities is destructive and resists integration and mingling. Mixing communities would be nice.
- More information for those who maybe set in there [sic] ways to educate people on other cultures to stamp out ignorance and to break stereo types

- Opportunities to appropriately identify and engage with those of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Organise more events that reach out to people from different cultures that bring people together and build a sense of community.
- Concentrate on diversity - promote it, have inclusive events for all ages

The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey is considered a reliable indicator of people's attitudes, values and beliefs on a wide range of social policy issues. According to NILT data for the period 2016 to 2020, 84.29% people in Mid and East Antrim feel that relations are the same or better between Protestants and Catholics than they were 5 years ago. This is a more positive figure than the Northern Ireland statistic of 81.5%. However, the data collected as part of the residents' survey suggests that at a local level, people are more doubtful.

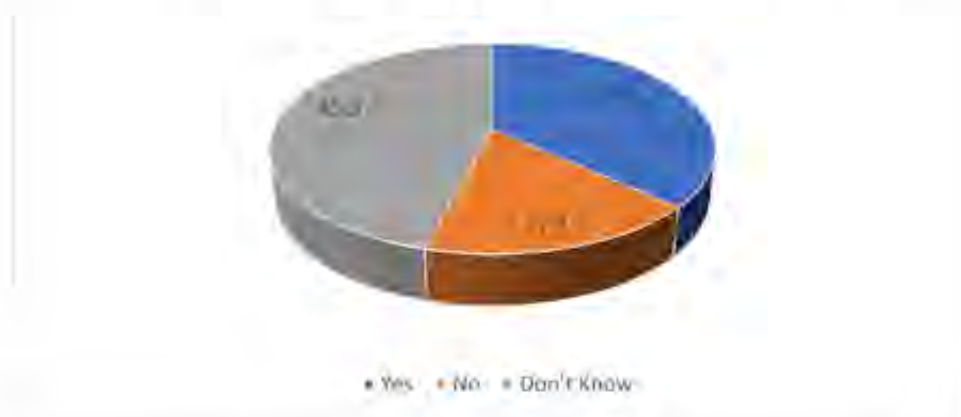


When asked to consider what could be done to improve relationships between religions, comments included:

- Develop with local community groups regular opportunities for people of different religious and cultural backgrounds to meet and share together and in this way build a stronger, more resilient, kinder and more inclusive community.
- Practice and preach tolerance.
- Look for common ground beyond religion
- Clear information that we welcome and support others. Dispel myths about those who want to come here
- The council needs to help communities break down political barriers and run projects throughout the local community and break that divide.
- Make plans to welcome people into the Borough who are from a variety of religious backgrounds and none. This stops it being about 2 opposing sides and creates a natural curiosity
- Treat everyone as equal, there should be no divide between religion, and work in a cross community way, not educate one side on its history but have more inclusion with groups from both sides undertaken projects the time is over for groups to deliver projects on one identify which in my opinion install hatred

More than 1 in 3 respondents agreed that relationships between people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds had worsened in the Borough in the past five years. Almost half of respondents (45.9%) were unsure.

Relationships between people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds have stayed the same or worsened. Do you agree?



When asked how relationships between people of different racial backgrounds might be improved, comments included:

- Council needs to be very public in saying the area needs new people to come, to bring prosperity, diversity, that there is enough resources to go round and that there are job vacancies that need filled
- Create culture of respect for everyone
- Create opportunities to bring people together, learn about backgrounds and culture.
- Create opportunities to share in relationship and confidence-building ways.
- Find a core group to make good networks with & build trust & natural relationships instead of forced, box ticking opportunities
- Highlight the cultural gifts people have and show what they can offer to the community.
- I think what we will see as primary schools are increasingly more diverse is a generation coming up that is much more tolerant and inclusive of everyone. Unfortunately, unfair stigma is placed on peoples' heads when they arrive here, and I don't have a solution for how to some people's mindsets here.
- More inclusive activities for children and also for parents, to help local children play with those from other countries

Of 226 respondents, 18% identified education as the means to improve relationships within and between religions and racial backgrounds. The comments included support for development of integrated education as well as strong support for identifying and delivering education programmes to increase understanding and challenge stereotypes.

A small number of respondents identified flags and territory marking as an issue in the borough, for example one respondent stated "I think more action needs to be taken in regards to the flying of flags supporting 'international' problems... The use of flags stirs up hatred and racism and is very unwelcoming". Another commented "Do something about bonfires, flags, sectarian murals etc to make towns more inclusive and welcoming. Do not let politics and religion dictate council policies."

It should be noted that a small number of respondents do not see the value of a good relations strategy for the Borough "I'm not interested in being inclusive. Let's look after our own locals."

Feedback from community and voluntary groups

Local community organisations who engaged with the research identified that *Covid had brought the community together, resulting in increased Community spirit and Improved cross community connections. 17 of 24 groups stated that in the area where they operate there is a lot of community activity, and 18 agreed that there are events which bring people together.*

Local organisations also highlighted the issue of communication, the need for positive language and awareness of the work of the Council in relation to good relations programmes and initiatives noting the "Power of words and language – they can pull a community down"

When asked how the area could be made more to feel more inclusive, comments included:

- Multi-cultural events to help celebrate what makes us unique rather than being fearful of it
- Provide more opportunity for genuine cross community engagement and interaction ,
- establish two-way understandings with members of communities recently arrived in our area
- Better understanding of different cultures
- Even though activities are inclusive, can still be a perception of "Us and Them"
- Encourage engagement and participation
- More participation in events from all the different nationalities that live in the area

Two-thirds of groups who responded agreed that relationships between people of different religious backgrounds have improved. When asked how relationships between people of different religious backgrounds could be improved further, comments included:

- More community events
- Tackle the poverty in the towns estates so that young people can see a future and not get sucked into organisations that only want to us [sic] them
- Enhance the opportunity for sustained engagement in areas of common and neutral interest.
- Exclude religion from the debate. If you keep discussing, highlighting it will always be an issue. If not people will stop thinking about it.

- More opportunities for people from communities to work together and run at times that suit those working
- More networking opportunities between groups of different religions across the Borough.
- Show them what makes them the same not what divides them
- Continue with slow improvement
- Remove all flags from the area
- Develop more cross community events and address the deep divisions between communities.

Almost half (12) of the groups who responded agreed that relationships between people from different racial backgrounds had gotten worse or stayed the same. When asked how this might be addressed comments included:

- Perhaps run workshops exploring each others culture through perhaps food or music which reaches all sections of the community
- Education to show that people coming here for a safer life aren't taking away from people already here
- Provide more opportunities for them to become integrated into their community through interest groups and places.
- improved engagement and understanding
- Better vetting of individuals entering the country.
- More information events/activities around the different cultures
- Education and transparency. Zero tolerance of hate crimes and racial abuse
- Exclude race/colour/creed from the debate. If you keep discussing, highlighting it will always be an issue. If not people will stop thinking about it.
- Provide more networking opportunities between groups of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Show them what makes them the same not what creates difference
- Promote an understanding of the consequences of Race Hate Crime and Incidents. Promote an understanding of diversity and the benefits that diversity brings to communities

Vision, Outcomes and Indicators

Vision

The Council's vision is that

People in Mid and East Antrim live in vibrant, shared, and cohesive communities.

Outcomes²

1. **Our Children and Young People:** Attitudes amongst our young people improve and they play a full and active role in building good relations.
2. **Our Shared Community:** People in Mid and East Antrim live in a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone.
3. **Our Safe Community:** People in Mid and East Antrim live in a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety
4. **Our Cultural Expression:** People in Mid and East Antrim live in a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

Key Indicators

We will measure progress towards these outcomes by tracking over time the trends in the following indicators:

- % young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background
- % People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics (MEA)
- % people who have a sense of belonging to their community
- % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society
- % people who value the contribution of other cultures
- Number of incidents with a hate motivation

² These outcomes are paraphrased from the outcomes in Together: Building a United Community.

How we will deliver the strategy

Delivery of the Good Relations strategy and the related annual action plans will be underpinned by the following approaches:

Collaboration and Cooperation

Good relations activity will, where possible, be delivered on a partnership or collaborative basis. Council staff will work with key stakeholder organisations in both the statutory and community/voluntary sector to maximise the benefit to local communities. The Education Authority and local youth providers will be key partners in delivery of actions under Our Children and Young People and through working closely with the PCSP we will contribute towards Our Safe Community.

Flexibility and Creativity

The annual good relations action plans will include flexible programmes that utilise creative approaches including activities such as outdoor pursuits, sport / recreation, education, music and drama. Innovation workshops will be encouraged to bring together those who want to think creatively about how to attract and engage the community in awareness raising, inclusion and diversity and cultural celebration activities and events.

Empowerment

The Council acknowledges that the most effective solutions are those which are owned and championed by local communities. As such the Council will support and empower local people and communities to engage in identifying good relations issues and, where appropriate, in co-designing solutions.

Locally focused

The DEA structures and emerging cluster approach to community activity provides the Good Relations Programme with an opportunity to access local intelligence in regard to local cohesion needs and to benefit from relationships with local organisations who are working in partnership with the Council and others. Community organisations, churches and schools are among the potential community partners who can inform and enhance delivery of the good relations strategy.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

In 2016 the NI Assembly adopted an outcomes-based approach (OBA) to the development of the Programme for Government. This outcomes-based approach has now been embedded across departments and is the basis upon which public sector strategies and action plans are developed and monitored.

The Mid and East Antrim Good Relations strategy and action plans is based on OBA which is reflected in its focus on making a difference to the lives of individuals and communities, its prevention focus and its commitment to measuring impact over time. The OBA framework for monitoring of the 2022/2025 strategy is:

How Much Did We Do	How Well did we do it
# Programmes implemented # small grants awarded # events facilitated	# Beneficiaries of programmes # attendees at events # people engaged who have not previously participated in GR programmes % people who value the contribution of other cultures # incidents with a hate motivation % People who believe local services are available to both Protestants and Catholics
Is anybody better off?	
% young people with a favourable attitude to the people from a different background % people who have a sense of belonging to their community % people who feel their cultural identity is respected by society	

Communicating our progress

The work of the Good Relations programme makes a significant difference to the lives of residents of Mid and East Antrim. The Council is committed to raising awareness of the variety of responses to good relations issues which it enables across the Borough, the opportunities that are available and the positive impact our work has had.

In addition, the Council is committed to developing a more co-ordinated approach to communications activity and will seek to engage more broadly in the design and delivery of campaigns and promotion to raise awareness.

Appendix 1 Strategic Context

The ultimate strategic guidance for Good Relations across Northern Ireland lies in the T:BUC Strategy. At a local level that guidance lies in the Community Plan for the Council area. The alignment of the Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan with the vision and outcomes of these two documents is presented in an earlier section. A number of other policy documents and initiatives also influence the plans as outlined below.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Good Relations Duty

A public authority when carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, must have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

PROMOTING GOOD RELATIONS

Section 75 (2) places a statutory duty on public bodies to pro-actively address good relations. This means a public authority must consider how the policies it makes and implements, affect relationships between people of different religions, political opinions and racial groups.

It involves considering steps to promote good relations amongst, for example, its employees, service users and others affected by its policies. The purpose of the duty is to mainstream good relations by placing it at the heart of public policy decision making.

Section 75 (2) formalises the shift from managing diversity and difference to promoting diversity and integration. It requires public authorities to take a pro-active initiating approach to contributing to a shared society, rather than responding to the effects of a divided one.

What other equality legislation is relevant to the promotion of good relations?

The race equality legislation places a specific duty on local councils to have due regard to the need to promote good race relations. There are also obligations on public authorities and others under the race equality and fair employment legislation, not to discriminate on racial grounds, or on the grounds of religious belief and/or political opinion, respectively. In addition, the Fair Employment Code of Practice recommends that employers promote a good and harmonious working environment.

What is meant by 'good relations'?

Neither 'good relations' nor 'promoting good relations' is defined in legislation. The Equality Commission has developed the following working definition of 'good relations'.

'Good Relations' - "The growth of relationships and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms." Equality Commission

Key Principles

Summarised below are a number of key principles that should underpin a public authority's implementation of the good relations duty.

Key Principles:

- effective leadership
- a visible and unequivocal commitment which is communicated internally and externally
- to address both equality of opportunity and good relations and to recognise their inter-dependence
- to work towards integration not segregation; and
- to ensure effective collaboration, co-ordination and consultation

How can public authorities implement the good relations duty?

The promotion of good relations by public authorities must be action-based in a way that is tailored to the specific remit and functions of the organisation. Each public authority needs to ascertain what needs to be done in the particular circumstances in which it carries out those functions. Certain functions may be more relevant than others to the good relations duty but should consider:

- Mainstreaming good relations into public policy decision making
- Complying with Equality Scheme Commitments
- Screening and Impact Assessing
- Including Good Relations Objectives and Targets in Corporate Objectives
- Producing an Action Plan (see below)
- Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluating Measures and Initiatives

The Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan

The Equality Commission recommends that public authorities develop a Good Relations Strategy in order to provide a clear and workable framework for, and to formalise its commitment to, the promotion of good relations.

Good Relations Strategy – Key Elements

- a vision or aim (reflecting leadership)
- the key principles under-pinning the Strategy (see above)
- an action plan to include specific measures with a timetable for implementation
- a commitment to meaningful and effective consultation
- a commitment to the communication of the strategy
- training plans and performance indicators/targets
- a commitment to monitor, review and evaluate

[How is this reflected in the Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan?](#)

The Council is committed to ensuring that:

- It shows effective leadership in relation to good relations and community cohesion within the area

- It is action based and tailored both to the functions of the Council and also the needs of the local community
- Complies with best practice guidance around the delivery, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of good relations programmes
- The inclusion of actions which have a focus on prevention as well as actions which are more reactive
- Delivering activity in partnership with all relevant stakeholders and utilising the opportunities provided at community meetings to share information and maximise the impact of Good Relations programmes through collaboration working.

Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality, and Organised Crime Programme

One of the main strategic goals for the Executive Programme is to try break the cycle of paramilitary activity and organised crime, and to stop another generation getting drawn into this spiral. Through a range of projects and interventions, the Programme is working towards ending recruitment and turning off the tap for these criminal gangs.

At the same time, the Programme works with people at-risk of paramilitary influence, coercion and violence. This includes young people, men, women and the community; to fix paramilitary harm in the here and now, protect victims, address issues and provide appropriate help and support.

Phase 2 of the overall Programme runs from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024.

Following a review of Phase 1 of the cross-Executive Programme, it was decided to move to a benefits management approach for Phase 2. This new approach requires delivery partners to communicate and measure how their projects contribute to a range of benefits (i.e. how they influence positive changes), which the Programme aims to achieve.

For Phase 2, the overall Programme outcome is: 'Safer communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality and coercive control'.

The two over-arching objectives for Phase 2 of the Programme are:

- People and communities are safe from the harm caused by paramilitarism';
- People and communities are more resilient to paramilitary influence and involvement in paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

In the Mid and East Antrim area this includes funding for the **Mid & East Antrim Support Hub**

This project involves the creation of a multi-agency youth stream of the Mid and East Antrim Support Hub to support young people who are at risk of being involved with, influenced by, or exploited by paramilitary groups.

How is this reflected in the Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan?

The Good Relations strategy and action plan acknowledge that local residents continue to be concerned about paramilitaries and organised crime in the area. Actions within the plan to address these concerns are complementary to those of the Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality, and Organised Crime Programme.

Racial Equality Strategy 2015 to 2025

A society which is strengthened by its ethnic diversity, where we can live together free from racism, racial inequality and unlawful racial discrimination, where we share a common sense of belonging and where human rights and equality are enjoyed by all.

The aim of the Racial Equality Strategy is to establish a framework for action by Government departments (and others) to tackle racial inequalities and to open up opportunity for all; to eradicate racism and hate crime; and (along with the Together: Building a United Community policy) to promote good race relations and social cohesion.

Shared Aim 1: Elimination of racial inequality

To eliminate racial inequalities and promote equality of opportunity in all aspects of economic, social, cultural, political and public life, for people of different ethnic backgrounds.

Shared Aim 2: Combating racism and hate crime

To combat racism and race hate and to provide effective protection against all manifestations of racism and racist crime. To provide redress and to have a victim-centred approach.

Shared Aim 3: Equality of service provision

To ensure that people from a minority ethnic background access and benefit equally from all public services.

Shared Aim 4: Participation

To increase the participation, representation and sense of “belonging” of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in all aspects of public, political, economic, social and cultural life

Shared Aim 5: Social cohesion

To strengthen social relations and interactions between people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds, both long standing within Northern Ireland and recent arrivals to these shores.

Shared Aim 6: Capacity building

To support minority ethnic communities in developing leadership and collective capacity at local and regional level.

Shared Aim 7: Cultural identity

To safeguard people's rights to maintain their cultural identity and to pass it on to subsequent generations

How this is reflected in the Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan?

The Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy aligns closely with shared aims 2, 4 and 5. The annual action plans will include actions to reduce hate crime and to protect those who would be most vulnerable to it. The strategy and action plans also have a strong emphasis on participation and community cohesion.

Community Safety Framework

Purpose

The purpose of the Community Safety Framework is to ensure effective connectivity between the community safety work of the responsible agencies. It provides the operational roadmap on how to collectively deliver the safer community objectives set out in the PfG and Community Plans, and to respond proactively and reactively to operational need.

The issues that cause people to feel unsafe in their communities are not always specific to crime, for example broader issues in relation to ASB which do not meet the criminal threshold. It is important we recognise and address those wider issues which cause communities to feel unsafe and damage confidence. The Framework reshapes and builds on the previous Strategy in how to support communities to be safe and resilient through crime prevention, whilst also addressing the issues of underlying harm and vulnerability that can lead to offending behaviour.

Community safety is defined as:

"an approach to preventing, reducing and responding to risk taking behaviour and crime, and the impact of related harm in relation to vulnerable individuals and communities, which:

- Provides **local solutions** to local problems
- Places prevention and early-stage intervention as the primary aim
- Focuses on **wider social issues**, including anti-social behaviour, fear of crime, quality of life issues, and related public health, social and economic factors
- Is delivered through a **partnership** approach, involving the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, as well as community groups and individual citizens; and
- Offers holistic and **problem-oriented** solutions."

This definition recognises that community safety can encompass issues that go beyond the perpetration of crime; and the importance and value of a preventative approach to contributing to reducing harm and vulnerabilities in communities.

Focus of Activity

Being safe and feeling safe is recognised as an important element of wellbeing that can provide the foundation for wider improvements in quality of life. People from all backgrounds and ages, influenced by a range of socio-economic factors, can behave in ways which lead to participation in anti-social behaviour or more serious offending. The nature and complexity of crime is changing and therefore needs a responsive approach that is adaptable to ensure a speedy and effective response. While reporting^[1] of traditional visible crime such as criminal damage and theft has reduced, there have been rises in certain crime types which can be more harmful in their impact, for example, cybercrime, child sexual exploitation, violent and sexual offending, and domestic violence.

In seeking to deliver a safer and resilient society, inclusive of urban and rural communities and the diversity of its people, focus of activities will centre on:

- **Taking a preventive approach** – with particular attention paid to prevention of the crime in the first place and creating conditions for a safe community, either by reducing the conditions for a crime to be committed or addressing the behaviours that can lead to offending. The ultimate aim is to protect people and communities from any form of behaviour which can cause them to be and/or make them feel vulnerable and unsafe and become a potential victim.
- **Addressing Volume Crime and ASB**– a higher quantity of some less harmful crime types and sustained ASB incidents can be experienced by a disproportionate number of people in society and have a greater effect on the community. Whilst the impact on the victim may not be as immediately severe as more violent crimes, it can result in feelings of invasion, loss of privacy and fear which can spread across the community and can cause harm to people's mental and physical health. A failure and/or perceived failure of relevant agencies to respond can have a significant impact on community confidence and decrease community and individual engagement. This can result in valuable information on community safety concerns and solutions not being shared with those in a position of addressing the root cause and source of criminality or negative behavioural traits.
- **Addressing Harm, Vulnerability and Repeat Victimisation** – it is important to recognise the impact of all crime but some will have a greater harm impact than others. A high proportion of calls to police relate to wider societal issues, many of which include issues of vulnerability and increased harm, for example mental health, sexual offences and violence against the person. When thinking about community safety we need to be cognisant of the work of other partners in addressing socio-economic needs such as unemployment, poor living conditions, substance addiction and poor educational attainment, which can enable communities to be more resilient and help to reduce negative outcomes and vulnerability of individuals becoming a potential victim and/or offender.
- **Enforcement and supporting the reduction of re-offending** – prevention of crime and ASB is recognised as the preferred and primary approach to protecting people and

communities. This relates to behaviours which can make them feel vulnerable and unsafe and become a potential victim; as well as reducing negative influences for people at risk of getting involved in, or pushed into, behaviours leading them to become a potential offender. Targeted interventions are used to support individuals from being drawn into offending or repeat offending, and away from risk taking behaviours leading to crime or ASB. However, where these have not worked or are not appropriate due to the severity and/or nature of the crime, it is important the relevant agencies have the necessary powers to ensure action is taken, where necessary. This is important to remove the threat to community safety, ensure suitable sanctions are actioned and to provide a clear message to others on the consequences of their actions, as a deterrent. The public also need to have confidence that the relevant agencies will bring offenders to justice and that they have the right tools and powers to respond proportionately to those who do not respect the law and are unlawful.

In delivering this work, underpinning approaches will include:

- **Problem solving** - working collaboratively with partners will help to collectively identify key issues; address links between behaviours and crime; and tackle the root cause of offending behaviour leading to crime and/or what makes individuals more vulnerable or susceptible to harm. Linked to the primary objective of prevention, it is important to identify solutions that prevent community safety problems reaching the point where individuals and communities need the help and support of emergency services; and help address the needs of the most vulnerable and frequent users of agency support.
- **Partnership Working** – by strengthening a collaborative departmental and multi-agency approach in addressing wider social issues, linked to crime and ASB, a partnership approach will support a prompt, proactive and visible response. The building of relationships will assist maximising skills and experience; sharing of information and data; and directing of available resources based on need and not demand, to where they can make the greatest impact. A whole system and integrated approach, engaging with key partners including with the local community on the ground, will provide a more effective combined response, reduce duplication of effort and enable long-term problem-solving.

Summary

It is important for people to have confidence in the agencies which serve to keep them safe. By linking the strategic and operational response to good relations issues, this Framework aims to increase community and individual engagement in good relations programmes, which in turn will

For example, community confidence can come from responding to ASB and low level repeat incidents, which can negatively impact on individuals and erode the resilience and cohesion of communities. Increasing confidence, through local and regional programmes, and multi-agency partnerships, can break down barriers to create shared assets, promote connectivity and identify local and/or thematic issues.

[How is this reflected in the Mid and East Antrim Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan?](#)

The Council is committed to ensuring that:

- it has the flexibility to respond to and address changing and emerging issues
- The inclusion of actions which have a focus on prevention as well as actions which are more reactive
- Delivering activity in partnership with all agencies and partnership across all sectors recognising their role in signposting to services provided by partners and utilising the opportunities provided at community meetings to share information and maximise the impact of Good Relations programmes



Council/Committee:	Neighbourhoods and Communities
Date:	25 February 2025
Report Title:	Council Response to DfI Active Travel 10-year Delivery Plan Consultation
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Lisa Kirkwood, Outdoor Recreation Officer
Approver:	Philip Thompson, Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report is to inform Elected Members of the Department for Infrastructure's (DfI) Active Travel Delivery Plan (ATDP) consultation and seek approval to submit the responses as outlined in the report by the response deadline of the 28 February 2025.

2. Background

- 2.1. In November 2024 DfI Roads launched their public consultation for their Active Travel Delivery Plan (ATDP) for Northern Ireland. The Department for Infrastructure defines Active Travel as: *"Travelling by physically active means such as walking, wheeling, or cycling. Active travel offers a wide range of benefits that enhance our health, environment, economy, and society. By incorporating active travel into our daily lives, we can create healthier communities, reduce our environmental impact, and build more vibrant, connected communities."*
- 2.2. The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 underscores the crucial role of active travel in addressing climate goals. It mandates the development of sectoral plans for transport which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%. Meeting this commitment will require a significant increase in investment from DfI.
- 2.3. The ATDP focuses on the shorter journeys, for those urban areas with populations over 5000. The prioritisation is centred around connections to schools, public transport and town centres.
- 2.4. Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Greenisland and Larne are the areas within the Borough included in the ATDP consultation. The active travel network maps, **Appendix 1**, show DfI's proposed priority and future routes for each location, as well as existing routes with the potential for future enhancement.
- 2.5. DfI propose to deliver their priority routes within the next 10 years with future routes being developed after 10 years.



- 2.6. DfI are seeking views on the ATDP priority routes shown on these maps or if there are other routes that you feel may bring more benefit to the local community and should be prioritised above those identified.
- 2.7. As part of Council's collective response, a number of officers from different departments within Council (Local Development Plan Team, Outdoor Recreation, Regeneration and Climate and Sustainability) met with officers from DfI Roads Transport and Road Asset, DfI Active Travel and DfI Transport Planning Modelling Unit, along with DfI's consultants for the Delivery Plan, AECOM, and Atkins Realis, who are the consultants for the Eastern Transport Plan.
- 2.8. Consultation has also been carried out internally with Council's City Deal Officers and the consultants working on the Carrickfergus aspect of this project.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. Ballymena Response – In principle providing safer active travel routes along the Galgorm Road, Cullybackey Road and Cushendall Road would be welcomed but given the high volume of traffic the disruption to provide active travel may deter from the overall benefits. A potential alternative or preferred future route would be to develop the South West Distributor route. This route is already identified in the Ballymena Area Plan 1986-2001 and protected under planning policy. If developed, this could alleviate some of the heavy traffic flow into the town along Cullybackey and Galgorm Roads. Alternatively, if a formal road is not considered feasible in parts due to funding or other constraints, then this could potentially be developed for an alternative use, such as a greenway. The South West Distributor Route could connect Ballee Road West, to the Galgorm Road connecting several schools and the Transport Hub, and onward to St Louis' Grammar School.
- 3.2. Carrickfergus Response – Council agree that Belfast Road and Larne Road should be a priority but would recommend that Marine Highway also be considered for inclusion. In effect this would treat the full length of the road from Downshire to Trooperslane junction as one project. Again, Council would be concerned with the disruption along the route due to the high volume of traffic and appropriate mitigation and notification should be given to residents and Council before any works would commence. Council also acknowledge the desire to link Middle Road with transport hubs and schools but are aware of alternatives that might cause less disruption for residents.

Possibility to re-prioritise Windslow Heights / Sandringham Heights / Prospect Link stretch for future consideration. To re-prioritise Woodburn Avenue / Beech Drive / Hawthorn Avenue / Ellia Street / Irish Quarter West / West Street to Market Place, for future consideration. To re-prioritise North Road Portion from Prince Andrew Way / St Brides Street to connect with



Carrickfergus Train Station and Park and Ride. Create a future Route from Marshallstown Road to Prince Andrew Way via Bashford Park Hill and utilising a developer led road to emerge at Ulidia School. In lieu of above, remove future route over Bashfordlands existing Public Right of Way to Prince Andrew Way. Create a future route from Prince Andrew Way via Victoria Road to Larne Road.

- 3.3. Greenisland Response – Given the current restrictions on the upper section of Station Road, Council feel this should be re-prioritised and retained for future consideration with an amendment to utilise the existing railway underpass. Alternative off road routes could be explored which will allow the connection of the Upper Road to Shore Road, possibly utilising rights of way. Upper Road portion is retained as a future route. Shore Road is retained as a future route with an amendment at the Station Road/Shore Road roundabout to use the Old Shore Road through the residential area.
- 3.4. Larne Response– Council concluded and recommend that DfI give priority to Belfast Road from Shane's Hill Roundabout to follow the route of Belfast Road and take up Sandford Avenue / Ballyhampton Road / to the bottom of Ballyboley Road utilising public Right of Way through to Linn Road onward to Antiville Road / The Roddens to Victoria Road. This would give links to residential areas, schools and the park and ride facilities on the A8 towards Belfast/Ballymena. Prioritise Old Glenarm Road / Agnew Street as this will provide links from the town limits into the town centre connecting with places of employment and schools. Meeting House Street / Pound Street / High Street removed as a priority route and put this in the future projects proposals due to the perceived disruption to those entering the town centre. A possible additional route would be to upgrade the south side of the A8, Inver River Walk to greenway standard, if a safe crossing over the A8 was provided this would provide a direct link to the bus station and Larne Port.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial implications – this is for the DfI Active Travel Delivery Plan which is solely delivered by the Department.
- 4.2. Equality Screening – All appropriate screenings will be carried out by the Department for Infrastructure
- 4.3. Assets – Some of Council's Assets may be utilised within the scope of the project, for example Marine Highway footpaths and Larne Inver River Path could be upgraded to facilitate the active travel routes in the areas.
- 4.4. Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact - All appropriate screenings will be carried out by the Department for Infrastructure



5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Council submit the response agreed by the internal departments and continue to liaise with DfI Active Travel team and consultants as the delivery plan progresses.

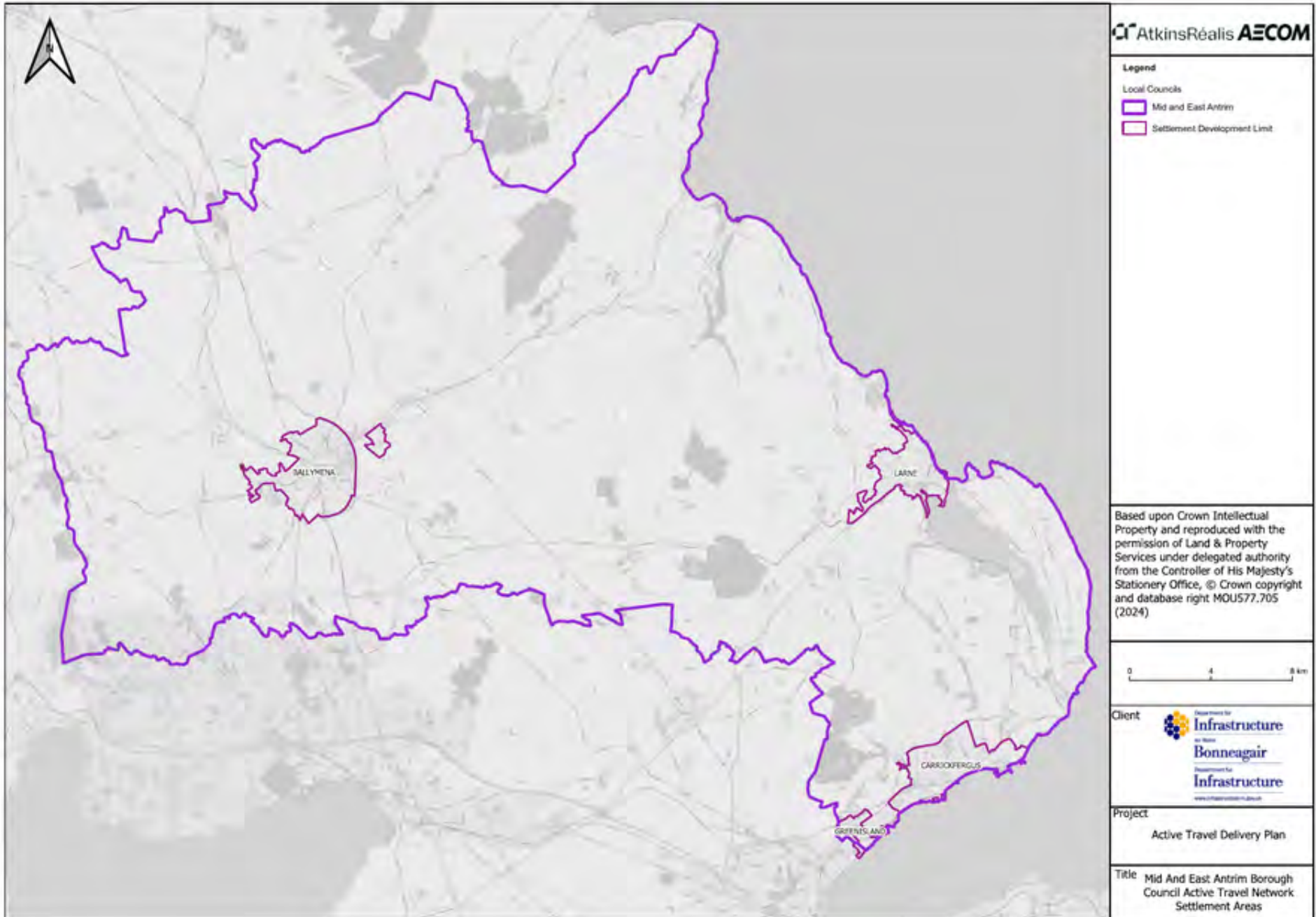
6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to
 - (i) note the Department for Infrastructure's (DfI) Active Travel Delivery Plan (ATDP) consultation
 - (ii) approve the responses developed by Officers as detailed in Paragraph 3.1 – 3.4.

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 DfI MEABC Priority Routes

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Appendix 8



The table below provides a summary of the routes in each settlement that have been identified as Priority Routes. The overarching aim of the prioritisation process is to identify routes that link populations to key attractors.

Settlement	Route No.	Description
Ballymena	1	A42 Galgorm Road (Bus Depot to Gracehill)
	2	Galgorm Road/North Road to Cullybackey Road (Bus Depot to Carniny Road)
	3	Broughshane Street/Cushendall Road (William Street to Cushendall Road Roundabout)
Carrickfergus	1	Castle Street/Marine Highway to Belfast Road/Trooperslane Road
	2	Beltoy Road (A2) to Green Street (A2)
	3	Middle Road (B90) to Carrickfergus Rail Station via Sandringham Heights, Prospect Link, Woodburn Avenue, Ellis Street, West Street and North Street
Greenisland	1	B90 Upper Road/Station Road to Shore Road
Larne	1	High Street/Upper Main Street to Killyglen Road (High Street to Killyglen Road)
	2	Circular Road Roundabout/Quay Street to Old Glenarm Road/Coast Road (Circular Road Roundabout to A2 Coast Road)

The ATDP Priority Routes for each settlement are shown in the maps on the following pages. The maps also show Future Routes, Existing Routes and Existing Routes with potential for Future Enhancements.

Ballymena



AtkinsRéalis AECOM

- Legend**
- ATDP Priority Routes
 - - - Future Routes
 - Existing Routes
 - Bus
 - Park & Ride
 - Rail
 - Education
 - Town Centre

- Route 1**
A42 Galgorm Road (Bus Depot to Gracehill)
- Route 2**
Galgorm Road/North Road to Cullybackey Road (Bus Depot to Settlement Limit)
- Route 3**
Broughshane Street/Cushendall Road (William Street to Ballygarvey Road)

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Client

Project

Active Travel Delivery Plan

Title

Proposed Ballymena Active Travel Network

Carrickfergus



Greenisland



Larne





**Mid & East
Antrim**
Borough Council

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Council/Committee:	Neighbourhoods and Communities
Date:	25 February 2025
Report Title:	Consultation Response to Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy 2025
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Patricia Allen, Head of Public Protection, Health & Wellbeing
Approver:	Philip Thompson, Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Elected Members approval for the submission of a response on behalf of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (MEA) to the Department for Communities consultation on the draft fuel poverty strategy, issued in December 2024.

2. Background

- 2.1. The new draft Department for Communities (DfC) fuel poverty strategy sets out a pathway to Northern Ireland where everyone lives in a warm, healthy home. It is a 10-year strategy designed to make energy more affordable for households in NI and help protect people, particularly the most vulnerable, from the effects of cold and damp living conditions. The strategy is underpinned by the principles of long-term sustainable solutions, introducing policies which are needs-based, collaborative and participative by design.
- 2.2. In 2022, modelling by DfC suggested that more than a quarter of households in Northern Ireland are living in fuel poverty. A 'fuel poor' household is one which needs to spend more than 10% of its income on all fuel use and to heat its home to an adequate standard of warmth. Living in cold and damp homes impacts health and wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable in our society.
- 2.3. The factors that contribute to making energy unaffordable include the energy efficiency of homes and the energy needs of the household, the cost of energy, household income and people's ability to access energy solutions that are right for them. The energy efficiency of Northern Ireland's housing stock is among the worst in Europe and there is a need to establish and raise housing standards and significantly increase investment in energy efficiency.
- 2.4. Northern Ireland still relies heavily on fossil fuels as a heating source. The continued high price of fossil fuels, low standards of energy efficiency in our homes and the ongoing cost of living all contribute to unacceptably high levels of fuel poverty.



- 2.5. The consultation for the new strategy closes on 6 March 2025 and the consultation document issued in December 2024 by DfC is attached in **Appendix 1**.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The draft DfC strategy aims to be both ambitious and wide ranging. It will focus on a number of key areas such as changes to the energy efficiency of people's homes, changes to the types of energy sources used to heat our homes and influencing energy behaviours. There is also a focus on protecting consumers, improving our understanding of the impacts of changes to energy bills and exploring bill support for those groups for whom energy efficiency may not be a viable option.
- 3.2. **Appendix 2** to this report provides an overview of the DfC stakeholder engagement process in developing a new Fuel Poverty Strategy, including a collated summary of discussions with stakeholders with a responsibility for or interest in issues relating to fuel poverty, across a series of workshops and focus groups held between April and July 2024. The report also contains some of the stakeholder feedback on how the Department could improve its new fuel poverty scheme, set to replace the current Affordable Warmth Scheme, which will be launched in April 2026.
- 3.3. The consultation contains 41 questions in total. In developing a response for Council, officers have been focused on the following issues:
- The need for a sound evidence base to develop a strategy which is capable of effectively alleviating fuel poverty through minimum energy efficiency standards. Relevant and comprehensive underpinning evidence is key, and should include demographic data, property energy performance data and property characteristics, fuel poverty statistics and energy consumption patterns
 - The need for partnership/multi agency implementation of the strategy, working across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, at both a regional and local level.
 - A revision of the current housing fitness standard for human habitation; this has not been significantly updated since 1981. If revised standards are well designed and enforces focus on aspects such as insulation, heating systems, thermal comfort, energy-efficient appliances, and the use of renewable energy sources, they are likely to encourage the construction of homes that are more energy-efficient, ultimately leading in the long term to lower energy consumption and a positive impact on fuel poverty.
 - Future Energy Efficiency schemes should prioritise low-carbon heating solutions and renewable technologies where possible, incentivising these options through grants or subsidies, particularly for low-income



households. By developing and implementing policies that support the deployment of renewable and low-carbon heating technologies, such as building control standards that promote energy efficiency, this opens the door to 'energy independence,' which can shield low-income families from fluctuating energy prices and provide a more stable financial situation.

- Using and building referral pathways between Government, Local Government, health professionals and the Voluntary and Community Sector for people needing advice and support. This is absolutely essential for creating a comprehensive support system to enhance overall community well-being, particularly for vulnerable populations who may struggle with energy-related issues. Effective collaboration is critical to ensuring that those struggling with fuel poverty are provided with accessible and timely assistance.
- Implementation of the relevant recommendations of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines by Government will increase awareness within the health, care and voluntary sectors of how health problems caused or exacerbated by cold homes can be addressed through appropriate referrals, training and identifying needs as well as ensuring people are discharged from hospital to a warm home.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. The consultation on the draft DfC 10-year fuel poverty strategy is an opportunity for Elected Members of Mid and East Antrim Borough to shape and influence this important strategy. Our contribution will help ensure that this strategy reflects and responds to the needs of those within our Borough who cannot afford to stay warm in their own homes in the coming winters.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1. It is recommended that Elected Members approve the submission to the Department for Communities of the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council consultation response on the draft Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, as detailed in **Appendix 3**.

6. Appendices / Links

- Appendix 1 Fuel Poverty Strategy Stakeholder Engagement Report December 2024
- Appendix 2 Consultation on a draft Fuel Poverty Strategy December 2024
- Appendix 3 Mid and East Antrim Draft Response to Fuel Poverty Strategy



Department for
Communities

An Roinn
Pobal

Department for
Commonities

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Fuel Poverty Strategy Stakeholder Engagement Report

December 2024

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1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Department for Communities' (DfC) stakeholder engagement process in developing a new Fuel Poverty Strategy. It includes a collated summary of discussions with stakeholders across a series of workshops and focus groups held between April and July 2024. This includes some of the stakeholder feedback on how the Department could improve its new fuel poverty scheme, which will be launched in April 2026.

It also summarises the engagement with government colleagues and those working in relevant Arms' Length Bodies and other organisations with a responsibility for or interest in issues relating to fuel poverty.

This report is being shared to support the public consultation process. It demonstrates how the strategy has been informed by our engagement process and our commitment to continue to work alongside stakeholders to shape proposals.

2. Approach

Stakeholder involvement has been key to ensure that a new Fuel Poverty Strategy:

- reflects the Northern Ireland context
- is based on people's own experience of fuel poverty and energy hardship
- develops the right solutions and support for those who need it most
- makes use of other people's expertise and experience
- builds on and reflects related policy work elsewhere

Cross-government policy workshop

In January 2023 an internal workshop was organised to bring together key policy teams from across government and other public sector bodies. This was an opportunity to set out initial design assumptions, build relationships with relevant teams, develop a picture of emerging policy and explore key priorities and gaps that a future fuel poverty strategy could focus on.

Project Board

A Project Board was formed in September 2023 consisting of senior officials from relevant Departments as well as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Consumer Council NI (CCNI) and NI Authority for

Utility Regulation (NIAUR) (See Appendix A for membership). The Board provides high-level oversight and critically evaluates and provides strategic direction for the preparation, development and management of a new Fuel Poverty Strategy for NI. They will continue to support the transition from development to implementation of the strategy.

Reference Panel

A reference panel was also established in September 2023 to provide external expertise and insight (see Appendix B for membership). Members came from the community and voluntary sector, academia and arms' length bodies. The Panel provides advice, feedback and support as well as a reference and challenge function. Key issues were brought to the Panel to enable discussion of these in greater depth and hear thoughts on how to approach these in the strategy development process.

Webinar

A webinar was held in May 2024 to learn from other countries' experiences dealing with fuel poverty and to hear how they have used a 'basket of indicators' approach to gathering a more complete picture of the fuel poverty landscape.

Bilateral/other

Throughout this process we have also met bilaterally with government, community and voluntary sector, academic, practitioner and other public sector organisations to build relationships, raise awareness of the strategy development and learn from experiences elsewhere.

Intensive stakeholder engagement

From April-June 2024, the Fuel Poverty Strategy project team and the Home Energy policy team hosted a series of stakeholder engagement workshops and focus groups across Northern Ireland. The aim was to gather opinions and real-life experiences to support the development of a new Fuel Poverty Strategy and explore initial priorities for a new Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Scheme. In total, more than 365 participants registered to attend the workshops or participated in the focus groups.

Workshops

We organised 9 workshops in total focusing on 3 key sets of topics. Each series of workshops had one online event for those unable to attend in person. Workshop topics were:

- Eligibility
- Collaboration and Partnership
- Understanding and Framing.

These events considered long and short-term support for those most in need, informed stakeholders about key issues and listened to lived experiences. Discussions were open and consideration given to the complex and wide-reaching issues faced by those in fuel poverty. There was a focus on how to work well across different sectors and government to achieve shared aims and make best use of our limited resources to help those most in need.

Participants came from the community and voluntary sector, energy companies, other government departments, housing associations, charitable organisations and energy industry professionals. A final online feedback event provided participants with an overview of what we had heard, in line with our 'feedback and feed forward' approach.

The workshop slides are available online at [Fuel Poverty Workshop overviews | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Focus groups

We held a series of focus groups to hear from vulnerable people and those who are most impacted by fuel poverty (See Appendix C for the dates and locations). In some circumstances it was challenging to speak with people directly and in these cases, we spoke to a number of representatives who support or work with these populations.

The discussions helped us to capture the real life experiences of vulnerable people, giving them a voice and including them in the process to help with strategy development. The groups provided real insight into the daily struggles of how fuel poverty impacts them and the choices people make in their homes. In addition, two focus groups were held with representatives from heating, insulation, renewable energy sectors, NIHE, Utility Regulator and colleagues from Department for Economy to discuss the energy

efficiency measures to be considered in the development of the new scheme. Discussion also centred on grant limits and a code of practice/quality standard for those working on the new scheme.

This report contains collated summaries of the discussions at the workshops and focus groups. It reflects discussions heard and does not reflect the views of the Department.

3. Framing and understanding fuel poverty

Stakeholders discussed a Vision and set of Principles for a new Fuel Poverty Strategy as well as addressing how we define fuel poverty and some of the challenges and opportunities for improving our understanding of both fuel poverty and its impacts.

VISION

The following proposed vision was tested:

Everyone lives in a warm, healthy home.

Generally, feedback was positive and some said that it states what we want to achieve in a simple and easy to understand manner. The word 'health' was welcomed. Alternative suggestions were to include 'sustainable' so that the vision would be linked to climate targets, with further suggestions to include energy efficient and affordable. Words such as accessible, inclusive and trust were also suggested, as well as affordability and urgency, recognising that people need immediate help.



Principles

The following proposed principles were discussed:

1. Long-Term Sustainable Solutions
2. Needs-Based
3. Person Centred
4. Collaboration

These principles generally received support, with discussions around how some of them might be applied. It was agreed that the principles should align with and underpin the vision. Stakeholders noted that it was important that the principles should be agreed and accepted by all government departments. Feedback included:

- **Long-Term Sustainable Solutions** - This should perhaps include innovation. Furthermore, all actions in the Strategy should be multiyear with a long-term focus.
- **Needs-Based** - When designing new interventions and taking forward the strategy we should consider both the home and the person who lives in it. Objective need is important but there are different types of need and vulnerability, not all of which may apply to the same people.
- **Person Centred** - often the most in need are vulnerable and they cannot advocate for themselves. We heard suggestions that support should be holistic. To be fully person centred we should be careful

around the use of language to remove the stigma that can be associated with poverty or fuel poverty. Also, we should recognise the behavioural change needed to reach net zero.

- **Collaboration** - If real collaboration is to be achieved a model must be in place. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of using existing relationships and not necessarily creating new structures. It was noted that there are many people and organisations that we can connect with to improve how we design and deliver policy.

Further suggestions included:

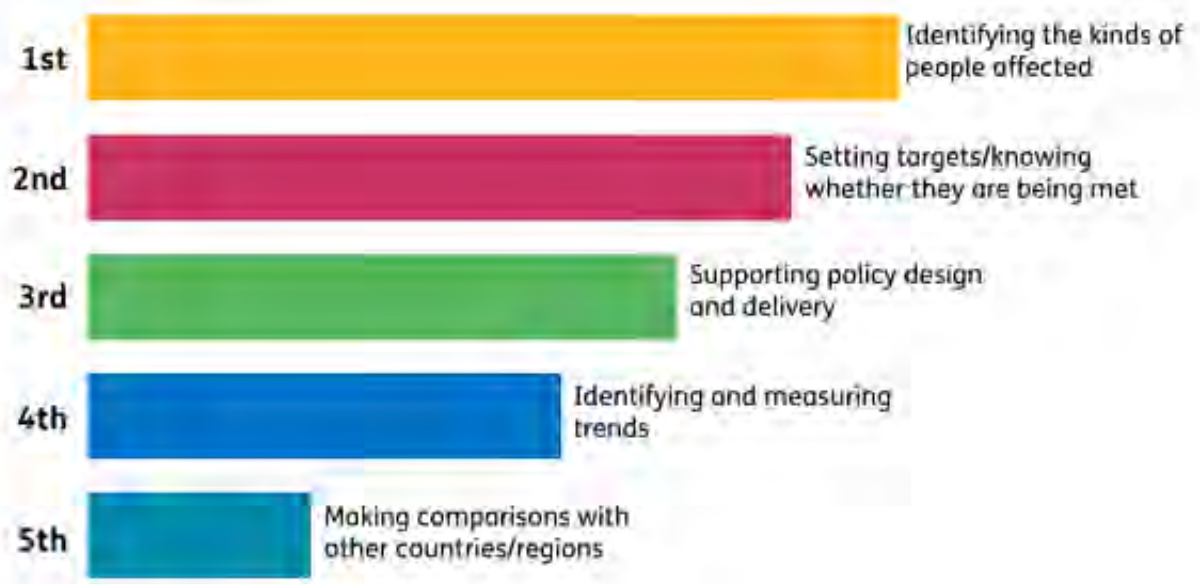
- **Transparency and trust** - there were concerns that people do not always know the support available, who is eligible, and why decisions are taken in certain ways. Building trust was considered important to improve awareness and confidence in what government wants to achieve
- **Empowerment** - we heard about the need to recognise structural barriers to participation. Some groups, such as private renters, can struggle to participate in energy efficiency measures and have little agency. Empowering people and communities also means increased awareness raising, advice and education.

Understanding fuel poverty

We discussed the definition of fuel poverty, the data we use to measure it and potential indicators in the future. These issues were informed by a webinar held with energy experts from New Zealand and the Netherlands to understand how other countries understand and measure fuel poverty. They used multiple mechanisms and data sources to build a picture of fuel poverty (also called energy hardship and energy poverty).

What is the most important aspect of a definition?

Results from workshop 3 – Understanding and Framing – held in NICVA Belfast



Results from workshop 3 – Understanding and Framing – Online session



Most groups agreed that identifying the kinds of people affected by fuel poverty was the most important aspect of a definition. This helps policy development and with targeting help to those who need it most. Linked to this, groups wanted to see a greater emphasis on the impacts of fuel poverty. It was considered important to link policy development with fuel poverty trends and understand the severity of fuel poverty.

There was disagreement on using a definition to set targets. Some wanted clear, timebound, measurable targets whereas others argued that target-setting can have adverse or unintended consequences. Making comparisons with other regions was considered less important because other regions are already changing their definition and there are different contexts across the

UK. There was more interest in regional comparisons within Northern Ireland and between rural and urban areas.

Concepts of a definition - People acknowledged that our definition is imperfect but there was wariness about 'changing the goal posts'. Some felt the 10% definition was no longer relevant but others thought that other definitions weren't necessarily better. It was suggested that people over the 10% threshold will also need support to achieve a warm healthy home. Some wanted to use multiple definitions but others disagreed.

'Using a tandem approach can become confusing as there may be too many caveats'.

We also heard a number of times that using language like ‘fuel poverty’ or ‘poverty’ does not provide dignity and can put people off applying for help. Some said that government should be careful not to stigmatise people by using the wrong language.

Income and savings - Some didn’t think the definition sufficiently considers living and housing costs. An ‘after housing costs’ measure or disposable income was suggested. Some said that savings should be taken into account. The **Rural Focus group** and **Women’s group** both said high childcare costs can affect people’s ability to heat their homes and the **rural focus group** emphasised high transport costs in rural areas.

Different population needs - Groups discussed the importance of capturing the needs of different people, for example whether older or disabled people need a warmer home to be healthy and comfortable. Some suggested other vulnerabilities such as end of life or the working poor. There were different opinions on whether a specific temperature regime or a flexible approach would be best, with an argument that we should focus on people’s perceptions rather than making assumptions.

Carers said it is hard for them and disabled people to have a good quality of life if they are cold. The **terminal illness support group** noted the high running costs of vital life-saving equipment. We heard that people are switching off medical equipment due to the costs of keeping it running and that:

‘People have been left in hoists overnight and deaf smoke alarms can switch off’

Travellers live in a wide variety of housing such as caravans, mobile homes, social and private rented housing and mould is a big issue in all of them. Bottled gas or electric heaters at sites can be expensive to run. **Migrant communities** may have higher heating needs if they come from warmer climates and can’t afford to go out.

Health - Stakeholders said that living in cold homes affects people’s health and this has a knock-on effect on the health service. This includes hospitals being unable to discharge patients to a cold home, which reduces available bed space. It was noted that DfC and DoH priorities are often closely aligned but the link up isn’t always there.

‘Houses aren’t habitable without heat’

Data – Participants focused on the need for up to date, relevant data that drives change. There were many calls for collecting more data and using data from trusted partners rather than relying on a 5-year survey to be responsive to changing need.

How would we know if someone wasn't able to heat or power their homes adequately?

This discussion focused on alternative ways of understanding fuel poverty, based on experiences of stakeholders. There were suggestions on qualitative and quantitative indicators to help understand fuel poverty and its impacts.

Responses to the question 'How would we know if someone wasn't able to heat or power their homes adequately?'



Health – Many stakeholders referred to the presence of damp, mould, condensation, or a fusty smell. They noted that health will deteriorate if the house is too cold or damp, particularly respiratory illness, asthma and excess winter deaths. A&E admissions for respiratory illness or asthma could be sources of data. The **women's disability focus group** mentioned a rise in the number of disabled people going to foodbanks.

'It gets you down and affects your mental health living in a cold home'

Living conditions - Stakeholders said that house visits provide clear indicators of fuel poverty: a cold or dark home, radiators turned off, lights off and people staying in the bedroom or in bed. People focus on heating themselves with blankets on the sofa or wearing coats indoors. Stakeholders noted reduced capacity of organisations to carry out home visits making it harder to pick up on these signs.

Seeking help - Stakeholders told us that a clear indicator for fuel poverty is when people go to warm places such as libraries or ask for help from charities, though there is a stigma in asking for help. Many ask family or friends for support but this is harder to capture. When people's health is affected by cold and damp it can also diminish their ability to seek help or take care of themselves and others. One health professional noted migrant children in

care increasing as parents believe that their children are better off in a home with adequate food and heat. The **Foyle Foodbank group** said people seek help when they are at rock bottom but this can be too late.

Debt and energy bills - People get into debt by borrowing money to pay for their utilities. They cannot pay their bills on time or self-disconnect. It was noted that the general cost of living caused an increase in expensive debt.

Social and behavioural aspects - Fuel poverty can cause social isolation, for example, children not bringing friends home and an increase in loneliness. Other signs were looking dishevelled or unkempt, or clothes with a damp smell. If people are not heating their home, they are also unlikely to be eating properly, and women particularly make decisions about whether to heat or eat. This was highlighted in all focus groups with the **disability focus groups** using heated throws, switching off the gas completely and sometimes choose between heating and eating.

Children and education - Fuel poverty can impact children through lower educational attainment, poor concentration, a decline in school attendance if uniforms can't be washed, children doing homework in busy rooms and teenagers working to support families. Restricted finances can cause stress, impact safeguarding and reduce

children's participation in activities. The **Women's Group** said that young children need warm homes but they sometimes make their families wear layers instead.

'When the house gets cold, we take the children to bed to watch TV'

Who would have this information or data?

People affected - A frequent suggestion about where to find information on fuel poverty was from those experiencing it. There were suggestions to ask people directly: 'are you worried about heating your home?'

Energy-related data - Energy suppliers may have data on who is vulnerable, on a payment plan, or making smaller top-up payments. Data on oil is hard to access but it was suggested that oil companies could help with referrals if they see people getting frequent small deliveries.

Health sector - Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has statistics on health conditions linked to damp and mould such as chronic respiratory illnesses and excess winter deaths. A&E admissions, Public Health Agency (PHA) and clinics may have data on poor health exacerbated by cold homes. Treasury may have data on savings to the public purse from reducing fuel poverty.

Benefits system - This could provide data on the number of discretionary payments and if these are related to universal credit figures.

Community and voluntary sector (VCS) -

Specific organisations were noted such as Saint Vincent DePaul (SVP), Advice NI, Trussell Trust as well as general recommendations such as charities, social services and food banks. Other data sources suggested were other departments, teachers, Councils, NIHE, Housing Associations and universities.

What data would you collect to measure the success of Fuel Poverty interventions?

Workshop attendees discussed what data would help capture the success of new interventions. They also made suggestions about how data should be collected, for example baseline data, post-intervention data, and potentially further data after the scheme has been up and running for a year. It was suggested that all government schemes should measure outcomes in the same way and these should be holistic.

Energy data - Some attendees suggested that smart meters would enable data on self-disconnection and low energy users. A number of people suggested that a key indicator was energy usage e.g. pre and post-installation impact on the energy consumption of the property or the Energy

Performance Certificate (EPC). Others suggested that data on financial savings should also be captured. It is harder to capture data on oil usage.

Health data - Stakeholder suggested that data on damp or mould in homes should be collected as part of any fuel poverty intervention. They suggested that social housing has data on damp and mould and landlords know if there is damp but they will not take any action or help. One idea would be to check if there has been a change in

the number of cases sent to environmental health in councils.

Carbon - It was recommended that intervention should capture carbon reductions. It was noted that people considered to be in fuel poverty are not the biggest carbon offenders as they are more likely to have smaller houses, use public transport or have one car.

4. Making homes more efficient

The workshops highlighted the importance of increasing investment in energy efficiency. There were discussions about how government should determine eligibility for support in a coordinated way and consideration of how a new Affordable Warmth Scheme could be designed to support those who need it most. Stakeholders said that much more investment was needed and some suggested DoH funding as well as recommending long-term budgets.

'You can give people fuel vouchers but the energy efficiency in the home [...] being rated so low it's like leaving the front and back door open.'

Housing Standards

In every workshop the problem of poor quality housing was raised repeatedly. Most discussions related to the poor standards experienced in the private rented sector, although there were references to low housing standards in some social housing homes. Stakeholders noted that many vulnerable groups live in this sector and they are harder to reach, likely to be on low-incomes and have children.

Migrant communities fear that raising issues will lead to rent increases or losing their home and for this group there can be additional cultural or language barriers.

'There is a feeling that anything will do for this group of people.'

Even the less vulnerable feel at risk: the demand for housing is so high that any tenant who requests improvements or repairs fears eviction or rent increases.

Many suggested that the PRS sector needs new standards, perhaps in legislation. Some suggested energy-related standards, such as Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES), EPCs or Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) ratings. **Men and women's disability groups** noted low standards in private rented accommodation. The **women's group** said that landlords don't want to help.

Others said that the fitness standards were far too low and enabled landlords to continue to rent out very poor quality housing. Overall there was a strong sense that regulation is needed to improve housing standards in the private rented sector and people regularly referred to

the need for a 'stick' in order to drive this change. The **Rural focus group** mentioned a case where the Environmental Health officer complained about a smell of damp but the house still passed fitness standards:

'How is this possible?'

Some believed that having an incentive such as financial support, a free EPC audit or rates reductions if energy ratings were met could raise standards. Stakeholders noted the importance of on-going protection, highlighting landlords can improve their properties with grants and then raise rents. Clawback mechanisms were suggested for those who benefit from improvements and then sell the property.

It was noted that there is government funding for new build social housing but not for retrofit which will need to be financed via rents. This could impact low-income homes. It was suggested that while there is generally higher energy efficiency in social housing, a targeted scheme for the least energy efficient homes is still required.

There is a unique challenge for the **traveller community** as a number live in caravans or mobile homes. These homes are usually of much poorer quality and are not subject to the same standards that apply to permanent homes.

Enforcement - It was noted that councils are not enforcing environmental health laws. Many wanted a focus on compelling landlords to take action to improve standards. Some tenants are aware of their rights but struggle to enforce change. Damp and mould are not being treated by landlords and stakeholders said they need to be held to account. The issue of vulnerability and a tenant/landlord power imbalance was raised multiple times. It was also noted that the landlord register is not up to date and there is no oversight of the Act or register.

'If private renters cannot participate, why should they be excluded when landlords are not held to account over poor standards?'

Replacement for Affordable Warmth Scheme

As DfC is in the early stages of developing a new fuel poverty intervention to replace the Affordable Warmth Scheme, it also gathered feedback on some operational aspects of this scheme. The current Scheme ends in March 2026, and a new scheme must support the principles of the new Fuel Poverty Strategy, align with the Energy and Green Growth Strategies and contribute to responsibilities under the Climate Change Act. Given the ongoing cost of living crisis, there is a need to review eligibility criteria, income thresholds and application mechanisms to ensure that the

most vulnerable and those experiencing fuel poverty can access the scheme.

Eligibility

Stakeholders ranked five potential eligibility criteria (income threshold, energy rating of a house, having certain health conditions, qualifying for certain benefits and age of applicant). Before the roundtable, groups placed most importance on using an income threshold to determine eligibility, followed by the home energy rating, having a certain health condition, being entitled to certain benefits, with age ranked as least important. Following the discussion income thresholds and home energy rating were rated as being of equal top importance with other rankings remaining the same.

It was noted that many with the lowest income are on benefits. However, using income threshold only as a criterion could mean a lack of flexibility. For example, a disabled person who requires lifesaving equipment has higher energy bills than a household without these needs. It was felt that the 'working poor' are often overlooked yet their disposable income can be less than those in receipt of benefits. It was also highlighted that older people often have low or no housing costs. Some noted the importance of household makeup i.e. a couple with or without dependents or a single person.

The consensus was that whilst certain health conditions were exacerbated by living in cold and damp conditions, not everyone with a health condition is fuel poor.

Energy rating of the home - This was considered most important by some. Using energy rating as a criterion would help those in the private rented sector and stakeholders said that improving efficiency of homes would not only help the current occupier but all future generations.

'If it is not fixed then the energy spending will always be high'

This led to discussion on the potential use of a home energy efficiency audit and considering the age of a property among the criteria. Another argument for prioritising the home was:

'Personal circumstances also change quickly - homes do not'.

Income - Stakeholders were asked to select the income band that they felt was most appropriate. It was felt that the current income threshold of £23k was low and stakeholders preferred the highest income threshold:

- £25-30k - 12.3%
- £30-35k - 27.7%

- £35-40k – 24.6%
- £40-45k – 35.4%

It was noted that if the budget for the new scheme is small, allowing higher income households to apply could mean that the most vulnerable do not get the help that they need. Many suggested that perhaps income could be on a sliding scale e.g. qualifying for an 80% grant with 20% loan.

The group felt that it should be net rather than gross income but acknowledged that this may be difficult to manage. Another suggestion was income after housing costs. Some felt that income should be backed with documentation and that savings should be considered. However some concerns were raised regarding the origin of savings, for example compensation claims due to injury. Stakeholders also asked:

‘Will the income threshold be raised each year in line with increases to, say, minimum wage levels?’

Benefits - 77.6% of stakeholders felt that recipients of all benefits should be eligible, 19% suggested only those on means-tested benefits and 3.4% felt that recipients of passport benefits should be included. If all benefits are included as eligibility criteria it was suggested the level of grant should be on a sliding scale as there are people in

receipt of disability benefits for example who are also high earners or have savings.

It was felt that if we were to consider disability benefits as eligibility criteria, that only those awarded for health conditions exacerbated by cold and damp conditions should be included. However, not all disabilities or conditions mean automatic entitlement to a disability benefit such as Personal Independence Payment e.g. asthma.

It was acknowledged that if means tested benefits were used to determine eligibility it would reduce the administration time and costs to process the scheme.

Other issues

- Can different models be used to help pay for making a home more efficient such as an interest free or low interest loan from the government as used in other countries?
- Can repayments be made straight from your salary as in childcare scheme?
- NI is the only jurisdiction that does not have a heat-pump or solar panel grants. The savings made from these measures could be reinvested back into the economy as disposable income is freed up.
- Broken boilers are a priority over insulation and financial assistance could be offered

for this short-term emergency need. Could a new scheme offer follow up services, annual servicing of boilers to maintain efficiency?

- There should be a multiyear budget for schemes and for voluntary and community sector funding to build up experience for the best outcomes.
- If administering 'green loans', safeguards need to be put in place for repayment – no high/increasing interest rates.
- The Affordable Warmth vulnerability matrix did help understanding who is most in need.

The Home Energy Branch held two focus groups in September 2024 with representatives from the heating, insulation & renewable energy sectors, NIHE, Utility Regulator and colleagues from Department for Economy (DfE) to discuss energy efficiency measures to be considered in the development of the new Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Scheme.

Energy Efficiency Measures

Over the two sessions the groups felt that we should be optimistic with our planning but that ultimately budget will dictate the scale of the scheme and measures offered. There was strong agreement that a 'whole house, fabric first approach' is required to maximise efficiency of action and that there is a need to 'future proof' current housing

stock. Each house should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, with an almost 'bespoke' solution offered and that all recommended measures must be accepted by the householder in order to proceed with the application.

With regards to 'distress retrofits' or emergency cases where a heating system breaks and is in urgent need of replacement, it was felt that these should be processed outside the remit of the new scheme. The groups also felt that low carbon heating solutions should be included within the scheme where appropriate to assist with meeting statutory Climate Change obligations. However, it was recognised that technologies are still evolving and that the scheme would need to reflect this through a transition period and emphasised the importance of progression towards low carbon heat away from the current heavy reliance on fossil fuels. The groups also felt that in those properties where a low carbon heating solution was installed, consideration should be given to the installation of PV (solar) panels with battery storage to maximise cost savings for the householder. The groups recognised the value of smart meters/monitoring to demonstrate savings in terms of energy efficiency, cost savings for the householder and return on investment for the Department. The addition of an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) assessment pre and post installation was considered essential to report on energy efficiency gains.

Grant limits

The groups felt that the current Affordable Warmth Scheme grant limit of £7,500 (£10,000 for solid wall insulation) was too low given the current costs of the measures offered. They agreed that the grant limits for the new scheme should be reviewed periodically throughout the lifetime of the scheme and amended to reflect both cost of living and material increases. The groups agreed that the new scheme should offer a full quality retrofit (circa £28k-£33k per house) even if this meant that fewer households could be assisted overall.

Code of Practice

The groups were also asked to consider the use of a code of practice or mandating an established quality standard for the new scheme. Discussions centred around the use of existing governing standards bodies and the group agreed that only accredited contractors should be used to ensure a consistent level of standards, this also would provide reassurance for often vulnerable customers. Post work quality inspections were also discussed with the groups feeling that this should be an essential element of any scheme, this would build trust and maintain high standards of work. The groups discussed accountability and the need to have a clear simple redress process if things go wrong. They also suggested the addition of third party pre and post installation inspections to assess the requirements of each house and the quality of works conducted.

Coordinating our approach across government

Stakeholders wanted schemes to be coordinated strategically to ensure help is provided to those who need it most. Some stakeholders suggested that all schemes should take into account fuel poverty principles. Many said that higher fuel poverty levels should mean more funding is available to address it. Some common principles or approaches to future schemes emerged. Others suggested a joint DfE, Department of Health (DoH) and DfC funding pot to help people to avoid duplication and make administration easier.

Consistency – There were calls for multiyear budgets to provide consistency and confidence, enable planning and investment by industry and ensure that schemes remain open year-round:

'Don't stop and start schemes'

Flexibility - Stakeholders said schemes need to be flexible and need to have built-in protections for future proofing. It was noted that the people who need help will change over time and that government should ensure sufficient flexibility to avoid excluding certain groups. On the other hand, if criteria change too often it's hard to keep track.

Accessibility and education - There are low levels of awareness of where to go for energy support. Many people suggested a one stop shop to enable help and advice on energy efficiency, grants and help with applications. Stakeholders told us that people need to be able to easily access information on schemes, customer care registers and other forms of support and requested much better awareness-raising and information campaigns:

'It can be hard to know where to start, it is hard enough for people in the know to keep track of schemes.'

Stakeholders said that it was very hard to get good information on energy efficiency with no recognised government body to do this. Many in the **women's disability group** who had medical equipment have not registered with the critical care or medical register with energy companies. The **Foyle foodbank group** had similar experiences:

'Why are these things not advertised anywhere?'

Schemes need to be transparent, easy to apply for and understandable for all. More needs to be done to target people and bring them through the process. Inclusion is vital, including multiple forms of application such as telephone, digital and in person.

Handholding and support - Government should support home visits by social, voluntary and community sector or medical professionals to help determine who is eligible. There was strong support for a service that handholds through the process, recognising that the vulnerable will need extra help, empathy and understanding and may slip through the cracks.

Needs-based - The greatest discussion was how to ensure that support is needs based. Many stated that people with the greatest need should come first but this meant different things to different people: income, disabilities, health, the number and type of people in a home, energy efficiency or a combination were all suggested. We also heard that everyone should be eligible for some help otherwise the vision would not be achieved. This could range from advice, loans, partial grants or fully funded retrofits.

Some called this a tapered approach or sliding scale and it was suggested that this aligns with the proportionate universalism health inequalities model. This may allow a greater proportion of the population to benefit. On the other hand, some stakeholders suggested support should only be for those who cannot afford interventions. It was noted that broad eligibility could lead to long waiting lists which could erode trust.

Health – this was considered an important factor in determining eligibility for support because health conditions worsen in cold, damp homes.

‘If you have health conditions and on benefits then you are on a low income and being at home more means your energy bills are higher.’

Some priorities were suggested, for example carers of a disabled child, people with a life-limiting condition and those unable to leave the house due to a disability. It was noted that for these households, energy needs are higher and income lower due to caring responsibilities or a reduced inability to work. The **traveller community** has a high incidence of disability and respiratory illness, both exacerbated by cold and damp.

An alternative suggestion was to focus on people in deprived areas who currently are not seriously ill but might be more likely to be if their homes are cold.

Income and benefits – All agreed that lower income households should take priority for support and that the benefits system was not the best way of setting eligibility. Many stakeholders noted that working poor household incomes can be very low:

‘Just because they aren’t on benefits does not mean they do not need help’

Another argument against using benefits as a criteria is that not everyone who is eligible for benefits applies for them. There was agreement that certain benefits such as Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance and Carers Allowance should not be counted as income.

Some said that debt was a growing problem and this need factored in. Others said that savings needed to be considered, but there was no agreement on whether they should exclude support or how we could assess savings.

The home - Some stakeholders said that schemes must consider both house condition and household income. Others said that government must either target the home or target the people. There was a suggestion to focus on areas that had fewer heating options, such as rural areas. We heard that to determine energy efficiency an energy advisor, energy audit or EPCs could be used. However, many recognised that EPCs are imperfect tools for assessing costs, carbon emissions or the effects of mould and damp. Others said that in the absence of anything better EPCs should be used.

Private Rented Sector - There was a strong focus on the needs of tenants, as the private rented sector is harder to reach, struggling more, has less influence over living conditions and likely to be low-income.

Age - Some people noted that age should be a factor but there was not agreement on whether this should relate to pension credit, retirement pension or something else.

How do we prioritise government support?

There was broad agreement that all schemes need clear prioritisation if they are over-subscribed. This would help with ensuring waiting lists did not grow too long. It was argued that government should align approaches to prioritising support.

Matrix - A matrix was suggested as a tool to help prioritise limited resources. Affordable Warmth and Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) vulnerability matrices were suggested as a useful approach to help prioritise support. A points-based system was suggested e.g. children, disabilities/health, earnings, energy efficiency etc. Other suggestions were:

- higher scoring for somebody in an emergency
- scales to measure household characteristics
- worst first
- people-focused

Access to previous schemes - We heard that if a scheme provides a single intervention, then this could exclude the household from support from other aspects of the schemes in a subsequent year.

Data - Stakeholders felt that government should target support using good data and not just rely on the voluntary and community sector, though this sector can ensure that very few slip through the cracks. There were calls for departments to share data with each other. However, the **women's disability group** said that they would prefer not to be auto-enrolled on schemes for support as they have issues with data sharing.

Area-based - Another suggestion was to focus on local initiatives and there was reference to the PHA health improvement partnership model. Stakeholders said that rural areas have different needs and fewer low-carbon heating options so support should be prioritised here:

'If they can't change from oil to gas, how can they make efficiency savings?'

Others argued that location should not exclude people from support.

Partnership - We were told that trust needs to be built with communities. Local knowledge helps identify people who are in need but less likely to apply for support and this could mean signposting to a range of support, but people should only need to 'tell their story' once. There were recommendations for partnership with health agencies, local authorities, statutory bodies and community groups.

Types of grant - Some stakeholders urged schemes not to neglect low cost options such as window seals, draft excluders, lightbulbs as these can make a difference in energy costs. These measures could be wide reaching and stimulate industry.

5. Collaboration and Capacity-Building

Emergency support

It was recognised that there will always be a need for short term emergency support and this will most likely be in the form of financial assistance. Such support is not always joined up and it varies from location and the type of help offered. There were calls to ensure that there is flexibility, for example people can get top up credit vouchers for gas and electricity, but for people who pay a bill there is less support. For those using oil or coal there is limited help and it may depend on location.

'For my birthday I asked for a fill of oil'

It was noted that there is little advertising for support and people have no awareness of it. People often rely on word of mouth.

Discretionary support - This helps people in the form of loans and grants in emergency situations. It was raised that the length of time it takes to get the payment is too long, especially when people are in an emergency. Another issue is that people need a guarantee in an emergency but

Discretionary Support does not offer this and waiting for a decision adds to stress.

It is felt that it is too bureaucratic at times and although Discretionary Support can help in emergency situations, recovering the loan from people on benefits can be an issue. An example was given in the **Foyle foodbank focus** group of someone receiving a loan to cover fuel costs. They were due to get paid by Universal Credit, but Discretionary Support recovered the loan amount in full and put them back into an emergency situation. It was suggested that a repayment period should be agreed as in Universal Credit.

One stop shop - The **men's disability group** said that despite feeling that they would be eligible for help nobody has applied for any schemes. They didn't know there was anything out there, didn't know how to apply and didn't think there was anyone to help them apply as these things aren't advertised anywhere. Knowing where to look can be an issue and they need to know what can be trusted. The only way they receive information is through the group or from Disability Action. The **women's group**

also highlighted a lack of awareness about available support

'If you don't know who to contact you are completely lost'

The **Foyle foodbank group** noted that when they have sought advice from the existing advice line service it was very basic information. The **rural focus group** gave an example of calling all 11 councils for information on the Affordable Warmth Scheme but they were unable to get in contact with anyone to speak about the scheme or get information on energy efficiency.

Boilers - It was raised that people often contact charities looking for help to get their boiler repaired. For people in social housing and the private rented sector this should be the landlords' responsibility. For homeowners they have nowhere to turn to for help. It was suggested that the government should provide this support or help should be available through discretionary support no matter how many loans they may have.

Universal Credit Budgeting Advance - It was raised in the workshops that if someone is claiming Universal Credit, they can get a budgeting advance to help with an energy household cost. This can be paid on the same day and an agreed repayment period

and amount arranged with the option to defer repayments to allow additional time to repay if they are struggling financially. However if someone had applied for an advance previously for another emergency, they are not able to get a further advance until this is repaid.

The Voluntary and Community Sector - This Sector was regarded as where most people go for help in an emergency situation. These groups all take a different approach to helping people but the one thing that they all had in common was that they put the person first and foremost and offer flexibility where they can.

When emergency energy assistance is required top ups for gas or electricity can be provided to help with that specific need. For people using coal or oil there is little to no help, although some charities, such as Saint Vincent DePaul, can help with oil drums. However, transport of drums can be challenging. Community organisations can refer people to foodbanks that may also operate as a fuel bank but this depends on location. We heard that many foodbanks do not offer fuel support as the demand would be more than they could cope with.

It was said that there is often a lack of collaboration between government and these organisations. There is a feeling that the government is looking them to do more and more with less and less and they are

putting an extra burden on organisations without providing extra resources or funding.

Energy Suppliers - Energy suppliers can support people in an emergency situation but the help varies from supplier to supplier. It may include help to ensure the electricity is not switched off or support with debt repayments. Suppliers noted that they are willing to help and support but they need partners to work with them as they do not have the capacity to deal with all the issues that are presented to them. The **terminal illness focus group** said that some suppliers help people going through terminal illness with top up vouchers for their electricity. This is not widely advertised.

Community energy

Stakeholders noted opportunities for communities to become more active in energy. Oil buying clubs are the most common type of community energy in Northern Ireland but other examples were the Northern Ireland Community Energy (NICE) solar panel scheme on publicly owned buildings and GAA green club initiative.

Each community has different needs and community energy masterplans and workshops on home energy efficiency were suggested. Councils could support a community-based approach as some have energy efficiency advisors. There were calls

for a Northern Ireland community energy scheme and suggestions for community heating or heat networks with fixed costs spread over the year.

The **rural focus group** noted that community energy could provide sustainable energy solutions for rural areas. Some schemes already deliver energy efficiency and reduced energy bills. There were suggestions that when infrastructure for renewables is built there should be local discounts on electricity or community energy opportunities and there is a need to change the narrative in rural areas on renewables.

Community equity in wind farms, Community Private Partnership, the Drumlin Wind Farm Cooperative and a geothermal energy project in Tralee were examples of communities engaging in energy and building wealth or keeping costs down.

Targeting

Targeting was considered positive but only if done correctly. It was felt that people would prefer to be targeted than miss out on the opportunity for help and that people with vulnerabilities may not have the capacity or knowledge to seek help. There were concerns about targeting in the previous Affordable Warmth Scheme where people in similar circumstances were not eligible even though they lived only a few metres apart.

Targeting was recognised as a complex issue. For example, if a targeted intervention is delivered then what will happen to the people who sit just outside the scope of eligibility but are still struggling financially? How can people be targeted if there is no direct contact with them? It was raised that advertising is needed for available support or schemes through social media, schools, leaflet drops, community groups and people who are in contact with vulnerable people.

The Voluntary and Community Sector feel that they are well placed to reach out to those who need help and support. There were varied opinions on who to target, tying into income levels and the vulnerability matrix for the new fuel poverty scheme. Some suggested the working poor, others high energy users with vulnerabilities who could be pinpointed by energy suppliers if they are on the customer care register. There were calls for the benefit system to target people. They can easily contact households but it was noted that there is not a lot of trust there.

Holistic support

It was frequently raised that there is a need for holistic support when someone has requested support for energy. When someone has asked for help, this is a good time to find out the issues that led to them asking for support, for example the efficiency of the home, debt, benefit checks, energy tariff and budgeting etc. An

additional point raised was that if a person repeatedly requests emergency support, then follow ups should be done to offer support or a referral for any issues they are facing.

‘There should be no wrong door to access support.’

The **disability focus group** said they have to build themselves up to make a call for support. If they are put on hold and then do not get an answer or are passed off to another organisation then this is off putting. A more holistic approach would be to pass their details on to the relevant organisation and receive a call back.

It was recognised that not all organisations or people can deal with all these requests for additional support but greater collaboration with trusted partners would help. There is a feeling that when an application is made no further details are captured to find out why the request has been made. This is a lost opportunity to offer holistic support.

Advice and information on emergency energy and benefits

Stakeholders mentioned many places that people go to for support across local and central government, the VCS, arms' length bodies and others. They noted helplines such as Make the Call, organisations such as energy suppliers and foodbanks, Jobs

and Benefit offices and online sources such as the Consumer Council and NI Direct. Some felt that the majority of emergency support was in benefit advice through the government.

Improve energy awareness knowledge in VCS - When discussing energy awareness and efficiency with the VCS it was clear that there is a gap in knowledge and even informed people can struggle with staying up to date. Due to the funding of organisations and use of short-term contracts they lose experience and knowledge as people seek more job security and move on.

Health professionals, councils and people in the benefit system have limited energy knowledge but all have interactions with vulnerable people and there should be an avenue for all to source information, educate themselves and make referrals if they have the scope to do so. NIHE offers energy efficiency advice but many thought this was only available for NIHE tenants. People said that the system is hard to navigate, with long waiting times and you cannot make requests on behalf of vulnerable people.

Many suggested a greater online presence so people can easily access information on behavioural change and a one stop shop for all energy matters to enable trusted

partners to make referrals on behalf of vulnerable people. A one stop shop was requested in all workshops and focus groups as the best method of raising awareness, seeking support and delivering measures.

Increase data-sharing capabilities - It was suggested that improved data sharing within and across departments would improve the accuracy of support, reduce waiting and administration times and be used to target the right people. The **women's disability group** felt uncomfortable with data sharing, however.

If Discretionary Support or Universal Credit has received requests for emergency energy support this should be referred on, but some stakeholders felt a reluctance for government to do this due to GDPR. Many suggested that if successful data sharing pathways were set up, this would allow greater collaboration between departments and trusted partners and help develop referral pathways.

The **terminal illness focus group** said that data sharing would be a good idea for someone who has a terminal illness. If someone presents an SR1 (special rules identifier) to any government department then this could trigger additional referrals for support such as benefit and energy efficiency checks. This was seen positively but the issue of data sharing and consent

arose as the person themselves may not know they have a terminal illness and may not have given consent for data sharing.

It was also suggested that VCS, council and energy suppliers hold data that could benefit government in identifying trends in fuel poverty but again the issue of data-sharing arose. Saint Vincent DePaul and The Trussel Trust hold data on support given to people with oil but they feel this cannot be shared as they have confidentiality agreements with those who have sought help. One

suggestion is voluntary databases that use data to allow additional help and support and build a pool of data for analysis. The feeling was that the VCS are in a good place to get data as they are trusted.

There were many calls for government departments to seek clarity on what can be shared rather than taking a cautious approach.

6. Protecting Consumers

Stakeholders discussed protecting consumers from high energy costs and how education and awareness could help people manage their bills. In addition, there was discussion about unfair practices and how people could have a more protected experience of energy.

Understanding and mitigating changing costs of energy

Support to manage oil costs - It was noted that there is little help or support if you run out of oil or non-metered fuels. Not everyone has the capability to call around suppliers to find the cheapest provider though it was noted that the Consumer Council website has oil prices to help people find the best deals. Oil buying clubs run by NIHE enable lower prices but it is dependent on people placing orders and in rural areas does not always work. Another form of help is oil buying stamp schemes organised by local councils and we heard that some Credit Unions run interest free oil loans.

Those on lower incomes pay more for oil because buying smaller quantities costs more per litre. If there are minimum delivery quantities, low-income households are least likely to be able to afford oil when needed: a particular issue in rural areas.

Support to manage electricity and gas bills

- These are regulated but people do not have the capacity to switch suppliers due to different vulnerabilities. Newer customers often get the best deals which can leave someone who is unable to switch on a higher tariff. The **men's disability group** felt that they would forget to switch at the end of a contract.

Some suppliers offer a hardship fund for people who cannot afford to top up their electricity. This varies from supplier to supplier and it is not advertised to customers. It was suggested that a one stop shop could help vulnerable people switch providers to enable them to make savings. Some wanted loyalty deals for existing customers, especially vulnerable people who have limited capacity to switch. The Energy Cloud project is a potential tool to use excess wind energy to heat hot water. Others suggested offering solar panels to reduce bills.

Higher energy needs for vulnerable groups

- The **disability, carers** and **terminal illness** groups highlighted that vulnerable people have a high level of energy use due to health conditions, for example electric hoists, stair lifts, oxygen, dialysis, consistent lighting requirements (for people who are partially

sighted or suffer from dementia), and more washing and drying of clothes. These groups are at home a lot and need more heat to not exacerbate their conditions. The use of affordability tariffs was suggested as support for these vulnerable groups.

'If someone has certain disabilities then there could be a discount scheme applied to them for oil, gas or electricity'

Types of support for those with additional needs - Energy suppliers can offer support for people who are terminally ill through an energy top up, but this is not advertised. Oxygen companies issue refunds for the use of oxygen and in Northern Ireland the NHS can refund money for the electricity needed for a dialysis machine. Some people suggested trialling free block units of energy for those who have a terminal illness along with their Personal Independence Payment claim. Great Britain has piloted warm home prescriptions and stakeholders suggested these be made available in Northern Ireland.

Other consumer protection issues

Non-regulated fuels - Some people use coal, anthracite or propane bottled fuel for heating. None of these are regulated and therefore their price can vary without any control. Lack of regulation also reduces ability to measure their use. Drums of oil, particularly used by those on low incomes,

are not always accessible - people must get the oil home and into their tank which can be challenging for the disabled or vulnerable. Rural areas often have a minimum delivery order and if people do not have £200, they go without.

Customer care registers - Energy suppliers hold a customer care register but most people do not know about this and struggle with the capacity and energy to register themselves. Some suggested that the register could be used to apply social tariffs to vulnerable people with high energy use to help mitigate their energy costs.

Smart meters - There were many calls for the introduction of smart meters to help consumers and allow data to be captured on energy usage, underconsumption and help with measuring fuel poverty. Smart meters can help customers see what appliances cost the most to use and may help change behaviour to make savings. There is a feeling that suppliers have no way of knowing that a customer has 'self-disconnected' and therefore no help can be offered.

Standards of work and redress - stakeholders want work carried out in the home to be of a good standard. New schemes should have retrofitting standards with regular review to ensure quality of work. Setting standards would build trust and confidence. There were suggestions for a trusted trader mark and government websites to provide links

to energy advice and trusted suppliers. It was noted that anyone looking to carry out energy efficiency improvements on their home should be able to find good, trusted companies. Stakeholders also said that anyone should be able to point out if things go wrong, and for problems to be resolved.

'Have trusted partners who are trusted to know what is needed in a home, that they will not rip people off and will have high standards'

It was recognised that this would need investment and more training and skills development, including upskilling for the existing workforce. Some people noted that work carried out in the past was sometimes of a poor quality, citing installation of solar panels that led to leaks in the roof and disability amendments.

7. Appendices

APPENDIX A - FUEL POVERTY PROJECT BOARD

Angus Kerr – Department for Communities – Director of Climate Change Division – Chair

Meabh Cormacain – Department for Communities

Una McConnell – Department for Communities

Noyona Chundur – Consumer Council NI

Jane Corderoy – Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – Climate Change, Science & Innovation

Kieran Devlin - Department for Communities - Housing and Sustainability

Sinead Dynan - Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation

Gary McGouran - Department for Communities

Colin Moffett – The Executive Office - International Relations

Elma Newberry – Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Director of Development

Liz Redmond – Department of Health – Director of Population Health

Carl Savage - Department for Communities - Engaged Communities Group

David Tarr - Department for Communities - Work & Health

Ryan White – Department for the Economy - Energy Group

APPENDIX B - FUEL POVERTY REFERENCE PANEL

Angus Kerr Department for Communities – Director of Climate Change Division – Chair

Meabh Carmacain – Department for Communities

Una McConnell - Department for Communities

Celeste McCallion – Department for Communities - Corporate Services Group (CSG)

Alan Mitchell – Fermanagh and Omagh Council

Alex Tennant – Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Nuala Toman - Disability Action

Nigel Brady – Bryson Energy

Pat Austin – National Energy Action

Wilma Stewart – Age NI

Tracey Colgan – Public Health Agency

Paul McKenzie – Ulster University

Lucie Middlemiss – University of Leeds

Siobhan Harding – Women's Support Network

Justina Corcoran – Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (ROI)

Graham Smith – Consumer Council NI

APPENDIX C - FOCUS GROUPS

DATE	LOCATION	GROUP
25 April 2024	Atlas Women's Centre, Lisburn	Women's group facilitated by the Women's Resource Network
13 May 2024	Online	BAME community workers, organised by StepNI
13 May 2024	Online	Disabled women's group, organised by Disability Action
15 May 2024	Online	Disabled men's group, organised by Disability Action
16 May 2024	Online	End-of-life care professionals, facilitated by Marie Curie
29 May 2024	NICVA	Discussion with Roma community worker
17 June 2024	Online	Focus group with foodbank users, organised by Foyle Foodbank
17 June 2024	Cookstown	Rural focus group, organised by Rural Community Network
25 June 2024	Online	Carers representative discussion, organised by Carers NI
26 June 2024	Online	Traveller community workers discussion, organised by Step NI and Travellers Community Support
27 June/ 8 August 2024	Online	Older people discussion, facilitated by Age NI
6 September 2024	Causeway Exchange	Representatives from heating, insulation, renewable energy sectors, NIHE, Utility Regulator and colleagues from DfE
20 September 2024	Causeway Exchange	Representatives from heating, insulation, renewable energy sectors, NIHE, Utility Regulator and colleagues from DfE

APPENDIX D - ORGANISATIONS WHO ATTENDED WORKSHOPS:

Advice NI	Department for Communities
Advice Space	Department for the Economy
Age NI	Department of Health
Alliance Party	Derry and Strabane Council
Antrim and Newtownabbey Council	Dry Arch Centre
Ards and North Down Council	East Belfast Community Development Agency
Ballysillan Community Forum	Electric Ireland
Barnardo's	Energy Saving Trust
Belfast City Council	Energy Store
Belfast Healthy Cities	Evolve Network
Bogside & Brandywell Health Forum	Fermanagh and Omagh Council
Bolster Community	Firebird
Bryson	Firmus Energy
Budget Energy	Forward South
Causeway Coast and Glens Council	Foyle Foodbank
Christians Against Poverty	Glen Development Initiative
Click Energy	Hillcrest Trust
CMG Energy Consultants	Lisburn and Castlereagh Council
Commissioner For Older People	Marie Curie
Community Advice Ards and North Down	Mid and East Antrim Council
Community Advice Fermanagh	Mid Ulster Age Well
Consumer Council NI	Mid Ulster Council
Cookstown & Western Shores Area Network	National Economic and Social Council Ireland
Credit Union	

National Energy Action

Newry, Mourne and Down Council

Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Phoenix Energy

Power NI

Private Individual

Queen University Belfast

Refresh NI

Sinn Fein Party

South City Resource & Development

SSE

Step NI

Tada Rural Support Network

Trussell Trust

Utility Regulator NI

Vineyard Compassion

Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership

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Consultation on a draft Fuel Poverty Strategy

December 2024

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1. Ministerial Foreword

This consultation on a new Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out a pathway to a Northern Ireland where everyone lives in a warm, healthy home. Too many people live in houses that they struggle to heat, and our most recent modelling suggests that in 2022 more than a quarter of households here were living in fuel poverty. Living in cold and damp homes impacts health and well-being, particularly for the most vulnerable in our society. The continued high prices of fossil fuels, low standards of energy efficiency in our homes and the ongoing cost of living all contribute to unacceptably high levels of fuel poverty.

My Department has made significant investment in improving energy efficiency in low-income households. In addition, I have recently secured a £17million allocation to provide a one-off £100 payment to pensioners no longer eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment and an uptake in additional benefits of £62million in 2023/24 through my Department's Make the Call service, £21.3million of which went to pensioners. These have all supported people struggling with high energy bills, especially older people, and have made a meaningful contribution to addressing fuel poverty.

In developing this consultation we have worked collaboratively with those who understand and can address fuel poverty. Our stakeholders provided valuable insights into the lived experience of people living in fuel poverty and have shaped the proposals contained within this consultation. Using the

input gathered during our engagement we now set out a series of actions, guided by clear and fair principles, to help us achieve three key goals: to make homes more energy efficient, to collaborate and build capacity, and to protect consumers.

Tackling fuel poverty will require significant collaboration across government and our partners to continue to provide both emergency and long-term support. It will help achieve wider societal benefits by supporting those struggling with the cost of living, improving health outcomes and decarbonising our homes.

The recent announcement to restrict the winter fuel payment creates an additional financial burden for less well-off older people and this Fuel Poverty Strategy aims to better understand the longer-term impact of the removal of the payment on pensioners who are above the threshold for winter fuel payments and provide support, if necessary, to help those who have moved into fuel poverty.

I encourage you to play your part in this consultation to help guide and shape this important strategy. This is a continuation of the engagement which my officials have carried out with the most vulnerable in our society. A warm home is a healthy home and your contribution will ensure that this strategy reflects and responds to the needs of those who cannot afford to stay warm in their own homes in the coming winters.

2. Executive Summary

There are many factors that contribute to making energy unaffordable. These include the energy efficiency of homes and the energy needs of the household, the cost of energy, household income and people's ability to access energy solutions that are right for them. Tackling fuel poverty in Northern Ireland will help protect people, particularly the most vulnerable, from the effects of cold and damp living conditions. Doing so sustainably will also make a positive contribution to our carbon reduction targets.

Our vision is a warm healthy home for everyone, and we propose that our approach to addressing fuel poverty should be needs-based, participative, collaborative and focused on long-term, sustainable solutions. Achieving our vision and being guided by these principles will make a significant positive contribution to a Just Transition to a low-carbon economy.

Improving the energy efficiency of homes is the first of our objectives and is a key priority. The energy efficiency of Northern Ireland's housing stock is among the worst in Europe and to address this we need to establish and raise housing standards and significantly increase investment in energy efficiency. Improving housing standards will help make homes easier to heat and

set clear expectations from government for homeowners across a range of housing tenures. This consultation also explores proposals for the successor to the Affordable Warmth Scheme and proposes alignment of our Fuel Poverty Strategy principles in all new home energy schemes.

Through our stakeholder engagement process we heard repeatedly about the importance of coordinating services to improve outcomes for citizens. Our second key objective is therefore to collaborate and build capacity, and particularly to build partnerships that can identify and provide advice and long-term sustainable support to those most in need. We will work closely with the voluntary and community sector and statutory bodies to build capacity and confidence and improve people's ability to seek the right energy solutions for them. However, we know that many people face stress just trying to pay for the essentials of life. Part of our response will need to address the immediate difficulty of keeping people's homes warm in emergency situations and ensuring such support is accessible and consistent. We will improve the pathway to ensure that they can also access the long-term, sustainable solutions that will help prevent or reduce future emergencies.

Making our homes more sustainable will help create warmer, healthier houses, reduce air pollution and create new job opportunities. However, the transition will mean changes to people's homes, energy sources and behaviours. Our third objective therefore focuses on protecting consumers. This means improving our understanding of the impacts of changes on their energy bills and exploring bill support for those groups for whom energy efficiency measures may not be a viable option. It also means making sure that when we fund energy efficiency and low-carbon heating measures that people can expect a common standard of installation and protection. This will also help industry plan their investment in training and accreditation.

We were asked by stakeholders to ensure that the language we use when designing and delivering schemes is clear, dignified and appropriate. This consultation therefore asks whether we should consider moving away from the language of fuel poverty and towards energy wellbeing to emphasise

the importance of essential and affordable energy to enable a decent standard of living and health.

During our engagement, there were calls for better and more frequent data on fuel poverty and its impacts. We propose improving our understanding of how fuel poverty affects people and utilising data to design better policy and ensure that interventions reach those who need help the most. We will improve monitoring and accountability by introducing indicators on issues that stakeholders have told us are important to them.

Our renewed focus on transparency also includes proposals for more regular, visible reporting and, reflecting our commitment to inclusiveness, ensuring that the voices of those most affected by fuel poverty continue to inform the implementation of this strategy.

3. Strategic Framework

Context	Just Transition, Climate Change Act (NI) 2022, Carbon Budgets, Programme for Government (“Our Plan”)		
Vision	A warm, healthy home for everyone		
Principles	Long-term, sustainable solutions	Needs-Based	Collaborative
Objectives	Make homes more energy efficient	Collaborate and build capacity	Protect Consumers
Outcomes	Improved energy efficiency for vulnerable households	Increased access to trusted energy efficiency advice, measures and support for low income, vulnerable households through partnership working	Informed, protected consumers have access to essential, sustainable and affordable energy
Governance & Accountability	Introduce a comprehensive, more frequent framework for understanding fuel poverty indicators and outcomes	Ministerial statement annually before the Assembly	Form a Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel

Fuel Poverty Strategy Policies & Actions

Objectives / Policies

Make homes more energy efficient

1. Raise and appropriately enforce housing standards
2. Increase investment in energy efficiency schemes for vulnerable households

Collaborate and build capacity

3. Utilise and build on experience and knowledge of others to increase energy wellbeing
4. Ensure consistent, accessible financial support for vulnerable people in emergencies

Protect Consumers

5. Implement a new support framework for energy affordability
6. Ensure robust protection and redress for heating and energy efficiency

Proposed Actions

1. Introduce a revised Decent Homes Standard for social housing by 2026
2. Introduce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) by 2027
3. Implement improved Fitness Standards for all tenures by 2030
4. Alignment of Fuel Poverty Strategy principles in all new home energy schemes
5. Introduce a more ambitious fuel poverty energy efficiency scheme
6. Consider alternative funding models to increase investment in energy efficiency schemes

1. Utilise and enhance referral partnerships across government and our partners to raise awareness of energy wellbeing, identify people in fuel poverty and provide support
2. Introduce a One Stop Shop
3. Explore role of community energy in addressing fuel poverty
4. Implement key aspects of NICE Guidelines on the health risks associated with living in a cold home
5. Work with other organisations to ensure consistent emergency support and referrals to efficiency measures and advice
6. In a future energy crisis, target financial assistance at those most in need
7. Gain a better understanding of the impact of changes to the Winter Fuel Payment and introduce additional support where appropriate

1. Improve our understanding of energy decarbonisation policies on the affordability of domestic energy bills
2. Raise awareness of existing price protection tools
3. Investigate targeted affordability support for certain vulnerable households
4. Assess need for non-price protection of less-protected energy and take appropriate steps
5. Agree minimum quality standards for all energy efficiency schemes
6. Ensure appropriate aftercare and redress mechanism for government energy schemes

4. Introduction

Fuel poverty is the inability to heat or power a home to an adequate degree at a reasonable cost. It is affected by household income, the cost of energy and how much energy is needed in the home. Fuel poverty levels in Northern Ireland have fluctuated from 27% in 2001, to 44% in 2009 and 22% in 2016¹ as reported in the NI House Condition Survey.² The most recent modelled fuel poverty estimate using the 2016 baseline data estimated a fuel poverty figure of 27% in 2022.³ Protecting human health from the detrimental effects of living in cold and damp homes is the primary driver for tackling fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

Our extant Fuel Poverty Strategy was published in 2011 and since then we have invested significantly in improving heating and energy efficiency in low-income households. However, much more needs to be done to improve the energy efficiency of homes. This will also help protect households

from volatile fossil fuel prices and economic shocks caused by geopolitical unrest.

In 2022, climate legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland with targets to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and an intention to do so in a way that contributes to reducing poverty and inequality through a Just Transition. This is core to our approach.

The proposals contained in this consultation have been developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, organisations and parts of Government that have responsibility for, or are impacted by, fuel poverty.

Purpose of document

This document sets out draft proposals for a Fuel Poverty Strategy that will contain a range of actions to make homes more efficient, raise awareness and build confidence and

¹ Lead author Dr Salvador Acha, from the Department of Chemical Engineering at Imperial College London, said: "Studies show the UK's 28.6 million homes are among the least energy efficient in Europe and lose heat up to three times faster than on the continent, making people poorer and colder." <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/publications/energy-and-low-carbon-futures/decarbonising-buildings-in-sights-from-across-europe.php>

² The Housing Executive - House Condition Survey (nihe.gov.uk)

³ The Housing Executive - House Condition Survey (nihe.gov.uk)

capacity, enhance collaboration and protect consumers. We are carrying out a full public consultation on a draft Fuel Poverty Strategy. We expect to publish a final strategy in Summer 2025.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity will be published. We will remove email addresses and telephone numbers from these responses, but apart from this, we will publish them in full. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice. Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). However all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (UK) 2016/679. If you wish your response to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, such that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

Impact assessments

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all Section 75 groups. Without prejudice to these obligations, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Equality screening of this consultation document has identified no adverse impacts. On this basis, the decision is that the proposed fuel poverty strategy should not be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment: The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 introduced a new duty on NI departments, district councils and other public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services. The Department, under a commitment to rural proof, is also required to identify the potential impact on rural areas and if appropriate, adjust to take account of rural circumstances. As part of the development of this consultation, issues in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas have been identified and taken into consideration.

5. Strategic Context

Fuel poverty is affected by and impacts policies and actions across government. Our approach in developing this draft strategy has been to reflect and build on existing government priorities relating to fuel poverty while setting new ambitions. We have collaborated closely with other parts of government and ensured stakeholder engagement throughout the process.

Reflecting and building on existing government priorities

The draft Programme for Government includes the publication of a new Fuel Poverty Strategy, as well as a commitment to provide more social, affordable and sustainable housing and making a contribution to the people, place and prosperity missions.⁴ The draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland⁵ recognises the importance of improving domestic energy efficiency in addressing fuel poverty, decarbonising our homes and reducing emissions and supporting green jobs for economic growth.

Since 2021, Northern Ireland has set a new ambition to decarbonise our economy. This includes a new Climate Change Act which sets a legal requirement to reduce emissions (from base year emission levels) by 48% by 2030.⁶ The Act includes a Just Transition principle to ensure that the benefits of moving to a green economy are shared widely and support is provided for sectors and people who are likely to be most affected by the transition. We believe that this strategy, which aims to reduce fuel poverty, makes a particular contribution to a Just Transition by its focus on actions to help eliminate poverty, inequality and social deprivation.

Other government policies impact our approach to fuel poverty including those relating to poverty, health, housing, energy and climate. Among these are the draft Green Growth Strategy⁷, the Carbon Budgets⁸ and the Climate Action Plan that will deliver on these. The Energy Strategy - The Path to Net

4 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most. Draft Programme for Government 2024 – 2027. <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/newnigov/draft-programme-for-government-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most.pdf>

5 Draft ISNI 2050. <https://isni.gov.uk/strategy/draft-isni-2050/>

6 Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 ([legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk))

7 Consultation on the draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)

8 Summary of Responses: Consultation on Northern Ireland's 2030 & 2040 Emissions Reduction Targets & First Three Carbon Budgets & Seeking views on Climate Change Committee (CCC) Advice Report: The path to a Net Zero Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)

Zero Energy has a key indicator of reducing households in fuel poverty⁹. Our Housing Supply Strategy¹⁰ sets out a 15-year journey to transform housing supply. Work has also been carried out on developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy¹¹ as well as a review of the People and Place Strategy.¹² Consideration is currently being given to a refresh of Making Life Better, our public health strategy¹³ which relates to the health impacts of fuel poverty.

We have reflected the ambitions of these in developing this draft strategy. Addressing fuel poverty in the right way can lead to a reduction in emissions, improve housing conditions and, through better, warmer homes, improve health outcomes and ensure people have to spend less on their fuel costs.

Stakeholder engagement

Our approach has focused on engaging with stakeholders through the formation of a Reference Panel, holding workshops and focus groups to understand and learn from existing experience and knowledge of fuel poverty and building close links across those parts of government that have responsibility for or respond to those who are impacted by fuel poverty.

A Reference Panel was formed with external expertise to provide advice, evidence-based communication and a reference-and-challenge function throughout the development of this strategy. A Project Board comprised of senior officials from across government was established to provide high-level oversight and strategic direction. Both groups met regularly from September 2023.

In addition to these groups and ongoing bilateral engagement, we organised workshops to engage and listen to stakeholders. A total of 268 registrants from a wide range of backgrounds came together to inform the process, raise issues and concerns, bring forward new ideas, and highlight what has worked and what can be strengthened. Focus groups were also held with vulnerable groups impacted by fuel poverty. We held a webinar on fuel poverty definitions with experts from New Zealand and the Netherlands to inform our understanding of measuring fuel poverty.

A Stakeholder Engagement Report outlining our approach and findings from the engagement process has been published alongside this strategy.

⁹ Energy Strategy - Path to Net Zero Energy | Department for the Economy ([economy-ni.gov.uk](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk))

¹⁰ Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2039 ([communities-ni.gov.uk](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk))

¹¹ Anti-poverty | Department for Communities ([communities-ni.gov.uk](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk))

¹² People and Place Review | Department for Communities ([communities-ni.gov.uk](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk))

¹³ Making Life Better - Strategic Framework for Public Health | Department of Health ([health-ni.gov.uk](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk))

To provide a voice to those impacted by fuel poverty we have included quotes from our focus groups throughout this consultation document.

6. Vision and Principles

“In relation to damp and mould. Everyone knows that this affects your health. People know that they need to keep the heat on, but they simply can’t afford it”

Vision

A warm, healthy home for everyone

Tackling fuel poverty will contribute to Executive commitments to improve health and wellbeing, tackle poverty, contribute to climate change targets and deliver positive outcomes for society. To support this strategy, we have set out a vision that describes our goal, setting out our desired outcome for the future and what success will look like. This vision will be shared across government departments and our partners.

During our stakeholder engagement phase this vision was tested and discussed. Most stakeholders welcomed the proposed vision. This vision is aspirational and should guide our work and the work of our partners when making decisions that may impact on people experiencing fuel poverty. It sets out our overall outcome and should be easily understood, not just by our partners, but also the people we are trying to help.

Principles

These principles support our vision and guide all the work we do, describing the way we will deliver solutions to tackle fuel poverty. All proposals and actions must meet each guiding principle and contribute to our vision for the future.

PRINCIPLE	EXPLANATION
Long-term sustainable solutions	Ensure people are lifted out of fuel poverty by focusing on long term solutions rather than short term fixes, aligning our duties under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022, including those relating to the Just Transition principle and its connected objectives to ensure that actions taken eliminate poverty, inequality and social deprivation.
Needs-based	Respond to the changing needs of people in or at risk of fuel poverty by providing more flexible, holistic support that prioritises those most in need.
Collaborative	Building partnerships, referral networks and collaboration across all sectors of society will be at the heart of everything we do.
Participative	Empowering people and communities to seek long-term solutions, recognising and removing barriers, and enhancing the capacity and confidence of fuel poor people to seek support.

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed vision and guiding principles? If not, please suggest alternatives and why?

Timeframe

We believe that a new Fuel Poverty Strategy needs to give sufficient long-term direction for stakeholders while also recognising that we are in a period of significant change in decarbonisation policy. We propose that the strategy focus on a ten-year period to 2035

with a review in 2030. This will provide a clear pathway for homeowners, our partners and industry to plan, prepare, invest and engage in the journey to more efficient homes and greater energy security.

Question 2: Do you agree with the timeframe and review period? If not, why not?

7. Make homes more energy efficient

OUTCOME 1: Improved energy efficiency for vulnerable households

Energy efficient homes are easier to heat and stay warm for longer. Improving energy efficiency is therefore a priority to reduce fuel poverty. A vulnerable household is one that is most at risk of fuel poverty and most likely to be negatively impacted by it, for example, households with low incomes, a long-term health condition or illness exacerbated by the cold. Good quality, warm, secure housing is vital to both mental and physical health, with the very young and very old most vulnerable to the impacts of fuel poverty.

More efficient homes contribute to the Energy Strategy principle of "Do more with less"¹⁴ and the Housing Supply Strategy objective of reducing whole-life carbon emissions from new and existing homes.¹⁵

To deliver on this outcome, we will:

- Raise and appropriately enforce housing standards

- Increase investment in energy efficiency schemes for vulnerable households

Current schemes to improve energy efficiency include the Affordable Warmth Scheme, Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) and projects developed and delivered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Government energy efficiency schemes raised mean SAP figures (an estimate of how much energy a property uses) from 59.63 to 65.83 between 2011-2016 and contributed to fuel poverty reduction during this period. However, investment in energy efficiency must increase significantly. Government must also collaborate across departments to ensure that there is a common approach to how we design and target future home energy schemes.

Minimum housing standards in Northern Ireland are significantly lower than those in the rest of the UK. Inefficient housing stock contributes to fuel poverty and stakeholders

¹⁴ The Path to Net Zero Energy. Safe. Affordable. Clean. (economy-ni.gov.uk)

¹⁵ Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2039 (communities-ni.gov.uk)

particularly raised concerns about inadequate housing in the private rented sector (PRS). In addition to improving thermal comfort, raising housing standards will make homes easier to heat, reduce damp and condensation through appropriate ventilation, make rental properties more attractive, and increase the value of the house.

Objective 1: Raise and appropriately enforce housing standards

Housing standards include a mix of statutory and administrative standards applying to different tenures and covering a range of safety, environmental and amenity aspects. Elements of each impact the efficiency and thermal comfort of housing and will impact fuel poverty, though none were designed specifically for this purpose. Some of our housing standards have not been updated significantly for decades and therefore significant improvement is now required.

Our aim is for all homes to be of good quality meaning that everyone can expect the same high standards no matter their tenure. This means updating existing policies and developing new policies that will ensure our housing standards support the delivery of higher quality homes across all tenures.

Through our pre-consultation engagement, there was an emphasis on the challenges facing tenants in the PRS. Tenants feel they have very little control over energy efficiency

and heating provision and landlords often blame them for damp, mould, or disrepair. They feel vulnerable if they raise concerns about their living conditions, fear eviction if they make complaints about poor conditions and fear retaliatory rent rises after energy efficiency improvements.

Proposed action: Introduce a revised Decent Homes Standard for social housing by 2026

The Decent Homes Standard applies to the social housing sector. A home is considered decent if it meets four criteria:

- a) It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing (Fitness Standard)
- b) It is in a reasonable state of repair
- c) It has reasonably modern facilities and services
- d) It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

DfC is developing a new Decent Homes Standard and social housing will be required to comply with this standard as part of the regulatory programme for social housing. Introducing this standard may impact fuel poverty as 'criterion d' (a reasonable degree of thermal comfort) requires dwellings to have both effective insulation and efficient heating. A 'reasonable degree of thermal comfort' is not yet defined but is likely to require higher standards of energy efficiency

and the consultation on the new Decent Homes Standard will explore this more fully.

Question 3: What would a readily understandable and measurable definition of “thermal comfort” look like?

Proposed action: Introduce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) by 2027

The 2016 NIHCS¹⁶ estimated that only 43% of private rented dwellings had an EPC rating A-C and 26% of those living in the PRS were living in fuel poverty - the highest percentage of any sector. Tenants in the PRS make up a very high proportion of the number of calls to Housing Rights advice services and some of the most common issues raised are damp, mould and cold.¹⁷

DfC has enabling legislation to establish standards for the PRS.¹⁸ Given the highest levels of fuel poverty are in this sector we propose to set MEES for PRS by 2027. Landlords will be required to comply with these new MEES standards within this strategy period and the exact date will be subject to consultation. DfC is currently progressing the transfer of the Landlord Registration Scheme to Councils, with Lisburn

and Castlereagh Council acting as the lead for this work. The overarching aim of the transfer is to make registration a more meaningful tool for improving the PRS. A second phase of this work will include exploring the potential to link standards more explicitly to the registration process.

MEES for other sectors may also be needed to achieve our aim that everyone can expect the same high standards. The Scottish Government is proposing that owner-occupied homes will be required to meet the same MEES as the PRS five years later (2033 and 2028 respectively).

Question 4: For MEEs in PRS to effectively alleviate fuel poverty, what information or data do you think would be useful and what barriers would we need to overcome?

Question 5: Should MEES also be applied to other tenures? Please give reasons for your answer.

¹⁶ The Housing Executive - House Condition Survey (nihe.gov.uk)

¹⁷ A 'just transition' to net zero in Northern Ireland | Housing Rights

¹⁸ Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)

Proposed action: Implement improved Fitness Standards for all tenures by 2030

The Fitness Standard is a basic standard for human habitation. It has not been substantially updated since its introduction in 1981 and has not kept pace with building standards, environmental or health and safety issues. 2% of dwellings (16,370) were considered unfit in 2016 and the most common reason for a property being classified as unfit was dampness.¹⁹ The House Condition Survey also assessed our housing stock based on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which is a risk-based system that replaced the Fitness Standard in England and Wales. Applying these standards, 9% of dwellings (69,900) had Category 1 hazards²⁰ and one of the common risks in HHSRS was excess cold.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

The HHSRS is a statutory, risk-based evaluation tool to help local authorities identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. Environmental Health Officers inspect a property and consider the likelihood of harm to the occupier, how

serious it would be and whether it would pose any additional risk for children or older people.

The HHSRS assesses 29 hazards and the effect that each may have on the health and safety of current or future occupants of the property. If a hazard is a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety, this is known as a Category 1 hazard. If a hazard is less serious or less urgent, this is known as a Category 2 hazard. Local Authorities have a duty take appropriate action in relation to Category 1 hazards and may choose to act in relation to other hazards.

The Housing Supply Strategy²¹ recognises that our Housing Fitness Standard lags behind other jurisdictions. It notes issues with the quality, security and safety of the PRS and commits to undertaking a comprehensive review of fitness standards. To address this, we commit to updating Fitness Standards by 2030. One area in which this standard is particularly deficient is defining "thermal comfort"; it requires "adequate provision for heating," but no minimum standard is specified. "Thermal comfort" will consider the outcomes of the Decent Homes Standard

¹⁹ House Condition Survey Main Report 2016 ([nihe.gov.uk](https://www.nihe.gov.uk))

²⁰ House Condition Survey Main Report 2016 ([nihe.gov.uk](https://www.nihe.gov.uk))

²¹ Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2039 ([communities-ni.gov.uk](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk))

review and Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards.

Question 6: Do you agree that introducing updated fitness standards will contribute to making homes more energy efficient? Please provide reasons for your answer.

Objective 2: Increase investment in energy efficiency schemes for vulnerable households

A very significant increase in funding for energy efficiency schemes is required. This will deliver substantial savings for consumers²² and generate savings for public health²³. Investing in energy efficiency will tackle fuel poverty, help our communities, reduce emissions in the residential sector, support green jobs for economic growth, and improve health outcomes for tenants and homeowners, contributing to a reduction in health inequalities. Government must collaborate to ensure that access to different kinds of support is straightforward and home energy schemes complement and align with each other.

A key policy to support this objective is the successor to the Affordable Warmth Scheme. This new scheme will be vital to improving the energy efficiency of low-income households and in this consultation, we

explore some key aspects of the new scheme. We also need to ensure that we consider all potential funding pathways for investment to enable us to achieve our energy efficiency ambitions.

Proposed action: Alignment of Fuel Poverty Strategy principles in all new home energy schemes

All government domestic energy efficiency, heating and other energy schemes should be coordinated to ensure help is available to those who need it most. The majority of government funding for domestic energy efficiency schemes should be allocated to those on low incomes and particularly when facing additional vulnerabilities. Stakeholders called for home energy schemes to be complementary and proposed a common approach to eligibility, ensuring there are no gaps or cliff-edges in support.

While not all domestic energy schemes will focus on the fuel poor, we believe that they should take account of the principles proposed in this strategy so that the fuel poor are not left behind:

- Long-term sustainable solutions
- Needs-based
- Collaborative
- Participative

²² <https://www.theeccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/>

²³ [Capturing the Multiple Benefits of Energy Efficiency \(windows.net\)](#)

For example, there is already a commitment that the roll-out of smart meters will be done with consumers at the core, in terms of both consumer protection, empowerment and cost effectiveness. Smart meters can improve consumer understanding of electricity use in the home, and, if new tariffs are introduced, they can help people manage or adjust their electricity use to take advantage of times when costs are lower²⁴.

Question 7: Do you agree that all government domestic energy schemes should take account of the Fuel Poverty Strategy principles?

Stakeholders also told us that as government develops new schemes we should ensure:

- **Consistency** – the need for long-term schemes and avoiding a ‘stop and start’ approach. Support to be available across Northern Ireland, moving away from what was sometimes referred to as a ‘postcode lottery’
- **Flexibility** – government should be responsive to changing needs and stakeholders requested that schemes build in flexibility in both eligibility and approach
- **Transparency** – making it clear what schemes are offering and who is eligible, as well as communicating with applicants

throughout the application process. It also means government sharing appropriate data to help plan and target schemes to areas or groups of people who need support most.

Proposed action: Introduce a more ambitious fuel poverty energy efficiency scheme

All questions posed in this section refer to the Department for Communities new fuel poverty energy efficiency support scheme

Improving the energy efficiency of vulnerable households has been a central element of the Government’s Fuel Poverty Strategy for many years. In Northern Ireland, the Affordable Warmth Scheme was introduced in 2014.

This Scheme provided a wide range of energy improvement measures including installation of new heating systems, cavity wall and loft insulation, replacement windows and external insulation in solid wall properties. The current Affordable Warmth Scheme stops in March 2026.

The Department for Communities is now planning an expanded, more ambitious energy efficiency support scheme that will take account of current economic issues, construction inflation and include the potential for replacing energy sources with lower carbon options.

²⁴ Data-For-Good-Final.pdf (esc-production-2021.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

Eligibility Criteria

The current eligibility criteria used to assess applications within the Affordable Warmth Scheme are that:

- (i) applicants must own their own home and occupy it as their sole or main residence, or rent from a Private Sector landlord, and
- (ii) have a total gross annual household income of less than £23,000.

The income threshold and eligibility criteria are currently set in legislation within the Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 and the use of gross income including certain passport benefits to define eligibility for grants provides a simple means of administering applications. However, the income threshold for the Affordable Warmth Scheme currently excludes groups such as the working poor and some pensioners as the calculation of the threshold was made using data that is now outdated.

During the stakeholder engagement workshops, participants raised the need to consider the makeup of income and stated that disposable income was the most important factor when looking at those low-income households most in need.

Additionally, the issue was raised that by only using income threshold as an eligibility criterion, it could mean a lack of flexibility.

Further discussion raised the point that as well as looking at household income, the makeup of a household was equally important, i.e. whether it was a couple with or without dependents or a single person, as it can also determine the amount of disposable income available.

Question 8: Do you agree that DfC should take a more flexible approach that considers current data when setting and reviewing:

- a) income thresholds and
- b) eligibility criteria?

Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 9: Do you agree that an income threshold should increase in line with minimum wage levels/inflation or another index such as Retail Price Index (RPI) to mitigate increases in the cost of living? Please give reasons for your answer.

Participants also felt that using the energy rating and age of a house as eligibility criterion was important, as investing in energy efficiency can make homes more sustainable and resilient which will not only help the current occupier of the house but also assist future generations that will live in the property.

Question 10: Should the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of a house be considered as part of eligibility criteria (i.e. the least energy efficient homes are considered first)? Please give reasons for your answer.

Energy Efficiency Measures

Given that in a typical household, heating accounts for over half of the fuel bills²⁵, most people think of their heating as a key factor when considering the energy efficiency of their home. But there is limited benefit in upgrading to an efficient boiler if other elements of the home such as windows that are single-glazed, doors that have gaps around the edges, and uninsulated floors, roofs, and walls are not addressed at the same time.

How well a home retains heat also plays a very important role in how much energy is used when heating your home. If your home is poorly insulated, your heating system will need to work harder and use more energy to maintain the temperature of your home. A typical house with no insulation will lose 33% of heat through walls and 25% through the roof²⁶.

The main element of retrofitting existing properties is to install measures to improve the fabric of the building such as insulation,

replacement glazing, controlled ventilation and improved airtightness. This alongside renewable energy sources such as solar panels and battery storage, plus low carbon heating options will make homes warmer, easier to heat and healthier for both the occupants and the planet. This is commonly known as the Whole House approach or providing a Whole House solution.

One of the lessons learned from the current Affordable Warmth Scheme is that although there was a priority of measures recommended, applicants could choose not to install all measures offered, opting instead to tackle one energy efficiency issue at a time, such as only replacing an old or broken boiler. By tackling individual measures, they weren't boosting the overall energy efficiency of their homes or maximising the support available.

Question 11: Do you agree that the new scheme should take a Whole House retrofit approach? Please give reasons for your answer

Question 12: If the Whole House approach is used, do you agree that all recommended measures must be installed unless there are exceptional reasons not to? Please give reasons for your answer

²⁵ Help and advice for heating your home - Energy Saving Trust

²⁶ Energy Saving Trust – Home Insulation

In order to meet climate change obligations, it will be necessary to phase out fossil fuel heating and move towards low carbon heating and renewable technologies such as solar panels with battery storage. Heat pumps are by far the most efficient technology, with their co-efficient of performance²⁷ approximately three to five times higher than the efficiency of condensing gas and oil boilers. However, to address and reduce the impact of fuel poverty it is imperative that the property is well insulated and ventilated so that the cost savings are passed to the householder.

The Affordable Warmth Scheme currently replaces or upgrades fossil fuel boilers if there is no functioning heating system in place or where an existing boiler is at least 15 years old. With the heavy reliance in Northern Ireland on fossil fuels such as oil, there will be a requirement for a stepped approach in the move to low carbon heating. Additionally, the Affordable Warmth Scheme failed to address the long-standing problem of 'hard to treat' homes, which typically are located in rural areas, off the gas network and often have a solid wall construction. This was a consequence of the current Affordable Warmth Scheme grant limits being too low to fully support these properties.

Question 13: Do you agree that the new scheme should prioritise low carbon heating solutions where possible?

Question 14: Do you agree that the new scheme should offer renewable technologies such as solar panels and battery storage to offset the running costs of low carbon heating solutions in low-income households? Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 15: Do you agree that rural properties should be prioritised for energy efficiency support? Please give reasons for your answer.

Proposed action: Consider alternative funding models to increase investment in energy efficiency schemes

The Energy Strategy included an Executive commitment to substantially increase funding and support for retrofitting buildings. The scale of the ambition to make homes more efficient is also set out in the Housing Supply Strategy. The draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland also recognises the need to facilitate retrofitting of the

²⁷ A heat pumps co-efficient of performance (COP) is a measure of its efficiency or how well it converts electricity into heating. A higher COP indicates a more efficient heat pump. For example, a COP of 4, means that for every kW of electricity used, 4 kW of heat was provided to the property.

existing housing stock to improve energy efficiency through increased investment and sustainable funding and partnership models. Investment in energy efficiency must increase significantly.

To achieve our ambitions, we must consider all financing options for home energy investment. Funding currently comes via core funding from the block grant (Affordable Warmth), electricity consumer bills (NISEP), rental income (for investment in social housing, supplemented by borrowing by Housing Associations), as well as individuals or institutions who invest for themselves, either for research purposes or to make a return.

'The higher the percentage of people who are in fuel poverty should equate to more funding being made available to help with the problem.'

Government funding: We must increase energy efficiency funding for low-income households, particularly those who are more vulnerable. A multi-year budget is necessary to ensure that schemes are both long-term and sustainable. This would enable experience to be built up by delivery agents and referral partners and give confidence to industry to invest in requisite skills and training. It would also help prevent bottlenecks in applications and ensure that schemes are not closed early to new applicants. A key action to deliver this funding is DfC's new fuel poverty scheme.

Private investment: To achieve higher standards of energy efficiency and thermal comfort we must unlock additional private investment. Stakeholders support a "sliding scale" or tiered approach, whereby those with greatest need receive the most support while those more able to pay contribute in line with their circumstances. This aligns with the public health concept of "proportionate universalism" whereby actions must be universal but with a scale and intensity proportionate to the level of disadvantage.

Landlords will need access to finance to support them to invest in their assets to reach new standards. However, landlord uptake of energy efficiency grants has been historically low: between 5-8% of home upgrades were installed in the private rented sector when Affordable Warmth offered 50% grants to landlords. In Scotland, schemes enabled landlords to access loans,

including the PRS Landlord Loan Scheme. As new standards are introduced, financing options for landlords will be consulted upon individually.

Housing Associations and NIHE carry out maintenance or improvements through their asset management programmes, funded by rental income. We are exploring Financial Transactions Capital funding being made available to Housing Associations to enable investment.

Question 16: Do you agree with a sliding scale approach to funding for home energy schemes?

Question 17: Do you agree that loans are the fairest financing option for landlords who are required to improve their assets? If not, what would you suggest as alternative funding options?

Consumers: The wholesale cost of energy makes up the largest and most volatile aspect of energy bills. Levies are also applied to bills to generate investment to save energy and reduce emissions, which also contribute to reducing costs in the longer-term. In

Northern Ireland, levies applied to electricity bills support the NI Renewables Obligation and the NISEP energy efficiency scheme for lower-income households. In GB, levies on electricity bills support new renewable generation as well as the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) domestic energy efficiency grants scheme and the Warm Home Discount (WHD). ECO and WHD levies are also applied to gas bills.

In Northern Ireland levies usually comprise around 10% of electricity bills²⁸. In GB levies comprise approximately 16% of electricity bills and 6% of gas bills (April-June 2024).²⁹

Additional funding for energy efficiency schemes for low-income and vulnerable households could be enabled by increasing the current levy on electricity bills. NISEP costs a subsidised £3.12³⁰ per domestic customer and the estimated average Lifetime Gross Customer Benefit is between £2,310 and £5,500: a significant benefit for households who access the scheme³¹. Importantly, business and industrial users contribute to NISEP but the vast majority of funding is ringfenced for households.

²⁸ Power NI Tariff Briefing Paper - April 2024.pdf (uregni.gov.uk)

²⁹ Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit | Are 'green levies' going up in... (eciu.net)

³⁰ Annual Retail Energy Market Monitoring Report 2022 | Utility Regulator (uregni.gov.uk)

³¹ Annual Report

Introducing levies on gas bills may also be a route to increasing investment for energy efficiency schemes. This could also help ameliorate potential disincentives to moving to low carbon, electrified heating in the future: only applying levies to electricity helps make it more expensive relative to gas.

For oil and other heating fuels there would be a number of challenges in considering energy efficiency levies, for example, the fact that these are unregulated, the high number of smaller suppliers, and potential taxation implications.

We would also want to understand the impact of increased energy efficiency levies on different consumers so that we may consider appropriate mitigation if required. This is addressed under Outcome 3.

Question 18: Do you agree that we should consider increasing levies from electricity bills to fund energy efficiency schemes for low-income households? Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 19: Should we explore introducing levies on gas to increase funding for such energy efficiency measures? Please provide reasons for your answer.

Question 20: What are your thoughts on exploring any revenue-raising opportunities for energy efficiency schemes from unregulated heating sources such as home heating oil?

8. Collaborate and Build Capacity

OUTCOME 2: Increased access to trusted energy efficiency advice, measures and support for low-income, vulnerable households through partnership working

While improving the energy efficiency of homes is an important element of alleviating fuel poverty, maximising incomes also plays an important role. The Department for Communities has a key role in this through the payment of social security benefits and helping people into employment, as does the Department for Economy through their economic policy, employment and skills programmes and support for further and higher education.

To alleviate fuel poverty, we want to ensure that people are accessing all the support they are entitled to, taking a holistic approach and collaborating with partners to ensure energy efficiency advice is included in the help provided to meet the needs of the person. The importance of collaboration and coordination of services to minimise duplication, maximise resources and improve outcomes for people was a key theme during our stakeholder engagement. We heard of the difficult circumstances people are in, and the stress and anxiety many face just trying to pay for the essentials in life. This experience meant that

people relied on trusted partners, friends and family to seek help, support and advice.

“People only really seek help when they are at rock bottom and are desperate. To really help you need to get people before they hit rock bottom especially to help with mental health. There is a stigma attached to seeking help and it puts people off.”

This section focuses on collaborating and building partnerships to identify and provide advice and long-term sustainable support to those most in need. A key part of this will be to build the capacity and confidence of people to seek solutions. However, in many cases, that means dealing with the immediate challenge of keeping their home warm before they can focus on the future.

To deliver on this outcome, we will:

- Utilise and build on experience and knowledge of others to increase energy wellbeing

- Ensure consistent, accessible financial support for vulnerable people in emergencies

“When people are already tired and down the last thing they have the energy for is to fight for what they are entitled to.”

Objective 3: Utilise and build on experience and knowledge of others to increase energy wellbeing

During our engagement all stakeholders praised the invaluable help and support provided by advice organisations, community groups, charities and church / faith groups. These organisations are trusted by their communities and have local knowledge that we could never replicate. We also heard of the importance of professionals who are in people’s homes on a regular basis, such as health workers and midwives, in identifying people most in need and providing vital advice and information.

We want to utilise these networks and build on established relationships to ensure those in fuel poverty can access long-term sustainable support to enable them to obtain and afford adequate energy to support their wellbeing in their home (energy wellbeing). To ensure people who

need our help seek it, it is important that we raise the importance and benefits of energy wellbeing and remove the stigma of seeking help and support. We also need to highlight and educate about the visible signs when someone may be struggling.

We know that people are more likely to seek support from people they trust. For some populations this trust may be lacking more than others, for example those from certain migrant communities and travellers. Trusted sources may be family, friends or organisations that have provided support in the past and built a relationship with the person needing help. There is an important role for trusted partners in the health sector, the independent advice network and across the voluntary and community sectors to raise awareness of energy wellbeing, remove any stigma to seeking help and direct people to the appropriate support.

During our engagement, the support provided by the Independent Advice and Debt Services Sector was widely praised and used as an example of how to build referral partnerships and support vulnerable people. This Sector is part of the wider Voluntary and Community Sector and comprises local community-based advice services in each council area, supported by regional advice organisations Advice NI and Law Centre NI. DfC currently

invests approximately £6.6 million annually into the provision of Independent Advice and Debt Services.

Local councils are co-funders and commissioners of community-based advice provision and this is central to the ambitions of Community Plans which have a focus on individual and community well-being.

The Family Support Hub model was also praised. This is a multi-agency network of statutory, community and voluntary organisations that provide early intervention services, or work with families who need support.

Referral partnerships within DfC include DfC's Make the Call benefits advice line following up on Personal Independence Payments (PIP) applications following notification of a terminal illness diagnosis. This leads to an offer of advice and guidance on the wide range of support the applicant may be entitled to, from benefits and transport to energy advice, providing referrals or application assistance as needed.

Subject to Executive approval, during 2025 DfC will consult on the People and Place Strategic Framework Review to improve how we address the objective

need of using a place-based approach to tackling deprivation. This will build on existing structures to develop practical community-based led delivery models to rebalance the relationship between government and communities, giving communities an increased ownership of decision making and improved outcomes.

Proposed action: Utilise and enhance referral partnerships across government and our partners to raise awareness of energy wellbeing, identify people in fuel poverty and provide support

To raise awareness, identify people who need support and provide this support, we will utilise and build upon collaborative partnerships and referral pathways between Government, local Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector. We do not want to duplicate support but rather build a partnership approach to better blend support services to the community and people in need including energy advice and the installation of energy efficiency measures, where appropriate. We will take best practice used by these organisations and provide specialist support when needed, using warm handovers to ensure vulnerable people access the support they need. This will include raising awareness with voluntary and community and health professionals on the signs and impact of fuel poverty, energy advice and referral pathways.

Building on and utilising existing partnerships and referral networks should improve outcomes for people struggling with fuel poverty as they will have access to more holistic support from the right people, delivering the right service at the right time. The Utility Regulator Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances requires companies to ensure processes are in place to enable a warm handover of consumers in vulnerable circumstances who need additional support.³² Energy companies could use these referral partnerships to support their customers who are experiencing hardship, either by building a relationship with partners or by referring their customer to additional advice and support.

“I was financially stable, was working and had money coming into the house. I was able to get a mortgage and buy the house and then everything changed when my partner died.”

Referral pathways and holistic support are crucial at crisis or transition points in peoples' lives, such as following a bereavement or serious health diagnosis. We will seek to enhance the support

provided by Make the Call at these critical transition points to include energy advice and support, working with a wide range of partners including health, Voluntary and Community partners, statutory organisations and energy companies.

Question 21: Do you agree that we should utilise and build referral pathways between Government, local Government, health professionals and the Voluntary and Community Sector? If yes, how can we best achieve this?

Proposed action: Introduce a One Stop Shop

Throughout our stakeholder engagement we heard the call for a local, tailored support service so people can access the energy, financial, technical and behavioural advice they need to become more energy efficient and reduce their energy costs. The Energy Strategy made a commitment to establish a One Stop Shop to act as a focal point for consumers as we transition to Net Zero, deliver trusted advice and support to consumers, raise awareness and provide coordination across Government, the public sector and Voluntary and Community Sector. This was expanded on in the 2022 consultation on the One Stop Shop Implementation Plan.

³² Appendix 2 (NIW) - Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances.pdf (uregni.gov.uk)

The establishment of a One Stop Shop was widely endorsed by all stakeholders. It underpins many key energy priorities for government. A One Stop Shop offers the opportunity to empower consumers through the provision of free impartial advice, building trust in new technologies, ensuring alignment and delivery of support, services and grants, and supporting behavioural change.

We support the provision of all energy efficiency advice and measures through the One Stop Shop model. One single point of contact for all energy efficiency support will allow us to assess the needs of the consumer and offer the appropriate support. This may mean financial support, either grants or loans, or by offering support with the actual application process, right through to aftercare support, based on the individual circumstances and needs of the consumer.

Many stakeholders conveyed their frustration of frequently changing information, contacts, support and eligibility criteria. The One Stop Shop will offer a single point of contact for specialist advice and grants, and additional support depending on the needs of the consumer. Having a single point of contact will reduce confusion and increase transparency of schemes, while still leaving space for the schemes to be flexible if required.

The Department for the Economy has committed to establish a One Stop Shop. Collaboration across Government and our partners will be necessary to ensure those likely to experience fuel poverty are supported to access specialist energy advice and grants.

Proposed action: Explore role of community energy in addressing fuel poverty

Communities can work together to discover and implement solutions to their energy needs, an approach taken in the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere. This was also recognised in the Energy Strategy which contains a specific commitment to adopt policies that facilitate active consumers and energy communities.

Stakeholders noted local examples of community energy, such as the Northern Ireland Community Energy (NICE) solar energy scheme, which fed profits into a community fuel poverty fund, the GAA green energy fund, the Drumlin Wind Farm Cooperative and recently launched Sustainable Energy Communities project. More broadly we heard calls for the development of community masterplans or community workshops on energy efficiency with more consistent support from Councils.

Community buy-in to energy infrastructure was raised as a significant issue in rural areas where most renewable energy generation is located. Rural communities particularly felt that community energy and renewable technologies were crucial in fostering energy wellbeing.

The Welsh Government Energy Service provides financial and technical support to help public sector and community groups develop their own renewable energy projects. When a community comes forward with an idea, support can be provided with feasibility studies, technical support, non-repayable grants and access to further Welsh Government loan funding. Scotland also has structures in place to support community energy projects such as private sector-funded grant schemes and the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) which supports communities to engage with, participate in, and benefit from the transition to net zero emissions.

Through GB Energy, the Labour Government has committed to scale up municipal and community energy by partnering with energy companies, local authorities and cooperatives to develop small- and medium-scale community energy projects. Profits will flow directly back into local communities to reduce bills with more local generation and ownership

During our stakeholder engagement we heard that those who may be struggling to pay their energy bills may find it harder to engage in seeking or developing community energy solutions. Additional bespoke support will be required to support people and communities to develop community energy projects in response to fuel poverty.

To ensure that vulnerable people and communities can participate in this potential solution to fuel poverty and provide energy stability and resilience for their communities, government will establish a taskforce comprising industry, councils, community energy schemes, experts and community representatives to develop enabling frameworks for community energy

Question 22: Do you agree with a taskforce/working groups to develop enabling frameworks for energy communities?

Proposed action: Implement key aspects of the NICE 6 Guidelines on the health risks associated with living in a cold home

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) produces guidelines containing evidence-based recommendations for the health and social care sector. NG6 focuses on reducing the health risks (including preventable deaths)

associated with living in a cold home.³³ The recommendations relate to:

- developing a strategy for people living in cold homes
- identifying people at risk from cold homes
- training practitioners to help people with cold homes
- raising awareness of how to keep warm at home
- ensuring buildings meet required standards

Implementing these guidelines in Northern Ireland would increase awareness within the health, social care and voluntary sectors of how health problems caused or exacerbated by cold homes can be addressed through appropriate referrals, training, and identifying heating needs as well as ensuring people are discharged to a warm home. There are also recommendations for housing and energy suppliers on how to deal with certain vulnerable groups whose homes may be too cold for their health and wellbeing. Their implementation would also help to address health inequities in a society where those who live in deprived areas have lower life expectancy, greater health struggles and worse outcomes.

Question 23: Do you agree that government should assess the most relevant recommendations of the NICE6 guidelines and consider their implementation?

Objective 4: Ensure consistent, accessible financial support for vulnerable people in emergencies

During our stakeholder engagement, we heard of the difficulties people struggling with fuel poverty have in looking towards the future and seeking long-term help. We also heard of the challenges that vulnerable people, such as elderly people or those with health conditions, have in accessing appropriate help and support. While we are committed to collaboration and building partnerships to ensure long term help, we recognise that people will still experience crises when access to emergency financial support is required. However, in line with the overarching principles of this strategy, the provision of emergency support must always be accompanied by energy advice and / or a referral to a long-term sustainable solution to support long-term energy wellbeing.

“To get the bare necessity of heat, I have to go to a foodbank.”

³³ Overview | Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes | Guidance | NICE

Proposed action: Work with other organisations to ensure consistent emergency support and referrals to energy efficiency measures and advice

People may experience occasions in their lives, when, potentially due to an unforeseen bill or an unexpected life event, they will require emergency financial support to keep the lights on or heat their homes. There are many organisations such as food banks, councils' hardship funds and charities such as Bryson House, the Salvation Army or St Vincent De Paul that provide crisis fuel support. However, awareness of support available, knowledge about how to access it, scheme eligibility and availability vary widely across council districts. Many vulnerable people do not know where or how to access support and through our engagement, it seemed that for some, securing emergency support was by chance, maybe hearing from a friend or family member or through contacting a charity.

In response, we will work with organisations, such as local Government, to increase awareness and accessibility of emergency financial support for vulnerable fuel poor people across Northern Ireland. This support should be geographically consistent and must include a referral to energy advice and / or a long-term sustainable solution, most likely an energy efficiency / fuel poverty scheme.

“There is nothing out there. If I had no gas or oil, I don't know where to go.”

Question 24: Do you agree that we should work with organisations that provide emergency support, to seek a consistent approach across Northern Ireland and the inclusion of a referral to a long-term solution? If so, what would be the best way to achieve this?

Proposed action: In a future energy crisis, target financial assistance at those most in need.

The Discretionary Support scheme is unique to Northern Ireland and was introduced in November 2016 to provide a fast and responsive means of providing short-term financial support. Eligibility criteria includes an income threshold, residency in Northern Ireland and being in an extreme or exceptional situation or a crisis. Applicants

who receive financial assistance from Discretionary Support are referred to Make the Call who complete a benefit needs assessment to identify potential entitlement to benefits and services. Discretionary Support is a well-recognised provider of emergency financial support, and it is available across Northern Ireland.

During the COVID pandemic, Discretionary Support was able to respond quickly, amending legislation to deliver financial support to people who were required to self-isolate. During the subsequent cost of living crisis, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) also made large-scale payments (on behalf of DfC) using the benefit system as a quick and easy way to identify those who needed support. During the winter of 2022/23, large scale energy payments were made to all energy customers. While this support was much welcomed, it was not targeted at those most in need.

If there was a future energy or cost-of-living crisis, due to the relative flexibility of Discretionary Support to provide emergency assistance, we propose, until we can secure improved data of who is most in need, that financial support through Discretionary Support should be prioritised rather than developing local large-scale payments based on benefit entitlement. This should ensure that assistance is based on need,

which is a more targeted approach and a much better use of resources. Optimising referral pathways highlighted previously should ensure people who need support are referred to Discretionary Support and could offer support to vulnerable people who may find the application process a barrier.

If Discretionary Support is to undertake this role in the future, it must be appropriately resourced, both financially and physically, potentially having the ability to stand up teams to manage claims in critical times of need.

In addition, we will explore options to share data between relevant organisations, such as the Department for Communities, the Utility Regulator and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure, if a future energy price emergency was to occur and large-scale payments were to be made, financial assistance could be targeted at those most at need.

Question 25: Do you agree with the proposal to prioritise Discretionary Support to provide emergency financial support if there is a future energy or cost of living crisis, until we have better data to target large scale payments? If not, can you provide a reason?

Proposed action: Gain a better understanding of the impact of changes to the Winter Fuel Payment and introduce additional support where appropriate

The Winter Fuel Payment was introduced in 1997 as a non-means-tested annual payment ranging from £100 - £300 paid to everyone who reached the qualifying age for State Pension, which is currently 66, and due to rise to 67 in 2026. On 29 July 2024, the Chancellor announced that from Winter 2024/25 onwards, only those receiving Pension Credit or other means-tested benefits would receive the annual Winter Fuel Payment in England and Wales, targeting these payments at those who are most in need. The NI Executive had to maintain parity with GB and implemented the revised eligibility criteria for Winter Fuel Payments locally.

An estimated 28% of households entitled to Pension Credit are not receiving it, with approximately £1.1 million in unclaimed Pension credit expenditure. To maximise claims from those who are eligible, DfC has begun a campaign to promote its uptake.

To minimise the impact of this change on pensioners here, we will analyse the impact of the removal of Winter Fuel Payments on pensioners who are above the threshold for Pension Credit to gain a better understanding of who may be at risk of fuel poverty as a result of this change. Following this analysis, we will provide support, if necessary, to help those who have moved into fuel poverty. This may include working with referral partners and / or energy companies to provide energy advice and long-term support through fuel poverty interventions. If necessary, and subject to the allocation of the necessary budget by the NI Executive, emergency financial support to pensioners who have moved into fuel poverty or are at risk of falling into fuel poverty will also be considered.

Question 26: Do you agree with the proposal to gain a better understanding of the impact of changes to Winter Fuel Payments and introduce additional support where appropriate? If not, why and do you have alternative suggestions?

9. Protect Consumers

OUTCOME 3: Informed, protected consumers have access to essential, sustainable and affordable energy

The cost of energy is a concern for many households. Improving energy efficiency and generating and using more local renewable energy are crucial to reducing our reliance on expensive imported fossil fuels. However, we need to improve our understanding of how new energy policies impact bills and any potential impacts on fuel poverty, as initial investment in energy efficiency and low-carbon heating sources is required to ensure longer-term savings. It may be necessary to implement energy cost mitigation measures if decarbonisation policies have imbalanced or unfairly distributed impacts on energy bills for different groups of people.

Other forms of energy consumer protection are also important, such as measures relating to debt, standards of service, Codes of Practice and energy literacy.³⁴ Currently price protections only apply to some regulated energy suppliers for electricity and gas; we want to assess whether there are specific vulnerabilities that affect those using oil or pre-payment meters.

We also need to consider protection of consumer's homes when new insulation measures or changes to heating systems are required. People should be able to easily access reliable advice, have confidence in the quality and standard of work carried out, and trust that, if things go wrong, they will be put right with help and support. Protecting consumers in these ways will help to ensure that we achieve a Just Transition.

To deliver on this outcome, we will:

- Implement a new support framework for energy affordability
- Ensure robust protection and redress for heating and energy efficiency

Objective 5: Implement a new support framework for energy affordability

Affordability is a key aspect of consumer protection. Carbon reduction investment brings long-term benefits but there will be necessary short-term costs.³⁵ This strategy's priority is to help manage energy costs through improved energy efficiency in homes. However, a Just Transition means that all policies that will impact energy costs

³⁴ Consumer Protection Programme 2024 – 2029 (CPP24) – Final decision paper | Utility Regulator ([ureg.gov.uk](https://www.ureg.gov.uk))

³⁵ [The-Sixth-Carbon-Budget-The-UKs-path-to-Net-Zero.pdf](https://www.theccc.org.uk/publications/the-sixth-carbon-budget-the-uks-path-to-net-zero/) (theccc.org.uk)

must be developed and implemented in such a way that they alleviate fuel poverty, particularly for those most impacted by it. Where this is not possible, appropriate mitigation measures should be considered to ensure that households still have access to essential and affordable energy to enable a decent standard of living and health. Therefore, we need to improve our understanding of the impacts of new policies and schemes on different types of consumers.

Network costs represent about 25% of domestic gas bills and domestic electricity bills. Supply costs make up around 8% and environmental policy costs – NISEP and NIRO renewable energy support – around 10% of electricity bills.³⁶ In Northern Ireland fixed costs are more heavily skewed towards industrial and commercial consumers than domestic consumers.

Proposed action: Improve our understanding of energy decarbonisation policies on the affordability of domestic energy bills

While low-carbon investment will generate savings in the long-term, the distribution of costs and savings over time could create

both winners and losers. Achieving a Just Transition in Northern Ireland requires us to ensure that the impacts of decarbonisation policies will be just and fair. This aligns closely with the Path to Net Zero Energy commitment to assessing the impacts of upfront investment and long-term energy bills on identified consumer populations.

Taking this commitment forward may mean that we need to introduce or improve mechanisms for identifying the impacts and trade-offs of new policies or regulatory decisions on different groups of people. Assessing costs and benefits can be a complex issue. For example, funding for the NISEP energy efficiency scheme comes from levies on all domestic and non-domestic electricity bills. The levies, although small, make up a larger proportion of the household income of lower-income groups. However, the scheme improves energy efficiency in lower-income households which leads to significant lifetime savings in their energy bills. There are potential challenges for regulators to make such trade-offs without government guidance; conversely, government may require information on the context and potential impacts of different choices from the regulator before providing such guidance.³⁷

³⁶ Power NI Tariff Briefing Paper - April 2024.pdf (uregni.gov.uk)

³⁷ Strategic Investment and Public Confidence (nic.org.uk)

Ofgem has introduced an impact assessment tool to better understand the impacts of changes in the energy system on consumers. This assesses how the costs or benefits are distributed across consumers with different characteristics such as income levels, disabilities and fuel types.³⁸ The assessments are part of the decision-making process and provide a structured framework for understanding the impacts of certain decisions (see box).³⁹ They can provide an insight into how policy costs can be spread across either unit rates or standing charges.

After calls for the abolition of standing charges in GB Ofgem analysed potential impacts using their distributional impact assessment tool and concluded:

- 5 million lower-income households would benefit
- 1 million lower income households would lose out and these would include some vulnerable customers with high energy needs, including those reliant on medical equipment and those with poorly insulated homes

The overall effect would be progressive (lower-income consumers would benefit more) but lower-income households that would lose out would see an increase in bills by twice as much as bills would fall

elsewhere. Using this analysis, Ofgem was able to develop options to reduce standing charges by moving some charges to the unit rate and increasing the range of such charges that suppliers offer. The analysis highlights an overall benefit from the changes proposed but also that some consumers' bills would increase. Ofgem was then able to work with government on how the impact on households in the domestic retail market could be reduced.

A better understanding of how new policies could impact the energy bills of different population groups could support evidence-based decision-making and help identify whether potential mitigations may be required. The Consumer Council highlights this as an important aspect of future-proofing consumer affordability and it also reflects Utility Regulator's commitment to embed Just Transition principles within their analysis and decision-making.

³⁸ Assessing the distributional impacts of economic regulation ([ofgem.gov.uk](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk))

³⁹ Standing charges: domestic retail options | Ofgem

Question 27: Do you agree that we should improve our understanding of the impacts of energy decisions on the energy bills of different consumer groups? If so, what would be the best way of understanding these impacts?

Proposed action: Raise awareness of existing price protection tools

Consumers can manage their energy bills by understanding and reducing their energy use and looking for the cheapest supplier. For electricity and gas, the best way a consumer can affect their bill is through switching suppliers to get a cheaper tariff. However, switching is challenging for some people: even if they get help to switch, they may not be able to check and change when the initial offer stops and prices rise. People can also engage with suppliers on payment methods that may be more suitable for them.

Oil prices are more volatile than gas or electricity and competition between suppliers is the primary method of keeping costs down.⁴⁰ Oil-buying clubs can help people buy in bulk with average savings of £10-£30 on 200 litres of oil, however stakeholders, particularly in rural communities, reported inconsistency in the availability of such clubs. The Consumer Council also publishes weekly data on oil prices to help people find the cheapest supplier.

Not enough people are aware of, or use, the tools that help access lower-cost energy. It is therefore important to increase awareness and engagement in tariff and supplier switching and oil-buying clubs while recognising that there can be barriers to accessing the cheapest energy source for those who have certain vulnerabilities.

Question 28: Do you have suggestions for how we could improve understanding and awareness of existing tools to enable consumers to manage their energy costs?

Question 29: How can we support vulnerable people to ensure they are on the most affordable tariff?

Proposed action: Investigate targeted affordability support for certain vulnerable households

While investment in energy efficiency is our priority to help people keep their homes warm, this solution is not always appropriate. For example, people living with a terminal illness or significant disability can have higher bills due to medical or life-saving equipment. Energy efficiency measures could support these groups but the timeframe and potential disruption for such works may not be the right solution.

⁴⁰ Home Energy Index | Consumer Council

Stakeholders suggested bill support to help certain low-income households. This would support targeted households through either an ongoing discount on the unit rate, a commitment to certain customers always being on the lowest tariff, a regular rebate on bills, or some combination of these.⁴¹ Such support would usually be subsidised by a levy on all consumer bills.

We believe that any support, if implemented, should be targeted at particularly vulnerable households for whom other forms of support, such as energy efficiency schemes, may not be appropriate. These vulnerable households could be groups such as low-income households with a terminal illness or a long-term disability that necessitates the usage of specialised medical equipment. We will build an evidence base that includes an analysis of the wider financial impacts of such support. We will also explore the barriers and opportunities of extending the GB Warm Homes Discount to Northern Ireland. We are aware that there are likely to be a number of legislative and operational challenges to doing so.

Question 30: Do you agree that we should explore potential affordability support for populations where energy efficiency measures may not be the right solution?

If so, which population groups? Please provide reasons for your answer.

Objective 6: Ensure robust protection and redress for heating and energy efficiency.

The Energy Strategy notes the need to review existing consumer protection frameworks. Such protections may mean different things depending on the service or product being offered, for example the type of energy supplied, or a new technology being installed in a home.

Certain protections are already in place for consumers in Northern Ireland, but we want to look at those areas where greater protection may be needed. For example, in GB Ofgem identified some consumer protection issues in off-grid markets such as heating oil and LPG.⁴² In our focus groups we heard from people, particularly low-income, those in rural areas and those with disabilities, who experience challenges with their oil supply. Furthermore, people who use pre-payment meters can “self-disconnect” by not topping up and data on this is limited. Similar “self-disconnection” occurs for off-grid fuels, whereby consumers are unable to afford the cost of fuel and either ration significantly or simply go cold.

⁴¹ The UK Energy Bill Support Scheme and Energy Price Guarantee, introduced in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, were not social tariffs as they were not targeted to low-income or vulnerable households.

⁴² insights paper on households with electric and other non-gas heating | Ofgem

When choosing or installing energy efficiency and renewable energy options, people need to have confidence in the quality and standards of work carried out. They should be able to easily access advice and they need to trust that if things go wrong, they can be put right, with help and support.⁴³ We propose that the following core components should be in place across all Government energy efficiency schemes:

- Trusted advice is available and provided in an easily understandable form
- Confidence in the suitability of recommended energy efficiency and renewable energy measures made through a consistent and complete assessment of the property
- Quality installations are carried out to robust standards by skilled installers, who are members of a standards body, helping consumers identify reliable, trustworthy businesses
- Reassurance that if things go wrong, there is a simple, fair and consumer-focused redress process to make it right

Proposed action: Assess need for non-price protection of less-protected energy and take appropriate steps

In our focus groups we heard that home heating oil accessibility and supply issues are experienced by some low-income, disabled or rural populations and that those from traveller communities have had similar experiences with other alternative heating sources. As we transition our energy use away from fossil fuels these issues may present a greater challenge for those unable to make the change to other energy sources, such as electricity, where a more robust standard of service exists because of market regulation.

Within the regulated sector, people who use pre-payment meters can also experience physical accessibility issues. Recent research also highlights that while people who use gas or electricity prepayment meters are protected by a Code of Practice, most people do not contact their supplier for support when facing challenges⁴⁴. Those who may be struggling should contact their suppliers to see whether help is available but it may be that communication could be improved to encourage this type of engagement.

⁴³ [Decarbonisation_Energy_Transport_and_Water_Summary.pdf \(consumercouncil.org.uk\)](#)

⁴⁴ [Energy Hardship - Consumer Lived Experiences - full report.pdf \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

There are therefore different challenges and protection levels for different energy users. More research may be required to identify particular issues for different energy users before we determine whether there is a need to strengthen or provide more consistent non-price protection.

Question 31: Is further research required to identify gaps in non-price protection for different energy users in Northern Ireland? If yes, what should we focus on?

Proposed action: Agree minimum quality standards for all energy efficiency schemes

Reducing energy bills or improving warmth and comfort in homes include traditional methods like adding insulation, changing windows and installing energy-efficient boilers. Renewable energy technologies, such as heat pumps and solar power are becoming more cost-competitive and cheaper to run providing that the property is well insulated and ventilated and along with solar battery storage, play an increasing part in helping many householders produce and store energy in their homes.

‘Have trusted partners who are trusted to know what is needed in a home, that they will not rip people off and will have high standards’

Consumer confidence is required to support people to buy, install, or accept support to embrace these products. Therefore, it is critical that people can trust businesses to treat them fairly and are protected from harmful practices. During the stakeholder engagement workshops, participants raised fears that installers in Northern Ireland may not be fully competent in installing these technology products. However, whilst relatively new to Northern Ireland, they have been commonplace in USA and Europe for many decades. Participants also asked as to the need for specified installer certification, qualifications and / or trusted supplier lists. We believe that a key step on the customer journey is to ensure that quality installations are carried out to robust standards by skilled installers, who are members of a standards body helping consumers identify reliable, trustworthy businesses.

Question 32: What are your views on whether government should adopt a common quality assurance standard or framework across all energy efficiency and low carbon heat grant schemes?

Proposed action: Ensure appropriate aftercare and redress mechanism for government energy schemes

Participants also called for a clear system in place for escalating a complaint with an independent arbiter if complaints reached an impasse. Consumer protection law already places obligations on businesses to provide people with the key information they need to make informed decisions, to use fair sales practices and contract terms, to have an effective way of dealing with complaints and to carry out work with reasonable care and skill. Bodies that enforce consumer protection law ensuring businesses act appropriately and treat consumers fairly include national and local Trading Standards and the Competition and Markets Authority.

Standards bodies often require member businesses to provide consumers with financial protection in case the business stops trading and is unable to honour the terms of their workmanship guarantee. This can provide consumers with additional peace of mind and, in addition to the installer’s workmanship guarantee, the product manufacturer will typically provide a guarantee to repair or replace a faulty item for a certain period of years. To help ensure that consumers have the necessary confidence and trust that they are protected, it is vital that there are robust and consistently high standards of quality, customer care and business competency, and that these are effectively monitored and enforced across all supported schemes.

Consumer protection along customer journey



Question 33: Do you agree that government should take a common approach to consumer protection across all supported energy efficiency schemes?

10. Governance and Accountability

Understanding fuel poverty

There are three main factors in determining whether a household is fuel poor: household income; energy efficiency; and fuel prices. However, it is measured differently across the UK and in other parts of the world. Understanding fuel poverty also means recognising its impacts: cold homes can cause and worsen physical and mental health conditions⁴⁵. People in fuel poverty may also be more susceptible to damp, mould and poor air quality, while draughty, inefficient homes require more energy to heat.

Through our engagement there were widespread calls for better and more frequent data on fuel poverty. There was interest in improving our understanding of the impacts of fuel poverty and using data to design better policy and ensure that interventions reach those who need help the most. We propose improving monitoring and increasing accountability by introducing indicators on issues that stakeholders have told us are important to them. This could also help us to identify groups that are

not being supported by existing policies, enable us to be responsive to these needs and improve links between policies and fuel poverty outcomes. We will keep this new approach for understanding and reporting on fuel poverty under review.

Most of the data we currently use to measure fuel poverty comes from the NI House Condition Survey, which is carried out every 5 years. We propose using additional annual statistics for many of the new indicators. In addition, we can improve our use of the data and research published by other organisations to monitor energy affordability in situations where rapid changes may occur, as happened during the fossil fuel price rises in 2021-22.

Stakeholders suggested we improve our understanding of the impact of new home energy schemes. We currently collect data such as energy cost savings, SAP improvements and carbon emission reductions⁴⁶ and, to ensure linkages between our strategic indicators and new interventions, we will work across

⁴⁵ Poor housing conditions harm family wellbeing | ESRI

⁴⁶ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/b83a9174-6361-4bff-aac0-90c570c0e8c8/Affordable-Warmth-Boiler-Replacement-Scheme-Evaluation-2020-2022.pdf>

government to ensure that all new schemes collect pre- and post-intervention data that can contribute to the indicators above.

Reframing the issue

Fuel poverty is not a term that people usually apply to themselves. Recent Utility Regulator research⁴⁷ indicates that even those who are struggling most to stay warm do not describe themselves as 'fuel poor'. Use of the term 'poverty' was felt by stakeholders to be unhelpful and could prevent people from accessing support designed for them. Government should use language that is person-centred and treats people with dignity.

'The phrase fuel poverty puts people off'

Our vision could be better supported by focusing on how people's wellbeing improves when they live in a warm, healthy home. This could be done by reframing fuel poverty towards a positive focus on "energy wellbeing", and this may also reflect the proposed basket of indicators approach, which is set out below. However, changing language can cause confusion and have unintended consequences in designing and delivering policies.

We could consider introducing energy wellbeing or a similar phrase to emphasise the importance of households having access to essential and affordable energy to enable a decent standard of living and health. This positive viewpoint is based on language introduced in the Energy Strategy. Whether or not we introduce a new way of describing fuel poverty, we recognise that the language used when designing and delivering schemes must be clear, dignified and appropriate to those whom we support.

Question 34: Do you have suggestions about how government could change our use of language to improve buy-in and engagement on fuel poverty?

Building a picture of energy wellbeing

Indicators help us to understand the persistence of a problem, identify trends, make comparisons with other countries, identify the people affected by the problem and design and deliver policy. However, no single indicator can fulfil all these roles and such statistics do not necessarily tell us about the outcomes of being fuel poor. This becomes more important if we want to prioritise better health by focusing on those most likely to be adversely impacted by living in a cold, damp home.

⁴⁷ Utility Regulator launches new lived experience research on energy hardship | Utility Regulator (uregni.gov.uk)

We propose introducing a basket of indicators to improve the understanding of fuel poverty and help us measure progress towards our outcomes. This will make better use of data already collected from a range of sources, provide a more person-centric understanding of fuel poverty and its impacts, and give us better information about how to design policy to help people move out of fuel poverty. We will also continue to make better use of relevant data and research carried out elsewhere.

Using a basket of indicators will enable us to monitor progress in a timelier manner. As this is a new approach, indicators may be staggered depending on how frequently different data sources are published.

Fuel Poverty 10% indicator

We currently use the 10% indicator for fuel poverty as set out in 2001:⁴⁸

“a fuel poor household is one which needs to spend more than 10% of its income on all fuel use and to heat its home to an adequate standard of warmth. This is generally defined

as 21° C in the living room and 18° C in the other occupied rooms – the temperatures recommended by the World Health Organisation”

Consistent use of this indicator using robust data collection through the House Condition Survey (HCS)⁴⁹ helps us to identify trends and understand the persistence of fuel poverty over time. It identifies some characteristics of people affected such as age, income and employment status, as well as the types of home that they are likely to live in. As it is based on what a household would need to spend, ‘under consuming’ - turning off the heating - is not counted as not being in fuel poverty. We therefore propose retaining this as one of our indicators as this will support our understanding of the overall persistence of the problem in Northern Ireland.

10% indicator using an after-housing costs calculation

Stakeholders raised concerns that using ‘before housing costs’ income could hide vulnerabilities of those with high rent or mortgage payments, and that this particularly affected working families with

⁴⁸ Fuel poverty strategy 2001.pdf (bristol.ac.uk)

⁴⁹ House Condition Survey Main Report 2016 (nihe.gov.uk)

children and those living in the PRS. Our current methodology uses a ‘before housing costs’ calculation which means older people are much more likely to be classed as being in fuel poverty because they typically own their homes outright and are less likely to rent. We propose introducing an ‘after housing costs’ indicator which will use the same methodology as the current 10% indicator. This may provide an additional perspective on those who may be struggling to pay all their household bills. In future, it may also help us to link changes in housing policy with our energy support mechanisms.

Neither oil nor pre-payment meter users have bills; rather, people delay getting a fill of oil or topping up their meter, or don’t turn on their heating.⁵⁰ Some people also prefer to borrow elsewhere to pay their energy bills rather than go into arrears with energy companies. We therefore propose using the Family Resource Survey (FRS) to understand the choices that people make in their own homes. This will also address some stakeholder concerns that the current definition of fuel poverty does not use disposable income in its methodology.

PROPOSAL	SOURCE
We will begin to capture information on fuel poverty levels using the 10% indicator for both before and after housing costs.	Ni House Condition Survey

INDICATOR	SOURCE
Are you able to pay regular bills, including gas, electricity or oil, without cutting back on essentials?	FRS

Ability to pay utility bills without going without

We believe that we should build a better picture of people’s ability to pay their energy bills and to what extent this impacts their ability to pay for other necessities. Some parts of Europe use arrears on utility bills as an indicator for energy poverty but there are limitations with this approach in NI.

Household Expenditure on Energy

In 2024 Northern Ireland had the highest weekly expenditure on energy of any UK region. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors including energy mix; geographic and weather conditions; energy pricing; and lower household income levels. A major contributor is our dependence on fossil fuels.⁵¹ This indicator includes energy used for transport and was introduced

50 Utility Regulator launches new lived experience research on energy hardship | Utility Regulator (uregni.gov.uk)

51 Energy in Northern Ireland 2022 (economy-ni.gov.uk)

by the Energy Strategy to create a more holistic understanding of our energy needs as they become increasingly connected; for example, as electricity starts to power heating (heat pumps) and transport (electric vehicles). We believe that linking this Energy Strategy indicator with our fuel poverty strategy will help start to capture the impacts of policies on overall household energy spending.

INDICATOR	SOURCE
Household energy expenditure relative to all expenditure	ONS Living Cost and Food Survey ⁵²

Damp and mould

Cold homes exacerbate health inequalities⁵³ and can cause and worsen respiratory conditions, cardiovascular diseases, poor mental health, dementia and problems with childhood development. In Northern Ireland, respiratory illness is a leading cause of excess winter deaths.⁵⁴ People are aware of the negative impacts of mould

but are unable to keep their homes warm and healthy. When homes are made more energy efficient, they are less cold and damp and become cheaper to heat, which leads to ongoing savings to the Health and Social Care System⁵⁵. We propose using damp and mould as a secondary indicator for energy wellbeing, an approach taken in New Zealand⁵⁶. While the HCS captures this information through the Housing Health and Safety Rating System⁵⁷ we propose using data from the annual FRS, which for the first time in 2024 requests data from all households on the presence of damp.

INDICATOR	SOURCE
Is your home damp-free?	FRS

Being able to keep homes adequately warm

Our 10% indicator defines a specific adequate standard of warmth, but stakeholders noted that people's backgrounds and health can affect their

52 Household energy expenditure relative to all expenditure

53 Fuel Poverty and Human Health : A Review of Recent Evidence — Ulster University; The cost of poor housing in Northern Ireland 2016 (nihe.gov.uk)

54 Winter Mortality in Northern Ireland, 2022-23 (nisra.gov.uk)

55 The cost of poor housing in Northern Ireland 2016 (nihe.gov.uk)

56 Report on energy hardship measures | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (mbie.govt.nz)

57 House Condition Survey Summary Report 2016 (nihe.gov.uk)

needs (e.g. people with disabilities requiring medical equipment, families with young children, older people, or people from other climates feeling the need to keep their home warmer). Some people supported the Scottish approach⁵⁸ of specified temperatures for targeted vulnerable groups. However, others felt that needs are best determined by the household themselves. We propose a new indicator based on people's own assessment of their energy needs and their inability to meet those needs. The FRS asks a question about people's ability to heat their homes; using this annual indicator would provide a subjective understanding of people's own needs.

PROPOSAL	SOURCE
In cold weather, is your home kept adequately warm?	FRS

Winter mortality

There is a clear relationship between Winter Mortality and low indoor temperatures.⁵⁹ In Northern Ireland, winter mortality in the last decade ranged from 560 - 1,620 and together circulatory disease and respiratory disease accounted for just over half of additional winter mortality in 2022/23.⁶⁰ Chronic respiratory disease is one of the six groups of conditions that are the greatest contributors to ill-health and early mortality.⁶¹ Living conditions are a risk factor in all groups and cold homes are the greatest risk factor for those suffering from chronic respiratory conditions, though other factors such as air pollution also impact these. Deaths from cardiovascular diseases are directly linked to excessively low indoor temperatures for long periods of time.⁶² However, there have been UK discussions around an overhaul of the definition and methodology for the Winter Mortality indicator to improve it and address some of the issues around reliability. We propose using winter mortality as an indicator but given the potential changes, we will include regular reassessments as to whether it is the most suitable indicator to use.

⁵⁸ The Fuel Poverty (Enhanced Heating) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (legislation.gov.uk)

⁵⁹ <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/the-health-impacts-of-cold-homes-and-fuel-poverty/the-health-impacts-of-cold-homes-and-fuel-poverty.pdf>

⁶⁰ Winter Mortality in Northern Ireland, 2022-23 (nisra.gov.uk)

⁶¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework-2#fn>

⁶² <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/research/effect-cold-weather-heart#Heading2>

PROPOSAL	SOURCE
Compare the number of deaths that occur in December - March with the average number of non-winter deaths occurring in the preceding August- November and the following April - July	FRS

Severe and extreme fuel poverty

Stakeholders told us that we need a renewed focus on identifying those who are in deepest fuel poverty. Since 2011 we have used a severity index, whereby households which need to spend more than 15% of income on fuel use are in "severe fuel poverty"; and households which spend more than 20% of income are in "extreme fuel poverty"⁶³. In 2016, 2% of homes were in extreme fuel poverty, and 4% in severe fuel poverty. We propose modelling severe and extreme fuel poverty annually, which could enable a tiered approach of support for such households. However, breaking these figures down by tenure, age or income presents statistical challenges as the numbers are low. This may require further refinement in future.

PROPOSAL	SOURCE
Annual modelling of figures for both extreme and severe fuel poverty	HCS

The drivers of fuel poverty

Our 10% indicator is calculated using income, energy price and energy use and this can make it difficult to isolate the reason for changes in overall fuel poverty levels. The last House Condition Survey identified that the sharp drop in fuel poverty levels between 2011-2016 was due to:

- Gas price reductions of 26%-28%, electricity price decreases of between 4%-16% and reduction of heating oil prices by 0.01p/kWh
- A 16% increase in household income
- Government investment in domestic energy efficiency schemes leading to improvements to mean SAP figures from 59.63 to 65.84

Improved fuel poverty levels were therefore both a direct result of government policy - domestic energy efficiency schemes - as well as factors where government has little impact - fossil fuel prices - to which our

⁶³ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/warmer-healthier-homes.pdf>

definition is very sensitive.⁶⁴ Understanding changes in the underlying drivers will help assess where our policies are having an impact and this is recognised by NIHE who now model the impact of each driver on fuel poverty levels.⁶⁵ We intend to continue to provide this breakdown going forward.

PROPOSAL	SOURCE
In our annual modelling we will continue to assess the impact of each driver on overall fuel poverty levels.	HCS and annual BRE modelling

Low-income households in energy inefficient homes - NEW

We believe that, as the area of fuel poverty over which we have most influence, we should introduce an indicator focused on energy efficiency. This would enable us to track progress and provide a clear link between our strategy and new policies and schemes across government. The main tool used to measure energy efficiency is the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC).⁶⁶ There are challenges in using EPCs, for example, they do not consider dwelling size and some low-carbon interventions could potentially cause a drop in EPC ratings. The

House Condition Survey collects SAP ratings and this is the base for energy efficiency rating band data for all types of dwellings in NI. This can be cross-tabulated with fuel poor households and can be used as a new indicator. However, in future we want to improve the availability and frequency of energy efficiency data for homes and will explore how to do this.

PROPOSAL	SOURCE
NEW - Link SAP data with income deprivation	HCS

Energy confidence and awareness - NEW

‘How do you know where to go for help with energy? I didn’t have a clue where to go.’

A frequent theme from stakeholders was a lack of energy confidence, agency and awareness. There was a reasonable understanding of where to access emergency financial help, but for grants or

⁶⁴ Hills, John (2012) the measure of fuel poverty: Final Report of the Fuel Poverty Review.

⁶⁵ Estimates of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland in 2020 and 2021 (nihe.gov.uk)

⁶⁶ Energy rating of housing in Northern Ireland - up to March 2023 (nisra.gov.uk)

trusted advice on energy efficiency, there is low awareness of where to go, who to ask and what support is available. If people lack confidence in how to engage in long-term solutions, they will be more likely to focus on short-term options such as vouchers or incurring debt. We believe that agency and awareness must be core to our approach and that policies need to be designed and delivered to enable people to engage in the solutions to fuel poverty. This reflects the Energy Strategy commitment to ‘Place you at the centre of our energy future’. We propose introducing a new indicator to help provide a better understanding of how confident and aware people are of information and support for energy solutions in their home. The NIHCS social survey asks about ‘seeking energy advice in the last 12 months’, however this data is only collected every five years.

INDICATOR	SOURCE
NEW – People’s awareness and confidence in being able to address their own energy issues	TBC

Question 35: Do you agree that government should take a basket of indicators approach to measuring and understanding fuel poverty?

Question 36: Are the indicators suggested the correct ones? Please provide reasons for your answer

Question 37: If you agree with the introduction of an indicator based on energy confidence, agency or awareness, do you have suggestions about what kind of indicator might be most valuable?

Carbon emissions

Achieving the targets in our Climate Change Act requires action to significantly reduce carbon emissions. Residential sector emissions form part of our overall reporting on carbon reduction. This means that new home energy schemes and new housing standards will be required to assess and report on their contribution to carbon emission reductions. We therefore do not propose using carbon emissions as an indicator for fuel poverty. However, we will ensure that carbon savings from all home energy schemes is reported in a consistent manner across government in future.

Question 38: Do you agree with our proposal that carbon emissions are not used as a fuel poverty indicator? Please provide reasons for your answer

Transparency and Accountability

The societal and health impacts of cold homes require a renewed focus. We recognise that alleviating fuel poverty and improving people's energy wellbeing will be an iterative process. The data we propose to capture and analyse will help us monitor our progress towards achieving our outcomes and allow us to target our policies and interventions more effectively. As part of our commitment to alleviating fuel poverty, we must increase visibility of the issue, thereby improving accountability and demonstrating government's best endeavours. This work will be guided by a cross-Departmental working group.

Lived Experience

In developing this consultation document, engagement with people living in fuel poverty was invaluable in helping develop proposed policies and actions, providing evidence and urgency to act. It is our desire to keep the lived experience of fuel poverty at the centre of this strategy and we are committed to ongoing engagement with people experiencing fuel poverty while building their confidence and capacity to engage / participate.

Question 39: What is the best way to continue to engage with people experiencing fuel poverty?

Annual Reporting

We believe that data on fuel poverty needs to be more frequent, more timely and more accessible. To achieve this, we propose to produce an annual report outlining our progress in achieving the actions contained within this strategy, modelling of the data from the proposed indicators and data from new home energy schemes, sharing the lived experience and future actions that will continue to address fuel poverty and contribute to the achievement of our outcomes.

Given the cross-cutting nature of fuel poverty and importance of collaboration this report should be laid before the Assembly by the Minister for Communities and will form the basis of an annual Ministerial statement on fuel poverty.

Fuel Poverty Advisory Group

As recognised in the introduction, alleviating fuel poverty requires a whole-of-government approach. It also requires a multi-agency approach. This complex issue cannot be resolved by just one organisation and the support we received from across Government, the Voluntary and Community Sector and the public in developing this strategy is proof of that. It also demonstrates the commitment of our partners to strive for change and we want to maintain and build on the partnerships and commitment we have gained.

To ensure all the key stakeholders are fully engaged and aligned towards achieving the vision, guided by our principles, ongoing communication and engagement built on trusting, working relationships will be key. Time and effort will be required to build and develop these relationships to ensure a truly collaborative approach is taken to alleviating and tackling the root causes of fuel poverty.

To assist with this, we propose the establishment of a Fuel Poverty Advisory group with partners from statutory agencies and the Voluntary and Community Sector. This group will play an advisory role to guide, advise and challenge actions and progress over the lifetime of the Fuel Poverty Strategy. While membership of the group will be appointed by the Minister, with secretariat provided by the Department

for Communities, the Advisory Group will be independent and offer a critical friend function in the implementation of the strategy. This will include reviewing the annual report and providing an assessment of our progress, helping develop future policies and actions as required.

Question 40 – Do you agree with the proposal for a Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, if not, can you suggest an alternative proposal?

Question 41 – If you have any further comments or suggestions not already captured, please provide these.

11. Next Steps

How to respond

This consultation will be hosted online at the following website: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/fuel-poverty-consultation> The Citizen Space website has been specially designed to be as user-friendly and welcoming as possible for those who wish to complete the consultation. It also allows DfC to rapidly collate results. For this reason, we would encourage anyone who is interested in responding to this consultation to utilise Citizen Space as the method of their response.

If this is not possible, you can however respond to this consultation via email to FuelPovertyStrategy@communities-ni.gov.uk or you can respond in writing to the following address:

Fuel Poverty Strategy
Department for Communities
4th Floor, Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation). Please also quote the following reference in your response: "Fuel Poverty Strategy Consultation".

Responses must be received by 23.59 on Thursday 6 March 2025.

Annex A - Summary of Questions in Consultation

1. Do you agree with the proposed vision and guiding principles? If not, please suggest alternatives and why.
2. Do you agree with the timeframe and review period? If not, why not?

Make homes more energy efficient:

3. What would a readily understandable and measurable definition of "thermal comfort" look like?
4. For MEES in PRS to effectively alleviate fuel poverty, what information or data do you think would be useful and what barriers would we need to overcome?
5. Should MEES also be applied to other tenures? Please give reasons for your answer.
6. Do you agree that introducing updated fitness standards will contribute to making homes more energy efficient? Please provide reasons for your answer.
7. Do you agree that all government domestic energy schemes should take account of the Fuel Poverty Strategy principles?
8. Do you agree that DfC should take a more flexible approach that considers current data when setting and reviewing income thresholds and eligibility criteria? Please give reasons for your answer.
9. Do you agree that an income threshold should increase in line with minimum wage levels/inflation or another index such as RPI to mitigate increases in the cost of living? Please give reasons for your answer.
10. Should the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of a house be considered as part of eligibility criteria (i.e. the least energy efficient homes are considered first)? Please give reasons for your answer.
11. Do you agree that the new scheme should continue with the Whole House retrofit approach? Please give reasons for your answer.

12. If the Whole House approach is used, do you agree that all recommended measures must be installed unless there are exceptional reasons not to? Please give reasons for your answer.
13. Do you agree that the new scheme should prioritise low carbon heating solutions where possible?
14. Do you agree that the new scheme should offer renewable technologies such as solar panels and battery storage to offset the running costs of low carbon heating solutions in low-income households? Please provide reasons for your answer.
15. Do you agree that rural properties should be prioritised for energy efficiency support? Please give reasons for your answer.
16. Do you agree with a sliding scale approach to funding for home energy schemes? Please provide reasons for your answer.
17. Do you agree that loans are the fairest financing option for landlords who are required to improve their assets? If not, what would you suggest as alternative funding options?
18. Do you agree that we should consider increasing levies from electricity bills to fund energy efficiency schemes for low-income households? Please give reasons for your answer.
19. Should we explore introducing levies on gas to increase funding for such energy efficiency measures? Please provide reasons for your answer.
20. What are your thoughts on exploring any revenue-raising opportunities for energy efficiency schemes from unregulated heating sources such as home heating oil?

Collaborate and build capacity

21. Do you agree that we should and build referral pathways between Government, local Government, health professionals and the Voluntary and Community Sector? If yes, how can we best achieve this?
22. Do you agree with a taskforce/working group to develop enabling frameworks for Energy Communities?
23. Do you agree that government should assess the most relevant recommendations of the NICE6 guidelines and consider their implementation? Please provide reasons for your answer.

24. Do you agree that we should work with organisations that provide emergency support, to seek a consistent approach across Northern Ireland and the inclusion of a referral to a long-term solution? If so, what would be the best way to achieve this?
25. Do you agree with the proposal to prioritise Discretionary Support to provide emergency financial support if there is a future energy or cost of living crisis, until we have better data to target large scale payments? If not, can you provide a reason?
26. Do you agree with the proposal to gain a better understanding of the impact of changes to Winter Fuel Payments and introduce additional support where appropriate? If not, why and do you have alternative suggestions?

Protect consumers

27. Do you agree that we should improve our understanding of the impacts of energy decisions on different consumer groups? If so, what would be the best way of understanding these impacts?
28. Do you have suggestions for how we could improve understanding and awareness of existing tools to enable consumers to manage their energy costs?
29. How can we support vulnerable people to ensure they are on the most affordable tariff?
30. Do you agree that we should explore potential affordability support for populations where energy efficiency measures may not be the right solution? If so, which population groups? Please provide reasons for your answer.
31. Is further research required to identify gaps in non-price protection for different energy users in Northern Ireland? If yes, what should we focus on?
32. What are your views on whether government should adopt a common quality assurance standard or framework across all energy efficiency and low carbon heat grant schemes?
33. Do you agree that government should take a common approach to consumer protection across all supported energy efficiency schemes? Please provide reasons for your answer.

Governance and Accountability

34. Do you have suggestions about how government could change our use of language to improve buy-in and engagement on fuel poverty?
35. Do you agree that government should take a basket of indicators approach to measuring and understanding fuel poverty?
36. Are the indicators suggested the correct ones? Please provide reasons for your answer.
37. If you agree with the introduction of an indicator based on energy confidence, agency or awareness, do you have suggestions about what kind of indicator might be most valuable?
38. Do you agree with our proposal that carbon emissions are not used as a fuel poverty indicator? Please provide reasons for your answer.
39. What is the best way to continue to engage with people experiencing fuel poverty?
40. Do you agree with the proposal for a Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, if not, can you suggest an alternative proposal?
41. If you have any further comments or suggestions not already captured, please provide these in the box below.

Annex B - Consumer Protection/ Redress

Low carbon home heating and insulation products are increasingly important in the context of the rising cost-of-living and meeting statutory climate change obligations. These products will help people heat their homes in environmentally sustainable and more energy efficient ways.

However, without consumer confidence, there is a risk people are put off from either buying or installing these products and progress toward Net Zero is slowed. Consumer engagement is also needed to drive effective competition between businesses, to spur greater innovation and better consumer outcomes.

Across the UK and Ireland, government has introduced policies to encourage uptake, including support with the cost of energy efficiency measures via grant and funding schemes. Therefore, it is critical that people can trust businesses to treat them fairly and are protected from harmful practices. Businesses also need to comply with their legal obligations, which will help drive consumer trust and confidence.

Consumer experience

Making people's experience of buying/ installing energy efficiency products as simple and straightforward as possible, is crucial for developing consumer confidence, supporting uptake of measures and further development of the sector. People must be able to make informed decisions about which products are right for their circumstances, their property and have easy access to clear, impartial, appropriate, and usable information and advice at key stages.

Therefore, the onus is on government to provide greater centralised information and advice services for consumers, to ensure they can fully engage in the energy transition.

Consumer protection

Consumer protection law places obligations on businesses to provide people with the key information they need to make informed decisions, to use fair sales practices and contract terms, to have an effective way of dealing with complaints and to carry out work with reasonable care and skill.

Overall, there are a number of bodies that enforce consumer protection law to ensure businesses act appropriately and treat consumers fairly. This includes national and local Trading Standards, energy sector regulators (i.e. the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland) and the Competition and Markets Authority.

Across government the need to ensure consumer protection is recognised within this growing sector. For example, the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland also includes the need to review existing consumer protection frameworks within its key policies. The Utility Regulator has set a key objective to 'provide the highest level of consumer service and protection' within its corporate strategy 2024-2029.

During our stakeholder engagement fears that installers may not be fully competent in installing new technology products and the need for installer certification and/or trusted supplier lists were raised. Participants also explained they would like a clear system for escalating a complaint with an independent arbiter in place if complaints reached an impasse.

Standards landscape

Standards bodies play an important role in the low carbon heat and insulation sector, by helping consumers identify reliable,

trustworthy businesses. Using a business that is a member of a standards body should mean that consumers can be confident the business is qualified to do the work to a high standard, will treat them fairly and provide protection if anything goes wrong.

However, the current standards landscape is complex and confusing, with low consumer awareness of the benefits.

The landscape can be divided into three categories:

- Quality Standards – Such as the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) for low carbon heating products and the British Standards Institution (BSI) for the installation of insulation products.
- Certification bodies that assess businesses' conformity with quality standards and are accredited by the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) to carry out this function.
- Consumer Protection standards such as the Renewable Energy Consumer Code (RECC) and the Home Insulation and Energy Systems Quality Assured Contractors Scheme (HIES) which set rules for member businesses selling low carbon heating products about how to engage with consumers and aim to strengthen consumer protection.

Quality Mark

The use of a government backed quality mark that represents a guarantee of adherence to standards provides consumers with a unified, equal, and consistent approach across different products and services at all stages of the consumer journey.

TrustMark is the quality mark established by the UK government and endorsed within the PAS 2035 retrofit framework. It is designed to ensure that professionals in the industry adhere to high standards of workmanship, technical ability, and customer protection. TrustMark also licences other standards bodies in the sector (including certification bodies and consumer codes) to deliver its scheme and to certify that businesses meet its requirements.

Additionally, the BSI publishes PAS 2035/2030 standards for retrofitting dwellings for improved energy efficiency through the use of insulation and other energy efficiency measures. Installers must be certified to the appropriate PAS 2030 standard to take part in UK government-funded energy efficiency schemes in England.

In the insulation sector the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency (CIGA) provides independent 25 year guarantees for Cavity Wall Insulation fitted by registered installers in the UK and Channel Islands.

Redress

A key component of consumer protection relates to complaints resolution and redress for when things go wrong. This is particularly relevant where new technologies may require high quality installation and specifications which will demand suitably robust regulation.

Standards bodies often require member businesses to provide consumers with financial protection in case the business stops trading and is unable to honour the terms of their workmanship guarantee. This can provide consumers with additional peace of mind and in addition to the installer's workmanship guarantee, the product manufacturer will typically provide a guarantee to repair or replace a faulty item for a certain period of years.

To help ensure that consumers have the necessary confidence and trust that they are protected, it is vital that there are robust and consistently high standards of quality, customer care and business competency, and that these are effectively monitored and enforced across all supported schemes. This will be particularly important given that most installers in the sector are small businesses.

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APPENDIX 3**Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Response to
Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy NI Jan 2025****Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed vision and guiding principles? If not, please suggest alternatives and why.**

The Department for Communities' (DfC) vision of warm, healthy homes for everyone, underpinned by the principles of long-term sustainable solutions, collaboration, participation and a needs-based approach, is sound. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council supports the concept of a needs-based approach to addressing fuel poverty, which involves identifying households most in need and providing targeted support accordingly. Such an approach is necessary to ensure that those who require assistance get it.

A collaborative approach, where stakeholders such as government agencies, statutory, voluntary and community sectors work together in a meaningful way to produce and implement a NI strategy is key. Collaboration can bring diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives, ultimately leading to more effective solutions and better outcomes.

Participative approaches that effectively engage with households and communities are also important. Building effective partnerships, referral networks and collaboration across all sectors, with meaningful involvement in the planning and decision-making process is necessary to ensure that solutions address actual need, and thus are more likely to be successful and sustainable in the long term.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the complexity of fuel poverty and the various factors contributing to it. A multifaceted analysis of these factors and their interactions is required, rather than focusing solely on a needs-based approach.

Ultimately, whether the government vision is effective in addressing fuel poverty will depend on how well it is implemented and the level of commitment and resources allocated to it.

To provide long-term sustainable solutions as an underpinning principle, the strategy should also consider the following:

- Economic factors - The strategy and implementation plan must be sufficiently flexible and responsive to take into account changes in energy prices, the economy, and other factors that can impact household income and energy expenditure.
- Social factors - Addressing fuel poverty often requires addressing underlying social issues such as inequality, and social exclusion.

- Environmental/educative factors -Encouraging energy efficiency, use of renewable energy, and reducing energy consumption can help mitigate the effects of fuel poverty and contribute to a more sustainable future.
- Monitoring and evaluation – regular and timely monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's effectiveness will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that adjustments are made as needed to ensure that the strategy remains flexible and fit for purpose

In summary, the DfC's vision and underpinning principles for tackling fuel poverty are sound in theory, but the effectiveness of the strategy will depend on its implementation, the level of commitment, and the incorporation of a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that adequately addresses the various factors contributing to fuel poverty.

Question 2 Do you agree with the timeframe and review period? If not, why not?

Yes, the 10-year strategy focus period from 2025-2035 with a 5 year review in 2030 seems a sensible approach.

Question 3 What would a readily understandable and measurable definition of 'thermal comfort' look like?

Thermal comfort depends on wider factors than just looking at temperature in isolation; instead, factors should include:

- Temperature: as defined by WHO standards
- Relative Humidity: for example, between 30% and 60% to prevent condensation and discomfort caused by high humidity.
- Ventilation: There is a gentle air movement of for example 1.5m/s to prevent drafts and discomfort caused by stagnant air.
- Thermal satisfaction: The overall thermal comfort experience is rated as satisfactory by at least 80% of occupants.

A readily understandable and measurable definition of thermal comfort in the home can be based on a combination of the above factors. To make these definitions more accessible to homeowners, however, consider the following:

- Encourage homeowner use of a simple thermometer to measure indoor temperature.
- Encourage homeowner use of hygrometer to measure relative humidity.
- Encourage homeowner use of a portable fan or blower to improve air movement.
- A smart thermostat or a thermostat with a built-in sensor to monitor and adjust temperature and humidity levels.

By promoting use of such measures, homeowners can be better equipped to create a comfortable indoor environment that meets their thermal comfort needs.

Q 4 For Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards in the private rented sector to effectively alleviate fuel poverty, what information or data do you think would be useful and what barriers would we need to overcome?

To effectively alleviate fuel poverty through minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector, DfC will need specific information and data, as well as an understanding of the barriers that might hinder data collection and analysis. The following information would be useful to provide a sound evidence base for the strategy:

1. **Current Energy Efficiency Ratings:** Data on the energy performance of rental properties, typically derived from Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs), indicating their current efficiency levels and potential for improvement.
2. **Demographic Data:** Information about the tenants, including income levels, family size, and specific vulnerabilities (e.g., elderly, disabled, children) to identify those at greater risk of fuel poverty.
3. **Fuel Poverty Statistics:** Data on the proportion of households that experience fuel poverty, including metrics such as household income, energy costs, and heating needs.
4. **Property Characteristics:** Detailed information on housing type, age, heating systems, insulation levels, and any previous upgrades to understand factors affecting energy efficiency.
5. **Energy Consumption Patterns:** Data on energy usage trends to understand how energy consumption relates to the energy efficiency of properties.
6. **Landlord Compliance and Awareness:** Information on landlord awareness of energy efficiency standards as well as their data relating to existing EPC ratings.

Barriers to obtaining this data are likely to include:

1. **Data Privacy and Accessibility:** Concerns over data privacy may limit access to personal information regarding tenants, particularly regarding income and demographic characteristics.
2. **Incomplete or Inaccurate Data:** Many properties lack up-to-date EPCs or relevant efficiency data, leading to incomplete datasets. Additionally, inaccuracies in self-reported data from landlords can complicate assessments.
3. **Reluctance of Landlords:** Landlords may be hesitant to share information about their properties due to concerns over potential regulations or financial obligations associated with data disclosure.
4. **Funding Constraints for Research:** Limited financial resources may restrict DfC's ability to conduct comprehensive research and data collection initiatives.
5. **Legislative and Regulatory Challenges:** Complicated legislation surrounding housing, energy efficiency, and tenants' rights may slow the process of gathering and analysing necessary data.

6. **Stakeholder Coordination:** Effective data collection often requires coordination among various stakeholders (e.g., councils, housing associations, NIHE, energy providers), which can be challenging to achieve.

To establish effective minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector aimed at alleviating fuel poverty, DfC must prioritise gathering comprehensive and accurate data on housing and energy use. Addressing the barriers to obtaining this information will be crucial for formulating policies and initiatives that truly benefit vulnerable populations while driving meaningful improvements in energy efficiency across NI housing stock.

Question 5 Should Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards also be applied to other tenures? Please give reasons for your answer.

The introduction of minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) for tenures beyond the private rented sector, such as owner-occupied homes or social housing, can have benefits, for example:

- **Environmental Impact:** Expanding energy efficiency standards can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to climate change mitigation efforts.
- **Energy Cost Savings:** Improved energy efficiency can lead to lower energy bills for residents, making housing more affordable over the long term.
- **Public Health:** Increased energy efficiency can improve indoor air quality and thermal comfort, leading to better health outcomes for occupants, especially in vulnerable populations.
- **Economic Stimulus:** Implementing energy efficiency upgrades can stimulate economic activity through job creation in the construction, energy, and related sectors.
- **long-term Resilience:** Enhancing energy efficiency can make housing more resilient to energy price fluctuations, benefiting both occupants and the economy.

However, there are further considerations which must be taken into account when formulating policy in relation to extension of MEES beyond the private rented sector. For example,

- **Cost and Financial Implications:** Homeowners may face significant upfront costs associated with upgrades, which could be a barrier, particularly in lower-income households.
- **Equity and Access:** Ensuring that all households, especially low-income or vulnerable ones, have access to resources and support for achieving energy efficiency improvements is crucial.
- **Market Readiness:** The construction and renovation sectors need to be equipped to handle increased demands for energy-efficient upgrades, which may require training and resources.

- **Regulatory Framework:** Implementing these standards would require careful consideration of the regulatory framework, including enforcement mechanisms and potential penalties for non-compliance.
- **Behavioural Change:** In addition to regulatory measures, promoting education and awareness around energy efficiency can encourage voluntary adoption beyond just meeting minimum standards.

While there may be compelling reasons to extend energy efficiency standards beyond the private rented sector, careful planning and consideration of the economic, social, and administrative implications are essential for successful implementation. Engaging stakeholders, including homeowners, local governments, and energy providers, can foster collaborative solutions that address the challenges and opportunities associated with improved energy efficiency across various housing tenures.

Question 6 Do you agree that introducing updated fitness standards will contribute to making homes more energy efficient? Please provide reasons for your answer

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is of the view that the introduction of new government housing fitness standards could potentially contribute to making houses more energy efficient, depending on the specifics of those standards. The current fitness standard for human habitation has not been significantly updated since 1981. If the revised standards focus on aspects such as insulation, heating systems, thermal comfort, energy-efficient appliances, and the use of renewable energy sources, they can lead to homes that consume less energy.

Examples of new housing standards, which could improve energy efficiency include:

- **Insulation and building materials:** Requirements for enhanced insulation and the use of energy-efficient building materials can significantly reduce heating demands.
- **Energy-Efficient appliances and systems:** Standards that mandate the use of energy-efficient appliances, heating systems, and water heaters can reduce energy consumption in households.
- **Renewable Energy Integration:** If the standards encourage or require the installation of solar panels or other renewable energy systems, this can lead to self-sufficient homes that rely less on traditional energy sources.
- **Smart Home Technology:** Incorporating requirements for smart home technology can help residents monitor and reduce their energy usage, including taking advantage of tariff bands at times when energy costs are lower, leading to overall efficiency gains.
- **Sustainability Practices:** Standards that promote sustainable building practices, such as the use of recycled materials or water conservation measures, can also contribute to energy efficiency indirectly.

Overall, if new standards are well-designed and enforced, they are likely to encourage the construction of homes that are more energy-efficient, ultimately leading in the long term to lower energy consumption and a positive impact on fuel poverty.

Question 7 Do you agree that all government domestic energy schemes should take account of the Fuel Poverty Strategy principles?

Yes

Question 8 Do you agree that DfC should take a more flexible approach that considers current data when setting and reviewing:

- a) Income thresholds and
- b) Eligibility criteria?

Please give reasons for your answer.

Yes, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council agrees that a more flexible approach that considers current data when setting income thresholds and eligibility criteria for energy grant schemes, would be beneficial, for the following reasons;

- **Dynamic Economic Conditions:** Economic situations can change rapidly due to various factors, including inflation, job market fluctuations, and other socioeconomic challenges. A flexible approach to income assessment and eligibility criteria allows for assessment and adjustment based on the most recent data, ensuring that schemes remains relevant and supportive of those in need.
- **Targeted Support:** By using up-to-date data, DfC can more accurately target support to those who need it most. For instance, individuals or families who may not have qualified under outdated thresholds could be struggling and in need of assistance.
- **Encouraging Participation:** More inclusive and adaptive eligibility criteria could encourage a wider range of participants to engage in energy efficiency programmes, leading to greater overall impact. When people see that a scheme considers current realities, they may be more likely to apply.
- **Efficient resource allocation:** Continuously reviewing eligibility criteria can help ensure that financial and policy resources are allocated efficiently and effectively, avoiding waste and ensuring that assistance reaches the intended recipients.
- **Promoting equity:** A flexible approach can assist in addressing inequalities faced by different communities. By being responsive to data reflecting disparities, DfC can design a scheme that promote equal opportunities for energy efficiency upgrades.

Overall, a flexible, data-informed and evidence led approach to income thresholds and eligibility criteria in energy grant schemes can lead to more effective and equitable outcomes.

Q9 Do you agree that an income threshold should increase in line with minimum wage levels/inflation or another index such as Retail Price Index (RPI) to mitigate increases in the cost of living? Please give reasons for your answer.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council favour increasing income thresholds for energy efficiency grant schemes in line with the retail price index (RPI) as a beneficial policy response to mitigate the impact of rising living costs rather than minimum wage/inflation, for the following reasons:

- **Expanded Accessibility:** Raising income thresholds in line with RPI would allow more individuals and families who are struggling with energy costs to access grants, thus alleviating financial pressure.
- **Alignment with Cost of Living:** As living costs rise, adjusting thresholds in line with RPI helps ensure that support measures remain relevant and effective in helping those in need.
- **Supporting Vulnerable Populations:** By updating income thresholds in line with the RPI, DfC can ensure that low-income households, who are often disproportionately affected by energy costs, receive the assistance they need.

It is however recognised that there are identifiable constraints with this approach.

- **Budget Constraints:** Expanding eligibility in line with the RPI may increase the financial burden on public funds, necessitating careful consideration of budget allocations and the sources of funding for these schemes.
- **Potential for over-qualification:** If thresholds are raised too high, it may allow individuals who are not in genuine need of assistance to access grants, potentially diluting the impact of the scheme.
- **Measurement of effectiveness:** It's important to have mechanisms in place to regularly evaluate the impact of policy decisions on energy efficiency uptake and overall cost savings.

Increasing income thresholds for energy efficiency grant schemes in line with RPI could be an effective measure to support households facing rising living costs and promote energy efficiency. However, it requires careful evaluation of funding mechanisms and ongoing assessment of the programme's effectiveness. Balancing support for vulnerable populations while ensuring efficient use of public resources is key to a successful implementation.

Question 10 Should the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of a house be considered as part of eligibility criteria (ie the least energy efficient homes are considered first?) Please give reasons for your answer

Yes, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council believes the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of a house should be considered as part of the eligibility criteria for an energy grant scheme. The following reasons supporting this approach:

- **Targeting Inefficiency:** Focusing on homes with the lowest EPC ratings ensures that resources are directed towards those properties that are the least energy efficient. This prioritisation can lead to reductions in energy consumption, thus making a more substantial impact on fuel poverty and ultimately climate change.
- **Maximising Impact:** By targeting the least efficient homes first, grant schemes can achieve better outcomes in terms of energy savings. Improving the efficiency of low-rated homes can lead to drastic improvements in energy use compared to already reasonably performing homes, offering greater returns on investment.
- **Addressing fuel poverty:** Homes with poor EPC ratings are often associated with lower-income households that struggle with high energy bills. By prioritising these properties, grant schemes can alleviate financial strain on vulnerable populations, contributing to social equity in energy access.
- **Compliance with policy goals:** UK have set ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions and improving overall energy efficiency. Using EPC ratings to guide grant distribution aligns with these policy objectives by ensuring that efforts to enhance building efficiency are strategically focused
- **Encouraging upgrades:** Providing grants to improve the EPC ratings of the least efficient homes may encourage homeowners and landlords to invest in necessary upgrades. This could stimulate the green economy, creating jobs in energy retrofitting and construction.
- **Regulatory alignment:** Many countries are already incorporating energy performance into building regulations and financial incentives. Including EPC ratings in grant scheme eligibility criteria aligns with existing frameworks, making the strategy more coherent and easier to implement.
- **Improving Property Value:** Energy efficiency improvements can enhance the value of properties. By improving the worst-rated homes first, grant schemes can help increase property values in areas that may have been economically stagnant, leading to broader community revitalisation.

In conclusion, considering EPC ratings as part of eligibility criteria for energy grant schemes not only addresses immediate energy inefficiencies but also aligns with broader social and environmental goals. It enables more effective allocation of resources while fostering sustainable development and energy equity.

Question 11 Do you agree that the new Affordable Warmth Scheme should take a Whole House retrofit approach? Please give reasons for your answer.

Yes, with careful implementation, taking a whole house retrofit approach to energy efficiency measures can be highly effective for several reasons:

- **Comprehensive solutions:** A whole house approach considers the interconnectedness of various building systems (heating, cooling, insulation, ventilation, etc.) rather than addressing individual components in isolation. This can lead to more effective and holistic energy savings

- **Increased energy savings:** By optimising the entire home's energy performance, homeowners can achieve greater energy savings than through piecemeal upgrades. This can significantly reduce energy bills and increase thermal comfort.
- **Enhanced Thermal Comfort:** Improvements made through a whole house approach can enhance indoor air quality, reduce drafts, and maintain more consistent temperatures, resulting in a more comfortable living environment.
- **Long-Term value:** Investing in comprehensive retrofits can improve the overall value of the property by enhancing its energy efficiency and sustainability, making it more attractive to potential buyers.
- **Environmental benefits:** By reducing energy consumption, retrofitting homes can contribute to climate change mitigation efforts.
- **Economic Growth:** A push for whole house retrofits can spur job creation in the construction and home improvement sectors, promoting local economies.
- **Accessibility and Equity:** Implementing a whole house approach through government initiatives can help low- and moderate-income households access energy efficiency upgrades that they might not be able to afford otherwise.

In summary, a whole house retrofit strategy can lead to significant environmental, economic, and social benefits, making it a compelling approach for DfC policy on tackling fuel poverty. However, a one size does not fit all, and there will be circumstances where this approach will not work (see Q 12 below).

Question 12 If the whole house approach is used, do you agree that all recommended measures must be installed unless there are exceptional reasons not to? Please give reasons for your answer.

The idea of a "whole house approach" in government energy efficiency grant schemes emphasises a comprehensive strategy to improve the energy performance of a home. Under this approach, *all* recommended measures should ideally be installed to maximise benefits. While a "whole house approach" can dramatically enhance the effectiveness of energy efficiency initiatives, making all recommended measures mandatory without exceptions may not be practical or feasible for every homeowner.

Reasons for Allowing Exceptions:

- **Financial Constraints:** Homeowners may face limitations, particularly if the upfront costs of all recommended measures are prohibitive. Providing flexibility allows participants to prioritise based on financial capability.
- **Property-specific conditions:** Each home is unique, and some measures may not be suitable due to structural limitations or existing conditions (e.g., historical buildings where certain alterations are not permissible)
- **Homeowner preferences:** Homeowners may have specific preferences or priorities based on their lifestyle or needs that could lead them to opt out of certain measures. For example, practical experience has taught us that elderly householders are often unable to clear out their roofspace used as a storage area, to allow for the fitting of roof insulation. Such scenarios should be

considered on a case-by-case basis to avoid the vulnerable elderly population in particular from being excluded from a scheme due to practical constraints.

- **Appropriate prioritisation:** Not all measures may yield equal benefits in all homes. A focused approach could consider the most critical improvements that provide the best return on investment in terms of energy savings.
- **Potential problems during installation:** In some instances, recommended measures may reveal or lead to other issues (like mould or structural damage) that could complicate a full installation. In such cases, exceptions or staged installations may be necessary.

Rather than insist on a whole house approach only, it would be beneficial to encourage comprehensive upgrades while allowing some level of flexibility to address individual circumstances. This balanced approach could promote participation in grant schemes while still achieving significant energy efficiency improvements.

Energy efficiency interventions in homes should consider what would return the maximum efficiencies for the level of investment. It was proposed a step-by-step approach e.g. insulation first, followed by windows / door replacement etc, however flexibility needs to be ingrained to ensure maximum efficiencies are gained.

Question 13 Do you agree that the new scheme should prioritise low carbon heating solutions where possible?

Yes, the new Affordable Warmth Scheme should prioritise low-carbon heating solutions where possible, for the following reasons:

- **Climate Change Mitigation:** Low-carbon heating solutions, such as solar, heat pumps, and biomass, play a crucial role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change. By transitioning to low-carbon heating, governments can help meet their climate change mitigation targets and reduce their carbon footprint.
- **Air Quality Improvement:** Northern Ireland still relies heavily on fossil fuels as a home heating source which can lead to air pollution, negatively impacting public health. Low-carbon heating solutions, on the other hand, produce little to no greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants, resulting in improved air quality.
- **Renewable energy integration:** Prioritising low-carbon heating helps integrate renewable energy sources into the energy mix. This can contribute to a more diversified energy supply, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and promoting energy security.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Low-carbon heating solutions often require less energy to operate than traditional heating systems. This can lead to cost savings for households and reduce strain on the grid during peak demand periods.
- **Economic benefits:** Investing in low-carbon heating solutions can create new economic opportunities, such as jobs in the renewable energy sector, and stimulate local economies. Additionally, the long-term savings from reduced energy consumption can have a positive impact on a region's economic growth.

- **Public Health benefits:** Exposure to air pollution from fossil fuel-based heating can have significant health impacts. By promoting low-carbon heating solutions, this can contribute to a reduction in respiratory diseases and other health problems associated with air pollution.

To prioritise low-carbon heating solutions effectively, the fuel poverty strategy for NI should consider:

- Incentivising low-carbon heating options through grants, subsidies, or low-interest loans for households (and businesses).
- Developing and implementing policies that support the deployment of low-carbon heating technologies, such as building control standards that promote energy efficiency.
- Investing in energy grid modernisation to ensure that it can accommodate increased adoption of low-carbon heating solutions.
- Providing education, training and awareness raising programmes to ensure that individuals have the knowledge and skills to select, install and maintain low-carbon heating systems.
- Encouraging public-private partnerships to accelerate the development and deployment of low-carbon heating technologies.

Question 14 Do you agree that the new scheme should offer renewable technologies such as solar panels and battery storage to offset the running costs of low carbon heating solutions in low-income households? Please give reasons for your answer

Yes, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council supports this approach:

- **Economic Relief and Energy Independence:** Low-income households often struggle with energy costs. By offering renewable technologies, the government can help reduce their reliance on conventional energy sources, thereby potentially lowering their monthly energy bills. Solar panels and battery storage empower households to generate and store their own energy. This independence can shield low-income families from fluctuating energy prices and provide a more stable financial situation.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Transitioning to low carbon heating solutions and renewable technologies is crucial for the UK's climate goals. By promoting these solutions, the government can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to combating climate change and improving air quality.
- **Job Creation:** Investment in renewable technologies can spur job creation in the green energy sector. This includes opportunities in manufacturing, installation, and maintenance, which can benefit both low-income communities and the broader economy.
- **Public Health:** Low carbon heating solutions and renewable energy can help reduce pollution, leading to better air quality and improved public health outcomes. This is particularly important in low-income areas that may experience higher levels of air pollution and related health issues.

- **Social Equity:** By prioritising access to renewable technologies for low-income households, the strategy can address fuel poverty and promotes social equity. Ensuring that all households, regardless of income, can benefit from clean energy solutions is fundamental to a fair transition.
- **Long-term Savings:** While the initial investment in renewable technologies may be a barrier, government support through grant schemes can facilitate access. Over time, these technologies can lead to substantial savings on energy costs, making them a financially viable option for low-income households.
- **Incentives for Adoption:** By providing incentives for renewable technologies in low-income households, the government can drive greater adoption of low carbon solutions, accelerating the transition to a sustainable energy future.
- **Community Resilience:** Renewable technologies and low carbon heating solutions can enhance resilience in communities, especially during energy supply disruptions or price spikes. Increased self-sufficiency is vital for vulnerable populations.

In summary, offering renewable technologies to low-income households aligns with economic, environmental, and social justice goals. It provides an important pathway for these communities to engage with and benefit from the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Question 15 Do you agree that rural properties should be prioritised for energy efficiency support? Please give reasons for your answer.

Whether a 10-year strategy should prioritise rural properties for energy efficiency support involves several considerations, and there are compelling arguments for and against such prioritisation. Here are some reasons to support prioritising rural properties:

- **Ageing Infrastructure:** Many rural homes are older and may lack modern energy-efficient features. 'Hard to Treat' homes with solid wall construction are typically located in rural areas. Targeting these properties for support can lead to significant reductions in energy consumption, lowering utility bills and improving overall energy efficiency in the region.
- **Access to Resources:** Rural areas may have limited access to resources such as the gas network distribution system that support energy efficiency improvements. By prioritising these areas, governments can directly address systemic inequities and ensure that rural residents have the same opportunities to benefit from energy efficiency programs as those in urban areas.
- **Environmental Impact:** Improving energy efficiency in rural properties can contribute to broader environmental goals, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on fossil fuels. Rural areas often have significant agricultural activities, and enhancing energy efficiency can lead to lower carbon footprints and promote sustainable practices.
- **Reducing Strain on Energy Grids:** Energy-efficient rural properties can reduce overall demand for energy, which can help alleviate strain on national energy

grids. This is particularly important during peak energy usage times when rural areas may face higher costs or energy shortages.

- **Local Economic Growth:** Supporting energy efficiency retrofits can create local jobs in construction, skilled trades, and energy audits. Prioritising rural areas can stimulate local economies and promote sustainable economic development.
- **Resilience and Self-Sufficiency:** By enhancing energy efficiency, rural properties can become more resilient against energy price volatility and disruptions.

However, it is also important to consider counterarguments, such as the possibility of neglecting urban areas that might need similar support or the logistics and costs associated with implementing programs in sparsely populated areas. Ultimately, an effective approach will involve a balanced strategy that assesses and addresses the specific needs of both rural and urban properties based on sound evidenced-based analysis.

The roll out of any new energy efficiency programme should be determined through a needs analysis, and not on one specific element i.e. rural/urban.

Question 16 Do you agree with a sliding scale approach to funding for home energy schemes?

A sliding scale approach to funding home energy schemes can be beneficial for several reasons:

- **Affordability:** It allows for a more equitable distribution of funds, ensuring that those who can least afford to invest in energy efficiency get more support. It also aligns with the public health approach of 'proportionate universalism' where actions are universal but the scale and intensity of is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.
- **Incentivising Participation:** A sliding scale can encourage broader participation by providing greater incentives for those who might be hesitant to invest in energy improvements due to cost concerns.
- **Targeted Assistance:** It enables the allocation of resources based on specific needs and circumstances, addressing barriers faced by different sectors of the population.
- **Improved Energy equity:** It can contribute to reducing fuel poverty, ensuring that energy-efficient homes are accessible to all socio-economic groups.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness:** A sliding scale approach can be adjusted over time based on changing economic conditions or energy markets, making it a more dynamic and responsive funding strategy.

However, there are also challenges to consider:

- **Cost and complexity:** Implementing a sliding scale may require more administrative oversight and could complicate the funding process.

- **Potential for misuse:** There may be concerns about ensuring that the funds are used appropriately and that those who truly need assistance are receiving it.
- **Balancing Interests:** It's important to balance the needs of different stakeholders, including taxpayers, homeowners, and energy providers.

Overall, if carefully designed and implemented, a sliding scale approach can enhance the effectiveness of home energy schemes and promote sustainability while addressing social equity concerns. The success of such an approach would depend on transparent criteria, robust oversight, and effective communication and support for the target population.

Question 17 Do you agree that loans are the fairest financing option for landlords who are required to improve their assets? If not, what would you suggest as alternative funding options?

While loans can be a viable financing option for landlords seeking to improve the energy efficiency of their properties, they may not always be the fairest or most suitable solution for every situation. Here are some considerations and alternative funding options:

Considerations for Loans:

- **Repayment Burden:** Loans require repayment with interest, which may be burdensome for landlords, especially if cash flow is tight.
- **Creditworthiness:** Access to loans can depend on a landlord's creditworthiness, potentially excluding those with less favourable financial backgrounds.
- **Market Variability:** Interest rates can fluctuate, affecting the overall cost of borrowing.

Alternative Funding Options:

- **Match funding grants:** These funds do not require repayment, making them a more accessible option for many landlords. However, 50% grant funding has been available to landlords for some years through the current Affordable Warmth Scheme, but unfortunately to date uptake has been stubbornly low (5-8%). DfC must first conduct research to uncover the reasons behind poor uptake before considering a similar roll out.
- **Incentives and rebates:** Offering incentives such as rates rebates could encourage landlords to undertake energy efficiency improvements.
- **Repayment Programmes:** Implemented on-bill financing programmes that allow landlords to finance energy improvements through their rates or utility bills can linking repayment directly to energy savings.
- **Public-Private partnerships:** Collaborations between government departments and private firms can provide funding, expertise, and shared risk for large-scale energy efficiency projects.
- **Energy Performance contracts:** These agreements allow landlords to partner with energy providers to implement energy-efficient upgrades with financing based on the savings realised from reduced energy bills.

- **Community partnerships:** Collective funding programmes can enable individuals or communities to finance energy-efficient improvements through contributions from a large number of people.

While loans can be an effective means to finance energy efficiency improvements, they aren't necessarily the fairest or most accessible for all landlords. A multifaceted approach that includes grants, incentives, and innovative financing models may provide a more equitable and supportive framework for property owners addressing energy efficiency upgrades.

Question 18 Do you agree that we should consider increasing levies from electricity bills to fund energy efficiency schemes for low income households? Please give reasons for your answer.

Increasing levies from electricity bills to fund energy efficiency schemes for low-income households is an idea worth considering. This approach has several potential benefits:

- **Targeted support:** Increasing levies and directly linking them to low-income households can ensure that those who need the most support are getting it. This targeted approach can be more effective than general schemes or subsidies that might not reach the most vulnerable.
- **Alignment with policy goals:** Increasing levies to fund energy efficiency schemes can be seen as part of the UK government's broader efforts to decarbonise the economy and tackle climate change.

However, it's essential to consider the following implications before implementing such a policy:

- **Increased costs for consumers:** Higher levies on electricity bills may lead to increased costs for consumers, which could exacerbate fuel poverty, particularly for those already struggling to pay their energy bills.
- **Regressive impact:** Energy bills are often seen as a regressive tax; thus, increasing levies could exacerbate inequality if not carefully designed to protect the most vulnerable.
- **Equity concerns:** Some critics argue that a levy-based approach may place an unfair burden on certain consumers, such as those who are not eligible for energy efficiency schemes or those with limited access to energy-efficient technologies.
- **Administrative complexities:** Implementing and managing a levy-based system can be complex and may involve significant administrative costs, which could eat into the budget allocated for energy efficiency schemes.

To mitigate these concerns, the DfC could consider the following:

- **Gradual introduction:** Introduce a phased approach to increasing levies, allowing consumers to adapt to the changes.

- Targeted support: Implement measures to ensure that the levies are used effectively to support low-income households and minimize the impact on vulnerable consumers.
- Transparency and accountability: Ensure that the allocation of funds is transparent and accountable, with regular progress reports and assessments of the effectiveness of energy efficiency schemes.

Question 19 Should we explore introducing levies on gas to increase funding for such energy efficiency measures? Please provide reasons for your answer

The question of whether DfC should increase levies on gas bills to fund energy efficiency schemes for low-income households is not straightforward. Benefits include:

- Support for Vulnerable Households: Increasing levies can provide much-needed funding for energy efficiency schemes.
- Encourage low carbon heating options: introducing levies on gas could also help ameliorate potential disincentives to moving to low carbon, electrified heating in the future since only applying levies to electricity helps make it more expensive relative to gas.

Cons:

- Increased Costs: Higher levies on gas bills may disproportionately affect all consumers, particularly if energy prices are already rising. This could create additional strain on low-income households
- Regressive Impact: Energy bills are often seen as a regressive tax; thus, increasing levies could exacerbate inequality if not carefully designed to protect the most vulnerable.
- Political Resistance: There may be significant public and political resistance to increasing levies, especially if consumers feel they are already paying high energy prices.
- Alternative Funding Sources: There might be other, potentially less burdensome funding mechanisms to consider, such as government grants, taxes on higher income brackets, or reallocating existing subsidies.
- Implementation and Management: Effectively managing and implementing energy efficiency programs requires careful planning and resources. DfC must ensure that the funds raised are used efficiently and reach the intended beneficiaries.

While increasing levies on gas bills could provide a necessary funding stream for energy efficiency schemes, DfC would need to consider the potential financial burden on consumers, particularly low-income households. A balanced approach that includes protections for vulnerable populations, alternative funding sources, and considerations of long-term benefits would be essential for such a policy to be effective and equitable. Engaging with stakeholders, including community groups and energy experts, could help refine the approach and ensure it meets the needs of those it aims to support.

Question 20 What are your thoughts on exploring any revenue-raising opportunities for energy efficiency schemes from unregulated heating sources such as home heating oil?

Exploring revenue-raising opportunities for energy efficiency schemes from unregulated heating sources, such as home heating oil, can be a beneficial approach for several reasons:

- **Energy Savings:** Home heating oil is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Cost Savings:** Energy efficiency measures can also result in cost savings for households.

Possible revenue-raising opportunities for energy efficiency schemes from unregulated heating sources include:

- **Carbon Pricing Mechanisms:** Implementing carbon pricing mechanisms, such as carbon taxes, can incentivise households to transition to cleaner energy sources and improve energy efficiency.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with private companies and organisations can help secure funding and expertise for energy efficiency projects, as well as create new revenue streams through energy savings.

To explore *all* revenue-raising opportunities effectively, DfC and stakeholders should:

- Develop a comprehensive energy efficiency strategy that outlines goals, targets, and implementation plans.
- Engage with stakeholders, including households, businesses, and local communities, to raise awareness and build support for energy efficiency initiatives.
- Establish clear policies and regulations to support the adoption of energy-efficient technologies and practices.

By exploring and implementing these revenue-raising opportunities, governments and stakeholders can create new sources of funding for energy efficiency schemes, promote the transition to a low-carbon economy, and support the development of sustainable communities.

Question 21 Do you agree that we should utilise and build referral pathways between Government, Local Government, health professionals and the Voluntary and Community Sector? If yes, how can we best achieve this?

Yes, building referral pathways for people needing advice and support is absolutely essential for creating a comprehensive support system to enhance overall community well-being, particularly for vulnerable populations who may struggle with energy-related issues.

Effective collaboration is critical to ensuring that those struggling with fuel poverty are provided with accessible and timely assistance.

To achieve this effectively, the NI fuel poverty strategy must ensure

- **Effective stakeholder engagement at all stages of planning and implementation:** Involve all relevant stakeholders from the outset, including government agencies, health professionals, and VCS representatives, to ensure their insights and needs are considered. Regular meetings and workshops can facilitate collaboration and build trust among partners.
- **Shared Goals and objectives:** Develop a clear framework outlining shared goals, objectives, and outcomes for the referral pathways. This can help ensure that all parties are aligned and working towards common aims, such as reducing fuel poverty and improving health outcomes.
- **Training and awareness:** Conduct training sessions for health professionals and VCS workers on the energy advice available, common energy-related issues faced by clients, and how to refer individuals effectively. This will empower them to recognize when someone needs support and know where and how to direct them.
- **Integrated information systems:** Establish a centralised information system or platform where stakeholders can easily access resources, share information, and track referrals. This can help ensure consistency in service delivery and facilitate communication between different sectors. This should include data sharing agreements between central government departments, local government authorities and other agencies.
- **Clear referral processes:** Develop clear, user-friendly referral procedures that outline how individuals can be referred between sectors. This should include a simple process to follow and the types of information required for referrals.
- **Community engagement:** Implement community engagement programmes to raise awareness about available resources and support channels. This could include workshops, informational sessions, or partnerships with local organisations or community groups that engage with residents.
- **Feedback and evaluation:** Create mechanisms for regular feedback and robust evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the referral pathways. Analyse data on referrals made, support outcomes, and areas for improvement to refine the process continuously.
- **Focus on accessibility:** Ensure that the referral pathways are accessible and inclusive, addressing potential barriers such as language, mobility, and technological access. Tailor services to meet the diverse needs of the community.
- **Data Sharing agreements:** Establish data sharing agreements among partners to facilitate information exchange while ensuring data privacy and security. This can help improve the understanding of community needs and enhance service provision.

Question 22 Do you agree with a taskforce/working groups to develop enabling frameworks for energy communities

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly supports the appointment of a taskforce with representation from industry, councils, communities etc to develop enabling frameworks for community energy. A taskforce or working group can be an effective way to bring together diverse stakeholders, including community representatives, experts, and decision-makers, to co-create and implement such frameworks. Enabling frameworks can help communities overcome specific challenges and barriers by providing a structured approach to addressing them. This can include:

- Facilitating dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders
- Identifying and mapping community strengths and resources.
- Developing tailored interventions and strategies
- Enhancing community engagement and participation.
- Building capacity and resilience within communities.
- Developing and refining the frameworks based on community needs and priorities
- Ensuring that frameworks are inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of communities.

Question 23 Do you agree that government should assess the most relevant recommendations of the NICE6 guidelines and consider their implementation

Yes. Implementation of the NICE6 guidelines will increase awareness within the health, care and voluntary sectors of how health problems caused or exacerbated by cold homes can be addressed through appropriate referrals, training and identifying needs as well as ensuring people are discharged from hospital to a warm home.

Question 24 Do you agree that we should work with organisations that provide emergency support, to seek a consistent approach across NI and the inclusion of a referral to a long-term solution. If so, what would be the best way to achieve this?

Yes, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council agrees that the government should collaborate with organisations providing emergency energy support, such as local councils and the Public Health Agency, to establish a consistent approach and facilitate referrals to long-term solutions. This collaboration can help ensure that people in need receive not only immediate assistance but also sustainable support.

Question 25 Do you agree with the proposal to prioritise discretionary support to provide emergency financial support if there is a future energy or cost of living crisis, until we have better data to target large scale payments? If not, can you provide a reason?

There are compelling arguments to continue to provide emergency financial support in the short term, at least until a time when there is data gathered about who is most in need and allow prioritisation. These include

- **Flexibility and responsiveness:** Discretionary support can be more adaptable to changing circumstances and can be tailored to meet immediate needs of individuals or families facing financial distress.
- **Targeted assistance:** It allows agencies to quickly direct funds to those who are most in need without waiting for extensive data collection, which can be time-consuming.
- **Prompt Relief:** In times of crisis, immediate financial support can prevent people from falling into deeper financial hardship, homelessness, or inability to afford basic necessities.

However the disadvantages of this approach are clear:

- **Risk of inequity:** Without robust data, there's a potential risk that support may not reach the most vulnerable populations, as decisions could be influenced by subjective criteria or less visible needs.
- **Sustainability concerns:** Discretionary funding may be limited in scope or duration, potentially leading to gaps in support once the initial funds are depleted.
- **Lack of comprehensive strategy:** Prioritising discretionary support might detract from the development of a more systematic approach that looks at the root causes of financial crises and provides longer-term solutions.

Question 26 Do you agree with the proposal to gain a better understanding of the impact of changes to Winter Fuel Payments and introduce additional support where appropriate? If not, why, and do you have alternative suggestions?

The proposal to analyse the impact of withdrawing Winter Fuel Payments from pensioners above the pension credit threshold seems reasonable, as it acknowledges the diverse financial situations pensioners face. Many pensioners, even those above the threshold, may struggle with heating costs, particularly during harsh winters. A thorough assessment could provide insights into how this policy affects vulnerable groups and inform future decisions. Additionally, introducing additional support where appropriate would ensure that those who are still in need receive assistance, promoting fairness and social equity.

If there are concerns, alternatives could include:

- **Income assessments:** Instead of a blanket withdrawal based on the pension credit threshold, a more nuanced approach could consider individual circumstances, such as other sources of income or cost of living considerations.
- **Targeted support programmes:** Establish specific programmes that target lower-income pensioners who may be less able to afford heating costs, ensuring that support goes to those most in need.
- **Emergency Funds:** Creating an emergency fund that pensioners can access during particularly cold periods could alleviate financial strain without entirely withdrawing support.
- **Broadening eligibility:** Instead of withdrawing payments, consider gradually tapering them based on income levels, allowing for a smoother transition and minimising the impact on those who may just exceed the threshold.

Overall, it is essential to balance fiscal responsibility with the need to support vulnerable populations, ensuring that all pensioners can maintain a comfortable and safe living environment during the winter months.

Question 27 Do you agree that we should improve our understanding of the impacts of energy decisions on the energy bills of different consumer groups? If so, what would be the best way of understanding these impacts?

Yes, improving our understanding of the impacts of energy decisions on the energy bills of different consumer groups is crucial. Understanding these effects can help policymakers design more equitable energy policies and ensure that no particular group bears an undue financial burden.

The best ways to understand these impacts include:

- **Sound evidence base:** Collect and analyse data on energy consumption patterns across different demographic groups, including income levels, geographic locations, and household sizes. This could involve utilising smart meter data, historical energy use data, and bill payment histories to assess how different policies or energy prices would affect various groups.
- **Consumer segmentation:** Identify and segment consumer groups based on factors such as income, energy usage, and access to renewable energy sources. This segmentation can help in predicting how changes in energy pricing will affect sector-specific demographics.
- **Surveys and focus groups:** Conduct surveys and focus groups to gather qualitative insights from consumers about their energy usage, the impacts of energy bills, and the willingness to adopt energy-saving technologies or practices. Understanding consumer preferences can shed light on how policies could impact their bills.
- **Modelling and simulation:** Use econometric models to simulate the impacts of different energy policies on consumer bills. This could include modelling scenarios like carbon pricing, changes in subsidies for renewable energy, or alterations in energy market structures.

- **Pilot programmes:** Implement pilot programmes aimed at specific consumer groups to measure the impacts of particular energy policies or decisions before rolling them out on a wider scale.
- **Collaboration with utilities:** Work closely with utilities, consumer advocacy groups etc to get a holistic view of the consumer impacts. These organisations often have valuable insights and data on consumer behaviour and challenges.
- **Transparency and reporting:** Ensuring that energy decision-makers provide transparent reports on how decisions affect various consumer groups, with accessible breakdowns of potential financial impacts, can foster a better understanding within the community.
- **Feedback and evaluation mechanisms:** Create channels for ongoing feedback from consumers regarding their experiences with energy pricing and policies, which can inform future policy adjustments.

By combining quantitative data with qualitative insights and consumer feedback and evaluation, policymakers can develop a comprehensive understanding of how energy decisions impact different groups and work towards more equitable energy solutions.

Question 29 How can we support vulnerable people to ensure they are on the most affordable tariff?

Government can implement a variety of strategies to assist vulnerable individuals in accessing the most affordable energy tariffs. Here are several approaches:

- **Information and education campaigns:** Launch campaigns to educate vulnerable populations about available energy tariffs and programs, helping them understand how to select the most cost-effective options. Provide resources in multiple languages and formats to ensure accessibility.
- **Tariff Comparison Tools:** Develop or support online platforms where individuals can easily compare energy tariffs from different suppliers. This can include filters for special rates for low-income households.
- **Subsidies and financial assistance:** Provide direct financial assistance or subsidies to low-income households to help cover energy costs, ensuring they can afford the best tariffs. Implement programmes that automatically enrol eligible households in low-income energy assistance programmes.
- **Partnerships with Energy Companies:** Collaborate with energy providers to create special tariffs or discounts for vulnerable people, such as elderly citizens, low-income families, or those on disability support. Encourage energy companies to offer simplified processes for vulnerable groups to determine their eligibility for lower tariffs.
- **Engagement programmes:** Deploy community engagement initiatives to connect with at-risk populations and help them navigate energy services. This can include partnerships with local councils who already work locally to assist vulnerable families in applying for energy programmes and understanding their options. It has been our practical experience in Mid and East Antrim that the arms' length service introduced by the DfE 'One stop shop' is not accessible or

user friendly to certain sectors; such as the elderly who don't have the confidence or family support to navigate the system. These are often the sectors that need the most assistance.

- **Legislative measures:** Introduce legislation or policies that prioritise affordable energy access for vulnerable populations, including limits on energy shut-offs during extreme weather. Ensure that consumer protection laws are in place to prevent exploitative practices targeting low-income households.
- **Data Sharing and referrals:** Utilise data sharing agreements (with privacy protections) to identify individuals who may qualify for assistance, enhancing outreach efforts. Create referral programmes between social services and energy providers to seamlessly connect vulnerable individuals to financial assistance and resources.
- **Crisis support services:** Establish or bolster emergency assistance programmes for energy disconnection to support individuals facing immediate crisis situations. Set up hotlines or helplines for individuals to receive immediate advice and support regarding energy billing and concerns.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programmes aimed at helping vulnerable populations with energy tariffs to ensure they meet their goals and adjust as necessary.

By implementing these measures, government can significantly improve access to affordable energy for vulnerable citizens, reducing their financial burdens and enhancing their overall well-being.

Question 30 Do you agree that we should explore potential affordability support for populations where energy efficiency measures may not be the right solution? If so, which population groups? Please provide reasons for your answer.

Yes, this is an area that requires exploration. Populations that might require additional and particular support include, for example, low income households with a terminal illness, or long term disability which requires the usage of specialised medical equipment.

Question 31 Is further research required to identify gaps in non-price protection for different energy users in Northern Ireland? If yes, what should we focus on?

Yes, further research is required to identify gaps in non-price protection for different energy users in Northern Ireland. Some key focus areas for this research could include:

- **Vulnerable Consumer identification:** Conduct studies to identify specific groups of vulnerable consumers, such as low-income households, elderly residents, and those with disabilities, to understand their unique energy needs and challenges.

- **Awareness and accessibility:** Assess the current awareness of existing non-price protections among different user groups and evaluate how accessible these protections are. This may include evaluating the effectiveness of communication strategies used by energy providers and regulatory bodies.
- **Impact of energy transition:** Analyse how the transition to renewable energy and changes in the energy market impact non-price protections for various user sectors and identify potential gaps in support.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Look at non-price protections in other jurisdictions to identify best practices and lessons learned that could be applied in Northern Ireland.
- **Regulatory Framework:** Review the existing regulatory framework to pinpoint any shortcomings or inconsistencies in protections for different types of energy users.
- **Method of Billing and Payment Options:** Explore the different billing methods and payment options available, assessing their fairness and accessibility for all user groups, especially those who may struggle with traditional payment systems.
- **Consumer Rights and Dispute Resolution:** Investigate the effectiveness of consumer rights protections and dispute resolution mechanisms in place, focusing on their adequacy for protecting non-price aspects of energy services.
- **Environmental and Social Impact Considerations:** Assess the intersection of environmental policies with non-price protections, ensuring that energy strategies are equitable and do not disproportionately impact vulnerable communities.
- **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Gather input from a wide range of stakeholders, including consumer advocacy groups, energy providers, and governmental agencies, to understand their perspectives on current protections and needed improvements.

By focusing on these areas, research can help to ensure that non-price protections are comprehensive, effective, and adaptable to the evolving energy landscape in Northern Ireland.

Question 32 What is your view on whether government should adopt a common quality assurance standard or framework across all energy efficiency and low carbon heat grant schemes?

The adoption of a common quality assurance standard or framework across all energy efficiency and low carbon heat grant schemes by the government could offer several significant benefits:

- **Consistency and Transparency:** A unified framework would ensure that all schemes adhere to the same standards, promoting consistency in the fuel poverty strategy implementation. This would provide clarity for both consumers and service providers, fostering trust in the strategy.

- **Improved Quality of Services:** A common standard could help ensure that all contractors and service providers meet minimum quality requirements, reducing the risk of poorly executed installations and ensuring that the benefits of energy efficiency measures are fully realised.
- **Streamlined Processes:** Having a standard framework may simplify administrative processes, reducing confusion and making it easier for applicants to navigate the various programmes. This could also ease the burden on government agencies managing these schemes.
- **Enhanced Reporting and Accountability:** A common framework would facilitate better tracking and reporting of outcomes across different programmes, allowing for more effective evaluation of their success and identification of areas for improvement.
- **Encouragement of Best Practices:** A standardised approach could promote the sharing of best practices across different areas and schemes, leading to continuous improvement in energy efficiency measures and low carbon technologies.
- **Increased Participation:** With clear standards in place, more homeowners may be encouraged to participate in energy efficiency programmes, knowing that they will receive support that meets a recognized quality standard.

However, there are also considerations to keep in mind:

- **Implementation Costs:** Establishing and enforcing a common standard may require significant initial investment in terms of resources and training. This needs to be weighed against the long-term benefits.
- **Potential for Bureaucracy:** A standardised approach could lead to increased bureaucracy, which might slow down the rollout of grants and limit accessibility for potential beneficiaries.

Overall, while the development of a common quality assurance standard or framework presents certain challenges, the potential benefits in terms of consistency, quality, and effectiveness make it a worthwhile consideration for improving energy efficiency and low carbon heat grant schemes. Careful planning and stakeholder engagement would be crucial to ensure that the implementation is practical and beneficial across different contexts.

Question 34 Do you have suggestions about how government could change our use of language to improve buy-in and engagement on fuel poverty?

Yes, a more positive or constructive term for "fuel poverty" could be "energy affordability challenges." This phrasing focuses on the issue as one of affordability rather than deprivation, emphasising the need for solutions and support rather than solely highlighting the negative aspects of the situation. Other alternatives might include "energy accessibility needs" or "energy security challenges," which also frame the issue in a way that suggests potential for improvement and support.

Question 35 Do you agree that government should take a basket of indicators approach to measuring and understanding fuel poverty?

Yes, a basket of indicators approach can be very effective for measuring and understanding fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is a multifaceted issue that encompasses not only income levels but also housing quality, energy prices, and household energy usage patterns. Utilising a range of indicators, such as winter deaths, household energy expenditure relative to total expenditure, and other socio-economic factors, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding fuel poverty. For example:

- **Winter Deaths:** Tracking winter mortality rates can highlight the health impacts of inadequate heating and poor living conditions, illustrating the human cost associated with fuel poverty.
 - **Energy Expenditure:** Comparing energy costs to overall household expenditure can help identify how much of a household's budget is being consumed by energy needs, revealing financial strain and potential risk of fuel poverty.
 - **Housing Quality:** Including indicators related to insulation, heating systems, and overall energy efficiency can shed light on the structural factors that contribute to fuel poverty.
 - **Income Levels:** Understanding income levels, including disparities based on demographics or geographic locations, can help identify which populations are most at risk.
- Energy Prices:** Monitoring fluctuations in energy prices can provide insights into how external economic factors impact households' ability to afford energy.

By using a diverse set of indicators, government can better tailor policies and interventions to address the root causes of fuel poverty and implement more effective solutions.

Question 36 Are the indicators suggested the correct ones?

Yes

Question 37 If you agree with the introduction of an indicator based on energy confidence or awareness, do you have suggestions about what kind of indicator might be most valuable?

To gauge consumer energy awareness and confidence, several indicators can be valuable such as

- **Surveys and Polls:** Conducting surveys that assess consumer knowledge about energy sources, conservation methods, and renewable energy can provide direct insights into awareness levels. Questions about their understanding of energy costs, efficiency, and environmental impacts can be particularly revealing.

- **Energy Consumption Patterns**:** Analysing trends in energy usage can indicate consumer confidence. A significant shift towards energy-efficient appliances, smart home technology, or renewable energy adoption may suggest increased awareness and confidence in sustainable energy choices.
- **Participation in Energy Schemes:** Tracking participation in energy efficiency programmes, renewable energy adoption (like solar panel installation), and demand response initiatives can indicate both awareness and confidence levels among consumers.
- **Feedback Mechanisms from Utility Companies:** Utility customer feedback about rates, service quality, and energy saving programs can serve as an indicator of consumer confidence. High satisfaction rates may correlate with awareness and confidence in energy management initiatives.

Combining these qualitative and quantitative measures will provide a fuller picture of consumer energy awareness and confidence, helping to inform policies and programs designed to enhance energy literacy and promote sustainable practices.

Question 38 Do you agree with our proposal that carbon emissions are not used as a fuel poverty indicator? Please provide reasons for your answer.

The question of whether carbon emissions should be used as a fuel poverty indicator is complex and involves various considerations.

There are compelling arguments for not using Carbon Emissions as a Fuel Poverty Indicator such as:

- **Primary Focus on Affordability:** Fuel poverty is primarily about the inability of households to afford adequate heating and energy. Using carbon emissions as a metric may shift the focus away from the immediate financial stress experienced by low-income households.
- **Diverse Energy Sources:** Different communities rely on a variety of energy sources with different carbon profiles. Some low-income households may use cheaper, less environmentally friendly energy sources (e.g., coal or older gas systems) to stay warm, which may not reflect their overall carbon footprint.
- **Impact on Policy:** Relying on carbon emissions as a fuel poverty indicator could lead to policies that focus more on emissions reductions than on helping people access affordable energy. The needs of vulnerable populations could be neglected.
- **Complexity of Measurement:** Accurately measuring carbon emissions requires comprehensive data on energy usage, which can be difficult to obtain. This adds complexity to an already critical issue.

However, ignoring carbon emissions in the context of fuel poverty could counteract long-term sustainability goals. 15% of greenhouse gases (GHG) are attributed to buildings and product use (NI Greenhouse Gas Statistics 1990-2022 statistical bulletin). Fuel poverty initiatives should ideally align with climate goals to ensure energy systems are both affordable and environmentally responsible. Households in

fuel poverty often live in energy-inefficient homes, which can result in high carbon emissions. Improving energy efficiency could reduce both fuel poverty and carbon output, making it relevant to consider both issues together.

In addition, using carbon emissions as a factor could raise awareness about the environmental impacts of energy consumption, potentially encouraging more sustainable practices among low-income households in the long run.

Ultimately, while there are valid reasons for DfC's proposal not to use carbon emissions as a fuel poverty indicator, it is also essential to recognise the interconnectedness of these issues. A balanced approach that considers both immediate needs for affordable energy and long-term sustainability goals may be the most effective strategy for addressing the dual challenges of fuel poverty and climate change.

Question 39 What is the best way to continue to engage with people experiencing fuel poverty?

Engaging with people experiencing fuel poverty requires an empathetic approach that considers their specific needs and challenges.

Establish connections through regular communication, showing genuine care and understanding. Use trusted local representatives such as local council officers or trusted community members to facilitate relationships.

Share clear, concise information about available assistance programmes, energy-saving tips, and financial support options. Use multiple formats (e.g., hard copy leaflets, social media, workshops) to reach different audiences.

Organise local community gatherings, workshops, or forums to raise awareness about fuel poverty and discuss solutions. This can also help build a supportive community network.

Encourage feedback through surveys, focus groups, or informal check-ins to understand their experiences, needs, and preferences better.

Collaborate with Local organisations: Work with local councils, charities, social services, and energy companies to develop comprehensive support programmes tailored to the community's specific needs.

Offer Practical Support, providing resources such as energy efficiency assessments, assistance with applying for grants or subsidies, and connecting them with home improvement schemes.

By combining these strategies, stakeholders can effectively engage with individuals experiencing fuel poverty, providing the support they need while also empowering them to take charge of their energy needs.

Question 40 Do you agree with the proposal for a Fuel Advisory Group. If not, can you suggest an alternative?

Yes. The formation of a fully representative fuel advisory group is critical to ensure that all stakeholders are fully engaged and aligned towards achieving the vision of warm, healthy homes for everyone.

Question 41 If you have any further comments or suggestions not already captured, please provide these.



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Author:	Patricia Allen, Head of Public Protection, Health & Wellbeing
Approver:	Philip Thompson, Acting Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Elected Members approval for the submission of a response, on behalf of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (MEA), for the Public Health Agency (PHA) Corporate Plan 2025-2030 Consultation.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Public Health Agency (PHA) has developed a draft Corporate Plan for the period 2025-2030, setting out the strategic direction for the PHA for the next five years. This draft plan takes account of engagement and discussion with a range of stakeholders, the vision set out by the Minister of Health in Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, Department of Health (DoH) priorities, especially the Making Life Better Public Health Framework and the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2024-2027 within the context of financial constraints and Health and Social Care (HSC) reform and restructuring.
- 2.2 Priorities and Approach
The PHA's objectives apply to everyone in the population, aiming to address health outcomes across all demographics, including diverse backgrounds and needs. Achieving these outcomes will require determination, innovative thinking, and collaborative efforts across HSC, government and the community and voluntary sectors. We must make partnership, involvement and engagement central to our work, explore new and different ways of doing things and make the best use of our combined resources.
- 2.3 The consultation for the draft strategy is attached as **Appendix 1** and the MEA Consultation Response as **Appendix 2**. The consultation closes on Friday 28 February 2025.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1 Views are sought through the consultation on the stated purpose, vision, values and strategic outcomes contained in the PHA Draft Corporate Plan.

3.2 Strategic Outcomes

Over the next five years, PHA will work to fulfil their stated purpose and advance towards the vision of a healthier Northern Ireland, by focusing on delivering a number of key public health priorities under the following strategic outcomes:

- Protecting Health - protecting the population from serious health threats, such as infectious disease outbreaks or major incidents
- Starting Well - laying the foundations for a healthy life from pre-birth, infancy, early years, childhood to adolescent years
- Living Well - ensuring that people have the opportunity to live and work in a healthy way
- Ageing Well - supporting people to age healthily throughout their lives

3.3 Each outcome sets out the ambition and priorities for the years ahead. These are aligned with the draft Programme for Government Framework 2024-2027 and the strategic direction outlined in key departmental strategies.

3.4 The following points are raised in the consultation response.

- Recognition of existing partnerships and greater emphasis on collaborative working.
- Impact of poverty, language barriers and homelessness.
- Need for greater emphasis on early years, injury prevention, violence against women and girls and dementia in aging.
- The value of workplace settings and working with businesses.
- Co-ordination across teams when there are dual/multiple health problems.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1 The consultation on the draft Public Health Agency PHA Corporate Plan 2025-2030 is an opportunity for Elected Members of Mid and East Antrim Borough to shape and influence this important corporate plan from one of our key partners. Our contribution will help ensure that this reflects and responds to the needs of MEABC residents.



5. Recommendation

5.1 It is recommended that Elected Members:

- (i) approve submission to the PHA the draft Mid and East Antrim Borough Council consultation response on the draft PHA Corporate Plan 2025-2030, as detailed in Appendix 2.

6. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 Consultation for the Draft Strategy

Appendix 2 MEA Consultation Response

Link PHA Website Current Consultations section

Public Health Agency
Corporate Plan
2025–2030

Preventing, protecting, improving:
Better health for **everyone**

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Collage of artwork from PIA all staff event 2023.

Foreword

This Public Health Agency (PHA) Corporate Plan 2025-2030 sets out our strategic direction for the next five years: where we will target our work, based on evidence and informed by engagement with our partners, the public, key stakeholders and aligned to Programme for Government and Department of Health (DoH) strategies and priorities.

This plan is being developed during a period of reform both for our organisation and for Health and Social Care (HSC) and in a time of significant financial constraint. However, we have embraced the opportunity provided by this time of change and constraint to set out our vision and ambitions for health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland and reiterate our call for a continued focus on improving health and reducing health inequalities across HSC and wider society.

Over the period of our previous corporate plan (2017-2021), the PHA has continued to take forward work to improve and protect health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities, improve the quality and safety of care services, and support research and development.¹ Much has been achieved, but much is yet to be done to deliver better health for everyone in Northern Ireland.

Our society has faced many difficult challenges in recent years, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. This has shaped many of our priorities and work areas over recent years and the lessons learned continue to influence our work: pandemic preparedness and a re-engaged focus on stubborn and systemic inequalities in health that we continue to experience. These unfair and avoidable differences in health impact our ability to lead healthy lives and too many people in Northern Ireland still die prematurely or live with preventable conditions. We must do all that we can to prevent this from being the case. Our commitment to work to reduce health inequalities is at the core of this plan and our work over the next five years.

The priorities set out in the following pages (and summarised on pages 40-43) relate to everyone in Northern Ireland irrespective of your age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, disability, whether you are a service user, a carer, independent or needing care. Our outcomes are ambitious, and will require energy, courage, commitment and creativity to deliver them – all against the backdrop of increasing demands

and financial constraints, as well as structural reform. We must take a 'whole system' approach and make partnership, involvement and engagement central to our work, to make the best use of our combined resources. We must work collaboratively with service users and carers, the community and voluntary sector and across government to have a positive, lasting impact on health and wellbeing.

It is also critical as we grow as an organisation that we focus on our people. We have a highly skilled and committed multidisciplinary workforce across a range of professions and we must strive to ensure they feel valued, equipped and enabled in their work. In particular, we must ensure that all staff are supported and given opportunities to develop both professionally and personally.

We must continue to develop as a learning organisation and build on significant developments in digital capacity in recent years. Embracing innovative, digital solutions and maximising the use of data will enable us to work more effectively to meet the current and future needs of the population.

This plan, supported by a more detailed implementation plan, sets out our next steps as we look forward. This will be a period of change and adaptation but also of great opportunity where we endeavour, as the lead organisation for public health, to be an organisation where people want to work, where we nurture collective and compassionate leadership.

Above all, this plan represents our unwavering commitment to improving health and wellbeing for everyone in Northern Ireland.



Aidan Dawson
Chief Executive



Colin Coffey
Chair

Purpose, vision and values

Purpose:

Protect and improve the health and social wellbeing of our population and reduce health inequalities through leadership, partnership and evidence-based practice.

Vision:

A healthier Northern Ireland.

Values:

The PHA endeavours to translate the Health and Social Care values into its culture by putting individuals and communities at the heart of everything we do, acting with **openness and honesty** and treating people with dignity, respect and **compassion; working together** in partnership to improve the quality of life of those we serve, listening to and involving individuals and communities; valuing, developing and empowering our staff and striving for **excellence** and innovation; being evidence led and outcomes focused.



Purpose, vision and values

Our context and the health profile of Northern Ireland

Since its establishment in 2009, the PHA has worked to improve and protect health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities, promote healthy behaviours and reduce barriers to good health, improve the quality and safety of care services, and support related research and innovation.



There have been many developments and advances in recent years in respect of interventions and programmes to improve and protect health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. The graphics on pages 10-15 show a snapshot of health in 2022-23. In general, the health of our population has been improving over time, as seen in increases in life expectancy (the number of years a person can expect to live) and healthy life expectancy (the number of years lived in good health). However, in recent years, improvements in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy have slowed and health inequality remains a major issue (see page 10).

and making best use of available resources to deliver better health outcomes and help people to stay well. It is well documented that long-lasting and significant improvements in health and wellbeing can only be achieved through a 'whole system' approach.¹⁻³ Our current context, compounded with the additional challenges to health and wellbeing further strengthen the need for a population health approach, a focus on prevention and early intervention and strong cross-sectoral, multi-agency collaboration.

Determinants of health

Health is determined by many factors: social, political, environmental and economic. Changes in these can have significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of the population and in recent years, society has experienced many significant events of this nature: the COVID-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis, climate change, the outworking of EU exit and other political change.²⁻⁴ The pandemic also highlighted both the stubborn and systemic inequalities in health that Northern Ireland continues to experience. Health inequalities remain and continue to divide our society. While this situation is not unique to Northern Ireland, it remains a major issue with significant differences in health outcomes between the most and least disadvantaged.

A time of change

The challenges facing our health and social care systems, and indeed health systems worldwide, are also well documented, and Northern Ireland's health and social care system remains under immense and growing pressure.⁵ Further change is also underway both in the development and implementation of the Integrated Care System for Northern Ireland (ICSI). The current economic climate and constrained financial environment for HSC continues to impact on population health and requires creative, innovative and collaborative ways of working.

Regional strategic frameworks

These key foundations for our work are reflected across the draft Programme for Government framework 2024-2027 and the wide range of departmental policies and strategies that influence and determine the work of PHA, including Making Life Better public health framework, and Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together.⁶⁻⁸ The PHA also has lead responsibility for implementing a number of strategies across key areas of work, including maternity and early years; mental health, emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention; obesity; tobacco use; alcohol and drugs; and long-term conditions, including cancer.⁹⁻¹¹

There are many DoH and indeed other departmental strategies and policies that are relevant to the setting of priorities for the PHA. The outcomes and priorities for the PHA for the next five years reflect and align with these key strategic documents, and our contribution to progressing this agenda and our commitment to working collaboratively with others, will help ensure that these outcomes are realised.

Our context and the health profile of Northern Ireland

Snapshot of health in Northern Ireland, 2022-2023.



Life expectancy and Healthy life expectancy¹⁶





Adults who smoke¹⁷



14%



MMR uptake at 5 years old¹¹

85.4%



Adults living with overweight or obesity¹⁹



65%



356

alcohol specific deaths²⁰



Babies breastfed (at discharge)¹⁷

51%



1 in 5 people may have a mental health difficulty¹⁷





*Includes Irish Traveller, Arab, Pakistani and Roma

65,600 Ethnic minority population

Northern Ireland population¹⁵



What is public health?

Public health works to protect communities and has a strong focus on equity.

There are three key domains of public health practice:²³

1. Health protection

This involves protecting the population from threats to their health from infectious diseases and other hazards. It involves both proactive preventative actions (such as vaccination) as well as reactive response to incidents such as disease outbreaks.

2. Health improvement

This involves wide ranging actions working with a variety of stakeholders to improve health and wellbeing. It includes influencing other sectors to address the wider determinants of health, as well as working with the general public and specific vulnerable or marginalised groups, to improve health literacy and promote healthy lifestyle choices. There is a heavy focus on addressing health inequalities.

3. Healthcare public health

This involves actions in the planning, commissioning and development of healthcare services working with partners across the HSC and related services to ensure provision of high quality, safe and effective services, while working to reduce inequalities.

As set out in the diagram, these three aspects of public health practice are not stand-alone and overlap with each other, requiring a skilled workforce that can work across these various domains to address complex issues.

HSC services make a significant contribution to the health of individuals and the population. The PHA has a statutory responsibility to work with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) and provide professional input to commissioning healthcare services. We work with SPPG and colleagues across HSC to ensure that people in Northern Ireland have access to high-quality and effective health services no matter where they live.

Three key domains of public health practice



The work of the PHA in each of these three domains is underpinned by a strong basis in science, with evidence informing all of our work. We cannot deliver improvements to public health in isolation, so partnership working and building relationships with our partners is a key element of our work.

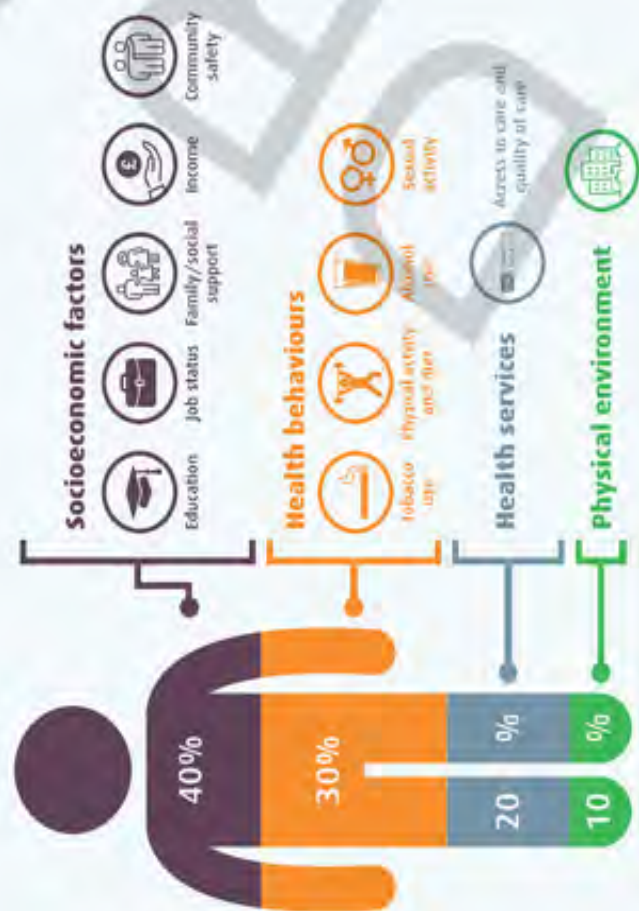
“Public health is the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health and wellbeing, through the organised efforts of society.”²³

What factors impact on our health and wellbeing?

Many factors, known as the 'wider determinants of health' affect our health and wellbeing. These include social, economic and environmental conditions such as income, education, access to green space, healthy food, work and living conditions.^{2, 24} It is widely recognised that, taken together, these factors are the principal drivers of how healthy people are.^{2, 25}

The PHA works with various sectors to influence these wider determinants of health, aiming to make it easier for our population to have healthy lifestyles and make healthy choices.

As well as working with partners to address the wider determinants of health, the PHA has a key role in encouraging healthy behaviours and ensuring equitable access to high quality, safe and effective preventative and treatment services.



What are health inequalities?

Health inequalities are "avoidable differences in health status between different population groups" and are influenced by variation in the determinants of health referred to above.⁵⁻⁴ Health inequalities are evident in terms of differences in the prevalence of certain health conditions among certain groups in society or differences in outcomes (like life expectancy or cancer survival, for example) for certain population groups.²⁶

Some groups are disproportionately impacted by the determinants of health, which can lead to health inequalities.

Factors impacting on health inequality:

- socioeconomic factors, for example living in socioeconomically deprived areas;
- geography, for example, region or whether urban or rural;
- specific characteristics including those protected in law, such as sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disability;
- socially excluded groups, for example, people experiencing homelessness.

The determinants of health interact with each other and can often have a cumulative effect with people often experiencing challenges across multiple determinants contributing to inequalities in health and health outcomes.²⁶



Source: Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement. Going beyond clinical walls: solving complex problems (October 2014)

Our focus

Our focus

These strategic themes encompass core areas of focus for our organisation as we work towards our vision of a healthier Northern Ireland.

Protecting health

Protecting the population from serious health threats, such as infectious disease outbreaks or major incidents

Starting Well

Setting the foundations for a healthy life from pre-birth, infancy, early years, childhood to adolescent years

Living well

Ensuring that people have the opportunity to live and work in a healthy way

Ageing well

Supporting people to age healthily throughout their lives

The first is focused on protecting health and the others adopt a life course approach. Whilst we have taken a life course approach, we recognise there are a number of cross-cutting areas, including for example mental health, learning disability and inclusion health.

Each theme sets out our ambition and a number of priorities for the years ahead. These are aligned with the strategic direction outlined in key departmental strategies. Population level indicators are also provided for each ambition to support regular evaluation.

In working to achieve the priorities set out in this plan, we commit to:

- tackling and reducing health inequalities being at the heart of our work
- championing a 'whole system', cross-government approach to tackle the challenges and barriers to improving health and reducing health inequalities
- providing professional public health advice to the planning and commissioning of safe, effective, equitable, high-quality healthcare

- listening to, involving, and working together with individuals, families, local communities, HSC and other key partners in all our work
- ensuring planning, guidance and decisions are based on best available evidence and driven by data, research and experience
- improving equity of access to prevention and early intervention information and services for those who need them.

Reporting against this corporate plan will take place through our annual business plans and corporate monitoring. In addition, a more detailed delivery and action plan will be developed setting out the actions to be taken forward and appropriate measures within each of the themes.

We commit to reviewing this plan in line with any future programme for government framework and departmental strategies to be developed during the period of this plan.

Protecting health

Our ambition

That our population is protected from threats to health arising from infectious diseases and environmental hazards and that we reduce death and ill health through effective screening.

Protecting our population's health is one of our core functions. We do this through surveillance, identification and timely response to threats to public health, providing advice and support, monitoring of threats to health, and education, training and research. This includes the prevention of infectious diseases through vaccination and early detection of disease through population screening programmes. Our focus is also on preparing and planning for potential future pandemics and other potential threats to the population's health and wellbeing. We will

work effectively across the organisation to ensure a robust coordination of the overall public health response. We will ensure that we learn from and implement recommendations from inquiries and incidents.

Our people will have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to deliver an effective and efficient service, using evidence-informed approaches to mitigate the impact of inequalities on prevention and control of infectious diseases and other defined hazards.

The PHA has responsibility for commissioning, coordinating and quality assuring a number of population screening programmes: infectious diseases in pregnancy, newborn blood spot and hearing; diabetic retinopathy; bowel, breast and cervical cancer; and abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA).

Priorities 2025-2030

- develop emergency response plans to support readiness to respond to incidents that may have an impact on public health for Northern Ireland;
- work collaboratively to minimise the impact of infectious disease, with a focus on antimicrobial resistance and our elimination targets for blood-borne viruses;
- deliver a high-quality and responsive health protection surveillance and epidemiology programme;
- strengthen the multidisciplinary coordinated approach to infection prevention and control across the wider HSC system through the established infection, prevention and control forums;
- ensure the delivery of high-quality screening programmes;

- lead the development and commissioning of vaccine programmes to ensure they are accessible to all, addressing the associated barriers and inequalities and ensure there is a key focus on seldom heard groups;

- scope existing evidence for public health approaches to protect people and communities from the public health impacts of the environment, including climate change, and develop a PHA climate action plan;

- build public confidence and trust in public health advice, information and messaging through improving health literacy via education and engagement with the public.

Indicators

We will measure success through the following:

- surveillance data
- notifications of infectious disease.

- screening uptake
- vaccine uptake.

Protecting health

Protecting the population from serious health threats, such as infectious disease outbreaks or major incidents



Starting well

Our ambition

that all children and families in Northern Ireland have the healthiest start in life.

What happens during pre-conception, pregnancy, the early years, the school years and adolescence is key to what happens in later life. This includes having an adequate standard of living, a secure family environment, good physical and mental health and wellbeing and being protected from harm.

We will support and empower families to create and provide a safe and nurturing home environment and to make good decisions about their physical and mental health and wellbeing. We recognise that adolescence is a unique stage of development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health.

Health inequalities can have a profound impact on a child's start in life. All children and young people, including those who have additional needs, should have the opportunity for better health and wellbeing. Adverse childhood experiences can have long-term impacts on health and wellbeing. We will embed a trauma-informed approach and work with partners to prevent these from happening.

The challenges faced by families are complex and multifaceted and we cannot improve their health in isolation. We must work together in strong partnerships with families and across society in a whole system, holistic approach to make a meaningful difference.

Priorities 2025-2030

- support families to take care of their physical and mental health, with a particular focus on the first 1,000 days;
- reduce the impact of social complexity in pregnancy; encourage support for breastfeeding mothers;
- protect the health of children and young people through antenatal and newborn screening programmes and childhood vaccination programmes;
- deliver universal and targeted support programmes, including Healthy Child Healthy Future, Family Nurse Partnership, and Northern Ireland New Entrants service (NINES);

- work together to reduce child deaths through improved use and application of data and evidence;
- support children and young people with special education needs, their families and carers in addressing the unique health challenges and disparities they face, by enhancing access to services, resources and support systems that contribute to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing;
- support adolescents to establish patterns of behaviour that can protect their mental and physical health;
- work with others to promote the safeguarding and protection of children and young people.

Indicators

We will measure success through the following:

- screening and vaccination in pregnancy uptake
- percentage of babies born at low birth weight
- avoidable child death rates
- percentage of mothers breastfeeding on discharge
- developmental progress in pre-school

- childhood vaccination uptake
- number of children starting school at a healthy weight
- smoking and alcohol use in children and young people
- incidence of hospital attendance with self-harm/deaths by suicide among children and young people.

Starting well

Laying the foundations for a healthy life from pre-birth, infancy, early years, childhood to adolescent years



Living well

Our ambition

That all people in Northern Ireland can live longer, healthier and independent lives.

Adults now generally enjoy better health and wellbeing and can expect to live longer than previous generations. However, in recent years life expectancy rates have been stalling and there are still many challenges and significant health needs within our population that impact the ability of people to experience good physical and mental health and wellbeing.

There are many factors that impact our health and wellbeing during our adult lives. These include where we live, our environment, access to education and employment, health services and the effects of poor diet, smoking, drug and alcohol misuse, low levels of physical activity, homelessness and food, fuel and financial poverty.

Many of the challenges that impact our physical health, also impact our mental health and emotional wellbeing. Too many people in our communities are struggling with ill mental health, which is impacting their ability to make healthy choices. It is important that we support and promote good mental health and emotional wellbeing across society.

Health inequalities continue to compound challenges to health and prevent many from experiencing good health and wellbeing. We must ensure that we provide targeted approaches where needed for those more vulnerable in our society.

As well as equipping people to live longer, healthier lives, we must also help protect them from becoming ill or needing health interventions. This includes access to adult immunisation programmes, screening and detection programmes and tackling issues that lead to poor health. Promoting healthy choices and healthier environments and communities, including within workplaces, will also be a key focus.

Supporting everyone to adopt healthier behaviours, avail of preventative services and access high-quality care throughout our lives can make a significant contribution to improving the health of the population. This is not about placing the responsibility on the individual but working together to support people and create supportive environments and opportunities for good health for all.

Living well

Ensuring that people have the opportunity to live and work in a healthy way



Alcohol

Adults drinking over recommended guidelines



Priorities 2025-2030

- create the conditions for people to adopt healthier behaviours and reduce the risks to health caused by low physical activity, smoking and vaping, poor diet and sexual behaviours;
- support those living with long-term conditions to live well with disease;
- deliver high-quality programmes and initiatives, including prevention and early intervention approaches, to protect and improve mental health and emotional and social wellbeing;
- continue to work in partnership across government and with communities, services, and families across society to reduce suicides and the incidence of self-harm;
- reduce harm caused by substance use by improving access to high-quality prevention and early intervention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services to ensure people can access the right service at the right time delivered in the right place to best meet their needs;
- support prevention and early detection of illness through vaccination and screening programmes;
- provide targeted information and support to help everyone, including those who experience multiple barriers to health, to adopt healthy behaviours, avail of preventative services and access high-quality care.

Indicators

We will measure success through the following:

- percentage of people with a high GHQ-12 score, indicating a mental health problem
- tobacco use, including smoking and vaping prevalence
- suicide rates
- obesity and physical activity measures
- alcohol and substance use
- screening and vaccination uptake rates
- percentage self-reporting a physical or mental health condition or illness expected to last 12 months or more
- percentage of those living with long-term conditions reporting a reduced ability to carry out daily activities.



Ageing well

Our ambition

That older people live healthier, independent lives.

As a population, we are living longer and many older adults enjoy good health and make significant contributions to their communities.

For others, however, older age brings a risk of poor physical and mental health, social isolation and complex health problems. Poor health and frailty should not be inevitable outcomes as we age. As well as living longer, we also want to live healthier for longer so that we can continue to participate in activities we enjoy and live fulfilled, independent lives.

There are many factors that impact our health and wellbeing throughout our lives and this is no different as we age. These include the environment we live in, access to health services and the impact on our health and wellbeing of poor diet, smoking, drug and alcohol

misuse, low levels of physical activity and food, fuel and financial poverty.

As our older population continues to grow, we want to support and promote healthy, positive ageing both for individuals and as a society. We must enable people to live longer, healthier more fulfilling lives but also create environments and communities that enable healthy behaviours and also support, value, respect and protect our older population.

Working with partners, we will support and advocate for delivery of healthcare that is wrapped around the person, be that in their own home, hospital or care home. We must take a lifelong approach to positive health and active ageing and work to reduce the impact of health inequalities through education and support for people to improve their health.

Priorities 2025-2030

- implement the World Health Organization (WHO) Age-friendly movement across Northern Ireland;
- reduce and prevent falls and home accidents, including the development and implementation of a regional model for safer mobility;
- reduce the impact of frailty by raising awareness and increase early detection;
- support prevention and early detection of illness through vaccination and screening programmes for older adults;
- increase levels of physical activity and promote opportunities to stay active;

- work with key partners to identify and reduce levels of loneliness and social isolation and to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- champion the voice of older people and the issues that impact on their health and wellbeing;
- lead and implement initiatives to ensure people who live with long-term conditions and those who live in care homes have good health and wellbeing and improved quality of life;
- work with partners to support individuals and families at the end of their life through advance care planning;
- build and develop a strong research and evidence base to support ageing well programmes in Northern Ireland.

Indicators

We will measure success through the following:

- percentage of people aged 65+ with a high GHQ-12 score, indicating a mental health problem
- percentage of people who report feeling lonely 'often/always' or 'some of the time'

- adults aged 65+ stating health is good or very good
- obesity and physical activity measures
- falls and frailty measures
- screening and vaccination uptake.

Ageing well

Supporting people to age healthily throughout their lives



Our organisation

The PHA is a multidisciplinary, multi-professional body with a strong regional and local presence and was set up with the explicit agenda to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of people in Northern Ireland.

Since its establishment in 2009, we have worked to improve and protect health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities, promote healthy behaviours, reduce barriers to good health, improve the quality and safety of health and social care services and support related research and innovation.

As part of the health and social care family, we work closely with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) of the Department of Health (DoH), local Health Trusts (HSC Trusts), the Business Services Organisation (BSO) and the Patient-Client Council (PCC).

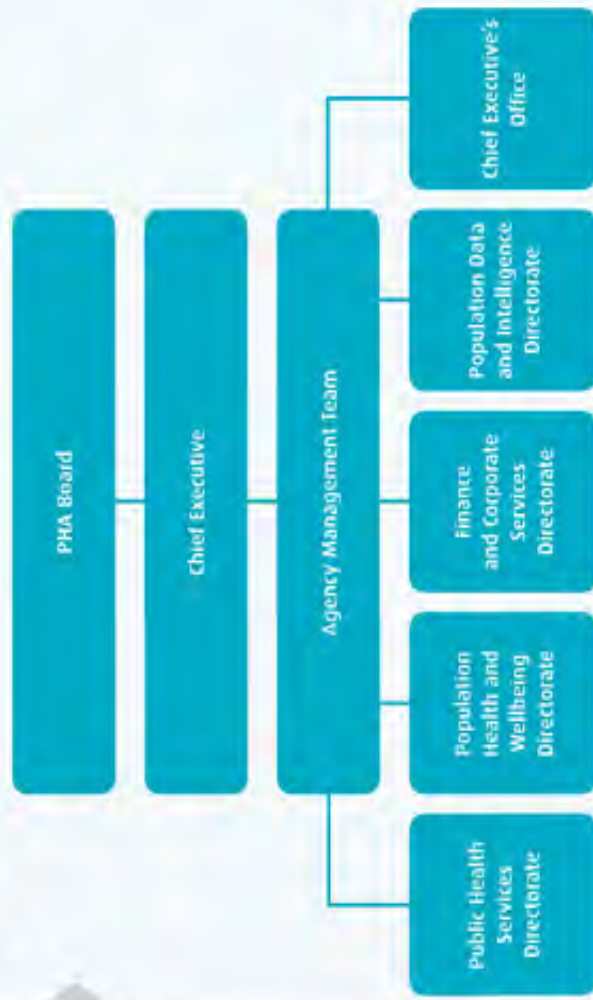
Central to our main responsibilities is working in close partnership with individuals, groups and organisations from all sectors – community, voluntary and statutory.

Through our organisational 'Reshape and Refresh' programme to design and implement a new operating model for the organisation, we continue to evolve as an organisation to ensure we can continue to meet the public health needs of the people of Northern Ireland.

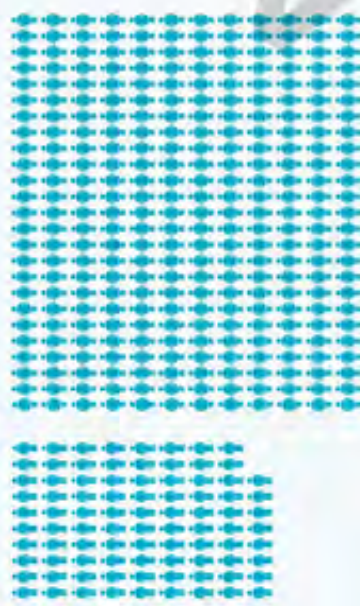
As part of this programme, our organisational structure has changed and is outlined below.

Our legislation determines that we should hold two distinct professional roles: Director of Public Health and Director of Nursing and AHP. These will be encompassed within the Public Health Services and Population Health and Wellbeing directorates.

PHA organisation chart



Staff at 31 March 2024



Our ambition

That we are an exceptional organisation, working effectively to improve health and wellbeing for everyone.

Our progress towards this ambition over the next five years depends on our people. We must therefore ensure that our staff feel supported, equipped and empowered in their work. We will continue to develop our staff and make use of their expertise, building on their experience, to make sure we achieve the greatest impact and can effectively respond to new challenges.

In fulfilling this ambition, we are committed to:

- People**
- Partnership**
- Process**
- Digital**
- Research and evidence**

People



Our people are our greatest asset and we must strive to ensure staff feel valued, are equipped and enabled in the work they do and given opportunities to develop both professionally and personally. We want to be an organisation where people want to work and are proud to be part of. All staff working in PHA should have a common understanding of public health and have a shared sense of purpose, feel valued and supported and have opportunities to upskill, develop and progress in their career.

We must ensure a multidisciplinary workforce which is highly skilled in the area of public health to ensure effective and appropriate preparation for future threats and that we are agile, designed to deliver and able to manage emerging risks to health. The PHA currently is the lead organisation in the delivery of the Public Health Specialty Training Programme for people wishing to become Consultants in Public Health. It is important that the quality and standards of this training programme are maintained in order to safeguard the future workforce.

As we work to implement the 'Reshape and Refresh' programme, we must remain focused on valuing and

supporting our people, recognising that periods of change and uncertainty are difficult for everyone and ensuring that staff are equipped and enabled to adapt to any new structures and to continue to take forward the important work set out in this plan.

Culture is key to the success of any organisation. We must continue to develop into an organisation where:

- our culture and values are clear in everyone's experience of the PHA;
- we are agile and adaptive to changes and challenges;
- we attract and retain high calibre staff;
- we are leaders in our field and strive to learn from research and evidence;
- we embrace collective and compassionate leadership, nurturing collaboration, continuous improvement and empathetic care and support.

Budget

Revenue resource
budget in 2023/24
£139.4m



Priorities 2025-2030

- implement the Reshape and Refresh recommendations and restructure;
- deliver Our People Plan and develop subsequent plans encompassing culture, staff experience and workforce development. This will include a wide range of targets with the overall aim of supporting the underlying goals that our staff:
 - are inspired with a shared sense of purpose to improve and protect the health of our population
 - feel valued, supported and engaged in all they do
 - are knowledgeable, skilled and competent;

Partnership

Improving the health and wellbeing of the population is the work of not just one single organisation but requires collaborative cross-society efforts. This includes ensuring that our communities, service users and carers are not only the focus of our work but that their voices are heard and listened to.

We are committed to working collaboratively with others, to help ensure the best outcomes for the population of Northern Ireland. This will include working with and across government departments, local government, other statutory bodies (such as housing and education), community and voluntary organisations and commercial and private providers and organisations as we create and distribute knowledge and information, interventions and services to improve health and wellbeing.

We will continue to engage and collaborate with partners with public health expertise locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, to maximise our combined resources to improve health and wellbeing. In line with the PHA's regional leadership role across the HSC in lived experience and involvement and in keeping with statutory and policy responsibilities in this area, we are committed to actively listening to and meaningfully involving service users, carers and the public who we serve.

- develop a professional governance framework;
- provide an improved working environment maximising flexible, modern ways of working to enhance staff engagement and wellbeing.



Priorities 2025-2030

- carry out a comprehensive stakeholder mapping and relationship profiling and collaborate with leaders in key sectors to implement improvements, enhance partnership working and target messaging;
- develop our communications and engagement strategy and resources to support the implementation of the corporate plan priorities;
- engage with key structures and foster partnerships focused on improving health and wellbeing including through SPPG Planning and Performance Teams, ICS Area Integrated Partnership Boards and Local Government Community Planning Partnerships;
- develop a partnership working strategy that embeds lived experience and involvement into the culture and practice of the PHA;
- use expertise and data from other sources to develop a comprehensive joined up approach to planning public health investment and programmes across government.

Process

We know the importance of demonstrating good organisational and professional governance in how we conduct our work, ensure good stewardship of all our resources and accountability for the use of public monies. In the volatile and continuing changing environment in which we are working, with organisational, sectoral and strategic change, increasing demand on health services and ongoing financial and economic constraints, it is essential that we have strong accountability and dynamic processes to enable effective delivery and achieve the greatest impact possible within organisational resources. We must also ensure our processes allow us to be agile, designed and able to manage any emerging risks.

The PHA will continue to look at creative, innovative and collaborative ways of working to make best use of available resources to achieve maximum impact. Strong planning and multidisciplinary ways of working as well as strong governance processes will be crucial to our success as an organisation.

Digital

In recent years, we have made rapid and significant development around digital capacity, embracing innovative ways of working and harnessing the potential of new technology.

Technology is continually changing the way we live, interact, learn play and work, offering new opportunities to connect and engage with people and communities in different ways. Digital tools offer new ways to gather and analyse data, collaborate within the PHA and with external partners to improve public health, support our core functions and build capabilities. Embracing new technology requires new thinking about public health provision models, data, governance, partnership and engagement. The PHA will take a 'digital first' approach to its work and develop an open data approach that supports openness and transparency.



Priorities 2025-2030

- establish and embed robust financial governance in line with new financial management arrangements as part of the ongoing transformative restructure;
- review, refresh and embed key corporate and information governance policies and procedures, ensuring that staff across the PHA understand their responsibilities and implement these ensuring good governance in how we do our business;
- develop the planning and procurement arrangements in the PHA, ensuring the necessary skills, expertise and capacity to work alongside programme leads and together progress these, to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the population ensuring best use of public monies;
- continue to implement the multidisciplinary public health planning structure.



Priorities 2025-2030

- strengthen public health leadership in digital innovation through development and implementation of innovative public health models, positioning PHA as a leader in digital health provision;
- enhance digital awareness and understanding across PHA, building digital literacy and fostering a shared understanding of digital opportunities and challenges;
- embed a digital first approach in planning by integrating digitalisation into the design of external and internal products, services and business processes;
- build and continuously improve the accessibility and functionality of underpinning digital platforms for the PHA;
- increase digital skills across the PHA, embed learning and development for digital ways of working and design new digital roles.

Research and evidence

The availability, analysis and interpretation of good data and evidence is essential for effective planning and delivery of services. As an organisation, we will bring together evidence and learning from both national and international sources and continually seek to develop and improve our data sources and analytic capability. We have a wealth of experience and knowledge in health intelligence, data management and surveillance, and it is essential that we invest in and further develop this over the next five years. This will inform not only PHA policy and actions but crucially also the policy, actions and plans of our partners, to improve the health and wellbeing of the population.

HSC Research and Development (R&D) division works to support research that provides high quality evidence to improve care for patients, clients and the general population, and adds to our understanding of health, disease, treatment and care. A new HSC R&D strategy is in development for launch in 2025, building on the existing strategy with an enhanced focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), sustainability and the safe and appropriate use of data in HSC research.

Developing as an organisation and enabling innovative, data-driven approaches to the planning and delivery of our services will enable the organisation to deliver a public health service that meets the current and future needs of the population and respond to emerging challenges or threats.

We will become a more research active organisation, both in identifying research questions and encouraging staff to engage in active research and collaborate with the Northern Ireland Public Health Research Network.



Priorities 2025-2030

- establish a new directorate focused on health intelligence, research and digital approaches;
- implement the new HSC R&D strategy;
- develop research literacy and capacity in research within the PHA workforce, through training and development opportunities such as critical appraisal and evidence synthesis training and R&D fellowships;
- build strategic partnerships with clear data-sharing agreements to ensure access to a comprehensive range of data sources, enabling robust modelling, planning and public health response capabilities;
- strengthen our reputation as a leader in evidence-based decision-making, using data to drive public health policy, inform practices and guide resource allocation;
- expand analytical capabilities by further developing skills in areas such as behaviour change analysis, data science, health economics and modelling and equipping the organisation for in-depth programme evaluation;
- use high-calibre modelling and evaluation techniques to assess equality impacts and effectiveness of interventions and programmes;
- be recognised as a leader in health intelligence, predictive modelling and scenario planning, driving insights for proactive public health strategy.

Summary table

Summary table

Summary of PHA priorities for 2025-2030 and indicators for each strategic theme

Protecting health	Priorities	Indicators
<p>Starting well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> support families to take care of their physical and mental health, with a particular focus on the first 1,000 days; reduce the impact of social complexity in pregnancy; promote the health benefits of breastfeeding and encourage support for breastfeeding mothers; protect the health of children and young people through antenatal and newborn screening programmes and childhood vaccination programmes; deliver universal and targeted support programmes, including Healthy Child Healthy Family, Family Nurse Partnership, and Northern Ireland New Entrants service (NINES); work together to reduce child deaths through improved use and application of data and evidence; support children and young people with special education needs, their families and carers in addressing the unique health challenges and disparities they face, by enhancing access to services, resources and support systems that contribute to their physical, mental, and social wellbeing; support adolescents to establish patterns of behaviour that can protect their mental and physical health; work with others to promote the safeguarding and protection of children and young people. 	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> screening and vaccination in pregnancy uptake percentage of babies born at low birth weight avoidable child death rates percentage of mothers breastfeeding on discharge developmental progress in preschool childhood vaccination uptake number of children starting school at a healthy weight smoking and alcohol use in children and young people incidence of hospital attendance with self-harm/health by suicide among children and young people 	

Living well	Priorities	Indicators
<p>Ageing well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement the World Health Organization (WHO) Age-friendly movement across Northern Ireland reduce and prevent falls and home accidents, including the development and implementation of a regional model for safer mobility reduce the impact of frailty by raising awareness and increase early detection support prevention and early detection of illness through vaccination and screening programmes for older adults increase levels of physical activity and promote opportunities to stay active work with key partners to identify and reduce levels of loneliness and social isolation and to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing champion the voice of older people and the issues that impact on their health and wellbeing lead and implement initiatives to ensure people who live with long-term conditions and those who live in care homes have good health and wellbeing and improved quality of life work with partners to support individuals and families at the end of their life through advance care planning build and develop a strong research and evidence base to support ageing well programmes in Northern Ireland 	<p>Indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> percentage of people aged 65+ with a high GHI-12 score, indicating a mental health problem percentage of people who report feeling lonely 'often/always' or 'some of the time' adults 65+ yrs stating health is good or very good obesity and physical activity measures falls and frailty measures screening and vaccination uptake 	

Glossary of useful terms

Term	Definition
AAA	Abdominal aortic aneurysm. A swelling in the abdominal aorta, the main artery that supplies blood to your body, which can be fatal.
Age-friendly	An WHO initiative to create liveable communities that are inviting and accessible for people of all ages – especially older adults.
Area Integrated Partnership Board (AIPB)	A local planning body with the overarching aim of improving health and social care outcomes and reducing health inequalities for its local population.
Collaboration	The action of working with someone to produce something.
Coronavirus disease/ COVID-19	An infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
Delivering Together 2026	Approach launched by the then Minister of Health, Michelle O'Neill, on 25 October 2016 and driven by the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Programme for Government, setting out an ambition to support people to lead long, healthy and active lives.
Department of Health (DoH)	A devolved government department in the Northern Ireland Executive.
Diabetic retinopathy	Diabetic retinopathy occurs when diabetes damages the small blood vessels in the part of the eye called the retina, affecting vision.
EDI	Equality, diversity and inclusion.
GHQ-12	General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) consisting of 12 items, each one assessing the severity of a mental problem.
Health and wellbeing	The combination of factors contributing to a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health.
Health inequalities	Unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population and between different groups within society.
Health intervention	A treatment, procedure or other action taken to prevent or treat disease, or improve health in other ways.
Health literacy	The ability to access, understand, appraise and use information and services in ways that promote and maintain good health and wellbeing.
Healthy life expectancy	The average number of years of full health that a newborn could expect to live.
Health and Social Care (HSC)	Publicly funded healthcare system in Northern Ireland. Although created separately to the National Health Service, it is nonetheless considered a part of the overall national health service in the United Kingdom.

Glossary of useful terms

References

Term	Definition
Integrated Care System Northern Ireland (ICS NI)	The new (2024) commissioning framework for Northern Ireland. It is a single planning system that will help us to improve the health and wellbeing of our population.
Life course approach	An inclusive approach that considers people's health needs and opportunities across all age groups.
Live Better initiative	A series of planned initiatives set out by the Health Minister in October 2024 to help tackle health inequalities in Northern Ireland and bring targeted health support to communities that need it most.
Making Life Better, the NI Public Health Framework	A strategic framework for public health designed to provide direction for policies and actions to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Northern Ireland and to reduce health inequalities.
MMR Vaccine	Vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella.
Mortality	In medicine, a term also used for death rate, or the number of deaths in a certain group of people in a certain period of time.
Personal and Public Involvement (PPI)	Active and meaningful involvement of service users, carers, their advocates and the public in the planning, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of Health and Social Care (HSC) services, in ways that are relevant to them.
Programme for Government (PFG)	The Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most outlines the Executive's priorities for making a real difference to the lives of people here.
Public Health	The science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society.
Public Health Agency (PHA)	Established in April 2009 as part of the reforms to Health and Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland, responsible for providing health protection and health and social wellbeing improvement to every member of every community in Northern Ireland.
Smoking cessation	The process of discontinuing tobacco smoking.
SPPG	Strategic Planning and Performance Group.
Whole system approach	A strategic integrated approach to planning and delivering services.
World Health Organization	(WHO) The World Health Organization sets standards for disease control, healthcare and medicines; conducts education and research programs; and publishes scientific papers and reports

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Public Health Agency
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www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:



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Public Health Agency Draft Corporate Plan 2025-2030 Public Consultation Questionnaire

Welcome to the draft Public Health Agency (PHA) Corporate Plan 2025-2030 Preventing, protecting, improving; Better health for **everyone**. Our new draft plan is open for public consultation.

Overview

The Public Health Agency (PHA) has developed a draft Corporate Plan for the period 2025-2030, setting out the strategic direction for the PHA for the next five years. This draft plan takes account of engagement and discussion with a range of stakeholders, the vision set out by the Minister of Health in Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, Department of Health (DoH) priorities, especially the Making Life Better Public Health Framework and the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2024-2027 within the context of financial constraints and Health and Social Care (HSC) reform and restructuring,

Priorities and Approach

The PHA's objectives apply to everyone in the population, aiming to address health outcomes across all demographics, including diverse backgrounds and needs. Achieving these outcomes will require determination, innovative thinking, and collaborative efforts across HSC, government and the community and voluntary sectors. We must make partnership, involvement and engagement central to our work, explore new and different ways of doing things and make the best use of our combined resources,

We recognise our work cannot be done in isolation and requires a whole system, cross government approach with robust engagement with the public. Cognisant of this, we have now published our draft corporate plan for public consultation from Thursday 28th November 2024 until Friday 28th February 2025.

APPENDIX 2

Respondent Information Form

Please use this questionnaire to share your views on the draft PHA Corporate Plan 2025-2030. You can email your response to phacorporateplan@hscni.net or return to us by post to PHA Corporate Plan Consultation, Public Health Agency, 4th Floor South, 12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8BS.

Here to Help

Please get in touch via contact details above if you require assistance, an alternative format or have any questions with regards to completing your consultation response. We would be happy to receive any other comments you feel do not fit into the questions set out in this survey.

Details of in-person consultation events taking place in the new year will be announced in due course on the [PHA website](#).

The draft PHA corporate plan 2025-2030 aims to have wide reaching effects. We would welcome views on how delivering this plan may affect any particular groups in society. The draft Corporate Plan 2025-2030, an initial draft equality screening and rural needs impact assessment are available via the [PHA Website - Current Consultations section](#)

Have your say now by completing our consultation survey. Please make sure to share your thoughts before the consultation deadline **4pm, Friday 28 February 2025**.

Thank you for your contribution to this consultation and joining us in building a healthier Northern Ireland for all.

APPENDIX 2

Consultation Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed to help you respond to the Draft PHA Corporate Plan 2025-2030 'Preventing, protecting, improving: Better health for everyone. Written responses are welcome either using this questionnaire template, via [online survey](#) or in an alternative format which best suits your response.

Please answer the following questions and note your comments and views in the text boxes provided.

About You

(Please tick the relevant box)

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

(required)

- Individual – Please complete Section 1, 2 and 4
- On behalf of an organisation – skip to Section 3 'Responding as an Organisation' – please complete section 3 and 4

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Section 1 - Responding as an individual

1.1 Please provide your contact details below:

Your name and email address are required for validation purposes.

Name: (required)

Email address: (required)

1.2 Can we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation?

This may be to follow up any specific points we need to clarify.

(required)

Yes

No

1.3 Can we contact you in future about the draft PHA Corporate Plan 2025-2030? For example, to provide you with a link to the results of this consultation, to inform you of further consultations or provide update information on the plan. (required)

Yes

No

1.4 To support transparency in our decision-making process, we will publish a summary of the consultation feedback on the PHA website. This will sometimes include the responses themselves and may mention names of the responding organisation (if

APPENDIX 2

applicable). However, names of individuals responding on a personal capacity will only be published where consent has been given. Please note we will not publish contact details.

(required)

Yes, I consent to my name being published with my response

No, please remove my name before publishing my response

[PHA Privacy Notice](#)

Feedback provided may be subject to publication or disclosure under access to information laws like the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If you believe your input should be treated as confidential, please contact us by email, so that this may be considered should we receive a disclosure request.

Email: phacorporateplan@hscni.net

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Section 2 – (Monitoring Information for individual responses only)

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is committed to providing equal opportunities for everyone. This makes sure everyone has the chance to participate in our survey groups regardless of gender, marital status, disability, age, religion, political views, ethnic origin, caring responsibilities or sexual orientation.

By answering the following questions, you will help us understand who we are reaching and how we can better serve everyone in our community. Your response to these questions is **optional** and answers will be **anonymised**.

2.1 What is your sex? By sex we are referring to your current sex.

- Male
- Female
- Identify in a different way
- Prefer not to say

If you identify in a different way, please specify below:

2.2 What is your age?

- Under 16

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- 16 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 to 84
- 85+
- Prefer not to say

2.3 What is your marital status?

- Single, that is, never married and never registered in a civil partnership
- Married
- In a registered civil partnership
- Separated but still legally married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated but still legally in a civil partnership
- Formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved
- Surviving partner from a civil partnership
- Prefer not to say

2.4 Which council area do you live in?

- Antrim and Newtownabbey
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon
- Belfast
- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Derry City and Strabane
- Fermanagh and Omagh
- Lisburn and Castlereagh

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- Mid and East Antrim
- Mid Ulster
- Newry, Mourne and Down
- Ards and North Down
- Prefer not to say

2.5 Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

If you answered 'Yes', does your condition(s) or illness(es) reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little
- Not at all
- Prefer not to say

2.6 What is your religion?

- No Religion
- Catholic
- Presbyterian
- Church of Ireland
- Methodist
- Baptist

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- Free Presbyterian
- Brethren
- Protestant - not specified
- Christian - not specified
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If you have selected Other, please specify below:

2.7 Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

- Heterosexual or Straight
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If you have selected Other, please specify below:

2.8 Do you have responsibility for caring of any of the following groups?

- Care of a child
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say

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- Care of a person with a disability
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say

- Care of a dependant elderly person
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say

2.9 What is your ethnic group?

- White
- Irish Traveller
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Other Asian background
- African
- Caribbean
- Other Black/African/Caribbean background
- Arab
- Other
- Prefer not to say

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If you have selected Other, please specify below:

2.10 Do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist or neither?

- Unionist
- Nationalist
- Neither
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If you have selected Other, please specify

Section 3 – Responding as an organisation

3.1 Please provide your organisation contact details below

Organisation name and email address are required for validation purposes. **(required)**

Organisation name: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Organisation email address:

Wellbeing@midandeantrim.gov.uk

3.2 Which of the following best describes the sector you work in?

(Please tick the relevant box)

This will assist us in monitoring the range of respondents the consultation has reached.

- Statutory or Regulatory Body
- Arm's Length Body (ALB)
- Organised interest Group: e.g. Education, Health, Business,

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Creative Industries, Environment, Community, Voluntary &
Third sectors

- Business operator
- Local Government
- Government Department
- Trade Union
- Church or faith group
- Media
- Academia
- Charity
- Political Party
- Other (please specify):

3.3 **Can we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation?** This may be to follow up any specific points we need to clarify. **(required)**

- Yes
- No

3.4 **Can we contact you in future about the draft PHA Corporate Plan 2025-2030?** For example, to provide you with a link to the results of this consultation, to inform you of further consultations or provide updated information on the plan. **(required)**

- Yes
- No

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3.5 To support transparency in our decision-making process, we will publish a summary of the consultation feedback on the [PHA website](#). This will sometimes include the responses themselves and may mention names of the responding organisation (if applicable). However, names of individuals responding on a personal capacity will only be published where consent has been given. Please note we will not publish contact details. **(required)**

Yes, I consent to my organisation name being published with my response

No, please remove my organisation name before publishing my response

Section 4 - Have your say

The following questions focus on the core elements of the draft PHA corporate plan 2025-2030.

Our purpose, vision, values and strategic outcomes are set out below and in the document.

Purpose: Protect and improve the health and social wellbeing of our population and reduce health inequalities through leadership, partnership and evidence-based practice.

Vision: A healthier Northern Ireland.

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Values: The PHA endeavours to translate the Health and Social Care values into its culture by putting individuals and communities at the heart of everything we do, acting with **openness and honesty** and treating people with dignity, respect and **compassion; working together** in partnership to improve the quality of life of those we serve, listening to and involving individuals and communities; valuing, developing and empowering our staff and striving for **excellence** and innovation; being evidence led and outcomes focused.

Over the next five years, as we work to fulfil our purpose and advance towards our vision of a healthier Northern Ireland, we will focus on delivering a number of key public health priorities under the following strategic outcomes:

- **Protecting Health** - protecting the population from serious health threats, such as infectious disease outbreaks or major incidents
- **Starting Well** - laying the foundations for a healthy life from pre-birth, infancy, early years, childhood to adolescent years
- **Living Well** - ensuring that people have the opportunity to live and work in a healthy way
- **Ageing Well** - supporting people to age healthily throughout their lives

Each outcome sets out our ambition and a number of priorities for the years ahead. These are aligned with the draft Programme for Government Framework 2024-2027 and the strategic direction outlined in key departmental strategies.

Using the scale, please indicate using a cross (x) or a tick (✓) to what extent you agree or disagree with the content in each of the sections

4.1 Do you agree with our purpose? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree;
4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

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1	2	3	4	5
			X	

Please include any comments in the box below:

The defined purpose of the organisation includes the key elements of protecting and improving public health alongside reducing health inequalities. Recognition that this will be achieved through strong leadership, meaningful partnerships and evidence-based practice is critical to success.

When considering partnership working, recognition should be given to existing partnerships such as Community Planning, Children Services Plan, Civil Contingencies, Regional Age Friendly, HAPSIG etc and how these can be utilised with PHA support and where appropriate, leadership to achieve the aims and objectives of a healthier Northern Ireland.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on collaborative working to make partnerships meaningful and successful in delivering outcomes.

4.2 Do you agree with our vision and values? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

1	2	3	4	5
				X

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Please include any comments in the box below.

The vision is clear, concise and easy to understand.

The values are as would be expected of an organisation.

4.3 Referring to the draft plan, do you agree with Outcome 1: Protecting Health and the priorities listed? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

1	2	3	4	5
			X	

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Please include any comments in the box below.

The importance of a collaborate approach to infection control cannot be underestimated. Clear roles and responsibilities are necessary for all delivery partners in this area. The recent Department of Health consultation on an updated Public Health Act was lacking in this area. It should be considered that should roles of individual partners change further specific consultation is necessary.

Consideration could be given in this area to link into existing structures such as Emergency Planning and Civil Contingency forums.

4.4 Referring to the draft plan, do you agree with Outcome 2: Starting Well and the priorities listed? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree;
4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

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1	2	3	4	5
			x	

Please include any comments in the box below.

In addition to the priorities listed, specific mention of families where English isn't a first language should be included along with a recognition of the impact of poverty on early years.

As well as stating preventing deaths, mention should be made of injuries. It should also note home accidents in particular, due to the high impact this has on the under 5 age group.

Consideration should be given to the impact of violence (particularly against Women and Girls) and perhaps the priority should be updated to state: support families to take care of their physical and mental health, *including protection from domestic violence*, with a particular focus on the first 1,000 days.

4.5 Referring to the plan, do you agree with Outcome 3: Living Well and the priorities listed? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree;

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4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

1	2	3	4	5
			x	

Please include any comments in the box below.

There is no mention of workplace health, working with businesses and the value of places of employment as “settings” to improve public health.

Previous work done on a “healthy settings” base e.g. hospitals, prisons, universities, schools and workplaces may be lost in this change of approach rather than built on if not included.

Again, the impact of violence (particularly against Women and Girls) is relevant to this section.

Where there are dual or multiple work areas involved e.g. a dual diagnosis of mental health & addiction problems, there is often little coordination and engagement between teams. A priority to engage collectively with other workstreams to tackle issues would be beneficial.

There is no mention of the particular concerns around health and homelessness which is an ever-growing problem in today’s society. A priority should be to work with homeless agencies and support services to address the health implications as part of the overall care.

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4.6 Referring to the plan, do you agree with Outcome 4: Ageing Well and the priorities listed? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

1	2	3	4	5
			X	

Please include any comments in the box below.

The inclusion of Home Accident Prevention, Active Ageing and Age Friendly is welcomed however the omission of a priority specifically related to dementia in ageing is disappointing. The inclusion of a priority to support those living with dementia to age well would be of benefit to the strategy.

Indicators – falls and frailty measures:

Data collected by Councils during home safety checks to households with people over 65 and or vulnerable adults (18-64) could be used as an indicator. For example, Percentage of households that had a home accident in the 12 months before their home safety check. Percentage of accidents that were falls etc.

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4.7 Referring to the plan, do you agree with our organisation ambition and priorities listed? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

1	2	3	4	5
			8	

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Please include any comments in the box below.

In considering the value of staff, this must not be a lip service approach, there is an expectation that this will be delivered with clear targets, measurables and continuous improvements. Employee health and wellbeing should be one of the highest priorities for PHA and they should be an exemplar organisation in this regard. If "health is your wealth" then PHA should be setting this example from within.

4.8 Is there an outcome you feel is missing or is not sufficiently reflected?

Yes []

No []

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Please include any comments in the box below:

Reduction in inequalities needs to be more prominent in stipulated priorities.

The statistical evidence illustrated should be more closely to priorities to show the evidence base from where these priorities have arisen.

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4.9 Have you any other comments or suggestions to improve the document as a whole? If so, please outline these in the box below.

Whilst the statistics are well presented they should be more clearly linked to the priorities.

Consultation process and [PHA privacy notice](#)

The PHA will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process on the PHA corporate website. The responses will be used to amend and further develop the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2030. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request, in line with Freedom of Information legislation.

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire. We very much value your input.



Council/Committee:	Neighbourhoods and Communities
Date:	25 February 2025
Report Title:	Ban on XL Bully Dogs Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Patricia Allen, Head of Public Protection, Health & Wellbeing
Approver:	Philip Thompson, Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report is to provide Elected Members with a further update on the implementation of the ban of XL Bully dogs within Northern Ireland and the current position within the Mid and East Antrim area.

2. Background

- 2.1. Elected members received reports in May, July, September and December 2024 outlining the detail of proposed new legislation and providing updates on implementation progress.
- 2.2. Legal safeguards came into operation on 05 July 2024 adding XL Bully type dogs to the list of restricted breeds and the process to obtain an Exemption Certificate closed on 31 December 2024. The result of the legislation is that from 1 January 2025, it is illegal to own an XL Bully type dog without an Exemption Certificate.
- 2.3. Licensed owners of XL Bully dogs who have obtained their Exemption Certificates for their dogs have as part of the process microchipped their dogs, obtained third-party insurance and are required to have their dogs neutered. An exemption certificate means that a dog cannot be rehomed, and the owner will retain full responsibility for complying with the safeguarding measures as introduced and controlling their dog both in the home and in public.
- 2.4. The penalty for having a XL Bully type dog without an exemption certificate is a fine up to £5000 and/or imprisonment for up to 6 months. Councils have worked closely with DAERA on practical implementation of the new safeguards and to ensure consistency of approach.



3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. There are currently approximately 698 XL Bully type dogs licensed in Northern Ireland and by 31 December 2024 675 applications for exemption certificates have been received, with 294 dogs currently neutered.
- 3.2. In the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area, there are currently 69 licensed XL Bully Type dogs, 67 exemption certificates have been issued and 25 of these dogs neutered. One dog has moved to an unknown place and investigations are ongoing.
- 3.3. A recent update from DAERA has indicated that up to 31 December 2024 only 18 applications to the compensation scheme were received for the whole of N Ireland. Compensation applies when an owner volunteers to have their dog euthanized rather than seek an exemption. Compensation claims must be submitted by 28 February 2025.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Councils continue to work closely with DAERA to ensure the remaining practical issues for the implementation of the ban. A letter from DAERA Minister to NIGLA (Appendix 1) and a further letter DAERA Officials to NI Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) (Appendix 2) outlined the Department's commitment to supporting Councils with costs of Personal Protective Equipment (circa. £40,000 overall for the 11 Councils) from the £100k budget made available.
- 4.2. MEA has been allocated £4,097 which has been used to purchase suitable protective equipment. DAERA Minister has also agreed to provide further funding for enforcement staff to attend a training course delivered by the Met Police. One MEA staff member has already attended a 10-day training course to undertaking breed type assessments in accordance with the conformation standard.
- 4.3. MEA Enforcement Officers have completed in-house training in relation to updated MEA operating procedures and health and safety risk assessments for dealing with dangerous dogs. Staff have also received training in the use of new Personal Protective Equipment.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Enforcement Officers will follow up with dog owners that have suspected XL Bully type dogs to determine if there is any breach of The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (NI) 2024. Legal advice will be followed in relation to the next steps regarding unexempted XL Bully dogs in line with



the procedure for other banned breeds. This may require seizure of unexempted dogs. Enforcement action will be taken in accordance with DAERA guidance and Council's Enforcement Policies

5.2 Further updates will be provided as necessary..

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. Elected Members are asked to:

- (i) note the details within this update.

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1	DAERA Letter to NILGA dated 12 December 2024
Appendix 2	DAERA letter to NIDAG dated 13 December 2024

**From the Office of the
Minister of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs**



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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Telephone: 028 9052 4140
Email: private.office@daera-ni.gov.uk

Our Ref: SUB-2146-2024
Date: 12 December 2024

Dear Alison

SAFEGUARDS FOR XL BULLY TYPE DOGS

As you are aware, in March 2024 I announced my decision to introduce safeguarding measures for XL Bully type dogs in Northern Ireland. Since then, my officials have worked closely with representatives from the Northern Ireland (NI) Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) on the implementation of the legislation.

NIDAG submitted a letter with a number of requests to the Department on 8 November 2024. A response is being issued directly to NIDAG, Council Chief Executives and the DAERA Permanent Secretary. However, I feel it is pertinent to communicate my position on these matters directly to NI Local Government Association (NIGLA).

Firstly, NIDAG requested that the Department brings forward legislation which would provide for an Interim Exemption Certificate. This would allow councils to return an XL Bully dog to the owner, prior to a court determination, if certain conditions have been met.

The Department has given detailed consideration to this and feel that it is problematic for several reasons. Most significantly, it is unlikely than the introduction of an Interim Exemption Certificate would absolve councils from liability should a dog that was awarded an Interim Exemption Certificate then attack someone. Additionally, primary legislation would be required as the current powers in The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (the Order) are not suffice. There is neither time nor resource for the Department to bring forward primary legislation before the deadline of 31 December 2024.

Furthermore, NIDAG has asked the Department to extend the deadline to apply for an Exemption Certificate. The application deadline is set in legislation and has been public knowledge since June 2024; therefore, I consider there has been sufficient time for XL

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We invest in people Standard

Bully dog owners to prepare. Extending the deadline would not be in the interests of public safety when the overarching purpose of this policy is to protect the public and other animals from potential attacks. I am also acutely aware that Northern Ireland scheme has had the longest application window of any similar scheme in place across the UK and Ireland.

NIDAG also requested that the Department introduce a neutering voucher scheme for XL Bully dogs. I believe that this is not necessary at this juncture as owners have until 30 June 2025 before evidence of neutering needs to be provided following the issuing of an Exemption Certificate. Further, consideration would need to be given to any potential equality issues which could arise, were such a scheme to be introduced, given that over 100 XL Bully dog owners have already neutered their animal.

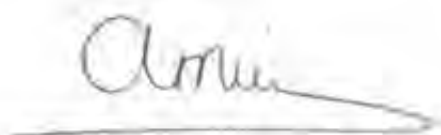
Finally, NIDAG requested that the Department confirm any further level of financial support available for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and to provide additional staff training. A commitment has been given to supporting with costs of PPE to a total of £24k, however as there is flexibility within the budget, I am now content that any unused financial provision within the £100k budget provided to support local councils in delivery of the XL Bully safeguarding measures for 24/25, is used for PPE; this takes the total amount available to support councils with PPE costs to approximately £40k.

In addition, I have considered providing further funding for training. Feedback received from local council officials indicate that the training provided on dangerous dogs by the Metropolitan (Met) Police Service is comprehensive and of the highest standard available for dog wardens. Therefore, I would be pleased to provide funding for one further dog warden from each council area to attend the Met Police training on handling of dangerous dogs. The funding will be made available, subject to my Department making the necessary amendments, and securing the relevant approvals for the business case. My officials will continue to work intensively with NIDAG on the implementation of the schemes and the funding.

As you have noted, the deadline for obtaining an Exemption Certificate is fast approaching and applications are yet to be made for the vast majority of known dogs. I want to assure NILGA that the Department will continue to lead on a proactive communications programme and I would ask that councils continue to take all steps necessary to contact owners who are yet to participate in the scheme.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to thank councils for the excellent engagement and ongoing cooperation with DAERA as we work towards the closing of the application window for XL Bully Exemption Certificates on 31 December 2024.

Yours sincerely



ANDREW MUIR MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

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If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

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From the Director of Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division
Neal Gartland



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Seamus Donaghy
Chair
Northern Ireland Dog
Advisory Group (NIDAG)

Via email

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Animal Health and Welfare Policy
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13 December 2024

Dear Seamus

LEGAL SAFEGUARDS FOR XL BULLY TYPE DOGS

Thank you for your correspondence, which I received on 8 November 2024, in which the Northern Ireland Dog Advisory Group (NIDAG) made a number of requests to the Department. I will address each one in turn following the Ministers consideration of the matters raised.

Firstly, it has been requested that the Department brings forward legislation which would provide for an Interim Exemption Certificate. This would allow councils to return an XL Bully dog to the owner, prior to a court determination, if certain conditions have been met.

The Department has given detailed consideration to this and feels that it is problematic for several reasons. Most significantly, it is unlikely that the introduction of an Interim Exemption Certificate would absolve councils from liability should a dog that was awarded an Interim Exemption Certificate then attack someone. Additionally, primary legislation would be required as the current powers in The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (the Order) are not suffice. There is neither time nor resource for the Department to bring forward primary legislation before the deadline of 31 December 2024.

NIDAG has also asked the Department to extend the deadline to apply for an Exemption Certificate. The application deadline is set in legislation and has been public knowledge since June 2024; therefore, the Minister considers that there has been sufficient time for XL Bully dog owners to prepare. Extending the deadline would not be in the interests of public safety when the purpose of this policy is to protect the public and other animals from potential attacks. We are also conscious that the Northern Ireland scheme has had

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the longest application window of any similar scheme in place across the UK and Ireland.

NIDAG has requested that the Department introduce a neutering voucher scheme for XL Bully dogs. The Minister has decided that this is not necessary at this juncture as owners have until 30 June 2025 before evidence of neutering needs to be provided following the issuing of an Exemption Certificate. Further, consideration would need to be given to any potential equality issues which could arise, were such a scheme to be introduced, given that over 100 XL Bully dog owners have already neutered their animal.

Finally, NIDAG has requested that the Department confirm any further level of financial support available for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and to provide additional staff training. A commitment had been given to supporting with costs of PPE to a total of £24k, however, as there is flexibility within the budget, the Minister has stated that he is now content that any unused financial provision within the £100k budget is used for PPE; this takes the total amount available to support councils with PPE costs to approximately £40K.

Following consideration of the excellent feedback about the training provided by the Met Police, which 13 dog wardens completed in October, the Minister wishes to provide funding for an additional dog warden from each council area to be trained. This will support councils with their health and safety responsibilities by ensuring each council area has two wardens trained to handle and identify XL Bully dogs.

As you have noted, the deadline for obtaining an Exemption Certificate is fast approaching and applications are yet to be made for the vast majority of known dogs. I want to assure NIDAG that the Department will continue to lead on a proactive communications programme, and I would ask that councils take all steps necessary to contact owners who are yet to participate in the scheme. Councils may wish to consider robust plans for enforcement, should dogs remain without certificates.

Lastly, may I take the opportunity to thank you and other members of the NIDAG for the excellent engagement and ongoing cooperation with DAERA, and my team in particular, as we work towards the closing of the application window for XL Bully Exemption Certificates on 31 December 2024.

The Minister has communicated these decisions to the President of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

Further, I have copied this letter to Council Chief Executives and the DAERA Permanent Secretary.

Yours sincerely



NEAL GARTLAND
Director
Animal Health and Welfare Policy

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Council/Committee: Neighbourhoods & Communities

Date: 25 February 2025

Report Title: Registration of Skin Piercing Business

Publication Status: Open

Author: Patricia Allen, Head of Public Protection, Health & Wellbeing

Approver: Philip Thompson, Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Elected Members approval for the registration of one business under the Council's Skin Piercing Bye Laws.

2. Background

2.1. Legal Background

Under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1985, the Council is responsible for registering and regulating businesses which carry out skin piercing. This can include ear piercing, cosmetic piercing, semi-permanent skin colouring, tattooing, acupuncture and electrolysis.

2.2. Skin Piercing Byelaws

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in pursuance of section 90 (c) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and Article 14(7) of the 1985 Order set byelaws for the purposes of securing the cleanliness of premises registered under Article 14 of Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. These byelaws set out the requirements regarding fittings in those premises and of registered persons and persons assisting them and the cleansing and so far as appropriate sterilisation of instruments, materials and equipment used in connection with the businesses of skin piercing activities.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. An application for registration has been received from the following premise to be registered under the byelaws for a skin piercing practice:
 - Keith McAllister, Electric Art Tattoo Studio, 93 Main Street, Larne, BT40 1HJ for semi-permanent skin colouring.
- 3.2. Inspection of the premises has found that the fittings and facilities were satisfactory. There were also suitable arrangements for ensuring



sterilisation of any instruments, materials and equipment used in skin piercing activities. The requirements of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Skin Piercing Bye Laws 2015 were found to have been fulfilled.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. The premises will be inspected routinely to ensure compliance with Council Skin Piercing Bye Laws.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Officers are satisfied that registration can proceed on the basis that all requirements under the appropriate bye laws in relation to both the applications listed within this report have been met.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to grant approval to register the following business under the Council's Skin Piercing Byelaws:
 - (i) Keith McAllister, Electric Art Tattoo Studio, 93 Main Street, Larne, BT40 1HJ - for the business of semi-permanent skin colouring.



Council/Committee:	Neighbourhood & Communities
Date:	25 February 2025
Report Title:	Safety Standards & Alarm Regulations for Private Rented Properties
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Patricia Allen, Head of Public Protection, Health and Wellbeing
Approver:	Philip Thompson, Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform Elected Members on the introduction of The Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and The Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and seek agreement on the Council's fixed penalty fee for offences under these regulations.

2. Background

- 2.1. Members were previously advised on the introduction of the Private Tenancies (NI) Act 2022 Act which brought about amendments to The Private Tenancies (NI) Order 2006, the main legislative framework for the regulation of private rented sector housing. The overarching objectives of the Private Tenancies Act were:
 - to make the private rented sector a safer and more secure housing option for a wider range of households,
 - to ensure better regulation of the sector and
 - to offer greater protection to private renters.
- 2.2. **The Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024** comes into force on 1st April 2025. The regulations will require landlords to have the electrical installations in their properties checked (inspected and tested) by a qualified person at least every 5 years. The electrical installations must meet the required standards and landlords must provide a copy of the electrical safety report to their tenants, and to the Council if requested to do so.



2.3. Important dates for compliance:

- the Regulations are operational from 1 April 2025, for all new private tenancies granted on or after this date
- existing tenancies granted before 1 April 2025, have to 1 December 2025 to comply

2.2. If the inspection identifies an electrical fault the landlord must take remedial corrective action to ensure the property is compliant with the Electrical Safety Standards Regulations.

2.3. A landlord who fails to comply with any of their duties under these regulations commits an offence. An authorised officer of a Council may take the landlord to court for non-compliance or issue a fixed penalty notice on the landlord to avoid prosecution through the Courts.

2.4. **The Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024** came into force on 1st September 2024 and introduced a responsibility on a landlord to install and keep in proper working order sufficient alarms for detecting smoke, heat and carbon monoxide within any property that they rent out to tenants. Alarms need to provide sufficient warning of potential danger. Additionally, any alarm within the property must be repaired or replaced once a landlord has been informed it has become faulty.

2.5. The Regulations came into operation on 1 September 2024, for all new private tenancies granted on or after this date. Existing tenancies granted before 1 September 2024, must comply by 1 December 2024. This means all private rented properties must now comply and install the required smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms.

2.6. If tenants find that their alarms are not in working order during the tenancy, they need to report this to the relevant landlord or letting agent. Landlords will be responsible for repairing or replacing any faulty alarms once they have been notified that a fault has occurred.

2.7. A landlord who fails to comply with any of their duties under these regulations commits an offence. An authorised officer of a Council may take the landlord to court for non-compliance or issue a fixed penalty notice on the landlord to avoid prosecution through the Courts.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. If the Council believes that an offence has been committed under The Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, an authorised council officer may offer the landlord the



opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction by the payment of a fixed penalty fine set at a level between £0-£1000.

- 3.2. If the Council believes that an offence has been committed The Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 the authorised council officer may offer the landlord the opportunity of discharging any liability to conviction by the payment of a fixed penalty fine set at a level between £0-£500.
- 3.3. Given the importance of these regulations, and the risk that non-compliance could result in the accidental death of a tenant, it would be prudent for Council to consider approving the fixed penalty amounts at the respective maximums for each offence under the relevant regulations.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. The introduction of these regulations increases the enforcement burden on existing staff which has already experienced an increase demand on housing and statutory nuisance services over recent years, coupled with competing priorities on other duties with the Environmental Health Service. The Department for Communities is aware of concerns raised on behalf of all Councils in terms of resources, however there is no financial support available currently to assist Councils with these additional powers.
- 4.2. The fixed penalty regime introduced for the new offences may provide some income, but it will not be possible to accurately forecast what this will be. Setting the fixed penalty to the maximum amounts is a key consideration in the absence of any financial support to implement this important legislation.
- 4.3. Whilst this legislation expands the scope of the regulations around private tenancies, officers will undertake the additional compliance checks during routine scheduled inspections and in response to tenant complaints. The impact on wider service delivery will be kept under review by management.
- 4.4. The Scheme of Delegation will be updated to reflect the introduction of the new regulations, and to record the details of those officers that will be authorised to enforce the new provisions.
- 4.5. The new requirements for fire, smoke and CO alarms are quite complex so it will take time for landlords and officers alike to become familiar with them. Landlords have already raised concerns about being able to get

electricians and obtain reports, so Council will have to take this into consideration as it seeks to enforce the new regulations.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Authorised Officers will work closely with landlords to improve knowledge and understanding of the new requirements initially. Thereafter to ensure private tenancies are compliant, they will consider and take appropriate enforcement action, including the issuing of fixed penalty notices, where offences under these regulations have been identified.
- 5.2. It is proposed that the fixed penalty fee for each offense under the Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 should be set at £500, and that the fixed penalty fee for each offense under the Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 should be set at £1000, the maximum amount permitted in each case.
- 5.3. Management will monitor the additional resource required for increased compliance checks and enforcement associated with these regulations for the first 12 months from implementation to establish the impact on wider service delivery.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1 Elected Members are asked to:
 - (i) approve the fixed penalty rate for offences under the Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 at £1000.
 - (ii) approve the fixed penalty rate for offences under the Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms for Private Tenancies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 at £500



Council/Committee: Neighbourhood and Communities
Date: 25 February 2025

Report Title: Ulster History Circle Partnership
Publication Status: Open

Author: Laura Cowan, Strategic Tourism and Regeneration Manager

Approver: Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Elected Members' approval for Council to engage in an annual partnership with Ulster History Circle.

2. Background

- 2.1. Ulster History Circle is a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation that places commemorative blue plaques in public places, in towns and villages all over Northern Ireland, in honour of men and women who have contributed to the Province's history.
- 2.2. In order to obtain a blue plaque, a proposal will be considered if the person to be commemorated has been deceased for at least 20 years, or if they have been deceased less than 20 years ago would have reached the centenary of their birth.
- 2.3. The decision to award a blue plaque is made by the Committee of Ulster History Circle. In addition to being deceased for 20 years, those proposed to be honoured must:
 - be associated with the nine counties of Ulster through birth, education, work, or vocation; and
 - have made a significant contribution to the development or delivery of education, industry, commerce, science, arts and literature, international affairs, or other calling locally, nationally, or internationally.
- 2.4. In recent years there have been five plaques placed within the Mid and East Antrim Borough; at Carnlough, Gleno and Larne (3). Most recently, in November 2024, a blue plaque was erected to honour Larne-born poet, and inaugural curator of Larne Museum, John Clifford.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. Unlike similar bodies in the rest of the United Kingdom, who receive government grants, Ulster History Circle depends on Local Authorities, individuals and businesses to fund individual plaques.



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- 3.2. Ulster History Circle would be keen to develop a formal relationship with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council as it has with other local authorities who are involved in the blue plaque programme.
- 3.3. Engaging in an annual partnership agreement with Ulster History Circle would secure three plaques per year to be erected in the Mid and East Antrim Borough. Cost to Council of funding the partnership would be £1,400 per year. These costs go towards the fabrication and installation of each blue plaque erected in the Borough.
- 3.4. To formalise the partnership, a Service Level Agreement will be issued from Council to Ulster History Circle. The Arts and Culture Manager will be the lead contact for the partnership, with quarterly meetings held between Council and Ulster History Circle. The partnership will be reviewed on an annual basis and brought to Elected Members for approval to continue each year.
- 3.5. Ulster History Circle has indicated a desire to next install a blue plaque to Charlotte Riddell on the Library building in Carrickfergus. Charlotte Riddell, born in Carrickfergus on 30 September 1832, was the youngest daughter of James Cowan of Carrickfergus, High Sheriff for the County of Antrim. A popular and influential writer in the Victorian period. Author of 56 books, novels and short stories, and also became part-owner and editor of St. James' Magazine, a prominent London literary journal in the 1860s.
- 3.6. A formal request to erect this blue plaque, along with any future plaques, will be brought to Elected Members for approval in advance.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial implications – cost to Council of funding the partnership would be £1,400 per year. Budget to fund the partnership, if approved, would be sourced from the existing Arts and Culture 2024-2025 budget allocation.
- 4.2. Honouring key artists from the Borough aligns with The Executive Office's 'Together: Building a United Community Strategy theme of Our Cultural Expression' strategy, which seeks 'to create a community, which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity, and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.'
- 4.3. This proposal links to the new Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 themes and objectives. Under the pillar of Place:
 - Help drive sustainable economic growth by promoting the Borough as a leading visitor and cultural destination, utilising our natural, and built, heritage and assets.



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5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. It is proposed that Council engages in this partnership agreement with Ulster History Circle.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to
 - (i) approve this partnership agreement with Ulster History Circle, which will see the erection of three blue plaques in the Mid and East Antrim Borough each year.

7. Appendices / Links

Ulster History Circle: <https://ulsterhistorycircle.org.uk/>



Council/Committee: Neighbourhoods and Communities Committee

Date: 25 February 2025

Report Title: Pilot Mid and East Antrim Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme – accommodation providers

Publication Status: Open

Author: Laura Cowan, Strategic Tourism and Regeneration Manager

Approver: Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to outline details of a Pilot Mid and East Antrim Accessible and Inclusive Tourism programme targeted at small to medium accommodation providers.

2. Background

- 2.1. Within the Mid and East Antrim Tourism Marketing Action Plan 2024 - 2025 a key objective is to deliver a variety of support programmes to grow, support and sustain new and existing businesses. To deliver on the relevant section of Councils Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan, a key action is to facilitate a skills development programme for tourism businesses.
- 2.2. One of Tourism NI's Strategic Programmes under industry Development Priorities 2024/2025 is Inclusive and Accessible Tourism. 2025 will see the roll out to industry of a new Inclusive and Accessible Tourism Toolkit with associated industry checklists and e-learning modules. Industry roadshow events are also planned to highlight these supports and the importance of this issue. The proposed Council programme is complementary to Tourism NI's planned activity and they have agreed to work in partnership with Council to promote this programme to all certified accommodation providers within Mid and East Antrim.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The Mid and East Antrim Embracing Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme has been designed to provide accommodation businesses with the skills to improve the service they offer to customers with a disability and to provide the vital accessibility information these customers need before choosing to visit somewhere for the first time.
- 3.2. This is a pilot programme for small to medium bricks and mortar accommodation businesses (excluding hotels) and incorporates both a



training element and an industry recognised accessibility assessment undertaken by experienced, trained surveyors from AccessAble. It will run between February and March 2025. (Please note that the programme is only available for one venue, for example, if a business owns three self-catering cottages, the discounted assessment can only apply to one).

3.3 There are 2 elements to the programme:

Part 1: Participate in a FREE full day WorldHost Inclusive Service training session with maximum 2 staff members per business.

Part 2: Obtain a discounted onsite accessibility assessment which will involve an AccessAble surveyor collecting facts, measurements and photographs to enable a detailed access guide to be produced. The guide is all about giving people factual information, it is not a user review or rating. AccessAble will also provide an accessibility improvement report, giving ideas on accessibility improvements for the future, and tips on inclusive marketing.

3.4 As part of the programme, the Council will fund 75% of the cost of the initial accessibility assessment. Any future updates or ongoing annual costs associated with publicising information on AccessAble will be the responsibility of the business.

3.5 As part of the initiative, participating businesses will gain exposure through promotion on the AccessAble consumer website, which attracts an audience of over 6 million users. Additionally, they will receive publicity on the Council Shaped by Sea and Stone tourism website, which will feature a dedicated section to actively promote accessibility and inclusion, highlighting businesses that prioritise these values.

3.6 The programme opened for applications week commencing 3 February 2025 and is subject to criteria, see link attached below for full information and the application form.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1. Financial implications - All costs for the programme are allocated within the existing 2024/2025 tourism business engagement budget.

4.2. Human Resources - The activities as outlined will be co-ordinated by in-house Tourism staff. There will be no requirement for any additional staffing.

4.3. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan - ambition for People:

By 2028, Mid and East Antrim will be a safe, inclusive, and welcoming borough, where diversity and cultural differences are celebrated, and communities live in peace. Our people will have equity of opportunity and support to achieve their full potential, in both a professional and personal capacity. Individuals and communities will be empowered to be independent and self-sustaining, enabling us to concentrate our efforts on those who need it most. To achieve this, we will:

- Lead by example to improve equality, accessibility, and inclusion across the borough by embedding it into everything we do.
- Work in partnership with employers and stakeholders to support those seeking employment, provide upskilling support, improve access to the labour market for those with disabilities, and promote skills pathways

4.4. Links to the Vision, Mission, Values and Measures as set out in the Council approved Tourism Arts and Culture Interim Plan 2024-2027.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1. The Pilot programme with accommodation providers will run throughout February and March 2025.

5.2. Should the programme prove successful, additional roll out to more accommodation providers, visitor attractions and hospitality businesses will be planned for the 2025/2026 financial year and budgeted for accordingly.

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. It is recommended that Elected Members note:

- (i) The implementation of the proposed programme and the benefit this will bring to accommodation providers within the Borough and
- (ii) The continued promotion of accessibility and inclusion to make the Borough more accessible for visitors with disabilities.

7. Appendices / Links

Link – [Latest MEA Tourism Training Opportunities - Mid & East Antrim](#)

Link – Accessible <https://www.accessable.co.uk/>

Forward Plan – Neighbourhoods & Community Committee

1. Planned Agenda Items Next meeting 25 February 2025

Items	Purpose
Lough Neagh Partnership 2025/2026 Funding Request	Approval
Tourism Marketing Strategic Update	Noting
Dog Control Orders – New & Amended	Approval
Impending Ban on XL Bully Dogs Update	Noting
Active Travel Consultation Response	Noting
Strategic Alliance Update	Noting
Ulster History Circle Partnership	Approval
Pilot Mid and East Antrim Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Programme – accommodation providers	Noting
Shared Island – Coast-to-Coast Capital Investment Scheme 2024	Approval

2. Future Meetings

Meeting Date	Item	Purpose
08 April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gracehill UNESCO Site Update • The Gobbins Operational Update • Arts and Culture Strategic Update • Quarterly Events update & Corporate Events Annual Plan 2025-2026 • Tree Strategy Report 	Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting
20 May 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gobbins Sub-Committee Adoption of Minutes • Mid and East Antrim Tourism Arts and Culture Interim Plan for 2025-2026 and year-end report • Visitor Information Provision Progress Update • Tourism Product Development and Regeneration Strategic Update (Quarterly) • Donations to Museums • Events Sub Committee adoption of minutes 	Report for Approval Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Approval Report for Approval

3. Items to be programmed

Item	Purpose
ToR	Updates as and when required
Grant Awards Quarterly Updates	
Environment Fund	If funding is secured, progress project – business case
Tullygarley?	Outcome of Survey? Proposed next steps?
Access and Inclusion Funding	Report for Approval
Age Friendly	Regular update
Leisure Transformation	Update on progress with filling new structure
Community Resuscitation	Update on multi-agency engagement
Animal Welfare Service	Update on funding post JR. Approval to adopt new delivery/funding model
Town Halls Update	To update Elected Members on progress of Arts & Culture team's involvement in improving town hall booking processes and to seek approval for way forward
Museum Accreditation of Arthur Cottage	To update Elected Members on application for accreditation

