Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Mid Ulster District Council
Arts Outreach Plan 2025/2026

the burnavon

Outreach Arts

Outreach and Development Arts programmes form an important part of the development of arts activities within Mid Ulster. Mid Ulster District Council, seek to develop and deliver a district wide Outreach Arts Plan (linked to Burnavon Arts Centre programme) which will focus on offering activity to groups and individuals. The aim is to make arts more inclusive and accessible with the Burnavon Arts Centre, while also targeting those with limited access to the arts, “Bringing Art to the Community”. Council will seek to deliver this in partnership with local groups, schools, arts agencies, and our strategic arts theatre partners located in the community including: Bardic Theatre, Craic Theatre, An Carn Theatre, Glasgowbury, The Hub, Brantry Bard.

The Arts Plan will contribute and partner the direction of a number of strategies and plans for the District:

- Mid Ulster Community Plan is built around five key themes, and the Community Arts Plan will contribute to the development of Theme 3: Education & Skills and to Theme 4: Health & Wellbeing.
- The Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan (draft 2024-28) also outlines three key themes, the Plan will seek to actively achieve positive action under Theme1: Our Service Deliver, Theme 2: Leadership & Partnership for Local Growth, Theme 3: Being the Best Council Possible.

The Arts Council of Northern Irelands 10 Year Strategy outlines the key priorities - To develop and champion the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy.

Mid Ulster District Council will strive to take our programmes in this direction.
The Community Arts Plan will be delivered under the following themes through the Burnavon Programme of Events or our supported Outreach Programmes:

- **Education & Youth Engagement Programme**
- **Art Engagement & Support Programme**
- **Older People & Disability Arts Programme**
- **Arts Cultural Programme**
- **Mid Ulster Arts Showcase**
- **Strategic Partner Engagement**
- **Creative Industries Engagement Programme**

Education & Youth Engagement Programme

Project	Detail	Target	Duration	Budget	Lead
Schools Project Primary Schools	Engagement of primary schools/students through workshops to develop an early interest in the arts Council procures facilitators to development and deliver programme	Approx.. 1500 participants per year	48 primary schools – P6/P7 – each year 96 primary schools - schools will be engaged bi annually Project delivered over a number of weeks	£27,000 To be procured	Arts
Special Education Project with schools	Engage young people in special education to use their senses skills to identify and explore different art forms	8 Special Schools / learning support units within the Mid Ulster area. 1 class per school	One project per School PA Project delivered over a number of weeks	£6000	Arts

Burnavon Activities					
Theatre Performances and activities for schools	Burnavon Arts Centre will hold a number of events targeting primary schools and post primary schools to visit the theatre space and enjoy live performances /workshops This programme will be subsidised	600 participants	A number of shows/ workshops annually	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon

Summer Youth Activities	Deliver a number of interactive workshops for young people to participate in creative skills – comic art, digital fun, fun with felt Workshops in Burnavon	100 participants	June/July	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon

Art Engagement & Support Programmes

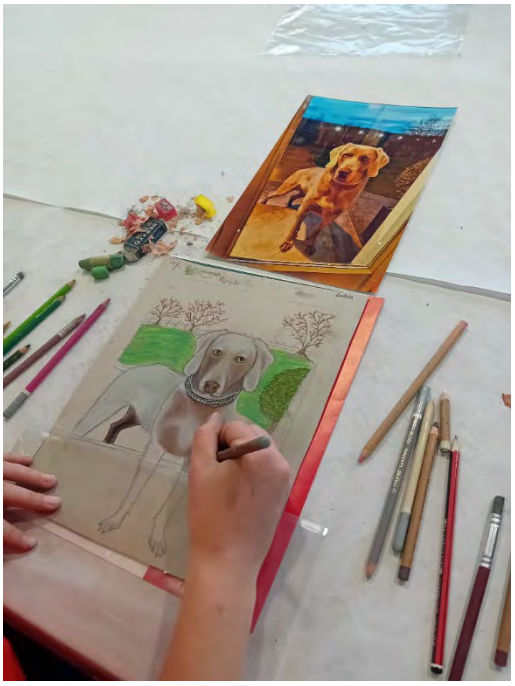
Project	Detail	Target	Duration	Budget	Lead
Support community art groups to engage with the Burnavon	Engage groups with the Arts – 1. Cookstown Youth Choir - £1000 2. Superstars - £1000 3. Burnavon Writers - £1000 4. Dungannon Choir - £1000 5. Magherafelt Choir - £1000 Further engagement across Mid Ulster to support/develop new groups (e.g venue hire- £500)	160 participants Weekly throughout year	All year	£5,500	Arts
Burnavon Activities					
Support Mental Health week	Offer arts/craft activities to engage and develop an interest in the arts	50 participants	Mental Health Awareness week 6 - 11 May	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon Arts

Burnavon Workshops	A varied number of workshops delivered across the year in Arts and Crafts to target different groups including neurodiverse, children, adults	1250 participants	April - March	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon Arts
Burnavon Programme of Events	Productions, performances, show, various art forms throughout the year	20000 (house and hire programme)	April - March	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon
Easter Fun Day	Engaging families in arts and crafts. Mid Ulster District Council event	1400 participants	One per annum	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon
Christmas Celebration Concert	Engaging families in the arts and opportunity for local artists to perform	500 participants	One per annum	Burnavon programme	Burnavon
Christmas Grotto	Provision of Santa's Grotto in Burnavon	Children, Families and local residents	December 2025	£2000	Burnavon Arts

Older People & Disability Arts Programme

Project	Detail	Target	Duration	Budget	Lead
Disability & Inclusive Arts Programme	Support to disability groups across the District with arts outreach inclusive arts activity	Groups – Day Centres, Day Opportunities (statutory & voluntary) Engage with 23 centres	Timeline developed to suit the groups	£25,500	Arts

Burnavon Activities					
Creative Arts workshops for older people	Host a series of workshops aimed at people aged 60y+ to learn new creative skills & meet new people	50 participants	October Positive Aging week	Burnavon programme Age Friendly Co-Ordinator	Burnavon Arts Partner Age Friendly



Arts Cultural Programme

Project	Detail	Target	Duration	Budget	Lead
Traditional Music in Schools (Primary) Project	Children P4 to P7 have an opportunity to learn to play the guitar, mandolin, tin whistle, flute, mandolin and banjo Delivered via cross community Participants perform at a number of Council events through the year	400 participants from various schools per week	Weekly (academic year)	£8,000 Arts £6,000 Good Relations To be procured for 3 year Sep 2026 – June 2029 Part funded by Arts & Good Relations	Arts
St Patrick's Community Concert	Engaging families in the arts and opportunity for local artists to perform	500 participants	One per annum	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon
Ulster Scots Cultural Celebration Event	A series of events/workshop to celebrate Ulster Scots culture	100 participants	June	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon
Ulster-Scots Leid Week 2025	Promote Ulster Scots culture through a series of activity @ Burnavon &Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House Talks Creative Writing. Scottish Ceilidh Dancing for the community	100 participants	November Ulster-Scots Leid Week 2025	Burnavon Programme Ranfurly House Programme	Burnavon & Ranfurly Linking Ulster Scots Community Network/ Ulster Scots Agency

Ulster Scots Agency Activities	To explore opportunities to partner with Ulster-Scots Agency to deliver programmes	Target TBC	Based on partner proposals	Dependent on funding made available from Ulster Scots Agency	Arts Partner Ulster Scots Agency
RPBSA NI & Piping with Young Children	Support Mid Ulster Pipe band in their Annual event and support young people through workshops to engage in the traditional music of piping. Delivered via cross community to support children to perform	5 x Workshops Pre and post event 3,000 Event numbers	June 2025	£10,000 - GR Partner Good Relations	GR Officer

Mid Ulster Arts Showcase

Project	Detail	Target	Duration	Budget	Lead
Mid Ulster Arts Showcase	Shining a light on our local arts scene over the month of March, celebrating various arts forms including; Music, Drama, Dance Family focussed, Workshops, Exhibitions Taster Sessions Focusing on the creative work of the strategic arts partners and other arts delivery partners. Craic Theatre, An Carn; Bardic Theatre, The Hub, Glasgowbury, The Brantry, plus other local drama groups and venues across the District It will seek to complement programmes being delivered by Burnavon Arts Centre, Seamus Heaney Homeplace, Hill of The O'Neill/RanfurlyHouse Good Relations, Seachtain na Gaeilge Develop links with local businesses to offer pre-theatre meals		March 2026	£10,000	Arts Strategic Partners Other Arts groups across the District may have arts offerings during the period and advertised as part of the programme- Pomeroy Players Mid Ulster Drama Society Bright Young Things Castlehill Theatre Group

MID ULSTER ARTS SHOWCASE

Shining a light on our local arts scene

Community Strategic Partner Engagement

Project	Detail	Participants	Duration	Budget	Lead
Strategic Community Arts Partners	Engage with the community arts partners ref outreach programme delivery – Bardic, Craic, Glasgowbury, An Carn, The Hub, Brantry	20,000	Annually	Link to the Community Grants	Arts Partner Neighbourhood Development

Creative Industries Programme

Project	Detail	Target	Duration	Budget	Lead
Monthly exhibitions @ Burnavon	Exhibition space for local professional / community artists and groups to showcase their work - include schools, local crafters etc. The 2 projects funded through Arts (Disability & Schools) will display the outcomes of their projects August will support Craft NI month	Artists / Community Groups etc	Monthly	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon

Winter Craft & Food Fair	Craft event within the Burnavon to offer artisan crafters the opportunity to showcase and sell products Partner local Creative Businesses	30 – 50 exhibitors 2000 visitors	1 day event Nov	Burnavon Programme	Burnavon
Creative Industries Collaborations	Explore opportunities to partner with: Screen Works Education Programme Creative Industries Apprenticeship Programme SWC BBC Film NI Apprenticeship Programme Nerve Centre Others	Target: All Schools PP Community Planning Careers Forum	Annually		Arts Link to LMP SWC Screen Works Other agencies as opportunity arises

In addition to the delivery of an Arts & Outreach programme, the Burnavon Arts Centre continues to lead as a facility, ensuring accessibility and inclusion for our community.

The Burnavon Arts Centre holds the following accreditation:

- Autism NI Impact Award (re-accreditation 2025)
- Equality and Access Standard Award (September 2024)
- Welcome Host Business Award (2024)

For 2025-2026 we will continue to deliver a varied programme of events to include all art genres.

We work with a range of international, national and local professional artists and promoters and community arts groups and organizations.

We deliver a variety of arts and craft classes, targeting various demographics including ASD and neurodiverse programmes.

Arts Programme Budget 2025-2026

Activity	Arts Budget	Other budget
TMIS	£8,000	Plus contribution from GR (£6k)
Schools Project	£ 27,000	
Special Education Programme	£ 6,000	
Theatre Performances and activities for Schools		Burnavon budget
Summer Youth Activities		Burnavon budget
Support Programme	£5,500	
Mental Health Workshops		Burnavon budget
Burnavon workshops		Burnavon budget
Burnavon programme		Burnavon budget
Easter Fun Day		Burnavon budget
St Patrick's Celebration concert		Burnavon budget
Christmas Celebration concert		Burnavon budget
Disability Arts Inclusive Arts Programme	£25,500	
Older Peoples workshops		Burnavon budget
Cultural Celebration Event		Burnavon budget
Ulster-Scots Leid Week		Burnavon and Ranfurly budget
Additional Ulster-Scots Agency activities		Depended on funding
Mid Ulster Arts Showcase	£10,000	
Creative Industries – support exhibitions		Burnavon budget
Winter Food & Craft Fair		Burnavon budget
Creative Industries Collaboration work		Depended on funding from potential partners
Christmas Grotto	£2,000	
TOTAL	**£84,000**	

Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House

Action Plan 2025 – 2026

Heritage Preservation & Visitor Experience

Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House is steeped in history with an abundance of rich engaging stories incorporating a vast history from the bronze age right up to the twentieth century when it was a barracks and arguably the present day as the chosen venue for the First and Deputy First Ministers press briefings during the pandemic. This presents a remarkable asset in terms of tourism potential for Mid Ulster District Council. It brings to life the most enigmatic and astonishing stories in Irish history – The Flight of The Earls and subsequent Plantation of Ulster of which Hugh O'Neill was the central character. These two seismic events dramatically changed Ireland and in particular Ulster and its landscape. We will continue to capitalise on opportunities to recount this facscinating period in our history and strive to elevate peoples interest and curiosity surrounding the importance that Dungannon played in these signifcant events.

Heritage & Visitor Experience Plan

Our award-winning programme for schools, colleges and the public is designed to make the Hill's history come alive in the place where it happened. The programme provides an excellent mechanism to engage residents and enhance the understanding of future generations. The continual evolvement of the learning programme is critical in channelling our great stories. Therefore, we will continue to review the current programme aligning it to the Hill's history to support the brand identity, positioning and promotion of Hill of The O'Neill, incorporating programmes, pre and post plantation, to illuminate all aspects of cultural identity.

Project	Detail	Target	Timeline	Budget	Lead
Traditional Craft Workshops	Implement a programme of art classes including traditional Irish heritage crafts to engage residents and increase footfall across the site e.g. Textiles/linen, basket making, willow weaving, painting, ceramics, St Brigid's Day cross making, sewing, photography, crocheting Programme to incorporate craft for key events in the calendar i.e. Halloween, Christmas etc.	Minimum 21 x 1- day workshops 5 x 4 - 6-week courses	Ongoing	£11,000	Manager Project Support Assistant
Walking Tours	Walking Tour of Battle of The Yellow Ford with historian and archaeologist. Walking Tour of Dungannon Town Centre	2 Walking Tours 40 people	**May** **Summer**	£1,000	Manager Visitor Experience Officer Project Support Assistant

History/Heritage Talks	Deliver 3 history talks associated with the site including but not limited to The O'Neill's, Ranfurly, Flight of The Earls to instil an understanding and sense of place in terms of the integral position Dungannon has played within the context of Irish history	3 per annum	Ongoing (excluding July & August)	£500	Manager Visitor Experience Officer Project Support Assistant
Heritage Preservation	Regular NIEA engagement and maintenance Quarterly update meetings with relevant Officers		Ongoing	N/A	Manager
Maintain connections internally and externally with interest groups	Ensure linkages are sustained with history/heritage community groups, cross border links in Donegal. Explore the possibility of joint promotions and projects		Ongoing	N/A	Manager Visitor Experience Officer Project Support Assistant
Promote Hill of The O'Neill complementing TNI Embrace a Giant Spirit experience	Increase the profile of Hill of The O'Neill as one of the most important heritage sites in Ireland. Continue to link with the Tourism & Heritage department in the delivery of all tourism experiences and in building relationships with stakeholders	2 joint promotions	MUDC Tourism, Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland		Manager Project Support Assistant Visitor Experience Officer Sales & Marketing Officer

Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Tours	Deliver heritage guided-tours as requested, with targeted marketing campaign. Through continued marketing we will aim to increase visitor numbers/ tours to at least pre-2020 levels. Deliver tours in Irish, when requested, in collaboration with Irish Language Officers Explore potential of Augmented Reality self-guided tours	Increase tours by 20% from 2025 – 2026. Visitor numbers to exhibition 1000	Ongoing		Manager Visitor Experience Officer Irish language Officers
Develop a sensory zone for schools and public	Autism NI Impact Award accreditation - creating a bright, engaging, sensory zone which can be used during larger events and increase the offering ensuring an autism-friendly environment across the site	Public and attendees / Visitors Classes (Evening)	August 2025		Manager Visitor Experience Officer Technical Supervisor

Project	Detail	Target	Timeline	Budget	Lead
Heritage Schools Engagement	Investigating and celebrating the heritage of Hill of The O'Neill through storytelling and creative writing Celebrating National Poetry Day and World book day activities –Heritage on the Hill, Irish Famine and Dungannon Workhouse, the stimulus being the novel "Under the Hawthorn Tree, World book creative writing Dungannon: Where I Live (for local schools) is a learning activity which aims to assist school pupils to participate in learning outside the classroom by exploring the local built environment and heritage of Dungannon.	**Primary/post-primary** **2 events** **Tours on request** **Dungannon where I live**	**All year**	£1200 Officer time	Visitor Experience Officer Link Dungannon Library
QUB Open Learning Course: **Looking at the O'Neill County – Heritage of South Tyrone Part 3**	Work in partnership with QUB to develop an open learning course focused on the heritage of Tyrone. This course aims to develop an awareness amongst the local community of the rich heritage in the area	**Adult** 20 participants	**April - May 2025** 4 Weeks (Tuesdays: 6.30pm – 8.30pm)	£650	QUB Visitor Experience Officer

STEM with young people: **Reimagining Hill of The O'Neill with Minecraft**	STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). Pupils take a tour of the exhibition on the Flight of the Earls and the Plantation of Ulster and then explore Hill of The O'Neill. This is followed by a STEM workshop that involves the use of Minecraft in which the O'Neill Castle on Hill of The O'Neill is reimagined. The STEM workshop is delivered in partnership with the AMMA Centre, Armagh	**Post Primary /Primary** Key Stage 2 & 3 pupils Primary & post-primary schools	**June** 3 weeks 1 full day session per school	£5,000 (subsiding transport)	Visitor Experience Officer AMMA
Heritage and Forest School Development	From September to December, 6 schools participate in four sessions per school. Teachers and school staff involved can undertake a Forest School Leader OCN Level 3 qualification, and they receive tuition from NIFSA personnel, thereby creating sustainability	**Nursery/Primary** Nursery and primary school – local to Hill of The O'Neill Call for applications 6 class places available	**September to December 2025**	£3000	Visitor Experience Officer Parks Manager NIFSA Facilitator

Events

We will continue to deliver and host an array of events that incorporate our heritage and engage the local community and visitor.

Project	Detail	Target	Timeline	Budget	Lead
St Patrick's Day **(link to Arts Showcase in March)**	Celebration of fun day of Irish traditional music & dance with arts & crafts and entertainment Link with Irish Language Officer regarding Seachtain na Gaeilge activities, Community Cultural parade, Mid Ulster Arts Showcase	3500 community/ visitors	**March 2025**	£7,000	Manager VEO Seachtain na Gaeilge
Easter Family Fun Day	A free family fun day with various arts activities and entertainment for all the Family Saturday 19th April (Quiet Hour 11 -12 noon)	2,000 community/visitors	**April 2025**	£4,000	Manager Project Support Assistant
Way of The Warrior Events	A journey of discovery on this Warrior experience day -learn how O'Neill would have readied his recruits for battle! Experience archery, sword and spear workshops - the new warriors will graduate ready to defend Hill of The O'Neill Link package to Pomeroy Forest and Magical Trails, and Dungannon town amenities	Saturdays in holiday period 10am-4pm Age 7+	**Summer** **Potential May, June, July period) 2025**	£4000 Officer time	Manager Visitor Experience Officer Project Support Officer

Shakespeare on the Hill 2025	Mid-Summer Nights Dream - Bardic Theatre Shakespeare's famous play will provide an immersive theatrical experience aimed at both the public and school groups (Shakespeare on the Hill represents O'Neill, as a well-known King who travelled across the UK and Europe engaging with royal families and leaders. Shakespeare a noted playwright moved in the same circles. It is highly likely that both would have been in the same places at the same time)	2/3 performances with a preview evening and public performances summer	**Summer** **(August) 2025**	£10,000	Partner Bardic Theatre Manager VEO
Ulster Orchestra on the Hill	Mid-Summer Night of music- Ulster Orchestra Group Experience the annual event of the Ulster Orchestra on the Hill, a night of music in a beautiful location.	Summer Performance	**Summer** **(August) 2025**	Covered event	Partner Ulster Orchestra Manager VEO
European Heritage Open Day	European Heritage Open Days is an annual event celebrating local architecture, history and culture throughout Europe Willowcraft Create Links with Love Heritage NI	1 session (10 people per session)	**September 2025** 13th & 14th September	£300	Manager Visitor Experience Officer

Murder Mystery	Murder Mystery evening in partnership with Craic. "Treachery in Tyrone" set in 1594 at the castle. The sudden and violent death of a nobleman, who has caused his untimely death and why, The Earl of Tyrone wants answers and the identity of the guilty party	45 participants Local community/ visitors	**October 2025**	£1,850	Manager Project Support Officer
Ulster-Scots Language Week	A celebratory event of Ulster Scots food, traditional dance and Scottish Ceilidh Dancing A food demonstration event showcasing flavours and delicacies - Link with Ulster-Scots Community Network and Ulster-Scots Agency	150 community /Visitors	**November 2025**	£2,500 Scottish Ceilidh & Food Demo	Manager Project Support Officer Ulster-Scots Community Network/ Agency
Christmas at Hill of The O'Neill **Santa's Grotto**	Santa's Grotto – Children get to meet Santa as he drops into Hill of The O'Neill Link to Council Corporate Events	600 community/ visitors	**December 2025**	£4,000	Manager Visitor Experience Officer Sales & Marketing

Conferencing & Civic Space

Mid Ulster, and indeed Northern Ireland, welcomes a significant number of business visitors (with and without family) for meetings, conferences and short-term working contracts. Tyrone is a significant hub for manufacturing and engineering. The Dungannon area in particular has the largest crushing, screening and recycling sector in the world, and offers a substantial untapped market with many global corporations in close proximity to Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House. This offers considerable potential to engage and attract the global businesses within our locality, enabling them to host events that impress and inspire their international clients at a unique location that provides an impressive back drop and spectacular panoramas.

The unique selling point of its breathtaking views, combined with its heritage, presents the ability to create a sought-after location for all. The offering and expertise onsite could be exploited to provide bespoke options to enhance customer events such as food and wine tastings, craft demonstrations, lectures, banquets, workshops and of course entertainment.

Project	Detail	Target	Timeline	Budget	Lead
Develop conferencing at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House **Google/Trip Advisor**	The O'Neill's suitability for conferences and meetings by showcasing its facilities Develop dedicated, digital content to encourage business visitors to return/ or recommend HOTON&RH Open Day for local businesses, Traders and residents	Increase by a minimum of 10% from previous year Aim to achieve 4* and above Regularly respond to reviews/shared	Ongoing	N/A	Manager Sales & Marketing Officer
Viewing Tower	Promote the viewing tower in all marketing materials and within the local community to increase usage	Residents and visitor	Ongoing	N/A	Manager Sales & Marketing Officer

Wedding Venue – for civic ceremonies	Promote -Tower Room, Events Space, Plateau for Civic Ceremonies & afternoon tea Wedding Ceremony & Refreshments Package	Residents/Visitors	Ongoing		Manager Sales & Marketing Officer
Square Box as a Creative Hub	Promote the Square Box with technical advancements Attract smaller hire uses e.g. community theatre.	Increase hires of space to attract different audiences			Manager Technical Supervisor
Event Space -for a range of events	Promotion of the events space for public and private hire – small events indoor all year, large events outdoor April to September	Maintain hire of space			Manager Technical Supervisor

Community engagement with local groups	Hill of The O Neill & Ranfurly House for community use – linking other Council venues e.g. Gardners Hall as a community venue, Dungannon Leisure Centre and Drumcoo as leisure venues	Residents and community groups	Ongoing	N/A	Manager Facility Supervisor Sales & Marketing Officer

Community Park

We will enhance the facilities and opportunities for residents through the creation and preservation of a picturesque, welcoming and clean space. We will ensure the maintenance and upkeep of the heritage park for both the local community and visitors. Through engagement with residents and landowners we will improve access to the Hill by reopening access routes, enabling residents to utilise the Town's EARLS Trail.

Project	Description	Target	Timeline	Budget	Lead
Hill of The O'Neill Park	Encourage greater use of the Public Park on Hill of The O'Neill through a series of events and activities. Provision of outdoor games on the terraced gardens for the summer season	Families, local residents, & Visitors	Ongoing	N/A	Manager Duty Manager
Earls Trail	Linking the newly opened gate at Circular Road to Hill of The O'Neill and wider Earls Trail. New promotional leaflet in place to promote the 7km walking/cycling route around Dungannon Town	Local Resident's Visitors	Ongoing	N/A	Manager Partner Parks Department for Earls Trail
Mast	Work towards the removal of the telecommunications mast Complete a feasibility study to ascertain the cost of removing the mast and the restoration of the sites landscape and recognition as a significant historical asset	Residents & Visitors	Ongoing	N/A	Arts Development Manager NI Water

Enhancing access to Hill of The O'Neill via Market Square	Explore potential of access to HOTON from Market Square through neighbouring property Update Brown Tourism Signage where required	Landowner	Ongoing	Through funding opportunities	Arts Development Manager Legal Services Property Services Landowners

PLEAN GNÍOMHAÍOCHTA GAEILGE – Aibreán 2025-Márta 2026

IRISH LANGUAGE ACTION PLAN - April 2025-March 2026

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

GOAL 1					
To Promote Opportunities to Learn Irish					
ACTION STEP DESCRIPTIONS	**DATE**	**DATE DUE**	**RESOURCES REQUIRED (staff, tech, etc.)**	**DESIRED OUTCOME**	**NOTES**
Deliver language taster days and or cultural workshops at various locations within the community	April 2025	March 2026		3 taster days and or Cultural Workshops to be delivered across MUDC	
Deliver Irish language classes at key locations across the District at • Beginner Level • Intermediate Level and • Advanced Level This will include youth and adult audiences and will involve clustering & collaboration with other groups eg schools, sporting, cultural groups and community organisations	April 2025	March 2026	£24,000	Residents of MUDC will have access to Irish Language class within 10-mile radius	MUDC classes will be marketed collectively Online options will be developed
Assist with provision of facilities /promotion for delivery of University of Ulster Diploma in Irish	Sep 2025	June 2026		15 + students will commence the Irish Language Diploma with Ulster University 2020/21	Advice and promotion provided to (potential) applicants
Deliver a schools Irish Language and Heritage programme across the district in the classroom setting Examples include: • Irish language lessons • Gaelic Heritage projects (Gaelic origins of townlands/surnames) • Workshops/site visits • Seek partnership with 'Scoil Spreagtha' programme – Gael Linn. • Explore long term benefits of teacher training options.	April 2025	March 2026	£10,000	Engage 15+ schools in the language and heritage programme	Aimed at Key Stage 1 classes. Persistent difficulties obtaining tutors for this programme. To adopt the existing 'Dúchas' project as part of the wider 'Scoil Spreagtha' initiative currently operating with 40+ schools throughout Mid Ulster. Such an approach could entail several staff training workshops which will be facilitated by Gael Linn to upskill teaching staff in participating primary schools. This would have the effect of maximising the budget in partnership

					with Gael Linn to target an increased number of schools than previously reached. This would be more sustainable long term and leave a legacy in schools.
Mid Ulster District Council Regional & Minority Languages Bursary	April 2025	March 2026	£30,000	100 + applicants across the district to attend recognised language summer colleges for an average of 3 weeks	Opened to residents (adults and young people) of MUDC only

GOAL 2

To Develop Irish Language in the community and to make it more accessible for all

ACTION STEP DESCRIPTIONS	DATE TO BEGIN	DATE DUE	RESOURCES REQUIRED (staff, tech, etc.)	DESIRED OUTCOME	NOTES
Provide development support, advice, information and guidance to individuals, groups and schools within the region in the promotion and development of the Irish Language, and particularly An Ghaeloideachas (Irish Medium Education). The aim will be the further development and strengthening of the wider school 'community', with the purpose of creating bilingual communities.	April 2025	March 2026	£4,500	Community programme at HOTON to enhance linguistic support for bilingual families in the South Tyrone area	In conjunction with HOTON education office Further projects and activities for Gaelscoileanna to help promote Irish language use outside of the classroom, will also link in with further promotion of HOTON as a 'Cultúrlann'
Liaise with Irish language community locally through the Mid Ulster Irish Language Forum to assess needs and inform development of annual action plan and IL strategy	April 2025	March 2026		2+ themed meetings of Mid Ulster Irish Language Forum per annum	Meetings will focus on areas of interest to the community eg. Co-operation with GAA/Council, education, external funding opportunities etc
Provide development support through activity grant funding to external cultural organisations to establish Irish language programmes and to promote the language among its audience bases.	April 2025	March 2026	£50,000	Irish Language Activity Fund	

Establish and maintain conversation circles and reading groups in local communities and possibly link with graduates and participants of Ulster University & Mid Ulster District Council Diploma participants - airgead breise d'imeachtaí HOTON	April 2025	March 2026		Adult fluency/language enrichment	
Co-operate with Irish Language community to develop a Mid Ulster Seachtain na Gaeilge programme which will feature a range of engaging activities aimed at Irish speakers and non-Irish speakers wanting to get involved in the language and profiling the Irish Language across the district	November 2025	March 2026	£7,500	Seachtain na Gaeilge delivered	Ensure geographical spread Align with MUDC Arts and Culture Festival
Facilitate the development of Foras na Gaeilge's Líonra programme in Mid Ulster Provide ongoing support for Cairde Uí Néill, Glór na Speiríní and Glór Mhachaire Fíolta An Coláiste Tuaithe stáidéar Gnó/Rural College Business Case Develop business case for Glór na Speiríní as required. Begin developmental work with Brantry, Clogher and Cúram Teo Mhachaire Rátha.	April 2025	March 2026	£2,468	Successful development of Líonra Charn Tóchair and subsequent extension of highest development level to other areas particularly Gael-Ionad Uí Néill in Coalisland. Development support for identified lower level Líonra zones in Coalisland and Ballinascreen/Magherafelt to achieve highest status within 5 years (see IL Strategy 2023-27)	

GOAL 3

To develop the Promotion and Use of Irish within and by Mid Ulster District Council

ACTION STEP DESCRIPTIONS	DATE TO BEGIN	DATE DUE	RESOURCES REQUIRED (staff, tech, etc.)	DESIRED OUTCOME	NOTES

Develop Irish Language service in Environmental health awareness/education, recycling etc.	Sept 2025	March 2026	Collaboration with Environmental Health and Technical Services	7 pre-schools will avail of the Nigh Do Lámha hand washing instruction workshops. One community group will host a recycling and anti-litter project.	Service to be proactively marketing to Irish Medium pre-schools
To raise awareness of Gaelic linguistic heritage within the district	April 2025	March 2026	£2,000	Develop materials and plans for the benefit of the local Irish language community	Promote awareness of the linguistic heritage of Mid-Ulster Work with Glór na Speiríní to develop Gleann Concadhain Gaeltacht Heritage project
Provide in-house translation services to Council Departments. Pat McKay	April 2025	March 2026	£500	Increase awareness within the Council of this service	As per Irish Language policy
Provide language awareness training to Council Departments.	April 2025	June 2026		Increase awareness of Irish language community needs within Council Increase MUDC ability to deliver a bilingual service to the community	As per Irish Language policy
Provide advice and support as necessary to council departments re bilingual service delivery	April 2025	May 2026	£14,000	Delivery of signage programme etc	
Provide Irish language audio tours for HOTON, Ohm Dark Skies Centre and Tulach Óg.	April 2025	June 2026	Collaboration with MUDC Cultural Venues	Enhanced facilitation of Irish language	As per Irish Language policy
Develop ‘Airghialla’ heritage project in collaboration with Monaghan County Council	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

OUR PROMISE TO OUR COMMUNITIES

Draft Housing Executive Corporate Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28

Housing Executive

Ten Year Mission

Organisations often overestimate what can be achieved in the short term, and underestimate what can be done in the long term. At the NIHE, we believe that it is possible to transform public housing and housing services over the next decade, and the history of our organisation demonstrates that this can be done.

Our ambition for the next ten years is great.

However, we are aware of our starting point; that housing need has never been as high, Housing Executive stock has never been so aged, demand for our homes has never been so great and that health inequalities so wide. The NIHE has not built homes at scale for more than twenty five years. A generation from our peace agreement, our communities are too separate, and community cohesion is far from done. And coming at us is the existential threat of climate change.

But we are not daunted- in fact these challenges have galvanised us to look ten years ahead, and consider what is possible.

Our Mission

While it would be reasonable for a housing organisation to set a mission that is focused on housing output, 50 years of experience has taught us that housing is more than just numbers; the best housing drives societal change and progress. Sustainable housing systems drive sustainable development, and they work across government to transform services.

Our mission is to ensure that housing helps resolve some of our greatest challenges. Through good housing, we will help end health inequalities, prioritise early intervention and prevention, protect our communities from climate change, and drive sustainable economic growth.

Our ten-year vision is therefore focused on the people we serve; on their health, their wellbeing and their protection. Our ambition is to:

1. Build a generation of well-designed, low carbon homes to meet housing need, by regenerating communities. With the right powers, resource and infrastructure, NIHE as a public landlord, could build homes at scale. Making housing a true growth lever.
2. If granted revised powers to borrow, we could transform the condition of our existing stock; ensuring as many homes as possible meet the Commonly Adopted Standard in a decade, while ensuring our overall stock is an average SAP Band C by 2030. Driving skills and capacity across the construction industry.
3. Partner across government to put early intervention and prevention at the heart of our public services. Delivering genuine systems change, we will ensure that homelessness and housing need is identified and prevented at the earliest possible opportunity; preventing homelessness among care experienced young people, those with mental ill-health, those with addiction and people leaving prison.
4. Work to protect low-income households from the worst effects of climate change. Partnering across government, we will drive the adaptation of existing private sector stock, increase energy efficiency, and ensure their homes keep them healthy.

We will do this by being a trusted public body, rooted in public service, employing skilled and committed housing professionals, and dedicated to community investment and community cohesion.

Foreword

It has never been more important for public bodies to be trusted, to be visible to our communities, and to be focused not on themselves, but on their purpose.

For this reason, we have rooted our three year strategy in our promise to the communities we serve. Despite the turbulence of the world around us, and our financial challenges, we remain focused on delivering.

Our mission is to ensure that housing helps resolve some of our greatest challenges. Through good housing, we will end health inequalities, prioritise early intervention and prevention, protect our communities from climate change, and drive sustainable economic growth.

This three year strategy must set us on the right path towards our mission. In this document we have set out clearly and unambiguously the work that lies ahead.

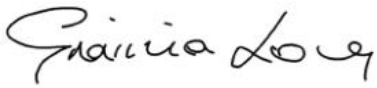
This new strategy will help deliver the priorities in the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027, including the priority to "provide more social, affordable and sustainable housing".

We cannot achieve this without our wonderful partners. Our tenants are ably represented through our Housing Community Network and the Central Housing Forum. Our statutory, voluntary and independent partners, and our Trade Union colleagues, work tirelessly with us to help us deliver our ambition, and we are very grateful to them. The Housing Council represents our local authority partners. The guidance and direction of the Minister for Communities and close working relationship with his officials remains crucial to our work.

Our colleagues, committed housing professionals, come to work every day to serve. Our work is impossible without their dedication.

We look forward to getting started.

NICOLE LAPPIN
Chair



GRAINIA LONG
Chief Executive

Our Vision and Values

'Everyone is able to live in an affordable, sustainable and decent home, appropriate to their needs, in a safe, attractive, and climate-resilient place.'

OUR CORE VALUES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We strive to make people's lives better

We put our customers first and deliver right first time

We build strong partnerships and share great ideas

FAIRNESS

We treat our customers, staff and partners fairly

We respect and promote diversity and equality for all

We work in an open and transparent way

PASSION

We are professional in all that we do

We strive for excellence

We look for new, creative, better ways to do things

EXPERTISE

We believe in our people

We are constantly learning, developing and innovating

We provide strong confident leadership

Developing and delivering the Strategy

There are a number of factors that we take into consideration when developing our corporate strategy including the Programme for Government, Ministerial and Departmental Priorities, our statutory requirements and most importantly how we as, a Landlord at scale and a public body can best positively impact the lives of all our customers and tenants in a changing world.

As we seek to develop this strategy, we seek meaningful consultation with key internal and external stakeholders. Critically we have engaged with the Housing Community Network who advocate, champion for and support customers and communities and help shape our plans and inform decisions that impact the lives of tenants and customers. We will continue to engage with other key stakeholders as part of the consultation process including our Consultative Forum on Equality, the Rural Residents Forum and the Northern Ireland Housing Council.

This document outlines our initial thinking and direction of travel for the Housing Executive. Through the public consultation exercise we would like to refine and develop these plans further shaped by the people who benefit from our services, are impacted by our services and our delivery partners with whom we collaborate to ensure effective service delivery.

Delivering our Vision

In order to deliver our vision, we have developed a clear set of priorities and a mission for the next ten years. Our Corporate Strategy outlines our ambitions, priorities and five high level strategic objectives we will work tirelessly towards, in order to achieve our vision.

Whilst there are many challenges ahead, there are equally as many opportunities for us to develop, improve and innovate our services, policies and procedures to improve the lives of all our tenants, customers and communities.

How we get things done: our Promise to our communities

To our partners: The Housing Executive works hard to be an indispensable partner; we work to break down silos, and are always keen to share resources and take risks through partnership, in the best interests of our tenants, customers and communities.

To our people: We value your skills and your experience, and your commitment to the people we serve. Your professional development is important to us. We strive to ensure you are safe in the workplace, have fair pay, excellent terms and conditions and that you feel welcome, included and engaged. We are lucky to have you!

To our tenants: We are passionate about keeping you safe warm and dry in your home. We will invest your rental income with prudence and care, ensuring it delivers sound maintenance of your home, with works undertaken 'right first time'.

To our customers: We will be visible, open and accessible. We will strive to ensure our services are seamless and easy, and deliver what you need. You will find us professional, fair, and we will always act with compassion.

To our communities: We are here to serve you, equally. Regardless of your background, your tenure, your view of the world, our promise is to help you thrive.

Who we are and what we do

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the strategic housing authority and a public landlord at scale. Rooted in public service, and dedicated to improving the lives of our tenants and customers, and to helping our communities to thrive, this three year strategy will bring us closer to our mission to end housing-led health inequalities, protect our communities from the worst effects of climate change, drive sustainable economic growth and eradicate homelessness for good, by 2035.

The scale of our business

2023/2024 Landlord Services

83,000

We managed 83,000 social homes (approx)

1,406

ERDF retrofits delivered

7,557

Trees were planted

£209m

spent in the **maintenance and improvement of our stock**

160,047

OUR HOMES
HOUSED 160,047 TENANTS
32,015 aged 15 years & under
44,574 aged 60 years old & over

99.61%

of **our properties occupied**

Financial Inclusion Team generated an additional **£2.21m** in **annual benefit entitlement** for customers

3,894

minor adaptations

27 **major adaptations**

We are the **largest funder of domestic violence services** in Northern Ireland

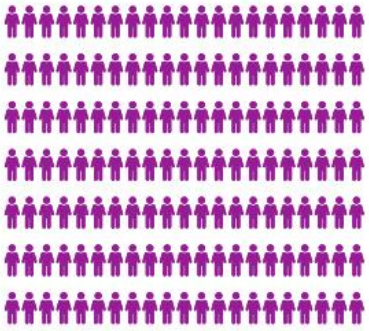
482,111

We answered over 482,111 phone calls to our offices

The scale of our business

2023/2024 Strategic Housing Authority

47,312
applicants on the **waiting list**



29,394
deemed to be **homeless**

35,464
in **housing stress**

£74.5m
Invested £74.5m on the **Supporting People Programme**

1,403
new social homes completed

683
disabled facility grant projects completed at a value of **£11.9m**

AFFORDABLE WARMTH
4,930
measures completed to **2,746 homes**

Provided housing assistance for Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian **Refugee Programmes**

1,508
new social homes started as part of the **Social Housing Development Programme**

c.£473.29m
paid out in **Housing Benefit**

Our Promise

Our strategy is a promise to our communities to focus on delivery, in their interests.

The strategy is launched at a time of turbulence, globally and locally. The effects of the global pandemic and resultant economic shock remain, and manifest themselves in our housing waiting lists, in demand for temporary accommodation, dramatically reduced public resources for new build social housing, capacity constraints in the construction industry, and lack of availability of skills.

However, as an organisation with a rich history of working in times of instability, we remain undaunted. We are committed to our ambition for the communities we serve. While focused on our ten year mission, over the lifetime of this three year strategy, our objectives are:

1. **Ensuring the right homes are built in the right places**
2. **Aligning our economic and environmental impact**
3. **Regenerating and investing in communities**
4. **Reducing housing-led health inequalities**
5. **Drawing on the talent of our skilled housing professionals**

Delivering and Funding our Plans

This document sets out a series of programmes, which will deliver on these aims. Some of these programmes are dependent on policy change or public resource from government.

Across the wider public sector the demand for services outstrips the investment available. Given this backdrop, it is our priority to ensure that every penny of tenants rent that is collected is invested back into our landlord side of the business in a way that demonstrates value for money, provides opportunities, provides housing solutions and improves the homes and enhances the communities our tenants live within.

In recent years the wider public sector financial pressures have also reduced the impact and scale of delivery for a number of key programmes in our role as the Strategic Housing Authority.

However, whilst financial resources are limited, we are abundant in terms of skills, expertise and ambition, for both our staff, and also our delivery partners. We will not be constrained in our ambitions and we will flex and adapt to these challenges, make brave decisions and become an exemplar in terms of collaboration and innovation to deliver our goals.

All programmes will be incorporated into the Housing Executive's annual Business Plan, with resources attached, SMART targets associated, and a series of indicators to measure performance (KPIs). Each year, we will publish our business plans and report on and publish how well we have performed against these objectives in our Annual Report.

High Level Objective 1

1. Ensuring the Right Homes in the Right Places

Good housing is essential to our health and wellbeing. We want everybody to have access to social, affordable and sustainable housing that meets their needs within thriving and inclusive communities

As the strategic housing authority, and a public landlord at scale, the Housing Executive will work with the Department for Communities and housing associations to ensure the commissioning and building of new social housing, and will drive the development of multi-tenure developments across Northern Ireland. It will work to deliver a programme of revitalisation of the Housing Executive, which is dependent on amended powers to borrow against its rental income, and through a sustainable rental curve, enable it to build new homes. Furthermore, it will work with the Department for Communities and housing associations to deliver new build social housing.

Work Programmes:

1.1 Deliver a programme of revitalisation of the NIHE: borrowing from public sources to support new build public housing, with a modernized legal framework. This is dependent on change to borrowing powers and achieving agreement on a sustainable rental curve.

1.2 Scale up a programme of new build social housing including using Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) to deliver ultra-low carbon housing.

1.3 Through delivery of our Land Asset Management Strategy, enhance our role in the assembly of public land for housing.

1.4 Ensure the delivery of a programme of culturally sensitive accommodation for Travellers

1.5 Working with DfC, increase the range of housing products available in Northern Ireland, as part of an Executive – wide housing strategy.

1.6 Subject to approval, deliver a programme of property acquisitions and long-term leasing, to increase the Housing Executive's portfolio of temporary accommodation.

High Level Objective 2

2. Aligning our Economic and Environmental Impact

The Housing Executive is a major economic driver, due to the scale of our investment. This not only helps to ensure that our tenants are living in comfortable, safe homes but also supports the local economy, sustaining jobs and critical supply chains. However, we also have a significant environmental impact and a commitment to decarbonize our stock in order to contribute to the targets set out in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The natural environment is vital to everyone's health and wellbeing, both now and in the future and the decisions we take in this decade will have a material impact on Northern Ireland's progress in reducing its carbon emissions. In this three year period and beyond, the Housing Executive will align its economic and environmental impacts, so that we ensure the economic decisions we take drive sustainable development and enable us to meet our carbon reduction targets, progressing to a cleaner greener society including more sustainable homes, addressing fuel poverty and, with partners, reducing emissions within the residential sector. Through all this, we will work in partnership and aim to ensure a 'just transition'.

Work Programmes:

2.1 Deliver an investment programme (£ to be confirmed) over the next three years to maintain and improve the condition of our homes with a strategic focus on tenant satisfaction.

2.2 Developing strategic partnerships to ensure that the construction industry supply chain has the capacity to help us meet our investment requirement.

2.3 Ensuring our public procurement is lever for delivery, particularly in driving social value.

2.4 Through our Strategic Housing Authority role, deliver investment into private sector stock to support the journey to net zero and address fuel poverty.

2.5 Respond to the outworkings of the review of the Decent Homes Standard in Northern Ireland.

2.6 Meeting the draft Programme for Government commitment on a just transition, deliver the goals set out in the NIHE's Sustainable Development Strategy including retrofit housing to upgrade energy efficiency to an average SAP Band C by 2030, a reduction of 23%, (89,000 tons of CO_2) across our landlord and a 25% reduction in CO_2 across our other corporate. functions by 2030/31.

2.7 Establish a Centre of Excellence in Low Carbon House Building to give us the capacity we need to meet our new build and maintenance objectives.

High Level Objective 3

3. Regenerating and Investing in Communities

The Housing Executive is a truly local landlord, and its approach to housing management is to put tenants and communities at the heart of our work. Our work extends far beyond the traditional tenant-landlord relationship. We work and collaborate with key partners including the Housing Community Network, Councils and local government partners to regenerate and invest in communities to create vibrant, thriving and safe communities. We have high levels of customer satisfaction but we want to do more.

Over the next three years, our focus will be on increasing tenant satisfaction with our services, while reducing the waiting list for housing through the development of strategic sites, and regenerating communities. We will scale up our community investment work, with a strategic focus on race relations and community cohesion both within and between communities. We will create better opportunities for everyone by acting as a key public sector stakeholder, who, in collaboration with community groups will work to solve problems and shape services in local communities.

Work Programmes:

3.1 Invest (£ to be confirmed) in the management of our homes with a strategic focus on increasing tenant satisfaction.
3.2 Oversee the redevelopment of strategic sites, including Hope Street and Upper Long Streets in Belfast.
3.3 Deliver the next phase of our Tower Block action plan, with a focus on regeneration of communities and a commitment to new build, where this is supported by housing need
3.4 Invest (£ to be confirmed) in community investment to drive community cohesion and strengthen race relations.
3.5 Introduce a proactive approach to bring forward suitable areas for ‘Housing For All’ and consolidate the Housing For All investment to maximise the output of good relations, in a strategic approach.
3.6 Using an area based approach, deliver housing led regeneration with a community led focus that utilizes the collective assets of partner organisation including community planners, local development plans, housing associations and our placeshapers.
3.7 Collaborate and engage with communities to deliver our community focused strategies so that we engage, involve and empower our customers and maintain our land in ways that promote biodiversity and minimized our environmental impact.

High Level Objective 4

4. Reducing Housing-led Health Inequalities

Housing has a major role to play in reducing housing-led health inequalities. Good housing conditions prevent illnesses, promote independent living, reduce poverty, increase quality of life and help mitigate climate change. In this three year period, we will take a strategic approach to this issue; prioritizing early intervention and prevention, and putting in place the programme necessary to improve the health and wellbeing of people across Northern Ireland.

We will continue to focus on preventing homelessness, making it brief, rare and non-recurrent by working collaboratively, prioritising housing solutions for those most in need. we will bring forward a pilot programme that will support young people leaving care and help to prevent this group from the risk of homelessness. We will continue to prioritise housing support for vulnerable people across society through the commissioning of the Supporting People Programme across the four thematic areas of Older People, Younger People, Disability and Mental Health and Homelessness. We will maximise our impact through Grants in the private sector and major and adaptations, where appropriate, for our tenants. We will continue to deliver the Housing Benefit service to over 90,000 customers which plays a key role in supporting and sustaining tenancies.

As both a landloard and as the Strategic Housing Authority we will work to improve the condition and quality of homes across Northern Ireland and we will prioritise building and tenant safety through targeted programmes. Along with partners, we will aggregate our skills and expertise and align our thinking to develop a strategy that uses housing as a vehicle to end housing inequalities.

Work Programmes:

4.1 Deliver systems change with statutory partners to prevent homelessness, starting with Young People Leaving Care , through our 'New Foundations Programme'.
4.2 Scaling up our work to tackle chronic homelessness, through greater investment in the Complex Lives model.
4.3 Ensuring the safety of our tenants by investing (£ to be confirmed) in building safety
4.4 Delivering a strategic programme of interventions on damp and mould across our stock.
4.5 Scale up our Financial Inclusion Service to empower our tenants and customers to become more financially resilient.
4.6 Support the Department of Health and the Department for Communities in the strategic review of adaptations.
4.7 Developing the first Housing and Health Strategy for the Housing Executive in a generation to, along with our partners, address housing inequalities, pathways into housing, learning and sensory disabilities, and older peoples housing.
4.8 Improving health and housing outcomes for people with disabilities and mental ill-health, young people, older people and those experiencing homelessness, through the Supporting People Programme.

High Level Objective 5

5. Drawing on the talent of our skilled housing professionals

As an employer with circa 3,500 colleagues, our success is dependent on our ability to attract and sustain talent. Our commitment to our people is demonstrated in the priority this work affords, in this strategy and in our day to day work.

Since the launch of our People Strategy in 2021/22 we have made significant strides in becoming an employer of choice for all in Northern Ireland's increasingly diverse community. We continue to recruit, invest in, develop and engage with our people as we seek to build on and draw on their talent so that we can continue to deliver high quality services to the community we serve.

We will continuously innovate and with our partners seek better ways of delivering for our customers in all that we do whilst ensuring value for money and good governance whilst meeting our statutory requirements.

Work Programmes:

5.1 Identify, develop and embed the required skills and working practices to deliver a programme of revitilisation

5.2 In conjunction with our partners, ensure the development of a range of future skills, including the development of green skills for residential buildings, delivering apprenticeships (number to be confirmed) while increasing female participation in the construction industry.

5.3 Improve our engagement score by 5% by 2028 ensuring a continued focus on the H&WB of our people and enabling all employees to fulfill their potential.

5.4 Implement our new Pay and Grading system in tandem with other reward strategies to ensure our people feel valued and recognised for their individual and collective contribution.

5.5 Deliver high quality public services, for our diverse community that we seek to reflect and serve.

To discuss or comment on this document, or to request an alternative format, please contact:

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CS-43-09-24-JG

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Draft Corporate Strategy 2025/26-2027/28

Consultation Response

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Draft Corporate Strategy 2025/26-2027/28. Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) recognises the crucial role that NIHE plays in providing high-quality housing solutions across Northern Ireland, and we are committed to supporting policies that promote affordable, sustainable, and inclusive housing for all.

Mid Ulster District, encompassing towns such as Dungannon, Cookstown, and Magherafelt, faces unique housing challenges and opportunities. As of the 2021 Census, Mid Ulster had a population of 150,282, with approximately 70% residing in rural areas. High levels of population growth are projected to continue in Mid Ulster. NISRA Population Projections 2018 (published 2020) for Mid Ulster show 7.0% growth between 2018 and 2028, approximately double the projected Northern Ireland growth rate of 3.7%. Mid Ulster is projected to require 9,500 new dwellings between 2012 and 2025.

1. Ensuring the Right Homes are Built in the Right Places

Mid Ulster is a largely rural district with towns such as Dungannon, Cookstown, and Magherafelt serving as the key urban hubs. As the demand for housing increases in these areas, it is essential that new housing developments are located strategically to support balanced regional growth. Additionally, with the rapid increase in the local population, particularly from inward migration, the need for more social and affordable housing is becoming more pronounced. The 2021 Census indicates significant growth in the district, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, and housing provision needs to reflect this.

We also highlight that the availability of housing must be well planned and linked with access to essential services and infrastructure, including public transport, healthcare, and education to ensure that developments support the wider community and are not

isolated. Particular attention of this should be applied to rural areas, promoting sustainable communities and reducing rural isolation.

The issue of water and wastewater management in Mid Ulster will however have detrimental impact on NIHE achieving this goal. Many people living in the Mid Ulster area are facing significant housing stress because of house building not keeping up with housing demand. New housing developments, particularly in our urban towns and key settlements, are being refused connection to the waste water infrastructure due to lack of capacity as a result of infrastructure upgrades not being delivered. It is essential that significant investment be prioritised to upgrade and provide new sewerage infrastructure across the District, in order to deliver social and affordable housing to meet the need. A significant collaborative effort is required to address a problem of this magnitude. Starting with central government to provide the necessary financial resources to upgrade the current waste water infrastructure; but also at a local level with NI Water, NIHE and local councils to develop local solutions. More sustainable solutions such as SUDs need to be explored, to offset rainwater capture to alleviate pressure on the system. Council offers any support necessary to seek solutions to this issue

MUDC is committed to the release of public sector land for the provision of social housing where possible and are working with NIHE to identify appropriate land for same. We also continue to encourage other statutory partners, through our Community Planning powers to identify unused land assets for social and affordable housing. However, in order to unlock the full potential of available sites, it will require much more than encouragement to partners. There is a need for a more formalised process, supported by a whole Public Sector Asset Management Strategy.

2. **Aligning Our Economic and Environmental Impact**

The Mid Ulster region is experiencing considerable economic growth, particularly in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism. However, this growth also places pressure on housing demand and requires sustainable development solutions. As such, we fully support the strategy's emphasis on environmental sustainability, but we believe emphasis should be placed on retrofitting existing homes in the district, many of which are older and less energy efficient.

Tackling fuel poverty and maximising thermal comfort for citizens should be a key reason to create more energy efficient housing. Statistics on the incidences of fuel poverty within lower income households is incentive enough for NIHE to make this a matter of absolute priority. Mid Ulster is home to a significant rural population, many of whom live in older homes that are difficult and expensive to heat. Addressing energy inefficiencies in these homes should be a priority to reduce fuel poverty and mitigate

environmental impact. Council recommends expanding the retrofitting program to target rural areas in Mid Ulster, where older homes contribute significantly to heating inefficiencies and fuel poverty.

Bringing current social housing stock up to standard will be a significant challenge and will require considerable resourcing. At the same time, whilst the Affordable Warmth measures, as well as the repairs, improvements, adaptations grants, are a welcomed support for private sector tenants, it is often difficult to access and have considerable waiting times. Council would ask NIHE to address these issues urgently, considering the impact of the cost of living and energy crisis tenants are facing.

Council continually lobby central government on a number of housing issues, including fitness and standard levels and will continue to do so, supporting NIHE by seeking the required funding needed to deliver this objective.

Council welcomes NIHE's pledge to social value. Following on from Minister's Hargey's commitment to Community Wealth Building, MUDC have also commenced development of a Community Wealth Building Framework for the district. Community Wealth Building requires a partnership approach, with the district's anchor institutions, like Council and NIHE, working together to 'plug the leaks' in public sector spend leaving the district, instead ensuring it has a beneficial multiplier effect as it is spent and re-spent in an area. Council would welcome NIHE's support in taking this forward in Mid Ulster.

3. **Regenerating and Investing in Communities**

Mid Ulster faces challenges related to depopulation in some rural areas, while urban centres such as Dungannon are facing rapid growth. For these communities to thrive, investments in social infrastructure, such as healthcare, education, transport links, and public spaces, must be made in tandem with new housing development. In addition, we believe that housing regeneration should prioritise local engagement to reflect the unique needs of each community. Local businesses, schools, and community groups should be involved in planning housing developments, ensuring that housing contributes to the creation of sustainable and cohesive communities.

4. **Reducing Housing-Led Health Inequalities**

Poor housing conditions can contribute to a range of physical and mental health issues, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities. In Mid Ulster, many older residents live in homes that are not suited to their needs, contributing to health inequalities. Ensuring that new developments are accessible and

that existing homes are made suitable for those with mobility issues or other health challenges is critical.

There has been little to none supported housing schemes for Mid Ulster in the last decade. However, the Mid Ulster Community Plan has identified a need for supported housing across the District and supported housing need has been identified for people with disabilities, older people and vulnerable women who are victims of domestic violence. A need was also identified in Dungannon and surrounding areas for people with learning disabilities which was brought to the attention of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust who recognised the need but stated that there is no current funding. We encourage the NIHE to prioritise the development of accessible and adaptable homes for the elderly and people with disabilities, especially in rural communities where such housing is in high demand.

Reducing Housing Led Health Inequalities is very much linked to fuel poverty. We therefore support NIHE's aim to address fuel poverty and energy inefficiency, which has a direct link to health outcomes. Fuel poverty is particularly concerning in rural areas of Mid Ulster, where heating costs are high, and homes are often poorly insulated.

Council would stress the importance of introducing specific targets and metrics to track progress on housing outcomes for vulnerable groups, ensuring that the strategy's objectives are being met in practice.

5. **Drawing on the Talent of Our Skilled Housing Professionals**

It is critical that housing professionals are equipped with the necessary skills to address the unique challenges faced by rural and suburban areas, such as those in Mid Ulster. This includes knowledge of local housing markets, regional development, and rural housing needs. We support the strategy's focus on professional development and suggest that a strong emphasis be placed on developing expertise in rural housing challenges, ensuring that housing professionals working in areas like Mid Ulster are equipped to address the distinct needs of this area.

Conclusion

Mid Ulster District Council supports the overall direction of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Draft Corporate Strategy for 2025/26-2027/28, recognising its commitment to addressing the housing needs of communities across Northern Ireland. However, we believe that greater emphasis should be placed on the unique challenges faced by rural districts like Mid Ulster.

Rural communities have been hit hard by the cost of living crisis, thus it is fundamental that NIHE play a key role in the sustainability and regeneration of our rural communities. This starts with a robust assessment of housing need in these areas to identify the true demand for social & affordable housing that then must be delivered. Uncovering the true extent to rural need is paramount for a rural council like Mid Ulster, where one in four of its population live in rural communities. MUDC welcomes the partnership working with NIHE to carry out Latent Demand Tests in rural areas of Mid Ulster. However, Council wishes to point out that many people are still completing housing applications by stating their preference of location based on where they know the housing is going to be situated and not where their family are located or where they would choose to live. This not only puts further demand and burden on social housing developments in our towns, where the necessary infrastructure required for development is already at capacity, it also creates further social issues relating to childcare and family support and isolation. Council will continue to work with NIHE to address this issue.

Delivering good quality housing is a central element in achieving many of the objectives detailed in the Mid Ulster Community Plan and cannot be considered in isolation of the other key areas, including poverty, regeneration, health and wellbeing and prosperity. Mid Ulster District Council therefore welcomes the development and delivery of the NIHE's Corporate Plan and supports all efforts to increase and improve social and affordable housing provision across our district.

Department for Communities
An Roinn Pobal
Depairtment fur Commonities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Consultation on a draft Fuel Poverty Strategy

December 2024

Contents

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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.

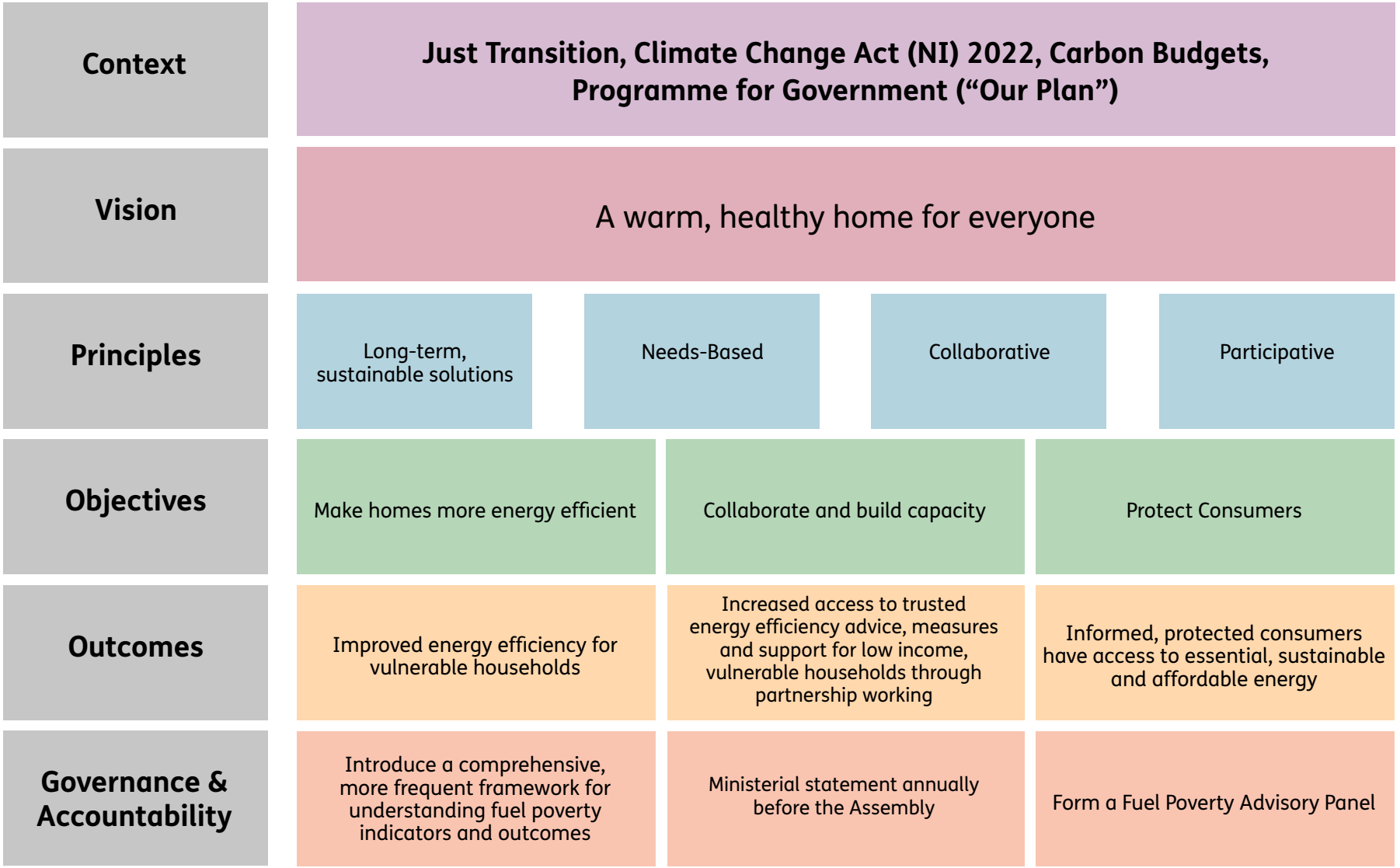
Making our homes more sustainable will help create warmer, healthier houses, reduce air pollution and create new job opportunities. However, the transition will mean changes to people's homes, energy sources and behaviours. Our third objective therefore focuses on protecting consumers. This means improving 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



Fuel Poverty Strategy Policies & Actions

Objectives / Policies

Make homes more energy efficient	Collaborate and build capacity	Protect Consumers
1. Raise and appropriately enforce housing standards 2. Increase investment in energy efficiency schemes for vulnerable households	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	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 2016[1] 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 Ireland[5] 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 Strategy[7], the Carbon Budgets[8] 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)**

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 poverty[9]. Our Housing Supply Strategy[10] sets out a 15-year journey to transform housing supply. Work has also been carried out on developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy[11] 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 strategy[13] 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)**

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

11 **Anti-poverty | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)**

12 **People and Place Review | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)**

13 **Making Life Better - Strategic Framework for Public Health | Department of Health (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. Vison 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 NIHCS[16] 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 hazards[20] 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 Strategy[21] 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)**

20 **House Condition Survey Main Report 2016 (nihe.gov.uk)**

21 **Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2039 (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 consumers[22] and generate savings for public health[23]. 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.theccc.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 lower[24].

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 bills [25], 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 roof [26].

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 performance[27] 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 bills [28]. 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 £3.12[30]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 scheme [31]. 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 (uregni.gov.uk)**

35 **The-Sixth-Carbon-Budget-The-UKs-path-to-Net-Zero.pdf (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)**

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 challenges[44]. 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.

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 conditions[45]. 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 reductions[46] 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 research[47] 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.

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

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. 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.

INDICATOR	SOURCE
Are you able to pay regular bills, including gas, electricity or oil, without cutting back on essentials?	FRS

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 inequalities[53] 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 System[55]. We propose using damp and mould as a secondary indicator for energy wellbeing, an approach taken in New Zealand[56]. While the HCS captures this information through the Housing Health and Safety Rating System[57] 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 approach[58] 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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Fuel Poverty Strategy 2024/25

Consultation Response

Introduction

Mid Ulster District Council welcome the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy 2024. Fuel poverty continues to be a significant issue, especially in areas like Mid Ulster District, where a combination of rural housing, economic challenges, and varying access to services exacerbate the difficulties faced by many households. Fuel poverty impacts thousands of households, particularly vulnerable groups, including the elderly, families with young children, and those living with long-term health conditions. A comprehensive strategy is essential to ensure that no one in Northern Ireland has to choose between heating their home and meeting other basic needs. Addressing fuel poverty is essential not only for the health and well-being of Northern Ireland's residents but also for supporting efforts toward a sustainable, low-carbon future.

Outcome 1: Make Homes More Energy Efficient

Energy efficiency is a critical element in reducing fuel poverty, and Council supports the strategy's focus on retrofitting existing housing stock. In Mid Ulster, many homes are older, often with poor insulation and inefficient heating systems.

The introduction of **revised decent homes standard for social housing by 2026** is a necessary step to ensure that social housing providers meet the minimum energy efficiency standards, providing vulnerable households with healthier, more comfortable homes. The strategy should ensure that the revised Decent Homes Standard includes clear guidelines on energy efficiency measures, such as insulation, heating systems, and energy-efficient appliances. This will help ensure that social housing tenants benefit from consistent and high-quality living conditions.

A large proportion of residents in Mid Ulster live in privately rented accommodation, where landlords may lack the incentives to improve energy efficiency. To address this, the strategy should focus on providing incentives for landlords to improve the energy efficiency of rental properties. This would help reduce energy costs for vulnerable renters who are often at the mercy of outdated heating systems.

The Introduction of **Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) by 2027** is a vital step to ensuring that landlords invest in energy efficiency measures for their properties, thus protecting tenants from high energy costs. We urge the Department to monitor and enforce these standards rigorously. In addition, incentives or financial support for landlords who exceed the

minimum standards could encourage further investment in energy efficiency improvements across the private rented sector.

Implementing **Improved Fitness Standards for All Tenures by 2030** is an important step toward ensuring that all households, irrespective of their housing tenure, live in energy-efficient homes. The current fitness standard for human habitation has not been significantly updated since 1981. The strategy should clarify the specific measures and performance criteria that will define "fitness" for each housing type. Engaging stakeholders, including housing experts, homeowners, local governments, and energy providers will ensure these standards are both practical and effective.

We support **expanding the scope of current Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency schemes**, including changes to the eligibility criteria to encompass more households. This scheme should include a wide range of energy-saving measures, such as home insulation, upgrading heating systems, and incorporating renewable energy options like solar panels. Additionally, the scheme should be adaptable to various household types and needs.

Council are in 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. By doing so, it will allow the low-income households, who are frequently disproportionately impacted by energy costs, receive the support they require.

Although a **whole house retrofit** approach can have substantial environmental, economic, and social benefits, it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. For instance, homeowners may have particular priorities or preferences based on their needs or lifestyle that may cause them to opt out of certain measures. Instead of insisting on a whole approach only, it would be better to encourage comprehensive upgrades while allowing some degree of flexibility to address individual circumstances.

The strategy should **prioritise the retrofitting of homes in rural areas** such as Mid Ulster, where many properties are off the gas grid and rely on costly oil or solid fuel. These homes often suffer from poor insulation, which contributes significantly to high heating costs. The strategy should ensure that rural communities are not left behind and that retrofitting programmes include options for homes reliant on oil and coal.

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.

Council do not agree with the use of **levies on electricity or gas to fund energy efficiency measures**. Imposing additional levies could disproportionately impact vulnerable households who are already struggling with high energy costs. Instead, the strategy should explore alternative funding mechanisms that do not place an additional financial burden on those who are most in need of support. A more effective approach would be to seek targeted government investment, private sector partnerships, or other sustainable funding models that prioritise reducing fuel poverty without exacerbating the issue for low-income households.

The Strategy should not consider re**venue-raising opportunities from unregulated heating sources, such as home heating oil, to fund energy efficiency schemes**. Introducing additional charges or taxes on heating oil could further burden households already facing financial difficulties, especially in rural or off-grid areas where heating oil is a primary source of warmth. The strategy should focus on supporting vulnerable households without penalising them for relying on alternative heating sources. As above, alternative funding sources, such as government investment or targeted incentives for renewable energy adoption, should be prioritised to ensure fair and effective solutions.

Outcome 2: Collaborate and Build Capacity

Increasing access to trusted advice and support is critical to empowering vulnerable households to make informed decisions about energy efficiency and cost-saving measures. A greater emphasis on public education is needed, especially in rural communities where digital literacy may be lower, and access to support services can be limited. In Mid Ulster, some households may face challenges accessing online resources or contacting national advisory services. The strategy should ensure that energy advice is delivered in-person or through local channels such as community organisations, local advice services and outreach programmes, particularly for elderly residents or those who may not be digitally literate.

Utilise and enhance referral partnerships across government and our partners will help to raise awareness of energy wellbeing, identify households in fuel poverty, and provide support is essential for reaching vulnerable populations. Collaborative efforts across these sectors will ensure a more holistic approach to addressing fuel poverty, improving coordination and service delivery. Health professionals, local authorities, and community organisations are often the first point of contact for those experiencing fuel poverty and can help identify and support those most in need. This will require however, clear referral protocols ensuring that individuals in need are seamlessly referred to the right services; training and awareness to recognise the signs of fuel poverty and understand the support services available; a centralised database to allow different sectors to share information securely and track referrals; community outreach and engagement to identify households at risk of fuel poverty and directly link them with health services and government programmes; and integrated funding ensuring that funding for fuel poverty alleviation is accessible across sectors to make sure there are no barriers to the referral process, and that individuals can access a range of services without delays.

A one-stop shop for energy efficiency and support is a fantastic way to centralise services for vulnerable consumers. This One-Stop Shop should provide a wide range of services, including energy advice, information about available schemes, assistance with applications for funding or support, and referrals to other services. It should be accessible both online and through physical locations in communities.

Implementing key aspects of nice guidelines on the health risks associated with living in a cold home is essential to improving health outcomes for vulnerable individuals. We urge the Department to integrate these health considerations into all energy efficiency programmes, ensuring that households experiencing cold homes are prioritised for support and intervention.

With regards to the action **working with other organisations to ensure consistent emergency support**, Council suggest developing clear protocols for emergency support for all partners, ensuring that vulnerable individuals can quickly access financial assistance, energy advice, and measures to improve energy efficiency during energy crisis. Mid Ulster District includes a number of households that experience seasonal or extreme fuel poverty, especially during winter months when heating needs spike. The strategy must ensure that emergency support mechanisms are robust and responsive to those in immediate need. Local Councils, could play a pivotal role in delivering emergency support services, helping residents navigate financial assistance schemes and providing short-term relief during crisis periods.

Targeting financial assistance at the most vulnerable in times of energy crises is crucial to minimising hardship. Discretionary Support is a flexible and immediate solution that can quickly respond to urgent financial pressures faced by households during times of crisis. This approach ensures that individuals who are most in need can access vital support without delays, particularly during periods of rapid economic change or energy price shocks. On the other hand, it can be inconsistent and reactive, potentially leaving many vulnerable households without timely aid due to gaps in eligibility, administrative delays, or lack of awareness about the support available. In the event of a crisis, a more proactive and universally accessible solution would be preferable

Gaining a Better Understanding of the Impact of Changes to the Winter Fuel Payment is crucial for ensuring that the support provided meets the needs of those at risk of fuel poverty. Understanding the impact of these changes will allow for a more targeted and flexible approach in providing additional support where it is needed most. If it is found that current Winter Fuel Payments are insufficient or do not reach those most in need, introducing further assistance—such as increased payments, more inclusive eligibility criteria, or supplemental support during extreme weather conditions—would be a proactive way to protect vulnerable individuals from the financial strain of heating their homes.

Outcome 3: Protect Consumers

Ensuring that vulnerable households have access to sustainable and affordable energy is crucial to protecting consumers and addressing fuel poverty. Mid Ulster has significant rural areas where many residents still rely on oil or coal for heating, which are not only costly but also environmentally unsustainable. Protecting vulnerable consumers from unfair practices and ensuring access to affordable, sustainable energy is fundamental.

We recommend that the Department conducts a comprehensive review of **energy decarbonisation policies to assess their impact on energy bills for vulnerable households** and adjust policies as necessary to prevent unintended financial burdens.

While energy efficiency improvements are a crucial strategy for reducing fuel poverty in many cases, they may not always be viable or sufficient for certain households or communities. For example, low-income households living with a terminal illness, or long-term disability or dementia which requires the usage of specialised medical equipment and considerations. The Department should conduct research into the specific needs of households that are not adequately supported by current schemes and develop **targeted affordability support** to meet these needs.

Agreeing Minimum Quality Standards for All Energy Efficiency Schemes is important to ensure that vulnerable households receive effective and lasting improvements. The strategy should ensure that all contractors and service providers adhere to strict quality standards, with regular monitoring and evaluations of the effectiveness of energy efficiency measures. Adopting a common quality assurance standard across all relevant grant schemes would protect consumers, ensure the effectiveness of these schemes, and create a level of trust and consistency that would encourage greater uptake of energy efficiency and low carbon heat measures. It is a critical step toward achieving the long-term goals of the Fuel Poverty Strategy and promoting sustainable, affordable energy solutions for all households.

The Department should e**nsure appropriate aftercare and redress mechanism for government energy schemes by** establishing a transparent and accessible system for reporting issues with energy efficiency installations or services, with clear timelines for resolution and redress.

Engaging with people experiencing fuel poverty is essential for developing effective, responsive policies and interventions. To ensure that the voices of those directly affected are heard and considered, ongoing and meaningful engagement must be built into the process. The best way to continue engaging with people experiencing fuel poverty involves a multi-faceted approach that fosters trust, accessibility, and active participation. This can include:

- community-led initiatives such as local advisory groups or forums where individuals can share their experiences and offer input on policies;

- local partnerships of organsiaitons that already work directly with people experiencing fuel poverty, such as advices services, foodbanks, community groups etc. who have established trust and rapport with the communities they serve and can act as intermediaries;
- regular surveys to capture the experiences of households facing fuel poverty;
- accessible communication channels where people facing fuel poverty are able to easily access information about available support and engagement opportunities, including printed materials, websites, social media, and local community centers etc;
- ongoing support are needed to assess how policies and programmes are working on the ground ensuring that people continue to have a voice throughout the duration of any fuel poverty-related initiative;
- empathy and understanding when engaging with people in fuel poverty, it is important. Many individuals in fuel poverty may feel marginalised or stigmatised, so creating an environment where people feel comfortable discussing their challenges and seeking help is essential. Training government staff, community workers, and volunteers in empathy and effective communication skills will make a positive impact in fostering open, honest conversations.

Conclusion

The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy 2024 offers a strong foundation for tackling fuel poverty, and the outcomes outlined in the strategy are crucial for achieving long-term improvements for vulnerable households. However, there are specific opportunities to strengthen the impact of these outcomes for rural communities such as Mid Ulster. By ensuring that rural areas are prioritised in energy efficiency programmes, that local partnerships are utilised for outreach and advice, and that sustainable, affordable energy solutions are made available to vulnerable consumers, we can achieve a more inclusive and effective strategy to reduce fuel poverty.

The integration of fuel poverty reduction with other social welfare policies is also essential. In Mid Ulster, where many residents face economic hardship and high transport costs, fuel poverty is closely linked to other social challenges. The strategy should ensure better coordination between fuel poverty initiatives and other regional social welfare programmes, including housing support, income assistance, and rural development schemes. This joined-up approach would maximise the impact of the strategy on overall quality of life and social inclusion.

Finally, for the Mid Ulster District and other rural areas, it is important that the strategy incorporates mechanisms to monitor regional disparities in fuel poverty levels. Local data on the prevalence of fuel poverty in Mid Ulster would ensure that interventions are specifically targeted and effective. Ongoing monitoring of the success of interventions, such as energy efficiency programmes, can help adjust strategies as needed. Annual reports that track fuel poverty levels by council area would enable more tailored policy responses and allow local authorities like Mid Ulster District Council to adjust their local strategies accordingly.

Policing & Community Safety Partnership

making Mid Ulster safer

STRATEGY 2025-28
ACTION PLAN 2025-26

MID ULSTER POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

CONTENTS

Introduction

Background

Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) is a statutory body established under the Justice Act Northern Ireland 2011.

The aim of the PCSP is to help make the Mid Ulster community safer by focusing on the policing and community safety issues that matter most. The Partnership is funded by the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) through the Joint Committee.

To help make our community safer Mid Ulster PCSP will:

- Consult and engage with the local community on the issues of concern in relation to policing and community safety. The Policing Committee has a responsibility to provide views to the relevant district commander and the Policing Board on policing matters.
- Identify and prioritise the particular issues of concern and prepare plans for how these can be tackled.
- Monitor – a Policing Committee comprising the political and independent members will monitor the performance of the police and work to gain the co-operation of the public with the police in preventing crime.
- Deliver a reduction in crime and enhance community safety in their district, directly through their own actions, through the work of their delivery groups or through support for the work of others.

The PCSP consists of Councillors, Independent Members, bodies designated by the NI Assembly, and locally designated bodies. The PCSP will consult, develop and agree local action plans that will be delivered through partnership working and based on local needs.

The Policing Committee is formed from the Councillors and Independent members sitting on the PCSP. The purpose of the Policing Committee is to provide views on policing in their area, monitoring the performance of the Police against the local Policing Plan and ensure the Police deliver against local

priorities and take forward work to gain the co-operation of the public with the police in preventing crime and enhancing community safety within the district. This will complement the work of the wider PCSP that will take forward initiatives to improve community safety in the local area.

Strategic Plan

Mid Ulster PCSP was requested by the Joint Committee (Department of Justice and NI Policing Board) to develop a strategic assessment and action plan for 2025-28.

1.1 The Joint Committee has agreed three Strategic Priorities for PCSPs which will remain the same as those in 2025-2028 Planning Guidance and are provided below for ease of reference.

These are:

Strategic Priority 1 – To ensure effective delivery in response to local need, and improve the visibility and recognition of the work of the PCSP through effective consultation, communication and engagement **through:**

- carrying out meaningful engagement in the district with the local community, relevant statutory partners / agencies, businesses and the community & voluntary sector in the development and implementation of PCSP Action Plans;
- ensuring ongoing two-way engagement in the district with the local community, relevant statutory partners / agencies, businesses and the community & voluntary sector to provide a problem-solving forum to identify effective solutions to local issues, ensuring sufficient flexibility to address issues as they emerge, and seeking relevant expertise from the designated organisations as appropriate;
- using a range of platforms, including multi-media, to communicate and promote the work of the PCSP; and
- increasing awareness of the work of the PCSP.

Strategic Priority 2 - To improve community safety by prioritising and addressing local community safety issues, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour **through**

- utilising the partnership created by the statutory, elected and independent/ community membership of the PCSP to initiate and lead work to improve community safety and tackle ASB locally;
- working in partnership to develop outcome and locality focused interventions to address the most pressing crime types and behaviours impacting local community safety, as evidenced by local need, with appropriate targets and indicators so that impacts can be measured;
- drawing on best practice, promote early intervention and collaborating effectively to improve PCSP-supported projects and programmes that address the underlying causes of ASB, crime and the fear of crime in the community, including, where appropriate, a focus on changing behaviours;
- enhancing safety and feelings of safety, in particular for those who might be more vulnerable;
- engaging with partners in the district, to horizon scan in order to respond to and re-direct resources to respond to emerging local community safety issues;
- having cognisance of the Community Safety Framework in developing local plans, and providing a feedback loop to the Community Safety Network* (previously Community Safety Board) on local issues in order to inform community safety policy development – and vice versa; and
- providing comprehensive community input into decision making processes about tackling actual and perceived anti-social behaviour and giving feedback to the community on the effectiveness of interventions on meeting outcomes.

Strategic Priority 3 – To support confidence in policing, including through collaborative problem solving with communities **through**

- ensuring local accountability through the Policing Committee's role in monitoring police performance;
- identifying priorities from the PCSP Plan for consideration in the development of the local Policing Plan which are consistent with the Northern Ireland Policing Plan;
- providing views to the District Commander through the Policing Committee and supporting the PSNI to engage with the community to identify and address local problems;
- delivering initiatives that link to identified local problems that impact confidence in policing;
- carrying out meaningful local events aimed at increasing PSNI engagement with local communities to build and strengthen public confidence in policing;
- delivering PCSP initiatives in the hardest to reach communities;
- providing a platform for the PCSP and PSNI to engage with young people, including on the themes of upholding the rule of law, and of ways of increasing confidence in policing; and
- building community confidence in the rule of law by helping mitigate the harm caused to people and communities by paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime consistent with wider Programme for Government objectives and through use of co-design principles, where appropriate.

1.2 The Strategic Priorities may be reviewed at any time by Joint Committee to ensure that they are fit for purpose in relation to the effectiveness of PCSPs.

1.3 In addressing the three Strategic Priorities, PCSPs are required to take account of a number of developments, including:

(a) The Community Safety Framework

The purpose of the Community Safety Framework is to ensure effective connectivity between the community safety work of the responsible agencies and provide an operational roadmap on how to collectively deliver the safer community objectives set out in the PfG and Community Plans, whilst providing the mechanism to respond proactively and reactively to operational need.
The Framework can be viewed at:
https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/community-safety-framework

(b) The Draft Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025-2030

The draft Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025-2030 is being developed using the principles of Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA). It outlines Outcomes and Indicators which clearly demonstrate improvement in police performance, in line with the draft Programme for Government (PfG).

The draft Policing Plan went out for public consultation on 17 September 2024 with the consultation closing on 10 December 2024. The consultation document which can be accessed via the link below, proposes the following three outcomes and associated indicators for policing over the next five years:

OUTCOME 1:
The PSNI is Victim Focused
Victims of crime will be treated with compassion and respect and kept informed in line with the principles of the Victim's Charter for Northern Ireland. The police will target resources to protect the most vulnerable victims of crime, including repeat victims.

Indicators

1.1 The Effectiveness in Tackling Violence against Women and Girls
1.2 The Effectiveness in Tackling Domestic Abuse
1.3 The Effectiveness in Tackling Child Criminal Exploitation
1.4 The Effectiveness in Tackling Hate Crime
1.5 Providing a High-Quality Service to Victims

OUTCOME 2:

We Have Safe and Engaged Communities with Confidence in Policing

The police will work with local communities and partners to deliver local solutions to local problems, building confidence in policing and supporting a safe environment for people to live, work, visit, and invest in Northern Ireland.

Indicators

2.1 Level of Public Confidence in Policing
2.2 People Feel Safe in their Community
2.3 The Effectiveness in Tackling the Threat posed by Terrorism, Paramilitaries and Serious and Organised Crime Groups
2.4 The Effectiveness in Tackling Repeat Offending
2.5 The Effectiveness in Working in Partnership with PCSPs and Local Communities to Provide Solutions to Local Problems
2.6 The Effectiveness of Working in Partnership to Reduce Deaths and Serious Injury on our Roads
2.7 Working in Partnership to Effectively Tackle Cyber Crime
2.8 Delivery of Effective Outcomes for Reported Crimes

OUTCOME 3:

PSNI have a Representative, Valued and Enabled Workforce

Our service should be representative of the community, supported through a positive working environment and appropriately resourced to serve the public with high standards of professionalism and care.

Indicators

3.1 Representativeness of the Police Service

3.2 Standards of Professionalism and Conduct

3.3 Making Best Use of Resources

The work of the PCSPs aligns to Outcome 2. The proposed Policing Plan framework may be amended in line with the outcome of the consultation and PCSPs will be provided with the final Plan once approved.

Policing Plan Consultation 2025-2030 (nipolicingboard.org.uk)

(c) Criminal Justice Inspection NI report "Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland".

In August 2019 the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) published the findings of the most recent PCSP inspection and made seven recommendations to enhance their profile, governance and operational arrangements.

In March 2024, CJINI published a report "Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland" which included a follow-up review of "Working Together for Safer Communities – A Review of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in Northern Ireland". Chapter 4 of this March 2024 report indicates that two recommendations from their August 2019 report were assessed as achieved, four partially achieved and one was not achieved.

CJINI - Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland - Community Safety and Local Policing Inspection

(d) Public Satisfaction with PCSPs

To gauge public satisfaction with their PCSP, PCSPs may consider conducting a local PCSP Community Survey, or refer to the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey at www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/

The Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey (NISCS), previously known as the Northern Ireland Crime Survey, may also be used. This is a representative, continuous, personal interview survey of the experiences and perceptions of crime of approximately 4,000 adults living in private households throughout Northern Ireland.

The **Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey** can be accessed from:

Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey | Department of Justice (justice-ni.gov.uk)

(e) Together: Building a United Community

The Northern Ireland Executive's Good Relations Strategy, Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC), which was launched by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in May 2013, has four key priorities:

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

The (T:BUC) Strategy can be viewed at https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/good-relations-and-social-change/together-building-united-community-tbuc

(f) The Executive's approach to tackling paramilitary activity, criminality, and organised crime

The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) aims to create safer communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality, and coercive control. The Programme is jointly funded by the NI Executive and the UK Government and originated from the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015. It currently invests £16 million per year in projects to address paramilitary harm in the present day, as well as projects aimed at breaking the cycle of violence in the future. The Programme delivers through a public health approach to violence in order to address the harm caused by paramilitary groups and organised criminality in our communities. It is an outcome focused programme which addresses harm in the present day and also invests in preventative approaches to build community resilience and building protection around those who are vulnerable.

In September 2024, the Executive agreed to extend the programme for two years, prior to its closure in 2027. The focus for the final two years of the Programme is on embedding and scaling up impactful interventions that have been initiated under the Programme, with an aim to ensure there is longevity for the critical work that remains necessary to tackle the complex and enduring problem of paramilitarism.

Through EPPOC, much more is now known about the factors that make individuals and communities vulnerable to paramilitarism and organised criminality. PCSPs may wish to consider which of these factors are particularly relevant in their areas in order to focus the content of action plans.

View the Ending the Harm website which contains public awareness campaign materials and information, news and research from the Programme

The Executive Office's Communities in Transition (CiT) Project is a key component to the Community Resilience objectives under EPPOC.

CiT was established in Phase 1 of EPPOC to deliver the following action: “The Executive should establish a fund to support ambitious initiatives aimed at building capacity in communities in transition, including through developing partnerships across civil society and across community divisions.”

CiT’s community safety specifications include a requirement that delivery partners must engage with the local PCSP, including in the circumstance where there is a new contract with an onus also placed on the CiT team to maintain regular contact with PCSPs as project proposals come through.

The expectation and request is that there is two-way communication on a regular basis between PCSPs and TEO CiT teams, with PCSPs requested to engage with TEO CiT teams in their area regarding possible community safety interventions to ensure complementarity and avoid possible duplication.

Equally, it will be important for PCSPs to engage with all EPPOC Community Resilience projects as there are many other projects (for example, under Department for Communities) also operating in this space.

(g) Community Planning

The Criminal Justice Inspection NI report “PCSPs, A review of governance, delivery and outcomes” recommended that the Community Plan should be the focal point for delivery of the long-term aims of the PCSP and that the action plans of the PCSPs should feed into the Community Plan.

As part of the community planning process, each council area has provided an assurance that PCSPs will be considered as the key delivery mechanism for community safety actions within community plans. Accordingly, actions within the PCSP action plans should align with community safety actions within the community plan.

(h) Relevant Community Safety themes for inclusion

In addition to taking account of the three strategic priorities set by Joint Committee there are six themes Joint Committee require be addressed within PCSP Action Plans as detailed below. Where these themes are not addressed in Action Plans, PCSPs must provide clear evidence regarding why they are not being covered.

These remain the same as in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 and are as follows:

1. **ASB**
2. **Drugs and alcohol abuse**
3. **Hate Crime**
4. **Domestic and sexual abuse**
5. **Cyber Crime**
6. **Vulnerability to organised crime (including paramilitary linked criminality)**

Mid Ulster Area Profile

Mid Ulster District has seven District Electoral Areas (DEAs), which are sub-divisions of the district used for local elections. The DEAs are: Carntogher, Clogher Valley, Cookstown, Dungannon, Magherafelt, Moyola and Torrent

Population

The estimated population of Mid Ulster Local Government District at the Census 2021 was 150,293, of which 50% were male and 50% were female. This was made up of:

0-14	22%
15-39	32%
40-64	31%
65+	15%

In 2011 there were 48,072 households in Mid Ulster.

The population of Mid Ulster LGD is projected to increase to 159,208 by mid 2030.

Economic Activity

In 2021 Census, 61% were in employment, and 2% were unemployed. 37% were economically inactive (people who are neither in employment nor unemployed). This group includes, for example, all those who were looking after a home or retired, long-term sick or disabled.

Qualification Level

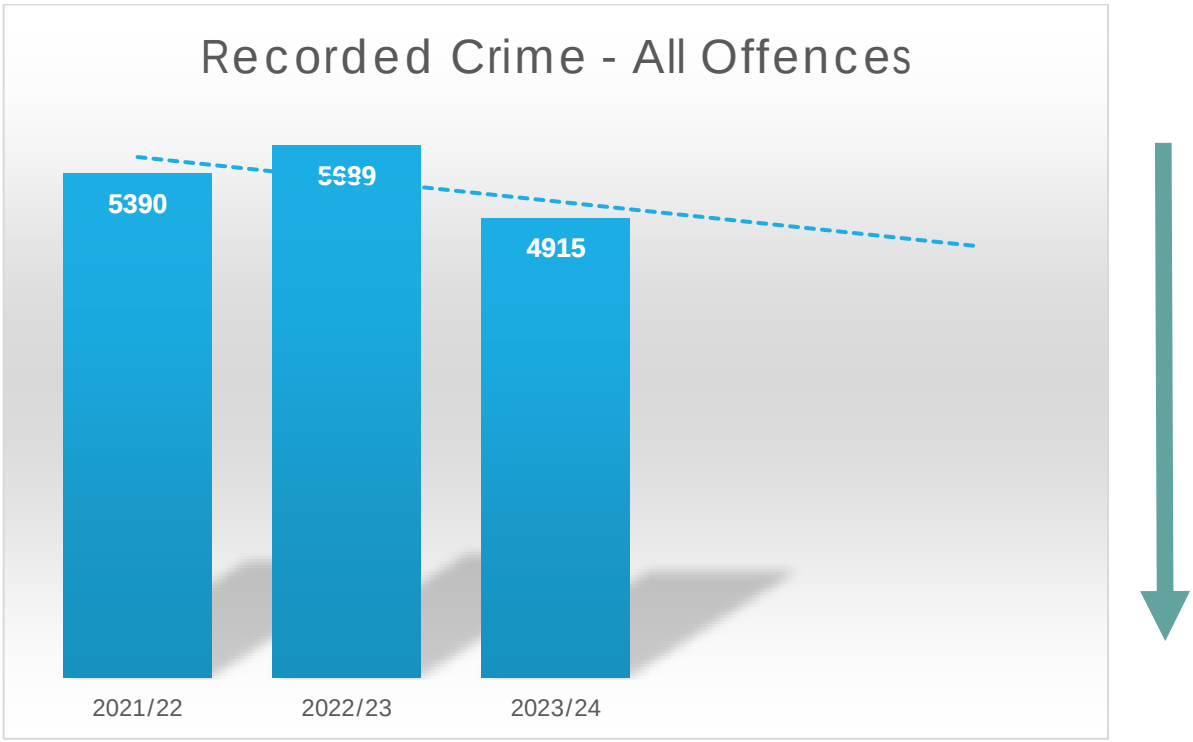
In the Census 2021 29% were qualified to Degree level or above whilst 27% had 'no qualifications'

Statistics

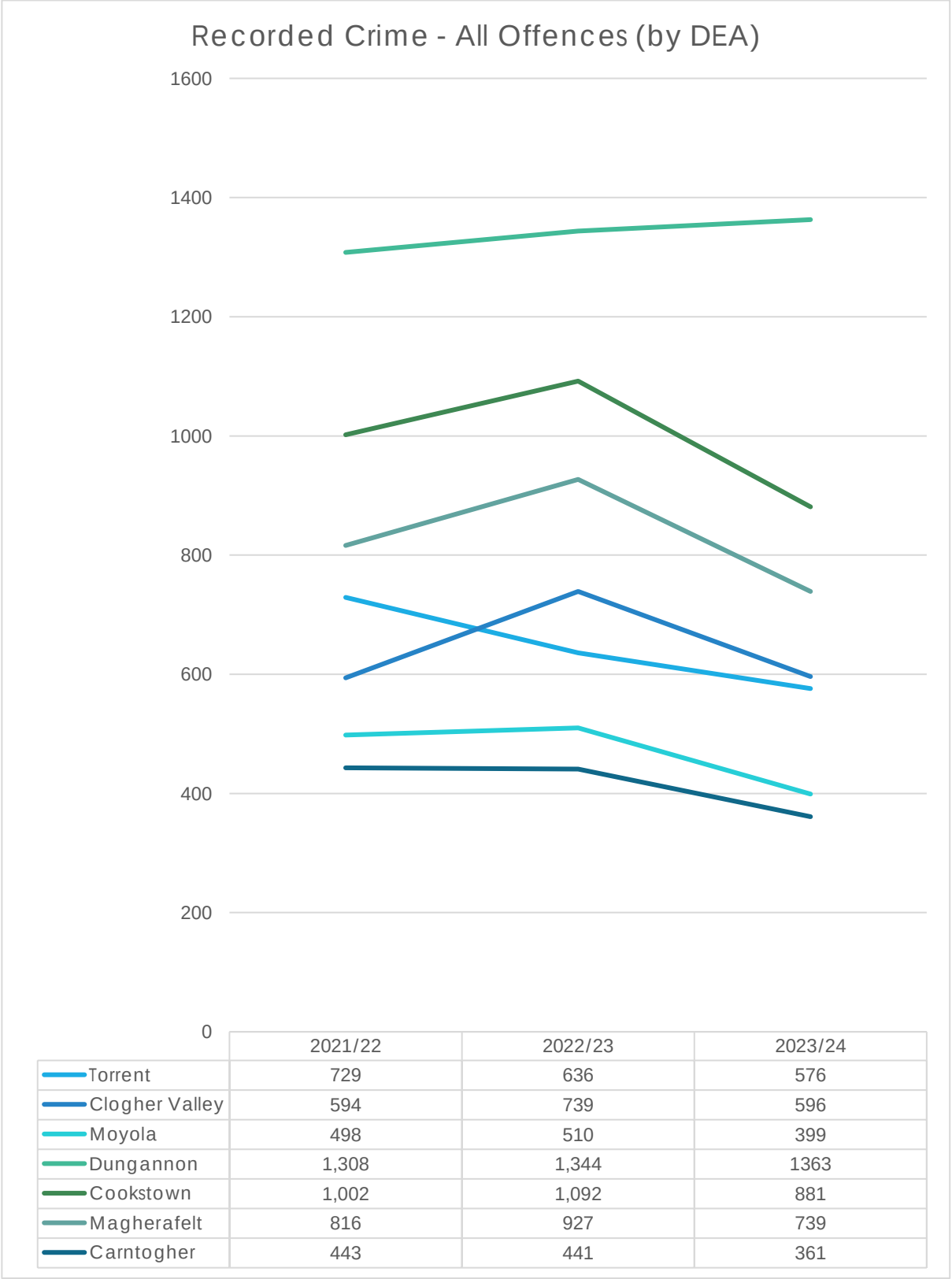
Official PSNI recorded statistics were obtained from NISRA. These statistics are presented in graphs. Each graph has a blue dotted line that outlines the trend forecast for each crime type/incident. The red or green arrow on the right hand side of the chart shows if the statistic is “turning the curve”, heading in the right direction.

Recorded Crime

The figure for overall recorded crime has decreased significantly since 2022/23. The trend figure (dotted line) is downward.



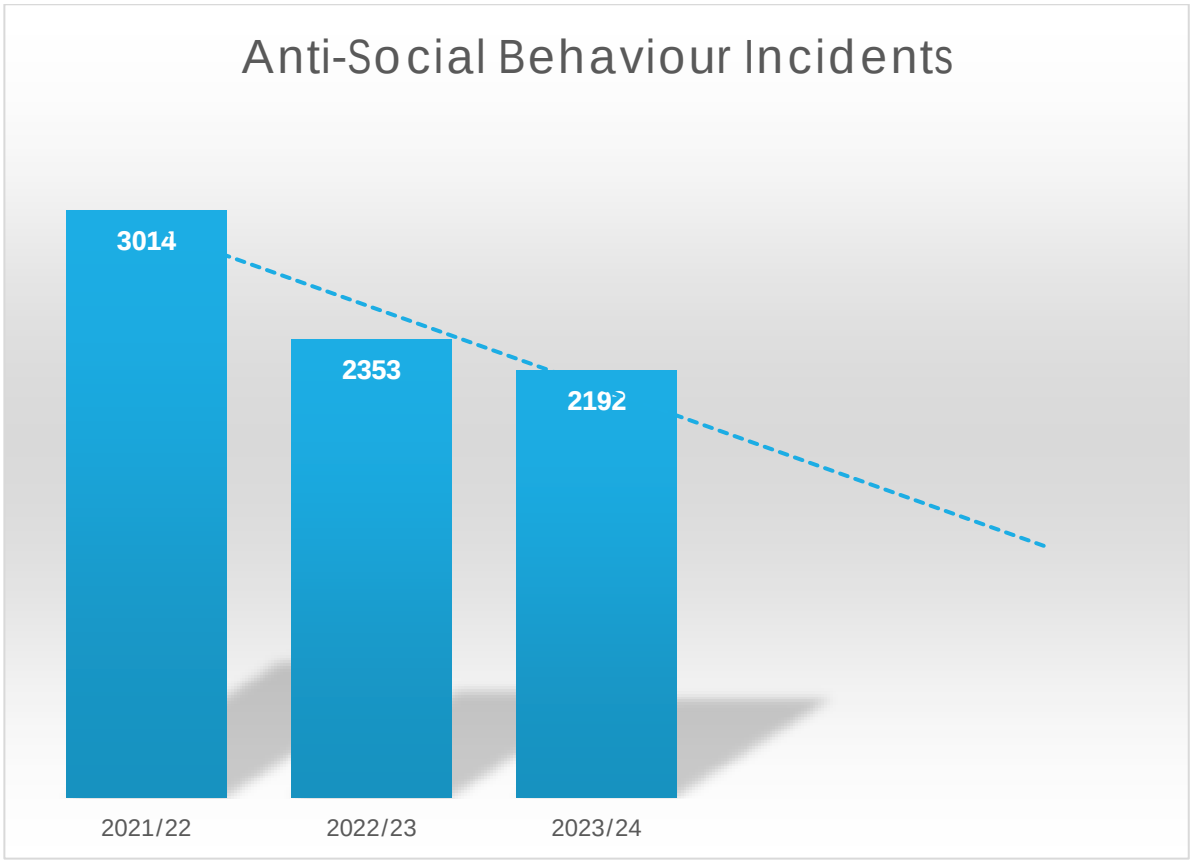
The DEAs (District Electoral Areas) with the highest rate of Recorded Crime are Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt respectfully. These can be viewed on the chart below.



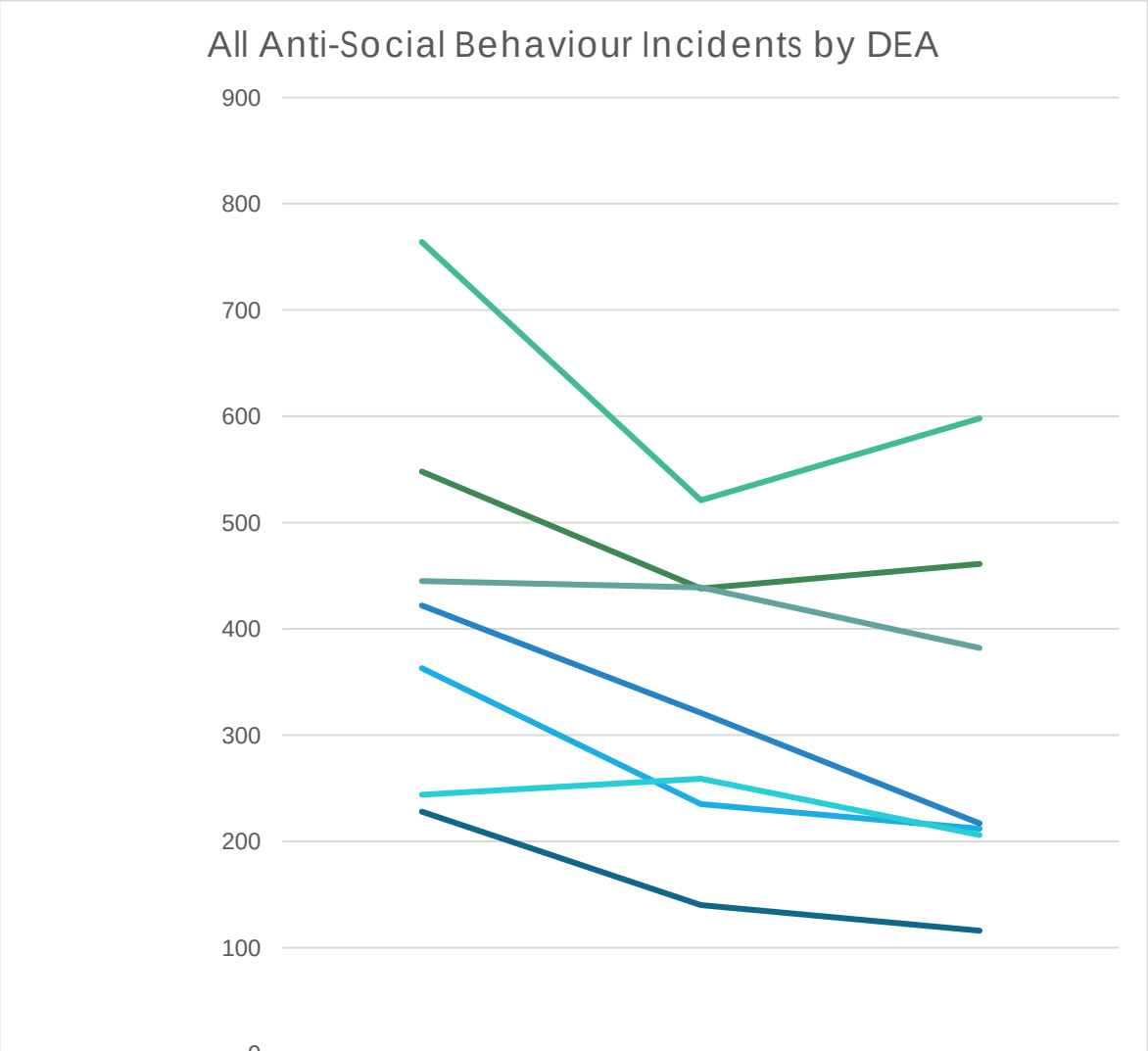
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Torrent	729	636	576
Clogher Valley	594	739	596
Moyola	498	510	399
Dungannon	1,308	1,344	1363
Cookstown	1,002	1,092	881
Magherafelt	816	927	739
Carntogher	443	441	361

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Statistics

Since 2021/22 the incidents of ASB have overall reduced across the Mid Ulster district. The trend forecast line (dotted line) demonstrates a downward trend for ASB with a forecast to continue decreasing.



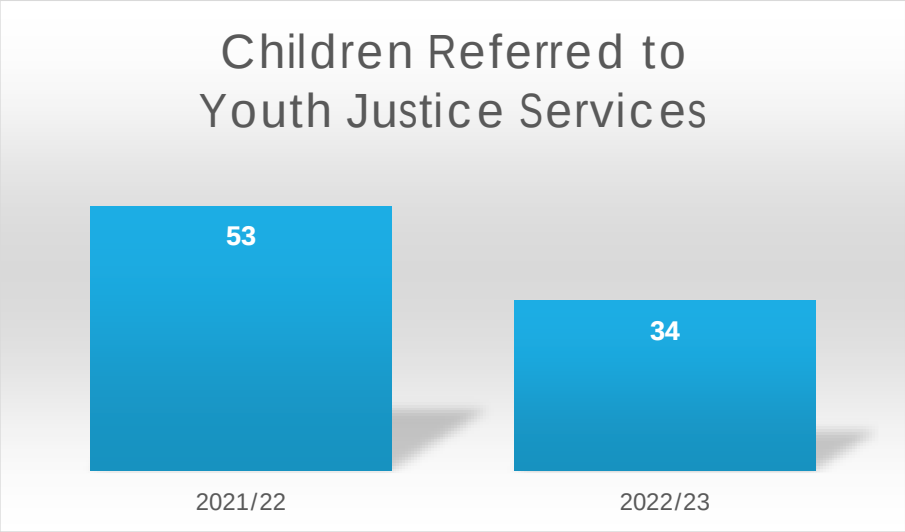
The three DEAs with the largest recorded incidents of ASB are Dungannon, Cookstown, and Magherafelt. The recorded incidents for each of these DEAs have all dropped significantly since 2020/21



	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Torrent	363	235	212
Clogher Valley	422	321	217
Moyola	244	259	206
Dungannon	764	521	598
Cookstown	548	438	461
Magherafelt	445	439	382
Carntogher	228	140	116

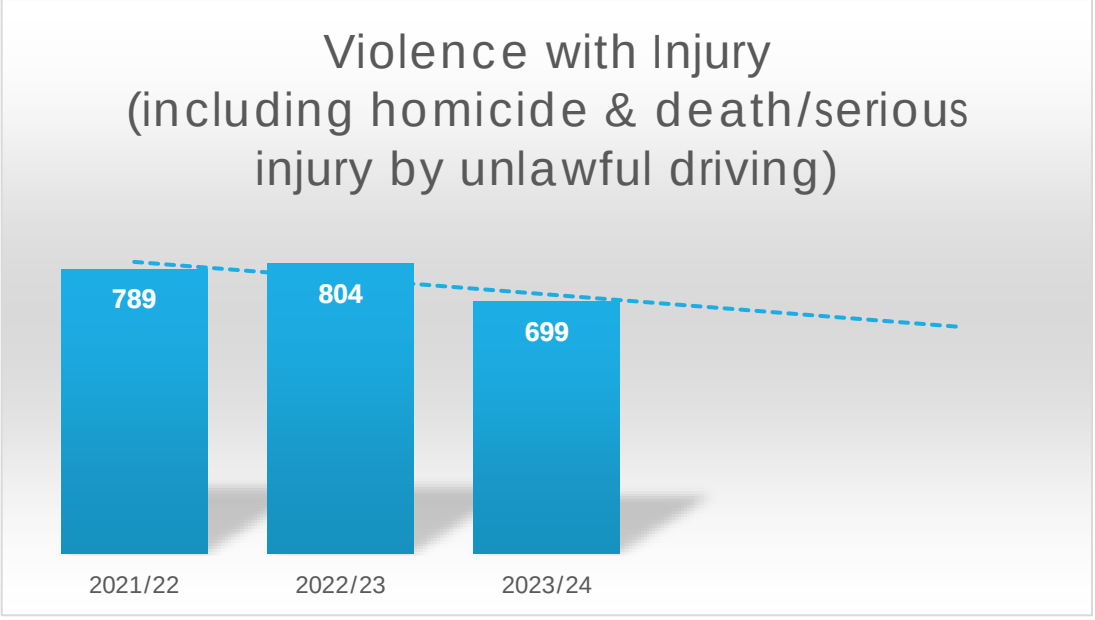
Youth Justice Agency

The statistics for the numbers of young people referred to the Youth Justice Services shows a reduction since 2021/22.



Violence with Injury

Overall, Violence with injury (including homicide and death) has reduced in 2023/24 after slight increases in the two previous years. The trend forecast highlights that figures will decrease.



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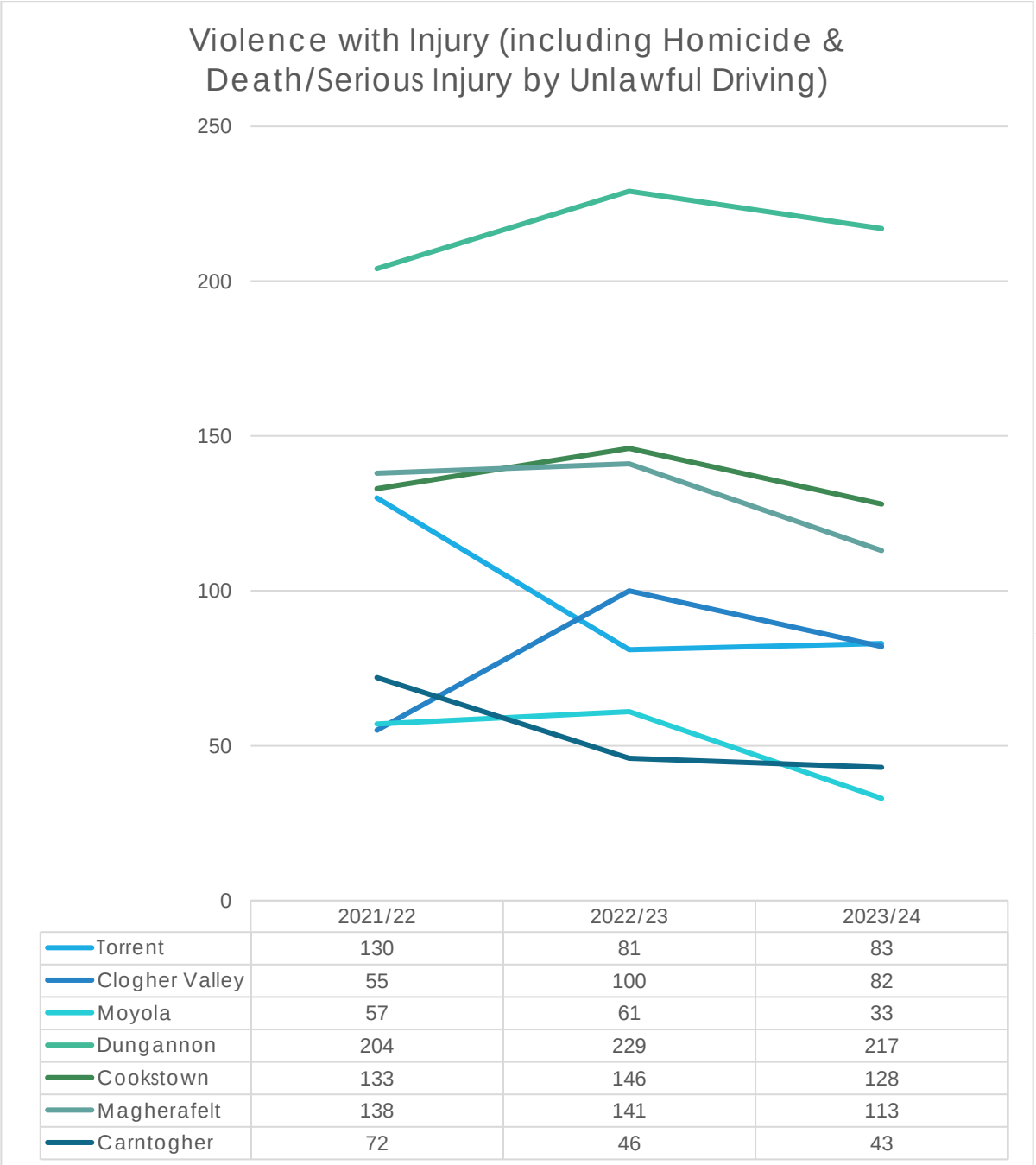
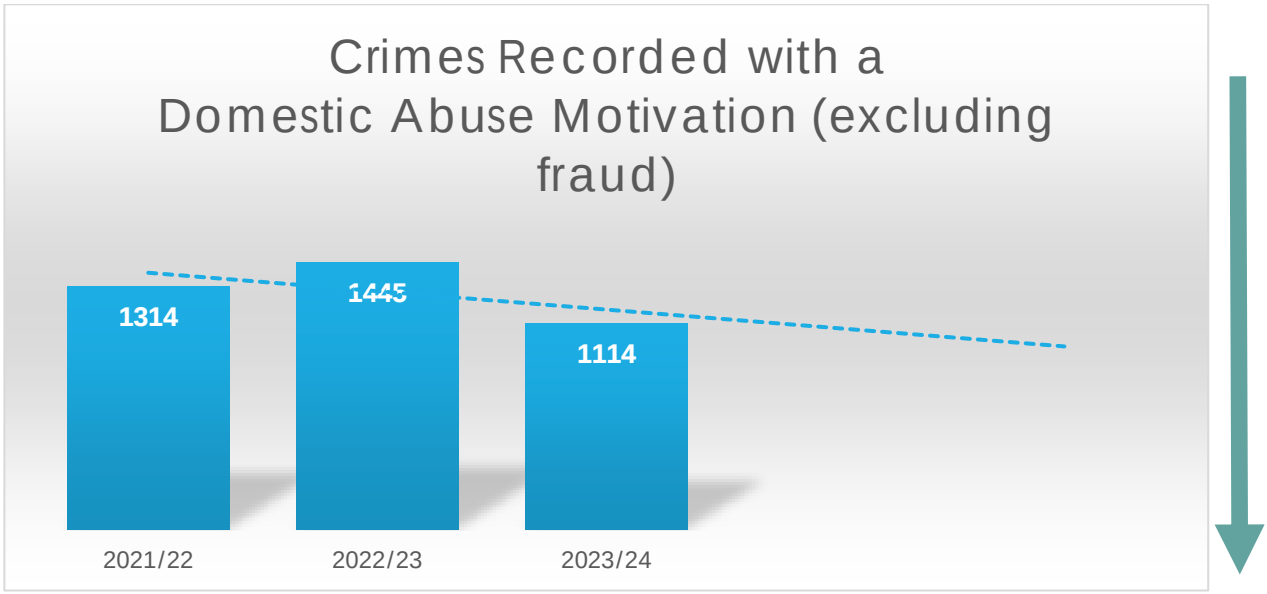


	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Torrent	130	81	83
Clogher Valley	55	100	82
Moyola	57	61	33
Dungannon	204	229	217
Cookstown	133	146	128
Magherafelt	138	141	113
Carntogher	72	46	43

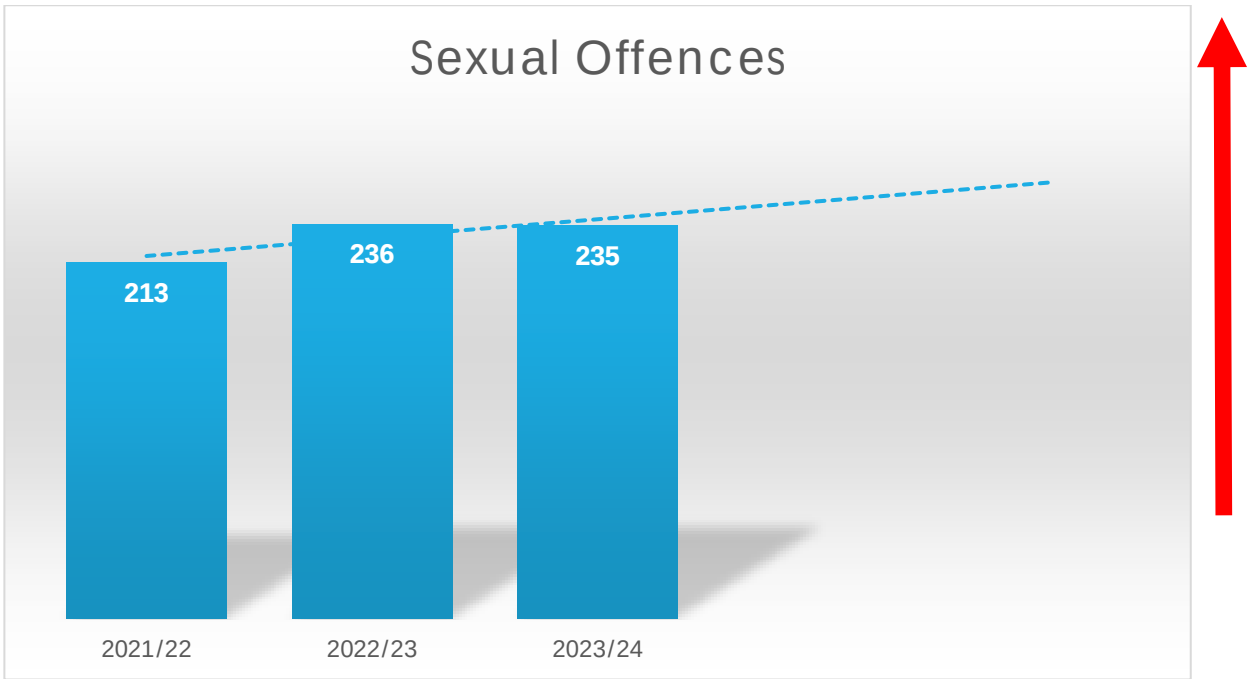
Domestic Abuse

Reported crimes with a Domestic Abuse motivation (excluding fraud) increased in 2022/23 but decreased in 2023/24. The trend forecast line is that figures will continue to decrease.



Sexual Offences

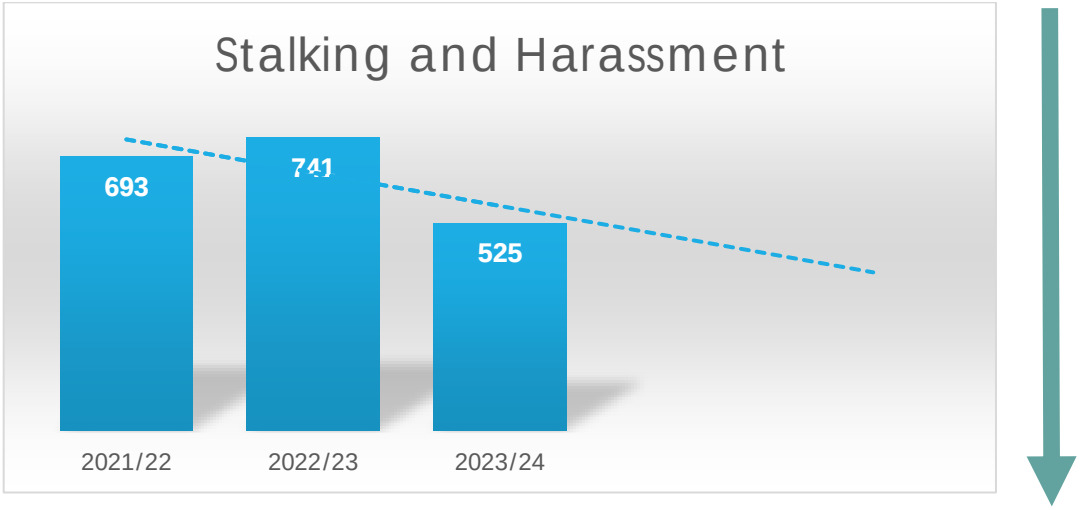
The trend for Sexual Offences is slightly increasing as offences increased in 2022/23 but remained at the same level for 2023/24.



Stalking and Harassment

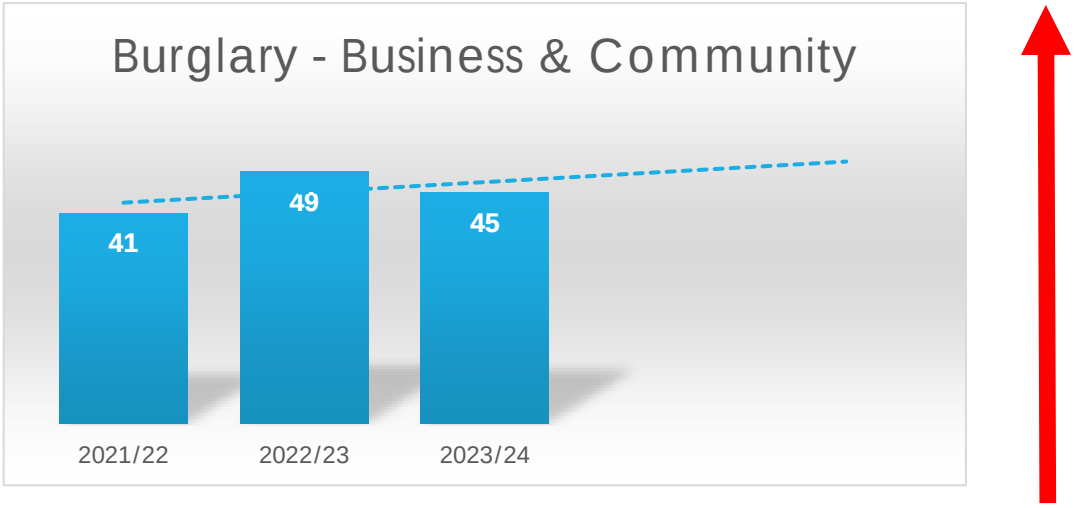
In 2023/24 the figure for Stalking and Harassment dropped significantly from the previous year. The trendline forecasts a possible decrease in incidents of stalking and harassment in the district.

The Protection from Stalking Act (NI) 2022 became law on the 26th April 2022.It creates a new specific offence of stalking, capturing conduct and acts associated with stalking behaviour, and will be better focused on recognising the fixated, obsessive, unwanted and repeated nature of stalking behaviours and the particular risks associated with stalking.



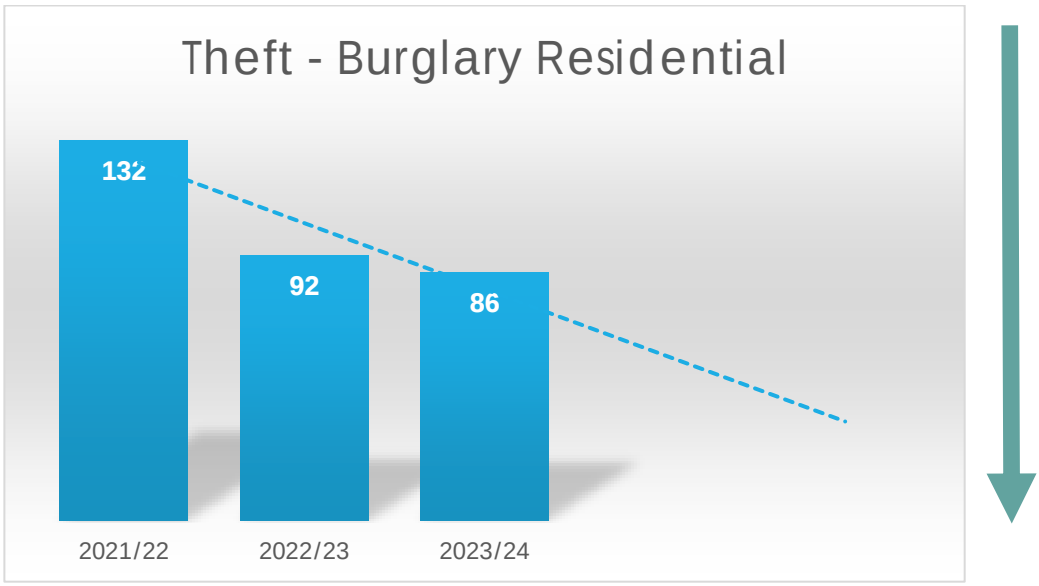
Burglary – Business & Community

Overall, Burglary for Business & Community is at a low level in the district. The trend forecast is slightly upward though recorded burglaries are quite low.



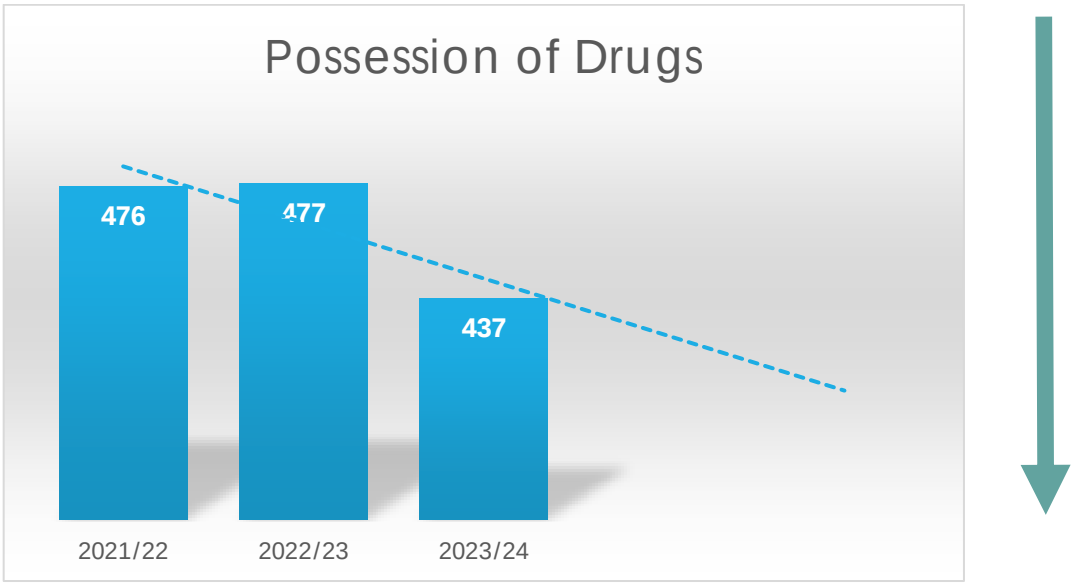
Burglary – Residential

Residential Burglary is showing a downward trend in recent years.



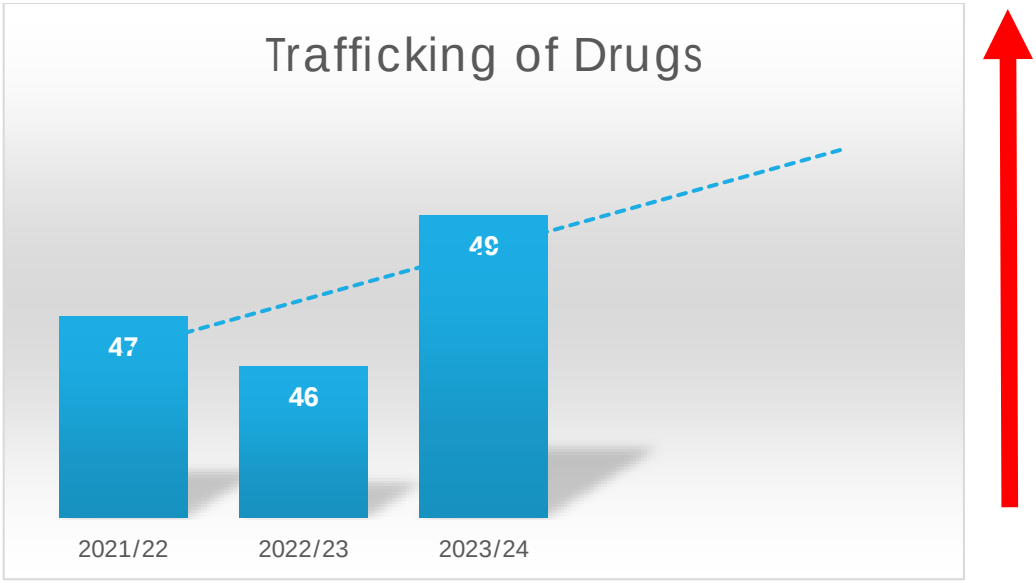
Possession of Drugs

Possession of Drugs has decreased in 2023/24 compared to the two previous years. The trend forecast is that figures will continue to decrease.



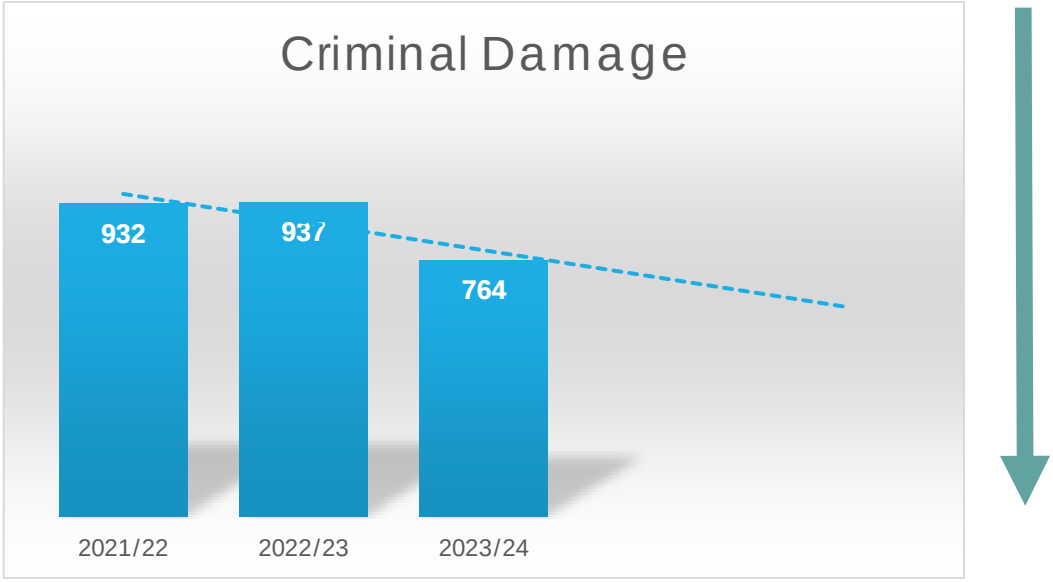
Trafficking of drugs

Trafficking of drugs has increased slightly in the Mid Ulster area since 2020/21. The trend forecast is upwards.



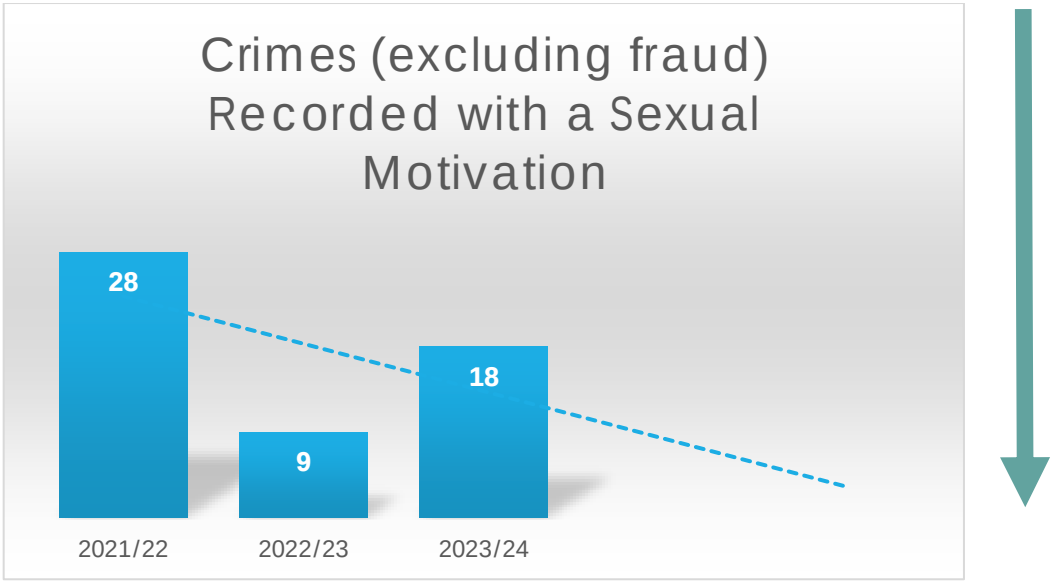
Criminal Damage

Criminal Damage has reduced since 2022/23 across the Mid Ulster area. The trend forecast is that figures will continue to reduce.

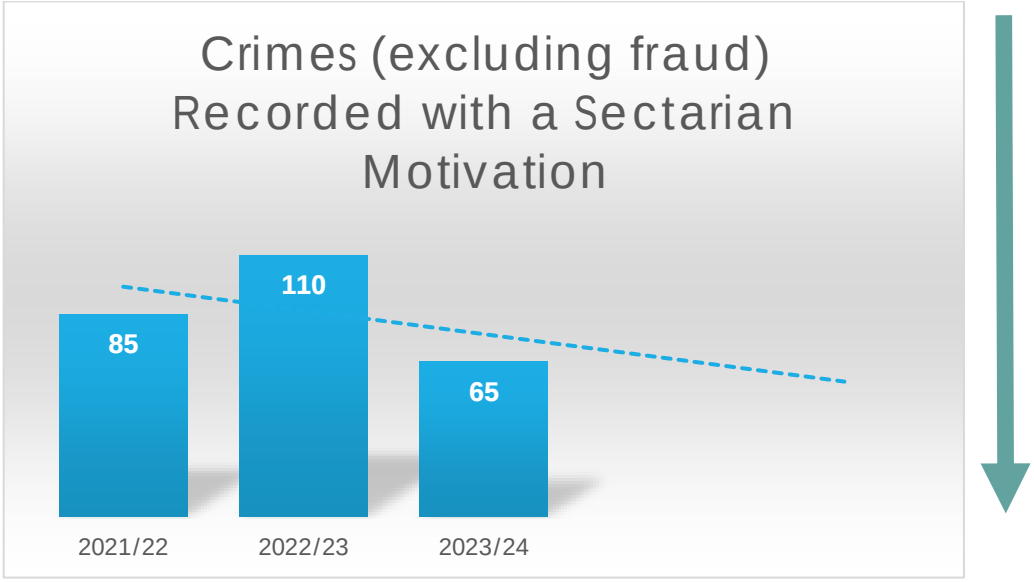


Hate Crime

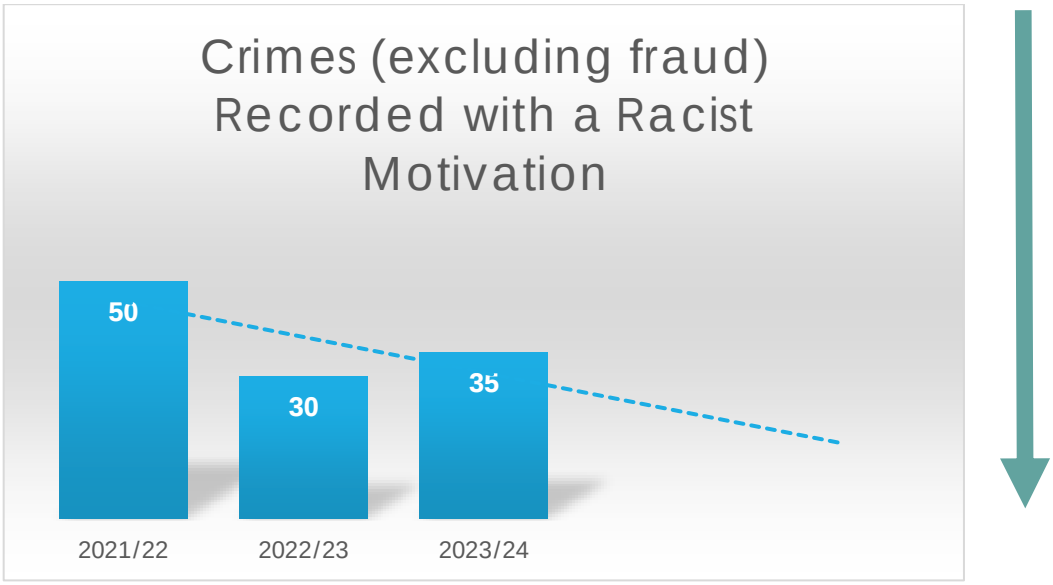
Recorded Hate Crime with Sexual motivation has decreased since 2021/22. The trend forecast is down



Recorded Hate Crime with a Sectarian motivation has decreased in 2023/24. The trend forecast shows a projected decrease.

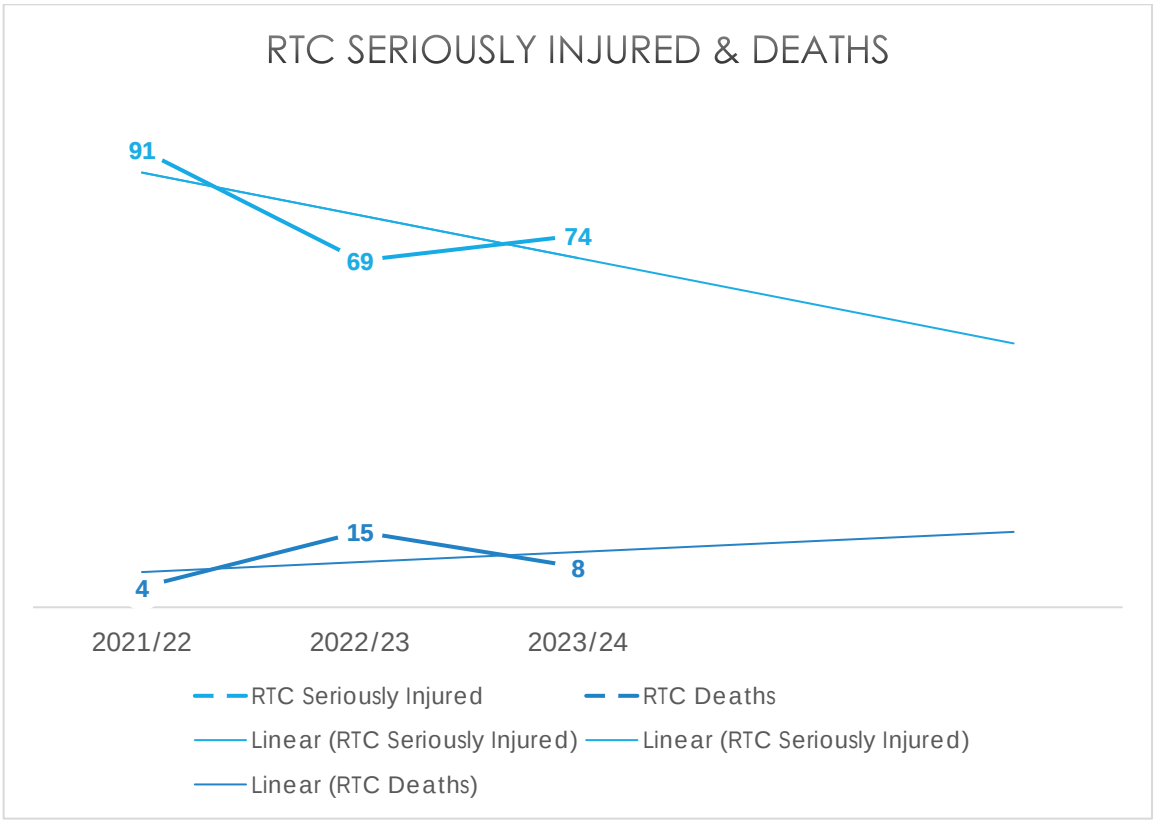


Recorded Hate Crime with a Racist motivation has varied from 2019/20. The current trend forecast is downward.



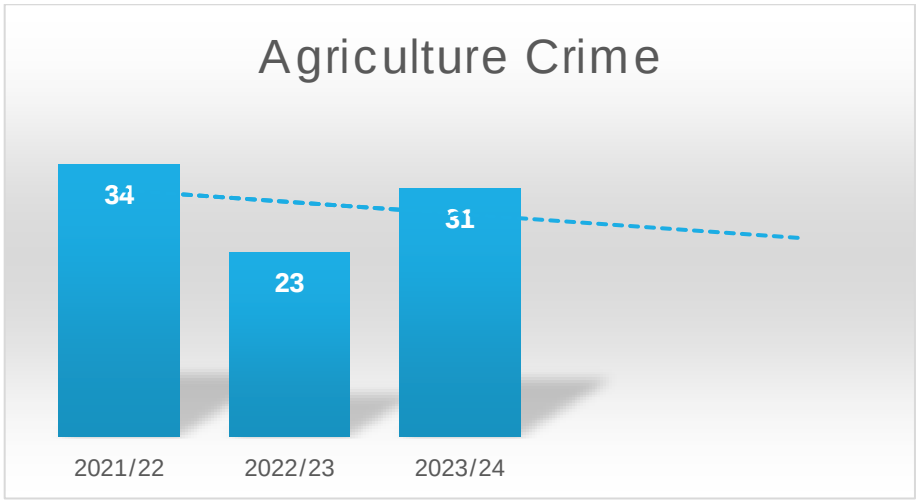
Road Traffic Collisions

The trend lines for deaths show a slightly increasing forecast.



Agriculture Crime

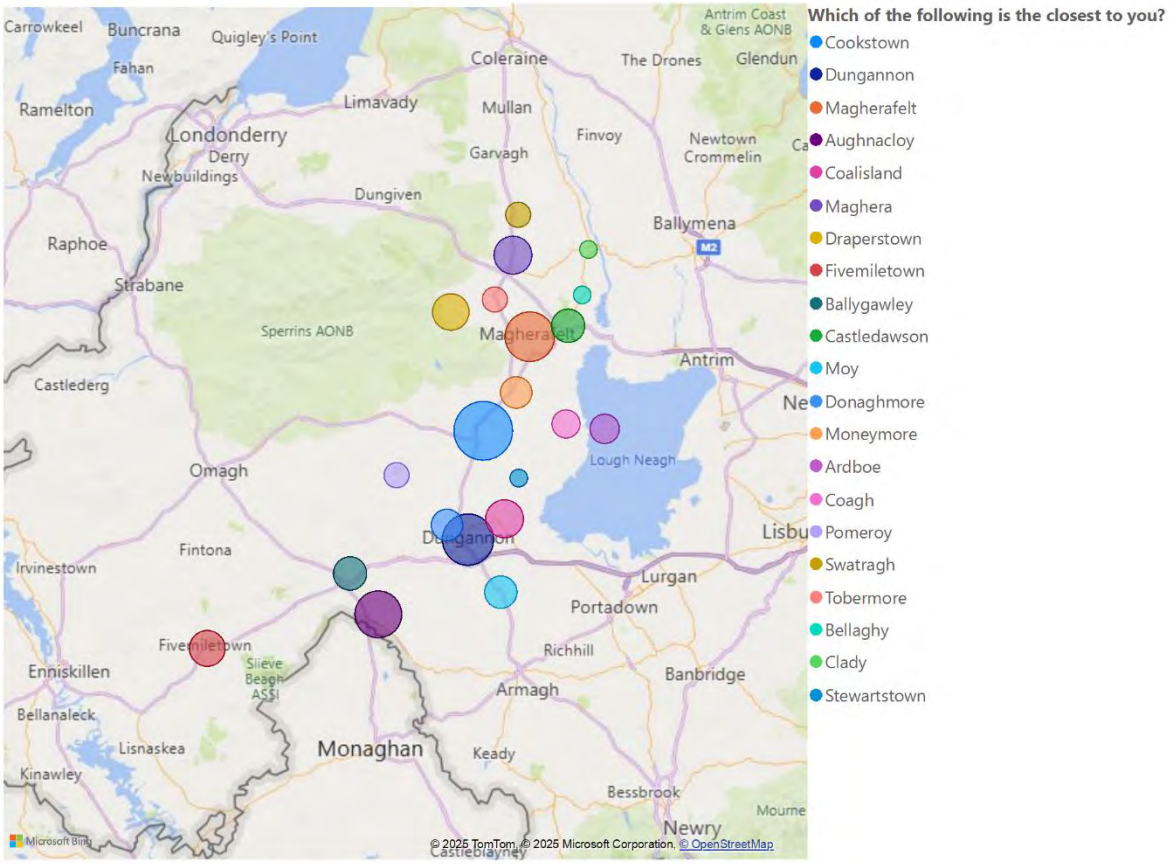
Agriculture crime has slightly decreased in the previous three years in the district. The overall forecast shows a decrease.



Community Audit

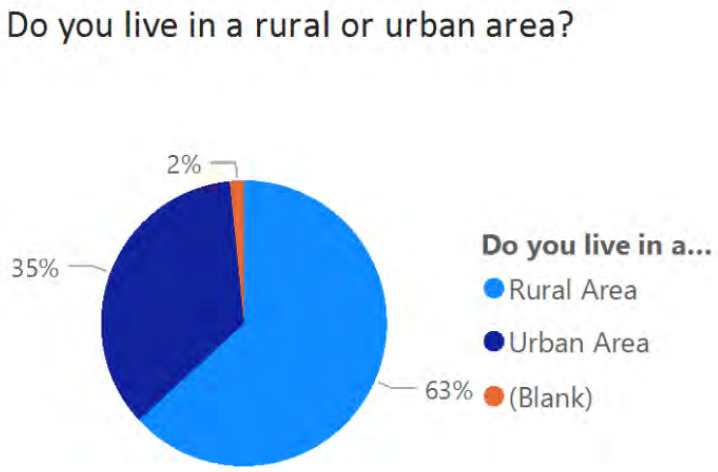
To assist PCSP members a community consultation survey was undertaken in December 2024 and January 2025. This survey was promoted through Social Media, PCSP events, Community Database, and the Text Alert system. There were 309 respondents.

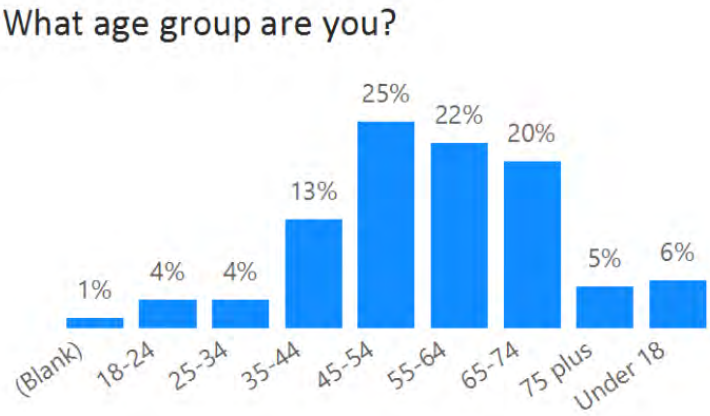
Respondents were asked to indicate the nearest town/village. Below is a map highlighting the responses.

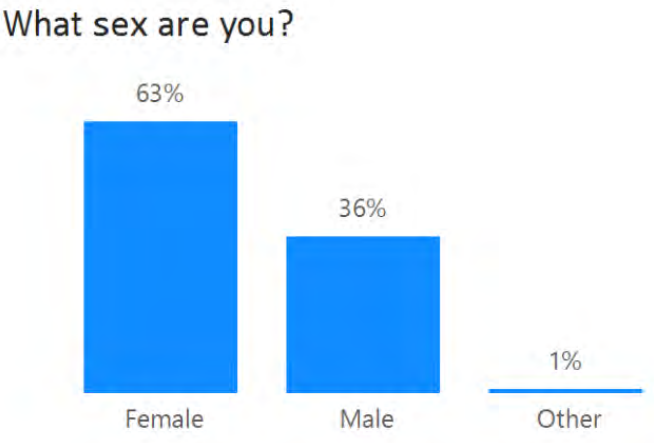


Analysis of Respondents

Below is a breakdown of the respondents age, sex and if they lived in an urban or rural area



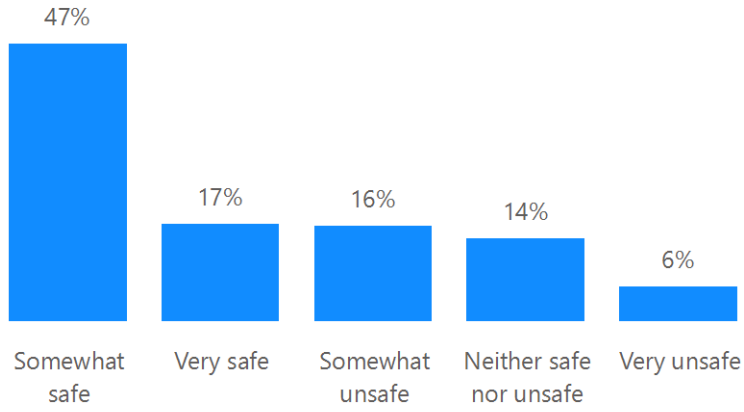




Fear of Crime

Respondents were asked how safe they felt in their local area

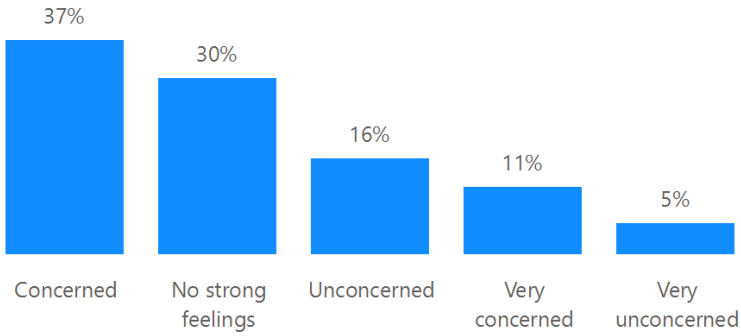
How safe do you feel in your local community?



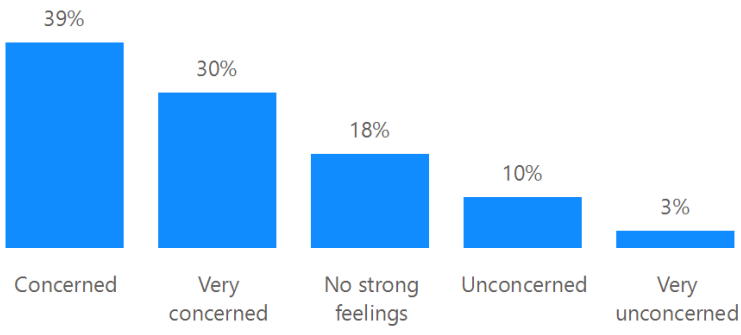
In 2021 20% of respondents stated they felt somewhat or very unsafe, in 2025 22% of respondents felt somewhat or very unsafe. The demographics who most felt unsafe were the age brackets 35-44 and 45-54.

Respondents were then asked about their fear of crime during the day and at night. Below are the responses.

To what extent are you worried by crime in your area during the day?



To what extent are you worried by crime in your area after dark?

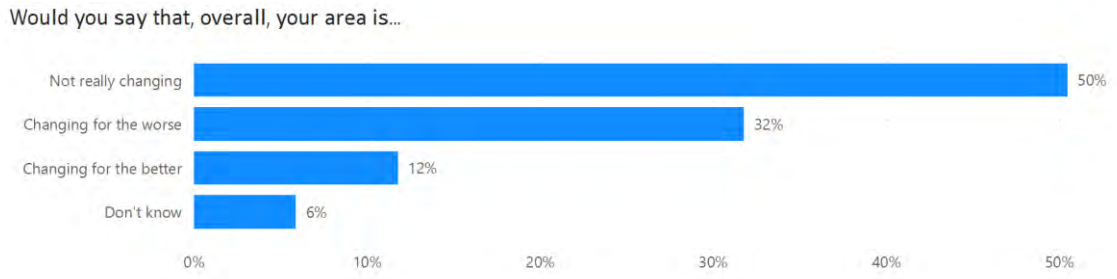


48% of respondents were concerned or very concerned by crime in their area during the day. In 2021 this was 39% of respondents.

69% of respondents were concerned or very concerned by crime in their area after dark. In 2021 this was 65% of respondents.

For those that responded the 35-44 and 45-54 demographics were the highest for feeling very concerned in both day and night.

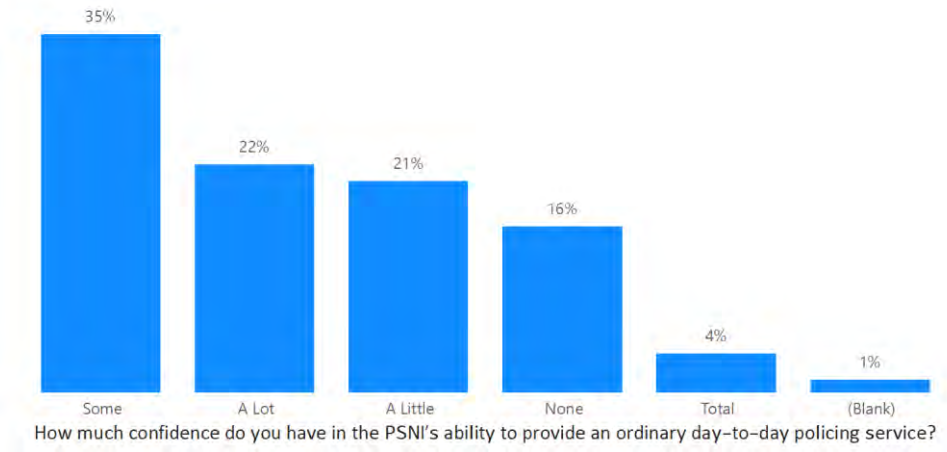
Respondents were asked how they felt their area was changing.



32% of respondents felt that their local area was changing for the worse. This was 29% of respondents in 2021. The 45-54 demographic was highest for stating there are was changing for the worse.

Confidence in Policing

Respondents were asked about their confidence in the PSNI to provide an ordinary day-to-day policing service



Of those who responded, 16% indicated they had no confidence in the PSNI's ability to provide an ordinary day-to-day policing service. 21% had a little confidence, and 61% had some to total confidence.

In 2021 it was 14% for none, 23% for little and 63% for some to total confidence.

Respondents were then asked for their rationale for providing their response. The following are the most common responses:

Resources and Staffing

A common theme was the perception that the police are understaffed and under-resourced, which affects their ability to effectively police the community.

Visibility and Presence

Many respondents mentioned a lack of police presence in their areas, stating that they rarely see officers on the streets or in their communities

Response and Effectiveness

Several comments highlighted slow or inadequate responses to incidents, with some feeling that the police do not take certain issues seriously.

Positive Experiences

Some respondents shared positive experiences with the police, mentioning quick responses and helpful interactions.

Community Engagement

There were comments about the lack of engagement with the community, with some feeling that the police do not interact enough with local residents.

Crime and Safety Concerns

Many respondents expressed concerns about crime and safety in their areas, including issues with drug dealing, anti-social behaviour, and road safety.

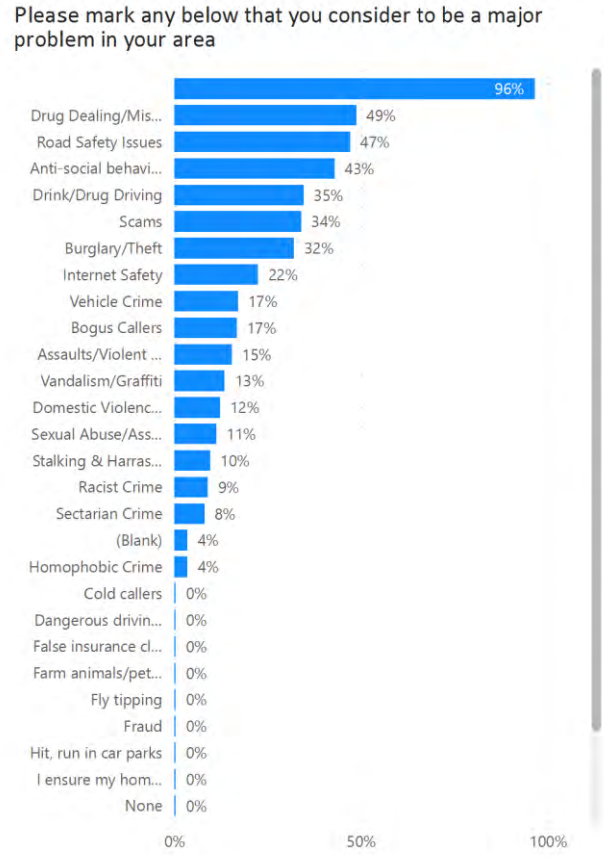
Perception and Trust

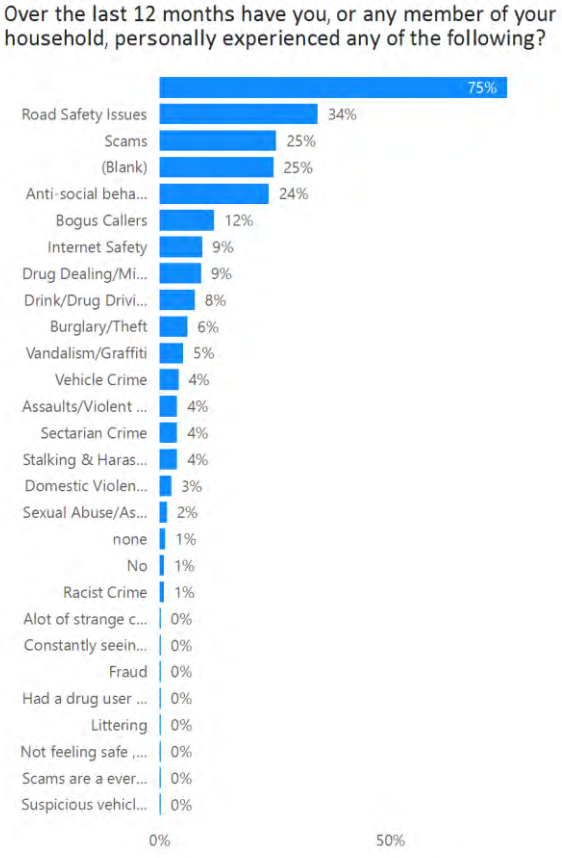
Some respondents mentioned a general lack of trust and confidence in the police, influenced by negative media reports and personal perceptions.

Respondents were also asked if they knew how to contact their local PSNI Neighbourhood Team (NPT). 51% of respondents stated they knew how to contact the NPT, 46% of respondents did not.

Local Problems

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the biggest problems in the district and then what they had actually experienced.





96% of Respondents rated the following as major problems

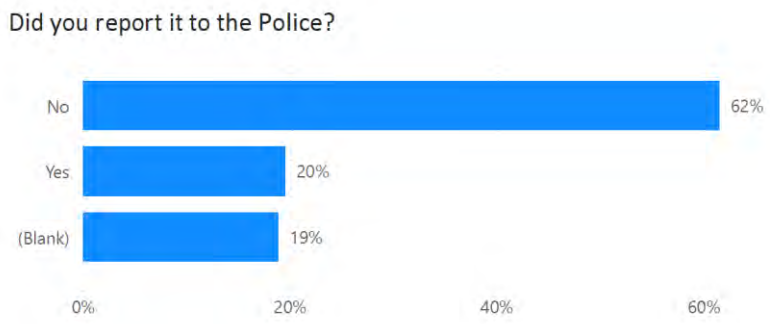
1. Drug Dealing/Misuse
2. Road Safety Issues
3. Antisocial Behaviour
4. Drink/Drug Driving
5. Scams
6. Burglary/Theft

75% of Respondents stated the following as crimes experienced over the last 12 months

1. Road Safey Issues
2. Scams
3. Blank/Nothing
4. Antisocial Behaviour
5. Bogus Callers
6. Internet Safety

Reporting a Crime

Respondents who reported they had experienced a crime were asked if they had reported it



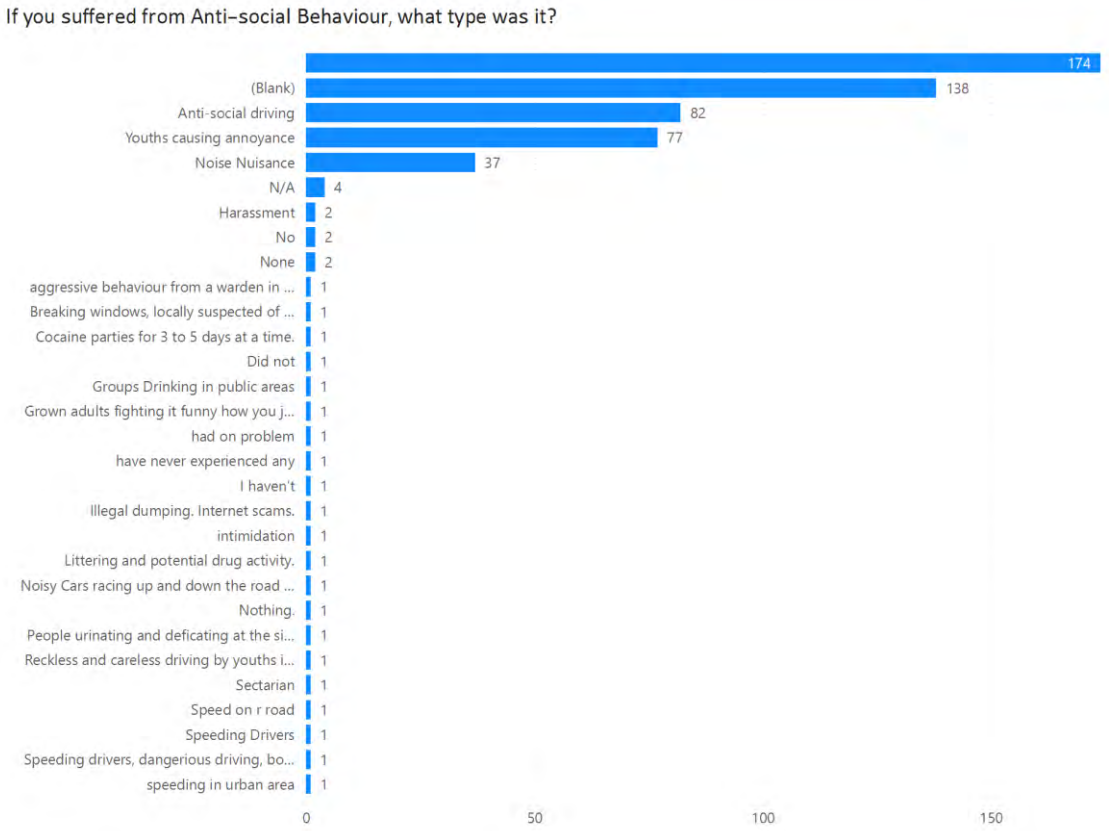
62% of respondents stated they had not reported the crime, with 20% stating they had.

Respondents were then asked the reason for not reporting. The main reasons provided were:

- Frustration with perceived lack of police responsiveness to minor crimes as police are too busy.
- Concerns about road safety, speeding, and dangerous driving in rural areas but no evidence to report. Also that it was not a police matter but a DfI Roads issue.
- Frequent reports of phone scams, particularly targeting vulnerable populations that was dealt by ending the call or contacting the bank.
- Low confidence in the reporting systems due to perceived ineffective follow-up
- Community members feel unheard and believe minor incidents are systematically deprioritized.
- Not wating to waste police time over what might be considered silly or that nothing happened to them or their property.

Antisocial Behaviour

Respondents were asked that if they suffered from antisocial behaviour, what form did it take

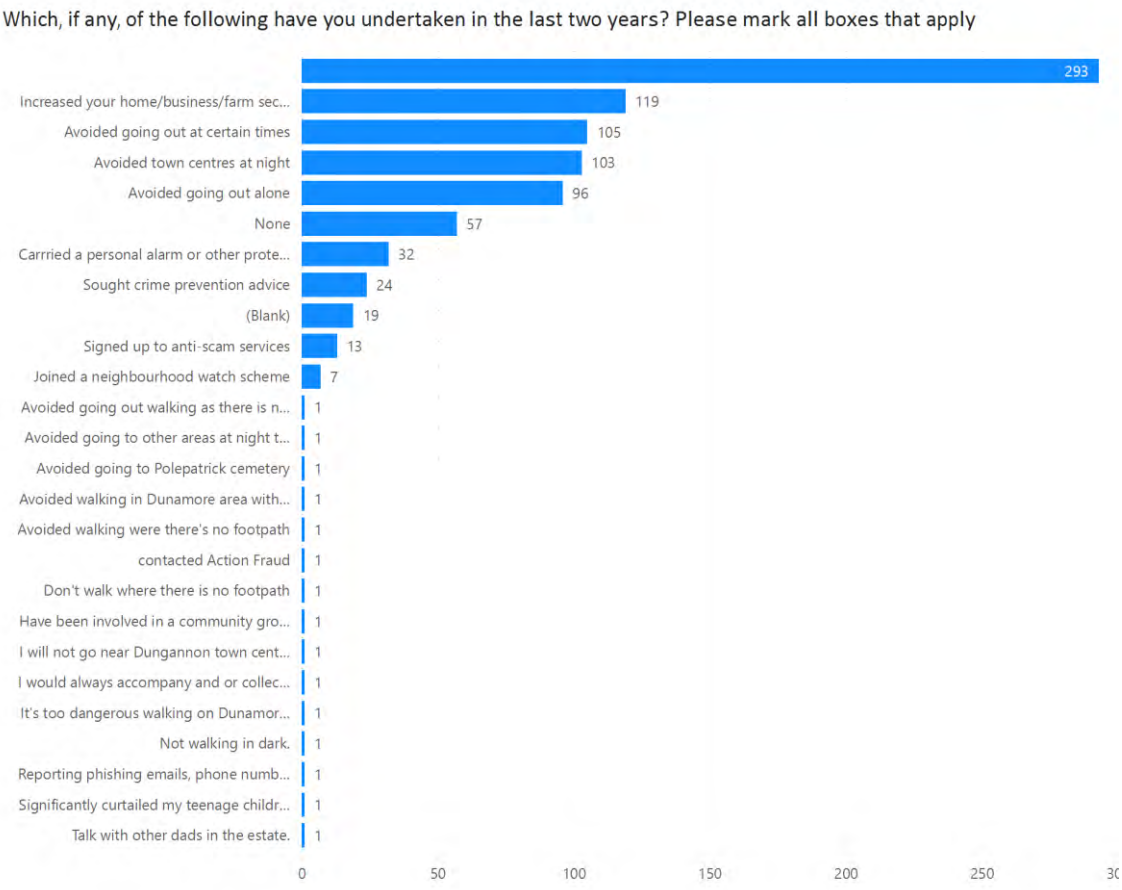


The main type of antisocial behaviour experienced were:

1. Antisocial Driving
2. Youth causing Annoyance
3. Noise Nuisance

Crime Prevention

Respondents were asked what crime prevention measures they had undertaken in the last two years



The main forms of crime prevention measures undertaken by respondents were increasing their home/business/farm security and avoiding going out alone or at certain times/places.

Respondents were asked what single step would have the biggest impact on crime, antisocial behaviour and fear of crime in their area, apart from increasing police numbers.

On analysing the responses the most common were:

• Increased police visibility and foot patrols in local communities and rural areas

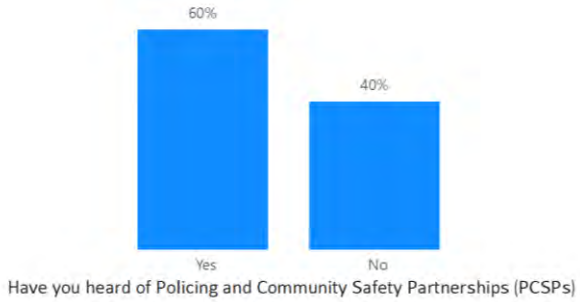
• Stronger legal consequences and more effective sentencing for criminal offenses

• Enhanced community engagement and education about crime prevention

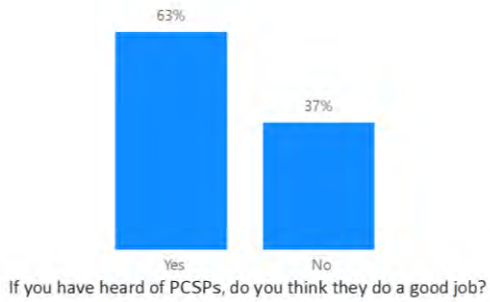
• More proactive policing, responding quickly to reports and focusing on repeat offenders

• Develop youth activities and community programs to address underlying social issues

Awareness of PCSP



Have you heard of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs)



If you have heard of PCSPs, do you think they do a good job?

Of those who responded 60% stated that they had heard of PCSPs, 40% stated they had not heard of PCSPs.

Of those that had heard of PCSP, 63% indicated that they thought they did a good job, with 37% stating that they did not think they did a good job

There was a correlation between 70% of those that responded that they did not think the PCSP did a good job, also responding that they had little to no confidence in the PCSP to provide an ordinary day-to-day policing service.

PCSP Strategic Plan 2025-28

The Joint Committee of the Dept of Justice and NI Policing Board agreed the strategic objectives for the PCSPs. These are listed below and will form the basis of the development of the PCSP Strategy and Action Plan.

Strategic Priority 1 – To ensure effective delivery in response to local need, and improve the visibility and recognition of the work of the PCSP through effective consultation, communication and engagement

through:

- carrying out meaningful engagement in the district with the local community, relevant statutory partners / agencies, businesses and the community & voluntary sector in the development and implementation of PCSP Action Plans;
- ensuring ongoing two-way engagement in the district with the local community, relevant statutory partners / agencies, businesses and the community & voluntary sector to provide a problem-solving forum to identify effective solutions to local issues, ensuring sufficient flexibility to address issues as they emerge, and seeking relevant expertise from the designated organisations as appropriate;
- using a range of platforms, including multi-media, to communicate and promote the work of the PCSP; and
- increasing awareness of the work of the PCSP.

Strategic Priority 2 - To improve community safety by prioritising and addressing local community safety issues, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour

through

- utilising the partnership created by the statutory, elected and independent/ community membership of the PCSP to initiate and lead work to improve community safety and tackle ASB locally;
- working in partnership to develop outcome and locality focused interventions to address the most pressing crime types and behaviours impacting local community safety, as evidenced by local need, with appropriate targets and indicators so that impacts can be measured;
- drawing on best practice, promote early intervention and collaborating effectively to improve PCSP-supported projects and programmes that address the underlying causes of ASB, crime and the fear of crime in the community, including, where appropriate, a focus on changing behaviours;
- enhancing safety and feelings of safety, in particular for those who might be more vulnerable;
- engaging with partners in the district, to horizon scan in order to respond to and re-direct resources to respond to emerging local community safety issues;
- having cognisance of the Community Safety Framework in developing local plans, and providing a feedback loop to the Community Safety Board on local issues in order to inform community safety policy development – and vice versa; and
- providing comprehensive community input into decision making processes about tackling actual and perceived anti-social behaviour and giving feedback to the community on the effectiveness of interventions on meeting outcomes.

Strategic Priority 3 – To support confidence in policing, including through collaborative problem solving with communities

through

- ensuring local accountability through the Policing Committee's role in monitoring police performance;
- identifying priorities from the PCSP Plan for consideration in the development of the local Policing Plan which are consistent with the Northern Ireland Policing Plan;
- providing views to the District Commander through the Policing Committee and supporting the PSNI to engage with the community to identify and address local problems;
- delivering initiatives that link to identified local problems that impact confidence in policing;
- carrying out meaningful local events aimed at increasing PSNI engagement with local communities to build and strengthen public confidence in policing;
- delivering PCSP initiatives in the hardest to reach communities;
- providing a platform for the PCSP and PSNI to engage with young people, including on the themes of upholding the rule of law, and of ways of increasing confidence in policing; and
- building community confidence in the rule of law by helping mitigate the harm caused to people and communities by paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime consistent with wider Programme for Government objectives and through use of co-design principles, where appropriate.

In January 2025 Mid Ulster PCSP undertook an Assessment of Policing and Community Safety in the Mid Ulster Council Area.

This exercise was undertaken to ensure that the priorities identified continue to reflect priority policing and community safety issues in the area and was informed by analysis of information provided by statutory partners, as well as the results of ongoing district wide engagement and consultation on policing and community safety across the council area.

The PCSP reviewed the information provided by the recorded statistics, community survey and partners. They listed the following as local priorities to be addressed in the strategy for 2025-28, in conjunction with the priorities set by the Dept of Justice and the NI Policing Board.

1 Drugs
2 Antisocial Behaviour
3 Domestic Violence & Sexual Abuse
4 Road Safety
5 Burglary/Theft
6 Scams
7 Violence with Injury
8 Hate Crime

Cognisance was also taken of:

- The draft Programme for Government 2024-2027
- The most recent CJINI Inspection Reports
- The Northern Ireland Policing Plan
- Local Policing Plan
- The Community Safety Framework
- Public Satisfaction Surveys
- Together: Building a United Community – Good Relations Strategy
- Council's Good Relations Plan
- The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime
- Community Planning

A Turning the Curve Exercise was undertaken in relation to the current PCSP Action Plan Indicators/themes to formulate the partnership's best thinking on projects and initiatives to contribute towards the overall outcome.

As a result of the Turning the Curve Exercise the following Indicators/themes have been identified as local priorities.

Strategic Objective 1 – To successfully deliver the functions of the Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Indicator:

- **% of public awareness of PCSPs**
- **% public confidence that PCSPs are doing a good job**

Themes:

- Support the PCSP to function effectively and deliver on the action plan aligned with the Community Plan and in line with OBA
- Engage with local community, statutory groups and key stakeholders and increase PCSP awareness

Strategic Objective 2 – To improve community safety by tackling crime and anti-social behaviour

Indicators:

- **Recorded incidents of ASB**
- **Recorded Crime related to NTE**
- **Recorded Crime against Vulnerable Groups**
- **Recorded Drugs Crime**

Themes:

- Engage target groups to divert, deter and raise awareness re anti-social driving and road safety

- Engage with, divert and deter young people from ASB in hotspot and target areas/times.
- Engage with young people to build community confidence in the rule of law by helping mitigate the harm caused to people and communities by paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.
- Raise awareness, engagement, and educate on the impact and consequences of ASB
- Deliver training to support Night Time Economy stakeholders and increase knowledge and understanding re trading responsibilities & NTE issues
- Improve NTE experience for all through education, training, and multi-agency initiatives
- Raise awareness, engagement, and educate on the impact and consequences of Drugs.
- Maintain and expand the Rapid Bins network to reduce prescription and illegal drugs in our community
- Engage with and increase target audience's awareness and knowledge of how cybersafety and scams
- Increase awareness and knowledge of Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Increase awareness and knowledge of community safety issues affecting vulnerable people and provide support as identified
- Increase community knowledge of PCSP and awareness of activities and preventative measures
- Facilitate the Support Hub to benefit vulnerable people

Strategic Objective 3 – To improve community confidence in policing

Indicators:

- **% increase in community confidence in Policing**
- **Level of reporting to the Police (NI Crime Survey)**
- **% increase in the level of community and police engagement**
- **Community confidence in ability of PCSP to monitor local police performance**

Themes:

- Ensure local monitoring of police performance against the local policing plan.
- Ensure that policing delivery reflects the involvement, views and priorities of local communities
- Support effective engagement with the police and local community
- Improve police service delivery in partnership with local communities
- Maintain and develop the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme.

Delivery

To deliver on the strategic priorities the PCSP has developed an action plan for 2025-26. As well as the main PCSP meetings and the Policing Committee, the PCSP has set up the following thematic groups:

Antisocial Behaviour, Road Safety & Drugs (ARD) – This thematic group will review, develop and deliver actions linked with anti-social behaviour including road safety and the nighttime economy. It will also review, develop and deliver actions with regards to Drugs.

Vulnerable Victims of Crime (VVC)– This thematic group will review, develop and deliver actions linked with Domestic Violence, Cybersafety and Vulnerable People.

Action Plan

Mid Ulster PCSP undertook an Assessment of Policing and Community Safety in the Mid Ulster District Council Area.

This exercise was undertaken to ensure that the priorities identified continue to reflect priority policing and community safety issues in the area and was informed by analysis of information provided by statutory partners, as well as the results of ongoing district wide engagement and consultation on policing and community safety across the council area.

A Turning the Curve Exercise was undertaken in relation to the current PCSP Action Plan Indicators/themes to formulate the partnership's best thinking on projects and initiatives to contribute towards the overall outcome. When developing the 2025-26 action plan, the PCSP reviewed current projects to determine if they were effective and should be continued in the new action plan

To deliver on the strategic objectives the PCSP has developed an action plan with three strands:

Strategic Priority 1 – To ensure effective delivery in response to local need, and improve the visibility and recognition of the work of the PCSP through effective consultation, communication and engagement

Strategic Priority 2 - To improve community safety by prioritising and addressing local community safety issues, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour

Strategic Priority 3 – To support confidence in policing, including through collaborative problem solving with communities

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – 1
To ensure effective delivery in response to local need, and improve the visibility and recognition of the work of the PCSP through effective consultation, communication and engagement
INDICATORS
% public awareness of PCSPs
% public confidence that PCSPs are doing a good job

Theme Form and Successfully Deliver the Functions of the PCSP	Aims and short description	Key Activities	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource/ cost required	Performance measures	Reporting Quarter
PCSP Delivery	Support the PCSP to function effectively and deliver on the action plan aligned with the Community Plan and in line with OBA	PCSP private, public and thematic sub group meetings (ASB, Night Time Economy and Vulnerable Persons) Local and regional PCSP training and capacity building activities	Q1	Q4	£4245		
PCSP Awareness	Engage with local community, statutory groups and key stakeholders and	PCSP Communications Strategy in place including a social media presence	Q1	Q4	£4245	**How much did we do** # of social media posts # of PR campaigns/projects developed and launched # of PCSP posters/leaflets	Q2-4

	increasing PCSP awareness					distributed **How well did we do it?** #/% Increase in social media reach **Is anyone better off** #/% of people with an increased awareness of the PCSP and its work to address policing and community safety issues	Q4
PCSP Engagement	Engage with local community, statutory groups and key stakeholders and increasing PCSP awareness	Engagement events to provide opportunities for meaningful and two way engagement	Q1	Q4	£4245	**How much did we do?** # of public engagement & consultation events held **How well did we do it?** # of attendees/stakeholders at PCSP engagement and consultation events # and % of members of the public satisfied with PCSP engagement and consultation events **Is anyone better off?** % increase of attendees at PCSP engagement events #/% of attendees at consultation/engagement events with an increased	Q2-Q4

						knowledge of the work of the PCSP	

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – 2
To improve community safety by prioritising and addressing local community safety issues, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
INDICATOR –
Recorded incidents of ASB
Recorded incidents of crime related to NTE
Recorded crime against vulnerable groups
Recorded Drugs crimes

Theme Anti-Social Behaviour, Driving & Drugs	Aims and short description	Key Activities	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource/ cost required	Performance measures	Reporting Quarter
Anti-Social Driving	Engage target groups to divert, deter and raise awareness re anti-social driving and road safety	Emergency Services Road Traffic Collision Reconstructions Crashed Car Simulator/VR Headsets Speed Indicator Devices	Q3 Q1 Q1	Q4 Q4 Q4	£12,735	**How much did we do?** Number of events Number of SIDs deployed Number of participants in events **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants assessed their participation as positive # of weeks SIDs were deployed **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants with increased knowledge and	Q2-4 Q2-4 Q2-4

						awareness of the impact of anti social driving (Reconstructions) #/% of participants with improved attitude towards policing (Reconstructions) % reduction in speed recorded by SIDs	 Q3-4 Q3-4
Youth Diversionary/ Engagement Programmes	Engage with, divert and deter young people from ASB in hotspot and target areas/times Engage with young people to build community confidence in the rule of law by helping mitigate the harm caused to people and communities by paramilitarism,	Youth Engagement Initiatives - Youth Engagement and Diversionary programmes at hotspot areas and times Hot Topics Engagement and Awareness/Signposting Events	Q3	Q4	£28,735	**How much did we do?** Number of initiatives Number of participants in each initiative **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants completing each initiative #/% of participants assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants with increased knowledge and awareness #/% of participants initiative with improved attitude towards policing (when PSNI involved)	Q3-4 Q4 Q4

	criminality and organised crime					#/% participants with improved levels of awareness of support services	
Anti-Social Behaviour Educational Programmes	Raise awareness and educate re impact and consequences of ASB	"Where is Your Child" education programme and PR campaign – District wide video campaign ASB 'Who Do I Call' initiative- District wide campaign	Q3	Q4	£10,735	**How much did we do?** No of posts/adverts No of leaflets distributed **How well did we do it?** Number of social media reach **Is anyone better off?** ASB reduction in population during initiative	Q3-4 Q4

Theme Anti-Social Behaviour, Driving & Drugs	Aims and short description	Key Activities	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource/ cost required	Performance measures	Reporting Quarter
NTE Training	Deliver training to support Night Time Economy stakeholders and increase knowledge and understanding re trading responsibilities & NTE issues	Training includes: Defib and First Aid Training Responsible Alcohol Trading programmes Drugs/Alcohol training programmes for staff in night-time economy	Q3	Q4	£10,735	**How much did we do?** No of events No of participants at each event **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants completing each initiative #/% of participants in each initiative assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants in each initiative with increased awareness and knowledge	Q4
Safe Night Out	Improve NTE experience for all through education and multi-agency initiatives	Penalty Notice: Cost of Your Night Out campaign	Q3	Q4	£14,735	**How much did we do?** No of advertising sites **How well did we do it?** No of advertising sites within NTE areas **Is anyone better off?** ASB reduction during initiative	Q3-4

Theme Anti-Social Behaviour, Driving & Drugs	Aims and short description	Key Activities	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource/ cost required	Performance measures	Reporting Quarter
Drugs Misuse & Crime	Raise awareness, engagement, and educate on the impact and consequences of Drugs Misuse & Crime	Drugs Misuse Campaign	Q2	Q4	£13,735	**How much did we do?** No of campaigns **How well did we do it?** Reach of campaign **Is anyone better off?** Decrease in reports in DV incidents/crimes	Q3-4
		Drugs Misuse & Crime Education Events	Q1	Q4		**How much did we do?** No of events Number of participants attending **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants at each event that assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants in each event with increased awareness and knowledge	Q3-4 Q4

	Provide Rapid Bins network to remove illegal and prescription drugs from availability	Rapid Bins	Q1	Q4		**How much did we do?** # of Rapid Bins # of campaigns promoting Rapid Bins **How well did we do it?** #/% of partners reporting satisfaction with Rapid Bins initiative **Is anyone better off?** # of drugs deposited in Rapid Bins	Q2-4 Q2-4 Q2-4

Theme Vulnerable Victims of Crime	Aims and short description	Key Activities	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource/ cost required	Performance measures	Reporting Quarter
Internet Safety	Engage with and increase target audience's awareness and knowledge of how to stay safe online	Internet Safety Programmes	Q3	Q4	£13,396	**How much did we do?** Number of schools Number of participants in each initiative **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants in each initiative assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants in each initiative with increased awareness and knowledge of internet safety #/% of participants in initiative more confident in accessing support services	Q4
Domestic Violence	Increase awareness and knowledge of domestic and sexual violence	Domestic Violence campaign	Q3	Q4	£30,735	**How much did we do?** No of advertising sites **How well did we do it?** No of advertising sites within high population areas **Is anyone better off?** Increase in reports of DV incidents/crimes during campaign	Q4

		Positive Relationships DV Schools programme	Q3	Q4		**How much did we do?** Number of participants in each initiative Number of schools delivered in **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants in each initiative assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants in each initiative with increased awareness and knowledge #/% of participants in initiative more confident in accessing support services	Q4
		High Risk DV Victims security installations	Q1	Q4		**How much did we do?** # of referrals # of home visits # of homes in receipt of equipment # items of home security measures provided **How well did we do it?** # and % of referrals satisfied with the service # and % of referrals feel that	Q2-4

		Domestic Violence Events				the service is useful # and % of equipment provided within 2 weeks of referral **Is anyone better off?** # and % of referrals who feel safer in their homes as a result **How much did we do?** No of events Number of participants in each initiative **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants completing each initiative #/% of participants in each initiative assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants in each initiative with increased awareness and knowledge #/% of participants in initiative more confident in accessing support services	

Vulnerable Persons Initiatives	Increase awareness and knowledge of community safety issues affecting vulnerable people and provide support as identified	Hold community safety awareness raising events with the following target areas: Older people and people with disabilities. Rural crime and Hate crime.	Q1	Q4	£28,735	**How much did we do?** No of events Number of participants in each initiative **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants completing each initiative #/% of participants in each initiative assessed their participation as positive **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants in each initiative with increased awareness and knowledge #/% of participants in each initiative with improved attitudes towards policing (where relevant) #/% of participants in initiative more confident in accessing support services	Q3-4 Q2-4

		Ageing Well – Older Persons Security	Q2	Q4		**How much did we do?** # of referrals # of home visits # of homes in receipt of equipment # items of home security measures provided **How well did we do it?** # and % of referrals satisfied with the service # and % of referrals feel that the service is useful **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants with increased feeling of safety	Q4
Awareness Raising	Increase community knowledge of PCSP, and awareness of crimes/issues and preventative measures	Awareness raising campaigns and engagements – Drugs Rural Crime, Cybercrime, Scams/Bogus Callers, Fear of Crime, Road Safety, Text Alert, Safer U App,	Q1	Q4	£27,480	**How much did we do?** Number of awareness raising campaigns No of events held No of members of the public attending Number of text alert messages issued **How well did we do it?** #/% of participants who report their participation as positive/beneficial	Q2-4

						Is anyone better off? #/% participants improved their level of awareness of information, resources or support available in relation to topic #/% of participants with increased confidence in police (where applicable)	
Support Hub	Support Hub	Facilitate Support Hub	Q1	Q4		**How much did we do?** # of Support Hub meetings # of referrals # referrals not accepted # of partners organisations on Hub # of support hub actions **How well did we do it?** % of partners attending meetings #/% of support hub actions completed **Is anyone better off?** #/% people helped by Hub who are discharged because their needs are met #/% of individuals who leave the Hub of their own volition	Q2-4

						or are removed due to lack of engagement	

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – 3
To support confidence in policing, including through collaborative problem solving with communities
INDICATOR
% increase in community confidence in policing
Level of reporting to the police (NI Crime Survey)
% increase in the level of police and community engagement
Community confidence in ability of PCSP to monitor local police performance

Policing Committee and Confidence Building	Aims and short description	Key Activities	Start Date	Finish Date	Resource/ cost required	Performance measures	Reporting Quarter
Policing Committee Monitoring	Ensure Local accountability through monitoring police performance Ensure that policing delivery reflects the involvement, views and priorities of local communities	Facilitate and hold Policing Committee private meetings, themed public meetings, and Local Policing Plan meetings	Q1	Q4	£8,735	**How much did we do?** Number of Policing Committee meetings No of members of public attending public meetings **How well did we do it?** #/% PCSP Members attending all meetings. #/% of members of public satisfied with public meetings **Is anyone better off?** #/% public attendees with improved awareness of local policing delivery.	Q2-4 Q4

Community and Police Engagement	Support effective engagement with the police and local community Improve police service delivery in partnership with local communities Maintain and develop the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme	Police engagement with communities including children, youth, at risk and disadvantaged communities (activities such as, PEPS, Bike Marking, Trailer Marking, etc) Themed public meetings, consultative forums and local meetings Neighbourhood Watch	Q2	Q4	£13,735	**How much did we do?** Number of local meetings. Number of public engagement/themed events held Number of NH Watch Schemes **How well did we do it?** Number of members of the public attending engagement/themed events #/% of members of the public satisfied with engagement/themed events #/% of members of the NH Watch satisfied with meetings/events **Is anyone better off?** #/% of participants with increased confidence in police #/% participants more likely to engage with PSNI following event #/% participants more likely to report crime following event. #/% of members of the NH Watch who feel their area feels safer because of the scheme.	Q2-4 Q2-4 Q3-4

Appendix A: Turning the Curve Summary

Area	Project Name	Short Impact Synopsis	
PCSP Awareness	Awareness raising	Reach for 23/24 was 157,600. 10 Campaigns undertaken.	Continue
PCSP Engagement	Engagement Events	Engagement including crime prevention stands and Clogher Show, Youth Events, Older Events etc.	Continue
Antisocial Driving	Emergency Services Road Traffic Collision Reconstructions	The Fatal Road Traffic Collision Reconstructions demonstrated good impact with increase in knowledge and awareness of 100% of those attending the initiatives. Feedback from partner agencies very positive. 100% stated that it had improved their attitude to the emergency services.	Continue
Antisocial Driving	Crashed Car Simulator/VR Headsets	The Crash Car Simulator/VR headsets demonstrated good impact with increase in awareness of 90% of those attending the initiative. The simulator/headsets will continue to be targeted at post primary schools. The VR headsets will also be utilised in youth programmes.	Continue
Antisocial Driving	Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs)	SIDs have been previously deployed and demonstrated that they reduce speed and are popular with the local community.	Continue

Antisocial Behaviour Diversion Programmes	Youth Engagement and Diversionary programmes at hotspot areas and times.	The Youth Engagement initiatives previously demonstrated positive increases in awareness of the educational topics and also demonstrated a behaviour change in the participants. Engage 4 Change Programmes are currently operational across the district. This includes relationship building with NPT to assist with integrating the message of increasing lawfulness. 77 young people were involved with over 90% of participants not reoffending for ASB.	Continue
Antisocial Behaviour Educational Programmes	Where is Your Child Tonight education programme and PR campaign	Operates at peak times such as Halloween and Christmas. Uses bus, adshels and social media advertising. Campaigns well received.	Continue
Nighttime Economy Training	Training includes: • Defib and First Aid Training • Responsible Alcohol Trading programmes • Drugs/Alcohol training programmes for staff in night-time economy	Previously 100% of those participating on the training courses stated they were relevant and well delivered. 100% stated courses met their objectives and helped them to practice responsible retailing in licensed premises. However update was lower.	Continue
Nighttime Economy Safe Night Out	Penalty Notice: Cost of Your Night Out	Campaign well received. Feedback from PSNI that there was reduction in penalty notices given during advertising period	Continue

Internet Safety	Hot Topics Programme	This programme is aimed at teenagers and involves them participating in topical workshops delivered by partners ranging from internet safety to road safety. 83% more confident in accessing support services. This will be moved to Youth Engagement section and encompass other topics.	Continue
Internet Safety	Internet Safety Programmes	The internet safety primary programme was delivered to 12 schools and 506 pupils in 23/24. 88% of participants found the programmes beneficial.	Continue
Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence campaign	Behind Closed Doors campaign normally held at Christmas through bus/adshel and social media advertising.	Continue
Domestic Violence	Positive Relationships Schools programme	This is a post primary school programme currently that operates in Q3 and Q4. This was delivered to 1215 participants across 12 schools in 23/24 with average of 92% increase in awareness of the topics presented.	Continue
Domestic Violence	High risk victims security installations	This provides security equipment to enable high risk victims of domestic violence to remain in their homes and increase their feeling of safety. Feedback from PSNI very positive for this programme. They report that 100% of participants stated it had increased their feeling of safety.	Continue
Vulnerable People Initiatives	Hold community safety awareness raising events with the following: • Older people and people with disabilities. • Rural crime • Womens Events including safety	Feedback from these events very positive and increased awareness of average 95%	Continue

Vulnerable People Initiatives	Agewell – Older Persons Security	This provides fitted security equipment to older people across the district. Crime prevention and awareness messages relevant to older people are distributed by Agewell directly to their members. 100% of older people who received this service stated that it had increased their feeling of safety	Continue
Community & Police Engagement	Police engagement with communities including children, youth, at risk and disadvantaged communities (activities such as, Bike Marking, Trailer Marking, PEPs, etc)	On average over 90% of participants stated the engagement event increased their confidence in policing, with over 90% stating that their awareness had been increased of the relevant topic.	Continue
Community & Police Engagement	Promote and sustain Neighbourhood Watch Schemes	Currently there are 32 schemes in Mid Ulster.	Continue
Crime Prevention Awareness Raising	Awareness raising campaigns and engagements – rural crime, cyber crime, scams/bogus callers, fear of crime, road safety, Text Alert, SaferU App, SIDs	PCSP to continue with awareness raising campaigns. Feedback from partners is positive and crime levels across all categories in the population has reduced.	Continue
Support Hub	Deliver Support Hub	Support Hub held 10 meetings with 15 referrals. 28% of clients were discharged because their needs had been met. 15% of clients left of own volition of were discharged due to lack of engagement.	Continue

Appendix B: Acronyms

DoJ	Department of Justice
NIBP	Northern Ireland Policing Board
FYTD	Financial Year to Date
PFYTD	Previous Financial Year to Date
NPT	Neighbourhood Policing Team
LPT	Local Policing Team
CPO	Crime Prevention Officer
DST	District Support Team
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
NTE	Night Time Economy
VVC	Vulnerable Victims of Crime
NIFRS	Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service
RAPID Bins	Remove All Prescription and Illegal Drugs
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
TAIS	Timorese Association Inclusive Support
CRN	Community Resolution Notice
YDO	Youth Development Officer
PPU	Public Protection Unit
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
STEP	South Tyrone Empowerment Project
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs
DVA	Driver Vehicle Agency
DFI	Department for Infrastructure