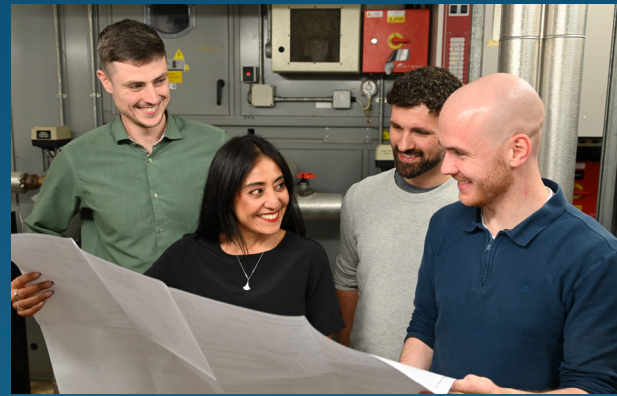




Department of
Finance
An Roinn
Airgeadais
www.finance-ni.gov.uk

Business Plan

April 2026 - March 2027







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Foreword



Minister of Finance

I am pleased to present the Department of Finance Business Plan for 2026/27. Since my appointment as Finance Minister in February 2025, I have seen first hand the vital role the Department plays in enabling departments to deliver the services that people here rely on.

In June, I secured agreement with Treasury, on behalf of the Executive, on our assessed level of need. This resulted in hundreds of millions of pounds of additional funding and provided essential support for front-line public services. My priority remains to ensure the Executive is funded fairly and sustainably, reflecting our needs and circumstances.

The Department has made strong progress on its legislative programme. In February, the Deaths, Still Birth and Baby Loss Act received Royal Assent. This important legislation will enable the establishment of a Baby Loss Certificate Scheme, offering bereaved parents and families formal recognition of the devastating loss of a baby in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy. Further progress has been achieved with the introduction of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill, the Fiscal Council Bill and the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill to the Assembly.

Despite a challenging economic environment, Land & Property Services collected £1.72 billion in rates, providing vital funding for public services. Alongside this, improving efficiency across the public estate remains a priority.

My Department continued to progress the NICS Office Estate strategy, divesting five Civil Service office buildings, reducing the size of the estate and delivering ongoing cost savings for the public purse. This Business Plan reflects the Department's commitment to delivering value for money, supporting sustainable public finances and enabling the wider public sector to deliver for people here. As legislators, we have a responsibility to bring forward policies and legislation that make a real difference in people's lives. The 2026/27 Business Plan includes important commitments, including work to develop policy proposals to automatically remove parental responsibility from anyone convicted of the murder or voluntary manslaughter of a person with whom they share parental responsibility.

Looking ahead, my focus will be on continuing to work with Executive colleagues to secure a multi-year budget that provides stability and certainty for workers, families and businesses.

I am confident that, through continued collaboration, strong governance and innovation, the Department of Finance will play a central role in supporting economic stability, transformation and public service delivery over the year ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John O'Dowd'.

John O'Dowd
Finance Minister

Introduction



Permanent Secretary

During 2025/26, the Department of Finance continued to deliver its responsibilities with professionalism and resilience.

Despite continued financial pressures, the Department successfully delivered a balanced budget for the year. This was achieved through a combination of increased income from service charges, careful management of vacancy numbers and timings, and rigorous control of expenditure throughout the year.

Pressures on public services continue to grow, making innovation, efficiency and prioritisation essential across all areas of delivery. In response, the Department has developed a new five-year plan focused on making the best possible use of available resources and adopting innovative approaches to meet increasing demand. This plan provides a clear framework for how we will respond to fiscal challenges while continuing to support delivery across the public sector.

This Business Plan sets out stretching and demanding targets. Transformation is central to achieving these ambitions while operating within significant financial constraints. Success will require clearer prioritisation of investment, increased efficiency, and new ways of working across the organisation.

During 2025/26, the Department introduced an innovative pilot recruitment model for Administrative Officers in the North West, delivering job offers within eight weeks and placing 155 candidates in post within twelve weeks of launch.

This demonstrates how reform and innovation can deliver tangible results.

The Department also awarded a contract for an Integr8 Delivery Partner to support the transformation of Finance and HR services and the rollout of new technology. This work will be critical to modernising how we operate and strengthening our capability to deliver efficient, high quality services.

People remain at the heart of delivering high-quality public services. The launch of the new five-year Civil Service People Strategy is fundamental to how services are delivered across the Civil Service. As expectations continue to rise, it is essential that our staff are supported, skilled and equipped to perform at their best.

I want to thank colleagues across the Department of Finance for their continued commitment to public service. By working together and maintaining a focus on improvement and collaboration, we will be well placed to meet the challenges ahead and continue to support Minister O'Dowd and his Executive colleagues, and the wider Civil Service to help in the delivery of the Programme for Government, "Doing What Matters Most."

Neil Gibson
Permanent Secretary



Our Purpose



The Department of Finance (DoF) provides the NI Departments and other public bodies with money, staff, professional services and business support systems, helping them to deliver excellent, value for money public services.

We do this by:

- **Managing public money** – effectively allocating resources to where they are most needed to support the delivery of public services;
- **Supporting people** – recruiting, developing and supporting the best people for the NICS and providing opportunities for individuals to reach their full potential;
- **Transforming and innovating** – improving effectiveness across the public sector by transforming the way we work;
- **Providing evidence and insights** – supporting evidence-based policy and informing public debate through high-quality, trusted, meaningful data, evidence and research; and
- **Delivering public services** – collecting rates revenue to provide funding towards public services such as health, education and infrastructure, as well as council services.

This helps us achieve our objectives

- » Sustainable funding for public services
- » A collaborative and skilled civil service
- » A modernised and innovative service
- » Excellent public services
- » Modern property and family policy
- » An efficient and effective Department

What we do

The Department of Finance is responsible for the delivery of a wide range of public services.

Our overall aim is to help NI departments make the most appropriate and effective use of resources and services for the benefit of everyone in the community. The Department is committed to deliver effective and efficient public services. The Department of Finance:



Promotes proper governance and financial management



Engages with Treasury on strategic finance and taxation matters



Provides official statistics and research



Operates nidirect - the official government website for citizens



Registers births, deaths, marriages, adoptions and baby loss



Delivers Land Registry services



Manages the NI budget process



Reforms and develops Civil Law



Provides procurement, property and project assurance services



Provides legal, HR, pensions, finance, and IT shared services to all NI Departments



Develops and implements Building Regulations policy



Supports Civil Service transformation and organisational development



Maintains the Stormont Estate



Provides land and property services and products to generate income and deliver Executive priorities



Produces geographic mapping data



Provides embedded technical services including economists & statisticians

Achievements

APRIL 2025 – MARCH 2026

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

The Department enabled
£29.85bn
of cash to be issued
to fund government
services.



Rate Collection
strategy launched
which has supported
collection of
£1.72bn.



68 disposals of
surplus public-sector
property completed
with a total value of
£14,155,000.



- ▷ Significant progress made in **review of rate reliefs** across a range of areas including Early Payment Discount, Maximum Capital Value, Small Business Rate Relief and Vacant Rating.
- ▷ As part of agreements at Interim Fiscal Framework and Spending Review, significant **additional funding** was delivered for local public services.
- ▷ **£122m** committed in PEACE PLUS funding calls.
- ▷ **Progress** made across the four City and Growth Deals; the Belfast Region and Derry City and Strabane District Council City Deals are in delivery phase; the Causeway Coast and Glens and the Mid South-West Growth Deals are progressing towards Deal signing.

LEGISLATING FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

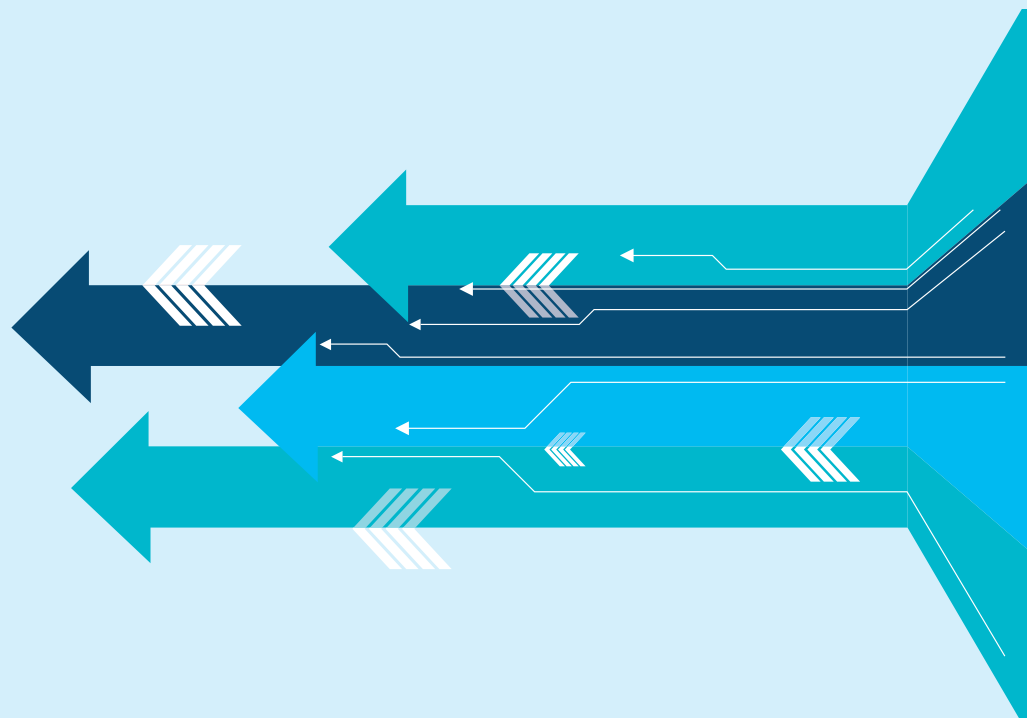
The Deaths,
Still-Births and
Baby Loss Act
received
Royal Assent
in February 2026.



Office of the Legal
Services Oversight
Commissioner
established.



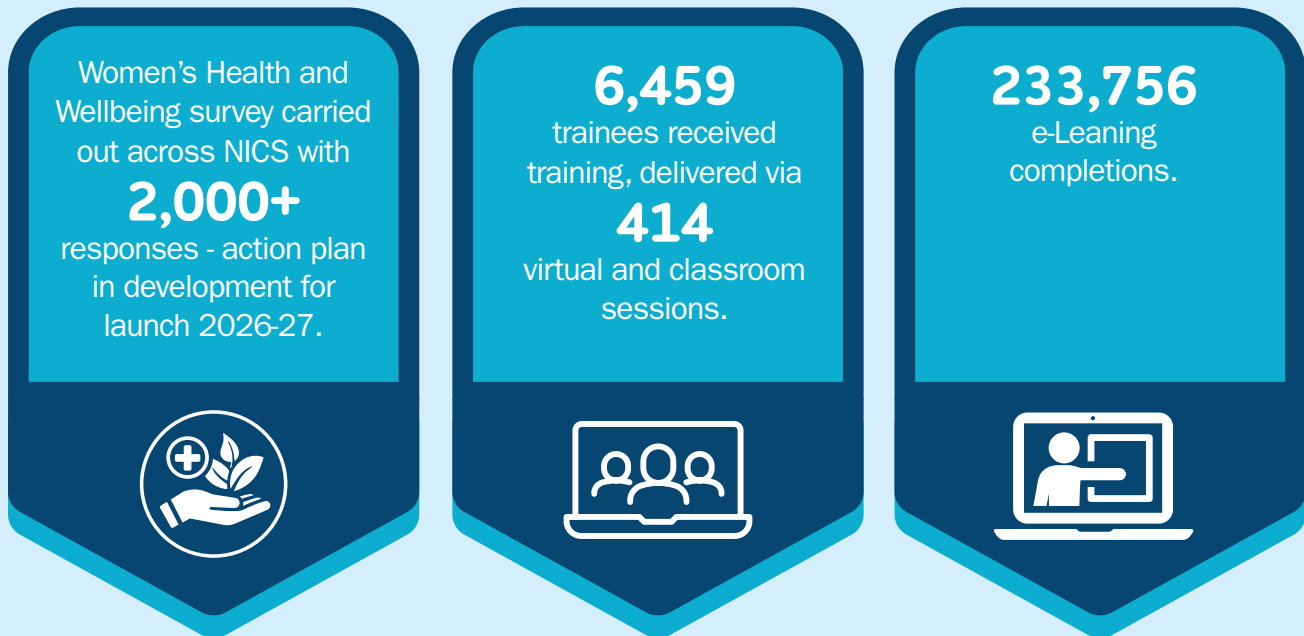
The Fiscal Council
Bill and the
Marriage and Civil
Partnership Bill
introduced into the
Assembly.



A COLLABORATIVE AND SKILLED CIVIL SERVICE



- ▷ The **NICS Job Families Framework** developed for union consultation and implementation through Integr8 and published the **Professions Framework** published, to strengthen professional capability.
- ▷ **Strategic Workforce Planning** strengthened across departments, through publication of a Guide and Workbook and by establishing a Working Group and Community of Practice to support consistency and shared learning.
- ▷ **Monthly dashboard** launched providing an enhanced view of current vacancy details by department and occupational group.
- ▷ **3,367** cases received by the Occupational Health Service, a **13.8%** increase on the previous year.
- ▷ **Sickness Absence: 2-3 weeks** from referral to occupational health appointment, which is a reduction from approx. 6-8 weeks waiting time in 2024/25.

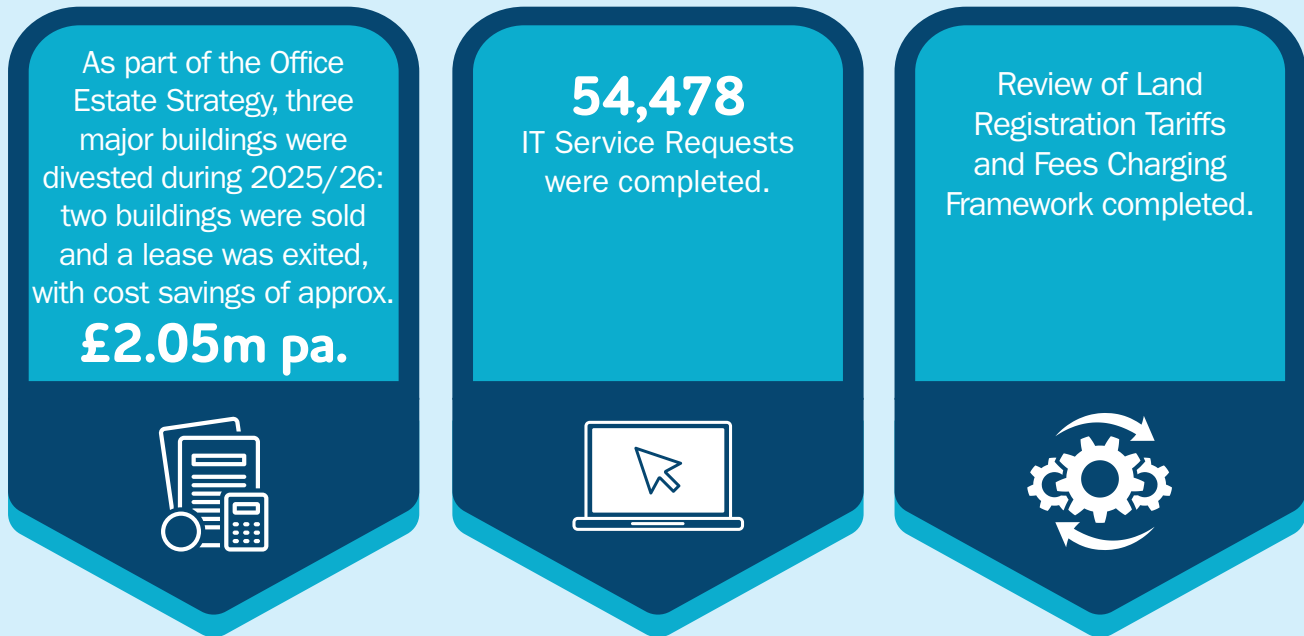


- ▷ A new innovative pilot recruitment model was used to recruit Administrative Officers in North West, delivering offers within 8 weeks, with **155** candidates in post within 12 weeks of launch and a merit list of **432** candidates generated for future supply.
- ▷ 30 NICS Live events delivered to over **17,000** colleagues on health and wellbeing topics.
- ▷ Over **7900** referrals received by Welfare Support Service.
- ▷ **96%** of Welfare Support Service appointments within 15 working days of referral being made.

A MODERNIZED AND INNOVATIVE SERVICE

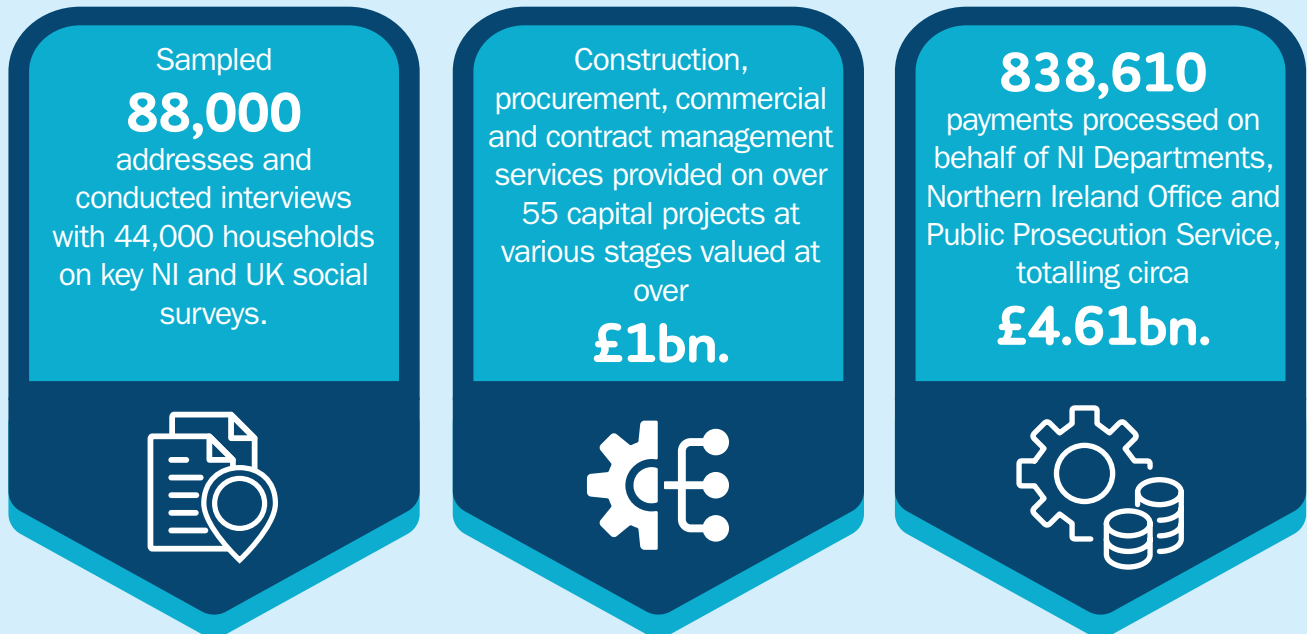


- ▷ NIDirect Contact Centre achieved a channel shift of **24%** providing alternate and faster ways for the public to get in contact with government at a time and place that suits.
- ▷ NISRA statistics, research and analysis informed Executive decision making, including the development of PfG and monitoring of wellbeing outcomes, economic monitoring and key societal outcomes.
- ▷ Research conducted by the UUEPC on the **Cost of Doing Business** was published.
- ▷ Improved **Strategic Asset management** supported and enabled through development of baseline report on central government estate.
- ▷ **The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)** successfully onboarded to FSS in October 2025.
- ▷ Pilot projects introduced targeting verification under the UK Net Zero Carbon Building Standard/ Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM)/Passivhaus to assist departments reduce the climate impact of their estate.

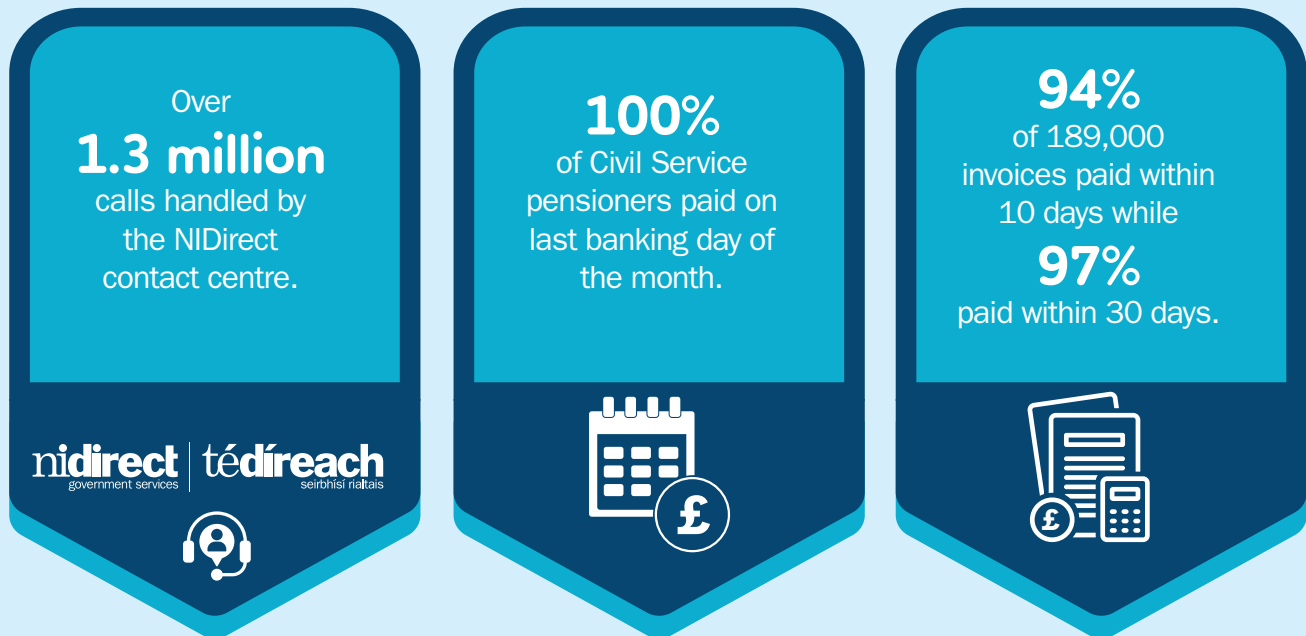


- ▷ **Revised Equality Scheme** submitted to the Equality Commission for approval.
- ▷ **943** Digital Inclusion training sessions delivered, supporting **2,803** individuals.
- ▷ The NICS Identity solution (NIDA) successfully onboarded two key citizen-facing services: AccessNI and LPS Rates.

EXCELLENT PUBLIC SERVICES



- ▷ General Register Office processed **119,916** birth, death, marriage, civil partnership and adoption certificates, with **99.99%** of priority certificate applications and **100%** of standard certificate applications fulfilled within target timescales.
- ▷ **82,876** forms were issued as part of the business surveys NISRA conducts to understand and report on the local economy.
- ▷ The Census User Needs Consultation was successfully launched in October 2025, running for 20 weeks and closed with **139** responses.
- ▷ **7800** calls handled by the Flood Incident Line.
- ▷ NISRA statistics, research and analysis **informed Executive decision making**, including the development of the PfG, and monitoring of wellbeing outcomes, economic outcomes and key societal outcomes.
- ▷ **New web pages** detailing NI Executive expenditure were launched, making it easier for a broader audience to access comprehensive breakdowns of spending by each Northern Ireland department, as well as quick, accessible summaries.
- ▷ NISRA expanded its **social media presence** on Instagram and LinkedIn, using these platforms to broaden the reach and impact of our statistics and research.

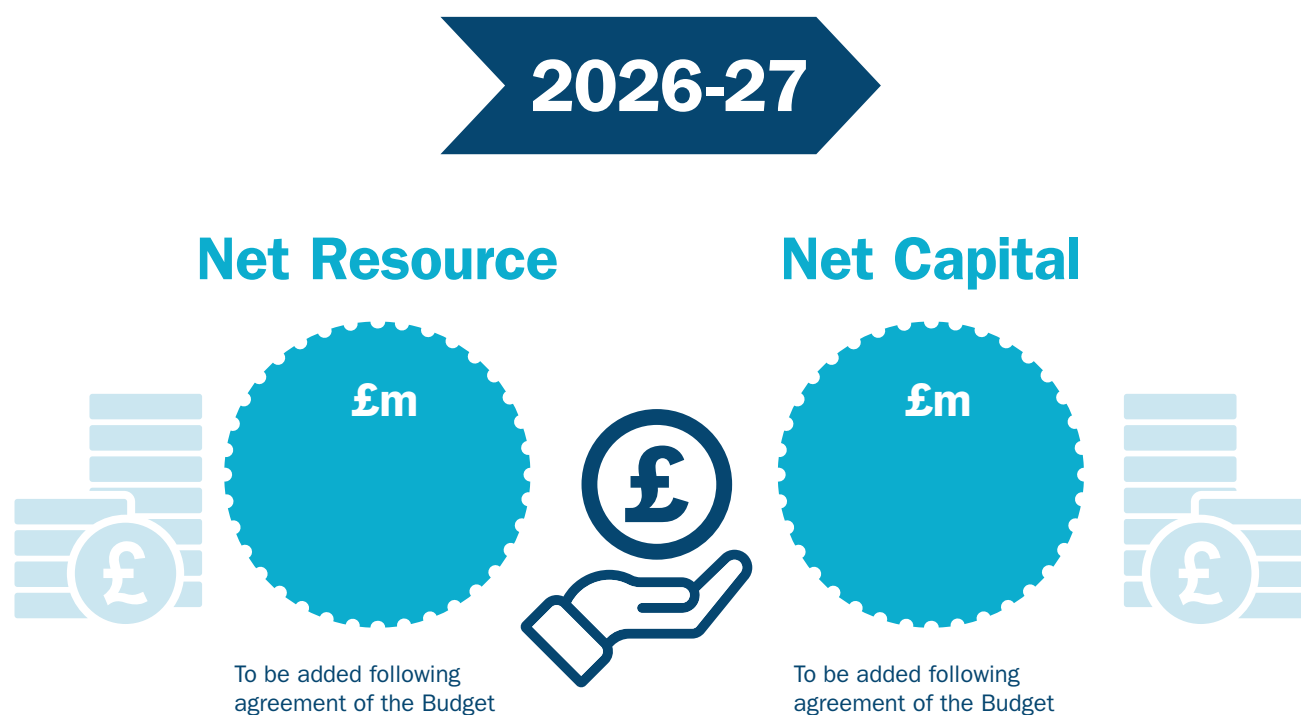


- ▷ **250** supplies and services contracts awarded, at a value of **£712.6m** and 9 frameworks awarded with potential spend of up to **£424.8m**, helping departments and public bodies deliver public services.
- ▷ The delivery of over **300** minor civil engineering, geotechnical and building projects, valued at over **£20m** were designed, procured and contract-managed.
- ▷ Over **90,000** orders and tasks issued for reactive maintenance, planned preventative maintenance and remedial works with a value of approx. **£17m**.
- ▷ **99.7%** of pension awards (including Ill-health) paid by due date/within six days of receipt of all information received.
- ▷ **Pensions Saving Statements** issued by legislative deadline of 6th October.
- ▷ **80%** of Annual Benefit & Remediable Service Statements for active members issued by the legislative deadline of 31st August.
- ▷ Issue Immediate Choice Remediable Service Statements by legislative deadline of 31st March 2027. On track for delivery – as at 31 March 2026 **78%** Immediate Choice Remediable Service Statements have issued.

Funding

At the time of publishing an Executive Budget had not been agreed. However, it is recognised that given the significant financial constraints facing the Executive it is highly likely that when a budget for the Department is set the delivery of its services will prove challenging given the pressures arising across a number of areas.

We will have to drive efficiencies across our divisions and optimise our commercial charging activities. In addition, the speed and timing of all capital projects will need to be carefully prioritised within the budget envelope provided.



People and Talent

As at 1 April 2026, the Department had 3,567 full time equivalent staff. This was made up of 3,242 permanent staff and 325 agency workers.



1,122

Land & Property Services

627

Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services

521

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

461

NICSHR

310

Construction & Procurement Delivery

160

Departmental Solicitor's Office

90

Strategic Policy and Reform

60

Finance Division

59

People and Organisational Development

55

NICS Internal Audit Services

51

Public Spending

25

Communications and Engagement Division

19

Corporate Services Division

7

International Fund for Ireland



* Business area figures may not add due to rounding.

Our Objectives and Targets

The objectives and targets below represent our aims for the 2026/27 year. They do not reflect all that we do. The Department is managed in line with good practice, adhering to departmental and cross-departmental policies and fulfilling statutory obligations.

The respective Group and Divisional plans will contain a suite of operational targets pertaining to standards, efficiency and effectiveness. Each division within the Department will have its own business plan which will be carefully monitored and performance reviewed by the divisional lead.

The delivery of the Business Plan will be led by Neil Gibson, Permanent Secretary. This will include agreement of the strategic aims and a series of check point reviews of progress at DoF Board. Delivery of these targets is predicated on the necessary budget being available.

OBJECTIVE 1: SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
1	Provide recommendations on the Executive's Budget to the Finance Minister.	Recommendations presented for Executive consideration.	ASAP	Deborah Brown
2	Fulfil key commitments outlined in the Budget Sustainability Plan.	Budget Sustainability Plan key commitments completed in line with the Plan.	March 2027	Deborah Brown
3	Lead the fiscal strands of reform.	Progress towards a full Fiscal Framework, inclusive of fiscal devolution, through engagement with HM Treasury and the Executive.	March 2027	Tony Simpson
4	Support the implementation and delivery of PEACEPLUS.	100% of PEACEPLUS funding committed and 2026 European Commission expenditure target of €275m achieved.	March 2027	Tony Simpson
5	Place the independent Fiscal Council on a statutory footing.	Legislation enacted by Royal Assent.	December 2026	Tony Simpson

6	Collect 93% of all collectable rates.	Performance of collection against rates assessed for 2026/27 year	March 2027	Sharon Gallagher
7	Review of Rating Policy	26/27 Rating Review Plan of work delivered	March 2027	Sharon Gallagher
8	Improve Strategic Asset Management	Departmental Strategic Asset Management Plans are in place Standardised leasehold framework developed	March 2027	Sharon Gallagher

OBJECTIVE 2: A COLLABORATIVE AND SKILLED CIVIL SERVICE

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
9	Lead workforce renewal across the Civil Service.	Delivery of priority 2026–27 actions within the People Strategy Action Plan.	In line with People Strategy Masterplan	Jill Minne
10	Advance a programme of service improvements across HR and drive broader change to enhance HR services, aligned with the People Strategy.	Delivery of priority 2026–27 actions within the People Strategy Action Plan. Completion of agreed NICS HR Integr8 milestones.	In line with the Action Plan	Catherine Shannon

Objective 3: A MODERNIZED AND INNOVATIVE SERVICE

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
11	Implement Phase 1 of the 2022-2028 Estate Strategy to deliver a right sized, sustainable, NICS Estate that supports climate change objectives.	Develop a DoF Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) and reduce the NICS Estate by a further four sites: College Street; Main Street Limavady; Waterside House; and Castle Barracks, Enniskillen.	March 2027	Colin Woods
12	Implement the agreed year-1 actions within the Expert Panel Report (Review of Public Procurement Governance Arrangements).	Implementation of year-1 actions.	In line with the Action Plan	Colin Woods
13	Modernise and integrate NICS Finance and HR services through the design and implementation of supporting technology.	Complete all design, build, test and business readiness in preparation for Integr8 wave 1 go-live.	March 2027	Paul Duffy
14	Develop a future-focused Citizen Contact Strategy and enhance NI Direct Contact Centre services by modernising interactions, expanding digital-first options, and driving continuous service improvement.	Agreement of the Citizen Contact Strategy by the Permanent Secretary. Achievement of service levels and customer satisfaction targets.	March 2027	Paul Grocott
15	Complete a Security Operation Centre (SOC) maturity review, establish a clear Target Operating Model and transition plan, and deliver the first phase of implementation.	Implementation of first phase of the transition plan.	March 2027	Paul Grocott
16	Modernise the NI Departments' approach to Information and Records Management, ensuring In-place records management is at the centre of the Digital Workplace.	Successfully implement and assess a Proof of Value of In-place Records Management. Evaluate options for the controlled retirement of Content Manager.	March 2027	Paul Grocott

OBJECTIVE 4: EXCELLENT PUBLIC SERVICES

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
17	Provide an efficient, secure, and resilient finance shared service for the NI Departments and ALBs.	Achievement of service levels and customer satisfaction targets.	March 2027	Paul Duffy
18	Provide an efficient, secure, and resilient IT Operating Environment for NI Departments and ALBs.	Achievement of service levels and customer satisfaction targets.	March 2027	Paul Grocott
19	Provide high-quality statistical information to support public policy.	Maintain the percentage of the general public who state they trust statistics produced by NISRA.	March 2027	Philip Wales
20	Advance a user engagement programme to understand census-statistics user needs and use these insights to inform the design of questions and how the 2031 Census is carried out.	Prepare and launch a Census Test in advance of Census 2031.	March 2027	Philip Wales
21	Deliver key civil registration services - births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions.	98% of priority certificate applications and 98% of standard certificate applications, fulfilled within target timescales (one working day for priority certificate applications / five working days for standard certificate applications).	March 2027	Philip Wales
22	Make statutory provision for the delivery of baby loss certificates.	Introduce secondary legislation which establishes the baby loss certificate scheme by June 2026.	June 2026	Philip Wales

OBJECTIVE 5: MODERN PROPERTY AND FAMILY POLICY

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
23	Amend the law on Marriage and Civil Partnership.	Complete legislation to raise the minimum age of marriage and civil partnership to 18, and to place belief marriage on a statutory footing.	March 2027	Louise Crilly
24	Amend the law in respect of property management.	Complete public consultation on legislative change to regulation of property management companies and agents and develop a final policy.	March 2027	Louise Crilly
25	Amend the law on parental responsibility and related family-law matters.	Consult on and develop policy proposals on reform of the law relating to the suspension of parental responsibility, including those convicted of the murder or voluntary manslaughter of someone with whom they share parental responsibility, and to consult and develop policy proposals on wider family law reform.	March 2027	Louise Crilly

OBJECTIVE 6: AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DEPARTMENT

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
26	Deliver the Department's Annual Report and Accounts.	Produced within statutory timeframe and certified without qualification by the Comptroller and Auditor General.	July 2026	Gavin Patrick
27	Refresh the DoF Departmental 5-Year Budget Plan.	Revise the DoF Departmental 5-Year Budget Plan by 31 December 2026.	December 2026	Gavin Patrick
28	Deliver a balanced DoF budget.	Outturn figures provided from financial systems.	March 2027	Gavin Patrick
29	Fulfil the Department's responsibilities for equality of opportunity under s.75 of the NI Act 1998.	Report progress against the Equality Action Plan.	March 2027	David Hughes
30	Support the Minister and Permanent Secretary.	Provide a programme of private-office information seminars for departmental officials to improve understanding of private-office processes that support delivery of business objectives.	March 2027	Ciarrai Conlan
31	Manage our workforce.	Provide a draft Workforce Plan for DoF to the Departmental Board by January 2027.	January 2027	David Hughes
32	Support our people.	Deliver staff engagement events including NICS Live events. Deliver Long Service Awards for staff with 35 and 40 or more years of service.	March 2027	Ciarrai Conlan

DoF Board Members



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Philip Wales
Chief Executive of NISRA and
Registrar for Northern Ireland

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The Department currently has two Non-Executive Directors:



Olwen Laird



Joan McEwan



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