



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

Business Plan

April 2024 - March 2025







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Foreword



Minister of Finance

I am proud to introduce the 2024/25 Business Plan for the Department of Finance.

When the Executive returned in February 2024 I was privileged to be nominated by my party as Minister of Finance. Previously as chair of the Economy Committee I had the opportunity to see how the Department of Finance supports all departments in delivering services.

Public sector workers are at the heart of delivering public services. I was pleased within two weeks of taking up post to secure Executive agreement to allocate £688 million to prioritise public sector pay awards.

Resolving civil service pay for the staff I have responsibility for was also an early priority for me. I am glad civil service unions accepted the pay offer made, the highest made in a decade which demonstrates my commitment to recognising the important role civil servants play.

The challenges of the 2024/25 Budget are well known. The reality is the demands on our finances far outstrip the funding available many times over. We simply don't have enough funding to deliver the public services that people need and deserve.

The budget will undoubtedly mean incredibly difficult decisions for departments, including ours.

I will continue to champion the case for the Executive to be funded at an agreed level of need. The Department of Finance will play a key role in supporting this work and on the development of a fiscal framework which will be central to putting our finances on a more sustainable footing.

The Department of Finance is about more than just finance. The Department provides a range of professional services and business support systems which assists other departments and bodies to meet their objectives. Like all departments we have had to draft this business plan within the budget we have.

Delivery of this plan will not be possible without the people in the Department. I thank them for the welcome I have received and the professional way they operate. We have a challenging journey ahead, but my focus is on being in problem solving mode. I want to focus on what we can do rather than what we can't.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C Archibald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA
Minister of Finance

Introduction



Permanent Secretary

In February 2024 we had the return of an Executive and appointment of Dr Caoimhe Archibald as Finance Minister. This signalled the beginning of a new era for the Department, as the Minister and Executive discuss and determine their priorities and we work to support them as best we can.

The Department has achieved many things over the 2023/24 year. This was only possible because of the energy and expertise of colleagues in the Department of Finance family. We deliver through people. We need a dynamic, creative, innovative, inclusive workforce to be able to seize opportunities and respond to the challenges we face.

The financial outlook for 2024/25 remains extremely difficult; therefore, we must find creative and clever ways to do our work. Working with colleagues in other departments and with our stakeholders we will need to be innovative and imaginative. I encourage all staff to consider ways we can do what we do in a more efficient way.

We have ambitious targets in the year ahead including implementing the actions within the NICS One Year People Plan which sets out what we will do to make this department and the civil service a great place for people to work. It sets out what we expect from our staff and the

commitments we make to support learning, development, and wellbeing. This is only just the beginning; we will be working on a five-year People Strategy.

I was pleased Budget 2024-25 provided funding towards the Integr8 Programme which is a strategically important transformation programme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is going to be a fundamental change in how we do HR and finance maximising the opportunities that new technology can present.

This business plan is ambitious and is the next phase of our journey of professionalising services and working collaboratively to deliver the best possible services.

I thank everyone within the Department for their continued support and professionalism. The year ahead is challenging, however, I am confident together we can meet the stretching targets in the year ahead.

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.

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 NICS 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



Supports strategic finance and local taxation policy



Provides official statistics and research



Operates nidirect - the official government website for citizens



Registers births, deaths and marriages



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 government departments



Develops and implements Building Regulations policy



Supports Civil Service renewal and organisational development



Maintains the Stormont Estate



Collects, processes and manages land and property information



Produces geographic mapping data

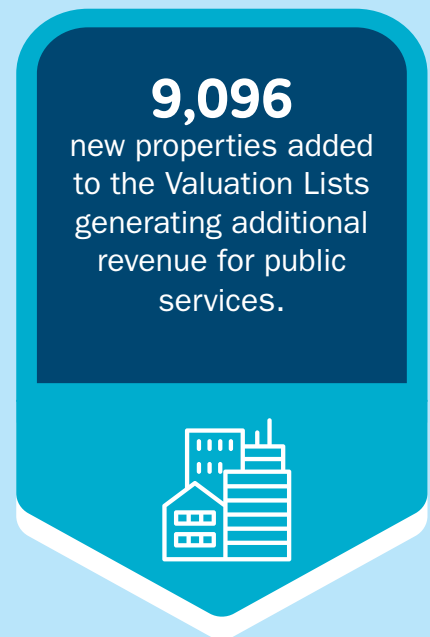


Provides embedded technical services including economists & statisticians

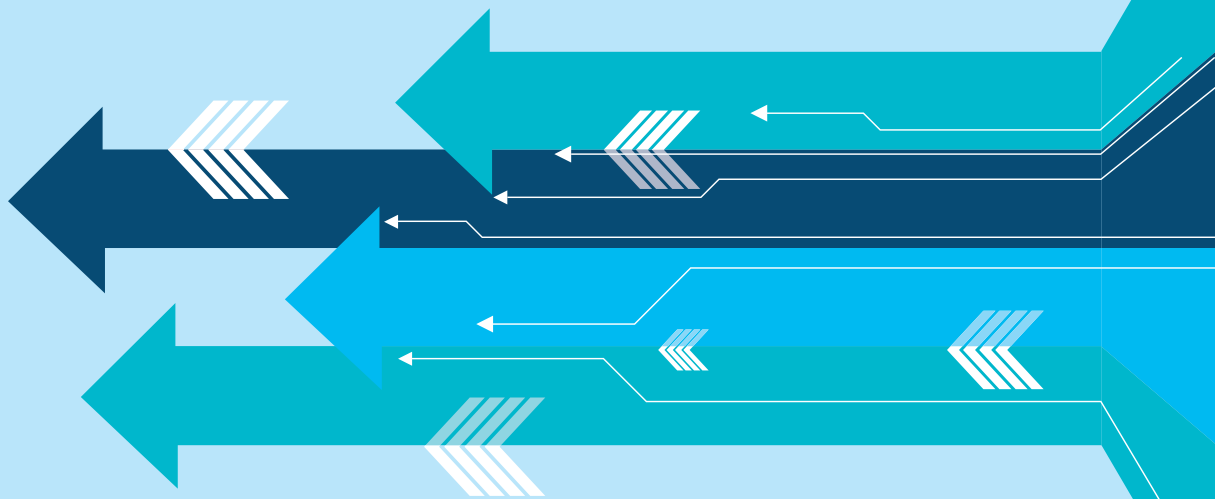
Achievements

APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2024

MANAGING PUBLIC MONEY



- ▷ Final 2023-24 Budget agreed within 2 weeks of Executive returning enabling the allocation of **£688m** to prioritise public sector pay awards.
- ▷ Completed over **300** reviews of new business cases and pay remits, exceeding key target of **70%** turnaround within 9 working days.
- ▷ **305 supplies and services contracts** awarded at a value of **£667m** and **21 Frameworks Awarded** with potential spend of **up to £95m** helping departments and public bodies deliver public services.
- ▷ Delivery of the Department's Annual Report and Accounts for y/e 31 March 2023. Produced on time and certified without qualification by NI Audit Office.
- ▷ Management of the Department's overall Budget for 2022/23 which was delivered without overspend.
- ▷ Set cost and design standards for the delivery of 1,500 social houses via the Social Housing Delivery Programme totalling circa £275m.



807,436

payments processed on behalf of NICS Departments, Northern Ireland Office and Public Prosecution Service, totalling circa **£4bn.**



91% of the **168,563**

invoices paid within 10 days while **97%** paid within 30 days.



£1 million rate support for

255 businesses affected by flooding.



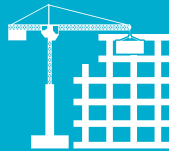
- ▷ Published tailored Community Asset Transfer Supplementary Business Case Guidance in September 2023 to support asset owners charged with producing business cases going forward.
- ▷ Over **100,000** work orders and **370** minor work projects, designed, procured and contract managed valued at **£26m.**
- ▷ Designed, procured and contract managed the delivery of over **400** civil engineering and geotechnical work orders and over **50** minor works projects valued at over **£15m.**
- ▷ Managing Public Money Northern Ireland updated and **published.**

DELIVERING PUBLIC SERVICES

Over **50 million** visits to the nidirect website, which hosted new campaigns on Stalking and Vocational Qualifications.



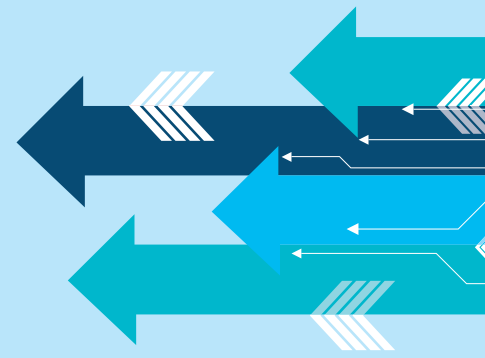
Go ON NI digital inclusion programme delivered over **1,700** digital skills sessions to the public.



Over **1 million** land searches generated in Land Registry supporting the property market and NI economy.



- ▷ Advised on delivery, procurement and management of grant funded programmes and projects totalling over **£800m.**
- ▷ Over **100,000** work orders and **370** minor work projects, designed, procured and contract managed valued at **£26m.**
- ▷ Provided design; cost and construction advice; project and contract management for over **70** school construction projects at a value of over **£590m.**
- ▷ Spatial NI, the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland data sharing website, facilitated:
 - Over 19.4 million interactions with address data
 - Over 12.3 million interactions with aerial photography
 - Over 141 million interactions with OSNI mapping data.
- ▷ Over **2,000** people attended events during the inaugural CyberNI week led by the Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre.



Over **1.5 million** calls handled by the nirect contact centre.



Over **6 million** text messages sent, helping alert customers to critical information such as appointment reminders.

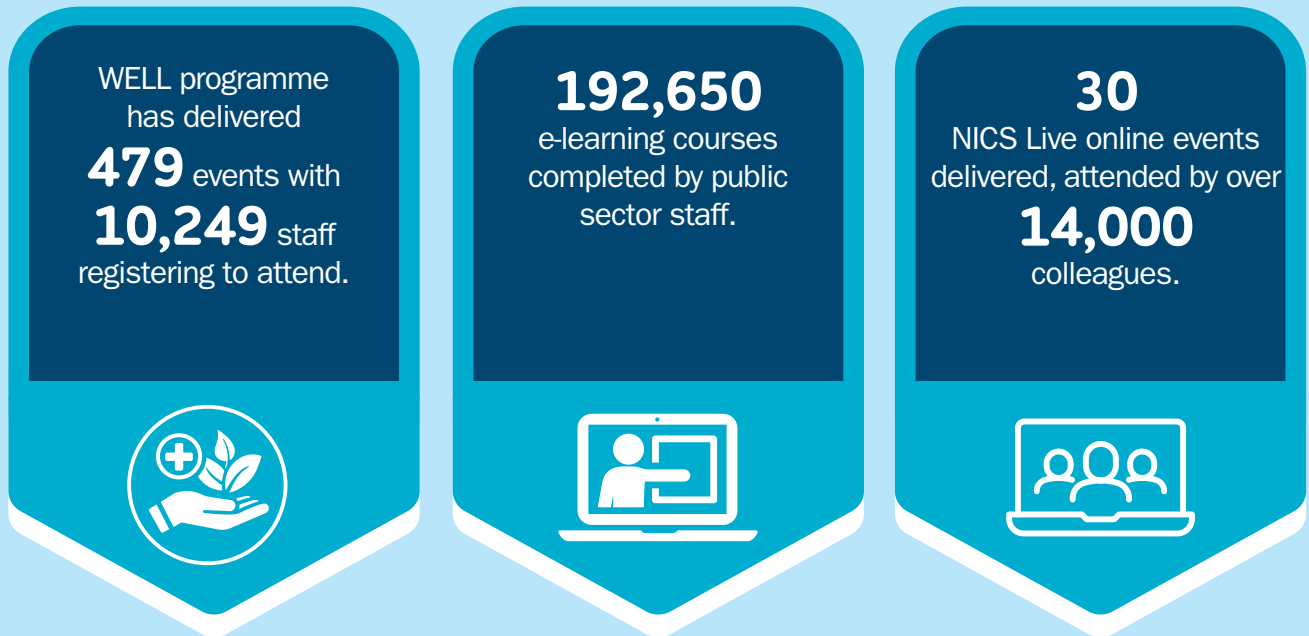


Processed **82,286** Land Registry applications.

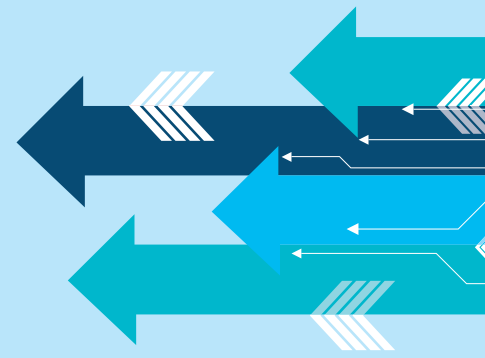


- ▶ Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre support contributed to a **64%** increase in uptake by local organisations of Cyber Essentials Plus.
- ▶ Procured collaborative arrangements for Integrated Consultant Teams and Grounds Investigation Works which supports the delivery of Infrastructure Projects.
- ▶ Successful implementation of rating and valuation legislation, including Small Business Rate Relief which will **support 29,000 businesses.**
- ▶ General Register Office processed **110,841** birth, death, marriage, civil partnership and adoption certificates, with **99.54%** of priority certificate applications and **100%** of standard certificate applications, fulfilled within target timescales.
- ▶ **535** Freedom of Information/ Environmental Information Regulations requests received. 99% responded to within statutory timeframes.

SUPPORTING OUR PEOPLE



- ▷ **98%** of **2,142** pension awards (including Ill-health) paid by due date/within 6 days of receipt of all information.
- ▷ **7,299** trainees received training via **452** virtual and classroom sessions.
- ▷ Maintained NICS' position as Living Wage Employer.
- ▷ Organised Assembly and Finance Committee Explained sessions for over **300** staff.
- ▷ **4,062** Occupational Health Service referrals completed.
- ▷ Made pay offers to all Civil Service trade unions and staff within weeks of Executive returning.
- ▷ Agreed approach with NICS Board and work commenced on the development of the NICS People Strategy 2025 – 2030.
- ▷ **38,873** bite sized cyber security learning courses completed across NICS and over **100** cyber security professional learning accreditations accomplished.



Handled over
154,000 calls
and **104,000**
emails to the IT Assist
Service desk.



100%
of Civil Service
pensioners paid on
last banking day of the
month.



Delivered Long
Service Awards
events for staff with
40 or more
years of
service.



- ▷ Diversity Action Plan for 23/24 developed and launched in July 2023.
- ▷ Revised Special Leave policy developed and implemented.
- ▷ Undertaken HR policy benchmarking audit and launched staff feedback survey to support development of prioritised HR Policy review plan for the NICS.
- ▷ Supported departments / Heads of Profession in design of **268** new competitions, which includes over **20** apprenticeships/graduate/trainee schemes.
- ▷ **1,836** vacancies filled across all grades.
- ▷ Advertised **21** internal and **105** external recruitment competitions.

TRANSFORMING AND INNOVATING

149,397

public sector assets
located and mapped.



Exited **12** owned
and leased buildings
delivering in year
savings of

c£770k.



Carried out
consultation on
changes to Building
Regulations in
respect of Fire Safety
and Energy Efficiency.



- ▶ Procured and mobilised a new property maintenance framework with a value of £80M over 4 years procured to deliver property maintenance services to assist Departments and public sector bodies with their service delivery.
- ▶ Launched a Public Consultation on proposed changes to the recruitment policy, specifically the provisions relating to recruitment advertising.
- ▶ Launched procurements for: replacement technology to support Finance and HR services; and an Integr8 Delivery Partner to implement and provide ongoing support and maintenance of this new technology solution.
- ▶ Successfully completed a major upgrade of the Finance Shared Services (Account NI), which processes payments on behalf of NI departments, associated Agencies and other bodies. Post upgrade, **£46 million** of payments were made in the first week, ensuring funding reached government suppliers, small businesses and staff.
- ▶ 4 buildings for sale on the open market with sale completion expected in 2024/25.
- ▶ Progressed the implementation of the Revenues & Benefits and Integration elements of the NOVA Programme that will transform how Land & Property Services delivers services to its customers.

PROVIDING EVIDENCE AND INSIGHTS

Published the quarterly Northern Ireland House Price Index providing timely, accurate information on changes in the value of residential properties.



Sampled **50,000** addresses and conducted interviews with **27,000** households on key NI and UK social surveys.



Delivered Business Consultancy Services and Innovation Lab support to all NICS Departments, achieving **90%+** customer satisfaction.



- ▷ Continued sponsorship of the independent NI Fiscal Council which is bringing greater transparency and scrutiny to Northern Ireland's public finances.
- ▷ Published revised 2011-2021 mid-year population estimates for Northern Ireland in line with the most recent Census 2021 population estimates.
- ▷ Census 2021 Flexible Table builder published in June 2023, allowing users to create their own tables and data downloads on demand. Over **170,000** page-views and **6,700** downloads (June 2023 to February 2024).
- ▷ A total of **136,890** forms (74% of which were online) were issued as part of the business surveys NISRA conducts to understand the Northern Ireland economy as it recovers from the pandemic.
- ▷ Sponsorship of Ulster University Economic Policy Centre to deliver independent economic research. In January 2024 a research paper comparing NI domestic rates bills with Council Tax bills was published.

Funding

For the 2024-25 year, the Department has been allocated an opening budget of £208.1m resource funding and £38.8m of capital funding. Delivery of the Department’s 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.



2024-25

Net Resource*

Net Capital



* Excludes £48.9m depreciation and impairment.

People and Talent

As at 1 April 2024, the Department had 3,402 full time equivalent staff. This was made up of 3,227 permanent staff and 175 agency workers.



- 1,110** Land & Property Services
- 601** Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services
- 426** Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
- 417** NICSHR
- 311** Construction & Procurement Delivery
- 169** Departmental Solicitor's Office
- 73** Strategic Policy and Reform
- 68** People and Organisational Development
- 67** NICS Internal Audit Services
- 55** Finance Division
- 53** Public Spending Directorate
- 31** Communications and Engagement Division
- 12** Corporate Services Division
- 9** International Fund for Ireland

Our Priorities and Targets

The priorities and targets below represent our aims for the year ahead. 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 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.

PRIORITY 1: SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
1	Compile Budget for 2024-2025	Present recommendations for Executive consideration.	April 2024	Joanne McBurney
2	Lead the fiscal strands of reform.	Delivery of the Budget Sustainability Plan.	March 2025	Joanne McBurney
		Final Fiscal Framework in development and engagement with Treasury progressed.	March 2025	Tony Simpson
3	Collect 93% of Gross Collectable Rates	This will be assessed as the total payments received and rates discharged as a percentage of Gross Collectable Rates.	March 2025	Sharon Magee
4	Delivery of the Department's 2023-2024 Annual Report and Accounts.	Produced within statutory timeframe and certified without qualification by the Comptroller and Auditor General.	July 2024	Stewart Barnes
5	Delivery of balanced DoF budget for 2024-2025.	Outturn figures provided from financial systems.	March 2025	Stewart Barnes

6	Place the independent Fiscal Council on a statutory footing.	Introduce legislation in the Assembly.	March 2025	Tony Simpson
7	Support implementation and delivery of PEACEPLUS	PEACEPLUS funding committed.	March 2025	Tony Simpson
8	Compile Budget for 2025-2026	Present recommendations for Executive consideration.	March 2025	Joanne McBurney
9	Commence a review of strategic policy options for the rating system to align with Executive's Programme for Government.	Launch public consultation on rating policy measures.	March 2025	Sharon Magee

PRIORITY 2: A WELL-LED, HIGH PERFORMING CIVIL SERVICE

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
10	Enable wider transformation to deliver service improvements in line with People Plan and Strategy.	<p>Produce a structured plan for streamlined recruitment across the NICS for all grades and disciplines.</p> <p>Implement the actions within the NICS One Year People Plan.</p> <p>Implement a new model for the delivery of Occupational Health Services that supports NICS staff and provides a more holistic, staff centric service.</p>	<p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p>	Catherine Shannon
11	Development of DoF People Plan to act on the 2023 People Survey results.	<p>Delivery of Long Service Awards for staff with 35 or more years of service.</p> <p>Establishment of People Survey Forum to include quarterly meetings.</p>	<p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p>	Mark McLaughlin

<p>12</p>	<p>Lead the People strand of Civil Service reform/transformation</p>	<p>Design and deliver apprenticeships, trainee schemes and employability programmes to support Civil Service inclusive employment and career pathways.</p> <p>Develop and implement a policy renewal programme to deliver the revision of key HR policies such as dignity at work; discipline; grievance; performance management; sickness absence; and hybrid working.</p> <p>Develop and agree a Civil Service Pay Strategy to support the organisation in recruiting and retaining staff.</p> <p>Develop and agree a new Civil Service People Strategy 2025 – 2030.</p> <p>Design, develop and agree new Civil Service and organisational development policies and guidance on issues such as Civil Service apprenticeships; employee mobility; workforce planning; ring-fencing; neuro-diversity; and carers.</p> <p>Design and agree an approach to the Civil Service workforce model to include professions, job roles, apprenticeships and trainee schemes.</p> <p>Develop, agree, and implement a new Civil Service Diversity Action Plan.</p>	<p>May 2024 and Autumn 2024</p> <p>September 2024</p> <p>September 2024</p> <p>December 2024</p> <p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p> <p>Developed by May 2024 Implemented by March 2025</p>	<p>Jill Minne</p>
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PRIORITY 3: A MODERNISED AND INNOVATIVE SERVICE

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
13	Modernise and integrate NICS Finance and HR services through the design and implementation of supporting technology.	Award contract for replacement technology.	May 2024	Paul Duffy
		Issue Intent to Award Letter for Integr8 Delivery Partner.	March 2025	
14	Amend death and still-birth legislation to make the provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 permanent.	Advance preparatory work on legislation to continue the remote registration of deaths and still-births and electronic exchange of related documentation on a permanent basis.	March 2025	Dr Philip Wales
15	Implement Phase 1 of the 2022-2028 Estate Strategy to deliver a right sized NICS Estate.	Reduce the NICS Estate by a further 10 sites.	March 2025	Sharon Smyth
16	Publish a Public Procurement Statement with the Executive's Strategic Objectives for Procurement.	Publish Public Procurement Statement and Strategic Objectives.	October 2024	Sharon Smyth
17	Transform delivery of Land & Property Services business operating model through the Nova programme.	Award a contract for a digital Land Registration solution.	March 2025	Sharon Magee
		Progress the implementation of the digitally enhanced core Revenue & Benefits services.	March 2025	
		Commence procurement of a property Valuation solution.	March 2025	
		Define and implement an integration platform to model, analyse and optimise use of LPS data assets.	March 2025	
		Define the LPS Target Operating Model and associated strategic implementation roadmap.	March 2025	
18	Amend the law on Marriage and Civil Partnership.	Advance preparatory work on legislation to raise the minimum age of marriage and civil partnership to 18, and to place belief marriage on a statutory footing.	March 2025	Louise Crilly

PRIORITY 4: EXCELLENT PUBLIC SERVICES

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
19	Deliver strategic support to the DoF Minister and the institutions of Government.	Support the Minister and the Department in relation to the legislative work programme. Respond to Assembly questions and Ministerial correspondence within agreed deadlines.	March 2025 March 2025	Mark McLaughlin
20	Provide high quality statistical information to support public policy.	Maintain the percentage of the general public who state they trust statistics produced by NISRA. Release remaining planned Census 2021 outputs and publish a general report. Develop and pilot new online Labour Market Survey.	March 2025 March 2025 March 2025	Dr 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 (1 working day - priority certificate applications / 5 working days for standard certificate applications).	March 2025	Dr Philip Wales
22	Provide strategic support and leadership across the Department to respond to the UK-wide Covid Inquiry.	Responses provided to Covid Inquiry requests within statutory timeframes.	March 2025	Tony Simpson
23	Provide strategic support and leadership across the Department to meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act (CCA).	Meet DoF statutory obligations to the CCA, including providing input to the Climate Action Plan as per timelines and agreement of the Executive.	March 2025	Tony Simpson

DoF Board Members



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Tony Simpson
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The Department currently has 2 Non-Executive Directors:



Joan McEwan



Olwen Laird



Department of
Finance

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