



Department of
Finance
An Roinn
Airgeadais

www.finance-ni.gov.uk

Business Plan

April 2023 - March 2024







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Introduction



Permanent Secretary

The last year has been very challenging for people, society, departments and the wider public sector. Record inflation levels coupled with the cost of living have meant huge challenges for citizens, businesses and the delivery of public services.

Thank you to all Department of Finance (DoF) staff for everything they have done. The business plan shows huge achievements despite the complex environment we have been operating within.

I am humbled every day by the public service spirit, willingness of colleagues to go the extra mile, to do what needs to be done and with their determination to make the very best of our current circumstances. It remains a matter of deep personal regret for me that I have been unable to reward our staff across the Northern Ireland Civil Service family due to the severity of the budget pressures.

With the financial situation remaining very challenging we need to progress new ways of working, thinking and delivering to seize the opportunities to deliver better services in a more effective and efficient way. If we are to improve the position regarding pay, we will need to be innovative and transformative.

I want to create a collegiate culture where everyone feels welcome to challenge how things are done and to suggest ideas on how to do things differently.

This plan sets out our goals for the year and how we will measure our performance and progress. The Department is now working through the implication of the budget for the services we provide. Delivery of these targets is predicated on the necessary budget being available.

Delivery of this 2023/24 plan will not be possible without my colleagues in the department. During the year DoF has welcomed new leaders including Catherine Shannon – Director of NICS HR, Tony Simpson – Director of Strategic Policy and Reform, Philip Wales – Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Statistics & Research (NISRA) and Louise Crilly – Deputy Departmental Solicitor. I look forward to working with all our new Board members.

There is no doubt we face huge challenges ahead, but I know that colleagues will continue to be supportive, professional and work collegiately to do their best to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland through their public service.

Neil Gibson
Permanent Secretary

Our Purpose



The Department of Finance (DoF) provides the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) 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 our 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 HR, finance and IT services to government departments



Delivers legal services to departments



Provides Civil Service pensions services



Develops and implements Building Regulations policy



Supports Civil Service Renewal



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 2022 – MARCH 2023

MANAGING PUBLIC MONEY



Enabled
£23.5bn
of cash to be issued
to fund government
services



£1.36bn
collected in rates
to fund vital public
services



10,996
new properties added to the
Valuation Lists generating
additional revenue for public
services

- ▶ Completed the Revaluation of almost **75,000** non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland
- ▶ **348** supplies and services contracts awarded at a value of almost **£400m** helping departments and public bodies deliver public services
- ▶ Set cost and design standards for the Social Housing Delivery Programme totalling **over £180m**
- ▶ Delivered **£9m** of grants to third sector from Dormant Accounts Fund with National Lottery Community Fund.



Oversaw the delivery of
£37.5m
in PEACE and
INTERREG funding



76 contracts awarded
delivering construction
services to our hospitals
and wider health estate at
a value over
£110m



£60.6m
rates holiday provided to
businesses affected by the
pandemic

- ▷ **93%** of the **170,000** invoices paid within 10 days
- ▷ **97%** of invoices paid within 30 days
- ▷ **777,000** payments processed on behalf of NICS Departments, Northern Ireland Office and Public Prosecution Service, totalling **£4bn**
- ▷ Designed, procured and contract managed the delivery of over **100,000** work orders and **300** minor work projects valued at over **£33m**
- ▷ General Register Office processed **115,248** birth, death, marriage, civil partnership and adoption certificates, with **99.98%** of priority certificate applications and **99.96%** of standard certificate applications, fulfilled within target timescales.

DELIVERING PUBLIC SERVICES



509

FOI/EIR requests received.
99% responded to within
statutory timeframes



Provided financial
support to

95,950

ratepayers through rate
related benefits and reliefs



Enterprise and Microsoft 365
services rolled out to over

20,000

users

- ▶ Managed over **50** Collaborative Arrangements for a wide range of goods and services which support the delivery of public services
- ▶ Advised on delivery, procurement and management of grant funded programmes and projects totalling over **£400m**
- ▶ Provided design; cost and construction advice; project and contract management for over 120 school construction projects at a value of over **£700m**
- ▶ Deployed new remote access technology to over **20,000** users
- ▶ Spatial NI, the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland data sharing website, facilitated:
 - Over 13.9 million interactions with address data
 - Over 9.4 million interactions with aerial photography
 - Over 64 million interactions with OSNI mapping data



Over **1.8 million** calls handled by the nidirect contact centre



Over **2 million** text messages sent, helping alert customers to critical information such as appointment reminders



Processed **85,821** Land Registry applications

- ▶ **Over 58 million** visits to the nidirect website, which hosted campaigns on the Cost of Living, the Ukrainian Crisis and COVID-19
- ▶ “Connected Devices” project rolled out to **150** households, helping those in need to engage with online government services
- ▶ Go ON NI digital inclusion programme delivered **over 500** digital skills sessions to the public
- ▶ Provided construction related advice, project management and contract management services across 22 major construction projects at a value of over **£340m** and awarded 42 construction related works and services contracts at a value of over **£80m**

SUPPORTING OUR PEOPLE



Retained the Onus Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence



166,569
e-learning courses
completed by public
sector staff



30
NICS Live online events
delivered, attended by over
13,148
colleagues

- ▶ **96%** of **1,785** pension awards (including Ill-health) paid by due date/within 6 days of receipt of all information received
- ▶ Have provided advice on all legal aspects of HR operational issues including recruitment, probation, agency workers, holiday pay, retirement, whistle-blowers and discrimination
- ▶ **7,538** trainees received training via **659** webinars and classroom sessions
- ▶ New mileage policy implemented
- ▶ **140** student placement opportunities offered in 2022 across 22 placement categories
- ▶ Raising a Concern Policy Framework published
- ▶ Test Score Banking introduced by NICS HR across all General Service competitions from AO to G6 improving the candidate journey and saving the NICS money and resource by reducing the need to retest candidates



3,301
vacancies filled across
all grades



Won the Chartered Institute
of Personnel Development
Northern Ireland HR Award,
Best Diversity and Inclusion
Initiative, in relation to the
Domestic and Sexual Abuse
policy



Graduate Management
Programme competition
launched

- ▶ **100%** of Civil Service pensioners paid on last banking day of the month
- ▶ Maintained NICS' position as Living Wage Employer
- ▶ Developed and managed **30** externally advertised recruitment competitions, **2** internal trawls, **17** temporary promotion opportunities and a range of secondments for senior Civil Service posts
- ▶ Worked collaboratively with Department for the Economy and The Executive Office to develop and deliver a **Civil Service Skills Academy pilot** offering pre-employment training opportunities followed by **80 recruitment opportunities** for permanent posts at Staff Officer and Deputy Principal grades
- ▶ Engaged with the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland to enable nine permanent offers of appointment to be made to disabled young people who took part in the **JobStart Programme**

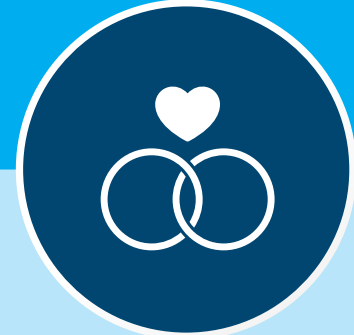
TRANSFORMING AND INNOVATING



Almost **100,000** public sector property assets located and mapped as part of the Government Land & Property Register Programme



Surveyed local construction suppliers to inform action plan to simplify and improve the tendering process for government construction contracts



Analysed marriage law consultation responses and developed proposals for Ministerial consideration

- ▶ Achieved the transfer of administration of Housing Benefits and Low Income Rate Relief to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for **over 30,000** claimants
- ▶ Online Redundancy Payment system established for the Department for Economy
- ▶ European Union Legislation Information Tracking System developed for TEO to help NI Government monitor and report on changes to legislation listed in the annexes of the NI Protocol
- ▶ Published the Office Estate Review to deliver a modern, fit for purpose and right-sized office estate that supports the needs of our business areas, people and environment
- ▶ Published new Sourcing and Construction Toolkits to enhance the commercial focus of public procurement and deliver improved outcomes from government contracts

PROVIDING EVIDENCE AND INSIGHTS



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



86,000
business surveys issued
informing economic
response to the pandemic



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

- ▶ Census 2021 Population & Main Statistics produced and widely disseminated with **120,000** documents/spreadsheets downloaded and **220,000** page-views on the NISRA website
- ▶ Sampled **48,000** addresses and conducted interviews with **25,000** households on key NI and UK social surveys
- ▶ Continued sponsorship of the independent NI Fiscal Council which is bringing greater transparency and scrutiny to Northern Ireland's public finances
- ▶ Supported work of the Fiscal Commission which has been fundamental in instigating a debate on the appropriate fiscal powers for Northern Ireland
- ▶ Have provided advice in relation to novel and complex legal issues surrounding the UK government's replacement for the EU Structural funds, the Fiscal Council Bill, the Coronavirus Act and the Network Information Systems Regulations

Our Resources

Money

For the 2023-24 year, the Department has been allocated an opening budget of £147.5m resource funding (excludes £53.1m depreciation and impairment). Living within a budget of this quantum will require difficult decisions given the reduction of almost 4% from last year's budget. In addition the Department received £37.9m of capital funding. Delivery of the Department's services will prove challenging given the pressures arising across a number of areas.



2022-23

Net Resource*



Net Capital



*Excludes £54.5m depreciation and impairment.

2023-24

Net Resource*



Net Capital



* Excludes £53.1m depreciation and impairment.

People

Unfortunately the severity of the budget pressures meant that we were unable to provide any additional scope to offer a higher pay award in 2022. With the financial position likely to remain very challenging in 2023/24 will need to be innovative and transformative if we are to improve the position regarding pay to reward our staff.

As at 31 March 2023, the department had 3,754 staff. This was made up of 3,540 permanent staff and 214 agency workers.



- 1188** Land & Property Services
- 775** Enterprise Shared Services
- 377** Construction & Procurement Delivery
- 321** NICS HR
- 474** Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
- 189** Departmental Solicitor's Office
- 101** Strategic Policy and Reform
- 82** People and Organisational Development
- 75** Internal Audit and Fraud Investigation Services
- 70** Finance and Corporate Services
- 60** Public Spending Directorate
- 36** Communications and Engagement Division
- 6** 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 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, responsibility for leadership standards will be led by Neil Gibson, Permanent Secretary. This will include agreement of the strategic aims and a series of check points and quality review 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 NI Budget for 2023-2024	Present recommendations for political consideration.	Quarter 1 2023	Joanne McBurney
2	Collect £1.45bn in rates revenue.	This will be assessed against the total value of the net rates revenue collected.	March 2024	Ian Snowden
3	Enabling EU funding opportunities	Open PEACE PLUS.	June 2023	Tony Simpson

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

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
4	Develop and implement 2023 People Survey Action Plan	Conduct the 2023 Civil Service People Survey, report key findings and develop action plans including a programme of DoF staff engagement activities and events.	March 2024	All DoF Directors
5	People & Culture Implement NICS Renewal Action Plan to enable wider transformation and reform	Produce a structured plan for streamlined recruitment across the NICS for all (non SCS) grades. Develop, design and implement a new model for the delivery of Occupational Health Services that supports NICS staff and provides a more holistic, staff centric service. Implement a refreshed Civil Service workforce model to include professions, job roles; apprenticeships and trainee schemes with the ability to support career pathways and skills programmes. Review and agree key HR Policies including discipline, recruitment, employee mobility and performance management. Implement a new Civil Service Diversity Action Plan.	March 2024 March 2024 March 2024 September 2023 March 2024	Catherine Shannon Catherine Shannon Jill Minne Jill Minne Jill Minne
6	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 2024	Tony Simpson
7	Provide strategic support and leadership across the Department to meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act.	Measurement to be agreed.	March 2024	Tony Simpson

PRIORITY 3: A MODERNISED AND INNOVATIVE SERVICE

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
8	Digitise property valuation to deliver a modern and innovative service to customers	Commence the procurement of a new digital solution for property Valuation.	September 2023	Ian Snowden
9	Digitise Land Registration services to deliver a modern and innovative service to customers	Award the contract for the new digital solution for Land Registration.	March 2024	Ian Snowden
10	Technology & Systems Implement NICS Renewal Action Plan to enable wider transformation and reform	Develop a Digital and Data Strategy to transform digital public services. Launch the procurements of replacement technology and a Systems Implementation Partner. Implement Phase 1 of the 2022-2035 Estate Strategy to deliver a right sized NICS Estate.	September 2023 December 2023 March 2024	Paul Duffy Paul Duffy Sharon Smyth
11	Review the operation of the Defamation Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and relevant developments in defamation law in other jurisdictions.	Completion of an interim report outlining relevant developments in defamation law and identifying areas for further policy development.	June 2023	Louise Crilly

PRIORITY 4: EXCELLENT PUBLIC SERVICES

NO.	TARGET	MEASUREMENT	TIMESCALE	OWNER
12	Provide high quality statistical information to support public policy	<p>Publish Census 2021 Flexible Table Builder allowing users to build statistical tables on-demand.</p> <p>Begin delivery of Census 2021 microdata outputs/products.</p> <p>Produce official population estimates in line with preannounced dates.</p> <p>Begin transforming Labour Force Survey into an online first Labour Market Survey.</p> <p>Maintain the percentage of the general public who state they trust statistics produced by NISRA.</p> <p>Publish official economic and labour market statistics in line with preannounced dates.</p>	<p>Summer 2023</p> <p>Summer 2023</p> <p>March 2024</p> <p>March 2024</p> <p>Autumn 2023</p> <p>Monthly, quarterly and annually</p>	Philip Wales
13	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 2024	Philip Wales
14	Provide high quality shared services to government departments	Development of a standardised / professional dashboard of DoF shared services.	March 2024	DoF Directors with responsibility for Shared Services

DoF Board Members



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Permanent Secretary

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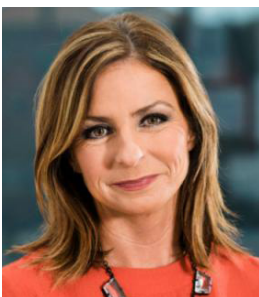
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The Department currently has 3 Non-Executive Directors:



Liz Ensor



John Smyth



Tom Taylor



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