



Department for the  
**Economy**  
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Department for the Economy

# **BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22**

## CONTENTS

Minister's Foreword	3
Our Plan In Summary	5
<b>1. Our Department</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Our Priorities</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3. Our Progress</b>	<b>25</b>
Appendix A – Budget Allocations Across Main Spending Areas	26
Appendix B – DfE Family of Business Including Budget Allocations	27

## FOREWORD FROM MINISTER

When I was appointed Minister for the Economy in January 2020, I could not have imagined the extent to which a public health crisis would in a few short months completely transform the way we live and work.

The shock that Covid-19 delivered to the economy in the 2020/21 financial year required an immediate and unprecedented response from both national and devolved government, including unprecedented levels of financial support helping tens of thousands of businesses across Northern Ireland. During the year the Department for the Economy led in developing and delivering a wide suite of interventions to help alleviate the economic impact of Covid-19. As a result of the tireless efforts of colleagues, funding in the region of £460 million was paid out via a number of businesses support schemes by the end of March 2021 to minimise the impact of the economic shock of the pandemic.



I prioritised addressing the severe impact which Covid-19 has had on all areas of our economy, including our hospitality and tourism industries. I established and chaired a Tourism Recovery Steering Group and launched the Economic Advisory Group to bring together Northern Ireland's industry leaders to drive forward the recovery for all. Working with others, both within government and with key stakeholders from various sectors and industries I was pleased to publish the Department's Economic Recovery Action Plan which sets out a range of decisive actions to kick-start the economy.

Amongst various other support mechanisms and initiatives, I brought forward a range of statutory rules to amend employment legislation in response to the pandemic and protected students and apprentices by developing temporary support funds for FE & HE students and introducing an Apprenticeship Recovery package.

Whilst a significant proportion of the Department's original work plans had to be put on hold, the Department still managed to deliver a significant amount of work, under extenuating circumstances, and continued to progress with preparations for the end of the transition period of our departure from the EU.

I am immensely proud of what was achieved.

This will be another exceptional year. I am pleased to have announced our economic vision for a '10X Economy' which sets out a long-term ambition for Northern Ireland to be a ten times better economy with benefits and opportunities for all our people. We will realise this ambition by focusing on innovation in areas where we have real strengths and making sure these gains mean something to all businesses, people and places in Northern Ireland.

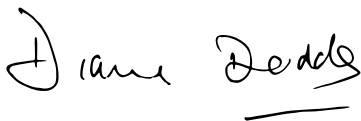
As a Department we will also need to continue to prioritise the economic response to, and recovery from, Covid-19 while also progressing our wide portfolio of business as usual work as best we can. In this context we may need to make hard decisions about where our priorities lie to ensure our work plans for the year are achievable.

Accordingly, this year's Business Plan focuses on a limited number of key strategic priorities which must be progressed during the year ahead – areas like developing our Energy and Skills Strategies, progressing Project Stratum, delivering key Covid-19 interventions, and ultimately delivering the economic recovery package which we will need when the worst effects of Covid-19 have abated. These are the challenges and priorities facing this Department in the coming months.

The tight focus of this Business Plan should not detract from the wide range of crucial business as usual work which the Department delivers alongside its Arm's Length Bodies and other delivery partners. Those areas will be captured elsewhere, not least as part of the Programme for Government and its associated delivery plans.

On the whole, there can be no doubt that this is a highly demanding and ambitious work programme and the Department will once again be delivering these commitments in truly extraordinary and challenging circumstances. Since being appointed as Minister I have been deeply impressed by the work and dedication of staff, to whom I would like to extend my sincere thanks.

Thank you.



**DIANE DODDS MLA**  
**Minister for the Economy**

## OUR PLAN IN SUMMARY

2021/22 Departmental Business Plan			
Progress:	Strategic Priority Area:	Milestone:	Date Due:
<b>June 2021</b>	Economic Recovery Action Plan	Stakeholder engagement & comms plan implemented	30 April 2021
	Launching a Decade of Innovation	Publish Economic Vision and develop Work Programme	31 May 2021
	Parental Bereavement Leave	Introduction of Bill in Assembly	31 May 2021
	Economic Recovery Action Plan	Governance framework agreed to enable expenditure against funds allocated	30 June 2021
	Energy Strategy	Complete consultation	30 June 2021
	Covid-19 Grant Schemes	Develop the policy and criteria for the High Street Stimulus Scheme	30 June 2021
<b>September 2021</b>	City Deals	Complete formal Departmental consideration of received Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) Outline Business Cases	31 July 2021
	Covid-19 Grant Schemes	Commence evaluation of the WPBSS, LCDSS and NSESS schemes	31 August 2021
	Economic Recovery Action Plan	Undertake a recalibration exercise based on stakeholder feedback, current economic conditions and assessment of delivery to date	30 Sept 2021
	Enabling Digital Connectivity	Secure agreement for additional funding to bring eligible premises out of scope into Project Stratum	30 Sept 2021
<b>December 2021</b>	Skills Agenda	Launch a new Skills Strategy for NI	30 November 2021
	Skills Agenda	Continue to deliver and grow the apprenticeship system including reintroducing the provision of All-Age Apprenticeships	31 December 2021
	Energy Strategy	Launch Energy Strategy	31 December 2021
	Enabling Digital Connectivity	Agreement of Mobile Action Plan	31 December 2021

## OUR PLAN IN SUMMARY *(continued)*

2021/22 Departmental Business Plan			
Progress:	Strategic Priority Area:	Milestone:	Date Due:
<b>March 2022</b>	Effective Response to EU Exit	Develop a Trade and Investment Strategy	31 January 2022
	Parental Bereavement Leave	Passage of Bill through Assembly and Royal Assent received	1 March 2022
	Effective Response to EU Exit	Have plan to ensure a regulatory framework that facilitates trade & unfettered access	31 March 2022
	Enabling Digital Connectivity	Project Stratum: Delivery of broadband services to at least 27,000 homes and businesses in NI	31 March 2022
	City Deals	Support Derry City & Strabane District Council to submit their innovation and digital OBC's	31 March 2022
	City Deals	Support MSW & CCG in developing their Heads of Terms	31 March 2022
	Launching a Decade of Innovation	Innovation Strategy 2030: Publication of progress report, future recommendations and policy direction	31 March 2022
	Launching a Decade of Innovation	Develop Circular Economy Strategic Framework	31 March 2022
<b>May 2022</b>	Parental Bereavement Leave	All secondary legislation drafted and operational	6 April 2022
	Effective Response to EU Exit	Maintain our level of goods market access to GB and increase sales in that market as measured across a range of short term survey data	31 May 2022
	Skills Agenda	Invest an additional £50m in the education and skills system in order to respond to and recover from the impacts of Covid-19	31 May 2022

## **1. OUR DEPARTMENT**

### **1.1 Our Responsibilities**

The Department for the Economy (DfE) was established in May 2016. Essential elements of its normal recurring business include:

- Leading on economic policy and strategy, working with delivery partners such as Invest NI on the programmes and projects that support business development and investment and job creation;
- Continuing to support Further Education Colleges in taking a pivotal role in generating a strong and vibrant economy through the development of world class professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels and by helping employers to innovate and by providing those with low or no qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and become economically active;
- Supporting higher education institutions in their provision of higher level skills, effecting a positive contribution to the labour market in order to contribute to economic recovery and improved social well-being;
- Supporting higher education institutions to fulfil their key missions of research and knowledge exchange, in order to maximise their achievement of excellent research and its translation into economic and societal impact;
- Supporting economic recovery by continuing to deliver Apprenticeship programmes supporting youth employment and improving the NI skills base, by expanding provision, widening access and improving the economic relevance through working with employers to develop pathways, qualifications & curriculum;
- Supporting economic recovery by continuing to deliver and introduce reformed vocational education programmes, Youth Training and Youth Inclusion programmes providing access to vocational education training and employability skills aimed at reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training;
- Championing economic, social and personal development by providing relevant high quality learning, research and skills;
- Continuing to support the tourism sector in NI working with delivery partners Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to maximise visitor numbers and associated revenue spend for the benefit of the NI economy and to support job creation;
- Supporting cross-border and all island trade and innovation through the activities of InterTradeIreland;
- Continuing to support NI Screen through the delivery of the 'Opening Doors 2' Strategy to maximise screen industry expenditure in NI, and build the skills capacity and reputation of the local screen industry internationally;
- Setting the strategic direction for how the energy sector can contribute towards addressing climate change and supporting a green economic recovery;

- Providing regulatory services, including Health and Safety Executive NI, Trading Standards, Consumer Council and Insolvency Service as well as labour market services including Labour Relations Agency, tribunals, employment law and redundancy payments;
- Continuing to deliver careers guidance and advice in line with strategic commitments;
- Ensuring that the European Regional Development Fund Investment for Growth & Jobs and the NI European Social Fund Programmes continue through to closure; and
- Maintain and enhance Northern Ireland's domestic and international air connectivity.

As outlined above, the Department has a broad portfolio of responsibility. However, this Business Plan focuses on a targeted number of key Ministerial priorities, detailed in chapter 2, which must be progressed by the end of the current Assembly term.

### 1.2 Economic Recovery

The [Economic Recovery Action Plan](#), which plots a pathway to economic recovery post Covid-19 sets out a range of decisive actions under four main themes of:

- R&D and Innovation;
- Highly Skilled & Agile Workforce;
- Investment, Trade & Exports; and
- Greener Economy.

### 1.3 Economic Vision (10X)

The Department has launched [10x Economy, a new Economic Vision for a Decade of Innovation](#). The Economic Vision sets out a long-term ambition for Northern Ireland to be a ten times better economy with benefits and opportunities for all our people. The aim will be for economic growth to mean something to all people and places in Northern Ireland, with a positive impact on wider societal and environmental wellbeing.

The vision builds upon the Economic Recovery Action Plan and sets out the long term path for economic growth over the next decade. A future work programme will be developed during 2021 and will set out the action required over the next year and beyond to achieve success. It will be based on five steps:

- Exploiting 'windows of opportunity' in NI's priority technologies and clusters;
- Preparing a future generation of workers that can respond flexibly to skills shortages and drive economic growth;
- Diffusing innovation from our core strengths to the wider economy;
- Taking a new approach to funding interventions; and
- Place-based investment that sets NI apart from the crowd.



To complement the Economic Recovery Plan and to deliver on a decade of innovation, the Department has a number of 10X strategies that will deliver on energy, tourism and skills. Together they will contribute towards building a globally based economy attracting high profile events to include sporting competitions, economic conferences and create a 10X future generation of workers.

Investing in the skills and talent of our workforce is vital for economic success and will deliver more and better job opportunities, greater earning potential, better individual wellbeing and, in turn, an improved overall economy.

The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of digital skills within our economy and we want to ensure we can supply the capability required to deliver our objectives. The Department's skills strategy sets out a plan to deliver growth in qualifications in technical and professional skills through further education. This will enable us to grow in the key strategic areas that are vital to our economic ambitions as set out in the 10X Economic Vision.

### **1.4 Transformation Programme**

The 10X vision requires a collaborative approach across government but primarily we need to ensure we have the staff and structures in place within DfE as the foundation and we recognise that our approach to delivery has to change.

During the latter half of 2020/21, the Department completed an extensive research project to gather detailed quantitative data on the current allocation of resources to work activities to identify potential areas of capacity across the Department and/or areas where a realignment of priorities might be required. As part of the engagement process, valuable feedback was obtained from participants in relation to perceptions and experiences of the Department in terms of its operation, structure, culture and future direction.

The quantitative and qualitative issues were considered by the Leadership Team against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and EU Exit, which has necessitated a range of temporary redeployment measures. It is very clear that the Department cannot revert to a pre-Covid operating model and there is a need to manage our priorities in the short term while proactively addressing longer-term organisational issues. The evidence base produced by the project identifies both a striking need, and a notable moment of opportunity to initiate a substantive transformation programme that will allow the Department to become the agile, refocused, cohesive organisation that will be needed to support the Northern Ireland economy over the next decade and beyond.

Work is already underway to develop an Organisational Development and Transformation Programme to address the findings of the research, which will in turn support our policy agenda. This will translate into a major change programme delivering longer-term benefits for DfE, its people and its stakeholders, which will ensure that the Department has the capacity and capability to deliver on Executive commitments and its economic vision in the future. The programme aims to be collaborative and inclusive, involving internal and external stakeholders in shaping our future

organisation. Further details on the scope and management of the Programme will be shared in the early part of 2021/22.

## 1.5 Our People

The Department has over 1,100 staff at various different grades as follows:

Special Adviser 1	1
Grade 2 / Permanent Secretary	1
Grade 3 / Deputy Secretary	5
Grade 5	17
Grade 6	9
Grade 7	128
Deputy Principal	224
Staff Officer	209
Executive Officer 1	224
Executive Officer 2	150
Administrative Officer	168
Administrative Assistant	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>1168</b>

Since 1 April 2020, as a result of the pandemic, all staff are working remotely from home in a pressurised environment as the personnel vacancy rate is in excess of 20%. In the current circumstances our overriding priority in terms of our people agenda is, of course, the health and wellbeing of our staff.

A project has been established under the Chairmanship of the Head of the Management Services and Regulations Group to gauge how DfE staff have adjusted to working from home. The Project now involves the delivery of three work strands: Communication and Engagement; Mental Wellbeing and Work life Balance; and ICT.

A newly developed staff support hub established as a result of staff feedback brings a wide range of information and sources of support and guidance into one place. A dedicated policy website has also been established by NICS HR to assist staff and managers during the pandemic called Information and Advice for NICS Staff.

The health and wellbeing of our staff is paramount at this difficult time and all managers are encouraged to ensure their staff access the range of support mechanisms available. Training and development materials and resources are available for staff to access from their personal computer or smartphone, as well as their work laptops. NICS HR has developed training bundles and 'Top Tips' resources to assist staff at this difficult time.

Efforts continue to ensure that resources are focused on priority areas and as our priorities continue to evolve, further staff redeployment may become necessary. We work closely with our HR Business Partners to carry out internal redeployment in line with the Guiding Principles for Redeployment in DfE as developed with Departmental TUS. We will also continue to work with NICS HR to ensure that recruitment for business critical vacancies can be progressed to address one of the most significant challenges facing the Department so that the 10X vision is realised.

A key objective for the Department is to appoint a Chief Scientific and Technology Officer (CSTO) and work is underway to appoint an interim CSTO at the earliest opportunity. The CSTO will play a crucial role in advising the Department on science, technology, R&D and innovation strategies, particularly in the wake of the pandemic where a science-led recovery is the priority. They will also play a key role in driving joined-up work with other governments and devolved administrations through scientific policy networks, for example the UK Government's Chief Scientific Advisory Network.

The Department recognises that launching a decade of recovery must start with its people. As we continue to build on new ways of working and improve our vacancy position, we want to embed an organisational culture where individuals feel empowered and supported to deliver the 10X vision.

### **1.6 Our Budget**

The Department's non-ring-fenced Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) budget allocation for 2021/22 is £821.3 million. This is based on the same baseline as last year, £805.4 million, plus additional non baseline allocations of £12.3 million for EU Exit and £3.6 million for EU match funding.

To address the significant challenges arising out of Covid-19 the Executive allocated DfE a further £275.8 million Resource DEL in relation to the Economic Recovery Action Plan (including £145 million for the High Street Stimulus Scheme) and an additional £0.9m for the City of Derry Airport London Public Service Route.

The total DfE non-ring-fenced Resource DEL allocation for 2021/22 is £1,098 million.

The Department also has Resource DEL ring-fenced budgets of £151.7 million for depreciation and the Notional Student Loan Subsidy.

The Department's Conventional Capital DEL budget for 2021/22 is £100.8 million, which includes, £11 million additional funding for the ERAP, £25.5 million capital receipts, to be used across DfE and

£2.5 million specifically for the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI). The Department also has a Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) budget of £34.7 million which includes £30 million for Ulster University Greater Belfast Development Project.

The combined DfE Resource and Capital initial allocation for 2021/22 is £1,385.2 million.

In addition, DfE will receive £12.2 million from HM Treasury to manage the additional work associated with the NI protocol.

DfE has also received confirmation of New Deal funding from the Northern Ireland Office to cover a number of years for Skills (£5 million per year for three years); and Invest NI overseas trade and investment (£8 million across two financial years).

A ring-fenced Capital DEL allocation of £42.3 million is expected to be allocated in-year for Project Stratum (Broadband).

**Appendix A** sets out how this budget is allocated across our main spending areas.

**Appendix B** sets out how this budget is allocated to the DfE Family of Businesses.

### 1.7 Our Governance Arrangements

The Department operates under the direction and control of the Minister for the Economy, who is responsible and answerable to the Assembly for the exercise of the powers on which the administration of the Department depends. The Minister has a duty to the Assembly to account and to be held to account for all the policies, decisions and actions of the Department, including its ALBs.

The Permanent Secretary, as the Departmental Accounting Officer, is responsible for the overall organisation, management and staffing of the Department. He also has responsibility for maintaining a robust governance and risk management structure and a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of departmental policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding the public funds and departmental assets for which he is personally responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to him in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland. He must also be satisfied that adequate financial systems and procedures are in place to promote the efficient and economical conduct of business and to safeguard financial propriety and regularity within the Department's Arm's Length Bodies.

The Departmental Board assists the Permanent Secretary in meeting his responsibilities as Accounting Officer for establishing and overseeing the corporate governance arrangements of the Department. The Board, which comprises both senior Departmental officials (Executive Board members) and Independent members (Non-Executive Board members), provides corporate leadership to the organisation as a whole. It monitors performance against business plans, budgets and targets, and oversees the governance and risk management arrangements of the Department. The Board is chaired by the Permanent Secretary.

The Departmental Board is supported in its role by the following committees:

- The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) supports the Board on issues of risk, control and governance through provision of independent advice, information and assurance to the Board and Accounting Officer on the operation of the Department's system of internal control and the comprehensiveness, reliability and integrity of available assurance.
- The Delivery Committee supports the Board in managing performance against the Department's Strategic Work Plans, including corporate and annual business plans and any delivery plans relating to the Programme for Government. It also scrutinises the effectiveness of the management of key risks to achieving the objectives set out in those plans, as outlined in the Corporate Risk Register.
- The Casework Committee's role is to deliver better value for the taxpayer by challenging expenditure proposals on the grounds of deliverability, affordability and value for money. It is responsible for the scrutiny of DfE projects involving expenditure above £1 million.
- The Resourcing and People Committee provides a strategic view of how the NICS Human Resource policies and procedures can best be applied to ensure that they contribute effectively to the delivery of the Department's business needs, in line with priorities set out in the draft Programme for Government, the DfE Corporate and annual Business Plans and the NICS People Strategy. It is responsible for making decisions and recommendations on the implementation of corporate NICS-wide people-related policies in DfE and the effective use of resources across the Department.
- The Strategic Oversight Group (SOG) will continue to provide a single point of strategic assessment and assurance of the Department's ongoing Economic Policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the end of the EU Exit transition period. This recognises the interdependencies between the two events as the Department moves forward to implement the Economic Recovery Action Plan, develop the long term Economic Vision and deliver the outworking of EU Exit.

### 1.8 Our Partners

The Department's services are delivered in partnership with a range of other bodies and we will continue to work with our Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) to develop the partnership working approach and ensure alignment of ALB strategies with the overall Departmental / Ministerial strategy.

Our main delivery partners and a brief synopsis of what they do is outlined at **Appendix B**.

## 2. OUR PRIORITIES

### 2.1 Vision and Strategic Priorities

The Department’s vision is for Northern Ireland prospering through a decade of innovation which will deliver an economy that is ten times better than it is today, with benefits for all our people. This level of ambition will be realised by focusing on innovation in areas where we have real strengths and making sure these gains mean something to all businesses, people and places in Northern Ireland. Our vision for the economy will seek to have a positive impact on our economic, societal and environmental wellbeing.

The Department will be adopting an integrated approach to all policy and strategic development so that the ambitions set out in the vision will be realised. Our strategic priorities must work synergistically to realise the aspirations of the 10X vision with all policies and initiatives across the Department adopting a 10X approach and setting out how they will help to achieve success.

We have a wide range of core business as usual work in place to help achieve that vision, and it must continue. However, for the remainder of the current Assembly term we have decided to focus our Business Plan around a small number of key Ministerial priorities which must be delivered by the end of the current term, as outlined below.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Launching a Decade of Innovation
2. The Economic Recovery Action Plan
3. The Skills Agenda
4. Responding Effectively to the Outworking of EU Exit
5. The Energy Strategy
6. Enabling Digital Connectivity
7. Parental Bereavement Leave & Pay
8. Covid-19 Grant Schemes
9. City Deals

## **2.2 Programme for Government**

Once a new Programme for Government Outcomes Framework is finalised, this Department will be the lead on the economy-focussed Outcomes within, and will have key contributions to make to various others. The Department will contribute to any further progress to be made towards the development of a full Programme for Government as required in due course.

## **2.3 What We Will Deliver**

The tables below outline the Department's key planned deliverables up until May 2022, according to the Ministerial priorities outlined at 2.1 above.

Across the nine strategic priority areas, there are 25 milestones expected to be delivered. High level risks, assumptions, issues and dependencies have been identified across the strategic priority areas but commonalities are summarised as:

- Further Covid-19 restrictions and regulation could impact the delivery of Economic Recovery Action Plan, Skills Agenda and Covid-19 Grant Schemes;
- Milestones within City Deals and Enabling Digital Connectivity are dependent on third party suppliers and/or partners;
- Milestones within the Skills Agenda and Innovation are subject to funding requests;
- Milestones within the Skills Agenda, Parental Bereavement Leave and Innovation are dependent on Executive or Ministerial support; and
- All strategic priority areas are operating with vacant posts which is noted as a risk or issue to delivery of certain milestones.

**2021/22 Business Plan: Launching a Decade of Innovation**

**Lead Official: Keith Forster**

This strategic priority builds on response and recovery phases to the Covid-19 pandemic provided by the Covid-19 Grant Schemes and the Economic Recovery Action Plan respectively and provides the long-term vision for the economy.

The ambition of building an innovative and inclusive economy is presented in An Economic Vision for a Decade of Innovation, published in May 2021. An initial work programme is due to be finalised in April 2021 which will inform the initial policy steps and full work programme to be completed throughout the year.

The workstream to review and refresh the Innovation Strategy will work in tandem with the Economic Vision to boost innovation-driven growth and is due to be completed by March 2022. The Circular Economy Strategic Framework will also encourage innovation through resource efficiency as well as boosting productivity and driving economic growth. The draft consultation for the framework is also due to be published by March 2022.



**KEY:**

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ▶ Activity





2021/22 Business Plan: Economic Recovery Action Plan

Lead Official: Michelle Scott

Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on our Economy. Many businesses have faced repeated cycles of restrictions whilst employees have been placed on furlough. Extensive business support measures have been put in place both by the UK Government and the NI Executive which have provided a valuable lifeline over the last year. However with the easing of restrictions underway and the successful rollout of the vaccine gathering pace, the Department must now focus on ensuring there are interventions in place to support recovery.

The actions laid out in the Economic Recovery Action Plan provide that support. The plan also recognises that embarking on this recovery journey provides the opportunity to build a more competitive, inclusive and greener economy. The decisive actions set out within the plan have been strongly endorsed by stakeholders and the wider business community.

Given the broad nature of the ambitions set out in the plan, success will be identified across a number of different measures. Key amongst these will be improving our skills base while delivering higher productivity and enhanced competitiveness.



**KEY:**

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ➡ Activity

2021/22 Business Plan: Economic Recovery Action Plan														
	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
<b>Governance</b>	★ 2021/22 Business Plan Launch		▲ Quarterly Progress Update			▲ Quarterly Progress Update			▲ Quarterly Progress Update				▲ Quarterly Progress Update	
<b>Economic Recovery Action Plan</b>	➡ Drive the delivery and refinement of the Economic Recovery Action Plan													
	◆ Stakeholder engagement & comms plan implemented		◆ Governance framework agreed to enable expenditure against funds allocated			◆ Recalibration exercise based on stakeholder feedback, current economic conditions and an assessment of delivery to date								

2021/22 Business Plan: Skills Agenda

Lead Official: Jamie Warnock

Covid-19, and the measures required to reduce its transmission, is having a significant impact on the NI labour market. At the same time, EU Exit is introducing changes to fundamentals such as migration and trade. We are focused on working with industry and our delivery partners to respond to these challenges and improve the skills profile of the working population; and, ensure our young people are well equipped for entry into the labour market. We will provide access and support to help people develop the skills required to meet the changing demands of the labour market. Not only does this support economic growth, it also improves wellbeing and helps address inequality.

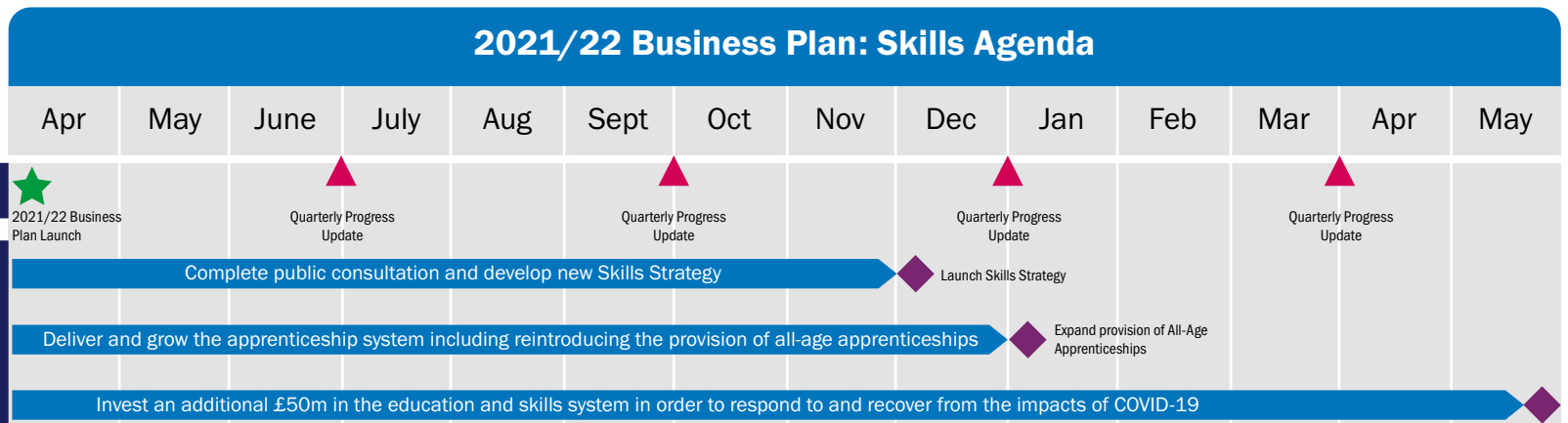
By investing in skills, we will help to ensure that NI businesses can rebuild and grow their markets, protect and strengthen their supply chains and maximise new opportunities. This investment will also enable our people to avail of new and better employment opportunities. Potential also exists to target NI's diaspora and to attract highly skilled 'returners' who can contribute to addressing key skills needs in high value sectors and, thereby, accelerate the growth of sectors of strategic significance.

The development of the new Skills Strategy for NI has focused on key themes and policy objectives that aim to deliver against these challenges, whilst taking into account the need for our skills system to address growing inequalities, providing everyone with the access to the education and training opportunities that will enable them to fulfil their potential. The new strategy is designed around three major policy objectives: addressing skills imbalances; creating a culture of lifelong learning; and enhancing digital education and inclusion across society.



**KEY:**

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ➡ Activity



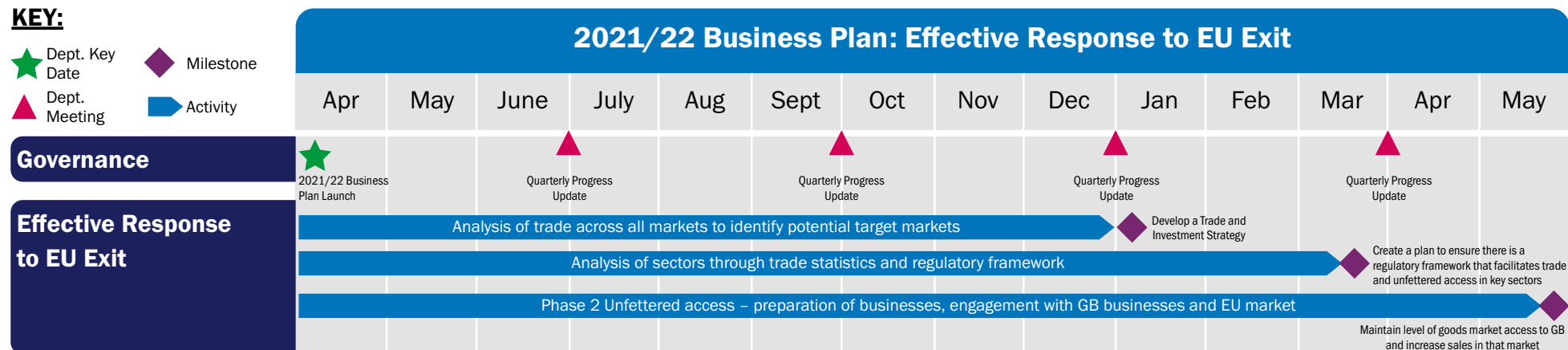
**2021/22 Business Plan: Effective Response to EU Exit**

**Lead Official: Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh**

For a small economy such as Northern Ireland, external sales are a vital driver of economic growth. EU Exit including the implementation of the Protocol has been extremely challenging for business. While in Northern Ireland the primary impact so far has been on inputs, particularly those sourced from GB, the scale of cost increases has also raised concerns for competitiveness of NI businesses in external trade. The changes from EU Exit particularly on goods regulation are not fixed, we have yet to see what future UK policy on goods regulation will be. This has the potential to have significant impact on highly regulated sectors here who rely on sales to GB.

By identifying key areas of focus: trade and investment strategy as a driver of economic recovery and growth; the need to focus and lobby on the regulatory framework for key sectors and the need to maintain a strong position in the GB market through unfettered access policy; this strategic priority area will aim to achieve a coherent response to EU Exit that creates the right framework for businesses here to increase external sales.

Success in this area is about positioning our economy and businesses for the long term. In the short term, and by the end of the Minister's mandate it will mean setting the direction on trade for the first time in a post-Brexit world. Some of the tangible benefits we should see in the short term are in terms of policy around goods regulation in GB and unfettered access which we hope to see businesses benefit from by maintaining or increasing sales in the GB market. We anticipate using a range of business surveys to monitor this.



2021/22 Business Plan: Energy Strategy

Lead Official: Thomas Byrne

The previous Energy Strategy was published in 2010 and reached the end of its useful life some time ago. A new strategy is needed to deliver on Northern Ireland’s commitment to addressing climate change and put in place supporting policies and investment in infrastructure to deliver on this. This is a high-profile area with significant external interest.

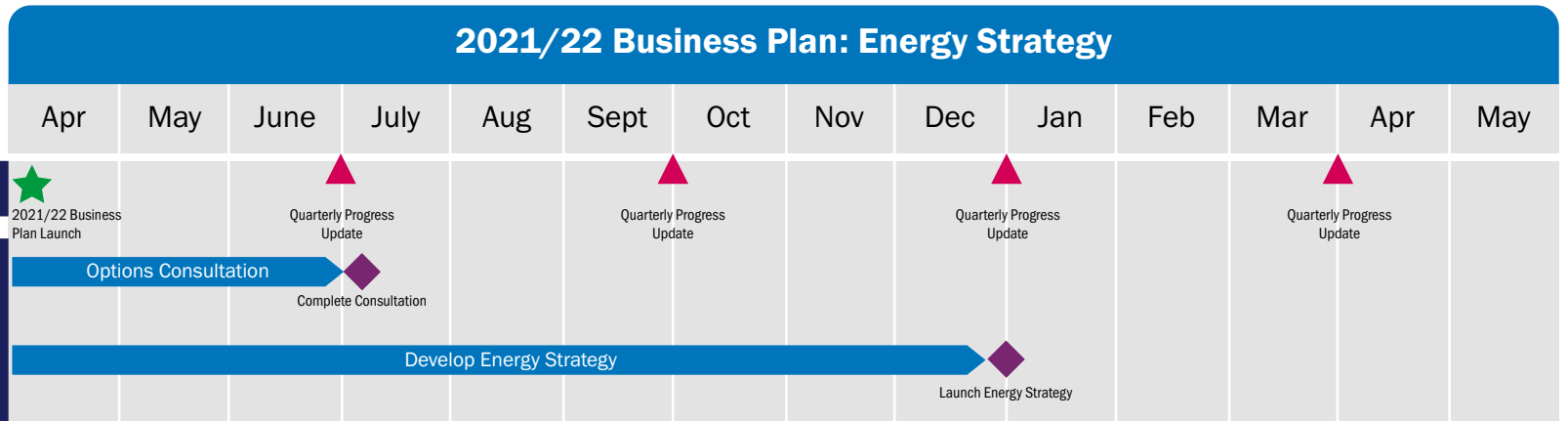
A Call for Evidence was published in December 2019 as a first step in developing a new Energy Strategy. This closed in April 2020 and the Department has taken forward a substantial collaborative work programme across government and involving external stakeholders to review the evidence, gather additional evidence and develop potential policy options. This resulted in the publication of a consultation on Policy Options for a new Energy Strategy in March 2021 which is open for three months.

Success will be demonstrated by the publication of a new Energy Strategy by the end of 2021. This strategy must be robust and evidence-based given the level of interest and scrutiny that will be placed on new energy policies. Selected policies and programmes will need to be progressed in parallel with the Strategy as the Minister has already committed to this.



**KEY:**

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ➡ Activity



2021/22 Business Plan: Enabling Digital Connectivity

Lead Official: Geraldine Fee

DfE's £165m broadband investment project, Project Stratum, is now at the implementation stage following a robust and competitive procurement process. The coronavirus pandemic has brought into sharp focus the dependency placed on high capacity broadband infrastructure. However, even before the pandemic, there was widespread consensus on the benefits of ubiquitous high-speed broadband, very much seen as a driver and enabler of economic growth and new economic activity. Project Stratum will help deliver against the ambitions set out in the Northern Ireland Programme for Government, and the outcome of the project is also fully aligned to the UK Government's pledge to bring full-fibre and gigabit-capable broadband to every home and business across the UK by 2025.

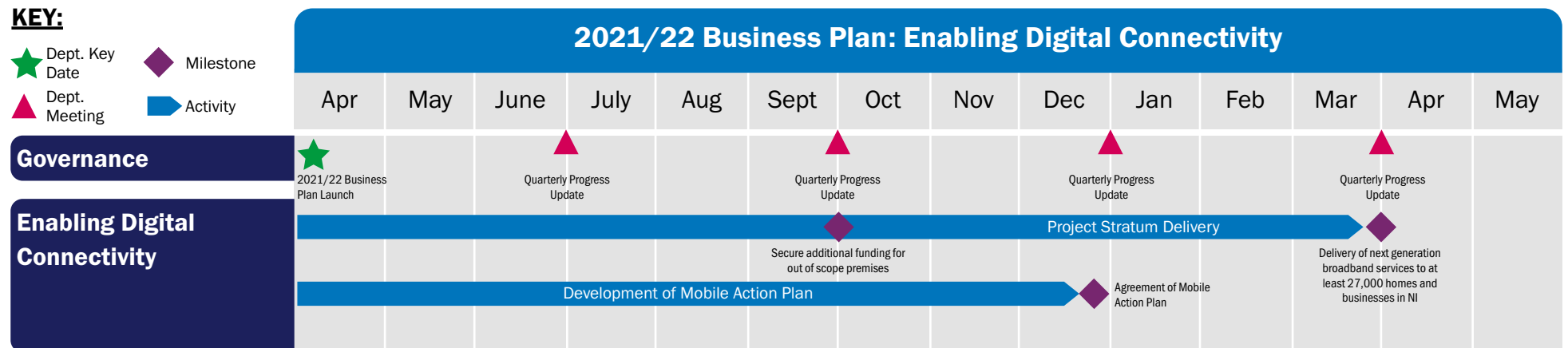
Going forward, DfE officials will seek to secure additional funding for Project Stratum, utilising the headroom funding provision within the contract, to bring additional eligible premises into scope of the project, ensuring that the aspirations of the Department are achieved through maximising broadband coverage across the target intervention area, based on a combination of available public funding and the contractor's investment in network build costs across the lifetime of the contract. It is anticipated that over 79,000 homes and businesses in predominantly rural areas of Northern Ireland will benefit from Project Stratum intervention by March 2024, the results of which will provide citizens with access to the highest broadband speeds available to consumers and businesses. The project will serve as a building block to help the Northern Ireland economy recover from its present challenges, and flourish in the longer term, as a result of ubiquitous high-speed broadband connectivity.

DfE officials are leading on the development of a Mobile Action Plan (MAP) for Northern Ireland. Like many parts of the UK, certain parts of Northern Ireland suffer from poor mobile coverage, the main aim of the MAP will be to identify issues faced by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) in the roll out and upgrading of mobile networks/ technologies and to seek to establish solutions to enable better, faster and more consistent mobile coverage throughout NI. The MAP, which is due to be developed and published by the end of 2021, would serve as a useful precursor to the development of a full Digital Infrastructure Action Plan for Northern Ireland.



KEY:

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ➡ Activity



**2021/22 Business Plan: Parental Bereavement Leave & Pay**

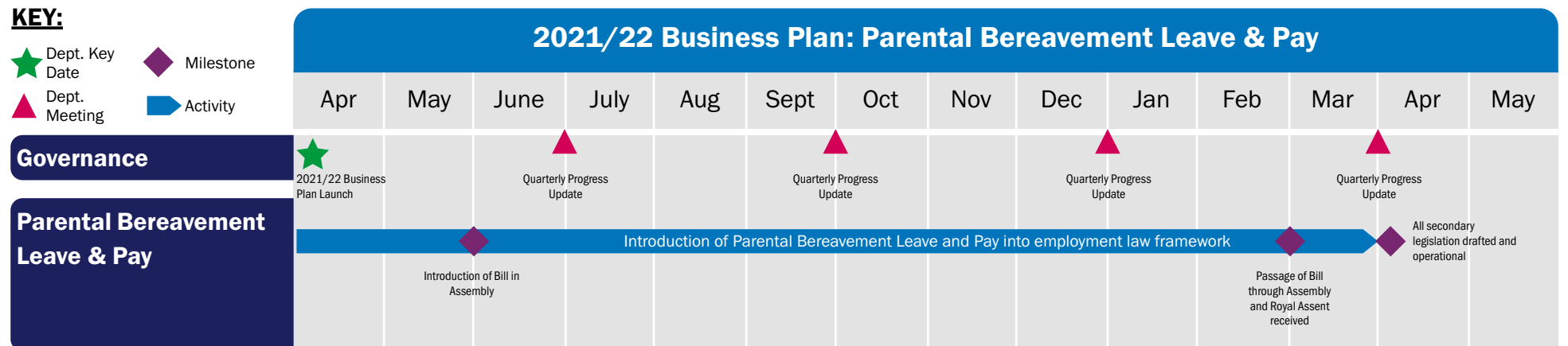
**Lead Official: Colin Jack / Kellie Sprott**

A new employment right to take Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (PBLP) was introduced in GB by the UK Government in April 2020. Upon taking up office in January 2020 Minister Dodds made it a priority to replicate this provision in NI and ensure that working parents here have access to the same parental bereavement right as working parents in GB. When introduced PBLP will allow employees who suffer the loss of a child under the age of 18 and those who suffer a still birth (after 24 weeks of completed pregnancy) to take two week’s leave from work. It will also allow, subject to certain qualifying criteria, a statutory payment to accompany that leave. The qualifying criteria for receipt of the statutory payment is 26 week’s continuous service with your employer and a minimum wage threshold must be reached. Both leave and pay entitlements will be available to employees. The pay element only will be available to workers.

By legislating for this new employment right we hope to enhance the employment rights of the most vulnerable in our workplaces. The intention of the new right is to support those parents whose employer would not under current arrangements support time off work or pay in these circumstances. Our Bill will provide the statutory minimum that all employees can expect and will provide an element of certainty for both employers and employees when faced with this distressing situation. Many good employers go far beyond this statutory minimum in supporting employees in this position and we encourage this good practice to continue.

How success will be identified:

- Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2022 is part of the NI Employment Law Framework.
- All accompanying secondary legislation is in place to enable PBLP to be operable.



**2021/22 Business Plan: Covid-19 Grant Schemes**

**Lead Official: Keith Forster**

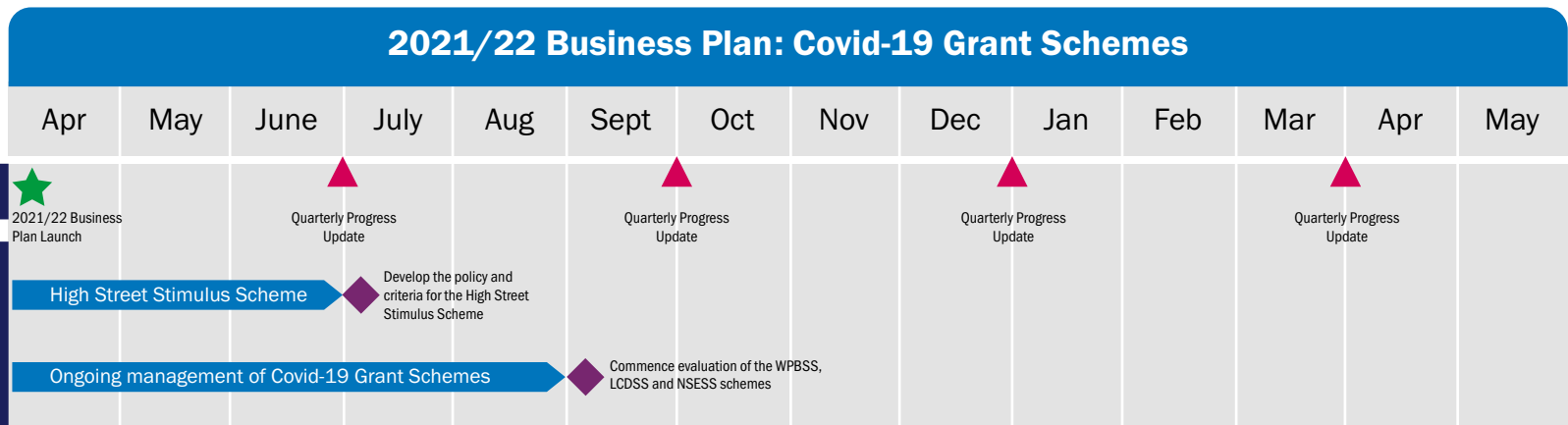
Approximately £460m of support has been provided via the Department’s business support schemes up to the end of the 2020/21 financial year. This has been vital in preventing business closures and job losses whilst also promoting our economic recovery. The Covid Restrictions Business Support Scheme (CRBSS) and the Large Tourism and Hospitality Business Support Scheme (LTHBSS) are continuing to provide support into the 2021/22 financial year whilst restrictions remain in place. Following a commitment of funding from the NI Executive, the High Street Stimulus Scheme is due to launch later in 2021 which will provide much needed economic stimulus for our local high streets and businesses across many of the sectors that have been most severely impacted by this pandemic.

Significant work is required for the ongoing management of those schemes that remain operational and in the closure and evaluation of schemes. External consultants have been appointed for the evaluation of previous schemes and this is anticipated to continue for the recent schemes. Ongoing work in collaboration with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) will be required to develop and implement the High Street Stimulus Scheme.



**KEY:**

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ➡ Activity



2021/22 Business Plan: City Deals

Lead Official: Ciaran McGarrity

The NI Executive have agreed that implementation of City and Growth Deals is a priority for delivery. It will involve £1.5 billion investment over the next 15 years in economic infrastructure across 4 Deal areas. DfE will be the Accountable Department for an estimated £800m of that investment. The Programme investment, particularly in areas such as innovation and digital, presents a huge opportunity to accelerate sustained and inclusive growth across NI and is a key commitment in the Economic Recovery Plan.

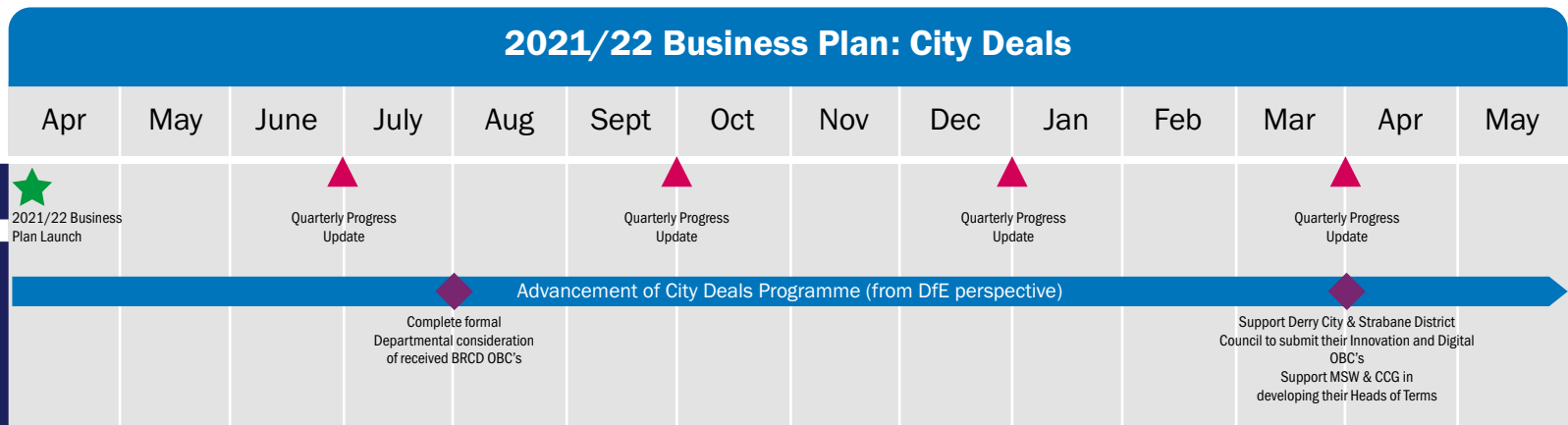
Over the coming 12 months we will work with the each of the 4 Deal Owners to accelerate delivery of their Deals.

- For the Belfast Region we will progress all received business cases through final approvals processes and support individual project implementation.
- For the Derry Strabane City Deal, we will support the Council and its partners to develop Outline Business Cases for submission to DfE for formal approval by March 2022.
- For MSW we will increase our engagement and support to ensure emerging projects are translated into robust Strategic Outline Cases(SOCs) that can be submitted for formal approval.
- For CCG we will assist the Council finalise its list of projects for inclusion in its Deal and support the development of associated SOC's.



**KEY:**

- ★ Dept. Key Date
- ◆ Milestone
- ▲ Dept. Meeting
- ▶ Activity





### 3. OUR PROGRESS

Progress against this Plan will be formally monitored on a quarterly basis, with progress reports prepared for the Departmental Board.

The indicative reporting schedule is set out below:

Reporting Period	Indicative Timing for Progress Report
Quarter 1 (April to June 2021)	September Board meeting
Quarter 2 (July to September 2021)	November Board meeting
Quarter 3 (October to December 2021)	February Board meeting
Quarter 4 (January to March 2022)	May Board meeting

**APPENDIX A – BUDGET ALLOCATIONS ACROSS MAIN SPENDING AREAS**



Summary per key policy areas	£million
Skills and Education	812.6
Economic Strategy and Development	175.4
Regulation	20.9
Economic Recovery Action Plan	286.8
SBRI	2.5
EU Exit	12.3
City of Derry Airport – Public Service Obligation	0.9
Other departmental spend areas <sup>1</sup>	73.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,385.2</b>

1 Includes Departmental Salaries

## APPENDIX B - DfE FAMILY OF BUSINESSES INCLUDING BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

In 2021/22 we have allocated £751.4m of our total budget to our sponsored and other bodies.



Sponsored Bodies	Role of the Body
<b>Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs)</b>	
<b>Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI);</b>	To grow the local economy by helping new and existing businesses to compete internationally, and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland.
<b>Northern Ireland Screen (NIS);</b>	To accelerate the development of a dynamic and sustainable screen industry and culture in Northern Ireland.
<b>Construction and Industry Training Board–Northern Ireland (CITB-NI);</b>	Encourages the adequate training of those employed or intending to be employed in the construction industry and to improve the skills and productivity of the industry in Northern Ireland.
<b>Tourism Northern Ireland (Tourism NI);</b>	Responsible for the development of tourism and the marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to domestic tourists, from within Northern Ireland, and to visitors from the Republic of Ireland.
<b>Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI)</b>	Promotes and enforces health and safety at work standards in Northern Ireland.
<b>Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI)</b>	Provides free, independent support and advice for all consumers and businesses in Northern Ireland. They also have powers to investigate complaints about energy, water, transport and postal services and undertake research to understand local consumer issues.
<b>Labour Relations Agency (LRA)</b>	To promote the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland.
<b>Stranmillis University College</b>	To identify, educate, and place highly qualified education professionals in schools and related professional settings. It also offers pre-service and in-service courses, undergraduate and postgraduate.

Sponsored Bodies	Role of the Body
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Further Education (FE) colleges:</b></li> <li>• <b>Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC);</b></li> <li>• <b>Northern Regional College (NRC);</b></li> <li>• <b>Southern Regional College (SRC);</b></li> <li>• <b>South West College (SWC);</b></li> <li>• <b>South Eastern Regional College (SERC);</b></li> <li>• <b>North West Regional College (NWRC).</b></li> </ul>	<p>The FE colleges are the main providers of vocational and technical education and training in NI and play a central role in raising levels of literacy and numeracy and in up-skilling and re-skilling through a broad range of courses.</p> <p>The colleges offer programmes which include foundation degrees, higher national diplomas, skills qualifications and level 3 diploma and certificates in a wide range of areas. They take a partnership approach in linking with employers and stakeholders. The six individual colleges develop their own links in their geographical area right across Northern Ireland.</p>
<b>Autonomous Higher Education Institutions</b>	
<b>Ulster University</b>	<p>A university with a national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement, making a major contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Their core business activities are teaching and learning, widening access to education, research and innovation and technology and knowledge transfer.</p>
<b>Queen’s University Belfast</b>	<p>It is one of the leading universities in the UK and Ireland with a distinguished heritage and history. It conducts leading edge education and research focused on the needs of society. They are globally connected and networked with strategic partnerships across the world.</p>
<b>St Mary’s University College</b>	<p>Provides degree programmes in teacher education – with the option to learn through Irish as well as English – and in Liberal Arts.</p>
<b>The Open University</b>	<p>Creates higher educational opportunities with no barriers to entry. Provides flexible, innovative teaching and understands the needs of part-time students. Their innovative, award-winning distance teaching credentials have seen over 2 million students receive an education, otherwise denied to them at campus-based universities.</p>

Sponsored Bodies	Role of the Body
<b><i>North/South Bodies</i></b>	
<b>InterTrade Ireland</b>	Helps small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland explore new cross-border markets, develop new products, processes and services and become investor ready.
<b>Tourism Ireland</b>	Responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination.
<b><i>Other Bodies</i></b>	
<b>Office of Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal (OITFET)</b>	Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal are independent judicial bodies in Northern Ireland. The Industrial Tribunals, hear and determine claims to do with employment matters. The Fair Employment Tribunal hears and determines complaints of discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion.