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# **FIRST ANNUAL REPORT ON SUSTAINABLE WATER - A LONG-TERM WATER STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (2015-2040)**

**November 2017**

## Executive Summary

1. The Executive's Sustainable Water – A Long-Term Water Strategy sets out a common vision for a sustainable water sector. To ensure full compliance with the Strategy, an Implementation Action Plan was agreed by all the relevant stakeholders. The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is responsible for managing the implementation of the Strategy and has undertaken to co-ordinate an Annual Report on its progress. A commitment has been made to the NI Executive to provide it with a copy of the Annual Report.
2. The Implementation Action Plan contains 231 actions which have been drawn directly from the Strategy. The actions have been prioritised as short, medium and long-term actions and progress, at this stage, is largely limited to the short-term actions. Some preparatory work or planning may have begun in respect of the others, but that may not be reported in this Report. It should be noted that a large number of actions are considered 'business as usual' and as such will always be ongoing rather than having a specific end date.
3. Seven actions have already been completed. One of these is the introduction of legislation in March 2016 to enable NI Water to combine its Water Resource Management Plan and Drought Plan into a single Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan. As a result of that, work on the Plan is already well underway and will be issued for consultation later this year.
4. The same legislation has made strides to encourage the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) by enabling NI Water to adopt 'hard' components of those systems, for example, over-sized pipes, retention tanks, flow control valves, etc. It also encourages developers to consider 'soft' SuDS, as NI Water now has the power to refuse a surface water connection if the developer has not considered sustainable alternatives.
5. Other actions completed include: the setting and exceeding of drinking water targets that focus on iron exceedances; revision of NI Water's project appraisal process to ensure investment decisions are based on 'whole-life'

energy and carbon costs; launch of the FloodRE scheme which ensures affordable flood insurance continues to be available to households and the publicising of the Flood Incident Line and flooding information on the NI Direct website.

6. The Strategy encourages further involvement by local councils, particularly in relation to their planning, environmental health and leisure activities, and this partnership will evolve as the actions are progressed. It is likely that future Annual Reports will show a greater input from councils along with a range of other environmental stakeholders.
7. This Strategy will need significant support from both central and local government if it is to be fully achieved. However, the benefits are also significant. It will assist in the delivery of a number of the Outcomes in the draft Programme for Government, and will ensure that water is respected as a valuable natural resource that is vital to life, enhances our environment and enables our economy to grow.

## Introduction

8. The Executive's Sustainable Water – A Long-Term Water Strategy sets out a common vision for a sustainable water sector. The Strategy focuses on Economic Development & Growth, Affordability, Environmental Improvement & Compliance, Flood Risk Management and Sustainable Service Delivery.
9. The Strategy will support the delivery of specific commitments in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government, as well as its European commitments. It will also inform future Social and Environmental Guidance for water and sewerage services, which sets out key investment priorities for the water sector.
10. Sustainable Water - A Long-Term Water Strategy aims to:-

- i. create a more sustainable water sector where all water-related activities can co-exist without compromising the environment or increasing flood risk;*

The Strategy's vision is "to have a sustainable water sector in Northern Ireland". The actions in the Strategy have been specifically tailored to help achieve this vision.

- ii. consolidate and bring together all policies that affect the water sector;*

The Strategy was developed with input from government departments with responsibility for water matters, NI Water and environmental NGOs. This helped to ensure that the Strategy takes a holistic approach to the water sector.

- iii. progress delivery of difficult cross-cutting policies such as water efficiency, surface water management and water and sewerage funding and regulation;*

The Stormwater Management Group, led jointly by DfI and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), is

leading in the development and delivery mechanisms for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). It has recently completed a gap analysis of the process and is currently preparing a roadmap for the future. DfI is also carrying out a baseline review of current roles, responsibilities, strategies and commitments relating to addressing the risk of surface water flooding through investment planning and delivery. This review will be used to inform the development of policy by DfI's Water and Drainage and Policy Division.

- iv. *inform the development and delivery of the Executive's River Basin Management Plans, Flood Risk Management Plans and proposed Marine Plan;*

One of the key objectives of the Strategy is to help meet the requirements of water-related European Directives. To help achieve this, the Strategy focuses on improving water quality and sustainably managing flood risk.

- v. *provide strategic direction and a framework for long-term investment plans to encourage the delivery of sustainable initiatives with longer pay back periods;*

The Strategy endorses the approach set out in the Social and Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Services, which sets out specific actions for NI Water regarding the delivery of sustainable initiatives. To deliver this commitment, NI Water has revised its Capital Appraisal Guidance for enhancement and maintenance projects to help ensure sustainable solutions are progressed.

- vi. *ensure existing water and sewerage infrastructure and investment proposals inform future planning decisions.*

NI Water works closely with Local Councils to keep them informed of the available capacity in the water and sewerage network and of future

investment plans. This enables Local Councils to encourage growth in areas with available capacity and better inform planning decisions.

11. The Strategy focuses on four high-level aims to cover the key water needs within a catchment:
  - i. to provide high quality sustainable supplies of drinking water to households, industry and agriculture;
  - ii. to manage flood risk and drainage in a sustainable manner;
  - iii. to achieve the environmental requirements of the Water Framework Directive in a sustainable manner; and
  - iv. to provide sustainable water and sewerage services that meet customers' needs.
  
12. The full implementation of the Strategy may require significant financial investment over the 25-year period of the Strategy. The issue of costs and funding is particularly concerning in the current economic climate. It is recognised that reductions in funding will have an impact on key stakeholders' (government departments and NI Water) ability to deliver the objectives of the Strategy. In addition, the implications of the UK withdrawal from the EU, which are still to be clearly defined, will need to be carefully managed to minimise any potential impact on the delivery of the Strategy.

### **Drinking Water Supply and Demand**

13. In order to "*Manage Drinking Water Quality Risks in a Sustainable Manner from Source to Tap (DW Aim 1)*", NI Water has, in consultation with key stakeholders, put a number of plans and programmes in place:
  - i. it prepares, and annually reviews, its Drinking Water Safety Plans in consultation with the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), to identify and mitigate against risks in drinking water;
  - ii. it has agreed Designated Drinking Water Protected Areas which are reported on in the River Basin Management Plans, with ongoing

monitoring, and steps taken, to protect these areas having been formalised; and

- iii. it is nearing the completion of Catchment Management Plans for all drinking water catchments (20 of 23 live catchments completed to date) and is progressing its Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCAMP). As part of this Programme, NI Water is completing a free pilot weed wiping trial for farmers, in the Seagahan Catchment (Co Armagh), during spring/summer 2017. The objective of the pilot is to remove pesticides from the untreated raw water and potentially avoid having to construct further expensive assets to remove the pesticides in the treatment processes at the Water Treatment Plant. Interreg VA funding has been secured for SCAMP, which is aimed at improving border catchments. NI Water's commitment to providing wholesome water supplies to its customers is evidenced in the 2016 drinking water quality compliance figure of 99.86%.
14. Consideration is also being given, through stakeholder engagement, to methods of encouraging private householders to replace lead pipes within the curtilage of their houses. This complements NI Water's pro-active annual programme of works to replace lead pipes, which only replaces pipework outside the curtilage of a property. Over the PC15 period, NI Water has committed to proactive replacement of over 11,000 lead pipes at consumer properties in addition to lead pipe replacement under water main rehabilitation. In 2016/17, NI Water completed 1867 lead pipe replacements under the proactive replacement programme against a target of 1844.
15. The DWI leads on risks to drinking water quality from private water supplies, within the Strategy. Local Councils, through a service level agreement on behalf of DWI, undertake the monitoring and risk assessments of private supplies that are registered with the Department. DWI works closely with council staff and private water supply owners in administering the private water supply regulations and in providing advice and guidance on mitigation of

risks, to protect both the groundwater source from contamination and the public health of consumers.

16. The DWI also leads on a series of targets, within the Strategy, related to managing water quality risks within domestic distribution systems. These include the development and implementation of an education programme to make owners aware of the public health risks that exist with water use within buildings.
17. The Strategy aims to ensure that we “*Meet the Water Demand Needs of Society, the Economy and the Environment (DW Aim 2)*” and a key means of achieving this is by effective forward planning. DfI made legislation in 2016 to enable the Water Resource Management Plan and the Drought Plan, prepared by NI Water, to be combined. This has successfully met one of the actions of the Strategy and NI Water is currently in the final stages of drafting its first Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan, in collaboration with key stakeholders including the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland (UREGNI), the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) and DfI. This Plan followed guidance issued by DfI and is the first such plan developed in the UK. The England & Wales water companies intend following this good practice for their next price control in PR19.
18. The impact of water abstraction and water usage on the environment is a key consideration and, in order to reduce water consumption, NI Water runs an extensive education campaign involving primary and secondary schools. This includes bringing the Waterbus to schools and giving class talks on how to save water in the home. In addition, NI Water has increased its attendance at exhibitions and local community events to promote water efficiency. For example, it has attended the Plumbing Apprentice of the Year Final 2017 and used that opportunity to speak to lecturers and apprentices on the need to use approved water fittings to promote water efficiency. Social media is also used to promote key messages.



19. To ensure that it can “*Resource Efficient Drinking Water Treatment and Supply Chains (DW Aim 3)*”, NI Water has made significant progress reviewing its water treatment and supply systems to identify how potential energy savings might be achieved.
- i During the current Price Control period (PC15 - 2015-21), NI Water has commenced implementation of its Instrumentation, Automation and Telemetry (ICAT) Strategy, with new technology already installed at over 30 service reservoir sites during 2016/17. This investment enables remote control of its assets providing additional resilience and improving customer service; and
  - ii It has also invested in energy efficiency measures and green energy, having invested in Renewable Solar PV at 55 sites adding to its three hydro schemes that were already in place. NI Water continues to purchase a significant portion of its grid energy as ‘Green Energy’.

### **Flood Risk Management and Drainage**

20. Land-use planning is key to managing flood risk and drainage issues and to “*Delivering Sustainable Flood Resilient Development (FRMD Aim 1)*”. DfI is responsible for planning policy and drainage matters and it is working closely with the councils to enable them to make informed decisions on planning, taking flood risk and drainage into account. .
21. The Stormwater Management Group is a multi-agency group jointly chaired by DfI’s Water and Drainage Policy Division (WDPD) and DAERA’s Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), which has been set up to encourage the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) as the preferred means of dealing with surface water. This group is exploring various issues, including planning for SuDS at an early stage in the development process, guidance on construction standards, the approval process and proposals for ongoing maintenance. The widespread use of SuDS will reduce flood risk and provide sustainable development.

22. In *“Managing the Catchment to Reduce Flood Risk (FRMD Aim 2)”*, it is important to consider man-made issues as well as natural. In relation to reservoirs, the Reservoirs Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 contains a regulatory safety framework for the management and maintenance of reservoirs capable of holding 10,000m<sup>3</sup> or more. Work to introduce the regulatory safety framework was suspended in June 2016, when it was discovered that the statutory responsibility for reservoir safety did not transfer from DAERA to DfI, when it was formed in May 2016. Work to rectify this error began immediately but was not completed before the Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved in January 2017. Work will recommence as soon as the institutions are up and running. DfI Rivers, NI Water and DfI Roads continue to carry out routine and reactive maintenance, as resources permit, to ensure that our publically managed drainage systems are performing their function, particularly during periods of intensive or prolonged rainfall. Specifically, DfI Rivers has a rolling programme of annual watercourse and drainage asset maintenance.
23. In urban areas, surface water run-off needs to be managed to reduce the risk of flooding and this will be aided by the work of the Stormwater Management Group. The Living with Water programme is also developing a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan for Belfast, to protect against flooding, enhance the environment and enable economic growth. The plan is currently being developed and SuDS schemes will be considered within the suite of options provided as potential solutions.
24. DAERA’s Forest Service has also published a report on the role of forests in flood mitigation entitled "Opportunity mapping for woodland creation to reduce flood risk in NI".
25. In an effort to *“Provide Sustainable Integrated Drainage in Rural and Urban Areas (FRMD Aim 3)”*, NI Water has successfully agreed proposals with Clandeboye Primary School for a Rain Garden to demonstrate how good design can mitigate against flooding and provide an additional educational resource, visual amenity and an element of play and fun in the school’s grounds. This collaborative, cross-departmental approach has shown how a

retrofit solution can work to deliver a small, but excellent, example of sustainable drainage to reduce flooding, whilst providing a valuable educational tool to illustrate some of the major topics of the Eco School programme, for example, water, waste, school grounds, biodiversity and climate change. It is expected that a range of topics can be discussed with the pupils, e.g. wildlife – flora and fauna, water cycle, flooding, pollution, flood mitigation and biodiversity.

26. NI Water is also piloting stormwater separation projects and has removed more than 54,000m<sup>2</sup> of impermeable area which was putting stormwater into the combined sewers. This is in excess of its target of 30,000m<sup>2</sup> per annum which was set in PC15 and reduces the risk of flooding from combined sewers.
  
27. To *“Improve Flood Resistance and Resilience in High Flood Risk Areas (FRMD Aim 4)”*, DfI Rivers maintains registers of flood hot spots, designated sea defences and properties that are at risk from flooding. Annual targets are set to reduce these and an investment and maintenance programme has been put in place for properties, alongside a flood defence and alleviation investment programme in areas at high risk of flooding. The Flood Investment and Planning Group (FIPG) was also established in October 2013 with the aim of alleviating flooding through improved partnership working between the departments and organisations responsible, to address customer need. In the relatively short time that the FIPG has been operating the partnership working that it has driven, has had a measurable impact, and has directly led to the development and delivery of a number of flood alleviation investigations and schemes. Some examples of where ongoing partnership working is being progressed include:
  - Lucerne Parade, Belfast;
  - Toome Road, Ballymena;
  - Foylesprings, Londonderry;
  - Whyte Acres, Banbridge; and
  - Lille Park, Belfast.

28. In addition, the Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme was launched, in January 2016, with a media campaign. To date, 99 applications have been received and of those, 66 have been assessed as suitable and approved. It is expected that the first homes will be fitted with property protection measures from August 2017.
29. In preparation for “*Extreme Weather Events (FRMD Aim 5)*”, the Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG) has developed multi-agency plans to help communities prepare for and respond to flooding emergencies. The Lead Government Department (LGD) framework and the CCG (NI) protocols, on escalation and co-ordination, also provide clear guidance on the various aspects of managing multi-agency emergencies. However, these protocols need to be formally adopted by the new 11 council arrangement. In addition, the Sub-Regional Emergency Planning Groups, chaired by Council and PSNI, are already in place. Emergency response plans have already been developed and a new Council Regional Co-ordinator is due to be appointed.

### **Environmental Protection and Improvement**

30. DfI and DAERA work closely to help develop and implement “*Sustainable Environmental Policy and Regulation (EP Aim 1)*”. Critical to the success of this approach, is working in partnership with key stakeholders and landowners. DAERA (NIEA) is responsible for progressing River Basin Management Plans for the whole of Northern Ireland. It does so using a catchment management-based approach which helps facilitate public / community / voluntary sector partnerships through support for the work of the Rivers Trust and other Catchment Partnerships, as well as smaller farm groups. In addition, the Living with Water Programme and the Shared Waters Enhancement and Loughs Legacy (SWELL) project have established a collaborative and shared model approach to implement sustainable shared solutions.
31. Further engagement took place at three stakeholder events organised by DAERA (NIEA), in 2016, to raise awareness of environmental issues and encourage the local community to help protect the water environment, while a

major conference is to be held in 2017. A small Environmental Advisory Unit has also recently been established within DAERA to help co-ordinate provision of environmental advice and guidance across the various sectors. This includes identifying and co-ordinating key messages around water quality. The aim is to provide increased access to better targeted, more relevant, high quality and timely information. These key messages, along with relevant advice and guidance, will also be communicated by DAERA, and by the UFU to its members, as part of the commitments contained in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which was signed with NIEA in April.

32. To work towards “*Sustainably Managing the Catchment to Improve Water Quality (EP Aim 2)*”, DAERA has overall responsibility for monitoring delivery of the WFD and PfG targets relating to the quality of ground and surface water bodies. It is responsible for delivering the data and evidence which help inform and target work within the catchments. It works closely with DfI, other stakeholders and landowners to develop and deliver a wide range of actions, within each catchment, aimed at improving water quality.
33. In addition, DAERA has recently established a multi-agency Priority Catchment Working Group, involving marine colleagues, and focusing on the Dundrum catchment. This should provide a model for addressing other catchments with multiple problems.
34. DAERA (NIEA) operates 24-hour water pollution response which deals with around 2000 reported incidents each year. Where appropriate, DEARA (NIEA) will take forward prosecutions against those deemed culpable.
35. DAERA opened its Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) in February 2017 and received 2363 applications. Farmers joining the scheme deliver specific environmental measures, within five years, in order to restore, preserve and enhance biodiversity; improve water quality; and foster carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture. The water quality environment measures are largely being delivered through the Wider Level of EFS. This is because the Wider Level targets more intensively farmed land, where agricultural pressures on water quality are greatest. Uptake has been very positive, with

56% of Wider Level applications including at least one of the five specific water quality options. This includes some 500km of watercourses protected by fencing and the creation of 40km of riparian zones. All valid Wider Level applications have been offered a five year EFS agreement commencing in July 2017. Tranche 2 of EFS is planned to open to applications in 2018 and there is a total target intake of 6200 across three tranches.

36. In 2016/17, DAERA's Forest Service supported the planting of 208 hectares of new woodland by grant aiding private landowners.
37. The Stormwater Management Group is working towards reducing diffuse pollution from surface water in urban areas with the promotion of SuDS.
38. To provide "*Effective and Efficient Wastewater Collection and Treatment (EP Aim 3)*", NI Water is developing a holistic catchment-based approach and has already successfully completed Integrated Constructed Wetlands at Castle Archdale (treating a population equivalent of 849) and Stoneyford (treating a population equivalent of 695), a further Constructed Wetland site is planned for Clabby Wastewater Treatment Works in County Fermanagh. NI Water and NIEA continue to work together on alternative sustainable treatment systems where appropriate. NI Water's commitment to providing compliant wastewater treatment is evidenced in the 2016 wastewater compliance figure of 98.89% (provisional). However, continued focus on the assessment and management of flow into wastewater treatment works is required to improve on the quantities of sewage treated and to reduce spill frequency.
39. NI Water has continued a programme of work, under PC15, to reduce unsatisfactory discharges from the public sewerage system and is also working with NIEA to deliver a prioritised programme to install monitoring equipment at combined sewer overflows and emergency overflows.
40. DfI, NIEA and NI Water have also been working together to produce a leaflet to raise awareness and understanding of drainage misconnections and the environmental problems they can cause. In addition, NIEA and NI Water have

become members of ConnectRight, which is a partnership of organisations working to reduce water pollution from drains and sewers.

41. NI Water is currently finalising its first Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan to ensure that it can “*Maintain Sustainable Levels of Water in the Environment (EP Aim 4)*”. The Plan will issue for consultation later this year. DfI has also developed and agreed guidance for making a Drought Order, should it be required. NIEA continues to support the Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan through the review of water abstraction licences to protect the water resource, in line with the Water Framework Directive restrictions, and to secure drinking water supply.
42. To assist in “*Improving River and Coastal Water Morphology and Biodiversity (EP Aim 5)*”, DAERA has published a handbook, to supplement legislation, which advises on control over physical modifications to fresh water bodies. In addition, it is working, through the delivery of the second cycle of River Basin Management Plans, to achieve Good Ecological Status, in 70% of Northern Ireland’s water bodies, by 2021, from a baseline of 37% at Good Ecological Status in 2015. The River Basin Management Plans outline 136 measures to be implemented between 2015 and 2021, in order to try to address and reduce the impacts of the key pressures affecting water quality in Northern Ireland. Key measures include investment in water infrastructure by NI Water and the implementation of the Environmental Farming Scheme. Good progress has been made to date, with 91% of the measures (due for completion by the end of 2016) already completed and 72% of the measures (to be completed by 2021) on target or complete. In addition, 23 measures are due to be completed in 2017/18. Interim statistics on the status of Northern Ireland’s water bodies will be published in 2018.
43. DAERA’s River Basin Management Plans and NI Biodiversity Strategy also aim to protect and sustainably manage Northern Ireland’s ecosystems and provide an overarching framework for the actions to be progressed to achieve this aim. A report on the implementation of the NI Biodiversity Strategy,

published in December 2016, highlighted that the majority of actions in the Strategy, due for completion by the end of 2016, had been completed.

## **Water and Sewerage Services**

44. NI Water strives to “*Provide Efficient and Affordable Water and Sewerage Services (WSS Aim 1)*” and this is overseen and monitored by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (“the Regulator”) which sets challenging targets for year on year efficiency improvements. In order to fully assess how NI Water is performing, the Regulator uses the Overall Performance Assessment (OPA) framework. This monitors the overall level of service that NI Water provides to its customers, by combining 11 individual service measures and scoring them against a reasonable range. Scores are then weighted in order of importance and combined to give an overall picture of service level performance.
45. According to the Regulator’s Annual Cost and Performance Report, 2015-16, NI Water outperformed its PC15 OPA target (of 218) for 2015-16 by 12 points. Over the 2015-16 year, service levels improved in the areas of unplanned interruptions, customer contact, risk of low pressure, sewage treatment works compliance and low category sewage pollution incidents. NI Water has recently indicated that it will outperform its 2016/17 target, which is still to be verified.
46. The company has also driven through efficiency measures in the past few years, cutting £65 million out of its operating costs since 2010, whilst at the same time improving its service levels and efficiency. This improved efficiency has also benefited the customer, with bills being reduced by some 12% in real terms over the last three years.
47. In addition, NI Water’s improved Capital Appraisal Guidance and Research, Development and Innovation Strategy both help to progress sustainable and innovative solutions and the trialling of new equipment and processes



48. In conjunction with investment in solar and hydro systems, NI Water has also established a dedicated energy efficiency team to examine further ways to invest in, and generate, renewable energy in order to reduce its energy consumption and minimise its impact on the environment.
49. In its aim to “*Provide High Quality Services to All Water and Sewerage Customers (WSS Aim 2)*”, NI Water has conducted consumer research and assessed the impact of its education campaigns to identify areas for improvement and to develop partnerships with new stakeholders to help deliver its key messages to achieve greatest effect.
50. NI Water places great importance on “*Providing High Quality Customer Service and Customer Information (WSS Aim 3)*” and in doing so it has invested in improving the customer experience, including the complaint process. NI Water works with the Regulator and the Consumer Council to set targets for the reduction of customer complaints, which are monitored on a monthly basis. NI Water’s Strategic Business Plan sets out Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) across its business activities to demonstrate the improvement and quality of services to be achieved. Despite its budgetary constraints, NI Water met or exceeded planned delivery in all but three of the 16 KPIs set out in the monitoring plan for 2015-2016. In addition, NI Water continues to develop its ability to resolve issues at the first time of contact and proactively engages with representative organisations to help vulnerable customers in the community.
51. The only three KPIs which reflected underperformance were:
- (i) Target 2a – supply interruptions failed in respect of >6hrs;
  - (ii) Target 3d – customer contacts; and
  - (iii) Target 12a – completion of regulatory outputs. It should be noted that target 12a is an in-year target and NI Water plans to deliver its regulatory outputs within the 6-year price control period (subject to funding availability).

52. In order to “*Provide Resilient and Secure Water and Sewerage Service (WSS Aim 4)*”, NI Water is in the process of preparing its Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan and has taken steps to insulate key components, in its water and wastewater treatment works, against extreme cold.
53. NI Water not only provides us with valuable water and sewerage services, but it also “*Utilises its Estate to Promote Recreation, Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage (WSS Aim 5)*”. NI Water has put in place a Recreational and Access Policy, for its land, to facilitate and encourage recreational activities, where it is safe to do so. It is also working in conjunction with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the Mourne Heritage Trust and Tourism NI to promote recreation, biodiversity and cultural heritage.

54. **Conclusion**

This first Annual Report shows some early progress, with actions and plans already in place to bring forth significant improvements in the water sector over the coming years. To sustain this progress and deliver the Strategy’s aims, continued close working relationships and co-operation of government departments and other key stakeholders will be required, as well as appropriate levels of funding. The current constraints on budgets across all areas involved in the Strategy is a cause for concern and may impact on the Executive’s ability to meet all its objectives.

Local Government has a key role to play in helping to deliver the Strategy in relation to, amongst other things, planning, environmental health and leisure activities. It is important that government departments develop strong links and partnership working with Local Government to help achieve a successful outcome.

Delivering the Strategy will also help to fulfil our commitments in the Draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016 by contributing to the following PfG outcomes:-

- (i) outcome 1 – we prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy;
- (ii) outcome 2 - we live and work sustainably – protecting the environment;
- (iii) outcome 4 – we enjoy, long, healthy, active lives; and
- (iv) outcome 11 – we connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.