



Department for
Communities

An Roinn
Pobal

Department for
Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk



DfC Business Plan

2023-24

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Foreword from the Permanent Secretary

I am pleased to introduce the Department for Communities' Business Plan for 2023-24, which outlines the key work we plan to deliver in the coming year. Our challenge is to build on the successes achieved during 2022-23, a snapshot of which is outlined later in this Plan.

People who work in the Department and our Arm's Length Bodies are the driving force behind our achievements and successes and I would like to thank everyone for their ongoing commitment to public service delivery.

With over 9,400 staff in the Department, our sustainability and responsiveness to emerging business need is progressed through our People Strategy. The strategy ensures insight and engagement from our teams and delivers against our strategic commitment to provide Leadership, Capacity and Capability and Well-being development. As an Investor in People organisation, we have made real progress in developing our People approach this year and that commitment to our teams will be enhanced further in the year ahead.

The Business Plan for 2023-24 has been developed against a backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis, high inflation, no functioning Executive and a very significant pressure on Departmental budgets which has been extremely challenging for the Department, and for our people.

Within budgetary constraints, the Department will continue to provide support to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged people, families and communities across Northern Ireland.

The absence of a functioning Executive has impacted on the range of our ambition, and should we see the return of an Executive and Minister this plan will be reviewed and revised to reflect their priorities. These include the Welfare Mitigations Review Report (2022), the development and delivery of an Executive Anti-Poverty Strategy, Disability, Gender Equality, and LBGQTI+/ Sexual Orientation Strategies; and delivery of a Housing Supply Strategy.

The key activities we are striving to deliver in 2023-24 are outlined in Annex A of the Plan and the Departmental Management Board will continue to monitor progress throughout the year.

This year sees us reach the half-way point of our five-year Strategy and this Plan sets out the flagship activities that we will undertake to deliver against our Strategic Objectives and the Strategy's four cross cutting themes of Anti-Poverty, Wellbeing & Inclusion, Sustainability & Inclusive Growth and Agility & Innovation for the year ahead.

Many other activities and targets are monitored by each Deputy Secretary through their Group Business Plans. The activities in the Departmental and Group Plans will be delivered by working in partnership with officials in other Departments, our Arm's Length Bodies, other public sector Organisations, and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

As always, the Plan will remain agile to allow us to respond to an ever changing and volatile environment, particularly in the event of a returning Executive.

I am confident that by working together to deliver this business plan for 2023-24 we will continue to strive to deliver our common purpose of Supporting people, Building communities and Shaping places.

Colum Boyle



Section 1 – Our Responsibilities

2.1 The Department delivers a wide range of services to the public – both directly and through its Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs) – which will support people, build communities and shape places. In supporting and advising the Minister, the Department’s main functions include:



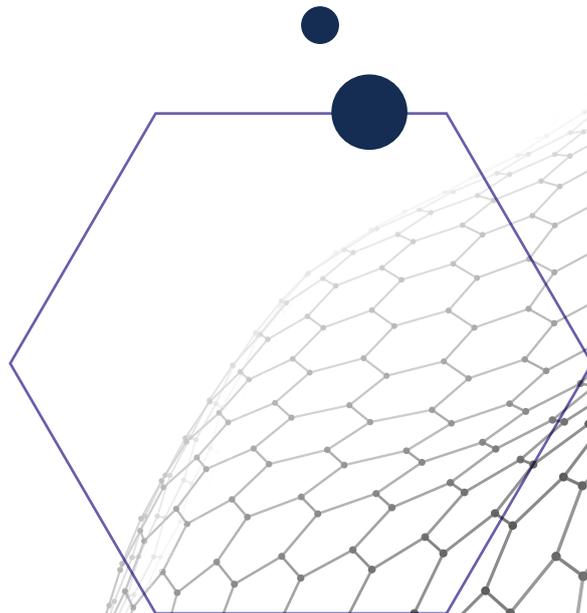
supporting creative industries, and promoting the arts, language and cultural sectors

providing free access to books, information, IT and community programmes through our libraries

maintaining museums

revitalising town and city centres

The Appeals Service



Section 2 – Key Achievements: 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

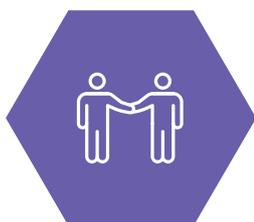
Anti-Poverty



We have supported 120,000 working age households in receipt of Universal Credit helping them to achieve financial stability and supporting them while they are in work, moving back into work and while they are unable to work.



We have supported 382,000 older people in receipt of state retirement pension and pension credit helping them to achieve better financial and social inclusion.



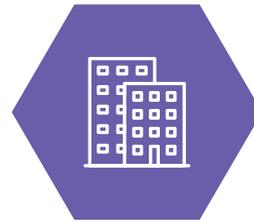
We have supported 304,000 disabled adults and children in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance allowance (AA).



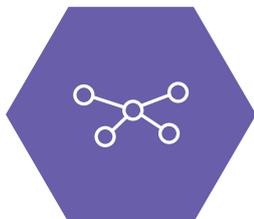
We made approximately 43,000 Mitigation payments to mitigate the impact of welfare reform changes.



We have supported nearly 4,000 bereaved customers to access financial support from Bereavement Support payments, Funeral Expenses and the Child Funeral Fund, reducing the financial burden associated with a death.



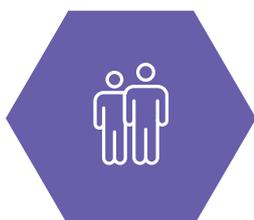
The Department supported approximately 300 projects in 65 of the most deprived areas through the Neighbourhood Renewal, Areas at Risk and Small Pockets of Deprivation programmes with investment totalling £19.2m.



The Department responded to the cost of living challenges faced by individuals, communities and our Voluntary and Community Sector delivery partners by providing additional funding of £2.1m to help organisations meet increasing running costs, support their staff and maintain critical services.



From April 2022 to March 2023, approx. £775m was paid to Universal Credit claimants. On average 97% of new claims and 99% of existing claims are paid in full and on time.

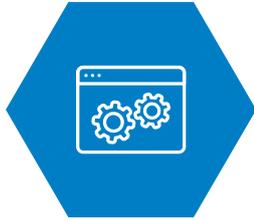


From April 2022 to March 2023 the Working Age Legacy benefits (ESA, JSA, IS, IIDB and MA) provided vital help and support to over 130,000 customers to the value of over £900m.

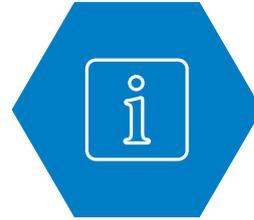


From April 2022 to March 2023 the Finance Support service comprising Social Fund and Discretionary Support met its highest ever levels of demand with over 190,000 claims for help dealt with and support provided totaling £87m.

Agility & Innovation



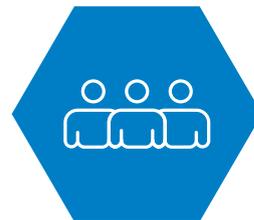
We have continued to deliver a programme of digital transformation across Pensions, Disability and Carers Service and Debt. This has resulted in with 96% of new claims to Carers Allowance now received online.



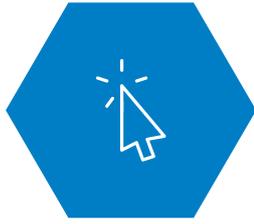
The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) continued to support victims of historical institutional abuse by working with The Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board to make information available from a wide range of PRONI records to support over 850 redress applications.



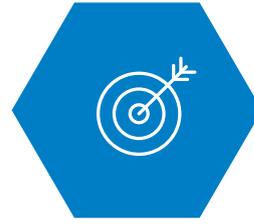
Professional Services Unit delivered the Data Automation and Visualisation Strategy.



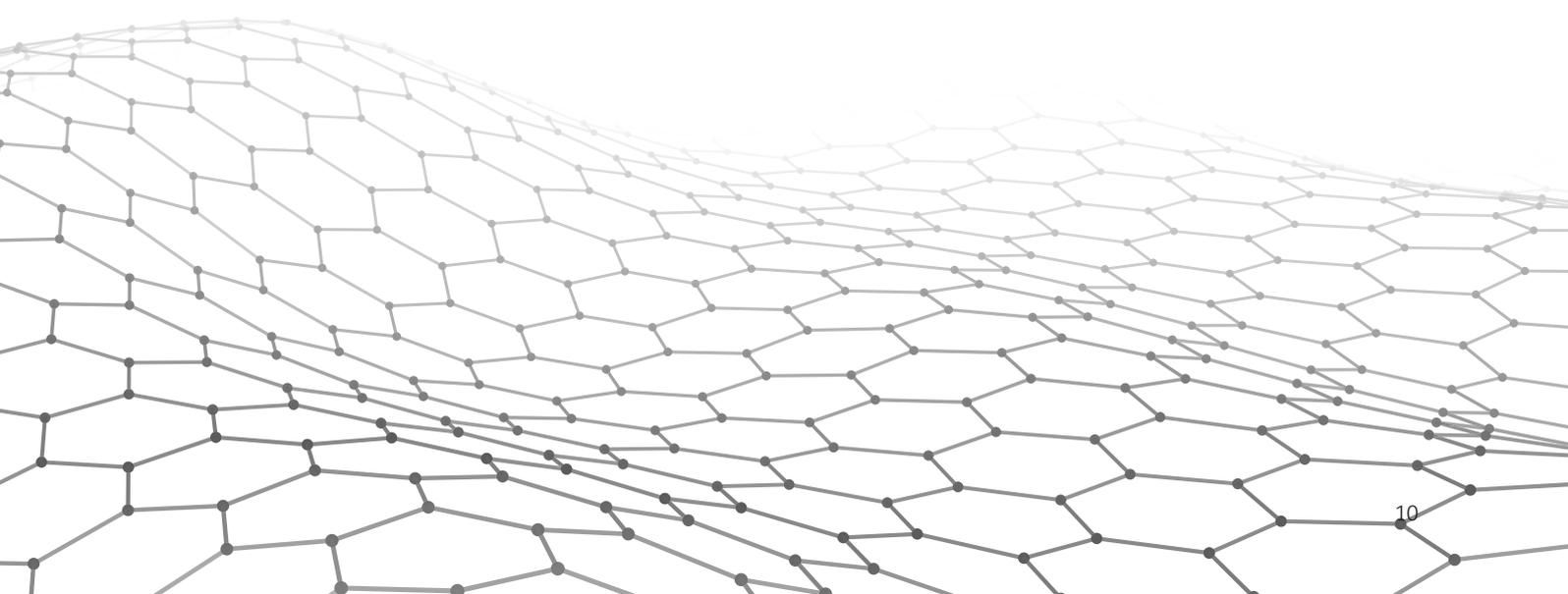
Leading collaboration with 4 other NICS operational delivery Departments in the creation, launch and oversight of the first entry level NICS Operational Delivery Apprenticeship Scheme for 39 apprentices.



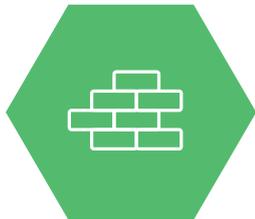
Digital Transformation across Work and Health Group continues. Following the highly successful Discretionary Support online claim form having now handled over 250k claims, further innovation is about to launch including new online claims for people applying for JSA and Social Fund and enhanced/intuitive Discretionary Support processing systems with greater automation.



Extensive planning and preparation during the year saw the next key milestone for Universal Credit reached with the successful launch of an initial Discovery Phase for Move to UC in April 2023.



Sustainability & Inclusive Growth



The Department invested £20m capital in the regeneration of town and city centres through various interventions.



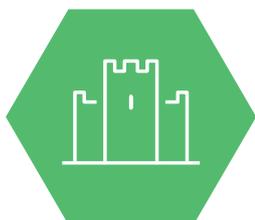
The Department collaborated with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to progress the delivery of 8 PEACE IV Shared Spaces projects to the value of £62m, and in the design of two new PEACEPLUS Investment Areas worth £90m.



The Shared Housing Programme commenced 11 shared schemes (252 new social homes). There are now a total of 69 shared schemes (1,973 new social homes) being delivered across all of NI's Council Boroughs, with a Good Relations investment in excess of £25m.



During 2022-23 the Department delivered 1,956 social new build starts against a target of 1,950.



A strategic plan was agreed for the ongoing conservation, management and enhancement of the portfolio 186 State Care Monuments.

Wellbeing & Inclusion



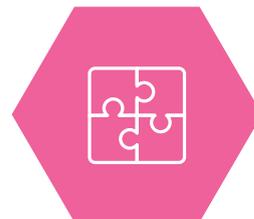
In the past year the Department, through the Child Maintenance Service, has collected and arranged maintenance payments totalling £25.3m, supporting 19,850 children.



The Department secured an uplift to the Supporting People Programme. A 5.86% increase was applied from 1 April 2022 at a cost of approximately £4.1m.



The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), in partnership with the Nerve Centre, delivered the CollabArchive project with 62 participants across the five projects who create and animation film, eBooks, podcasts, short films and ezines.



Completion of the co-design of initial drafts of the Social Inclusion Strategies (Anti-Poverty; Gender Equality; LGBTQI+; Disability).



The Department hosted a “Disability on the Record – Exploring Perceptions through Time” event at PRONI to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities and will tour all 96 libraries.



The Department launched its first Health & Well-being Framework and Action Plan which marks our commitment to recognise and invest in the health & well-being of our people.

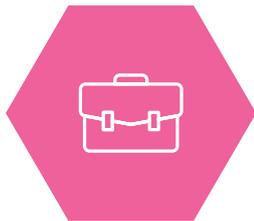


In June 2022, the Department hosted 'Harkin Belfast', an internationally recognised Disability Employment Summit.

Across the Summit and week-long Engagement Programme, over 640 delegates, represented more than 30 countries, and had access to 47 items of content delivered by 115 speakers.



The Department supported 8,667 people with disabilities/health conditions through Access to Work (NI), Workable (NI), Employment Support Scheme, Condition Management Programme and ESF projects that the Department match funded.



A total of 1,452 young people completed a JobStart opportunity with 1,120 (77%) sustaining employment. This rate rises to 82% when into education or training is included.



The Labour Market Partnership provided employability provision to a total of 2,035 participants, with 35% of those who have completed so far achieving an employment outcome, and a high proportion of participants still progressing their course/provision.



Section 3 – People, Resources and Governance

3.1 People

As at 31 March 2023 the Department employed 8,765 FTE staff.

This is made up of 6,796 FTE permanent staff and 1,969 FTE Agency staff.

- Engaged Communities Group: **460**
- Supporting People Group: **4,343**
- Housing Urban Regeneration & Local Government Group: **380**
- Work and Health Group: **3,138**
- Strategic Policy & Professional Services Group: **444**

Our People Action Plan

The DfC People Action Plan will continue to reflect insight gathered from in year delivery, feedback from colleagues through the People Working Group, Policy and Resources Sub-Committee (PRSC), Staff Engagement Fora, the People Survey and our Investors in People re-accreditation process.

In the year ahead we remain committed to our strategic objectives to work together, build our leadership and management capability and foster an inclusive environment where all our people are valued and can thrive.

This will be achieved through:

- Embedding and embodying our DfC Values in all that we do;
- Developing a Departmental Workforce Strategy that includes regular focused learning needs analysis and development of a process to plan for succession;
- Promoting a culture of continuous learning with related resources that recognise the many ways we can build knowledge and awareness in our people;
- Progression of our Corporate Engagement Fora that provide insight and connection with our people and the environment in which they operate;
- Pursuing suggested improvements from our Investors in People re-accreditation recommendations;
- Implementing our DfC Health & Wellbeing Framework to ensure a leadership commitment to the wellbeing of our people;
- Expansion of the DfC recognition programme to ensure a culture of acknowledgement and appreciation; and
- Expansion of our Diversity and Inclusion programme to exhibit our commitment and responsiveness to the needs of our current and future workforce.

3.2 Resourcing

2022-23 Budget

On 28 October 2022, Ministers ceased to hold their positions with responsibility for setting a budget for 2022-23 passing to the NI Secretary of State. After consultation with NI Departments, the Secretary of State set the 2022-23 Budget for NI on 24 November 2022. The Final 2022-23 Budget position for DfC was £853.0m in Resource DEL funding and £254.8m Net Capital DEL.

2023-24 Budget Process

The Secretary of State announced the 2023-24 Budget on 27 April 2023 which provides DfC with £861.6m Resource and £241.7m Net Capital DEL. For the Department the allocations result in a Resource funding gap of £111.2m (15.5%) and a £59.0m (27.3%) shortfall in Capital required for 2023-24. Managing Resource and Capital shortfalls of this magnitude will undoubtedly have a significant and adverse impact on the Department's ability to deliver public services in 2023-24.

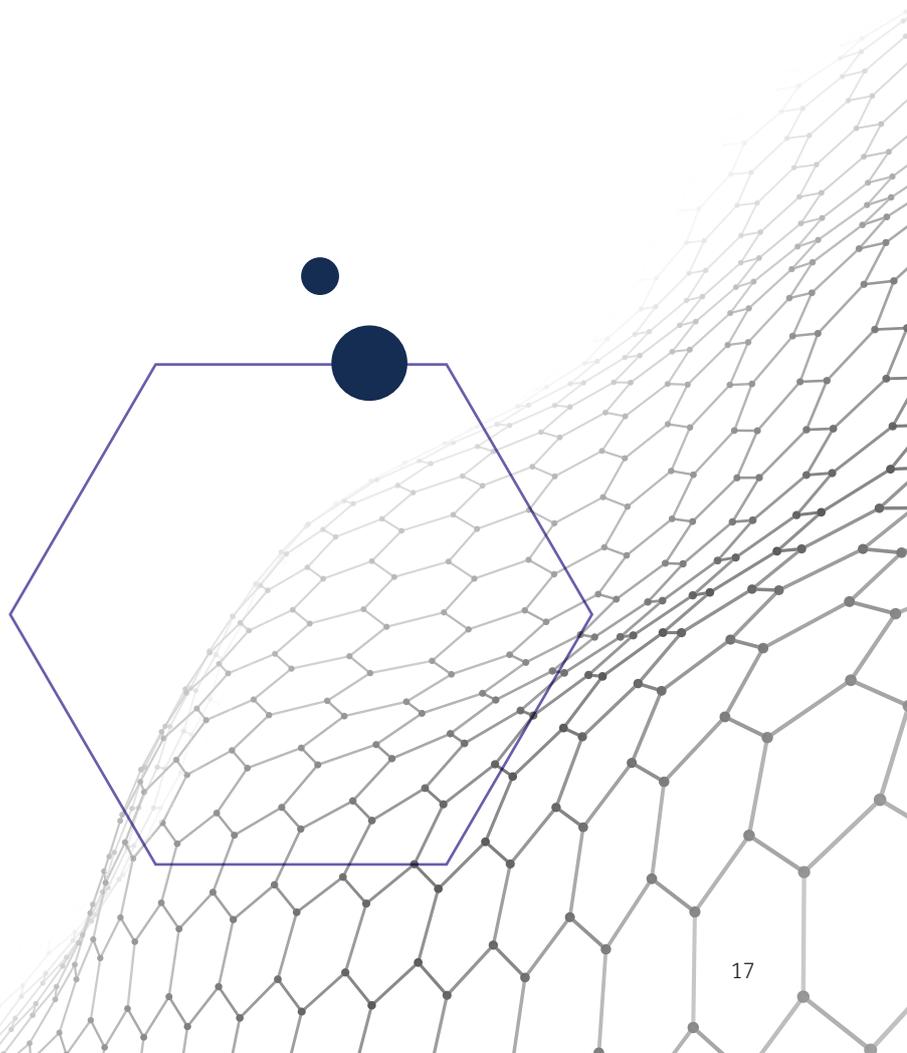
An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was published on 10 May 2023 to present the decisions required by the Department to live within its 2023-24 Budget allocation and the potential impact to people in Section 75 categories of those decisions on the services and supports the Department provides.

The EQIA consultation was open for 12 weeks, however early responses were requested within the initial 4-week period to allow decisions to be made. These decisions were published on 21 June 2023. Any further consultation responses between weeks 5 and 12 are to be used to inform further mitigation measures and reallocation of any additional funding available during 2023-24.

3.3 Governance

The functions of the Department for Communities are exercised at all times subject to the direction and control of the Minister (The Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (NI) 2016). The Permanent Secretary as administrative head of the Department is responsible for strategic direction and advice to the Minister on Departmental policy making and implementation activities.

The DfC Permanent Secretary is the principal advisor to the Minister, the administrative head of the Department and the Departmental Accounting Officer. The Accounting Officer is personally responsible and accountable for the effective management and organisation of the Department, the efficient and effective use of its resources and the stewardship of its assets.



DfC Board and Committee structure



The Accounting Officer is assisted by a Departmental Management Board (DMB) which meets on a six-weekly basis.

The key aspects of the Board’s role include:

- Setting strategic direction through the Departmental Strategy and Business Plans to achieve Ministerial objectives and NICS Work Programme commitments;
- Agreeing and promoting the Department’s vision and values;
- Financial planning and management, including allocation of resources to match delivery requirements and in-year monitoring and management of expenditure;
- Monitoring departmental performance against objectives and targets and assessing the risks to delivery;
- Monitoring overall financial position of the Department;
- Monitoring progress against PfG commitments (once established);
- Risk management policies, registers, and the risk appetite of the Department;
- Finance, human resources and IT strategies affecting long term capability of the Department;
- Budget allocation;
- Corporate governance arrangements within the Department and its ALBs; and
- Scrutiny of performance of sponsored bodies through established sponsor arrangements.

The Department is organised into five Groups. Each Group is responsible for policy and service delivery for its areas of business. Individual Groups are led by a Deputy Secretary each of whom reports to the DfC Permanent Secretary.

The Department's Corporate Governance Framework specifies the organisation's governance structures and the roles and responsibilities of those charged with governance. This framework provides an overview of the Department's approach to risk management, its system of internal controls and the governance and assurance arrangements which have been established to safeguard against risks which threaten the successful achievement of departmental objectives and effective public service delivery.

Governance arrangements include regular monitoring of the Departmental Business Plan, risk management and assurance reporting, stringent financial management and control procedures, communication of Governance policies and arrangements, anti-fraud policies, raising concerns procedures and publication of the Department's Annual Report and Accounts.

DMB is supported in its role by a Departmental Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (DARAC). Its role is to support the Board on issues of risk, control and governance across the Department. It does so by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Board and Accounting Officer's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances.

DMB is supported in its role by three further Sub-Committees: The Policy and Strategy Sub-Committee (PSSC) ensures that the Department has a cohesive policy and legislation agenda, provides policy leadership and ensures the Department is equipped to fulfil its policy responsibilities. The Committee will provide assurance to the Accounting Officer and assist DMB in ensuring the effective delivery and monitoring of the Department's Five-Year Strategy "Building Inclusive Communities 2020-25". Through its focus on the Strategy, the Committee oversees the Department's delivery against its Programme for Government (PfG), "New Decade, New Approach" (NDNA) and Ministerial commitments, the operational management of their implementation via the DfC Business Plan, and the ongoing development of the Department's policy making capacity.

The Departmental Management Board's People & Resources Sub-Committee (PRSC) provides assurance to the Accounting Officer and assists DMB by overseeing strategic resource planning in relation to the Department's staff headcount from a financial, HR, capability, staff engagement, accommodation and IT enabled perspective. PRSC ensures the Department has the right people, at the right time with the right skills and talent to deliver the Department's Building Inclusive Communities Strategy. The sub-committee also observes and responds to changes in operating context that might impact on the Department's ability to achieve sustainable performance.

The Departmental Information Assurance Committee (DIAC) is a Committee of the Board whose role is to ensure that the Department has appropriate policies, management and governance systems to effectively protect the considerable volume of information held by the Department. DIAC is chaired by the Senior Information Risk Owner and assists the Board and Accounting Officer with responsibilities relating to the use, processing, storage, sharing and transmission of information or data and the systems and processes used for those purposes.

Section 4 – Our Strategic Objectives and Activities for 2023-2024

- 4.1 While the Strategy defines what we want to do, this Business Plan sets out how we are going to do it, setting out key activities and milestones to deliver against the strategic objectives and priorities until 31 March 2024. These activities and milestones have significant interdependencies to delivering on the objectives and priorities which will help support people, build communities and shape places.
- 4.2 The Department’s objectives, activities and supporting milestones for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 are available on the [DfC website](#). This represents a snapshot of our key activities with further detail captured at Group Plan level. There are several activities that we would like to deliver during the coming year but due to the lack of functioning Executive we are unable to take these forward. Should an Executive return during the reporting year, the Business Plan will be reviewed and updated to include these activities and an incoming Minister’s priorities. The Business Plan has been developed with consideration for the outcomes and spirit of the previous Programme for Government and NICS Outcomes Delivery Plans.
- 4.3 DMB will receive quarterly progress updates throughout the 12 month period of the Plan with assurance provided through the PSSC review. Progress of the longer term strategic objectives will be measured through the quarterly monitoring of business planning activities, with a RAG rating assigned to each objective on a quarterly basis and agreed with Deputy Secretaries. Cognisance will also be taken of the performance of strategic objectives at group level when arriving at these overall RAG ratings.
- 4.4 Our ALBs, Councils and other Executive Departments perform many vital and significant functions and it is through the strategic alignment of objectives and working with these strategic partners that the Department will deliver much of its work. DfC ALBs, Statutory Advisory Bodies and Independent Statutory Office Holders are outlined below:

Arm's Length Bodies

Armagh Observatory & Planetarium

Arts Council for Northern Ireland

Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland

Libraries Northern Ireland

Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland

National Museums Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee

Northern Ireland Museums Council

North South Language Body – Ulster Scots Agency

North South Language Body – Foras Na Gaeilge

Sport NI

Ulster Supported Employment Limited

Advisory Committees

Charity Advisory Committee

Historic Buildings Council

Historic Monuments Council.

Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment

Other

The Discretionary Support Commissioner

Vaughan's Charitable Trust

Local Government Boundaries Commissioner

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