



# Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most

## Northern Ireland Executive’s Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 – Consultation

To: Northern Ireland  
For info: Scotland, England and Wales

### Table of Contents

- Purpose of the briefing ..... 2**
- 1 Reform and transformation of public services ..... 2**
- 2 Grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy ..... 3**
- 3 Deliver more affordable childcare..... 4**
- 4 Ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) ..... 4**
- 5 Provide more social, affordable and sustainable housing ..... 4**
- 6 Protecting the environment..... 5**
- 7 APSE comment ..... 5**
  - 7.1 Share your views with APSE ..... 6

## Purpose of the briefing

The Northern Ireland Executive returned from a two-year hiatus in February 2024. On 9 September, the Executive published for consultation its draft Programme for Government (PfG). The document can be downloaded [here](#).

The PfG outlines nine strategic priorities for Northern Ireland over a three-year period. While it is primarily a framework for the devolved Executive, it has significant implications for local authorities, which play a crucial role in implementing and supporting these priorities. The closing date for responses is Monday 4 November 2024.

This briefing provides an overview of those priorities outlined in the PfG that are relevant to local councils. The briefing also invites our colleagues from APSE Northern Ireland member council service teams to share their views with APSE so that we may collate them and respond to the Consultation on your behalf.

## 1 Reform and transformation of public services

The PfG states that: *“Many sectors are in critical need of investment and reform to ensure the quality and efficiency of services you quite rightly expect. The scale of the problem is enormous. Rapid growth in both the cost and demand for public services is placing huge pressure on public finances and is undermining service provision.”*

In the context of reduced spending power - because of the loss of structural funds and other pressures - the NIE will maximise any potential funding sources delivering in innovative ways. To ensure this happens, the NIE will set up a new Reform and Transformation Unit at the heart of government.

The **Reform and Transformation Unit** will work across all departments, ensuring NIE priorities get the focus, resources, and efficient delivery they need. It will be one part of a Reform Package which will include a Fiscal Framework, a Sustainability Plan, and a Transformation Programme.

A central component of the package will also be a new Public Sector Transformation Board, through which £235 million will be invested from a new Transformation Fund.

The objectives of the Board include working to: Increase the financial sustainability of public services; Transform the model of delivery of public services; Improve effectiveness and

efficiency to meet increased demands and improve outcomes for citizens; and Prevention, Cost Savings, and Early Intervention.

A Sustainability Plan will be at the heart of this transformation, implementing new approaches to planning, spending money more wisely, funding vital public services, and delivering stable and sustainable public finances.

The NIE also intends to implement a planning improvement programme with local government and other stakeholders. The goal is to ensure *“that the planning system works for businesses, people, and the environment.”*

## **2 Grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy**

To *“create an economy that works for everyone”*, the PfG will address four key challenges: productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation, and regional balance.

### **I. Productivity**

The PfG notes the NIE *“will prioritise the development of high-productivity sectors through specific programmes to support cluster development and we will continue to streamline City and Growth Deals processes and approvals to accelerate delivery of these transformational projects.”* The PfG notes that to achieve this, *“the public sector will be a key enabler of this change.”*

The NIE intends to the following:

- Appointing a new Chief Science and Technology Adviser.
- Establishing a Northern Ireland Science and Technology Advisory Network.
- Develop a new Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund. This will *“help people in communities, including disabled people and women returning to the labour market, find meaningful opportunities in local businesses.”*

### **II. Good jobs**

The NIE intends to enact the following:

- set up a new Skills Fund to assist sectors struggling to recruit into vital roles. This will include a new Tourism and Hospitality Careers Programme and a new Skills Academy for the childcare sector.
- Introduce new Employment Rights Legislation and a Good Work Charter to ensure better quality jobs and promote a healthy work-life balance.

### **III. Decarbonisation**

The PfG seeks *“...to achieve self-sufficiency in our own clean and affordable energy... This will unlock carbon emissions reduction and economic growth here.”*

The NIE intends to enact the following:

- Invest £15 million in the Energy and Resource Efficiency Support Scheme.
- Invest a further £75 million via the Invest to Save Fund into the public sector’s transition to net zero.
- Publish a Circular Economy Strategy with responsible production and consumption at its core. The Strategy will have three key principles of designing out waste, keeping products in circulation at their highest value for as long as possible and regenerating natural systems.

#### **IV. Regional balance**

The NIE intends to enact the following:

- Boost tourism's subregional impact through an innovative Tourism Strategic Action Plan that will showcase Northern Ireland as a great place to visit.
- Work with Councils and local partners to deliver a Sub-Regional Economic Action Plan. This will include enhancing the role of Invest NI and providing increased support for entrepreneurs. Over the next few years £1.3 billion will be invested with the aim of stimulating regeneration and tourism across Northern Ireland.

### **3 Deliver more affordable childcare**

The NIE intends to enact the following:

- Develop an Early Learning and Childcare Strategy which improves provision and includes two high-profile targets: supporting the development of our children to give every child the best start in life, while supporting more affordable childcare.
- Introduce a 15% childcare subsidy for parents in receipt of tax-free childcare who have children below primary school age.

### **4 Ending violence against women and girls (VAWG)**

The NIE intends to enact the following:

- Invest through a Change Fund, providing on-the-ground support for the vital work of communities and the sector in the delivery of the first-year delivery plan. Projects will support local communities to raise awareness of the significance of VAWG in everyone's lives.

### **5 Provide more social, affordable and sustainable housing**

The social housing waiting list currently stands at over 47,000 households, including 35,000 experiencing housing stress. The Executive has not been able to deliver on its ambition of 2,500 new social homes a year, and we therefore want to commit to the long-term public subsidy required to deliver more social homes, while at the same time innovating to develop new funding models for the delivery of more Affordable Homes to make this achievable.

The NIE intends to enact the following:

- Deliver a Northern Ireland Housing Supply Strategy to provide a long-term framework for the policies and actions required to increase the supply of homes across all tenures and reduce housing stress.
- Seek Treasury agreement for appropriate treatment of borrowing to enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to increase investment in its homes, improve energy efficiency, and contribute to new supply.
- By 2025, launch a new Fuel Poverty Strategy to support those struggling with the cost of

living.

- continue our programme of reform of the private rented sector and review the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Private Sector Grants, including the Disabled Facilities Grant.

## **6 Protecting the environment**

Proposed action on the environment includes:

### **I. Northern Ireland's First Environment Strategy**

A new environment strategy which will be adopted as Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP).

### **II. Climate Action**

The NIE will develop its first Climate Action Plan, detailing cross-cutting steps to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to changing weather patterns, and work towards net zero.

### **III. Interagency Protocol**

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has led work with other government agencies to develop an Interagency Monitoring Protocol to clarify what monitoring will be carried out, and by whom, in response to future blooms of blue-green algae at any site.

DAERA is already using the Protocol, and has also developed messaging for the public, giving cautionary advice on blue-green algae. The Protocol can be used by councils and water business operators looking for advice on how to monitor sites being managed, and how to advise the public.

## **7 APSE comment**

APSE welcomes the ambitions set out in the PfG. However, the consultation must give added consideration to the key role local councils can play in helping the NIE realise its policy aspirations.

Local government plays a critical role in ensuring that decisions are made closer to the communities they affect. This aligns with the PfG's goal to create more tailored, responsive policies that reflect the specific needs and priorities of people in Northern Ireland's diverse communities.

Through localised initiatives and partnerships, councils in Northern Ireland have pioneered practical solutions to the social and environmental challenges highlighted in the PfG; ones suited to specific regional challenges such as managing green spaces, promoting local sustainability, as well as fostering social inclusion.

It is worthy of note that local authorities in Northern Ireland have significantly less powers and the scope of their duties is limited compared to other areas in the UK. A more expansive role for local government and greater powers, and resources, to local authorities could help achieve many of the outcomes set out in the programme for government.

## **7.1 Share your views with APSE**

The consultation for the PfG closes on 4 November 2024 and APSE will provide a response to NIE.

APSE therefore invites our member councils to share your responses to enable the views of APSE members to be reflected in our response to the consultation.

You are therefore asked to submit your responses to Matt Ellis using the email address no later than 5.00 PM on Monday 28 October 2024.

### **Matt Ellis**

APSE Principal Advisor

[www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk)

## Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular APSE Networks, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The APSE Networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

APSE Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Networks and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email [enquiries@apse.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@apse.org.uk).

Our national networks include:

- FM and Building cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authority Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) for more details.



Association for Public Service Excellence  
3rd floor,  
Trafford House,  
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.  
telephone: 0161 772 1810  
fax: 0161 772 1811  
web: [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk)

**NEW MUNICIPALISM**  
Delivering for local people and local economies