

The first seven months of the restored Northern Ireland Executive

PIVOTAL TRACKER
SEPTEMBER 2024

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PUBLIC POLICY
FORUM NI

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Executive returned in February 2024 following a two-year collapse. While the institutions were down, struggling public services deteriorated further and budgetary problems grew because of the absence of political leadership. The return of local decision-making in the Executive and Assembly was welcomed, with some optimism, as a fresh opportunity to take on these problems.

The Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis and increasing challenges in public services are problems governments across the world have recently faced. For two years, Northern Ireland [tried to take on those issues without a functioning government](#). The result was struggles with over-stretched budgets, public sector strikes, deteriorating public services, and an ecological crisis in Lough Neagh. Ministers and MLAs returned to high expectations – but also a large backlog of difficult problems.

This new iteration of Stormont is a historic one, with Sinn Féin the biggest party in the Assembly for the first time, and a new official opposition led by the SDLP. With Michelle O’Neill as First Minister, and the Democratic Unionist Party’s Emma Little-Pengelly as deputy First Minister, the Executive has appeared more united than some previous coalitions, marked by positive public engagements and a seemingly friendly relationship between the First Ministers.

However, many have suggested that the Executive needs more substance than this. Having the institutions in place is a big step forward, but the business of government is about more than just operating without collapse. The lack of a Programme for Government (PfG) and strategic vision has

been criticised. In many areas of policy, Northern Ireland needs a complete transformation to reverse recent declines and be ready for the future. There is not much evidence yet that the Executive grasps the level of joint vision, ambition and change needed.

THIS REPORT CONSIDERS

- 1 How well the Executive has functioned as a government over the last seven months
- 2 Five cross-cutting issues where the Executive needs to make urgent progress
- 3 Actions taken by each Department since February and suggested priorities ahead

The report concludes with an annex of some headline data.

As a politically independent think tank, Pivotal aims to help inform and enhance policy-making in Northern Ireland. We offer this analysis on that basis.

How well has the Executive functioned?

There is no doubt that since its return in February, the Executive has made some progress that would not have happened had the institutions remained down. However, while the return of proper ministers has been welcomed, has it been effective in providing good government overall?

A new legislative programme was agreed, but the failure to produce a Programme for Government is a big shortcoming. A Budget was approved, but managing within financial allocations this year will be extremely challenging. Meanwhile big, persistent challenges remain with health waiting lists, infrastructure, housing supply, the environment and community relations. So far there is little evidence of proper plans to take these on. Collective leadership and a joint focus on priorities are needed to make real progress on these long-standing issues.

There has been action on some important issues, including public sector pay settlements, an early learning and childcare strategy, capital funding for schools, extra money for social care, and a Lough Neagh action plan. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have clearly made serious efforts to work together and present a united front. The Executive appears to be working in a constructive way, which has not always been the case in the past.

The Executive agreed a [Budget for 2024-25](#) despite the huge financial and political challenges involved – albeit staying within these allocations is proving difficult. The Finance Minister negotiated an [Interim Fiscal Framework](#) with the UK

Government which recognises the importance of fair and sustainable funding arrangements for Northern Ireland, with a commitment to future funding being at or above the 124% level of relative need.

This paper sets out headline actions and priorities for each Northern Ireland Department. But cutting across these individual areas, Pivotal suggests that the Executive needs to give urgent attention to the five joint issues below.



A sustained period of stable and effective government is essential

Stability is essential for effective government. It is fundamental for economic growth, investment, and public service delivery and reform. All the political parties must give their full commitment to the continued operation of the institutions, particularly in more challenging times. The last seven months have seen some positivity and constructive working, but the Executive needs to be robust enough

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to withstand difficult political periods too. A continued commitment to the leadership and spirit of compromise shown in the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement is essential. Collapse, or the threat of collapse, should not be options. The UK and Irish Governments should work to nurture and support the institutions, maintaining positive engagement and offering assistance as needed.

However, stable government alone is not enough. Politicians and civil servants must also show that they can provide effective government for Northern Ireland. Previous policies and ways of working have led to poor performance in many public services, and continuing with them will only lead to further deterioration. In many areas of policy, a complete transformation in approach is needed, beginning with an acknowledgement of the scale of the problems and the need for different decision-making.

2

Publish an ambitious Programme for Government as soon as possible

Failure to publish a Programme for Government (PfG) is an enormous shortcoming. As a result, it's unclear what the Executive's priorities are, how we can expect public services to improve and/or change, or when this will happen. A PfG was promised in February but has still not emerged, despite repeated statements that it was coming soon.

However, just publishing a PfG will not suffice. An effective PfG must include the ambition to take on Northern Ireland's biggest challenges and reverse the current pattern of poor

performance. It should demonstrate collective prioritisation and ownership by the Executive as a whole, not just be a summary of all activity by each department. Its objectives need to be realistic, measurable and strategic. Not every issue can be a priority.

The PfG should then determine what the civil service does. It should underpin budget allocation decisions, and show how outcomes will be monitored and reported. Pivotal has produced a [summary graphic](#) suggesting some key features of an effective PfG.

3

Manage within this year's tight budgets and plan for future multi-year funding

All Departments' budgets remain stretched, particularly around health, housing and policing. [Making public sector pay awards will be difficult](#), given the expectations set by above-inflation increases in England. Several departments seem on course for over-spends. These difficulties are shared by the other devolved administrations and local authorities across the UK. Nevertheless, Ministers and the Executive as a whole need to take responsibility for operating within agreed budgets. Blaming a lack of funding for all difficulties and failings is inappropriate.

The upcoming fiscal sustainability plan (due in August) should consider a full range of measures to manage NI's public finances, including revenue raising, efficiency and transformation. Previous Executives avoided unpopular decisions and relied on extra funding from Westminster to

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resolve pressures. There is little evidence yet of the Executive being prepared to face up to their own financial choices. The introduction of domestic water charges was ruled out and rates were only raised in line with inflation. The Executive should be transparent with the public about the consequences for public services if no more revenue is raised locally.

Preparations should be made for a one-year budget for 2025-26 (including time for proper consultation), and then a multi-year budget following the UK Spending Review in spring 2025. Moving to multi-year budgets is essential to allow proper strategic planning for service delivery, investment and reform.

4

Adopt a relentless focus on improving public services

The public's experience of many services at present is completely unacceptable, for example health waiting lists, access to GPs, schools budgets, SEN places, water infrastructure and the criminal justice system. In many cases, performance is not only poor and far worse than elsewhere in the UK, but also deteriorating. There is little evidence of plans that will reverse these trends.

The Executive and civil service need to commit to improving priority services so that people can feel the difference. The civil service should show ambition and commitment to drive this delivery. This means working to improve those key services now, while at the same time putting in place changes that will transform them to be fit for the future.

5

Grasp long-term challenges and show collective ownership of big issues

The Executive has returned to old habits of focussing on immediate issues that are in the public eye, rather than strategic challenges. Short-term issues are often important, but should not distract from longer-term problems. Repeated failures along these lines are perhaps the biggest single reason why Northern Ireland's public services are in such a dire place today. This needs to change.

The [financial settlement from the UK Government](#) included ring-fenced funding for public service transformation and a new Transformation Board, but details of what these mean in practice have not emerged so far.

Politicians need to be honest with the public about the difficult decisions required. The Executive needs to show unity and take collective responsibility. The most obvious example is the long-overdue reform of public service delivery, especially in health. The Bengoa report's warning of 'change or collapse' is happening now, and it is increasingly clear that current systems are unfeasible.

Similar criticisms could be made of Executive failures in climate change, infrastructure investment, poverty, health inequalities and the educational attainment gap.

Health

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Pay awards for health and social care staff to end industrial action



£70m social care support package



Community pharmacy plan

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Manage within a tight budget, including pay awards this year



Action plans to reduce waiting lists to more acceptable levels



Long-term transformation of services in line with Bengoa recommendations

When the Executive was restored, all parties agreed that the health service was a top priority, particularly given the deterioration in services in recent years. Previous failures to reform, the Covid pandemic, poor workforce planning, and periods without government had left the health and social care system here in a very weak position. Waiting times are by far the worst in the UK, and are increasing further.

Industrial action by healthcare staff over a lack of pay parity between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK culminated in a large-scale public sector strike in January 2024. Without a Minister in place, no pay offer could be made. In his first week back in post, the Health Minister prioritised a 5% pay increase and a one-off payment of £1,505, which meant a restoration of pay parity with England for those under Agenda for Change. While Junior Doctors are continuing industrial action, consultants were offered an average uplift of 5.26%.

Waiting lists in Northern Ireland have continued to increase (see Chart 1 and Chart 2). Over half (52%) of those waiting for a CAMHS assessment were waiting more than the 9-week target, while in Emergency Departments, the attainment of the 4-hour waiting time target has collapsed (from 65% in 2019/20 to 47% in 2023/24). Fewer than 30% of those with suspected cancer were treated within the target of 62 days. The Health Minister called for a 'whole system approach' to tackling these issues, rather than dealing

with them in isolation, but said there is not enough money in the budget to implement their waiting list initiatives.

In the April budget, the Department was given over half the total amount of DEL resource funding (£7.76bn), as well as an additional £122m in the June monitoring round. Both Health Ministers emphasised that this funding was insufficient and stated that they will not sanction balancing their budget through the implementation of cuts to services, including voting against the Budget in the Executive.

Some steps have been taken towards health and social care reform, including a community pharmacy plan, key initiatives to tackle health inequalities, a planned health and social care strategy and a conference in the autumn led by Professor Bengoa to help 'reboot' the sector. Looking ahead, a sustained, long-term focus on service transformation in line with the Bengoa recommendations remains needed. There has been some hospital reconfiguration, but this has been largely reactive and not strategic. Significant and potentially unpopular choices will have to be made and owned by the whole Executive about where and how health services are delivered. So far, there is little evidence that the Executive is willing to grasp this challenge.

Education

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Pay awards for teachers and support staff to end industrial action



Early learning and childcare strategy



Capital investment in SEN provision and school building

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Delivery of the early learning and childcare strategy



Resolve funding pressures facing schools



Longer term reforms as recommended in the recent Independent Review of Education

The Department of Education has faced significant pressures in recent years, being hit hard by falling budgets, the impacts of Covid and industrial action. The Education Minister made clear his commitments to [pay resolution](#) and to [transforming the Special Educational Needs \(SEN\) system](#). In April, he announced an [increase of teachers' starting salary](#), bringing an end to two years of industrial action. A [pay award for support staff](#) was later agreed.

The Minister announced significant [investment in SEN](#), with a programme to deliver eight new schools and refurbish current ones, as well as funding for mainstream schools to support SEN students. Despite this programme, there are concerns about the [number of pupils still awaiting confirmation of their school place](#) for the new term, with calls for [reform and further investment](#). An increasing number of children and young people have an SEN statement, but [many schools are unable to facilitate the provision needed](#).

Childcare was recognised by all parties as a vital cross-cutting issue for the Executive, and a necessary part of Northern Ireland's [economic infrastructure](#). The Department announced a [£25 million investment in early learning and childcare](#), offering 22.5 hours of pre-school per week to all children aged 3-4 as well as increased support for some childcare costs. This has been welcomed by many as an important ['first step'](#) in an Early Learning and Childcare Strategy, although it has been noted that it could take

[up to a decade](#) to provide these extra hours for all children in the pre-school year. Moreover, the financial support for childcare in NI [still falls far short of the free hours offered in England](#), meaning childcare remains much less affordable here than in the rest of the UK.

Meanwhile the Department and sector face significant financial pressures, with [80% of schools projected to be operating in deficit](#) by the end of the year (see Chart 3). There has been a ['systemic underfunding'](#) and [lower per capita funding](#) for schools here than the rest of the UK. There have also been frequent warnings about the deterioration in school buildings, and the announcement of new [capital investment in 15 schools](#) was welcomed.

The recent [Independent Review of Education](#) gave extensive consideration to the future of education here, including a renewed focus on learners learning together, the importance of early years, schools reconfiguration, increasing the participation age to 18, curriculum reform and retaining local talent. It is not yet clear whether and how the Department will take forward these recommendations.

Justice

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Pay award for PSNI



Suspension of industrial action by police civilian staff



Extension of Sexual Offences pilot and Victim & Witness Charters campaign

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Manage service delivery within this year's budget, including pay awards for staff



Monitor and manage the rising prison population



Action to address court backlogs

Financial pressures have hit the Department hard, with the Minister stating that the criminal justice system is facing 'intolerable pressures' based on continued underfunding. The PSNI are suffering from a **budget gap of over £300 million**, receiving less than a tenth of what it requested in the June monitoring round. The Chief Constable told the Policing Board that his budget falls '**significantly short of the underlying requirement**', and that therefore he did not know how he would operate without an overspend. Budgetary pressures have led to **11 planned closures of PSNI Station Enquiry Offices**. The PSNI is also low on personnel, with only around 6,500 officers, despite **needing around 8,000 officers** to provide their services.

Northern Ireland has the **biggest courts backlog** in the UK. As of July 2023, there were almost 19,000 cases waiting to be heard in the Magistrates Courts, and 1,286 waiting for availability in the Crown Court (81.4% of which were in the queue for over a year). Even with these issues, the **prisoner population continues to rise**, as has the number of prison staff. Recent disorder will further increase pressure on the criminal justice system and on prison capacity. While Northern Ireland has not yet reached the crisis levels seen in England and Wales, continued pressure over time will require monitoring and action to mitigate. Strategic planning, reform, and adequate funding are required to stabilise the criminal justice system.

The Justice Minister has had a focus on victims of crime in Northern Ireland. The **Sexual Offence Legal Advisers pilot** was extended to 2025, giving free legal advice to complainants in serious sexual offence cases. This is part of the recommendations made by the 2019 **Gillen Review**. Furthermore, the **Victim and Witness Charters** were launched, showing where support and information is available for those who need it. With **domestic abuse crimes being the least likely to be reported** in Northern Ireland, these victim supports are vital to ensuring trust in the criminal justice system.

The Justice Minister has faced pressures regarding her **decision to appeal** the High Court decision which struck down part of the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act 2022, and there have also been criticisms of the past **surveillance of journalists**. The task for the Justice Department is to deal with these immediate issues, while not losing sight of the systemic reforms which are needed.

Economy

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Economic vision prioritises good jobs, regional balance, more productivity & lower emissions



Good Jobs consultation launched



Magee Taskforce set up to oversee the action plan on Ulster University expansion

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Long-term plan to increase NI's productivity, focusing on skills and infrastructure



Make the most of dual market access



Set out early goals and longer-term strategies to deliver economic vision

The Economy Minister put forward his [vision for the Northern Ireland economy](#), based on four pillars: good jobs, regional balance, increased productivity, and a reduction in carbon emissions. For each of these areas, he appointed an independent expert advisor.

Good jobs will prioritise terms of employment, pay, benefits, representation, and a healthy work/life balance. The [recent Good Jobs consultation](#) seeks ways to increase workers' rights and help create a more productive workforce that can participate in and drive the economy.

Productivity will also be targeted through a focus on [skills and innovation](#). This, and the [confidence of businesses and investors](#), would benefit from strategic thinking, long-term planning, and a multi-year budget.

One of the ways in which the Minister seeks to promote regional balance is through the expansion of the Ulster University campus in Derry/Londonderry. The new [Magee Taskforce](#) met for the first time in April to oversee the campus expansion to 10,000 students. This will help address the long-standing 'brain drain' from the North West (and Northern Ireland as a whole) of young people who leave to find education and job opportunities elsewhere.

The Minister's aims to reduce carbon emissions have been actioned through a proposal to [ban onshore oil and gas](#)

[exploration](#), as well as a [£20 million support fund](#) which gives businesses grants to buy and install energy efficient equipment. His collaboration with the Republic of Ireland's Tourism Minister has led to a commitment to environmentally [sustainable tourism](#) across the island through a [cross-border Sustainability Network](#).

Northern Ireland has the unique advantage of access to both the UK and EU markets. Business leaders have called on the Minister and the rest of the Executive, and the UK and Irish Governments, to make the most of this [dual market access](#). The return of the institutions means the North-South and East-West bodies can meet (including the new [Intertrade UK](#)), allowing for increased cooperation between the governments in Belfast, Dublin and London. Working with the US is another important way to generate growth, and the [St Patrick's Day visit](#) to Washington DC brought focus on Northern Ireland as a place to invest. While the US Special Envoy has increased the profile of Northern Ireland, significant tangible results are yet to be seen.

Infrastructure

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Early action to reduce MOT waiting times and to fund road repairs



Publication of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review



100 new battery electric buses to help de-carbonise public transport

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Progress A5 Western Transport Corridor



Action plan to reduce time taken for planning approvals



Publish options for funding water infrastructure including considering water charges

In order to tackle the long MOT wait times, the Infrastructure Minister ruled out privatisation of these services, and opted to recruit new examiners, as well as opening emergency tests for cars for which the tax had expired. He also announced a temporary exemption for cars which were taxed, insured and roadworthy. The Minister invested an extra £8.1m in road repairs, which followed an extra £1m for the highest priority resurfacing projects.

The A5 Western Transport Corridor has been consistently delayed by repeated legal challenges and rising costs. With over 50 people killed on the A5 since the delays began, work on the upgrade is a key test for the Executive and the Department.

The protection of public transport is a priority for the Minister. He committed to maintain concessionary fares for over-60s (with a fee for first-time applicants for a Smartpass), as well as ringfencing funding for improvements to the Derry-Coleraine railway. The Department also injected £64m into 100 new battery electric buses to help de-carbonise public transport, in line with the Executive's cross-cutting carbon reduction targets.

The publication of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review, commissioned jointly by the Irish Government's Department of Transport and the Department for Infrastructure, sets out 32 recommendations for the expansion and improvement of the rail service both North and South, widening accessibility and

connectivity. Decisions will need to be taken on whether and how to take forward these recommendations.

Planning reform is a part of wider public service transformation that is much-needed in Northern Ireland, with delays in the planning system having a significant impact on house-building and the wider economy (see Chart 4). An efficient and effective planning system would help to boost investment, unlock growth and contribute to climate targets. While planning involves local councils, statutory consultees and the Planning Appeals Commission, the Department should lead the way on reform.

Deteriorating water infrastructure is having a serious impact on development and growth, holding up the building of thousands of new homes. The cost of upgrading the system, including sewers and pumping stations, is estimated to have increased to £2.1bn. Despite calls for alternative arrangements to how water infrastructure is funded, the Minister ruled out the introduction of household water charges.

Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Approval of the Lough Neagh Action Plan



New climate change reporting duties for public bodies



Digital Catapult tech partnership supporting businesses to reach net zero

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Delivery of the Lough Neagh Action Plan



Publish the overdue environmental improvement plan



Action plans to fulfil the commitments in the Climate Change Act 2022

One of the biggest issues facing Northern Ireland over the last few years has been the blue-green algae crisis in Lough Neagh. The Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs Minister's [Lough Neagh Action plan gained Executive approval](#) in July, agreeing 17 cross-cutting actions to go alongside the 20 actions approved by DAERA. The Report and Action Plan has [four pillars](#) – education, investment, incentivisation, and regulation and enforcement. However, activists and campaigners have criticised the Report's '[vague language](#)' and a watering down of targets for sewage reduction. A change of ownership is not one of the actions, although the Earl of Shaftesbury has suggested he would like to see a '[charity or community trust model](#)' put in place. The Minister has conceded that restoring Lough Neagh could take decades, so the full delivery of the Action Plan is an essential priority for both the Department and the Executive as a whole.

The Climate Change Act passed by the Assembly in 2022 commits to net zero by 2050. The Executive approved an emissions reduction target of at least 77% by 2040, which campaigners say [should be treated not as a ceiling but as a floor](#). There was a [3% decrease in emissions between 2021 and 2022](#), with the agriculture sector remaining the largest emitter at 29.1%. The UK Climate Change Committee has noted '[limited](#)' delivery so far and '[unacceptable](#)' data gaps, such as on the missed deadline for a climate change action plan for all departments. However, the [new climate](#)

[change reporting duties](#) will help public bodies take informed and timely climate action. The delivery of the overdue [environmental improvement plan](#) should be a priority.

The establishment of an [independent Environmental Protection Authority](#) was a commitment made in [New Decade New Approach](#) that is still outstanding. The lack of robust independent regulation contributes to the occurrence and persistence of environmental problems here, such as the [doubling of serious water pollution incidents](#) in 2023 (see Chart 5).

As DAERA focuses on Northern Ireland's waterways, it has noted the need to invest in the '[blue economy](#)' – in harbour infrastructure and fleet modernisation, in keeping with climate change targets. DAERA also has to deal with [illegal dumping in sites such as Mobuoy](#) in Derry/Londonderry, which is affecting the drinking water of the area.

Communities

HEADLINE ACTIONS SINCE FEB 2024



Victoria Square Apartments legislation



Some additional housing support



Proposals for a Sign Language Bill

PRIORITIES FOR THE DEPARTMENT



Publish an anti-poverty strategy as promised in New Decade New Approach



Prioritise investment in social housing given increasing homelessness and waiting lists



Urgent decision on Casement Park re-development

For the Communities Minister, [housing is a key priority](#). He has stated that the building of more social, affordable and ‘[better quality](#)’ homes is high up his agenda. He has provided support for housing, such as £3 million for the Housing Executive’s [Supporting People](#) programme, raising the [limit for co-ownership](#) to £195,000, and the [Intermediate Rent](#) scheme which will deliver new homes with lower rents.

However, despite these positive actions on housing, the capital budget allocation for the Department provides enough for only 400 new social homes this year, a cut which has been called ‘[devastating](#)’ and ‘[disproportionate](#)’. This sits in sharp contrast to the NI Housing Executive’s target of 2,200 new homes per year, and the [housing waiting list that sits at over 47,000](#) (see Chart 6).

On a specific housing issue, the early days of the Executive’s return saw a lot of focus on the defective apartments at Belfast’s Victoria Square. The Communities Minister worked with his Executive colleagues to seek accelerated passage for legislation which would [bring residents’ protections in line with the rest of the UK](#).

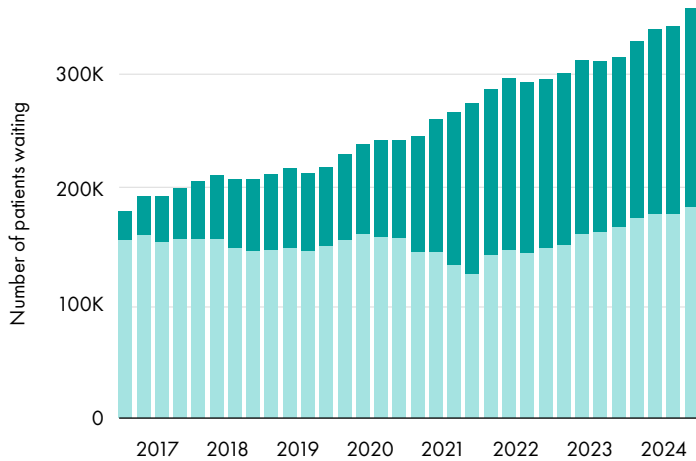
An [anti-poverty strategy](#) from the Executive is long overdue, with [14% of the population and 19% of children in absolute poverty](#). The Minister has faced pressure from campaign groups and the Opposition to [remove the two-child benefit](#)

[cap](#), and there have also been calls to address the [5-week wait for Universal Credit](#) and offer more [support to renters](#).

One issue that has followed the Executive for years is the re-development of Casement Park, which is in the spotlight due to the upcoming Euros Football Tournament in 2028. The Minister has said that he cannot move ahead with the work until he gets a firm [commitment from the UK Government](#) as to what funding they will provide. The GAA and the Irish Government have confirmed their funding, and the new Secretary of State has said he is assessing his options, but that ‘[one way or another](#)’ the stadium will be built. As an issue important to large parts of the community and to community relations, the re-development of Casement Park is a key priority for the Executive to complete. A decision is needed urgently.

SEPTEMBER 2024

Data Tracker



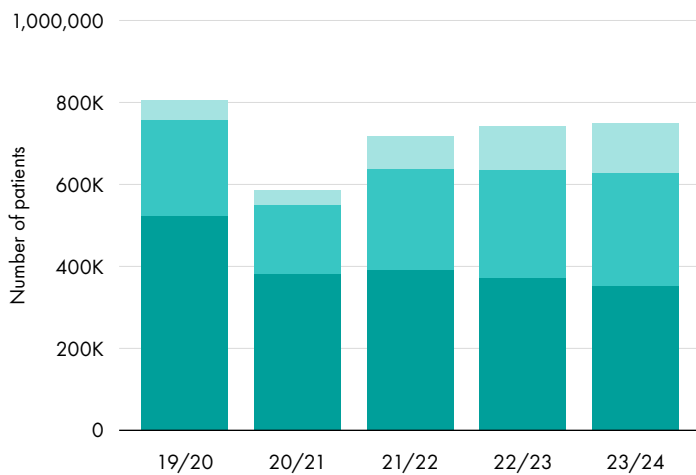
Health - Chart 1

Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment

More than half of patients in NI wait more than a year for a first appointment, compared to just 4% in England.

- Over 52 weeks
- Under 52 weeks

Note: Chart excludes South East Trust from whole data series as latest data not available
Source: [Northern Ireland waiting time statistics, outpatient waiting times March 2024](#)



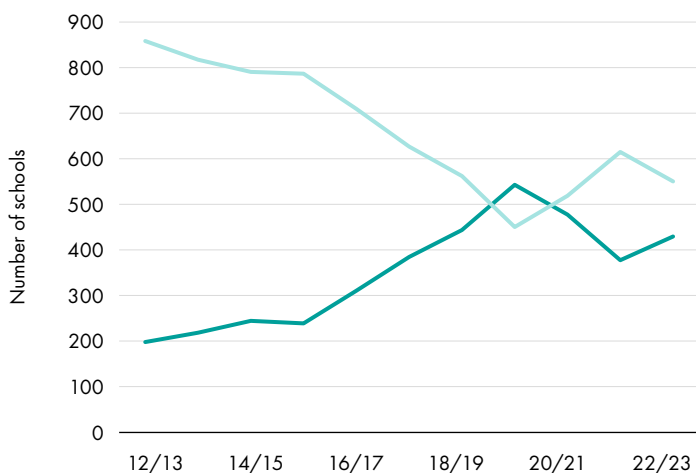
Health - Chart 2

Attendances at Emergency Departments by the time waited

Since 2019-20, the number of people being treated in ED within the 4-hour target has fallen from 65% to 47%.

- Within 4 hours
- Between 4 & 12 hours
- Over 12 hours

Source: [Department of Health Emergency Care Activity 2023/24](#)



Education - Chart 3

Number of schools in financial surplus or deficit

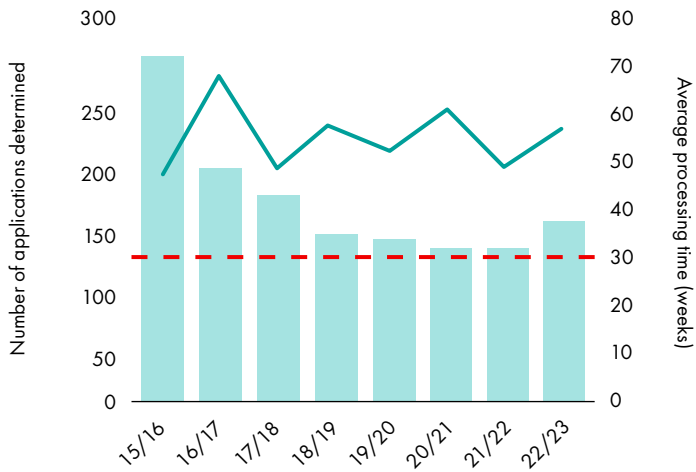
Recent data from Education Authority show that 50% of schools were in deficit at end of 2023-24.

- Schools in deficit
- Schools in surplus

Source: [Independent Review of Education - Volume 2](#)

SEPTEMBER 2024

Data Tracker

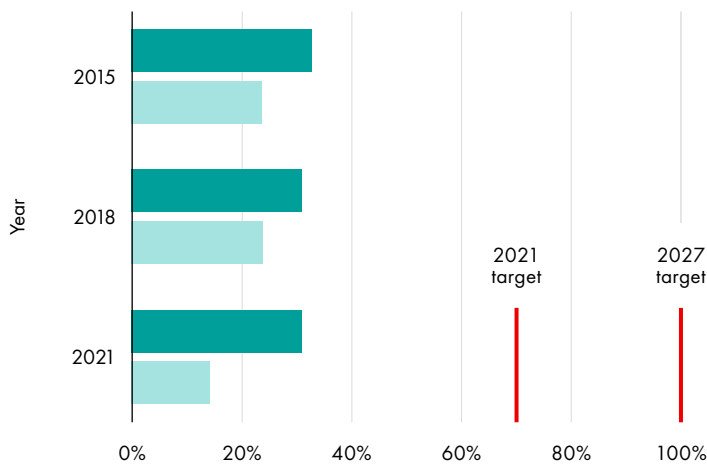


Planning - Chart 4
Average processing time for major planning applications (all councils)

Average processing times for major planning applications far exceed the target of 30 weeks.

- Average processing time (right scale)
- Number of applications determined (left scale)

Source: Northern Ireland Chamber Planning Improvement and Reform Position Paper, 2024

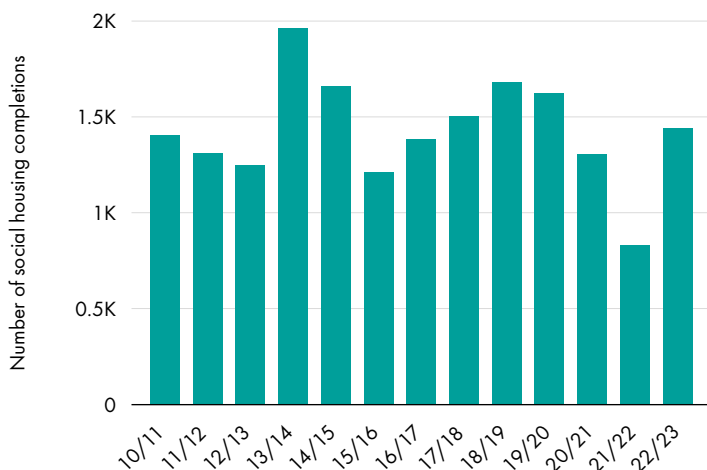


Environment - Chart 5
River and lakes water body ecological status

In 2021, less than one third of NI's rivers and only 14% of lakes had good ecological status.

- Actual % of NI rivers at 'Good' or 'High' status
- Actual % of NI lakes at 'Good' or 'High' status

Source: NI Audit Office - Water Quality in Northern Ireland's Rivers and Lakes, 2024



Housing - Chart 6
Social housing completions

In recent years the number of new social homes completed has been far below the new target of 2,300 per year.

Source: Department for Communities Northern Ireland Housing Statistics, Social Housing Development Programme

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