



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

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PART 2

Minister's First Day Brief

ISSUES LIKELY TO ARISE WITHIN THE FIRST 4-6 WEEKS

Every day connecting people safely, supporting opportunities and creating sustainable living places.

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RESOURCES, GOVERNANCE AND EU GROUP

CORPORATE POLICY AND PLANNING DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Sian Kerr

PRIVATE SECRETARY COMPETITION

- Following a NICS wide competition your new Private Secretary [REDACTED] who acted as Private Secretary since the Assembly's restoration in January 2020, will conduct a suitable hand over period with [REDACTED]

BUILDING FORWARD: EXECUTIVE CONSOLIDATED COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

- The Consolidated Recovery Plan was approved by the NI Executive on 29 July 2021 and subsequently published on 2 August 2021 on TEO website.
- It was intended that delivery of the Recovery Plan will provide a "glide path" into the Executive's emerging longer term Programme for Government.
- A Grade 3 Recovery Plan Oversight Group is facilitated by TEO and the COVID-19 Working Group departmental officials are working with TEO's Recovery Plan team to monitor delivery of the plan interventions and provide implementation update reports. It is important to note that many of the interventions included in the Recovery Plan will need to be assessed in light of any future budget.

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

- The Programme for Government (PfG) draft Outcomes Framework went through a full public consultation which ended on the 22 March 2021. A final PfG based on wellbeing outcomes is still waiting for Executive approval.

SENIOR OFFICIALS' GROUP ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

- The DfI Permanent Secretary, co-chairs, along with Aingeal O'Donoghue from the Taoiseach's Office, a Senior Officials' Group (SOG) charged with overseeing progress on New Decade New Approach (NDNA) commitments relating to North/South Infrastructure and Investment and reporting to North South Ministerial Council (NSMC).
- SOG's remit is to:

- maintain a strategic overview of the delivery of NDNA projects;
 - define specific objectives and timelines for implementation;
 - monitor progress on delivery of objectives identified, implementation timelines and plans;
 - facilitate regular reporting to Ministers and to the NSMC on policy and resource requirements and on project implementation; and
 - agree appropriate actions to progress implementation.
- The NDNA projects overseen by SOG which are led by DfI or in which the Department has an interest are: the Narrow Water Bridge, the Ulster Canal restoration, cross border greenways, the A5 Western Transport Corridor, and the Strategic Rail Review.
 - The Group also monitors and drives delivery of the following projects led by other NICS departments: Investment in Higher Education Provision in the North West Region, Air connectivity, the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, the Enhanced North/South Programme of Research and Innovation / All-Island Research Hub and the North-South Research Programme.
 - SOG meets at least quarterly, or as agreed by the co-chairs. The most recent meeting was on 3 March 2022 and the next meeting is planned to take place in hybrid form in Armagh on 7 June. Following each meeting you will be provided with a summary report of discussions for information.

COVID-19 INQUIRY

- The Cabinet Office public consultation on the draft terms of reference for the UK-wide Covid-19 Public Inquiry closed on 7 April. The Inquiry team has held a series of engagement events across the four nations.
- TEO is hoping to get early indication of the approach the Inquiry team will take. It is expected that the inquiry will commence in May following the elections with written evidence gathered in 2022, and oral evidence in 2023. Aspiration for report within five years.

- All Departments are required to look at their own arrangements as each Department will participate in its own right. TEO has established a cross departmental working group to bring together all NICS departments to ensure a coordinated approach is adopted. This is an issue that could draw significantly on limited resources in the Department depending on the final scope of the Inquiry.

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW WAYS OF WORKING

- DfI staff continue to work from home where possible, in line with current public health guidance. However, many of our staff deliver front line services which cannot by their nature be delivered from home, for example, flood prevention work, road maintenance, winter gritting and DVA services such as MOTs and driving tests. Moving forward, the NICS will be adopting a blended approach of workplace, remote and home working depending on business need and individual job roles. We are currently working to ensure that for people who need to be in our buildings for business reasons that they are safe and available for them to do so.

FOYLE BRIDGE

- The Department is seeking to explore how the Foyle Bridge can fully contribute to its objectives of encouraging active travel, increasing connectivity and aiding a green recovery. Given the large and complex nature of the bridge, the Department needs to consider a range of options that are both deliverable and take into account our challenging financial position.
- The Department is preparing a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to establish the strategic context for the spending proposal, evidence the case for change, and, establish the preferred way forward.
- Once a preferred way forward has been identified and approved through the SOC process then, subject to approval and availability of resources, a more detailed proposal, in the form of an Outline Business Case, could be progressed.
- The Department is working with key stakeholders, including the Mental Health Champion, Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Public Health Agency and the local Council to seek to ensure that any proposals help address wider societal issues in this area.

EQUALITY

- The Department published its new Equality Scheme in February 2021. In line with the Equality Scheme commitments an Audit of Inequalities was carried out. It is intended that a draft action plan will be issued for consultation later this year, once the budget position is clearer.
- A key issue within DfI is the current lack of S75 data. Whilst this is not unique to DfI - it is an issue across all departments - it is vital to remedy such gaps in data. The Equality Unit and Analysis, Statistics & Research Branch are working together to address this anomaly.
- S75 training is continuing across the Department with the e-learning training for all staff due to be completed by the end of April. S75 Screening training will follow for relevant staff once ECNI confirm their availability to carry out the training.

SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGIES

- On 5th April 2022 representatives from three of the four Co-design Groups, Anti-Poverty, Disability and LGBTQI+ presented their position papers to the Ministerial Steering Group.
- Key issues raised from a DfI perspective include the current lack of S75 data, removal of hate language from DfI property, bus design and the lack of space for wheelchair users on buses. The disability Co-design Group welcomed the work and the campaign highlighting pavement parking and have also suggested Senior Leadership training on Disability that incorporates the UN Convention on Rights of People with a Disability (UNCRPD). Officials are currently considering these key issues.
- Work has commenced, led by TEO, on the cross departmental Violence against Women and Girls Strategy. DfI is currently contributing to the work on the Strategy. DfI continues to provide a free travel scheme that allows for free public transport to a refuge or emergency housing shelter for those fleeing domestic abuse, including LGBTQI+.
- Work has begun on the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy; and the Irish Language Strategy. The Expert Advisory Panels have published their Recommendation Reports. The outworking of these recommendations could be quite significant for DfI, particularly in the context of the continued constrained resource budget position in the years

ahead. However, the Department will work with DfC colleagues and the Co-design groups to explore how best DfI can play its part in delivering that progress.

FINANCE DIRECTORATE

Director: Susan Anderson

2022-23 BUDGET

- The Finance Minister advised that in the absence of an Executive a budget cannot be progressed.
- Legislative cover through the Budget Bill will provide departments with 45% of 2021-22 cash and resources for 2022-23 until a Budget (No.2) Bill passed (June/July).
- DoF Permanent Secretary may approve up to 95% of cash and resources in the 2021-22 financial year, should Budget (No.2) Bill not be passed.
- Legislative cover is in place but there is no budgetary basis on which to plan.
- Contingency planning envelopes have been proposed until a budget is agreed.

Resource Budget

- Proposed resource planning assumption is that opening 2021-22 baseline level of funding is maintained - **£420.7m.**
- Inescapable pressures facing the Department in 2022-23 currently total **£188.9m**, 45% of the 2021-22 rolled forward baseline, including the NI Water (NIW) Price Control (PC) 21 Determination, and escalating energy and fuel costs.
- Very difficult decisions to stop and/or reduce services will likely be required depending on the budget settlement for DfI.

Capital Budget

- Capital contingency planning envelope includes: tails of existing projects; contractual commitments (at the date of resignation of the First Minister); previous Executive agreed programmes; and core capital for routine programmes/ maintenance.

- Green growth is not currently a consideration for capital planning scenarios, however essential health and safety works are being considered for inclusion.
- Indicative position, based on the criteria above, provided by DoF, £486.2m, against the Department's capital requirements of £744.9m.
- We have been working with DoF officials to emphasise that the capital planning envelope needs to avoid creating significant delay in infrastructure delivery with knock on impacts.

2021-22 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN

- 2021-22 Provisional Outturn was provided to DoF on 13 May 2022, which reports the Department's outturn against its final budget position for both Capital and Resource.
- This will be the position that Departments are assessed against.
- Target is to not have any overspend and underspends of 1.5% or less for both capital and resource.
- For resource, provisional outturn is a small underspend of less than £1m against the final budget of £573.2m (0.17%). Provisional outturn for capital is an underspend of £1.4m which is 0.18% of the final budget (£754.7m)

2021-22 FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS

- The draft Financial Accounts to 31st March 2022 are due with the Audit Office on 27th May and will be considered at the Departmental Audit and Risk Committee on 25th May.
- The final Accounts will be reviewed at the 29th June Audit Committee. The Accounting Officer is scheduled to sign the Accounts on 30th June and will be laid in the Assembly in advance of Summer Recess.
- For the 2022-23 year, part of Waterways Ireland Accounts will be consolidated into the Departmental Accounts under the Review of Financial Processes. This is the only other body to be consolidated.

- The Financial Accounts team is also responsible for preparing the DVA Accounts with similar timescales to above. However, DVA have their own Accounting Officer who will sign their Accounts.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT DIRECTORATE

Director: Jackie Robinson

OVERVIEW OF TRANSLINK

- The Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, trading as Translink, was established under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. This Act outlines that the Holding Company must engage as a commercial enterprise in the formation and promotion of its subsidiary companies (Ulsterbus, Citybus and NI Railways). This Act also provides detail on a range of issues including the provision of railways, powers of the railway undertaking, accounts and auditing.
- The Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 also sets out that the Department must secure “most public passenger transport services continue to be provided by the Holding Company and its subsidiaries” (i.e. NITHC/Translink). This Act stipulates that the Department must secure the provision of public passenger transport services with due regard to accessibility, economy, efficiency, safety of operation and sustainability and this is implemented through the Public Service Agreement with Translink.
- Other relevant legislation includes the Transport (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971; the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (Extension of Powers) Order (Northern Ireland) 1972; the Local Government (Transfer of Belfast Corporation Transport functions) Order 1973; and the Transport (Northern Ireland) Order 1977

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TRANSLINK PAY NEGOTIATION AND POSSIBLE INDUSTRIAL ACTION

- Two of Translink's trade unions that represent bus drivers, cleaners and shunters balloted members on a revised pay offer for the 21/22 financial year following an initial ballot on industrial action following an offer of a 3% pay award. Members voted to take strike action and that is now due to commence on Tuesday 17th May for one week.
- The strike action will affect all bus services including school services. This is causing concern for EA and DE and officials are keeping them updated on the position.
- Officials are working closely with colleagues in Translink on this issue whilst being cognisant of the difficult financial position faced by both organisations.
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TRANSLINK – PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

- The relationship between the Department and Translink is set out in two main documents. The Public Service Agreement is a contract for the delivery of public transport services and the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) sets out the governance arrangements between the Department and Translink.
- Through DAO 05/19, a new template, known as the Partnership Agreement, was produced to replace the MSFM. This was to apply to all ALBs.

- The Department is currently in the process of working with Translink to produce a new Partnership Agreement that will require approval by the Department's Principal Accounting Officer and the Translink Board.
- Significant work has been ongoing on this document and it is hoped that the new Partnership Agreement will be completed in the near future.

ALB REVIEW

- NDNA includes a commitment to a review of Arm's Length Bodies with a view to their rationalisation. In November 2021, the Finance Minister issued an Executive Paper on Public Bodies Reform – Review of Arm's Length Bodies. The Finance Minister acknowledged that responsibility for individual ALBs rest with individual Ministers, but that there must be a collective approach to realise substantive change to deliver the NDNA commitment. In line with this, the Finance Minister agreed that sponsoring Departments should carry out their own assessments of their ALBs and identify those which may fall within the scope of a proposed Public Bodies Bill, with a programme of work to review and reform those ALBs deemed to be large and more complex to be set out.
- Due to the very unique nature of Translink, being the main public transport provider in NI, it has been assessed as being a large and complex ALB. It is therefore deemed out of scope for inclusion in the proposed Public Bodies Bill. Officials are engaging with DoF colleagues to determine what may be required to meet the commitments in the NDNA, in particular the scope, methodology and timeframe for any review of the organisation. Further advice will be provided to you to consider and agree any future work programme.

RATHLIN ISLAND FERRY CONTRACT

- The contract for the Rathlin Island Ferry has been subject to a rebasing exercise for the 2017 and 2018 financial years, which has been disputed by the contractor (Rathlin Island Ferry Limited (RIFL)). This resulted in the appointment of BDO to provide an independent assessment of the exercise.
- The final report, largely concurring with the Department's original calculations, was received November 2021 and shared with the contractor in January 2022. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Assessments in relation to 2019, 2020 and 2021 are now underway.

- Officials received correspondence from Unite the Union on 23rd March 2022 regarding unrest among the crew due to a lack of salary increases since 2019. Officials were also copied into correspondence from Unite to the company in mid-May which suggest some action will be taken although the nature of this is currently not known. Unite has been informed that any salary increases are a matter for the company alone and not the Department. Should any strike action take place, this could result in a disruption to and/or withdrawal of services.

EXTENSION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONCESSIONARY FARES SCHEME

- In January 2022 the then Minister announced her intention to provide free travel for people with disabilities who currently pay half fare and to widen the range of services facilitating concessionary fares by extending the Scheme to new operators who have already indicated or expressed an interest in joining the Scheme. Three new operators had previously done so, namely Belfast Taxis CIC, Airporter and CFT Coaches.
- Separate business cases are being developed in relation to: (1) the extension of free travel and (2) the extension of the Scheme to a select number of new operators. The Departmental economists have undertaken an initial review of the business case for free travel and have significant concerns. The business case for new operators is still being worked on and has not yet been sent to the economists. However similar concerns are likely to arise.
- The Draft Budget 2022 -2025 Consultation included ring fenced funding to support the concessionary fares extensions. That process has been paused but policy development has continued as much as possible until the budget is confirmed.
- All new operators will need to ensure they meet the Scheme's Terms and Conditions and satisfy audit requirements, for example in relation to an appropriate ticketing system, before being able to access the Scheme.
- Work is continuing on the business cases, policy development for the extension of the scheme from half to full fare, including engaging with Translink on back office and customer facing ticketing software, targeted engagement with key stakeholders and scoping the necessary changes to media such as customer documentation and websites.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ORGANISATIONS AND SHOPMOBILITY SCHEMES

- The Department provides the main source of income for 12 Community Transport Organisations and 15 Shopmobility Schemes. Annual funding for all the schemes is £4.9m (approximately). It is a discretionary payment as there is no statutory obligation placed on the Department to provide this funding. This level of baseline funding has, more or less, remained the same since 2018/19.
- The community transport organisations provide accessible, affordable transport options to those people who are socially isolated and have difficulty accessing public transport. These transport services provided are highly valued by the service users, which include the elderly and those with a disability i.e. some of the most vulnerable in our society, and local communities.
- Grant funding is provided annually and is paid quarterly in advance. The first payment was due in April 2022. Due to the uncertainty on the budget position a decision was taken to release the end of year retentions (the final payment of funding for the 2021/22 financial year which is normally held back until end of year accounts are reviewed) earlier than usual, as an interim measure to ease cashflow issues, and address concerns raised by the organisations, until a budget position could be confirmed. The Minister has subsequently confirmed funding for quarters 1 & 2 up to a maximum of £2.4m. Further funding will be reconsidered later in the year
- The budget uncertainty is compounded by the increasing cost pressures being faced by the organisations. Both these factors will make it difficult for all these organisation to plan ahead for the year and could lead to, for example staff being put on notice.
- The Community Transport organisations, particularly the RCTPs, have a strong lobby voice amongst their political representatives. Continuing financial uncertainty is likely to lead to increased questions being asked on the way ahead.

GATEWAYS AND EU RELATIONS

Acting Director: Claire Cockerill

RAIL SAFETY - INTEROPERABILITY OF THE RAIL SYSTEM

- Interoperability of the rail system is a reserved matter (See paragraph 28, Schedule 3, Northern Ireland Act 1998) and the Department for Transport is bringing forward Rail Interoperability (Amendment) Regulations 2022 to implement a Protocol obligation regarding ongoing implementation of EU technical rules on interoperability of the rail system.
- While reserved, DfI is the Competent Authority covering interoperability issues. This includes assessing applications for authorisation to bring new/ upgraded infrastructure and/ or rolling stock into service on the network. The new regulations place additional duties/ functions on the Department regarding processing these applications and managing the authorisation process. There will be a consultation period which may commence either during the election period or shortly after the election. As you will be aware, there is significant political interest in all Protocol-related legislation.

UKG SANCTIONS TO PREVENT RUSSIAN SHIPS FROM ACCESSING NI TRUST PORTS

- As part of its response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, UKG passed legislation on 1 March 2022 (Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2022) prohibiting UK ports from providing access to any ships under a Russian flag or that are owned, registered, chartered or operated by persons connected with Russia. The restrictions do not however apply to non-Russian ships carrying cargo such as Russian oil or coal to or from Russia, as the impact of this would be much more significant and would require consideration of supply chains.
- Analysis showed that the impact to NI ports will be minimal, as so far no ships have been caught under the sanctions by DfT.

EU FUNDING: INTERREG VA GREENWAYS

- The Department, along with the *Department of Transport* (DoT) in the South, performs the role of Accountable Department for the Sustainable Transport theme of the INTERREG VA programme. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is the managing authority for the programme. The INTERREG VA programme is due to close at the end of December 2023 and any costs incurred after that date will need to be funded from outside of the programme.

- Additional funding of approx. €13.86m and an extension to delivery timeframes is being sought across the three Greenway projects that sit under the Sustainable Transport theme of the INTERREG VA programme.
- The Department has requested information to inform its value for money assessment of the additional funding requests. Discussions with SEUPB and DoF as the sponsoring Department for the INTERREG VA programme are ongoing.

NW MULTI-MODAL HUB – ACTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL CENTRE

- The Department secured funding through the INTERREG VA Territorial Co-operation Programme to construct a Multi-Modal Transport Hub at the site of the Old Waterside Railway Station in Derry.
- Although not a condition of the EU funding received through the INTERREG VA programme, an Active and Sustainable Travel Centre (ASTC) was included as an element of the overall NW Hub project and is not yet in operation.
- Through engagement with potential partners an option to establish the ASTC in the NWMTH as a pilot project is being progressed. This would provide an opportunity to demonstrate viability and sustainability for the longer term.
- The pilot project, which would run for a defined period of time, would enable the testing of an operating model for the ASTC to ensure it meets set objectives. The collection of data would be used to determine the future viability and operation of this facility. If the data produced during the pilot project supports the continuation of the ASTC, then a tender process could be initiated to find a long term operator – subject to a funding stream being identified.

WATERWAYS IRELAND – ABSENCE OF NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL (NSMC)

- Waterways Ireland (WI) is a North South Implementation Body (NSIB) co-sponsored by the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).
- In the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive the North/South Ministerial Council cannot meet, and NSMC decisions relating to the operations and governance of the North/South Implementation Bodies cannot be taken.

- The most recent NSMC Inland Waterways Sectoral meeting took place on 3 November 2021 and there are no further meetings scheduled at this time.

WATERWAYS IRELAND ORGANISATION REVIEW

- Waterways Ireland was established in 2000 and the original, approved structure has not been reviewed since that time. The operating environment has changed significantly in the interim particularly as a result of the advances in technology.
- In May 2021, the NSMC agreed that Waterways Ireland and its Sponsor Departments should bring forward Terms of Reference for an Organisational Review. The Terms of Reference have been developed and Finance Departments have recently provided their input.
- The absence of NSMC to agree the Terms of Reference could delay the review. The Department's Waterways Ireland Sponsor Branch is working with colleagues in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (the Co-Sponsor Department) to examine alternative options to progress the review.

RESTORATION OF THE ULSTER CANAL

- Waterways Ireland is currently taking forward the restoration of the Ulster Canal, from Lough Erne to Clones. Funding has been allocated by the Irish Government from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the Shared Island Fund.
- The project involves acquisition of land in County Monaghan and indications are that not all land owners are willing to sell voluntarily. Under its founding legislation in Ireland – the British Irish Agreement Act 1999 – Waterways Ireland can use Compulsory Purchase Orders for the acquisition, if necessary, but cannot initiate the process without NSMC approval.
- Our Co-Sponsor Department is examining possible options to progress the matter in the present circumstances. The restoration of the Ulster Canal is a high profile project and this matter is likely to generate interest.

WATER AND DRAINAGE POLICY

DIRECTOR: Alison Clydesdale

NI WATER - BUDGET

- NI Water's 2022-23 budget requirement is defined with the company's annual Operating Plan and Budget, which is informed, and reflective of, the Price Control 21 Final Determination. NI Water's budget requirement for 22-23 of £176m - £184m* Resource DEL and £282m Capital DEL reflects the PC 21 baseline plus increases for inflation and energy costs.
- The current budget planning envelope provided by DoF is c. £70m-£80m* less than NIW's estimated RDEL requirement for 22/23, with the final CDEL planning envelope for NI Water still to be confirmed by DoF. There is therefore a significant risk that NI Water will not receive the level of budget necessary to fund the delivery of water and sewerage services to the level required during 22/23. (**currently under review*)

GALLIAGH SHORE – UNADOPTED DEVELOPMENT

- Galliagh Shore (phase 2) in Enniskillen is a private development of 14 houses which were sold to the residents without the sewerage infrastructure being adopted or having an Article 161 agreement with NI Water in place for future adoption.
- The infrastructure is inadequate and in need of substantial repair/replacement. There has been extensive correspondence from residents and political representatives detailing the problems and impacts of the inadequate infrastructure, and requesting financial support to resolve the issues.
- Residents accepted an offer of £150k from the National House Building Council (NHBC) as full and final settlement, and in March 2022 submitted a request for £513,344.00 to the Department to make up the shortfall required to repair the system.
- A range of options to provide assistance have been considered, but ultimately neither NI Water nor the Department has any remit or legal obligation to repair or adopt private sewerage infrastructure.
- There are over 100 identified sites where sewerage infrastructure has not been built to an adoptable standard. Costs involved in the repair of those sites are not quantifiable without individual detailed site investigations. The repercussive impact that would arise from the Department stepping in to fund the repair of private sewerage infrastructure would present a significant financial risk to the Department.

COMMENCEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESERVOIRS ACT (NI) 2015

- DfI received statutory responsibility for the Reservoirs Act (NI) 2015 in June 2021, which provides for reservoir safety in Northern Ireland.
- A targeted consultation on the commencement orders and secondary legislation required to commence and implement the Reservoirs Act closed on 23 January 2022 and a consultation response report has been prepared and will issue to you for approval, in due course.
- The next stage in the legislative process is to make the commencement orders and the necessary secondary legislation. This will be progressed in this new Assembly Legislative Mandate, subject to your agreement.

LIVING WITH WATER PROGRAMME

DIRECTOR: Simon Richardson

DELIVERY OF THE LIVING WITH WATER IN BELFAST PLAN

- The Living With Water in Belfast Plan was published on 9 November 2021 following NI Executive ratification. This is a 12 year, £1.4bn drainage and wastewater management plan to protect against flooding, improve water quality in our rivers and Belfast Lough, and provide capacity in the wastewater systems to facilitate development and growth.
- £1.2bn will be invested by NI Water to improve their hard infrastructure, including sewers, pumping stations and wastewater treatment works, while £200m will be invested in blue/green integrated drainage schemes to deliver more sustainable drainage solutions.
- The programme is now moving into the delivery stage and the Department is working with other Departments and stakeholders to design and deliver the blue/green schemes in the plan. The first two years of delivery will focus on designing and appraising integrated solutions and there will be little opportunity to construct blue / green schemes on the ground before year 3, due to the complex nature of their design and approval.

STRATEGIC DRAINAGE INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN - DERRY/LONDONDERRY

- In June 2021 it was announced that a Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan (SDIP) for Derry would be developed, similar to the Belfast Living With Water Plan.

- The development of an SDiP for Derry is a significant piece of work and it is envisaged that the final plan will be published in 2025.
- In March 2022 it was announced that the Department would develop a pilot Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) in the O'Naullian Crescent in Derry and commence community engagement. This will help demonstrate the Living With Water approach in the city and assist the development of the SDiP.

DIRECTOR: Alistair Beggs

DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS / AMENDMENT OF MINISTERIAL CODE

- You will be familiar with the *Buick* judgment and may be aware that its implications have continued to have impact on the planning process as its wording essentially meant that where planning applications would have been of 'interest' to other Departments, decisions would have to be referred to the Executive Committee, thus making the Executive a de facto planning authority.
- In May and June 2020, Minister Mallon placed draft papers before the Executive asking for an amendment to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to clarify that planning decisions can be taken by the Department for Infrastructure. The Executive Office (TEO) brought forward an alternate paper with a wider amendment, and with Executive approval that paper led to the Executive Committee (Functions) Act 2020 coming into effect on 26 August 2020. However, the amendments to the Ministerial Code to reflect the provisions of the 1998 Act, as amended by the 2020 Act, were never carried out.
- The Minister, on foot of the amended 1998 Act made a number of planning decisions, including the approvals of the North South Electricity Interconnector. That decision was challenged in the courts and while the subsequent *Woods* judgement of November 2021 found the 2020 Act to be valid, it also found there to be a technical failure to comply with the strict terms of section 2.4 of the Ministerial Code in its present form. In essence this still requires referral of crosscutting, significant and controversial matters to the Executive.
- In the context of the case the planning decisions were not quashed, but the Judge urged the amendment of the Ministerial Code in order to reflect the new and modified requirements of section 20 of the 1998 Act.

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- As such in progressing its broad planning workload the Department will have to consider on a case by case basis the meaning of the terms 'crosscutting', 'significant' and 'controversial' in the sense intended by Ministerial Code.
 - The planning approval of the Casement Park redevelopment is currently being challenged on similar grounds with a decision due before the end of May.
 - The Department is arguing against the Woods SEAT judgment in respect of the Casement challenge. As such, a Notice of Appeal was lodged against the Woods SEAT judgment on 13 April.
 - Following the judgment the then Minister wrote again to the FM and dFM requesting that the amendments to the Ministerial Code be brought forward. While the FM and dFM took an urgent decision, on 3 February 2022, to progress the amendments, the Ministerial Code still remains unchanged.

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- On 26 March, and in the absence of amendments to the Ministerial Code, Minister Mallon took decisions to refuse the arc21 waste treatment plant and to approve a mixed use development at Upperlands Co. Derry. Officials will discuss further with you the context to and potential implications for the Department of those decisions.

POTENTIAL INVESTMENT BY BELFAST DISTILLERY COMPANY AT CRUMLIN ROAD GAOL

- Belfast Distillery Company Ltd (BDCL) was awarded preferred developer status by the Executive Office, formerly the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in May 2012 to convert A Wing at the Crumlin Road Gaol into a small operational whiskey distillery with tasting room, bar, restaurant, café and whiskey visitor attraction.
- Legal agreements were entered into and construction commenced in February 2015 but stopped in July 2015 as BDCL ran out of money to continue.

- Since 2018, officials have worked with BDCL to try and get agreement on the outstanding legal issues to allow for the completion of a Supplemental Agreement. Based on legal advice DfI asked that BDCL provided a Guarantee / Bond to protect the Department should BDCL fail to comply with its contractual obligations or if BDCL fail. The amount to remedy A Wing including the unauthorised works has been valued by CPD officials at £870,000. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- BDCL have advised DfI that they would not provide a Bond and the Accounting Officer's advice remained that a Bond is necessary. Minister Mallon directed officials to proceed without a Bond, which has been approved by DoF.
- Officials have worked with BDCL to get satisfactory evidence of funding for the completion of the works. Although some risks remain, funding is being provided by Invest NI, DFC, Metropolitan (US finance) and Belfast Investors. Given the wider benefits that will accrue from the project, a number of checks and balances being placed on the project and the fact that, without the investment, DfI will likely have to pay £870k for restoration of the building, Minister Mallon decided that the investment should proceed. The contract is due to be signed imminently and a submission about the announcement of this outcome will be with you shortly.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROCESS

- The Planning Act 2011, introduced a dual role for the Department in the Local Development Plan (LDP) process. That of statutory consultee and also an oversight function. At different stages throughout the process, the Department takes on each role.
- Statutory consultee role
 - The Department engages with the councils offering assistance with draft policy formulation and submitting written representations during periods of public consultation where concerns regarding the soundness of a plan document arise.

- At Independent Examination (IE), representatives are invited to take part in the hearings to discuss issues of soundness with the council and the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC)
- Oversight role
 - Councils submit their plan documents to the Department to cause an IE. The Department considers whether the development plan document is ready to be tested for soundness. If it is, the Department will cause an IE by referring the plan onto the PAC.
 - After the IE, the PAC send its findings to the Department. The Department then direct the council to adopt, adopt with modifications or withdraw their development plan document.
 - The Department has intervention powers, whereby it can direct a council to withdraw or modify a submitted development plan document at any time.
- The IE into Belfast City Council's (BCC) draft Plan Strategy (dPS) was held by the (PAC) from 16 November 2020 – 8 March 2021.
- The Department received the PAC's IE report on 29 September 2021. The PAC concluded that subject to 78 recommended amendments, the dPS would be sound.
- As legislatively required the Department considered the PAC report and agreed with the PAC recommendations.
- On 4 February 2022 the Department issued a Direction to BCC, to adopt their draft Plan Strategy subject to the modifications outlined in the Direction. The modifications are consistent with the PAC recommendations. Significantly, the PAC amendments included the requirement for BCC to draft new policy in relation to significant infrastructure capacity issues. To ensure compliance the Direction requested that BCC submit its draft policy to DfI for agreement.
- On 4 March 2022, BCC provided a draft policy wording and the Department worked with the Council to try to ensure that the wording would meet what the PAC considered necessary.

- BCC have recently decided to consult based on their draft policy wording, which is not in line with Departmental expectations. However BCC want to work with the Department during the consultation period to reach an acceptable position regarding the wording of the strategic policy and officials stand ready for this engagement.
- Given this is the first Direction of this kind issued by the Department and as BCC are the first council to reach this stage, the approach will set a precedent for other councils in the coming months.

REGIONAL PLANNING DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Angus Kerr

IMPROVING THE PLANNING SYSTEM

- Long before the NIAO study, the Department had commenced work on a number of fronts to improve the performance of the planning system. A key piece of work has been to review the implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.
- By way of context, DfI is required under section 228 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 to review the Act's implementation and to assess whether its objectives have been achieved. Subsequent reports are to be published every five years.
- The first Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 was published on 27 January 2022 and made 16 recommendations. The Department will seek to develop the policy proposals around these recommendations at the earliest opportunity and decisions will be needed on how the work will be prioritised within available resources and the approach agreed with you.
- These include recommendations on:
 - reviewing the consultation requirements in plan-making;
 - improving the quality of planning applications submitted;
 - increasing the use of digital technology in the planning system;

- reviewing the statutory consultations process, including timeframes for consultations responses, penalties for late responses and how councils can proceed if statutory consultees do not respond within the required timeframes;
 - reviewing - categories of development, Departmental Directions, and the Department's approach to call in notifications;
 - reviewing aspects of the appeals system around restricting new material at appeal and the variation of proposals at appeal; and
 - reviewing planning fees to address resourcing issues, including proposals for an automatic annual inflationary uplift and multiple fees for retrospective applications
- Responses to the *Call for Evidence - Review of the implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011* indicated strong support for the commencement of legislation for the review of old mineral permissions (ROMPs). Commencing the ROMPs legislation, in the Planning Act, will required amendments to the Act and subordinate legislation.
 - Actions which require amendment to current primary legislation will need to be taken forward through the NI Assembly Bill Process. Other actions which require secondary / subordinate legislation will also be undertaken in accordance with best practise, and in conjunction with the Committee and Assembly where appropriate. Other actions may be addressed through new or revised guidance.
 - Other work to improve the system has included the establishment of a cross-departmental Planning Forum to take forward recommendations from a report into the role of statutory consultees in the planning process. A significant number of agreed actions have already been completed and this work continues at pace.
 - You will be briefed on a monthly basis by those planning statutory consultees within DfI (DfI Roads and Rivers) so that issues impacting on their performance can be addressed appropriately and in a timely manner. More resources are needed to ensure improvements in performance which is challenging in the budget context.
 - The Department has also been working with local government to deliver a new regional planning IT system. It has also recently published a the report of the Planning Engagement

Partnership containing recommendations on how to enhance the quality and depth of community engagement in the planning process at both the regional and local planning levels.

NIAO AND PAC REPORT – PLANNING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- The NIAO published its report into Planning in Northern Ireland on 1 February. This report considers how the planning system has operated since April 2015, when responsibility for delivering the majority of operational planning functions passed from central government to local councils. The key message from the report is that, in the view of the auditors, the planning system is not operating effectively, and in many aspects is not delivering for the economy, communities or the environment.
- The NIAO report led to a PAC Inquiry at which officials, local council representatives and others gave evidence. The PAC report was published on 24 March and contains a number of fundamental recommendations which the Committee considers might help improve the planning system.
- DfI met with stakeholders in a workshop format on April 29th to work through the recommendations and agree a way forward.
- A draft Memorandum of Reply will need to be approved by you and the Finance Minister before being provided to the PAC. A final deadline will be clarified as soon as possible but is dependent on when a PAC will be in place. This response is being prepared in liaison with councils and DOF officials.

PLANNING STATISTICS

- The planning system has 3 statutory targets: major planning applications to be processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks; local planning applications to be processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average of 15 weeks; and 70% of enforcement cases to be progressed to conclusion within 39 weeks.
- There has been much interest in the delays in processing major planning applications: the annual planning statistics for 2020/21 show that the average processing time for major applications was 61.4 weeks across all councils. Performance in relation to local applications (17.8 weeks across all councils) and enforcement (69.9%) is much better.

- The most recent performance statistics (April – December 2021) show that the average processing time for local applications was 16.8 weeks across all councils and 55.9 weeks for major applications, with 70% of enforcement cases being concluded within 39 weeks.
- There is also a statutory requirement on statutory consultees to respond to consultation requests within 21 days or extended agreed timescales.
- The recent Q3 2021/22 statutory consultation report indicates a dip in consultee performance from 76% (20/21 performance) to 68% (year to date in 2021/22). Statutory consultees are advising that increased numbers in consultations, along with resourcing issues are impacting performance.

KNOCK IVEAGH WIND TURBINE

- Planning permission for a wind turbine at Knock Iveagh, Katesbridge was granted by the former Department of the Environment in 2013 in close proximity to a scheduled monument (a Neolithic Round Cairn) but due to an administrative error, the part of the then DOE responsible for advising on heritage issues (including scheduled monuments) was not consulted. The permitted wind turbine was therefore not built in accordance with the permission and, in addition, further unauthorised development was carried out at the site.
- Since 2017 there has been extensive public pressure ('Friends of Knock Iveagh') and elected representatives to have the turbine removed – targeted at the council, DfI and DfC.
- Given that the former DoE granted the original planning permission, the Council has requested that the Department use its enforcement powers under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 or to exercise its powers to discontinue the use of the land for wind generation purposes (forced removal of the wind turbine) and to pay any consequential compensation liability and all associated costs incurred by the council.
- The Department has engaged with the council on this issue for a number of years. The council has completed an extensive planning enforcement investigation into the site and a report on the matter was considered by the council. In addition, a number of live planning applications in relation to the development remain under consideration by the council.
- Legal proceedings were initiated by the council against the Department in March 2021. A leave hearing has not yet been listed, but the case has been managed by way of review

hearings before a senior Judicial Review Judge. The Department is currently engaging with the Council and their legal representatives on the matter and has appointed Counsel to provide advice.

- Officials will brief you on this complex issue in due course.

NEW PLANNING IT SYSTEM

- The current IT system, known as the Northern Ireland Planning Portal (NIPP), is used by all 11 councils and the Department with approximately 13,000 planning applications managed through the system per year.
- The original contract for NIPP was awarded in 2004 and has been extended a number of times, most recently to 31 December 2022. Therefore, as the NIPP is reaching the end of its life, the Department and councils are working to replace it.
- An Outline Business Case identified that a single IT system for all 12 planning authorities was the preferred solution. However, Mid Ulster District Council decided to exit the project and procure their own standalone system at Final Business Case stage.
- A contract to provide a new regional IT system was awarded to IT Supplier TerraQuest in June 2020. The estimated whole-life cost of the new system (over 12 years) is £32m and is being split between the Department and the 10 remaining councils. The delivery of the project is being taken forward by a joint local council and Departmental project team and is due to be rolled out later this year in autumn.
- The new regional IT system will bring a range of benefits including, the ability to submit planning applications online which will transform the system by putting online and paperless submissions at the heart of the business model. It will also see improved validation and the use of workflows to better manage workloads and enable more efficient processing of applications. Better user experience and functionality will also make it easier for citizens to understand and engage with the planning process.

BRITISH-IRISH COUNCIL SUMMIT MEETING

- The British-Irish Council (BIC) was formally established when the British-Irish Agreement (the Agreement which gave effect to the provisions of the Multi-Party agreement) signed by the UK and Irish Governments came into force on 2 December 1999. BIC was established to

promote positive, practical relationships among its members and to provide a forum for consultation and cooperation.

- The Member Administrations are the UK Government, Government of Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the Isle of Man Government, the Government of Guernsey and the Government of Jersey.
- BIC is comprised of 11 thematic work sectors, meeting at official level 2-3 times a year and at Ministerial level every 2-3 years. Your Department chairs two of these work sectors (Collaborative Spatial Planning and Transport) on behalf of the NI Executive.
- Heads of Administration meet at Summit level twice a year, hosted on an agreed rotational basis by the eight Member Administrations. Summit engagements have recently been focused on a thematic area linked to one of the 11 BIC work sectors and as such Heads of Administration are often joined by other Ministers and senior officials from Member Administrations for these meetings, in accordance with the specific Summit theme.
- The next BIC Summit will be held in Guernsey on 7 and 8 July 2022 (currently held in your diary). The theme for the Summit is Collaborative Spatial Planning. The Government of Guernsey have requested in-person attendance at this meeting.
- Officials are currently working with the BIC Secretariat to prepare papers for consideration at the thematic and Summit meetings. A formal submission will follow setting out additional details in this regard and in respect of logistical arrangements for the event.

TRANSPORT POLICY DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Liz Loughran

ACTIVE TRAVEL - BELFAST CYCLING NETWORK

- The Belfast Cycling Network (BCN) was published in June 2021 under the title '*Making Belfast an Active City*'. It sets out proposals to make Belfast a more cycle friendly city and reduce the dominance of cars.

- Following on from the publication, the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan was published in March 2022. It sets out a blueprint for the development and operation of the cycling infrastructure in the city for the next ten years. It will require significant investment and restructuring within the Department in order to set up a dedicated team and secure consultancy support to deliver the Network. Despite the Climate Change legislation requirements about investment in active travel, no budget has yet been provided for this purpose in the contingency planning envelope for 2022/23 so progress is likely to be slower than originally intended.
- The Delivery Plan aims to join up the existing cycle infrastructure and develop new safe routes across the city to encourage more people to choose active travel modes of transport. Over 50 individual schemes are planned for delivery including trialling new routes. Subject to availability of funds in future Departmental budgets, the Delivery Plan represents a projected capital investment of over £100 million.

REGIONAL STRATEGIC TRANSPORT NETWORK TRANSPORT PLAN (RSTNTP)

- The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTNTP) is the first of 4 Transport Plans in line for completion. The Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN) was formally designated in the Regional Development Strategy and forms the principal connections in the region linking the cities, towns and hubs and the Gateways (ports, airports and cross-border). The RSTNTP is therefore concerned with strategic roads, the buses which run on them and the rail network across all of Northern Ireland.
- Last year, the then Minister gave a public commitment that the RSTNTP would be published in 2021. In late November an emerging scheme list was produced but these proposals have not progressed further.
- By mid-February we advised the then Minister that we would no longer be able to commence consultation prior to the commencement of the formal pre-election period. For contractual reasons, we instructed our consultants, AECOM, to stop all work on the project until after May's Assembly election.
- There is a need for an urgent discussion with you to take this work forward.

- The Assembly has agreed a Climate Change Bill which, when enacted, will place very significant requirements on all departments and is likely to have implications for much of the work of DfI.
- Within the Bill, DfI has been identified as the responsible Department for the development and implementation of two significant plans - an Infrastructure Sectoral Plan and a Transport Sectoral Plan. DfI is engaging with other Departments to clarify the scope, timeframes and implementation arrangements associated with the requirements of the Bill.
- In particular requirements have been placed on DfI to produce plans which set a minimum spend on active travel from the overall transport budgets of 10%. Currently, we expect to spend around £13 million on active travel in 2021/22 (which has been reported as 2%, which is £7 per head of population). This suggests an increase of the order of £50 million per annum would be required to meet this requirement of 10% spend. To increase current spend on active travel to 10% of the overall budget would require the reallocation of budgets from other areas of transport, impacting on the current services currently provided by the Department. Officials are conducting detailed analysis to fully understand the implications and identify options to meet this statutory requirement, which is likely to apply from 2023/24.
- Further, in respect of transport, as drafted, the Bill provides for DAERA to make provision by regulations for emissions from aviation and shipping to count as Northern Ireland emissions. We have concerns about the inclusion of aviation and shipping within the transport sectoral plan as proposed in Section 61(b), given the Department has no statutory responsibilities for these sectors.
- It is clear that the sectoral split will require agreement between Ministers and the DAERA Minister chairs an Inter-Ministerial Group of relevant Ministers to discuss such issues. Particular consideration will need to be given to circumstances where Departments are to be held responsible and accountable for plans where much of the spending and investment will be controlled elsewhere.
- The work required to agree the scope of sectoral plans, to understand, identify and implement policies to fully satisfy and deliver the requirements of the legislation will be significant and will require additional staff, expertise and substantial funding.

- As the requirements of the Bill will have impacts across the Department, the team is currently considering governance structures to support the future and imminent delivery of this work and it is likely that the legislation will have wide ranging impacts and for example, will require consideration of our work on transport plans, planning policies, active travel, decarbonisation of our fleet and development of the roads network.

A BOLDER VISION FOR BELFAST

- The Department, in partnership with Department for Communities and Belfast City Council, is developing 'A Bolder Vision' strategy document and action plan for Belfast City Centre. The four key moves in the strategy, which have been endorsed by public consultation are:
 - establishing a north-south pedestrian route to provide safe and accessible movement through the city centre, including car-free streets;
 - enhancing existing and creating new riverside destinations, connecting communities to the river and encouraging travel along the waterfront;
 - reimagining the 'inner ring' to reduce dominance of cars, redesign key junctions and creating safe active travel routes;
 - incentivising city centre living by providing better quality, choice and affordability of accommodation, and creating pedestrian friendly routes and city parks to promote play and relaxation.
- A number of joint workshops have been held with both Departmental Ministers and the Chief Executive of the Council. The main focus of these workshops has been on the creation of a civic spine and the redesign of key junctions.
- There are currently 3 options under consideration for Royal Avenue and Donegal Place namely one-way public transport, two-way public transport or full pedestrianisation.
- In order to inform any decision by DfI, Atkins has been commissioned to carry out an assessment of the impacts of each of options. The report is expected to be complete mid-May.
- Following completion of the report and consideration by DfI, it is proposed that another Ministerial workshop will be held.

CROSS DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGIES

- A number of key environmental and energy strategies are currently being developed collaboratively across Departments to which DfI is contributing.
- In December 2021, DfE published the Executive Energy Strategy which committed DfI to developing a Local Transport Strategy by 2023, an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Plan by 2022 and reviewing permitted development legislation for low carbon heat installations to ensure it is up to date and fit for purpose.
- The EV Infrastructure Plan is being progressed in line with the 2021/22 Action Plan which was published alongside the strategy and is to be in place by 31 December 2022.
- Consideration is being given to how the development of the Local Transport Strategy will be taken forward and tie in with Sectoral Plans which will be a requirement of the NI Climate Change Act following Royal Assent.
- DAERA has engaged with the Department on the development of an Environment Strategy. In March, Minister Poots made an oral statement to the Assembly regarding a draft Environment Strategy, which contained actions to be implemented by DfI. The intention is that this Strategy will be signed off at a future Executive meeting, following the election.
- A DAERA-led Green Growth Strategy is being taken forward under the direction of an Inter-Ministerial Group, which includes the Infrastructure Minister, and will build on the Northern Ireland Environment Strategy and other policy work.
- This strategy will facilitate a coordinated approach to addressing climate change and achieving environmental sustainability whilst supporting businesses and delivering green recovery and renewal.
- From a broader UK perspective officials have been engaging with Defra on the National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) which sets out measures and analysis for how emission reduction commitments can be met across the UK. This is due to be published for public consultation in May.

LOUGH NEAGH

- Prior to the election, the Department had been contacted by stakeholders to request that it take the lead role in the development of Lough Neagh.
- The bed and soil of the Lough is privately owned by the Shaftesbury Estate. The Department has a statutory responsibility for dredging the mouth of the Six Mile Water River where it enters the lough and maintenance of 7 navigational markers in that locality. The Department is also obliged to dredge some of the fishing quays under an agreement with local fishermen.
- The position of the previous Infrastructure Minister has been that given the Department's statutory legislative powers and limited discretionary powers which may be exercised for limited purposes, combined with the financial pressures, the Department is not in a position to agree to take the lead nor would it be appropriate for DfI to do so.
- Whilst DAERA has provided grants for projects on and around the Lough, The Agriculture Minister similarly did not agree to taking the lead on this matter.
- DfI officials have engaged with representatives from local councils and other stakeholders to try to resolve specific barriers to accessing the Lough including around the River Blackwater.

ROAD CLOSURES

- The Department makes on average 18 SRs each year to close roads for race events at the request of road race promoters. Eleven SRs have already been made for this year's racing season. In order to permit the remaining race events to take place as planned over the summer months and early September another seven SRs must be made before the summer recess of the new Assembly. Submissions will be prepared for you in respect of each seeking approval to make the SRs and send SL1s to the Committee for Infrastructure.

SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL DIRECTORATE

DIRECTOR: Chris Hughes

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME FOR PRIVATE BUS OPERATORS IMPACTED BY COVID-19

- DfI does not have the powers to run grant schemes for the bus and coach industry. These have been given to DfI by FM/dFM through the Financial Assistance (NI) Act in recognition of

the 'exceptional circumstances' arising from Covid-19. Two previous schemes have been completed, and a third is underway.

- Minister Mallon examined information provided by the sector, and concluded that a number of businesses had demonstrated a justifiable need for further Government support. This was based on evidence that a number of private bus and coach companies continued to suffer financially, as a result of reduced demand for their services.
- The third Scheme opened on 17 February 2022 and closed to applications on 3 March 2022. This Scheme is based on similar principles to the first two Schemes. In summary, private bus and coach operators will have to demonstrate a decrease in turnover of at least 40% from 1 April 2021 to 31 January 2022, compared to the best equivalent period between 1 April 2018 and 31 January 2019 or between 1 April 2019 and 31 January 2020, i.e. prior to the pandemic.
- Payment provision is again based on the reserves that licensed bus and coach operators are required to hold in satisfying the requirement of 'financial standing'.
- As with previous schemes, the Department is committed to ensuring value for money. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the funding is actually needed. Operators have therefore been asked to provide evidence of their expenditure to cover the period between 1 April 2021 and the end of January 2022 to ensure they are loss making. This evidence again requires verification by a suitably qualified accountant.
- 90 applications have been received and these are currently being processed, with payments to be made as quickly as possible, once the necessary validation checks have taken place.

BIENNIAL MOT TESTING

- On 25th August 2021, the then Minister issued a Call for Evidence (CfE) which sought views on the option to introduce biennial testing (every two years) for private cars, light goods vehicles under 3,500kg and motorcycles, as compared to the current annual testing arrangements.
- The CfE was issued for an 8 week period which closed on 19th October 2021. A total of 1,224 responses were received from a range of individuals, groups, and industry representatives.

- The key issues that the CfE asked respondents to consider were the potential impact of introducing biennial testing for private cars, light goods vehicles and motorcycles on: the automotive industry here, specifically those involved in MOT preparation and vehicle servicing; road safety; the environment; our comparison with other jurisdictions; and DVA operational arrangements. It generated a high level of public support although concerns were raised by key stakeholders such as the PSNI and the insurance industry.
- Given the high volume of interest and the degree support for biennial MOT testing, the then Minister advised that there was sufficient evidence to explore the next steps on a move to a biennial testing regime. She therefore asked officials to engage with the main Civil Service Trade Unions, NICSHR, staff and with key stakeholders, including the PSNI, automotive industry and the insurance industry and to commence preparation work for a public consultation. If biennial testing is introduced, it would potentially have significant implications for the DVA and its staff. This policy direction will be discussed with you so you can advise on your preferred next steps.

2022 TAXI FARE REVIEW

- The Taxis Act (NI) 2008 Section 16 provides the Department with the powers to set a maximum taxi fare tariff.
- It is Departmental policy to undertake a desktop review of the taxi tariff every 2 years in order to determine if a fare change is required.
- A review was carried out in 2019 but was not implemented due to the collapse of the Assembly. However in 2021, as a means of supporting the taxi industry through trading difficulties as a result of the pandemic and to help address the shortage of taxi drivers, the 2019 review was revisited and the Minister agreed to implement an increase of 7.6%.
- The then Minister gave an undertaking that a further taxi fare review would be initiated in spring 2022. Officials, working in conjunction with Ernst Young, have progressed this review. A submission will be prepared on this for your consideration and should you wish to proceed, it will need a targeted consultation and supporting regulations before being implemented.

- A draft Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2030, including a draft high-level Action Plan for 2022/23, has been developed. This has been informed both through ongoing research and a pre-consultation engagement with key stakeholders throughout summer 2021 and a formal consultation process which ran from 15 November 2021 - 10 January 2022. Throughout the Strategy development process officials briefed the Committee, both on 29 September 2021 and again on 23 February 2022, to keep them informed on progress and provide an opportunity for their input.
- Finalisation and publication of the Strategy, and the associated consultation outcome report, has not been possible due to the absence of an Executive but can be revisited early in the new Assembly Mandate.

DVA

DIRECTOR: Jeremy Logan

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DRIVER & VEHICLE TESTING CAPACITY

- Both driver and vehicle testing services were significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Normal driver testing services resumed on 23 April 2021, and on 26 July 2021 normal vehicle testing services resumed.
- The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) has been experiencing very high demand for both services. To meet that demand, the DVA has steadily increased its vehicle testing capacity by adopting a range of measures including the recruitment of additional vehicle examiners, the use of overtime to provide cover for leave and sick absence and a reduction of the vehicle test appointment time.
- The DVA is also offering vehicle test appointments on a Sunday and bank holidays, at most test centres. Following conversion of an adjoining building at the Newbuildings test centre, additional testing capacity is now available to meet demand in the north-west. The DVA is monitoring the situation and expects waiting times to reduce over time through the actions they have taken to increase vehicle testing capacity across the network.

- From 1 September 2021 to 31 March 2022, the DVA conducted 498,734 full vehicle tests, which is 13% more than the five-year average for those months.
- In terms of driver testing, the DVA has 91 full time and dual role staff capable of conducting driving tests across its network of test centres. It is in the process of completing an external recruitment competition for 16 new full time driving examiners and to date nine new driving examiners have been appointed. A further training course commenced on 25 April 2022 for the next tranche of recruits and training will continue until all new driving examiner posts are filled.
- In addition to increasing staff resources, the DVA continues to offer driving tests on a Saturday and at certain centres on Sundays where it is suitable to do so without compromising the integrity of the test. Overtime is also being used to rota off-shift dual role driving examiners to provide further capacity and to provide cover for scheduled driving tests, where due to a variety of unforeseen reasons such as sick absence or the requirement to self-isolate, driving examiners are unable to attend work.
- In just over 11 months since driving tests resumed, from 23 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the DVA has conducted 65,061 driving tests. This is more than the total number of tests conducted in 2018/19 (57,946), the last full year when driving tests were not affected by COVID-19 restrictions and is 43% more than the five year average for this period.
- Despite these excellent statistics, much of the political and media attention is highly critical and we will need to discuss with you how to ensure a clearer understanding of the facts regarding performance.

DRIVING LICENCE EXCHANGE ARRANGEMENTS

- Licence exchange arrangements in Northern Ireland are set out in the Motor Vehicles (Exchangeable Licences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009.
- On 6 June 2021, Minister Mallon gave approval to proceed with legislative amendment to the Motor Vehicles (Exchangeable Licences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 for the designation of the Republic of North Macedonia, Taiwan and Ukraine in respect of certain categories of licence including motor cars, light motor vehicles/invalid carriages, cars and trailers, agricultural tractors, mowing machines and national mopeds.

- The DVA completed the Designation Order instructions at the end of March 2022 so that the Department can take forward the legislative changes. Completion of the legislative process will take around six months.
- As these arrangements extend to Ukraine, they have become topical and it is useful for you to be aware that Ukrainian licence holders who are resident in Northern Ireland are permitted to drive on their Ukrainian licence for a period of 12 months commencing from the date that they took up residence in the UK. To continue driving beyond the twelve month period, Ukrainian licence holders are currently required to take both the theory and practical driving tests to obtain a Northern Ireland driving licence.
- Amendments to the legislation in GB were completed in 2021. Completion of the changes to the Designation Order to include Ukraine would mean a Ukrainian licence holder could exchange their licence for a NI licence, without the need to sit a test in the categories B, B1, BE, F, K and P.

NETWORK SERVICES

DIRECTOR: Conor Loughrey

BONFIRES

- The traditional bonfire season is July/August. In general, July bonfires are supported by elected representatives whilst August bonfires are not.
- The Department does not approve of any bonfire material being stored or bonfires being located on the adopted road network, or on its land as they can put lives and property at risk, divert the emergency services from other important work and disrupt the travelling public.
- When officials become aware of material being stored on adopted roads or on DfI land, we will do our best to remove the material, usually consulting with the PSNI and other relevant parties, before taking action, to ensure that the safety of our staff and contractors is not compromised, and that our actions do not cause an escalation of any issues.
- DfI and other key stakeholders have developed and signed off a MOU to help manage this difficult area going forward. Regular meetings took place involving key stakeholders throughout the 2021 summer season. The MOU is now being reviewed by the key partners to reflect any lessons learned from the 2021 season.
- Decisions made in July 2021, in relation to the Adam Street bonfire are now the subject of litigation. An application for leave hearing was rejected by the courts and is now the subject of an appeal.
- A business case for funding to assist in the removal of bonfire materials from adopted land or DfI owned land in 2022 has recently been accepted.
- Varying amounts of material are now being deposited at several sites across Belfast, including Adam Street where officials have been engaging with Belfast CC to seek its removal.
- To facilitate future redevelopment of the site, the Department has recently abandoned a portion of adopted carriageway in Adam Street. This effectively returns the land to InvestNI

and DfC who we understand are in discussion with North City Business Centre regarding redevelopment of the site.

LEGAL – INCIDENT AT DUBLIN ROAD, ANTRIM

- As a result of Storm Arwen a tree branch fell on a vehicle on Dublin Road, Antrim on 26 November 2021, killing the driver, [REDACTED] (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-59442316> for additional information). The incident is currently under investigation by PSNI.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- The Department has received correspondence from solicitors representing [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. The correspondence seeks details of the regime the department engages in for identifying and taking steps to remedy the presence of any trees adjacent to a road that pose a danger to road users. A copy of an independent arboriculturalist's report into the site was also enclosed.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- As previously advised, the Department is currently carrying out remedial works at the site of the accident, involving the removal of 163 trees with evidence of crown failures.
- In September 2021 the Department commissioned a Consultant to review standards, best practice, duties and liabilities associated with roadside tree and ash dieback risk management aimed at producing a Tree Risk Management Strategy. The review is broken down into two stages.
 - Stage 1 (which is at an advanced stage) will review current Departmental policy, procedures and legal responsibilities and consider best practice across GB and Ireland.
 - Stage 2 will bring forward a tree risk management strategy to assess options for, and establish, a suitable inspection regime.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

MAINTENANCE OF ROADS

- Routine Maintenance (generally resource funded) includes the key functions of defect repair, grass cutting, gully emptying and traffic signal repair. In 2021/2022 the Department has provided a 'limited service' with reduced levels of pothole repair, grass cutting and spend across other areas such as road markings and safety barrier. This limited service has been in place since 2015; it is proposed to continue this level of service for the first 3 months of the incoming year after which the budget position and its implications will become clearer.
- The capital element of Structural Maintenance is the collective term given to a range of functions including road resurfacing, surface dressing, footway resurfacing and structural drainage. In 2021/22 the forecast capital outturn is circa £85m; capacity to deliver was impacted by the legal challenge associated with the resurfacing contracts (see Major Projects

and Procurement section below) as well as staff resource levels across the various teams that contribute to spend in this functional activity.

MAJOR PROJECTS AND PROCUREMENT

DIRECTOR: Kaine Lynch

A5 WESTERN TRANSPORT CORRIDOR (A5WTC)

- The A5WTC is a flagship project of the NI Executive and, on completion, will provide 85 kilometres of new dual carriageway in the west of the province between New Buildings and the border just south of Aughnacloy. Design and development work on this scheme dates back to 2007 but has been delayed, primarily as a result of 3 legal challenges by a local group opposed to the proposals. It also has been the subject of 3 public inquiries, the most recent being in early 2020.
- An Interim Report on the findings of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) from the 2020 public inquiry contained two key recommendations in relation to the need for further assessment work to be carried out by the Department. It recommended that the resulting documents from both these assessments be incorporated into a further addendum to the Environmental Statement and that the addendum be made available for further public consultation. In the circumstances, the PAC adjourned the inquiry, indicating that it could be reconvened when the Department had taken the above steps.
- A new Environmental Statement Addendum was prepared by our engineering consultants and published on 16 March 2022. The consultation period ended on 6 May 2022.
- It is hoped that the public inquiry can be reconvened later this year. Receipt of the PAC's final report from the inquiry should then allow you to take a new decision on progression of the scheme during 2023. Subject to your decision and successful completion of the necessary statutory processes and environmental assessments, the construction of phase 1A (New Buildings to North of Strabane) could then commence.
- The programme for scheme delivery in recent years has alluded to full scheme completion by 2028 and although some slippage has occurred, this timeframe remains achievable. The estimated cost for whole scheme completion is £1.2bn. This figure is currently under review.

ASPHALT RESURFACING

- Northstone (NI) Ltd successfully challenged the former Department for Regional Development's handling and determination of a tender process for road resurfacing contracts in 2015. This decision was appealed by the Department. In April 2021, the Court of Appeal found that there had been a manifest error in the Department's approach to the award of multiple, term-type maintenance contracts across Northern Ireland. The judgement concluded that the Department's post-tender evaluation and scoring interaction with one of the tenderers, and the resulting related contract award decisions were not in accordance with the governing EU legal rules and principles and were not permitted by the competition rules.
- In 2020, Roads & Rivers Centre of Procurement Expertise (R&R CoPE) undertook two separate competitions, in line with the 2014 term contract strategy, to award nine asphalt term contracts for areas where existing contracts were due to expire: Term Contracts for Asphalt Resurfacing 2020 A – (four contracts); Term Contracts for Asphalt Resurfacing 2020 B – (five contracts).
- As a result of the Department's unsuccessful appeal to the July 2020 judgment of the 2015 Northstone (NI) v Department for Regional Development case, and the subsequent legal advice received relating to Writs of Summons received on Asphalt Resurfacing 2020 A, the decision was taken to collapse both competitions.
- R&R CoPE worked at pace to develop a new interim procurement strategy for asphalt resurfacing, and after conducting a market engagement exercise, the final procurement strategy was approved in Aug 2021. The interim strategy is based on three separate strands:
 - Strand 1 – Interim Term Contracts for Asphalt Resurfacing
 - Strand 2 – Reinstatement of regular lower value one-off asphalt packages

- Strand 3 – Development of longer term strategy for delivery of asphalt resurfacing post 2023
- The [Strand 1 strategy](#) involves the procurement of 24 separate asphalt resurfacing contracts grouped into four Phases with six contracts in each Phase. Phase 1 with a total maximum estimated value in excess of £35m over the next two years, was issued for tenders in November 2021 and tenders are currently being assessed. It is anticipated that these first six contracts will be awarded in May. The Phase 2 competition is also likely to commence in May. Phases 3 & 4 are scheduled to begin procurement in summer 2022.
- Strand 2 is also well developed with five asphalt resurfacing schemes commencing procurement since September 2021 and further schemes programmed to commence procurement over the next twelve months.
- Procurement consultants have been engaged to assist with the development of Strand 3. This work has been widened to develop a modern strategy for all maintenance and lower-value new road works.
- An independent investigation was established in relation to the 2015 procurement competition for asphalt resurfacing works that was successfully challenged by Northstone (NI) Ltd. The purpose of the investigation was to ensure that the Department and others learned from the court judgments and to inform the development of future procurement strategies.
- The independent investigation, led by Ms Sarah Hannaford QC, concluded in March 2022. The report generally accords with the court's findings and notes that some significant improvements have been made to the Department's procurement practices since. That said, Ms Hannaford has also identified further potential improvements in relation to clearer competition rules, alternative assessment approaches, additional training and guidance for staff involved in procurement activities, and enhanced record keeping. Work is ongoing to address these issues. The intention is to publish the report once issues have been addressed. It is currently envisaged that publication will be in late 2022.

YORK STREET INTERCHANGE

- The York Street Interchange project is a Strategic Road Improvement that will provide a fully grade separated interchange to replace the existing at-grade signal controlled junction providing direct links between Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways.
- The published estimated cost of the current York Street Interchange project ranges between £125m and £165m. This estimate is being updated at present, to reflect the continuing design development of the project, as well as recent changes to construction costs across the industry.
- A procurement competition was run in 2016 but a legal challenge was received preventing the Department from awarding the contract. The competition was subsequently terminated in 2019 following an unsuccessful court hearing and appeal.
- In July 2020 an Independent Assurance Review of the York Street Interchange project was initiated. The purpose of the review was to provide assurance to on how and to what extent the proposed scheme reflected and accommodated key Ministerial, Executive and Belfast City Council objectives and priorities (or could be adjusted to do so). This review was completed in November 2020 resulting in six recommendations, which were accepted in full.
- One of the recommendations was the completion of a review to ensure the scheme aligns with the concept of "placemaking" and new best practice in terms of urban transport design. To meet this recommendation further work was undertaken in relation to placemaking and to maximise ambitions in terms of what can be delivered for communities, connectivity and the wider living places agenda. This work was also to take into account the ongoing Bolder Vision for Belfast work stream, which is under development at present and aims to reimagine how the city will look and feel in the future.
- The report provides proposals to strengthen the placemaking and active travel provision of the York Street Interchange project and advises that additional measures could be implemented in tandem with it, to maximize the benefits for communities. The report recommends that three of the enhancement options are further developed and refined to allow an informed decision to be taken on the way forward.
- Work is ongoing to refine the shortlisted options, explore implementation issues and engage further with stakeholders.

- The proposed Newry Southern Relief Road aims to provide a new strategic road link to the south of Newry city, between the A1 Dublin Road dual carriageway and A2 Warrenpoint Road dual carriageway. This will provide an alternative route for strategic traffic that avoids Newry city centre.
- The proposed scheme has been included within the Belfast Region City Deal. The funding requirement recommended within the Deal for NSRR is £93m, which includes inflation. This cost is based on a fixed bridge crossing of Newry Ship Canal which is one of the main structural elements of the project.
- The proposed fixed bridge over the Newry Ship Canal, which is a Scheduled Monument, would provide clearance for vessels under 12 metres in height and provide these vessels access to the Albert Basin area of Newry. Vessels over this height, such as tall ships, would not be able to gain access beyond the fixed bridge. A number of local interest groups, elected representatives and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council (NMDDC), who are the owners of the Newry Ship Canal, have raised concerns about the fixed bridge proposal and its potential impact on Newry's maritime heritage and future tourism and regeneration potential. They are lobbying for an opening bridge.
- The current cost estimate for project with a fixed bridge option is in the range of £85-£100m excluding inflation. The estimated additional whole life cost of an opening structure is the range £18m- £32m. These costs include estimated ongoing additional cost of operation and maintenance for the opening structure over a 60 year period.
- Whilst NMDDC have stated their preferred option is an opening bridge, a report by NMDDC concluded that, based on economic assessment, by not having a lifting bridge across Newry Ship Canal, the loss to the NI economy would be £198k excluding inflation over the 60 years of the bridge. This is clearly less than the additional cost of providing an opening structure.

A6 DUALLING – DERRY TO DUNGIVEN – PHASE 1: DUNGIVEN TO DRUMAHOE

- The 25.5km A6 Dungiven to Drumahoe dualling scheme is the first phase of the A6 Derry to Dungiven Executive Flagship project. The contract to design and build the scheme was awarded to Sacyr Wills Somague JV in March 2018. Following completion of the initial design, construction of the scheme commenced in September 2018. This £220m scheme will provide a high standard dual carriageway from Dungiven to Drumahoe, including a bypass of Dungiven.
- Construction of the scheme is well advanced with the earthworks, drainage and all twenty-two structures substantially complete. The pavement construction is progressing well with more than 60% of the final surface course already laid along the main carriageway.
- Other works still required to complete the scheme include the provision of safety barrier, road marking, signage, street lighting at junctions, landscaping and accommodation works. These works are ongoing and it is expected the scheme will be complete this year, largely as planned.
- The project is experiencing ongoing cost increases primarily due to:
 - Poorer contractor productivity than previously projected; and
 - Construction material price increases and market volatility.
- The contract contains a complex payment mechanism called “contractor’s share” (or pain/gain) which shares any additional cost, or saving, up to stipulated thresholds. Due to the issues, mentioned above, the project is projected to exceed the assessed departmental liability before the project is complete. It was previously agreed, on balance and for the good of the project, that the implementation of the contractor’s share mechanism be deferred until the end of the 21/22FY and review again at that point. Officials are considering the current situation and will present a further submission within the next month to inform next steps.

A6 DUALLING – DERRY TO DUNGIVEN – PHASE 2: DRUMAHOE TO CAW

- Phase 2 of the Flagship project is between Drumahoe and Caw roundabout. It is estimated this 7km section will cost around £200m and is not currently programmed. This section was not included in the current phase 1 construction contract.
- Part of the line of phase 2 encroaches on the Mobuoy waste site. This is a contaminated landfill site due to the illegal dumping of waste material, which is the subject of an ongoing court case being taken forward by DAERA. This is a very sensitive issue due to the legal case.
- Officials are currently developing a strategy to determine the most efficient mechanism to allow the scheme to be taken forward.

BELFAST RAPID TRANSIT PHASE 2

- Phase 2 of the Belfast Rapid Transit Project (BRT2) is one on 3 infrastructure projects included in the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD). The proposal is to extend the existing east-west Belfast Rapid Transit network to serve North and South Belfast as well as extending the existing G2 Glider service (which currently operates between Belfast City Centre and Titanic Quarter) to connect with Queen's University and Belfast City Hospital.
- The estimated cost to deliver BRT2 is £142m-£148m as submitted to BRCD Partners in August 2020 as part of an Interim Outline Business Case. It is envisaged that the estimated cost may reduce as part of the update to the Outline Business Case (OBC) that is nearing completion.
- BRT2 was not prioritised within the BRCD and therefore only £35 million has been made available to deliver the project. This shortfall will need to be made up from Executive funding and will be subject to discussions and agreement between you and your Executive colleagues.
- A 10 week public consultation on route options closed on 4 October 2021. The purpose of this exercise was to gather the views of members of the public and other stakeholders on BRT2 proposals.

- Over 1200 responses were received from the public consultation highlighting broad support; however, a number of alternative routes were proposed. A public consultation report detailing deliberations and responses has been drafted.
- The next step for the scheme is the selection of the preferred route based on the public consultation report and outline business case.

RIVERS

DIRECTOR: Jonathan McKee

BELFAST TIDAL FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME

- The Northern Ireland Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) identified Belfast as being at the highest flood risk of 20 Significant Flood Risk Areas in Northern Ireland.
- Belfast is at risk from tidal, fluvial (river) and surface water flooding. An extreme tidal event would cause a risk to life, serious damage to property, disruption to drainage/sewerage infrastructure and significantly impact the transportation network. Flooding of the city centre may cause major disruption for several days or weeks, with increased clean-up and recovery consequences.
- The contract to design and build the Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme was awarded to Lagan Construction Ltd in August 2021. The scheme, which is currently being progressed, involves the detailed design and construction of over five miles (approximately 8.5km) of flood defences along the tidal River Lagan covering the area from Belfast Harbour to Stranmillis Weir.
- The £17.8m scheme aims to provide a long term approach to tidal flood risk management in the City. It has been designed to reduce tidal flood risk to over 1,500 properties. The scheme has not only been designed to integrate with the surrounding landscapes and streetscapes but also takes into account the latest projections on climate change.
- In advance of the main construction works the contractor commenced preparatory works, including site clearance works along the scheme area. These works were necessary to facilitate the construction of the flood defences which are currently scheduled to commence later in the Spring 2022. The majority of the site clearance works were carried out prior to the

bird nesting season, which runs from 1st March to 31st August to mitigate the potential impact on nesting birds.

- Throughout the development of the scheme design, efforts have been taken to minimise the impact from the proposed works on the local environment and wildlife as much as possible and consultation with relevant authorities has been undertaken. However, the removal of some trees and shrubs is unavoidable to facilitate the construction of this important project. The trees and shrubs which require removal are either in the direct line of the flood wall or adjacent to the line and any excavation through the root network would result in destabilising the tree.
- Despite efforts by officials to explain the flood alleviation benefits of the project and that a number of alternative options have been considered to try and minimise the removal of trees, a number of campaigners do not accept the flood risk in the area and were opposed to the removal of any trees in this location. Areas where trees and shrubs have to be removed to facilitate the works are to be reinstated with similar species where possible, and where it is not possible to reinstate in the original location, some compensatory planting will be undertaken in suitable areas subject to the agreement of the appropriate landowners.
- It is anticipated that the completion of the detailed design will take approximately four months with the works commencing later in the spring 2022.

SHIMNA RIVER FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME

- The Northern Ireland Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) identified Newcastle as being 1 of 20 Significant Flood Risk Areas in Northern Ireland. Fluvial (river) flood risk was the main concern. Newcastle has flooded regularly over the last 40-50 years, with major flooding occurring in August 2008 and August 2020.
- The Shimna River Flood Alleviation Scheme involves the construction of approximately 1,430 metres of flood walls and embankments which will extend both upstream (into Tipperary Wood) and downstream (into Islands Park) from New Bridge on the Bryansford Road, Newcastle.
- Construction of the scheme, which will reduce flood risk to 312 homes and businesses in the area, commenced on 11th October 2021 and will take approximately 12 months to complete.