



Driving Efficiency in the Public Sector

Introduction

Despite day-to-day spending by Executive departments rising over the past six years, the quality of many public services in Northern Ireland is declining. Inflationary pressures, ongoing pay costs, changing demographics and a lack of progress toward public sector transformation have all contributed to a perfect storm in which rising demand is outmatching available budget envelopes and departments are struggling to maintain even current levels of service. Some have characterised this as managed decline.

In February 2026, the Department of Education commenced a consultation on a five-year budget strategy in response to Northern Ireland's deepening education funding crisis. Disturbingly, 70% of local schools are projected to have a budget deficit by the end of 2025-26. However, these pressures are not isolated to education. Perhaps the most visible and impactful effects can be observed in long health waiting lists, delays in the criminal justice system, a deepening roads maintenance crisis and difficulties accessing general practice.

Of course this is not a static picture. Demand is projected to increase exponentially - and become more complex - because of our ageing population, with the number of people aged 65 or over likely to rise by almost 50% by mid-2047.

One approach to arresting the decline in public service outcomes would be to reduce constraints on public spending, including making the case for a fairer and more

responsive funding settlement from the UK Government. This would also warrant consideration modest and progressive proposals to increase the Executive's fiscal effort. We explore these questions in our separate policy paper on *A New Fiscal Framework for Northern Ireland*.

However, underfunding - and structural flaws in our public finances - are just one factor fuelling concerns over the sustainability of public service delivery in Northern Ireland. Inefficiencies in how funding is allocated, how it is spent and how services are configured are also a major drag on delivering better outcomes. In recent months, with the publication of the Northern Ireland Audit Office follow-up report on *Leading and Resourcing the Northern Ireland Civil Service*, there has been a renewed focus on the need to increase productivity and deliver better value for money within Northern Ireland's large public sector workforce. Other transformation workstreams adopted in other jurisdictions include setting targets to reduce corporate and administrative spend, adopting a preventative approach to the root causes of public service demand and better harnessing the use of AI and technology.

This paper will explore the merits of a number of these proposals and outline the Democratic Unionist Party's proposals for driving efficiency in the public sector.

Northern Ireland's public sector - key considerations

- *Public sector employment* – between 2014-15 and 2018-19, there was a 15% reduction in NICS workforce numbers as a result of the introduction of a Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES), with estimated annual staff cost savings of £87 million. However, numbers now appear to be rising. There were 230,080 public sector jobs in Northern Ireland as 1 September 2025. Northern Ireland has consistently had a higher proportion of public sector jobs per population than

the whole of the UK. NI public sector jobs as a proportion of the UK population were 11.9%, which compares to 8.7% for the whole of the UK. In terms of the full-time equivalent roles, the three largest employers are health trusts (75,000), education (44,800) and the Northern Ireland Civil Service (24,500).

- *Agency spend* - in December 2025, the Minister of Health indicated that £120m less had been spent on “off-contract” nurses, midwives and health workers since May 2023. However, to put this perspective, total health agency expenditure between April 2022 and March 2024 was £770m. NICS also employs 4,939 agency workers. Concern has been raised by the Northern Ireland Audit Office that without a comprehensive Strategic Workforce Plan, there is no framework to determine whether the rising demand for agency workers is genuinely required.
- *Review of Public Administration* - this was launched in 2002 to examine governance arrangements and to propose reform options. Recommendations implemented included the amalgamation of 19 Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) into five HSCTs in 2007 and the reorganisation of certain services under new bodies (including the Driver and Vehicle Agency, Land & Property Services, Public Health Agency, Business Services Organisation). There was also a reduction in the number of local councils from 26 to 11 in 2015, with additional functions and responsibilities were transferred to local government. A review by the Department for Communities Analytics Division in 2024 concluded that whilst Councils could identify £21.5m of efficiencies from this process, many assumed benefits were unquantifiable and that it is too early in the process to conclude if the reforms have been cost effective.

- *Reduction in Executive Departments* - subsequent to the 2014 Stormont House and 2015 Fresh Start Agreements, the number of Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) departments was reduced from 12 to 9.
- *Bengoa 'Systems Not Structures'* – this 2016 review by an expert, clinically-led panel made recommendations on the best configuration of HSC services in NI. This included the need to rationalise more specialist services in order to free up resources and moving to a more patient centred, population health model. Whilst there is broad political support for these reforms, progress has been slow. In December 2024 the Minister of Health published a further three-year plan to stabilise, reform and deliver services. Other workstreams also include a framework for hospital reconfiguration, the Elective Care Framework and Cancer Strategy.
- *Confidence and Supply* - as part of the DUP agreement with the Conservative Party in 2016, £100m was secured for health transformation over two years. This included investing in primary care through the initial roll-out of an operating model for multidisciplinary team located within GP practices
- *Independent Review of Education* - this was a key commitment within the New Decade New Approach agreement in 2020. The Review made twenty-five recommendations on changing the education landscape locally, including immediate and significant investment for education, expanding early years education, transforming special education needs provision to ensure equality for all learners, better retaining local talent and ensuring systems of education are well-designed and efficient.
- *Current Executive transformation workstreams* - as part of the package to restore devolution in February 2024, a £235m Transformation Fund was established,

underpinned by a new Delivery Unit within The Executive Office. A new Office of AI and Digital has also been created to help drive efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.

A Strategic Workforce Plan for the Northern Ireland Civil Service?

In its report on *Leading and Resourcing the Northern Ireland Civil Service*, published on 27 January 2026, the Northern Ireland Audit Office found that NICS has not delivered the scale and pace of reform necessary to demonstrate value for money in its workforce and people management.

Key trends identified:

- Despite a 19 % in full-time senior staff and improved governance structure, the NICS leadership has not demonstrated the necessary skills or effectiveness to transform the workforce.
- Of NICS staff (97% of whom are in non-industrial roles) two thirds of jobs are categorised as general service.
- 5,486 vacant posts have been declared in NICS.
- A greater reliance on temporary staffing solutions - with 4,939 agency workers employed as of 1 April 2025 (more than double the number recorded in April 2019).
- Increasing sickness absence rates, with an average of 13.4 days lost per staff, with costs rising from £32.9m in 2018-19 to £48.8m in 2024-25.
- Despite there being twenty-six professions within the NICS, only a fraction of the NICS workforce is linked to one. For comparison, the Cabinet Office assigns all employees to a specific profession (either operational, policy, functional and specialist).
- The NICS does not routinely collect data on the underperformance of staff.

- HR Connect, the designated recruitment service provider for the NICS, is unable to meet the scale and pace of recruitment demanded by departments
- Workforce productivity is not formally measured across the NICS, limiting the ability to assess performance and measure the impact of new or revised policies, such as hybrid working.

Critically, the Comptroller and Auditor General found that:

“In the absence of a robust data-driven Workforce Plan that aligns business priorities with required roles, skills and existing talent, the NICS cannot reliably identify genuine skill surpluses or deficits across the organisation.”

The Report also recommended:

- Developing Strategic Workforce Plans over the next two years
- Placing a strong emphasis on identifying critical posts and succession planning
- Establishing data-driven metrics to evaluate performance and outcomes, including clear key performance indicators and regular reporting to senior leadership.
- The introduction of new technology to support the reform of its workforce management.
- The HR processes delivered by DoF’s shared service must be streamlined and efficient, reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and make effective use of technologies.

“Getting It Right First Time” - A missed opportunity for health?

The Department of Health commissioned the NHS England Get it Right First Time (GIRFT) team to undertake a review to identify potential efficiencies in non-clinical areas across the health and social care system in Northern Ireland. The review report was published in January 20125, with 37 recommendations provided. These included:

i. Estates

- Establishing an overarching Health Property Asset Management (PAM) Board with main duties to provide strategic planning for estates performance, maintenance and efficiency.
- Benchmarking sites to measure and compare at site level space utilisation, annual running costs, and sustainability.
- Mandating agile and hybrid working throughout region.
- Scoping out a project to deliver more effective medical storage solutions to include consolidation of warehousing and training facilities.
- Benchmarking sustainability data to help drive improvements in utility, waste etc, and exploit more widely any regional 'invest to save' initiatives.

ii. Litigation

- Introducing a new system or database to allow interrogation of data to easily identify claims based on themes and specialties.
- Establishing regional programmes to recommend 'saying sorry', a 'just and fair' culture for staff.
- Appointing a forensic accountant to review patterns and trends.
- Introducing clear standardised processes across NI for each Trust to feedback learning of claims from litigation managers to frontline clinical staff.

- iii. Back-office and corporate support;
 - Examining opportunities for further consolidation of some corporate services (e.g. within finance and HR)
 - Reviewing opportunities to develop a regional approach to training delivery to release space, reduce costs and develop a regional strategy for training and development.

- iv. Reporting structures
 - Developing Key Performance Indicators focusing on BSO's role in delivering savings and efficiency.
 - Clarifying roles, responsibilities and accountabilities between BSO and Trusts.
 - Agreeing KPIs and benchmarks and for all services currently delivered by BSO.

- v. Commercialisation
 - Trusts should explore the scope to renting vacant estate to retail outlets on their sites.
 - Trusts should explore opportunities to develop income streams from research including industry sponsored studies.
 - BSO should explore opportunities to provide business services to other public sector bodies e.g. salary services.

- vi. Procurement
 - Reducing the spread of products that clinicians are able to routinely choose from - removing the ability for clinical teams to use higher-cost suppliers when lower-cost alternatives are available.

- Moving to a more competitive approach where suppliers actively compete for a place on BSO's framework
- Regularly re-tendering to test the market, ensuring pricing remains competitive
- Undertaking regular benchmarking against other sources to give confidence that Northern Ireland prices represent value for money
- Examining potential future coordination with procurement with approaches in England

vii. Medical staffing

- Develop an overarching regional medical staffing strategy.
- Establishing a regional cap for agency medical staff with associated escalation process and accountability framework.
- Developing a regional job planning framework to harmonise practice across Trusts
- Considering the regional procurement of job planning software for all Trusts.
- Developing a regional approach to international fellows and CESR programme.
- Considering a Service Level Agreement for selected services in hard to recruit localities with a single provider Trust e.g. dermatology & neurology.

The Department of Health responded to the Review, stating the following:

“The review has made 37 recommendations across these areas and work is underway to develop an action plan to address the recommendations. Some of the recommendations made will

require investment to enable efficiencies to be realised and will therefore take time to implement. Some will also need to be held while funding streams are identified...

Amongst the recommendations to reduce procurement costs was the suggestion to standardise, where clinically possible, the products available through procurement frameworks. A pilot project is currently underway focussing on products within Orthopaedics as well as Endoscopy accessories. It will also consider how the buying approach by Trusts can be improved, so that value for money is one of the criteria used when selecting products on frameworks...

Whilst Trusts work closely with the Department and other health agencies to develop common processes and apply learning from elsewhere, there has to be a recognition that each Trust also faces unique challenges which result in differentiated working practices. This recognition of the individual needs of the communities within each Trust is to be commended and encouraged and there needs to be recognition of the balance needed between standardisation of practices and the need for local variations.

Department of Education's Five-Year Budget Strategy

The Minister of Education published a five-year budget strategy for public consultation on 6 February 2026 following what he described as deepening budget crisis facing education in Northern Ireland. Drawing on the Independent Review of Education, this Strategy identifies a number key areas where reforms could reduce costs over the next five years.

These include:

Reforming home-to-school transport

- Revising the eligibility criteria, including narrowing the definition of “nearest suitable school” to align more closely with other parts of the UK.
- Taking forward the introduction of transport charges for some pupils, as recommended by the Independent Review of Education.
- Aligning SEN transport with wider SEN reforms in mainstream schools
- Reducing reliance on taxis, ensuring good value for public money.
- Reviewing how additional transport needs are assessed.

Modernising school meals delivery

- Consolidating meal production at primary level utilising a smaller number of well-equipped production kitchens.
- Reducing net costs by increasing the number of paying pupils, including through a cashless catering system and associated parental payment app across all post primary schools.

Reshaping the SEN support model in mainstream schools

- A SEN budget for schools will be introduced to provide funding directly, giving autonomy to develop flexible approaches.
- A team-based flexible support model to replace one-to-one classroom assistant assignments
- Involving small group-based provision alongside specialist therapeutic input from a range of professionals.

Restructuring the schools estate, including reducing the number of schools

- Appointing an Independent Commission to:
 - Carry out a comprehensive viability audit of all schools to assess sustainability
 - Make evidence-based recommendations for restructuring the school estate, ensuring resources are focused where they deliver the greatest benefit for pupils.
 - Produce a detailed five-year implementation plan

2. Introducing a new model of financial management for schools

- A traffic-light system will be introduced, enabling the EA to prioritise intervention where it is most needed.
- A centralised staffing model, similar to that used in the Republic of Ireland, will be implemented for schools in significant deficit, with an agreed teacher complement over a defined period, and supported by clear management plan.

Recent developments in Scotland

Public Sector Reform Strategy

The Scottish Government published a major public sector reform strategy in June 2025, committing to adopting a preventative, joined-up and efficient approach to the delivery of public services through 16 workstreams. Notable pledges included:

- Identifying duplication across public bodies and working with those bodies to share processes/services.
- Where necessary, identifying and implementing changes to the status of public bodies where this prevents them delivering to best effect.
- Applying a presumption against the creation of new public bodies by assessing and challenging any new proposals.
- Measuring preventative spend by Government
- Changing budget processes to allow resources to move between portfolios, organisations and services in order to share resources and collaborate across boundaries.
- Developing an Invest to Save scheme to support the move to preventative investment.
- Enabling effective sharing of critical data
- Setting financial targets, including for Scottish Government operating and staff costs. These include reducing corporate costs in the public sector by 20% over the next five years and ensuring 25% of public sector correspondence is digital by 2030.
- Taking steps to reprofile the public sector workforce
- Developing a workforce management policy and governance framework, including the impact of projected demand for public services on workforce size and shape.
- Strengthening leadership capability on workforce planning and organisational restructuring
- Increasing cost avoidance and cashable savings to up to £300 million over a two-year period by increasing usage of existing national collaborative agreements for procurement
- Identifying and delivering efficiencies in public service operations from using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Piloting a Scottish Government app as a gateway to personalised public services.
- Using geospatial data from satellites and LiDAR surveys to reduce the requirement to visually inspect the natural and built environment, reducing the cost of regulation and grant management.

Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan

As an outworking of the Public Sector Reform Strategy, the Scottish Government has published a Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan, which commits in general terms to:

- Identifying and prioritising higher impact spending
- Reviewing all spending lines
- Reviewing opportunities to target existing spending more effectively
- Reviewing options for public bodies to more effectively raise revenue from government services.
- Improving the evidence base for the impact of existing spending; and
- Efficiencies and productivity.

Among the headline measures being taken forward include:

- A public sector workforce reduction target of 0.5 per cent per annum on average over the next five years - delivered through service re-design, automation, re-prioritisation, mergers, and shrinking corporate functions. However frontline roles are protected.
- Multi-year pay metrics for the public sector - the Scottish Government's Public Sector Pay Policy 2025-26 to 2027-28 sets an overall pay envelope/ceiling of 9% over three years, with a cap of 3% for any single-year deal.

Planned UK Government reforms

On 20 January, Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister Darren Jones set out plans to modern public services. The proposals include:

- Establishing a National School of Government and Public Services to train civil servants in the skills needed to deliver the new digital state.
- Remove the layers of bureaucracy civil servants have to navigate to deliver for the public, including through the creation of delivery taskforces that will be able to expedite recruitment and bring in external expertise on short-term appointments
- Ensuring the hiring criteria for senior civil servants put greater value on experience of frontline delivery, innovation and the private sector, rather than policy-writing.
- Civil servants assessed as under-performing and who fail to improve will be dismissed, with senior civil servants will having their performance marked against KPIs set by Ministers.

Evolution of DUP policy

Since 2007, the DUP has been to the forefront in a series of public sector reforms intended to promote more efficient and accountable government. This has included advocating successfully for:

- A reduction in the number of Government Departments from 12 to 9
- A reduction in the number of Councils from 26 to 11
- A Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme
- The establishment of a NI Public Sector Innovation Laboratory

- Expanding Northern Ireland's 'shared services' government systems
- The creation of a Delivery Unit within the Executive Office to progress reform and transformation.

In the run up to the 2022 Assembly and 2024 General Elections manifestos, we set out further proposals for root and branch civil service reform in Northern Ireland, with a particular focus on:

- Addressing the NICS position as a standalone body - detached from the UK Home Service - and the disadvantages that brings in terms of the transferability of skills and expertise
- Driving and improving cross-departmental collaboration to avoid a departmental 'silo' mentality
- The need for recruitment programmes that reflects a full range of skillsets and depends less on general posts;
- Greater collaboration with both the third sector and private sector and the NICS in the development of policy proposals for Ministers.

We have also consistently supported the implementation of the Bengoa health reforms and smarter justice, the latter, in particular, envisaging the utilisation of technology to help citizens have greater access to the criminal justice system and to improve the efficiency of the system more generally.

These proposals build on longstanding DUP commitments to public sector reform through a National Reform Plan, which envisioned pillars including digital government, change funds, alternative models of service delivery and harnessing the benefits of data analytics.

We have said repeatedly that reforming public services is not solely about realising efficiencies so that Northern Ireland can live within its means. It is also about

delivering a more effective and efficient public sector and enabling those additional savings to be spent on priorities like schools, hospitals and roads.

Policy proposals

The DUP believes there is a need to inject a fresh impetus into public sector reform. Taking account of Northern Ireland's unique institutional arrangements, whereby Executive decisions are generally reached by consensus rather than on a formal basis of collective responsibility, we believe the most cogent way of realising progress would be for parties entitled to Executive representation after the next Assembly Election to reach agreement on a number of strategic priorities prior to the running of the d'Hondt process. This would also be in keeping with commitments made in the Stormont House Agreement.

In this context, the DUP will seek political agreement on a landmark Public Sector Reform Strategy for Northern Ireland, with an ambitious and costed implementation plan. We recognise that this would require significant upfront investment to enable interventions which release cash efficiencies and increase cost avoidance over the short to medium term. In our separate policy paper on *A New Fiscal Framework for Northern Ireland*, we argue that a new Invest to Save programme, funded by the UK Government, is both necessary and justified to meet this objective.

We believe any Public Sector Reform Strategy should include the following pillars:

1. Accelerating Civil Service transformation

The DUP remains unconvinced that the present leadership of the Northern Ireland Civil Service has the capacity, or the collective will, to deliver necessary reform and modernisation of the workforce. We propose the time-bound appointment of an

independent adviser with a proven track record in workforce transformation and/or public sector reform to drive this forward. They would receive unfettered access to data held by departments in relation to workforce planning, recruitment and performance and have the ability to recruit a limited number of staff with specialist expertise to inform advice to the First and deputy First Ministers.

We envisage that the primary function of the independent adviser would be to provide recommendations on the size and profile of the Northern Ireland Civil Service in the medium-term. This would provide a strong challenge function to departments in the development of Strategic Workforce Plans within the timelines recommended in the January 2026 NI Audit Office report on *Leading and Resourcing the Northern Ireland Civil Service*.

We believe this proposal would also provide a level of objectivity and strategic planning that is often lacking because of the 'silo' mentality displayed throughout the Civil Service. In working to address the needs of the NICS workforce holistically, rather than in a piecemeal fashion, we feel there are a number of issues that an independent adviser could advance, including:

- Identifying skills surpluses and deficits across the public sector.
- Establishing workforce baselines for all departments and arms-length bodies.
- Examining whether a headline public sector workforce reduction target should be introduced.
- Assessing where workforce efficiencies could be released through fostering innovation and introducing new technologies
- Examining whether a baseline level of digital expertise, backed up by mandatory training, should be a requirement for all new senior civil servants.
- Proposing measures to reduce reliance on agency spend.

- Recommending a new, more robust and transparent framework to track and tackle underperformance, including for senior civil servants.
- Examining whether modest but regular compulsory redundancy rounds would improve workforce efficiency vis a vis voluntary exit schemes or hiring freezes.
- Establishing a credible performance management policy and line manager structure for the Head of the Civil Service.
- Evaluating recruitment practices, with a particular focus on removing barriers to hiring those with specialist or private sector experience.
- Considering the merits of market-based pay flexibilities and non-salary incentives to attract the right talent, especially for specialist financial and digital roles.
- Establishing productivity metrics to ensure workforce outputs can be formally monitored.
- Assessing the efficacy of home or hybrid working policies.
- Proposing measures to drive down rates of sickness absence, with an emphasis on prevention.
- Examining the potential for greater integration with the Home Civil Service, with particular attention given to training opportunities across all staff grades and skills areas.
- Pursuing greater efficiency in the Department of Finance's Shared Services.

2. Prioritising prevention

The DUP wants to see mission-led government in Northern Ireland. That means ensuring Executive policies are targeted on achieving long-term goals for our society rather than short-term targets. We believe prevention, and securing a better understanding of the drivers of demand, must be a key pillar of public sector reform.

This will not only enable the Executive to design interventions that address the root causes of poor life outcomes but also promote fiscal sustainability by easing acute pressures on frontline services in the medium to long term.

Going forward, the DUP will:

- Require individual departments to report periodically on the drivers of demand for their services.
- Seek Executive agreement on costed proposals to address demand drivers, with a particular focus on:
 - Reforming primary, community and social care
 - Investing in early years and education
 - Tackling socio-economic and health inequalities
 - Preventing offending and reoffending
- Back this up through an Invest to Save fund agreed with the UK Government as part of a new Fiscal Framework
- Ensure departments track preventative spend by departments as part of the budget process.

We acknowledge that a shift in public spending toward preventative interventions may in cases require inescapable structural reform. The DUP believes that wherever possible, compulsory redundancies should be minimised, promoting instead a cascade approach that firstly considers redeployment (with a focus on pooling of resources between departments), retirement and voluntary redundancy.

3. An efficiency agenda

The DUP will pursue a relentless approach to eliminating wasteful spending across government. Almost two decades have passed since Executive departments last

committed to making cumulative efficiency savings as part of the budget process.

We believe the Executive should address this and draw on the recent experience of the Office for Value for Money within HM Treasury to bolster scrutiny into value for money in public spending and encourage continuous improvement.

In particular, we will:

- Agree mandatory, rolling targets for every department to identify and deliver efficiencies in day-to-day spending.
- Require each department to publish an efficiency plan biennially to demonstrate how they will meet these targets. These plans should, in particular, quantify and improve understanding of the cost of services and draw on recommendations made by the NI Audit Office following the 2008-2011 Efficiency Delivery Programme.
- Seek to reduce corporate costs in the public sector by 20% by end the next Assembly mandate, including cut spending on consultants and hospitality by 50%.
- Ensure departments take a more hands-on approach to requiring efficiency savings from their ALBs.
- Advance an ambitious NI Health and Social Care efficiency programme, based on the framework and recommendations outlined in the 2025 'Getting It Right First Time' Review.
- Support a fundamental overhaul of the current commissioning and delivery framework for major infrastructure projects. This must streamline processes, improve accountability and tackle unacceptable project delays.
- Drive down legal bills across departments and in health and social care trusts by equipping staff to identify and mitigate risks of litigation and through early settlement.
- Target better cooperation between departments and public bodies in terms of sharing of back-office services.

- Explore opportunities for estates rationalisation, including speeding up disposal processes, as well as commercial opportunities from vacant space.
- Exploit the opportunities provided by newly agreed arrangements on the transfer of surplus land between departments and public bodies, with view to utilising as subsidy for housebuilding.
- Increase the proportion of government procurement via collaborative agreements and strengthen competition.
- Drive down the level of direct award contracts.
- Harness the potential of artificial intelligence and digitalisation in non-frontline roles and for public sector correspondence.
- Increase the use of LiDAR surveys and other geospatial tools to reduce the cost of physical inspections and monitoring the natural and built environment.
- Reduce ideological spending across government. This will be considered in greater detail in our separate policy paper on *Restoring Common Sense*.

4. More accountable government

We believe Executive departments and public bodies should be held accountable for decisions taken that affect everyday life in Northern Ireland. Senior civil servants and public service leaders should not operate in a vacuum. The DUP wants to see lines of ministerial accountability strengthened.

We will:

- Identify opportunities to reduce the number of arm's length bodies in Northern Ireland - or make changes to their status - with view to ending duplication and achieving better value for money.

- Seek Executive agreement on a presumption against creating new public bodies, building on the Ministerial Control Framework operated by the Scottish Government.
- Explore whether ministers should be given additional powers in circumstances where a public service is failing, including consideration of making provision for Intervention Orders, as is in place in England.
- Create bespoke delivery taskforces where departments consistently demonstrate a lack of skills or capacity to deliver on the aims of the Programme for Government. This could involve fast tracking recruitment and removing layers of approvals.
- Rationalise Northern Ireland’s environmental protection architecture. We do not believe the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs should be outsourcing responsibility in this area to a myriad of agencies. In particular, we will oppose the establishment of an independent environmental protection agency, which risks duplication. We will also legislate to clarify that guidance provided by Shared Environmental Services is not to be deemed determinative by Councils in planning decisions.
- Seek to abolish the unnecessary role of Climate Change Commissioner given that other bodies, including the UK Climate Change Committee, already provide this function.
- Shift government’s relationship with the community and voluntary sector from one of a ‘giver’ to an ‘investor’, building on the longstanding OECD recommendation.