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Ulster Wildlife has deployed 2,000 adult European oysters (*Ostrea edulis*) and 30,000 juvenile oysters in a bid to restore oyster reefs in Belfast Lough.

BELFAST EXPENSIVE AREA FOR YOUNG DRIVER INSURANCE

Young motorists in Northern Ireland are facing hair raising car insurance premiums of £1470, just £8 off London, the UK's most expensive region.

Using data from Q4 2025, car insurance experts at CompareNI.com reviewed the insurance costs of teenage drivers both locally and across the UK to try and discover ways to reduce costs.

While most UK regions saw premiums for young drivers drop, prices in Northern Ireland rocketed by £152 over the previous quarter – the biggest jump anywhere in the UK.

London tops the list of most expensive regions in the UK for young drivers, with Northern Ireland coming a very close second, followed by Yorkshire in third place.

Across Northern Ireland, seven of the District Council areas saw teenagers facing premiums of over £2000, with Belfast, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Fermanagh & Omagh the worst affected.

Not surprisingly, the youngest drivers, 17 and 18-year-olds, were the most expensive to insure – with 18-old-drivers in Belfast facing eye-watering costs of more than £3000.

The average cost of car insurance in Northern Ireland is currently £626, which is £19 higher than the overall UK average.

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THOUSANDS OF OYSTERS DEPLOYED IN BELFAST LOUGH TO HELP REVIVE ENDANGERED SPECIES

Thousands of European oysters have been placed on the seabed of Belfast Lough, marking a major step in efforts to revive this near-extinct native species.

In a first for Northern Ireland, local nature conservation charity Ulster Wildlife has deployed 2,000 adult European oysters (*Ostrea edulis*) and 30,000 juvenile oysters, called spat, attached to shells.

This marks the next step in plans to restore oyster reefs – vital habitats that support the recovery of this endangered species and deliver wider benefits for people and the marine environment. European oysters

disappeared from Belfast Lough more than a century ago, due to overfishing, pollution and habitat loss. A small surviving number were discovered in 2020, inspiring Ulster Wildlife to establish a

network of protected nurseries, including one at Belfast Harbour's City Quays, to help bring the native species back from the brink.

**Continued on
page 4**

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Macmillan Cancer Support is new Assembly ‘Charity of the Year’

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has selected Macmillan Cancer Support as its chosen charity for 2026.

The Speaker of the Assembly, Edwin Poots MLA made the announcement at an event in the Great Hall, Parliament Buildings recently where he was joined by representatives from Macmillan as well as Assembly Commission staff and service users of the charity.

In late 2025, Assembly Commission staff were asked to nominate charities which met the Speaker’s selected charitable purpose of ‘the advancement of health or the saving of lives’. With 13 charities shortlisted, staff voted for Macmillan as their preferred choice.



Pictured (left-right) Liz Beaton from the Northern Ireland Assembly’s Charity Fundraising Group with Aaron Nugent, Macmillan Cancer Support Relationship Fundraising Manager; the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Edwin Poots MLA and Jessica Sturgeon, a Macmillan Cancer Support service user. The Assembly Commission has chosen Macmillan as its ‘Charity of the Year’ for 2026. Picture: Michael Cooper

Speaker Poots said: “Today marks the start of a year-long fundraising campaign by the Assembly Commission staff which I’m sure will significantly benefit Macmillan Cancer Support, and all those people who are helped by them. Many of us are sadly familiar with the impact a cancer diagnosis can have, and we hope that the contribution made to Macmillan over the

next 12 months will go some way towards maintaining the excellent service they provide. Assembly Commission staff have been extremely proactive and creative in the past in finding ways for people in Parliament Buildings to show their generosity and I look forward to being involved in those fundraising efforts to support Macmillan over the next 12 months.”

Aaron Nugent, Relationship Fundraising Manager with Macmillan added: “The impact of a cancer diagnosis often ripples through families, friendships, workplaces, and communities. Macmillan’s services and support play a vital role in ensuring that everyone affected by cancer can access the care and support they need, and particularly for those who need us the most.

We are delighted to have been selected as the Assembly Commission’s charity of the year for 2026 and for the continued opportunity to work closely alongside Members, staff, and all those connected to the Assembly. Together, we’ll do even more for people with cancer across Northern Ireland, supporting those who need us now and sparking a revolution for cancer in the future.”

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BELFAST HARBOUR ANNOUNCES £350,000 COMMUNITY FUND PROGRAMME FOR 2026

Belfast Harbour has announced a £350,000 Community Fund Programme for 2026 to further support local communities in the city and across Northern Ireland.

This funding brings Belfast Harbour's support to community and charity-based initiatives to more than £3.5 million over the past decade.

Rooted in its Trust Port ethos and corporate values, Belfast Harbour continues to advance regional prosperity

through initiatives that drive inclusive growth, social wellbeing, and environmental sustainability. This open and responsible approach ensures that every investment directly benefits people and communities across the city and beyond.

Building on previous years, including a £335,000 investment in the Community Fund last year, the 2026 commitment will strengthen existing partnerships, build new relationships and foster collaboration across key areas such as employability, skills development, community resilience, and green innovation.

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons MLA has welcomed the announcement of Belfast Harbour's Community Fund Programme for 2026, highlighting its importance in supporting local

communities.

The Minister said: "I welcome Belfast Harbour's continued commitment to investing in local communities through its £350,000 Community Fund Programme for 2026. This initiative reflects Belfast Harbour's long-standing dedication to inclusive growth and social wellbeing, ensuring that prosperity is shared widely across Northern Ireland. By continuing to support projects that help to build skills, resilience, and sustainability, Belfast Harbour is helping to create opportunities that will benefit at individual and community levels for generations to come."

The Belfast Harbour Community Fund Programme is central to the Trust Port's role as a driver of economic growth and regeneration, working hand-in-hand with local partners and grassroots organisations to deliver lasting social and



economic impact.

Joe O'Neill, Chief Executive of Belfast Harbour, said: "As a Trust Port, Belfast Harbour exists to serve our customers and the community. Every pound of post-tax profit we make is reinvested to strengthen the port, create opportunities, enhance sustainability, and build a thriving Belfast for people, businesses, and generations to come. We are proud to lead the way by ringfencing

1% of annual operating profit to supporting local communities, as a long-term commitment benefiting our neighbours, wider society and our organisation."

In 2026, the Belfast Harbour Community Fund Programme will continue to support established partners while welcoming new collaborations with organisations such as Simon Community and NI Game Academy, with a particular focus

on youth engagement and environmental sustainability. The funding also includes enhanced support for the Ulster Orchestra and the Belfast International Arts Festival in recognition of their impactful project delivery. Together, these initiatives demonstrate Belfast Harbour's ongoing commitment to diverse, high-impact investments that create lasting community value.

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Continued from page 1

Supported by Belfast Harbour and DAERA, via the Carrier Bag Levy, the innovative pilot project will scale-up the restoration of wild populations. As the oysters grow, they will release millions of larvae

into the Lough each year. European oysters, and other shellfish, help improve water quality, as each adult oyster can filter up to 200 litres of water a day – roughly the equivalent of a bath – removing nutrients and, in time, helping to reduce coastal erosion.

Dr Nick Baker-Horne, Marine Conservation

Manager with Ulster Wildlife, said: "This is a significant step forward in helping to restore this small but mighty ocean superhero. Over the past four years, our nurseries have thrived and we have gained invaluable knowledge about these fantastic ecosystem engineers. Deploying them onto the seabed is the next step to restore our lost oyster reefs and, alongside our nurseries we hope the population will grow, and create thriving habitats for a host of marine life. We will be watching the oysters closely to guide even bigger deployment projects in Belfast Lough in the future."

The oysters, delivered from The Oyster Restoration Company (TORC) from Scotland, were cleaned, screened

and measured before being deployed onto the seabed at low tide by a team of staff and volunteers from the local nature conservation charity. Regular checks will be conducted to assess their survival and growth.

Simon Gibson, Marine, Environment & Biodiversity Officer at Belfast Harbour, added:

"The seabed deployment is an exciting expansion of the current drive to restore European oysters within Belfast Lough. This project, a first for NI will support Belfast Harbour's sustainability ambitions by promoting improved water quality and bolstering marine biodiversity. We are proud to play our part in this pioneering project."

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Could there be a new moveable active travel bridge across the River Lagan?

Global consulting engineer Arup and leading bridge designer Knight Architects will work with Eadon Consulting (mechanical and electrical engineering) and Cumming Group (cost consultancy) to deliver RIBA Stages 0-2, resulting in a preferred Sailortown Bridge option recommendation next year.

Chair of Belfast City Council’s City Growth and Regeneration Committee, Councillor Ian McLaughlin said: “Sailortown Bridge will help us achieve the Belfast Waterfront Framework’s vision of a better connected, more vibrant and more attractive corridor linking to and with key education, leisure, tourism and economic destinations, neighbourhood communities and the city centre.

“So we’re delighted to see this much-needed regeneration project moving forward, thanks to investment from the Department for Infrastructure. With this level of expertise on board, I’m confident that the resulting design concepts will be iconic, and that the bridge will encourage more people to walk, wheel and cycle to the many key destinations around the Harbour Loop along



both sides of the River Lagan.” Héctor Beade, Design Director at Knight Architects, added: “The area’s shipbuilding history, unique waterfront setting, river navigation requirements, and modal shift opportunities all combine to make this a very exciting project. We are looking forward to getting

started with our integrated consultant team partners on this transformational scheme for the people of Belfast.” Mike Mitchell, Project Director at Arup, said: “We are proud to be involved on this project that promises to make a pivotal contribution to Belfast’s active travel infrastructure, with a new link across

the River Lagan downstream of the existing Lagan Weir bridge. In connecting the historic Sailortown district with the Titanic Quarter via an opening bridge, the uninterrupted active travel corridor from the Lagan Gateway will be extended, whilst also providing stronger links to the recently upgraded York Street train station.”



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Vital role of Sure Start programme recognised by Lord Mayor of Belfast

A programme which supports young children and their families living in disadvantaged areas of Belfast has been selected as one of Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tracy Kelly’s charities for her year in office.

Sure Start provides advice and opportunities to parents from pregnancy until their child’s fourth birthday, supporting them to flourish at home, at school and beyond.

“As someone who used Sure Start services myself when I became a mum for the first time, I know just how valuable their support can be,” said Councillor Kelly.

“They offer a safe place for parents to meet with professionals, each other and local services and understand what help and support is available to them, especially if they’re dealing with particular challenges or aren’t sure where to turn to next on their parenting journey.

“The team at Sure Start are a wealth of information, helping children right through until school age, to communicate, play and get the best start in life. Their contribution to our local communities is second to none, and I am delighted to help shine a light on their work through my role this year.”

There are nine Sure Start projects in Belfast,



providing everything from breastfeeding advice and nutritional guidance to help with speech and language and access to good quality play opportunities.

Each scheme offers home-based and community support and works directly with parents, statutory agencies and community organisations to tailor activities and services for local families.

Joy Poots, Project Co-ordinator for South Belfast

Sure Start, said: “We are really honoured to have been chosen as one of the Lord Mayor’s charities this year. We will be coming 25 years old in 2026, and this feels like such a validation of our work with young children and families in the communities we serve.

“Over the years, we have built trusting relationships with families and other community groups, and it is these relationships which are the basis of the positive

outcomes achieved for our children and families.”

Each year, the Lord Mayor of Belfast selects a number of charities to support during their year in office.

Other charities announced by Councillor Kelly this year include Little Heroes and NI Alternatives.

More information about Sure Start services in Belfast, visit nidirect.gov.uk and search for ‘Sure Start’.



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THREE CORNERED GARLIC

A few years ago, I became aware of a roadside plant growing extensively in winter and carrying white flowers. It looked like wild garlic; it smelled like wild garlic; so, it must be wild garlic.

Wrong!! Sadly, it's actually a blow-in, an alien invasive species, commonly called three-cornered garlic, a native of the Mediterranean area, and like so many other plants

and animals was either introduced (as were rhododendrons, which are now a major problem in some of our forests) or brought in accidentally (which is presumably how the invasive zebra mussels found their way into Lough Neagh, contributing to its ecological collapse). The problem with alien species is that they didn't evolve here and have no natural predators or limits to their spread. Some aliens may not thrive, but those that do can end up being a problem. One of the best (or worst) examples is American



grey squirrels, introduced in the 1800s, which almost wiped out our red squirrels. Three-cornered garlic is just one more alien, which will probably continue to thrive, out-competing primroses and violets on roadsides and elsewhere. It's notoriously difficult to remove and eradicate, and testament to its ability to spread and take over foreign parts is the fact that it's known as angled onion in Australia and onion weed in New Zealand; it's also in some areas of North and South America. While three-cornered garlic and our native wild garlic (sometimes called ramsons) are similar in appearance, they can be

identified, particularly by their stems: the former has a ribbed stem which is concavely triangular when cut laterally (hence its common name). Additionally, the natives are usually found in damp woodland, seldom on road verges, and flower much later, in April to June. These days, our gardens are full of imported flowering plant species, so to prevent their introduction to our wild places and becoming problem aliens, I ask that gardeners do not discard cultivated seed and plants in waste land, roadsides, parks and similar areas; just keep them in your garden to enjoy. Thank you. JVA

Flour Power: Elizabeth's Home Bakery

Now established for over 14 years at its current site, Elizabeth's Home Bakery has evolved from a local favorite into a Belfast institution—though Stephen would be the first to tell you that the secret to their longevity isn't reinventing the wheel, but rather perfecting the classics.

Stephen Brown's journey with the "Elizabeth's" name spans far longer than his time on the Belmont Road. With nearly 40 years of experience in the craft, Stephen originally spent two decades working at the bakery's former site in Ballyhackamore. After owning that location for 11 years and taking a well-earned sabbatical, he returned to his passion, opening the current shop at 29 Belmont Road and bringing the heritage of the Elizabeth's name with him. Elizabeth's remains a traditional, old-style home bakery. The shelves are a testament to Northern Irish baking heritage, featuring:

- The Famous Sausage Rolls: Frequently cited by locals and online reviewers as the "best

in Belfast," known for their perfect pastry and seasoned filling.

- Breads & Scones: From crusty sodas and wheaten bread to fruit-filled scones that are a morning staple for commuters.
- Classic Treats: German biscuits, traybakes, apple tarts, and seasonal highlights like their legendary Christmas mince pies.

What the Locals Say:

Recent feedback highlights why Elizabeth's continues to thrive:

- "The best sausage rolls in East Belfast, hands down. You can tell they use quality ingredients and the pastry is always light and flaky." — Google Review
- "A proper bakery. No gimmicks, just great bread and the friendliest staff. Their German

biscuits take me right back to my childhood." — Local Guide

- "I love how they support the local schools. It's more than just a shop; it's part of the fabric of the road." — Facebook Comment

Beyond the ovens, Elizabeth's is deeply embedded in community life. Stephen and his team are frequently involved with local school initiatives and charity drives, using their platform (and their Facebook page) to "spread the smiles" throughout East Belfast.

If you find yourself on the Belmont Road, follow the scent of fresh bread to number 29.

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Too Many Lives Lost to Suicide: Stand with PIPS Charity. Demand Change.

New figures released by NISRA lay bare a devastating truth: 290 people were registered as having died by suicide in Northern Ireland in 2024.

Each number represents a life, a family shattered, and a community left grieving. This is not a statistic to be quietly absorbed — it is an urgent warning.

In response, PIPS Suicide Prevention Charity has launched its campaign, "Too Many

Lives Lost to Suicide. Stand with PIPS Charity. Demand Change."

It comes at a critical moment, as the delivery of Northern Ireland's Mental Health Strategy — a strategy designed to reform services and save lives — faces severe disruption due to funding

cuts. At a time when demand is rising, within a broken Mental Health system "

"These 290 lives mattered," said Renée Quinn, CEO of PIPS Charity. "Without proper investment in Crisis community Mental Health Services, our services are being stretched beyond breaking point. Our communities deserve better than the cuts being imposed upon us as it places more people at risk. How can we face those who come after us and admit we did enough?"

Though PIPS receives no government funding for its core services, it continues to absorb increasing pressure from long NHS waiting lists and overstretched statutory services. The

charity warns that without a properly structured and resourced mental health system, every organisation — and every family — will continue to feel the strain.

Mental health support is not optional; it is a human right. Scaling back risks undoing years of hard work and will inevitably cost more lives. As a society we simply cannot afford to step backwards.

Every number is a name. Every statistic is a story. Every life lost is one too many.

If you believe every life should be protected, if you believe mental health services must be funded — stand with PIPS today.

Hope cannot be scaled back.

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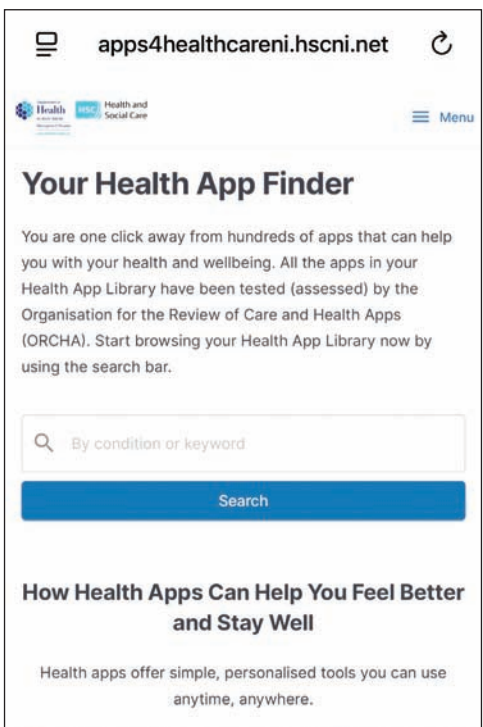
Over 1,000 Health Apps Available to Support Wellbeing This Winter

The Health Minister is encouraging people to make use of the Health and Social Care (HSC) App Library this festive period to help support their health and wellbeing.

With over 1,000 HSC-endorsed apps available, the library offers trusted information and guidance across a wide range of topics, including mental health, healthy ageing, general wellbeing and advice on staying well during the winter months. The apps can be downloaded on smartphones and tablets and accessed anytime, anywhere.

The Health Minister said it is especially important to look after ourselves and one another, noting that winter can be a challenging time, particularly for those affected by cold weather, loneliness or increased stress. He encouraged people to explore the HSC App Library, which includes safe and trusted apps for both adults and children to support the management of a variety of health conditions.

He also highlighted the additional pressure currently facing HSC services, adding that taking small steps to improve physical and mental wellbeing can make a positive difference. The range of approved apps, he said, offers something for everyone.



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Your Health App Finder

You are one click away from hundreds of apps that can help you with your health and wellbeing. All the apps in your Health App Library have been tested (assessed) by the Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Apps (ORCHA). Start browsing your Health App Library now by using the search bar.

By condition or keyword

Search

How Health Apps Can Help You Feel Better and Stay Well

Health apps offer simple, personalised tools you can use anytime, anywhere.

Dr Paul Rice, Chief Digital Information Officer in the Department of Health, said digital tools give people easy access to information, helping them better understand their conditions and take greater control of their health. He noted that whether it is managing stress, staying

active during colder months or finding support to stop smoking, the library provides reliable, easy-to-understand resources. The HSC App Library is managed by Digital Health and Care Northern Ireland in partnership with ORCHA, with all

apps assessed for clinical assurance, data protection and usability. Lifeline, Northern Ireland's crisis response helpline, is available 24/7 on 0808 808 8000. They are available to download 24 hours a day

across 365 days of the year. You can search for key terms here: apps4healthcareni.hscni.net/en-GB or browse through all of the apps here: dhcni.hscni.net/hsc-apps-library/



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GO ALL IN AGAINST CANCER AT RACE FOR LIFE BELFAST

The Traitors star Leanne Quigley is urging people across Northern Ireland to kick-start the New Year by signing up for Cancer Research UK's Race for Life in Belfast.

The much-loved fundraising event will return to Stormont Estate on Sunday 24 May, offering 3k, 5k and 10k routes suitable for people of all ages and abilities. To encourage early sign-ups, anyone who registers in January can claim 30 per cent off the entry fee using the code RFL26NY. Around 10,700 people are diagnosed with cancer in Northern Ireland each year, and money raised through Race for Life helps fund vital research into preventing, detecting and treating the disease. Leanne took part in Race for Life with

her fiancée, Sophie Jones, after Sophie was diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2024. The couple led a team that raised more than £1,200 at a Pretty Muddy event last summer, marking the end of nearly a year of treatment. Now in remission, Sophie received chemotherapy and radiotherapy, including Herceptin – a drug developed through research led by Cancer Research UK scientists. Leanne said: “I’m all in against cancer. Watching Sophie go through treatment was incredibly tough, but crossing the finish line together with our

family and friends was unforgettable. Sophie is back at work, we’re planning our wedding and our twin boys are about to turn three – there’s so much to look forward to. We want to support Race for Life so others facing cancer can have that hope too.” Lisa Adams, Cancer Research UK’s spokeswoman in Northern Ireland, said the charity is calling on communities to unite. “Nearly one in two of us will get cancer in our lifetime, but together we can power the research that will beat it. Race for Life is non-competitive



– people can walk, jog or run at their own pace. What matters is showing up together.” Since 1994, more than 10 million people have taken part in Race for Life, helping fund decades of life-saving breakthroughs. To enter, visit raceforlife.org



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Ballyhackamore Credit Union Moves to Heart of the Community

Ballyhackamore Credit Union (BHCU) is proud to announce a historic milestone in its almost 60-year history.



Just last month the doors officially opened at their brand-new premises at 520 Upper Newtownards Road, moving the credit union into the very heart of its common bond area, which includes BT4, BT5, and BT16. As a not-for-profit organization, BHCU remains a refreshing alternative to traditional banking. Unlike high-



street banks, BHCU is owned by its members, meaning any surplus is returned to the local community rather than outside investors. The move comes with a modern approach to lending: the “Join Today, Borrow Today” policy. New members no longer need a long savings history to access fair finance. With competitive loan rates starting from 9% and flexible repayments, members can borrow up to £20,000 over their shares! Whether it is a small emergency car repair, a dream wedding, or home improvements, BHCU believes no loan is too small to make a difference. While BHCU celebrates its deep roots in the community, it is also looking to the future. With online access via a dedicated app, managing your finances has never been easier. Visit the new office today and discover why BHCU is truly here to lend a hand.

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Omorphia Laser Cosmetics Leads the Way in Belfast

Located at 122c Castlereagh Street, Omorphia Laser Cosmetics is establishing itself as a premier destination for advanced skin and laser treatments.

Founded by owner and lead practitioner Sophie Christie, the clinic is fully RQIA regulated, ensuring that every client receives the highest standard of medical-grade care in a safe, welcoming, and judgment-free environment.

Sophie Christie's journey into the world of aesthetics began with her own first laser treatment in 2015. Inspired by the transformative power of the technology, she utilized the opportunity to qualify at one of London's top laser training clinics, eventually opening her own practice in 2022. "It brings me so much joy when I see men and

women's lives transformed by the services that I provide," Sophie says.

The clinic offers a comprehensive suite of services designed to address a variety of concerns. These include laser hair removal, tattoo removal, carbon facials, and SPMU (Semi-Permanent Makeup) removal. Omorphia is particularly noted for its inclusive approach; transgender and PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) clients are eligible for a 20% discount on all hair removal treatments, recognizing the significant impact these procedures can have on a person's confidence and

quality of life.

Beyond laser technology, the clinic utilizes advanced Cryopen therapy for the removal of warts and skin tags, and offers micro-needling to target wrinkles and pigmentation. As an exclusive stockist of the award-winning vegan skincare range Pestle & Mortar, Sophie also provides personalized consultations to help clients find the perfect facial routine for their unique skin type.

To book a consultation or view a full list of services, visit www.omorphialasercosmetics.com, follow them on Facebook and Instagram, or call 028 9012 4261.

THE WINNING WAY: MASTER LEO MAGUIRE AND THE TAEKWON-DO NORTHERN IRELAND LEGACY

Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland, under the esteemed leadership of Master Leo Maguire, is a prominent force in the martial arts community, shaping the lives of children and adults across the province.

Master Maguire, a VI Degree Black Belt and President of the International Taekwon-Do Federation Northern Ireland (ITF N.I.), has established a network of schools dedicated to fostering confidence, discipline, and self-defense. His distinguished career as a national coach has led the Northern Ireland team to numerous medal victories at both national and international competitions.

The Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland schools offer a comprehensive program tailored to all ages, beginning with the "Little Tiger Cubs" for children aged 3 to 5. This "Learn Through Play" program introduces basic martial arts skills through a fun mixture of games and fitness drills, helping children develop improved balance, coordination, and

respect.

For slightly older children, the "Active Tigers" class (ages 5 to 8) allows students to develop their Taekwon-Do skills at a more relaxed pace. The core "Tae-Kwon Do" program, for students aged 9 to adult, is designed to be safe, practical, and fun. It focuses on the fundamental tenets of the art, including self-defense and self-discipline, while building confidence and physical fitness.

The organization's commitment to excellence was recently highlighted when Lisburn hosted the prestigious 2024 ITF Taekwon-Do Championships at the National Badminton Centre. The historic one-day event brought together Grandmasters, Masters, instructors, and competitors of all ages for a



spectacular display of skill and spirit. Master Maguire, as President of Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland, was instrumental in bringing the event to the region.

Taekwon-Do NI is also very excited to announce that they are working towards sponsorship and

fundraising for a trip to the World Championships that are taking place at the end of October 2026 in Mexico! This is going to be an amazing life changing experience for the Squad and all involved with it!

With a wide range of classes available across

Northern Ireland, anyone interested in experiencing the benefits of Taekwon-Do can easily get involved. To find a full list of classes and begin your journey, visit the official website at www.taekwondo-ni.co.uk or contact Leo Maguire directly at 07891 191494.

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the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor. A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top

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your next city break away.

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The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of

travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect travel option for Christmas shopping. There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with



keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at www.hannoncoach.com

up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking

service. Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit www.hannoncoach.com

ON YOUR MARKS! JIMMY'S 10K ENTRIES OPEN FOR MARCH 2026

Entries are open for the 26th annual Jimmy's 10K road race — proudly sponsored by Finnebrogue, the largest private employer in the Downpatrick area.

The countdown is on as entries officially open for the 26th annual Jimmy's 10K, taking place on Sunday 15 March 2026, hosted by East Down Athletics club, with valued support from returning sponsor Finnebrogue.

Entries are now open and this year's event promises to be bigger and better than ever. The measured 10K course starts close to Ballydugan Industrial Estate runs past the War Memorial and takes runners on two scenic loops along the Quoile Road, before finishing beside Down Leisure Centre. With a largely flat profile and a few gentle inclines, the route is perfectly suited to all abilities — from those chasing PBs or the £200 winner's prize to those tackling their very first 10K.

For runners seeking a team challenge, the popular relay option returns, allowing pairs to split the distance and complete approximately 5K each.

Anthea McAuley, Communications Manager at Finnebrogue, said:

"Finnebrogue is absolutely delighted to sponsor the Jimmy's 10K road race for the fourth consecutive year. It's a well-established community event that brings people together of all ages and abilities and we're proud to be associated with it."

Chair of East Down AC, Wayne Giles, added:

"We are delighted to host the 26th annual Jimmy's 10K on St Patrick's weekend and help kick-start the celebrations in the heart of St. Patrick's homeland. Jimmy's 10K is one of the first major running events in the calendar and we hope to see a record number of



Pictured from left to right: East Down AC Chairman Wayne Giles; East Down AC members Tom McClean, Sharon Madine, Declan Hampton, Róisín Gaffney, Leaghann Jervis (Finnebrogue); and Stephen Heasley East Down AC.

participants taking to the streets of Downpatrick in March 2026."

This year's entry package includes a 2026 race t-shirt for the first 700 entrants, chip timing, on-course and finish water, pacers and post-race refreshments.

The Early Bird rate runs until mid-January 2026, with the first 100 registrants receiving a Finnebrogue goodie bag. Registration will close on Wednesday 11 March at 9:00pm.

To enter or find out more

details, click the link: <https://in.njuko.com/jimmys-10k-2026176064869588> For media enquiries, please contact: Clare Forster | Clarewatson26@gmail.com | 079 26 903 126

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MINISTER ANNOUNCES OVER £2MILLION TO CUT ENERGY BILLS FOR LOW INCOME HOMES

More than 1,000 additional low income households will benefit from warmer, more energy efficient homes thanks to a new £2.17million investment announced today by Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald.

The funding boost for the NI Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP), delivered by the Energy Saving Trust on behalf of the Utility Regulator, will support insulation and other energy saving measures, and is directed to low income households.

This new allocation brings the Department for the Economy's total investment in domestic

energy efficiency measures to over £5million in the last three years.

Speaking in Coleraine, Minister Archibald said: "This funding will enable more than 1,000 low income households to install practical measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation. These improvements will help reduce energy bills,



improve comfort and warmth, and lower carbon emissions.

"Over 1,600 homes have already benefited from £3.5million of additional support provided by my Department in the past two years. I am committed to ensuring that no one is left behind as we transition to a greener, more sustainable economy."

The Minister said the investment will also provide a welcome boost to local businesses delivering energy efficiency services.

Sammy Aiken, a homeowner from Coleraine and a beneficiary of the

scheme explained: "Thanks to the scheme, I was able to have roof insulation installed without paying the £1,500 upfront cost. Our home feels warmer and more comfortable, and our energy bills have gone down - it's made a big impact for us."

Welcoming the additional funding, Peter Russell, Utility Regulator Executive Director - Price Controls, Networks and Energy Futures, said: "NISEP is about helping homes and businesses become more energy efficient, while also reducing carbon emissions. An average of more than

3,500 households have benefitted from NISEP funding annually in recent years.

"Since 2010 NISEP has invested £108million, which will achieve a benefit of £845million for both business and domestic customers in reduced bills.

"We are proud to continue administering NISEP in partnership with the Energy Saving Trust, to ensure energy efficiency support is provided to those who most need it."

Further information on NISEP, eligibility criteria and how to apply can be found at www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/programme/nisep

Health Minister celebrates Sarcoma UK Awards nominees

Health Minister Mike Nesbitt was delighted to invite nominees from Northern Ireland who were recognised in Sarcoma UK's 2025 Shining Star Awards to a meeting in Stormont.

The awards celebrate excellence in sarcoma care, advocacy and patient support across the UK.

The meeting, held in Parliament Buildings provided an opportunity to acknowledge the exceptional contribution made by individuals and organisations from Northern Ireland who were nominated across four national award categories. The Shining Star Awards ceremony took place at Tower Bridge, London in November 2025.

Northern Ireland nominees recognised in Sarcoma UK's 2025 Shining Star Awards included:

- Sarcoma Support Group Champion of the Year (public vote) The Boom Foundation, which received the award - Leona O'Neill MBE, Founder

- Young Sarcoma Voice of the Year (public vote) - Carly Wilson

- Healthcare Professional of the Year - Sandra McAllister, Consultant Plastic Surgeon and Regional Multidisciplinary Team Lead for Sarcoma

- Political Voice of the Year - Minister Mike Nesbitt

Health Minister, Mike Nesbitt said: "The nominees recognised by Sarcoma UK have truly inspiring stories. Whether through clinical leadership, tireless advocacy or compassionate support for patients and families, each has made an extraordinary contribution. Their work shines a light on what can be achieved when expertise, commitment and lived experience come together to improve care and raise awareness of sarcoma across Northern Ireland and beyond."

Nominee Sandra McAllister, Consultant Plastic Surgeon and Regional Multidisciplinary



l-r - Health Minister Mike Nesbitt; Sandra McAllister, Consultant Plastic Surgeon and Regional Multidisciplinary Team Lead for Sarcoma; Professor Mark Taylor.

Team Lead for Sarcoma, based at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald and who was nominated for Healthcare Professional of the Year, said: "It is a real honour to be recognised by Sarcoma UK alongside so many dedicated colleagues and advocates. Sarcoma care relies on strong multi-disciplinary working and on the voices of patients and families being heard. I am proud of the progress being made in Northern Ireland and grateful for the continued commitment to improving outcomes for people affected by this rare cancer."

Carly Wilson, nominated for Young Sarcoma Voice of the Year, was unable to attend the meeting as she is currently overseas for work. Diagnosed with a rare sarcoma in her teens, she has used her platform as Miss World Northern Ireland and as a Sarcoma UK Ambassador to raise awareness nationally and internationally.

The Boom Foundation, established in 2013, is the only charity in Northern Ireland dedicated solely to supporting people affected by sarcoma. It has raised over £1.1 million to support research, patient services and specialist nursing

posts within Northern Ireland.

Sarcoma UK's Healthcare Professional Engagement Lead Sam Hackett said: "We were delighted to see Minister Nesbitt take the time to celebrate these exceptional nominees from Northern Ireland. He has himself been a strong advocate for better care for sarcoma patients. Sarcoma UK's Shining Star Awards shine a light on the people who are making a real difference in the sarcoma community. Sandra McAllister's clinical leadership, Carly Wilson's powerful advocacy as Miss World Northern Ireland, and The Boom Foundation's incredible fundraising efforts demonstrate what can be achieved when healthcare professionals, patients and dedicated charities work together."

Sarcoma is a rare cancer that can affect any part of the body. Around 5,900 people are diagnosed with sarcoma in the UK each year, with approximately 100 diagnoses annually in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland delivers sarcoma services through a coordinated regional model aligned with specialist centres across the UK.

There's a Grand Oul Stretch in the Evenings

On New Year's Day in Belfast, the sun set around 4:16 PM. By January 31st, it stays up until 5:05 PM. That is nearly 50 minutes of extra evening light gained in just four weeks!

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release of serotonin, the "feel-good" hormone. It helps combat Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and lifts that "January slump."

- Circadian Rhythms: Evening light helps signal to your body that the day isn't over yet, preventing that 4:00 PM energy crash where you feel like hibernating.

It's a common question this time of year: When do we actually get our hour back? As we operate on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) during

the winter months, we won't officially "Spring Forward" until the last Sunday of March.

The clocks will go forward one hour at 1:00 AM on Sunday, March 29th. Until then, we rely on the natural "stretch" provided by the Earth's tilt to brighten our afternoons.

The winter isn't over yet, but the darkness is retreating. Next time you hear someone mention the "grand oul stretch," take it as an invitation to step outside and enjoy the return of the sun!

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Michael with his son Franklin

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Rylan as unofficial ‘Head of Holidays’ to discover why “Nothing beats a Jet2holiday”

Jet2holidays has appointed Rylan as its unofficial ‘Head of Holidays’, seeing the presenter take on a variety of different roles across the business to uncover exactly why “Nothing beats a Jet2holiday”.

Following a year of unprecedented online fame for the UK’s largest tour operator, Rylan has set out on a mission to “see what all the fuss is about” and hilariously uncover the award-winning formula behind the nation’s favourite holiday brand.

Over an eight-week period, Jet2holidays is publishing weekly mockumentary style episodes, with Rylan playing a starring role in these, across its social media channels. Each of these episodes will allow holidaymakers to take a peep behind the scenes at the company’s head office, at the airport and in resort to see exactly what goes into Jet2holidays’ award-winning holidays.

To celebrate Rylan’s new unofficial role with Jet2holidays, the package holidays specialist is giving away five incredible 7-night

getaways to Cyprus, Lanzarote, Antalya, Rhodes and The Algarve across the course of the campaign. In addition, bonus prizes including a Jet2holiday to Gran Canaria, a Jet2CityBreak to Rome, holiday vouchers, signed by Rylan Jet2holidays’ merchandise and a pair of return flights will also be up for grabs. To enter the competitions, all people need to do is head over to <https://www.jet2holidays.com/rylan-clark> and complete the online form.

David Hills, Chief Customer Officer at Jet2holidays, said: “Following a phenomenal year of success, which has seen us take social media by storm thanks to the “Nothing beats” viral trend, we are excited to unofficially welcome Rylan to our award-winning team as he takes on the challenge of proving why “Nothing beats a Jet2holiday”.

Olympic Lifts; making steps safer one stairlift at at a time.

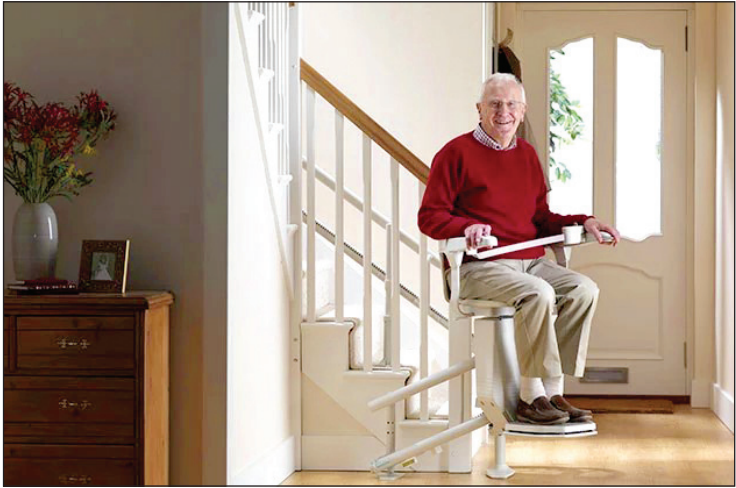
Olympic Lifts is your trusted partner for a wide range of accessibility products. Based in Lisburn, our easily accessible showroom just off the M1 showcases several Home Elevators.

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- Stannah straight



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highest quality products and services.

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WAYS TO GET AHEAD IN 2026

To achieve your best life in 2026, make a shift from endless consumption to mindful curation by scheduling short, intentional digital minutes and aggressively limiting digital noise outside of those times. Create phone-free zones to protect your mental space and relationships, ensuring technology serves you rather than the reverse.



Next, aim for Minimalist Momentum through decluttering your environment and routine. By implementing the “tidy-up trio”—removing three items daily—you create a simpler, less demanding environment. Automate financial tasks for simplicity and ruthlessly prune non-essential commitments to reclaim the luxury of a less busy schedule.

Build a robust Buffer Zone to handle life’s unpredictability. This includes creating a 30-day accessible savings fund to minimize financial stress, and adding a 15-minute time buffer to all appointments to eliminate rushing. This resilience is supported by establishing an Emotional Buffer with dedicated weekly time for true restorative rest. Finally, prioritize Macro-Health

through consistent micro-habits—not extreme changes. Commit to the “5-minute movement rule” daily, hydrate immediately upon waking, and maintain a consistent sleep wind-down routine. Couple this with a Growth Mindset that schedules skill-play time for fun and views all setbacks as valuable feedback, ensuring you remain curious, adaptable, and fully engaged with the world.

Downsize your home and upsize your life with Abbeyfield Belfast

Pat thought leaving a long-time family home meant giving something up. Instead, residents often discover they gain far more than they expected.

“I loved my house,” said Pat, “but I felt, joy, peace and happiness at the new home I’d found”.

Abbeyfield Belfast is part of a nationwide charity founded in 1956, offering supported sheltered housing for independent older people. Since 1960 it has helped residents across South and East Belfast stay connected to their communities while enjoying a home that suits their lifestyle.

Residents have their own private rooms or apartments, with the reassurance that practical support is available 24/7 if needed. Freshly prepared meals, housekeeping and laundry help remove

the everyday pressures that can make living alone a struggle, while still allowing people to live life on their own terms.

For many, the atmosphere is what matters most. “You can go back to your own room when you want quiet,” a resident explains, “but there’s always someone in the lounge for a cup of tea and a chat. I’ve made more friends here than I had in years.”

Communal dining rooms, gardens and shared lounges create opportunities to connect naturally, and activities are available for those who wish to join, with no pressure to participate.

As more people look to simplify their lives without losing



their independence, Abbeyfield Belfast offers a reassuring alternative. It is not about giving things up – it is about choosing a lifestyle that is easier, safer and more social.

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PHARMACY CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

A new campaign has been launched in community pharmacies across Northern Ireland, encouraging people to look after their mental health and wellbeing.

Running throughout December and January, the campaign encourages people to ask themselves and others a simple but powerful question: "How are you feeling?". The campaign encourages people to check in with themselves and others, turning a common greeting into a meaningful opportunity to support mental health.

The campaign is running in over 500 community pharmacies as part of the Living Well service, with pharmacy teams supporting people to look after their mental health. Living Well is delivered in partnership with the Public Health Agency (PHA), Community Pharmacy NI (CPNI), and the Department of Health (DoH).

Using the Take 5 steps to wellbeing – Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give – the campaign promotes everyday actions that can help people feel more positive and better equipped to manage life's challenges.

Clodagh Crowe, Health and Social Wellbeing

Senior Improvement Officer at the PHA, said: "Mental health is just as important as physical health, and looking after it is not something we should only do when we are feeling down. Research tells us that someone who practises all five steps daily feels higher levels of wellbeing, and they are things that we can incorporate in to our everyday routine which are simple, practical and proven to make a difference."

"In Northern Ireland, a fifth of adults have mental ill-health at any one time and we want everyone to know that support is available. Community pharmacies are trusted spaces where people feel comfortable and this campaign gives them the tools to start meaningful conversations."

Pharmacies will display posters, leaflets, and staff will start conversations to help the public reflect on their mental health and direct people to further support, including local services, apps, and professional help.

Patrick McCallion,



Champion Pharmacist at Bradley's Pharmacy in Claudy, said: "We see people every day who may be struggling quietly with their mental health. This campaign gives us a practical and approachable way to start conversations, share simple tools and offer support in a non-judgemental space. Community pharmacies

are another trusted source of advice and support. Whether it's through a leaflet, a friendly chat, or signposting to services, we want people to know they're not alone and that help is available in their local community."

The campaign also encourages pharmacy teams to look after their own mental health, with

ideas like mini-workshops, self-care challenges, and wellbeing resources for staff.

Next time you visit your local community pharmacy, look out for the campaign displays and pick up a 'How are you feeling?' leaflet for advice on looking after your mental health.

For more information

and mental health resources, visit www.pha.site/living-well or www.mindingyourhead.info

For anyone in a crisis, Lifeline is available 24/7, call 0808 808 8000 or visit www.lifelinehelpline.info/i-need-help

If you or someone else is in immediate danger or you require urgent medical attention, please call 999

Resolutions Worth Keeping All Year

We enthusiastically sign up for gym memberships, vow to learn a new language, and promise to finally declutter the garage. But for too many of us, the momentum fades by mid-February, leaving behind a trail of guilt and unused intentions.

The secret to success isn't about setting grand, unrealistic goals; it's about adopting sustainable habits and making small, consistent shifts that compound over time.

This year, instead of making a list of things you might fail at, focus on these resolutions that are genuinely worth keeping for all twelve months and beyond.

Mind and Body

True long-term success stems from a foundation of good health—both mental and physical.

The first essential resolution is to Move Daily (Not Just Exercise Hard). The flawed resolution is often, "I will work out for 90 minutes, five times a week," which often leads to burnout. The sustainable commitment, however, is, "I will find ways to move my body for at least 20 minutes every day." Instead of fixating on grueling, intense workouts, aim for daily movement. This could be a brisk walk during your lunch break, a stretching

session while watching TV, or dancing while you cook dinner. Consistency in movement is far more valuable than sporadic intensity.

Finance and Future

Financial peace isn't achieved through one-off windfalls, but through disciplined, repetitive actions.

A crucial financial resolution is to Automate Savings. Relying on willpower to manually save \$500 every month is the flawed approach. The sustainable resolution is, "I will set up an automatic transfer of 5% of my paycheck to a savings account." Make your savings non-negotiable and invisible. By automating a small, manageable percentage of your income to a separate account right after payday, you remove the decision-making process entirely. You save money without even thinking about it, guaranteeing financial progress throughout the year.

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GOLF GTI EDITION 50

Exclusive anniversary model offers outstanding driving dynamics and numerous design highlights

In 2026, the Golf GTI2 will celebrate its 50th anniversary, and the brand is marking this special event with this outstanding special model. With an output of 239 kW (325 PS), the Golf GTI EDITION 50 is going down in history as the most powerful production Golf GTI to date.

The Golf GTI is one of the most successful compact sports cars in the world. More than 2.5 million units have been produced worldwide to date.

Volkswagen is equipping the special model with a 2.0-litre turbocharged engine – a modification of the drive unit from the Golf GTI Clubsport4 with 221 kW (300 PS). Thanks to internal engine measures, the Volkswagen engine team have succeeded in increasing the output of the Golf GTI EDITION 50 to 239 kW (325 PS) – compared with the classic Golf GTI2 in the basic configuration with 195 kW (265 PS), this is an additional 44 kW (60 PS). The maximum torque of the EDITION 50 has been increased to 420 Nm. In comparison, the Golf GTI Clubsport has a maximum torque of 400 Nm, while the



Golf GTI produces 370 Nm. The chassis of the Golf GTI EDITION 50 has been further refined and adapted to the higher power. A MacPherson front axle and a four-link rear axle form the basic layout. Overall, the anniversary model is 15 mm lower than the basic configuration.

The Golf GTI EDITION 50 boasts numerous highlights inside and out. Combined with the red seat belts, the sporty seats with check pattern, a line in Racing Green and synthetic velour elements create a high-quality ambience with a motorsport touch. The newly designed

multifunction leather sports steering wheel features trim with the GTI 50 logo. Together with the integrated shift paddles for the seven-speed DSG, it offers a real motorsport feeling. The seats and steering wheel are thus the interfaces to the exceptional chassis and engine of the Golf GTI EDITION 50.

On the exterior, the GTI 50 logo is placed on the roof spoiler and the insides of the exterior mirrors. Other exclusive features include special trim on the door sills, a roof with black paintwork, black exterior mirror housings and black tailpipe trims on the exhaust

system. A striking side stripe on the side members with a colour gradient from black to Tornado red additionally underlines the sporty character of the vehicle.

Five exterior colours are planned for the Golf GTI Edition 50: in addition to the characteristic Pure white, these are Moonstone grey, Grenadilla black metallic and – exclusively for the anniversary model – Dark Moss green metallic and Tornado red. Tornado red is the colour that has been synonymous with high-performance Volkswagen vehicles over the decades since 1986.

Jeep® Wrangler named The Sun Road trip Car of the Year

Jeep® has triumphed at the 2025 News UK Motor Awards, with Wrangler being named The Sun Road trip Car of the Year.

This win is notable, as Wrangler is the first car to win this brand-new category that reflects the growing appetite among drivers for hitting the road and creating new adventures, core values that remain at the heart of Jeep.

Wrangler won the award for its ability to defy limits and fulfill the road-trip dreams of those seeking adventures around the world. Its versatility and ability to provide true open-air freedom, with its removable roof and doors, set it apart and make it the ideal car to make unforgettable memories with.

Wrangler has cemented itself as the benchmark for the off-road capabilities and ruggedness that are inherent to Jeep. Blending style with practicality, Wrangler adapts to the different needs of road trippers across the world. Unmatched off-road capability, removable doors and roof and a foldable windscreen make it the perfect car for exploring the world.

Wrangler also benefits from the latest Advanced



Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS) and Uconnect infotainment system, making road trips comfortable and enjoyable.

Kristian Cholmondeley, MD of Jeep UK said, “At Jeep we encourage everyone to get out and explore the world around them with friends and loved ones. Wrangler has the style and capability to undertake any adventure.

There’s no better way to live out our motto of ‘Go Anywhere. Do Anything’ than by hitting the road and seeking the freedom that doing so provides - this award proves that.”

Rob Gill, Motoring Editor of The Sun, said “Nothing is off-limits in the all-American hero, and you can whip off the roof and the doors while you’re at it. Wrangler is

the perfect companion for unforgettable adventures on the road trip you always promised yourself.”

Launched in 2018, The News UK Motor Awards are judged by industry respected automotive journalists from across News UK’s titles. Categories honoured include Luxury, Sports, Family, Adventure and Electric.

Thousands of lives to be saved under bold new Road Safety Strategy

New road safety strategy shows that the government is listening and leading: together, we can build a safer future for all UK road users.

The first road safety strategy in more than a decade will save thousands of lives on the nation’s roads by tackling drink driving, improving training for young drivers and introducing mandatory eye tests for older motorists.

Launched today (7 January 2026), the strategy sets out an ambitious plan to reduce deaths and serious injuries on Britain’s roads by 65% by 2035, with an even more stretching target of 70% for children under 16.

Approximately 4 people die on Britain’s roads every day, with thousands more seriously injured each year, but through targeted action on speeding, drink and drug driving, not wearing seat belts and mobile phone use, thousands of these tragedies can be prevented.

The government will consult on lowering the drink drive limit in England and Wales, which has remained unchanged since 1967 and is currently the highest in Europe.

In 2023, 1 in 6 road fatalities involved drink driving, but a consultation will explore the use of preventative technology, such as alcohol interlock devices and new powers to suspend driving licences for those suspected of

drink or drug driving offences.

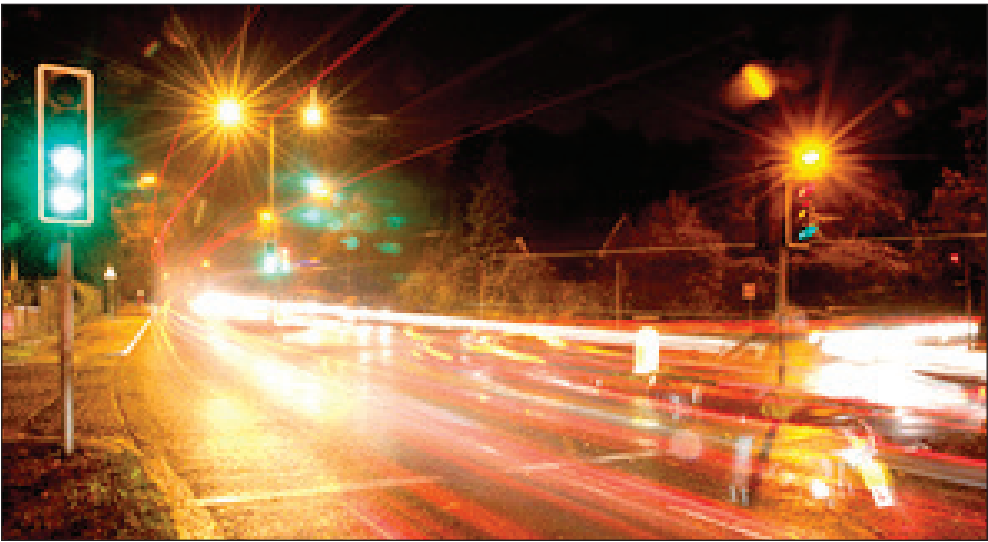
This could mean that, in future, some drink drive offenders might be required to have one of these devices fitted to their vehicle as a condition of being allowed to drive again.

Inexperience behind the wheel is costing lives. Drivers aged 17 to 24 represent just 6% of licence holders but are involved in 24% of fatal and serious collisions. To address this, the government will consult on introducing a 3 or 6-month minimum learning period, giving learner drivers more time to develop their skills in varied conditions, such as night driving, adverse weather and heavy traffic.

With the number of older drivers continuing to rise as Britain’s population ages, a consultation on mandatory eyesight testing for those over 70 will be launched, while options for cognitive testing will also be developed to protect all road users.

New measures will also target the growing problem of illegal number plates, including ‘ghost’ plates designed to fool camera systems, while also cracking down on uninsured drivers and vehicles without a valid MOT.

Secretary of State



for Transport, Heidi Alexander, said:

Every life lost on our roads is a tragedy that devastates families and communities. For too long, progress on road safety has stalled. This strategy marks a turning point.

We are taking decisive action to make our roads safer for everyone,

from new drivers taking their first lessons to older motorists wanting to maintain their independence. The measures we are announcing today will save thousands of lives over the coming decade.

Local Transport Minister, Lilian Greenwood, said:

Our vision with this

ambitious road safety strategy is clear: to ensure that people can travel safely on our roads however they choose.

One of the hardest parts of my job is speaking to families who have lost loved ones on our roads and this is something we as a government are taking action to prevent. No

family should have to endure that loss, and this strategy sets out how we will work to ensure fewer do.

Experts and campaigners have long called for a comprehensive strategy that treats road safety as a shared responsibility – from car manufacturers and town planners to

drivers and legislators.

RAC road safety spokesperson, Rod Dennis, said:

We’ve long said the dial needs to be turned up when it comes to reducing road casualties, so we warmly welcome this strategy – and especially the reintroduction of casualty reduction targets, that were scrapped 16 years ago.

The simple truth is that this strategy can’t come soon enough. Britain might have some of the safest roads by international standards, but on average, 4 people are still killed and 76 seriously injured every single day. That’s an unacceptable number of lives being ruined or cut short.

The strategy addresses many areas we know drivers are concerned about, including drink and drug-driving, ‘ghost’ plates and dazzling headlights. The inclusion of a commitment to

consult on the use of alcohol interlocks for convicted drink-drivers – which are internationally proven to save lives – is particularly encouraging, especially given the extent to which drivers are supportive of their use.

It’s also positive to see proposals on the table for both improving young driver safety and tackling the scourge of uninsured drivers who push up motor insurance costs for everyone.

It’s important to remember that the ultimate success of any new or updated penalties or laws will depend on awareness among drivers and enforcement. But undoubtedly, this strategy is a real chance to give the whole topic of road safety the focus and public attention it deserves. What we need now is for it to quickly evolve into a set of concrete actions that make the roads safer for everyone.



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LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A BRILLIANT SPRING

To the untrained eye, the February garden looks dormant, perhaps even bleak. However, for a gardener, this month is the "Quiet Work" phase.

The tasks you complete now—while the sap is still low and the pests are mostly asleep—will determine the health and yield of your garden for the rest of the year.

Here is your practical guide to essential February garden maintenance.

Structural Pruning: The "3 D's"

February is the prime time for "dormant pruning." Because deciduous trees and shrubs have no leaves, you can clearly see the structure of the plant and address issues before the spring growth spurt.

- **The 3 D's:** Inspect your trees and shrubs for anything Dead, Damaged, or Diseased. Removing these prevents rot from spreading.

- **Wisteria and Roses:** Late February is the deadline for pruning bush roses and thinning out wisteria side-shoots (cut back to 2-3 buds) to encourage massive blooms in May.

- **Fruit Trees:** Prune apples and pears to

create an "open goblet" shape. This allows light and air to reach the center of the tree, reducing the risk of fungal infections.

Note: Avoid pruning "stone fruits" (plums, cherries) in February, as they are susceptible to Silver Leaf disease if cut in winter.

Soil Preparation and "The Mulch Move"

Good gardening starts from the ground up. If the soil isn't frozen or waterlogged, you can begin the vital work of feeding the earth.

- **Suppression**

Mulching: Spread a thick layer (2-3 inches) of compost or well-rotted manure over your flower beds. Do not dig it in; let the earthworms do the work for you. This smothers early weed seeds and locks in moisture.

- **Vegetable Bed Prep:** If you use "no-dig" methods, lay down cardboard and fresh compost now.

If you have heavy clay



soil, a light turn of the soil in February allows the remaining frosts to break up the clods into a fine tilth.

Hardscape and Tool Hygiene

Before the "Spring Rush" hits and every Saturday becomes a race against the clock, get your infrastructure in order.

- **Power Wash the Slippery Bits:** Algae grows aggressively in

damp winter weather. Clean your patios, decks, and walkways now to prevent slip hazards.

- **The Tool Tune-Up:**

- **Sanitize:** Wash your pots and seed trays with a mild bleach solution to kill lingering pathogens.

- **Sharpen:** Use a whetstone on your hoes and spades. A sharp spade cuts through soil with half the effort.

- **Oil:** Rub linseed oil into wooden tool handles

to prevent splintering.

Early Sowing and "Chitting"

While the ground is too cold for most seeds, you can start the clock indoors or in a greenhouse.

- **Chitting Potatoes:**

Place seed potatoes in egg cartons in a cool, bright, frost-free room. They will grow "chits" (sturdy green sprouts), which gives them a head start when you plant them in March or April.

- **Sweet Peas:** Start these indoors now. They love a long growing season to develop deep roots.

- **Hardy Veggies:** If you have a bright windowsill or a heated propagator, you can start sowing onions, leeks, and hardy salads.

Cold snaps causing burst pipes – check your property urges NI Water

Since the beginning of January, a series of cold snaps have led to a considerable rise in burst pipes across the NI Water network and on private property.

While the NI Water teams are out finding and repairing bursts on the network, the public can help by checking for leaks on their property.

If you spot a leak on your property, turn off the water supply using your stop valve (usually under the kitchen sink) to minimise any damage. If you spot a leak or burst pipe on the public system - such as on streets, pavements, or public spaces - please report it to us.

Paul Bryce, Head of Water at NI Water, said: "NI Water is asking the public to be proactive; if you discover a leak, repair it if it's on your property or report it to NI Water if it's on the public network. We are also asking farmers, caravan owners and landlords to inspect empty buildings, drinking troughs, sheds, yards, taps, and outhouses - any location with water supplies. Keep an eye



on your water meter, as this can indicate a burst; quick repairs can help prevent unnecessarily high water bills."

How to Report a Leak or Burst Pipe:

If you spot a burst pipe or leak on the road or street, please report it to NI Water straight away. Reporting is quick and easy:

- Fill in the online form at www.niwater.com/report-a-leak-or-burst-pipe

- Contact Leakline on 0800 0282011 (free, open 24/7)

- Use NI Water's webchat service or reach out via NI Water's social media channels

What to Do If You Have a Leak or Burst Pipe:

- Turn off your stop valve (usually under the kitchen sink, turn clockwise).

- Use towels or thick cloths to block escaping water.

- Turn on all taps to lower water pressure and reduce flooding; make sure to turn them off once the problem is fixed.

- Contact a plumber - find an accredited professional by searching your postcode at www.watersafe.org.uk.

- Notify your insurance company to check for protection against water damage.

With further cold snaps possible throughout the winter months, NI Water is also urging the public to protect their outdoor taps from freezing and costly damage caused by leaks and bursts by fitting a free insulated tap cover, available at www.getwaterfit.co.uk while stocks last.

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ESSENTIAL FEBRUARY HOME MAINTENANCE

February is often considered a “limbo” month—too late for holiday decorating and too early for major landscaping.

However, for a savvy homeowner, this is the most strategic time of year to focus on the interior health of your property. By tackling these indoor tasks now, you free up your schedule for the outdoor demands of spring.

Optimize Your Indoor Air Quality

Since windows remain shut against the winter chill, your home’s air circulation is under heavy load. February is the ideal time to service the “lungs” of your house.

- Replace HVAC Filters: Dust and allergens accumulate rapidly during peak heating months. A fresh filter improves air quality and prevents

your furnace from overworking.¹

- Clean Refrigerator Coils: Dust buildup on the coils at the back or bottom of your fridge forces the compressor to run longer.² Use a vacuum attachment or a coil brush to clear it away; this simple act can extend the life of your appliance by years.³
- Dust Ceiling Fan Blades: Before you flip the direction of your fans for the warmer months, wipe down the blades to prevent a “dust shower” when they start spinning at higher speeds.

The “Safety First” Audit

With more time spent indoors, ensuring your home’s safety systems are functional



is paramount. Use the mid-month mark as your annual reminder.

- Test Detectors: Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. If you haven’t replaced the batteries in the last six months, do it now regardless of whether they “chirp.”
- Clear the Dryer Vent:

Lint buildup is a leading cause of household fires.⁴ Disconnect the duct from the back of the dryer and vacuum out the accumulated debris.

- Check Fire Extinguishers: Ensure the pressure gauge is in the green zone and that the extinguisher is easily accessible, not buried at the back of a pantry.

Kitchen and Bath “Mini-Refreshes”

Low humidity in February makes it a great time for minor sealing and deep-cleaning projects that require dry air to cure.

Gear Up for Spring

February is the “planning phase.” Preparation now prevents frustration when the first warm weekend arrives.

- Sharpen Garden Tools: Take your lawnmower blades, pruners, and shears to be sharpened. Local hardware stores are usually quiet this month and can offer a faster turnaround.
- Inspect Sump Pump: If you live in a rural property, pour a bucket of water into your sump pit to ensure the pump activates and clears the water effectively.
- Drain the Water Heater: Flushing out sediment from the bottom of your tank improves heating efficiency and prevents the “knocking” sounds caused by mineral buildup.

What to grow on your windowsill this month

While February often feels like the depths of winter, the increasing daylight makes it the perfect time to start a “windowsill farm.”

” You don’t need a greenhouse or a massive backyard to start producing food; a south-facing ledge and a few pots are all it takes to get a head start on spring.

Here is your guide to what you can successfully grow on your windowsill this month.

High-Speed Microgreens

Microgreens are the “instant gratification” of the gardening world.¹ Since you harvest them at the seedling stage, they don’t require deep soil or intense summer heat.

- Best Varieties: Radish (spicy), Broccoli (mild), Pea shoots (sweet), and Mustard greens.
- Harvest Time: 7–14 days.
- Top Tip: Use a shallow container (like a recycled take-out box) and sow seeds thickly on the surface of the soil.²

Hardy Culinary Herbs

While heat-loving herbs like basil might struggle without a heat mat in February, hardy perennials and cool-season herbs will thrive.

- Chives: These are

incredibly resilient and will grow quickly from seed or a divided clump from a garden.³

- Mint: Warning—it grows like a weed! Keep it in its own pot so it doesn’t take over.
- Parsley: A bit slower to germinate, but once it starts, it will provide fresh garnishes all through spring.

“Cut and Come Again” Salad Leaves

You can grow baby leaf salads quite easily in a long, narrow trough on a windowsill.

- Loose-leaf Lettuce: Varieties like ‘Lollo Rosso’ or ‘Red Salad Bowl’ handle the lower light levels of February better than head-forming lettuces.
- Arugula (Rocket): This peppery green loves the cooler temperatures of a windowsill near a window pane.
- Harvesting: Only snip the outer leaves, leaving the center “heart” to continue growing.

Alliums from Scraps

February is the perfect time to try “regrowing” kitchen scraps. It’s free, sustainable, and educational if you have



kids.

- Scallions (Green Onions): Place the white root ends in a small glass of water. They will regrow green tops in less than a week.
- Garlic Greens: Plant a clove of garlic that has started to sprout in a small pot of soil. You won’t get a new bulb, but the green shoots taste like a cross between garlic and chives.

In order to maximise daylight - use a south-facing window if possible. Rotate your pots 180° every few days so the plants don’t lean too far in one direction.

At night, temperatures

near the glass can drop significantly. Move your plants a few inches away from the pane or close the curtains behind them.

Indoor heating can dry out small pots quickly. Mist your plants occasionally or set them on a tray of pebbles with a little water.

Why Grow Now?

Growing on a windowsill in February isn’t just about the food; it’s about the mental boost. Seeing vibrant green shoots against a grey winter backdrop is a powerful reminder that spring is just around the corner.

Audit your home security

As the winter chill lingers many homeowners fall into a “hibernation” mindset, often overlooking the unique security vulnerabilities that come with late winter.

February is an essential time to audit your home’s defenses.

Here is a comprehensive guide to securing your home and property during the shortest month of the year.

Eliminate “The Darkness Advantage”

Criminals rely on the cover of darkness to scout properties.

- Audit Your Lighting: Walk around your property at 6:00 PM. Are there blind spots? Install motion-activated LED floodlights near entry points.
- Smart Timers: If you aren’t home until after dark, use smart plugs to turn on interior lamps. A dark house for three hours every evening is a clear signal that no one is home.

- Clear the Path: Trim any overgrown evergreens or shrubs that provide a “hiding spot” near windows or doors.
- Fortify Entry Points Against “Winter Wear”
- Cold temperatures and moisture can cause door frames to warp and locks to seize.
- Check the Strike Plate: Ensure your door’s deadbolt fully engages. If the house has shifted due to freezing ground, the bolt might not be sliding all the way into the pocket.
- Lubricate Locks: Use a dry graphite spray to keep outdoor locks from sticking or freezing.
- Reinforce Sliders: Sliding glass doors are notoriously easy

to pop off their tracks. Place a security bar (or “charlie bar”) in the track to prevent it from being forced open.

Manage Your “Digital Footprint”

February is a popular month for mid-winter vacations or “sun-seeking” trips.²

- The Social Media Rule: Avoid posting “check-ins” or vacation photos until you are back home. Advertising an empty house is a high-risk move.
- Package Management: If you are ordering gear for an upcoming spring project, don’t let packages sit on the porch. Use a parcel locker or have a neighbour bring them inside.

Don’t Forget the Perimeter

Your home’s security starts at the edge of your property, not just at the front door.

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