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Councillor Ian McLaughlin, chair of Belfast City Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee, with participants of the SistersIN programme attending the Inspiring Entrepreneurs event at Belfast City Hall.

## CITY HALL WELCOMES YOUNG FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS OF TOMORROW

Over 300 young women taking part in the SistersIN programme have gathered at City Hall to celebrate female entrepreneurship at the Inspiring Entrepreneurs event, supported by Belfast City Council and Danske Bank.

The SistersIN programme enables, empowers and develops female pupils aged 16 and 17 from schools across Northern Ireland to become leaders of tomorrow. It encourages students to achieve their full potential and increase

confidence by developing specialist skills essential in driving innovation, economic growth and social change.

The event featured insight from successful female leaders, who spoke about their own accomplishments

and challenges, and provided advice to young women considering entrepreneurship as a potential career path.

Attendees heard from keynote speaker Alice Thompson, co-founder of Social Bite, who shared

her remarkable journey of using business as a force for good, building international recognition, before switching to a different career.

**Continued on  
page 6**

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## Belfast's Brilliant Christmas Countdown

The Northern Irish capital is once again preparing to transform into a stunning winter wonderland, with a spectacular programme of festive events planned for the countdown to Christmas 2025..

With Belfast already lit up for Christmas and Belfast Christmas Market, located in the grounds of City Hall, is already in full swing. This award-winning market runs until Monday, December 22, 2025. The market operates with extended hours: Monday to Wednesday (10 am - 8 pm), Thursday to Saturday (10 am - 10 pm), and Sunday (12 noon - 6 pm).

The seasonal magic extends far beyond the City Hall grounds, with a range of dedicated family entertainment and cultural experiences.

One notable venue is 2 Royal Avenue, which hosts the Winter's Den until December 31. This free community and cultural hub offers a range of festive activities and is home to

Santa's Post Office (until December 21), allowing children to ensure their letters get a direct route to the North Pole.

A core Christmas tradition is the Pantomime season, which sees major productions take to the stage across the city. The Waterfront Studio is hosting two key shows this year: the family-friendly Jack & the Beanstalk: The Giant Family Pantomime, running from late November, and the return of the popular late-night adult pantomime, Red Riding Hoodz. For a more traditional circus experience, the much-loved Winter Circus returns to Writers' Square from Friday, December 12, offering spectacular performances and family fun right up to the New Year.

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# Translink announces defibrillator roll-out across NI Railways fleet

Translink has announced that Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) will be installed across the NI Railways train fleet by the end of December 2025.

Local trains will feature the new life-saving equipment which will play a vital service in helping people who suffer a cardiac arrest, which can happen to anyone. This latest development follows the installation of 134 units at over 80 locations across Translink bus and rail facilities in recent years.

Announcing the AED rollout on board trains, John Thompson, Translink Head of Safety and Corporate Responsibility, said: "This latest development reflects our ongoing commitment to keeping people safe and these life-saving kits are currently being installed across our rail fleet.

"We know that with a cardiac arrest every second counts so having AEDs accessible to everyone on board a train could make all the difference in an emergency.

"Located within the train's first aid cabinet beside the accessible toilet, each defibrillator is also accompanied by step-by-step audio and visual instructions which are built into the unit and explain how to use it.

"We also provide online CPR training tools to



support our employees should they find themselves in an emergency situation in the future."

Welcoming Translink's announcement, Fearghal McKinney, Head of British Heart Foundation Northern Ireland said: "Every defibrillator has the power to save a life and it's great to see Translink's recognition of the importance of these live-saving devices by installing them in trains across Northern Ireland.

"There are over 1,400 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests

every year in Northern Ireland. Tragically, less than one in ten people survive. This is partly because public access defibrillators are not used often enough.

"We're also delighted to partner with Translink to train their staff in CPR with our free and interactive online training tool, RevivR. Early CPR and defibrillation can more than double the chances of survival. It takes just 15 minutes to learn through RevivR, and all you need is a mobile phone or tablet

and a cushion – that's 15 minutes learning a skill that could one day save the life of a loved one." Fearghal added.

Michael Allen, Community Resuscitation Team Manager, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, said: "Cardiac arrest can happen to anyone, at anytime, anywhere. This key initiative increases public access to vital, lifesaving equipment in the early moments of cardiac arrest, when time matters the most."

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# 778 NEW CITY CENTRE HOMES TAKE SHAPE IN BELFAST

Construction work is progressing at pace on Loftlines, Belfast’s landmark mixed-tenure development that will soon deliver 778 new homes to the city centre – a major step forward in addressing Northern Ireland’s housing shortage.

Set within the iconic Titanic Quarter, Loftlines is one of Northern Ireland’s most ambitious regeneration projects and will be the city’s first major residential scheme to be built in 25 years. The development combines Northern Ireland’s first Build-to-Rent (BTR) homes with social housing, discounted market rent housing, and private rental housing.

First to complete will be 81 high-quality social homes at Dargan House which will be owned and managed by Clannmil Housing Association.

Representing an investment of £18.6 million, these new social homes are being funded by Clannmil with support from the Department for Communities and Housing Executive’s ‘Housing for All’ Shared Housing Programme.

With around 49,000 households currently on the social housing waiting list in Northern Ireland, the completion of this first phase will mark a crucial step toward addressing that challenge and building a more inclusive, sustainable city centre community.

Anthony Best, Managing Director of Lacuna Developments, joint developer of the site,



commented: Developing the site alongside Lacuna Developments is Watkin Jones, the UK’s leading residential for rent developer and operator. Alex Pease, Chief Executive Officer at Watkin Jones said:

“This project is about more than new homes. It’s about creating a vibrant urban neighbourhood that sets a new standard for city-centre living in Belfast.

Loftlines will be a destination — a place where people want to live, spend time, and build a community.”

Situated within the iconic Titanic Quarter, the wider Loftlines development is set to become one

of the most significant regeneration projects in Northern Ireland. It will include Northern Ireland’s first Build-to-Rent (BTR) homes, backed by a £150 million investment by Legal & General, and will bring to market 627 one, two, and three bedroom stylish modern homes.

These pet-friendly units will be available for short term or long-term rental and will welcome their first tenants in Spring 2026.

Designed to foster a strong sense of community and convenience, Loftlines will feature on-site amenities such as independent retail stores and a creche, ensuring that everyday needs can be met within walking distance.

With extensive outdoor space and a walkway connecting the development with the Maritime Mile, the scheme also encourages walking, cycling, and public transport use, contributing to a healthier lifestyle and reduced carbon footprint.

In addition to the social housing in Dargan House and the 627 BTR homes, the Loftlines development will also provide a premium private rental offering comprising 70 one and two-bedroom apartments in Lady Pirrie House.

For more information on the Loftlines development currently under construction in Titanic Quarter, visit [www.loftlines.com](http://www.loftlines.com).

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# A gull called Kevin.

We live in a modestly sized apartment block in North Down, which since late summer has also been home to a juvenile herring gull, which we named Kevin, because his/her behaviour is reminiscent of Harry Enfield's character, Kevin the Teenager; grumpy, pleading, complaining and mildly irritating.

Often accompanied by an adult, presumably a parent, Kevin has become a fixture, if not sitting on a rooftop making a repetitive squealing sound, clearly begging for food (though largely ignored by the adult) then appearing, apparently from nowhere, when we're putting out food for small birds, and tucking into seed, meal worms and suet pellets. Given that we expect gulls to feed on marine life, and hang out around our coasts, this behaviour prompted me

to find out more about them.

Herring gulls are typical of what we call seagulls, often seen scavenging around seafronts, and sometimes even trying to snatch chips or ice-creams out of our hands, and most of us would assume they're common. Wrong. They have been in decline throughout the UK and Ireland for years and are now red listed, meaning they're of serious conservation concern.

It might seem obvious, but, as with all animals



(including us!), birds need to eat to breed and survive, and, in addition to impacts of bird flu and global warming affecting coastal waters, it seems that food, or lack of it, is to blame for herring gull difficulties. Back in the day, rubbish tips or dumps as they were known, offered oodles of waste food to scavengers such as herring gulls, but H & S regulations and, of course, the welcome move towards recycling of waste food has progressively removed that option, as has greater efficiency and protection of fish brought ashore by trawlers.

At one time gull colonies

could depend on intertidal feeding on crustaceans and other marine life, along with forays into farmland, but intensive farming's impact on worms and other invertebrates has probably had an impact.

So, as with so many wild creatures, herring gulls are being squeezed.

Kevin has found an unnatural food source, which we fear will not auger well for his (or her) lifespan, but hope that our unusual and intriguing visitor will eventually survive and prosper. You go, Kevin, our friend. We'll miss you when you've gone.

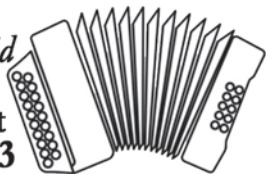
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# Justice Minister congratulates Hydebank Wood Secure College on prestigious international award

Justice Minister Naomi Long has offered her congratulations to the staff of Hydebank Wood Secure College, who have received a prestigious award from the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA).



Justice Minister Naomi Long and (from left) David Kennedy, Director of Prisons, Richard Taylor, Governor of Hydebank Wood Secure College, and Beverley Wall, Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

The award recognises Hydebank Wood's innovative and sector-leading work in rehabilitation, specifically acknowledging the success of its Secure College model in placing education, skills, and rehabilitation at the core of their work.

Minister Long said: "This is an outstanding achievement and deserved international recognition for the dedication and hard work of everyone at Hydebank Wood. The entire ethos of the Secure College is centred on breaking the cycle of reoffending by equipping residents with the qualifications and practical skills they need to lead productive, law-abiding lives upon release.

"This award underlines

that, although our prisons are facing many challenges, the Prison Service's approach to rehabilitation is second to none."

The Minister added: "Hydebank Wood is not simply a place of custody; it is a place of learning and opportunity. The staff are to be commended for their commitment to justice through rehabilitation, fostering an environment where individuals can gain confidence, qualifications, and ultimately, contribute positively after they are released back into our community."

Welcoming the award, Hydebank Governor Richard Taylor said: "This international award is testament to the work of prison officers in changing lives. It also reflects the tremendous work of our partners. Whether that is from our healthcare partners in the South Eastern Trust; our education providers in Belfast Met or through the many voluntary and community organisations who work with the College – there is no doubt this award belongs to us all."

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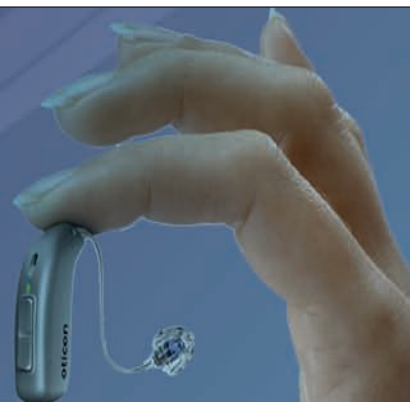


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## The Busy Parent’s Guide to Self-Care

The term “self-care” often conjures images of luxurious, uninterrupted leisure: an hour-long massage, a quiet afternoon reading, or, yes, a long bubble bath.

While wonderful, these activities are often completely out of reach for the typical busy parent juggling work, school runs, appointments, and household chaos.

True parental self-care isn’t about escaping reality; it’s about making strategic, micro-adjustments to your daily life to refill your cup without needing a full-scale vacation. It’s about maintaining your emotional and physical reserves so you can show up as the parent you want to be.

Here are some Quick Wins for Instant Relief

When you only have a few minutes, focus on simple, high-impact resets that shift you out of the stress response.

The Power of the 4-7-8 Breath: When you feel tension rising (e.g., during homework struggles or traffic), use this quick calming technique: Inhale silently through your nose for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 7. Exhale completely through your mouth with a “whoosh” sound for a count of 8. Repeat 3–4 times. It physically lowers your heart rate.

Tactical Hydration: Keep a water bottle with you at all times. Taking a big drink of cold water can provide a surprisingly quick mental and physical break.

Dehydration often mimics fatigue and irritability.

The “Sensory Reset”: Engage one of your senses. Spray a scent (like peppermint or citrus oil) or listen to one specific song on headphones. This interrupts the mental loop of worry or to-do lists and grounds you in the present moment.

Mindful Movement: Instead of sitting down, stretch while waiting for the kettle to boil or for the kids to put on their shoes. A quick 60-second neck roll, shoulder shrug, or a forward bend releases physical tension instantly.

The most sustainable form of self-care is integrating it into your existing routine, rather than scheduling an extra activity.

By focusing on these small, consistent acts of self-care, you shift the perspective from “How can I escape?” to “How can I sustain myself?” You don’t need a bubble bath; you just need to honour your own needs within the structure of your busy life.

## Rosetta Primary School: A Community of Encouragement and Respect

Rosetta Primary School, located on the Knockbreda Road in South Belfast, is known for its commitment to inclusive education and a positive school environment.

The school’s ethos is clearly reflected in its motto: “Everyone’s invited. Everyone’s included. Everyone’s encouraged.”

Rosetta Primary School has recently welcomed a new Principal to lead its dedicated staff. Mr McGarrigle took up his post at the start of the academic year, bringing his experience from his previous role as Acting Principal of Londonderry Primary School in Newtownards.

The school has a rich history dating back over a century, with the original school building opening in 1896. It has been a cornerstone of the South Belfast community ever since and now caters to children who travel from a wide area.

The core of Rosetta Primary School’s philosophy is encapsulated in its three-part motto, which promotes an environment built on respect—for self, others, and the environment. The school is proud to be a School of Sanctuary, welcoming children from all faiths and none, and is committed to inclusive education. Rosetta Primary School is also proud to be a Forest School and recently achieved another Green Flag award for Eco-Schools ensuring all pupils are encouraged to thrive and work together towards a sustainable lifestyle.

Rosetta Primary School offers facilities that support a rich and balanced curriculum for both the primary school and its attached Nursery Unit. The school delivers a curriculum ranging from play-based learning in the Foundation Stage to an age-appropriate curriculum in Key Stage Two. The school is noted for its successful Activity-Based Learning in Key Stage One (P3/P4), which helps children develop skills across the curriculum.

Extra-curricular activities are a strong feature, kept at a minimal cost (or free when run by staff) to ensure access for all children.

Come see why Rosetta is a wonderful place for your child to grow and thrive at the forthcoming Open Day – Wednesday 3rd December. There will be a guided tour of Rosetta Primary School and opportunity to discover what makes the school so special. The school is also hosting two special events designed for families considering a Nursery or P1 place for September 2026. These events offer a chance to experience the warm, inclusive, and joyful learning environment at Rosetta. P1 - A Beary Special Afternoon is fun and friendly session specifically designed for prospective P1 children which takes place on Tuesday, 16th December. Pre-School Peek N’ Play, a special play session at the Rosetta Nursery Unit



for children and parents to enjoy together—a gentle taster of the fun and learning in the Nursery is also planned!

The Pre-School Peek N’ Play is already fully booked. The closing date for bookings for the Beary Special Afternoon is 12th December 2025. To secure a space, please scan the QR code provided on the advertisement or contact the school directly. Phone Number: 028 9049 1650 Website: [www.rosettaps.co.uk](http://www.rosettaps.co.uk) Address: 21-23 Knockbreda Road, Belfast, BT6 0JA

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# Family Focus



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# Realistic Fitness Goals for the Family

The key to successful family fitness in 2026 is setting realistic, sustainable, and fun goals using the S.M.A.R.T. framework: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely.

Instead of focusing on high-pressure resolutions, prioritize small, consistent habits that become lifelong routines. Core family targets could include scheduling three active sessions per week (like biking or hiking) and incorporating a non-negotiable 15-minute family walk after dinner to increase daily movement and reduce screen time. Goals should be tailored to age. For kids and teens, focus on fun and skill development,

such as trying a new sport or training for a family 5k fun run. Busy adults should aim for consistency over intensity, incorporating three 10-minute "micro-workouts" on busy days and one strength training session weekly. Older adults should prioritize balance and mobility, for example dedicating 10 minutes daily to gentle stretching or chair yoga. To ensure long-term success, use a central tracking chart to monitor



progress and celebrate effort rather than perfection. By making movement a collaborative and non-punitive part of your routine, you will build a healthier and more connected family in 2026.

# Campbell College Headmaster offers some advice on getting the best out of School Open Days!

January marks the start of Open Day season, a time when parents and primary pupils explore schools to find the right fit.

Choosing a school can be an exciting experience, but also a little daunting. Headmaster of Campbell College, Mr Jonathan Anderson, shares practical advice to help guide your decision. Start with the little things: When visiting, observe how pupils behave and interact with teachers, each other, and with you and your child. The Principal's address will outline the school's values, but the atmosphere and pupil interactions often speak louder than words. Talk to pupils: They are the best advocates, if

given the chance. Ask open questions such as, "Why do you enjoy school?" Avoid yes/no questions and listen carefully to their answers. Then ask yourself, "Would my child feel at home here?" This is very different from "I want my child to go here!" Think partnership: Education works best when school, parent, and child collaborate. Consider how the school communicates and involves families. Your involvement matters, and the relationship between home and school is key to a child's success. Be practical: Picture daily

life. How is the uniform worn? How do pupils greet you? What are their manners like? These details reveal a lot about the school culture. Do your homework: Read the materials provided, explore the school's website and social media, and compare what pupils say with what's promoted. Authenticity matters. Gather as much information as possible before making your decision. Choosing a school is about finding the best environment for your child - and for you. Take time, ask questions, and trust your



instincts. For more information, contact: Campbell College, Belmont Road, Belfast, BT4 2ND Tel: 028 9076 3076 Email: hmo@campbellcollege.co.uk www.campbellcollege.co.uk Open Day: Saturday 17th January 2026 | 9:00am - 12 noon

# Applying for a School Place

Visiting a school is an important step in choosing a school, and this personal touch reflects Leadhill's approach in supporting families.



As a smaller, nurturing school in the Castlereagh area, working to support parents and children is central to what Leadhill has to offer. Leadhill parents recognise the value of a primary school setting where every adult knows every child. Leadhill welcomes and supports children from all backgrounds and promotes inclusivity and child-centred approaches. This year, Leadhill are offering a range of flexible opportunities to visit. Bring your nursery-age child to

'Stay and Play' session on Friday 16th January from 2:30pm to 3:15pm. Parents can enjoy a cuppa and a chat while children enjoy a range of activities in the P1 classroom. Come along to our Open Day on 9 January, or arrange for a visit at a time that suits you, throughout January. Mrs Millis, the Principal will take the time to tailor your visit to address the things that matter to your family. Visiting Leadhill during the school day gives a fantastic opportunity to experience the nurturing, family

atmosphere and meet the fabulous staff and pupils. For younger children, Toddler Time - Leadhill's toddler and adult group, meets every Wednesday during term time from 9 - 11am. The Leadhill Website provides a useful window into life in Leadhill. Visit us on www.leadhillps.com. Leadhill would love to welcome you for a visit. Contact the school office on 028 90401101 or email Mrs Millis on amillis370@c2kni.net to arrange for a suitable date and time.

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# STRATHEARN HEAD GIRLS LEAD ‘TOASTY COATS’ DRIVE TO WARM EAST BELFAST THIS WINTER

In a heart-warming display of compassion and community spirit, Strathearn School’s Head Girls team — Jamillah, Charlotte, and Maddie — have helped bring warmth and hope to children across East Belfast through their support of the TOASTY initiative.

The project invites families to donate high-quality coats that their children have outgrown, ensuring they are passed on to local families who need them most during the coldest months of the year. Working closely with the Skainos Centre, the initiative transforms simple acts of generosity into practical, life-enhancing help.

TOASTY was created several years ago by Dr Patrick Campbell, whose awareness of the difficulties faced by some East Belfast families inspired him to take action. His goal was straightforward yet powerful: to keep children “toasty” warm while fostering a stronger sense of community care.

This year, Strathearn’s Head Girls embraced

that mission with exceptional enthusiasm. Through careful organising, collecting, and coordinating across the community, the girls gathered more than 270 coats from several local primary schools as well as from the congregation at Knock Presbyterian Church. Each coat reflects an act of kindness and a community’s shared belief that no child should face winter without warmth.

Mrs Connery, Principal of Strathearn School, expressed her gratitude to everyone who played a part in the project’s success. She praised the generosity of the entire East Belfast community and emphasised how vital such cooperation is during challenging times. Mrs Connery



added that she looks forward to supporting this meaningful initiative again next year.

The success of the TOASTY project was made possible by a network of dedicated supporters. Warm thanks go to Dr Campbell for his leadership; to the staff, pupils, and families of participating primary schools; to the facilities staff at Strathearn; and to the hardworking team at the Skainos Centre. Their combined efforts ensured that every donated coat reached a child who will step into winter feeling warmer, safer, and cared for.

In a season often marked by harsh weather and rising need, TOASTY shines as a beacon of generosity — and a reminder that when a community comes together, even a simple coat can make a profound difference.

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## Every young person can have the chance to find the activity that feels right for them at Kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscope is Northern Ireland's only centre that offers gymnastics, cheer and dance under one roof - and that's exactly what makes it stand out.

Families don't have to choose one pathway — children can try different disciplines, discover what they enjoy and thrive in a setting that prioritises inclusion, positivity and most importantly, fun!

The club's success is backed by major recognition for their amazing teachers and coaches. Kaleidoscope has been awarded British

Gymnastics NI Club of the Year and Cheersport Ireland Club of the Year, showing its strength across two very different sports. Its dance programme has also earned a place as a finalist for Co. Down Dance School of the Year, highlighting the quality and creativity of its dancers and coaches.

Kaleidoscope offers a wide mix of classes, from



recreational gymnastics and cheerleading to a wide range of dance classes, inclusion classes, musical theatre, adult fitness, holiday camps and birthday parties. There are opportunities for those who just want to enjoy the sport and stay active, as well as structured competitive pathways for athletes ready for the next step.

At Kaleidoscope, we strive to give every young person the chance to find the activity that feels right for them. Whether they love cartwheeling, dancing, stunting or just being part of a team, there's a place for them here at Kaleidoscope — and they're supported every step of the way.

## FORGE FORGES AHEAD! Belfast School Beats the Odds with New Build Dream and Top Team

Forge Integrated Primary School isn't just a school; it's a movement! Founded in 1985 by fiercely determined parents, this south Belfast institution has become a cornerstone of shared education, proving that bringing together children from all faiths and none creates confident, capable, and world-ready pupils.

Under the leadership of new Principal Ms Joanne Bryans, who took office this Autumn term the school boasts a dynamic teaching team—experts in everything from literacy and ICT to Eco-Schools and the renowned PATHS emotional learning model. They don't just teach the curriculum; they embody the school's "SAFE, RESPONSIBLE, and RESPECTFUL" ethos.

Principal Ms Joanne Bryans says: "I see Forge as a school where every child is important, where every child is an individual, and where every child deserves to be understood and met at their stage of development. I see Forge as a school where all voices should be heard, understood & respected. Every member of our school family has talents & experiences which can only enrich others and I very much look forward to creating some positive relationships with you the

parents and also members of our community. Finally I see Forge as a school where diversity is not just part of the mix but is intentionally part of the fabric of our school where children are celebrated for who they are and are respected."

The future looks bright as plans for a brand-new, modern school and nursery unit are underway on the former Knockbreda High School site. This huge investment will cement Forge's position as a top-tier integrated facility for the next generation. Even before the new campus, the school impressed a recent Westminster cross-party delegation, showcasing its resilience and success on a national stage.

Forge stands out for embracing diversity and ensuring every child's talents are celebrated—a vibrant, inclusive atmosphere that makes it a true Belfast success story!

Parents looking to secure a Primary 1 or Pre School



New Principal Ms Joanne Bryans

place for 2026/2027 should note the following dates:

Friday 5th December, 2.30-3.30pm : Teddy Bear's Playday for prospective Pre School and Primary 1 children and parents

Saturday 10th January, 10am-12pm : Open Day GET IN TOUCH Address: 20 Carolan Road, Belfast, BT7 3HE; Phone: 028 9049 2177; Email: info@forge.belfast.ni.sch.uk; Website: forgeips.co.uk

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Dr Morrison is a member



of the Irish Academy of Aesthetic Dentistry and the Association of Dental Implantology, and is always reading articles and attending courses to stay up to date with the latest advancements!

He says: "I believe that we are at an exciting time in dentistry, with more

and more technological advances which can improve what is possible for our patients. I feel as a dentist in the modern age we must continually learn and improve our practices otherwise we will be left behind!"

The growing team (so far!) consists of five dentists, five nurses,

dental hygienist Claire, receptionist Shauna, Yuko (Richard's wife) who does a lot of the work behind the scenes!

Morrison Dental Clinic is conveniently located at 95 Saintfield Road (not far from Forestside), and offers free parking available on site! For your appointment Tel: 028 9070 3215

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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](http://www.hannoncoach.com) up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

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# UNWRAP THE MAGIC: EXCITING CHRISTMAS FAMILY ACTIVITIES

As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, Northern Ireland transforms into a winter wonderland, buzzing with festive cheer.

From dazzling light displays to enchanting Santa experiences, there's a sleigh-full of activities to delight families in the run-up to Christmas. Get

ready to create cherished memories with these magical outings!

Step into a Fairytale at Antrim Castle Gardens Enchanted Winter Garden

One of Northern Ireland's most beloved festive attractions, the Enchanted Winter Garden at Antrim Castle Gardens is a truly

immersive experience.

As dusk falls, the historic gardens are bathed in a spectacular display of light installations, soundscapes, and interactive features. Wander through glowing tunnels, marvel at illuminated sculptures, and let the festive atmosphere transport you. It's a perfect evening out for all ages, offering stunning photo opportunities and a truly magical ambiance. Other venues such as Mount Stewart and Royal Hillsborough normally offer similar experiences - check their websites for details!

Meet Santa in Style

No Christmas is complete without a visit to the big man himself! Northern Ireland offers a plethora of ways to meet Santa:

- Traditional Grottoes: Many shopping centres

like CastleCourt in Belfast and FoyleSide in Derry, along with various garden centres, host traditional Santa's Grottoes.

These are often beautifully decorated and provide a classic meet-and-greet experience with a festive gift.

- Santa Steam Trains: For an extra special journey, hop aboard a Santa Steam Train! Often run by heritage railways (Check out Downpatrick Railway), these experiences allow families to enjoy a festive train ride through scenic landscapes, with Santa making an appearance onboard to chat with children and hand out presents. It's a truly memorable way to combine a love of trains with Christmas magic.

- Farm Park Experiences: Local farm parks (such as Mountpath) often



transform for Christmas, offering

"Winter Wonderland" events that include meeting Santa, seeing his reindeer, and enjoying festive activities

like elf workshops and seasonal crafts.

- Take in a Tour of Lights. Take a drive or walk around your local area to see and admire

the efforts of neighbours. Or make time to visit neighbouring town and village town centres and markets - remembering of course to buy local!

## A Guide to Mindful & Sustainable Gifting

Christmas shopping often feels like a frenzied race to acquire.

This year, shift the focus from volume to value and embrace mindful gifting. A thoughtful,

eco-friendly present is not just kinder to the planet; it offers a deeper, more personal connection to the recipient.

Mindful gifting means choosing items that are: intentional, high-quality and built to last, and have a minimal environmental footprint. Ditch the fast-fashion holiday jumpers and disposable plastic trinkets. Here is a guide to choosing presents that truly matter—long after the wrapping paper is recycled.

The ultimate zero-waste gift is one you can't wrap. Experience-based presents create lasting memories and don't end up in a landfill. Class or Workshop; Tickets for a pottery class, bread-making course,

or a nature photography workshop. They gain a new skill and a shared memory. Membership or Subscription; A pass to a local museum, National Trust/Park membership, or a digital subscription to an interest (e.g., an audiobook service or a meditation app). Voucher for Service; A gift certificate for a house cleaning service, a massage, or a home-delivered meal kit. This grants the gift of time or self-care.

Planned Outing; A personally designed scavenger hunt, a picnic with local produce, or tickets to a concert or theatre show you'll attend together.

Help your loved ones reduce their daily



footprint with beautiful, long-lasting alternatives to single-use items.

Reusable Food Wraps: Replace plastic cling film with beeswax wraps or vegan food wraps made from natural materials. They are washable, compostable, and come in beautiful patterns.

Insulated Reusable Bottles/Cups: A high-quality stainless steel water bottle or leakproof coffee cup is practical and helps eliminate single-use plastic cups.

Zero-Waste Cleaning: Gift a soap block for dishwashing, a set of reusable cloth dishcloths, or a natural cleaning kit with reusable glass spray bottles and concentrate refills.

Jars of Homemade Goods: Fill attractive, reusable glass jars with homemade granola, preserves, or infused oils. The presentation is personal, and the container is reusable.

When buying an object, look for ethical credentials. These gifts support responsible sourcing and local

economies.

Secondhand & Vintage Treasures: A well-chosen vintage piece of jewellery, a classic vinyl record, or a beautiful antique book not only avoids new manufacturing but holds a unique history.

Locally Made Craft: Support local artisans and reduce transportation emissions. Look for items made by hand in your area, such as ceramic mugs, wooden toys, or hand-knitted accessories.

Ethical Fashion Accessories: Choose small items made from recycled or upcycled materials, such as wallets made from reclaimed fire hoses or jewellery crafted from repurposed metals.

Grow-Your-Own Kits: A seed ball kit for wildflowers, an indoor herb garden set, or a potted succulent gives the recipient something living to nurture.

By shifting your mindset, you can give gifts that feel deeply personal, reduce waste, and truly bring joy without the burden of environmental guilt.

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# Colourful new mural strikes a chord

A new mural celebrating the value of music has been unveiled at the Telegraph Building in Donegall Street, marking four years since Belfast became a UNESCO City of Music - still the only city in Ireland to hold this title.

The colourful artwork, depicting different musical styles and genres, was created by artists Friz (Marian Noone) and Gerry Norman and commissioned by Belfast City Council. The UNESCO mural is another welcome addition to the city's eclectic street art collection – much of which has been funded by council.

The artwork is also the latest initiative in the council's Music Matters programme which has seen £400,000 invested into the local music scene in the last year.

Projects to support local artists, ignite the live music scene, nurture new and breakthrough talent and maximise opportunities through the UNESCO designation have included the Pathways into Music conference, helping music tutors and teachers support young people keen to break into the music industry; a music internship programme with WorkPlus, supporting four paid work placements with festivals and events providers; and a NI



Venues Day, highlighting the value of local music spaces, together with the Music Venue Trust. The council continues to fund both the Gradam Ceoil bursary scheme for traditional musicians, with the Duncairn and TG4, and a micro-bursary scheme, with Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival which, last year, provided 20 individual musicians with up to £1,000 of support each. Funding has also been provided to a wide range of music events and

festivals during 2025, including the second edition of the Soultrane Festival in February, an all-ages event celebrating reggae and ska music at the Imagine Festival in March, the Output conference for industry professionals in September, the LyndonFest community festival in September and the NI Music Prize this week. A sustainability toolkit for the music sector will soon be launched on the Music

Connections website (musicconnections.com), while work is also underway on new programmes targeting young people, disabled music fans and local music businesses. For more information about support for Belfast's music scene, visit belfastcity.gov.uk/music Follow Belfast Music at @belfastmusic on Facebook, @ourbelfastmusic on X and @belfastmusic\_scene on Instagram

# FIELD DAY PARTNERS WITH ULSTER WILDLIFE TO ENCOURAGE 5,000 HOUSEHOLDS TO LET NATURE IN BLOOM

Local County Down fragrance company FieldDay has partnered with local nature conservation charity Ulster Wildlife to encourage 5,000 households to get involved in the charity's Let Nature In wildlife gardening campaign.

The campaign inspires households to take simple but powerful steps to support wildlife, starting in their own gardens. From planting native flowers for pollinators to leaving water and natural food for birds, these small changes can make a big difference for biodiversity. Already more than 2,600 households have signed up to Let Nature In. And with one in nine native species at risk of extinction in Northern Ireland – including once-common garden visitors such as hedgehogs and house sparrows – the campaign has the potential to make a huge difference in helping bring nature back.

Dawn Miskelly, CEO of Ulster Wildlife, said: "We're thrilled to partner with FieldDay to inspire even more people to take simple, positive action for nature. By making small changes at home, together we can make a big difference for local wildlife – helping to bring nature back, one garden at a time." Maureen Carvill, Wildlife Gardening Officer at Ulster Wildlife, said: "Our gardens collectively cover more land than all



of Northern Ireland's nature reserves, making them a lifeline for wildlife especially as climate change and habitat loss take their toll. With FieldDay's support, we're aiming to reach our ambitious goal of getting 5,000 households involved – sowing the seeds of change and creating a network of wildlife-friendly spaces that will help nature thrive." Alix Mulholland, Co-

founder of FieldDay, added: "We've always been inspired by Ireland's landscapes, and through this partnership with Ulster Wildlife, we can combine creativity with conservation. Helping people transform their outdoor spaces into havens for wildlife is a natural extension of our ethos – and it's easier than people think, thanks to Ulster Wildlife's fantastic step-by-step

guides." Everyone who signs up to Ulster Wildlife's Let Nature In' campaign will receive a free digital pack, packed full of information to get started, plus seasonal advice and tips to help bring more nature into gardens, terraces, and balconies. To join the campaign and bring more nature into your outdoor spaces, visit ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in

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# ALL-NEW LEAF HITS THE ROAD

The Nissan LEAF – the world’s first mass-market electric vehicle when it originally launched in Europe in 2011 – is back, signalling Nissan’s determination to be at the forefront of electric innovation.

Proudly built in Britain, at Nissan’s world-class EV manufacturing site in Sunderland, the all-new third generation model has hit the roads for the first time in Copenhagen, boasting an elite level range of up to 386 miles alongside a sharp new look, integrated technology and a host of new driver assistance features.

Designed at Nissan’s Global Design Studio in Atsugi, Japan and built at Nissan’s Sunderland Plant, UK, the all-new LEAF presents a dynamic crossover look that blends aerodynamic efficiency and visual impact. With a drag coefficient of just

0.25, the car’s clean, flowing appearance not only looks sharp and brings a real presence to the road, it also supports the model’s excellent 386 miles top range and its general efficiency.

Supporting its sleek and streamlined look, Nissan LEAF boasts a host of upgraded exterior features, carefully engineered to catch the eye and confirm that our zero-emission masterpieces don’t skip on style.

The cabin inside is spacious and family-ready, including up to 437 litres (VDA) of cargo space. Power liftgate and roof rail options add flexibility, while seven expressive colour



choices – including signature Luminous Teal – ensure the Nissan LEAF can be personalised to suit families, commuters,

urban explorers and weekend day-trippers alike.

Built on the CMF-EV modular platform shared with the

Nissan Ariya, LEAF delivers engaging yet comfortable driving.

The suspension – MacPherson at the front and multi-link

at the rear – ensures a smooth, agile drive across city streets and motorways.

At the heart of the Nissan LEAF

is a refined electric motor delivering clean and responsive performance – 215hp of power and 355Nm of torque power the LEAF from 0 to 62mph in 7.6 seconds (Sport Mode / 75kwh battery). With 4.5 miles/kWh miles energy consumption, all-new LEAF ensures effortless driving with maximum efficiency.

The Nissan LEAF is equipped with a suite of advanced safety and driver assistance features, designed to support confident driving in all conditions. From Intelligent Emergency Braking and Blind Spot Intervention to Rear Cross Traffic Alert and Lane Keep Assist, Nissan

LEAF is engineered to deliver peace of mind. Additional features such as the 3D Around View Monitor, Invisible Hood View, and Front Wide View make parking and navigating tight spaces easier and safer.

At the heart of the LEAF’s connected experience is NissanConnect with Google built-in, delivering seamless integration with daily life for the modern driver.

Nissan LEAF will be manufactured in Sunderland, UK, using 20% renewable energy. Production and pre-orders to start before the end of the year, with first deliveries set for Spring 2026.

## DFI Launches Road Safety Campaign: Be Bold. Be Seen

Minister for Infrastructure Liz Kimmins has launched a new road safety campaign to encourage road users to be more visible as the darker winter months approach.

‘Be Bold. Be Seen’ encourages pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users to wear bold bright or high-visibility clothing.

Far too many lives are being lost and too many families lives are shattered by the worst possible news and evidence shows that people who walk, cycle or ride a horse are among the most vulnerable groups of road users.

Tragically, more than one in five people killed on our roads over the past decade were pedestrians. Stark statistics have revealed that, on average, 10 motorcyclists are killed on our roads every year.

The campaign features three striking visuals that will appear on the rear of buses, posters and a social

media campaign.

1. You wouldn’t be seen dead in this

This visual delivers a hard hitting message, that being invisible on the road is a risk not worth taking. The slogan plays on the double meaning of being seen both in terms of fashion and survival.

2. Take a fashion risk not a safety risk

This creative approach is designed to capture attention quickly, particularly in high-visibility formats such as bus rears, by linking fashion choices with personal safety.

3. If he could he would

The message is clear: while wildlife has no control over its visibility on our roads, people do. Whether walking, cycling, or working near traffic,

choosing to wear high-vis clothing can be the difference between being seen and not.

By using this relatable and emotive image, the campaign aims to spark conversation and encourage behavioural change, especially as daylight hours shorten in autumn.

Minister Kimmins said: “Road safety is a priority for me as Infrastructure Minister as we work hard within the Department to reduce the number of road deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

“This campaign uses simple but powerful images to remind us all that visibility is a choice.

“We hope it encourages people to think twice before heading out without high-vis

gear, especially during darker months.

“Be Bold Be Seen is a particularly important message for those who might be most vulnerable on our roads as the nights get darker including pedestrians and cyclists.”

The latest road safety campaign complements recent work undertaken by the Department to improve road safety behaviour.

Current campaigns include safety around school buses for children [www.sharetheroad-tozero.com/DriversThinkSafetyWhenPassingBuses](http://www.sharetheroad-tozero.com/DriversThinkSafetyWhenPassingBuses), and a TV campaign which urges pedestrians and drivers to recognise the shared risk of using the roads: [www.sharetheroad-tozero.com/PedestrianSafety](http://www.sharetheroad-tozero.com/PedestrianSafety).

## The MINI Paul Smith Edition.

Paul Smith and MINI – two traditional British brands have taken their partnership to the next level and created something great:

The new MINI Paul Smith Edition. Following the MINI STRIP in 2021 and the MINI Recharged by Paul Smith in 2022, the British designer is now bringing his world-famous design language – ‘Classic with a twist’ – to the new MINI family. Whether electric or combustion engine, the edition will be available for all MINI Cooper 3-door, 5-door and Convertible models, with the exception of the John Cooper Works models. The look and details not only show Paul Smith’s signature style – but also the brands playful, optimistic and independent spirit.

Combining MINI design with Paul Smith’s distinctive style: Exclusive exterior colours, sophisticated accents and unexpected details bring the shared history of MINI and Paul Smith into the present.

The MINI Paul Smith Edition offers a choice of three exterior paint finishes, two of which are edition-exclusive: Statement Grey is a modern interpretation of the classic Mini Austin Seven colour from 1959 – a clear, bluish-tinted grey shade and self-confident statement of timeless modernity. Inspired White is a contemporary homage to the popular Classic Mini Beige colour, and finally the elegant and classic Midnight Black Metallic from the

current MINI Family.

Regardless of the body colour, the specially created Nottingham Green paintwork – a tribute to Sir Paul’s hometown – adds sophisticated accents to the side mirrors, the octagonal radiator grille, the wheel hub covers with Paul Smith lettering and as the paintwork for one of the two roof variants.

In addition to the colour variants, numerous details characterise Paul Smith’s signature and make the MINI Paul Smith Edition unmistakable: The ‘Signature Stripe’, a central design feature of the British designer, adorns the roof in Nottingham Green at the rear of the driver’s side. The alternative version of the roof features elegant stripes in Jet Black in varying thickness, both matte and glossy. The MINI Cooper Convertible Paul Smith Edition is supplied with a black soft top.

All edition vehicles are equipped with 18-inch Night Flash Spoke black aluminium wheels with tinted clear coat in Dark Steel. The MINI logo at the front and rear is offered in newly designed Black Blue and complements the colour composition of Paul Smith and MINI. On the black horizontal handle strip at the rear, Paul Smith’s signature refers to the creative spirit behind the vehicle design.



British character is also reflected in the interior with numerous components featuring a modern, elegant look. The knitted surfaces on the dashboard and door panels appear in black, while Paul Smith fabrics in tone-on-tone stripe patterns serve as inspiration for the special structure of the dashboard. The Nightshade Blue sports seats are made of Vescin and have knitted textile in the

shoulder and headrest areas. Drawn from the Signature Stripe, the decorative stitching on the steering wheel’s textile band is designed in bright colours - quintessentially Paul Smith.

To mark the 40th birthday of the classic MINI in 1999, the fashion designer dipped an exclusive one-off in his characteristic stripe design, using 86 stripes in 26 colours.

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# Prepping Your Home for a Tradesman’s Arrival

You’ve signed the quote, agreed on the schedule, and cleared your calendar. The professional plumber, electrician, or decorator is scheduled to arrive tomorrow. Your job is done, right? Not quite.

A tradesman’s ability to work quickly, cleanly, and efficiently often hinges on the preparations made by the homeowner. Think of it as the “pre-game”—the small steps you take now that save hours of labor costs and prevent common job site headaches.

Spending 30 minutes on preparation can translate into hundreds of pounds saved and a much smoother overall experience. Here is a three-step checklist to ensure your project starts quickly and smoothly.

A professional’s hourly rate starts the moment they arrive. Every minute spent moving furniture, boxing up knick-knacks, or sweeping up clutter is time you are paying for, which delays the actual work.

Create a Buffer Zone: For internal work (plumbing, electrical, decorating), clear a space at least three feet (one metre) around the immediate work area. If they are working on a kitchen wall, empty the adjacent cabinets and move the dining table.

Remove Personal Items: Take down all wall art, framed photos, and mirrors in the vicinity, as vibration from tools can cause them to fall. Roll up area rugs and remove curtains if the work involves a window or door.

Provide Clear Access: Ensure the path from the entryway to the work zone is completely clear. If they need to haul materials, make sure there are no obstacles like parked cars in the driveway or garden tools blocking the gate.

Pro Tip: If the work is dusty (e.g., sanding or demolition), ask the tradesman beforehand what they recommend for protecting nearby items. They often expect you to have cleared the area, not for them to spend time masking delicate items.

A critical aspect of professional work is access to necessary resources. Before the contractor arrives, confirm these three basics:

Power: Locate and clearly label your consumer unit (fuse box) and ensure the area around it is accessible in case a breaker needs resetting.

Water: If the work involves plumbing, ensure the main water shut-off valve is accessible and that you know how to operate it (and share this knowledge with the tradesman). If they will need to clean tools, designate an accessible sink or outdoor tap they can use.

Parking and Access: If parking permits are required in your street, let them know in advance. If there are specific entry or exit rules for your building (e.g., block of flats), communicate these clearly.

Communicate on Pets, Children, and Security

Safety and clarity are paramount on a job site.

Secure Pets and Children: Construction sites are inherently unsafe for children and pets. Even a friendly dog can become a hazard by walking over tools or distracting a professional operating machinery. Secure pets in a closed room or outdoor space before the tradesman arrives and keep children away from the active work zone.

Communicate House Rules: If you have special requirements (e.g., taking shoes off, specific bathroom usage, or a quiet time for naps), communicate these upfront, not during the work.

Review the Scope: Have a quick five-minute conversation when the team arrives to review the work area, confirm what they plan to achieve that day, and address any last-minute questions.

By preparing your home, you demonstrate respect for the professional’s time and expertise, which fosters a better relationship and ensures your project starts quickly and progresses without costly friction.

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# SETTING YOUR 2026 HOME REPAIR BUDGET

The New Year is a time for resolutions, but for homeowners, the smartest resolution is financial: getting ahead of inevitable wear and tear.



A house isn’t a stagnant asset; it’s a collection of systems that require constant funding. By budgeting proactively, you replace the stress of emergency repairs with the power of planned investments.

Calculating Your Annual Maintenance Budget

The first step is establishing a baseline for routine care and unexpected small repairs. Professionals use a few rules of thumb:

- The 1% Rule of Thumb: Budget 1% to 4% of your home’s value annually for maintenance and repairs. If your home is valued at £300,000, that means allocating £3,000 to £12,000 per year.
- Newer Homes (under 10 years): Stick closer to the 1% range.
- Older Homes (over 30 years): Plan for 2% to 4%, as major components are likely due for replacement.
- The Component Age Method (More Accurate): Instead of a percentage, look at the remaining lifespan of your major systems. This is the most accurate approach for long-term planning.
- If a new roof costs £12,000 and is expected to last 20 years, you should budget £600 per year for the roof alone. Repeat this for your boiler, water heater, etc.
- Establishing an Emergency Fund for Major Replacements

While the annual budget covers ongoing costs (gutter cleaning, boiler service, minor plumbing), a separate Capital Replacement Fund is essential for high-cost, systems-level failures that often happen suddenly. This includes your Boiler/heating system, roof, water heater and exterior paint/render.

Start with a Goal: Aim to save a minimum of £3,000 to £5,000 as a readily available, “liquid” emergency fund for unexpected events like a burst pipe or structural repair.

Fund the Future:

The remainder of your calculated annual savings should go into a dedicated, high-interest savings account earmarked strictly for these major replacements. This prevents you from taking on high-interest debt when the boiler inevitably fails in mid-winter.

The Upgrade vs. Repair Decision

When a major component breaks, you face the crucial question: Should you pay for a repair, or upgrade the system entirely? A professional should help you weigh these three factors:

- The 50% Rule (Cost vs. Replacement)

If the cost of the repair exceeds 50% of the cost of a brand new, equivalent system, replacement is almost always the more economical choice. For example, if a new boiler is £4,000, but the repair quote is £2,200, opt for the new unit. You gain a full warranty and a new lifespan for a slightly higher investment.

Age vs. Efficiency (The Payback Period)

Especially for heating systems (Boilers, HVAC), age is the enemy of efficiency.

Repair if: The system is under 10 years old and the repair is minor (e.g., a simple thermostat replacement).

Upgrade if: The system is over 15 years old or you’ve noticed a significant increase in energy bills. New A-rated condensing boilers or heat pumps are so much more efficient than older models that the energy savings often pay back the installation cost within a few years.

The Frequency of Failure

If you are calling a repair professional more than once a year for the same system, it is showing systemic failure and should be replaced. The cumulative cost of recurring service calls, labour, and minor parts will quickly outweigh the cost of a reliable new installation. Frequent failure is a clear sign that repair is just delaying the inevitable.

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# A Checklist for Hiring a Contractor

The New Year often brings plans for renovation, repair, or that long-deferred major project. Yet, for many homeowners, the process of hiring a qualified professional—be it a plumber, electrician, or general contractor—is riddled with anxiety.

As tradesmen, we see the costly results of shortcuts and rushed decisions. We know the difference between a professional who stands by their work and one who cuts corners. To protect your investment and ensure quality, use this simple 5-point checklist, straight from the professional's perspective, before you sign on the dotted line.

1. Verify Licensing and Insurance: Your Baseline Protection

This step is non-negotiable and is your first line of financial defense. Always ask for proof of two key documents:

- Licensing: The contractor must hold a current, valid license relevant to the work being performed in

your specific area. A licensed professional has demonstrated competency and is bound by industry standards and local building codes.

- Insurance: They must carry both Public Liability Insurance (to cover accidental damage to your property, e.g., if they accidentally drop something through the ceiling) and Employers' Liability Insurance (to protect you if a worker is injured on your property). Without this, you could potentially be held financially liable for significant damages or medical bills.

Pro Tip: Never rely solely on a photocopy. Look up the license number and insurance details yourself via the relevant local trade

or regulatory bodies to confirm they are active and in good standing.

2. Demand a Detailed, Written Scope of Work (Quote)

Verbal agreements invite costly misunderstandings. A professional quote—or Scope of Work (SOW)—must be more than just a single price. It should be a blueprint for the entire job.

Insist that the SOW clearly defines what is included and, crucially, what is not included. It must specify:

- Materials: Exact brand names, model numbers, and quantities of materials (e.g., "Dulux Trade Vinyl Matt in Brilliant White," not just "paint").

- Labor: The estimated time frame and the breakdown of labor costs.



- Payment Schedule: A clear plan of payments tied to completed, verifiable milestones. Avoid large upfront deposits; a reasonable deposit is acceptable, but payments should reflect progress.

- Change Orders: A defined process for how

scope changes will be documented, priced, and approved by you before the work proceeds.

3. Review Portfolio Examples of Relevant Work

While enthusiasm is great, major projects demand proven experience. Ask potential contractors

for references and, specifically, photos or site visits related to the project you are hiring for.

If you are renovating a bespoke bathroom, ask to see recent bespoke bathroom renovations. If you are hiring a roofer, ask for evidence of similar-sized and similar-style roof installations. This confirms that the tradesman has mastered the specific skills and logistical challenges your job presents. A quality professional is always proud to show off their recent work.

4. Check References (and Ask the Right Questions)

Don't just ask for references; ask for the most recent references and actually call them. This is where you gain insight into

the contractor's process, not just their final product.

When you call, ask questions that go beyond "Were you satisfied?":

- Did they stick to the budget? If not, what caused the deviation?

- How did they handle unexpected issues? (The true test of a good contractor is how they solve problems, not if they run into any.)

- Was the site kept tidy and safe?

- Would you hire them again?

5. Evaluate Communication and Professionalism

The way a contractor handles communication before the job is often a perfect reflection of how they will manage the job itself. Pay close attention to

these cues:

- Punctuality: Did they show up on time for the consultation?

- Clarity: Did they clearly and patiently answer your technical questions, or did they use jargon to confuse you?

- Respect: Did they respect your time, home, and budget constraints?

A successful contractor is not only skilled with tools but also skilled at project management and client relations. If you sense poor organisation or a lack of attention to detail now, those issues will inevitably amplify once the construction starts. Choosing a tradesman isn't just about the lowest price; it's about investing in trust, reliability, and quality that will last.

# Efficiency Upgrades That Really Save You Money

When facing the costs of home maintenance, homeowners often ask: Which investments genuinely pay us back? With rising energy prices, the greatest return on investment (ROI) often comes not from aesthetics, but from efficiency.

From a tradesman's perspective, these three upgrades are the most impactful ways to slash utility bills and increase your home's value in 2026.

Insulation: The Foundation of Savings

Before considering new technology, look at the basics. Proper insulation is arguably the best return on investment a homeowner can make. It's a one-time cost that dramatically reduces heat transfer, extending the life of your heating and cooling systems because they don't have to work as hard.

Attic/Loft: Ensure

your loft meets current recommended insulation levels, focusing on the R-value (a measure of thermal resistance). Upgrading from older, shallow insulation to modern, thick materials can cut heating bills by up to 25%.

Cavity Walls: If your home has unfilled cavity walls, insulating them is fast, relatively inexpensive, and stops a huge amount of heat from escaping.

Investing in robust insulation is like putting a thermos around your home—it keeps the expensive, conditioned air in, providing immediate and

consistent savings.

Smart Thermostats: Smarter Heating, Not Harder

For a relatively small initial outlay, a smart thermostat offers powerful control. These devices learn your routines, automatically adjust temperatures based on whether you're home, and can be controlled remotely.

While a smart thermostat doesn't technically generate savings, it maximizes the efficiency of your existing system by eliminating wasted energy. You stop heating an empty house. Furthermore, many models provide detailed energy usage reports, allowing you to identify and adjust

inefficient habits. This technology offers a quick ROI, often recouping its cost within the first year through optimised scheduling.

The Leap to Heat Pumps

For major, long-term savings, few systems rival the Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP). Unlike traditional boilers that burn fuel to create heat, ASHPs extract heat from the outside air (even when it's cold) and use a heat exchanger to transfer it indoors.

While the initial installation cost is significant, government incentives and the unit's incredible efficiency make it a powerful investment:

Exceptional Efficiency: ASHPs produce significantly more energy than they consume, often achieving efficiencies of 300% or more, compared to around 90-95% for high-efficiency gas boilers.

Dual Function: They provide highly efficient heating in the winter and cooling in the summer,

replacing two separate systems.

A heat pump represents the future of home heating, offering a substantial ROI over its 15- to 20-year lifespan through vastly lower running costs. When calculating your 2026 budget, prioritise efficiency; it's the professional way to future-proof your bills.



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## Explore Rosetta: Events for Prospective Nursery & P1 Families 2025/2026



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We'd love to welcome you into our warm and inclusive school community. Whether you're considering a Nursery or P1 place for September 2026, these special events offer a chance to experience the joyful learning environment that makes Rosetta so unique.



### P1 – A Beary Special Afternoon

Thinking about a P1 place for  
your child?

We'd love to welcome all prospective P1 children to join us for a Beary Special Afternoon on Tuesday 16th December. This is a fun and friendly session designed just for prospective P1 children.

Scan the QR code to book your  
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### Pre-School Peek N' Play

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