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Specially designed wristbands and hang tags free are available free of charge for individuals living with dementia Near Field Communication (NFC) technology to assist if a person wearing them becomes disorientated or lost. For information see <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/dementiafriendly>

LOCAL DEMENTIA SAFEGUARDING SCHEME LAUNCHED

This local dementia safeguarding scheme provides specially designed wristbands and hang tags free of charge for individuals living with dementia.

These devices help to support independence and improve safety of these individuals within the community.

Avon and Somerset Police pioneered this scheme which uses Near Field Communication (NFC)

to assist if a person wearing them becomes disorientated or lost. The NFC tags are programmed with emergency contacts for the next of kin, which can be accessed quickly and securely by anyone with the tap of a smartphone.

Families and caregivers of those living with dementia can get peace of mind from the easily identifiable devices of this Dementia Safeguarding Scheme.

If a person living with dementia is found in distress or confused,

members of the public can easily recognise the wristbands or hang tags and take action to contact the next of kin to reunite them quickly with their family or carer.

Continued on page 4

LISBURN AREA HAS FEWEST REPORTED POTHOLES

Northern Ireland's most pothole-ridden areas have been revealed, with the latest data showing that the region's broken roads continue to pose a danger to motorists.

Potholes are a persistent source of frustration for drivers, leading to costly repair bills for thousands of motorists in Northern Ireland every year. They are also a major safety concern, increasing the risk of serious accidents and injuries on our roads.

While there was a slight drop in the number of potholes reported over the last 12 months – down 3% from the previous calendar year – they continue to present a significant challenge for NI motorists, accounting for 80% of all road claims received by Stormont last year.

The statistics show that of the 127,109 surface defects recorded on NI roads in 2025, a staggering 77%

(97,897) were related to potholes.

Overall, Belfast emerged as the area with the highest number of reported potholes, with 16,856 in 2025 – a significant rise of 38% from the previous year.

Newry, Mourne and Down was the next hardest hit area at 15,249, followed by Mid Ulster, which recorded 12,683 potholes.

While four of the 11 local council areas saw an increase in potholes year-on-year, the majority experienced a decrease. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon enjoyed the biggest year-on-year drop of 35%, while Lisburn and Castlereagh recorded the fewest potholes overall at 3980.

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LOCAL COMMUNITY HUBS TO DELIVER BLOOD TESTS FOR PATIENTS ACROSS TRUST

The South Eastern Trust’s Community Phlebotomy Hubs in Ards Hospital, Downe Hospital and Lagan Valley Hospital provide a vital blood testing service in the heart of the community.

In 2025, the Team carried out an incredible 28,000 tests.

The Trust is delighted that this valuable and growing service is now fully funded by the Department of Health.

The hubs play a crucial role in providing blood tests in local hospitals, meaning patients do not have to travel to the Ulster Hospital.

When the service began prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Team initially helped approximately 400 patients per year. However, during 2024/25 alone, the service delivered an impressive 28,000 blood tests, clearly demonstrating how vital and well used the hubs are by both patients and clinicians. On average, 2,000 patients go through the hubs each month.

Patients attend the Community Phlebotomy Hubs for blood tests ahead of planned procedures or treatment. This includes patients from the Diabetes Service, those undergoing cancer treatment, patients receiving



biologic therapies and anyone preparing for surgery. Pre-assessment Nurses, particularly when carrying out pre-assessments, can refer patients directly to the Community Phlebotomy Hubs to ensure all required blood work is completed in advance and patients are clinically cleared for their procedures or surgery.

Having blood results available ahead of appointment means clinical staff have the necessary information at hand, helping to avoid delays and improving overall care pathways.

Highlighting the significance of the service receiving recurrent funding, South Eastern Trust, Director of Surgery,

Paediatrics and Elective Care, Maggie Parks, stated, “Our Community Phlebotomy Hubs make a real difference by providing essential blood testing closer to home for thousands of patients.

“We are delighted to have recurrent funding in place, which allows us to sustain and grow a service that is clearly valued by our communities.”

“Pathways to Succeed” launched for local schools

Young Enterprise NI, in partnership with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, has launched an exciting new initiative, ‘Pathways to Succeed’, a series of interactive enterprise skills development programmes for at post-primary and special educational needs (SEN) schools across the council area.

Pathways to Succeed offers a range of engaging, hands-on sessions focused on developing work readiness: preparing young people for the world of work and inspiring them to realise their potential.

Commenting on the programme, Councillor Claire Kemp, Regeneration and Growth Chair said: “We are proud to invest in the future of our young people. Pathways to Succeed gives pupils across the area the chance to develop vital skills, confidence and ambition. This programme reflects our ongoing commitment to nurturing potential and building a stronger, more resilient community for the future.”

Carol Fitzimons, CEO of Young Enterprise NI added: “We’re delighted to work with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council on Pathways to Succeed. This initiative helps young people build the confidence, creativity and enterprise skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world of work.



Together, we’re ensuring every young person has the opportunity to realise their potential and shape their own future.”

Speaking at the launch of the Pathways to Succeed Programme in Lagan College, Belfast, Vice Principal Deborah Carlisle said: “Young Enterprise is an invaluable resource for all of our

pupils. Their expertly led workshops, programmes and resources develop financial capability, entrepreneurship and employability skills. From Year 8 to Year 14, students enjoy participating in these programmes as they gain in confidence and enhance their communication and presentation skills.

“We are thankful for

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council’s support for this initiative in our school. It’s about building skills for life and preparing young people to thrive in whatever path they choose. It’s an investment in our young people and in the future of our economy.”

To learn about Young Enterprise NI visit: www.yeni.co.uk



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Funding opportunities for Lisburn South

This year, £15,000 of Grand Choice funding is available for local projects across Lisburn South, including Knockmore, Lagan Valley, Lisnagarvey, Old Warren, Ballymacash and Ballymacross.

Successful projects will then be chosen by local people, with residents voting for the ideas they want to see happen in their area.

Councillor Tim Mitchell, Chair of LCCC's Community & Wellbeing Committee, said:

"We're delighted to bring Grand Choice back to Lisburn South. This scheme puts local people in control and gives communities a real say in how funding is spent. We encourage everyone to come along, vote and support the projects that matter to them the most."

Funding can be used for things like:

Activities and events (online or in person)

Workshops, tutors or performers

Specialist facilitators

Equipment or promotional campaigns to tackle local issues

Projects must run between April and September 2026 and support one or more of the 'Take 5' themes of 'Connect', 'Be Active', 'Take Notice', 'Keep Learning' and 'Give'. You can find out more about the Take 5 themes here. Policing and community safety related projects will also be eligible for funding.

Councillor Alan Martin, Chair Lisburn and Castlereagh PCSP, said:



"Grand Choice has already been a huge success across the council area. It's a great opportunity for residents and groups to turn simple ideas into real community projects. If you have an idea and a few friends willing to help, we'd love to hear from you."

"Groups that are not formally set up can still apply, as long as they have support from a local constituted group. If you need help with your idea, our team will be available during the application

period to talk you through it, in-person or via online workshops. All applications will be checked to make sure they are safe, legal and achievable within the budget and timescale."

How to apply?

You can apply online or download an application form <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/grand-choice-2025-26-lisburn-south>. The closing date for entries is Sunday 8th February 2026. Voting will take place in-person at a Community

Decision Event on Saturday 21st March, from 11am to 3pm in Elmwood Presbyterian Church Hall, Lisburn.

To ask a question or get advice, email pcsp@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk.

Grand Choice is supported by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, alongside partners including the PSNI, Sport NI, Ark Housing, South Eastern Trust, Choice Housing, Apex Housing and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.



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VITAL SERVICE NOW OFFERED AT THOMPSON HOUSE HOSPITAL

A "busy person" all his life, 73-year-old Gerard 'Gerry' Heaney from Craigavon was diagnosed in 2018 with the rare and chronic Myasthenia Gravis (MG), an autoimmune neuromuscular disease that causes severe weakness and rapid fatigue in voluntary muscles.

The former School Teacher has praised the exceptional care and compassion he has received from the South Eastern Trust Neurology Team, which delivers the Regional Neuromuscular Service for Northern Ireland.

The Regional Neuromuscular Service transferred from the Belfast Trust to the South Eastern Trust in November 2024. It was initially based at Lagan Valley Hospital but in October 2025, it moved to Thompson House in Lisburn, which is a Regional hospital providing acute assessment and rehabilitation for adults with an Acquired Brain Injury or complex neurological disability.

South Eastern Trust, Neuromuscular Clinical Nurse Specialist, Sarah Mason highlighted the importance of having a dedicated Regional service. "Once a patient's diagnosis is confirmed, it is really important that they have their own specialist service. There are often no cures or definitive treatments for many neuromuscular conditions. Having our own service in Northern Ireland, based in Thompson House Hospital, is vital. Otherwise, patients would have to travel outside Northern Ireland, for care.

"We provide essential, practical support such as monitoring respiratory and cardiac function. There are more than 60 neurological

conditions, some rare and some extremely rare and it is crucial that patients are seen by staff who understand their condition, can ensure they access the right services and can advocate for them with other professionals."

Gerry Heaney recalled being referred to Neurology Consultant, Dr John McConville who at the time was based at the City Hospital in Belfast.

"After a while I was told the service would be moving to Lagan Valley Hospital in Lisburn. It did not matter where I went, as long as I was getting the right treatment by the experts," said Gerry.

"When I was told the service was moving again to Thompson House Hospital. I have to say I was really impressed. Both the City Hospital and Lagan Valley are big, busy places. Thompson House Hospital is much quieter and more personable. It is fantastic and Dr McConville is here along with such a high level of care from the Nurses and staff. I cannot fault anything about the care I have received."

Coming to terms with his initial diagnosis, Gerry and his family faced further challenges when he was also diagnosed with Cerebellar Ataxia in February 2025. This condition affects muscle co-ordination, balance and control due to damage or dysfunction in the cerebellum, the part of the brain responsible for



Patient Gerry Heaney with Neurology Staff Nurse Paula Woods

movement.

"I did have a bad fall at home and damaged my rotator cuff and hurt my ribs, but thankfully nothing was broken. I am coping and that is the main thing," Gerry explained.

The Neuro Muscular clinic is located on the ground floor of Thompson House Hospital, with easy access from the car park. For Gerry who uses a rollator, this has made attending appointments much easier.

With his calm and positive outlook, Gerry shared how his diagnoses meant he had to step back from his ministry as a Deacon in his Church, but he remains hopeful. "I am hoping that in the New Year that I will be able to go back to assisting with Mass.

"The level of care I have received is second to none. I feel so well looked after. I have a great Consultant

in Dr McConville and a fantastic Neuromuscular Nurse, Sarah Mason. You could not ask for more."

South Eastern Trust, Neurology Consultant, Dr John McConville said the Thompson House Hospital location offers significant benefits to patients. "What we have here is excellent access in terms of parking and wheelchair access. Thompson House Hospital is a really nice hospital with a strong rehabilitation background, making it an ideal environment for people with neuromuscular conditions."

Dr McConville added, "We are very patient-centred and we aim to offer a holistic service. Our Specialist Nurse and Specialist Physiotherapist are experts in Neuromuscular conditions and having the team based together at Thompson

House Hospital allows us to carry out complex reviews of the multiple issues our patients often face."

South Eastern Trust, Assistant Director of Medical Specialties and Cancer Medicine, Mary Jo Thompson stated, "We are delighted as a Trust to deliver the Regional Neuromuscular Service for Northern Ireland. Since October 2025, the service has been based at Thompson House Hospital, our specialist neuro-rehabilitation facility.

"It is fantastic to provide both inpatient and outpatient neuromuscular services from this beautiful and accessible building which is ideally suited to this patient group.

"We have a dedicated and highly skilled team delivering an excellent neuromuscular service for our patients."

Continued from page 1

Councillor Tim Mitchell, Communities and Wellbeing Chairman added: "Within Lisburn and Castlereagh our percentage of older

residents is increasing, and this scheme helps us deliver better, safer communities for all. Dementia is diagnosed in people aged 30 to 65 and currently in Northern Ireland around 25,000 people are currently living with

dementia.

"We must prepare our communities as this figure is expected to rise to 37,500 by 2040. By introducing the Dementia Safeguarding Scheme and providing wrap around support we can help our communities become 'Dementia Friends'. Let us work together to ensure those with dementia are protected and supported."

The Dementia Safeguarding Scheme is a joint initiative between the Lisburn & Castlereagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We have 500 wristbands and hang tags available that are free of charge.

A series of drop-in information sessions

have been arranged to give people the opportunity to find out more about the scheme and register for an information band in person. No appointment is necessary.

For more information about the Dementia Safeguarding Scheme, how to use NFC or to register for a device, visit <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/dementiafriendly>

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Hairdressing Students Raise £300 for Skincare Charity DEBRA

Level 3 Hairdressing students at South Eastern Regional College (SERC) raised £300 at their hair treatment fund-raiser in aid of skincare charity DEBRA at Shadeka, the college's hair salon at the Lisburn Campus.



Level 3 Hairdressing students at South Eastern Regional College (SERC) (Back L - R) Kirsten Ayton, Becky Benson, Emily McConnell, Lucy Patrick and (Front L-R) Hairdressing Lecturer, Lynn Rainey, Demi-Lee Tiffen, Jess Hughes, Megan Roberts, Ellie Richardson, Jessica Hamilton, Sahara McCormick.

DEBRA is the national charity and support organisation for people with epidermolysis bullosa (EB). Inherited EB is a group of rare and incredibly painful genetic skin conditions that cause the skin to blister and tear at the slightest touch. It is often referred to as ‘butterfly skin’ as sufferers have skin as fragile as a butterfly’s wings.

SERC Hairdressing lecturer Lynn Rainey said, “As part of the students’ assessment, they are required to plan, organise and promote an event for charity. The event gave them the opportunity to deliver a range of hairdressing treatments for clients, to include OLAPLEX treatments, blow-dry, up-styles and heated curls.

She added, “The students decided to support DEBRA as one of their classmates - and members of her family - suffer from the condition which affects around 5000 people in the UK. Learning about the rare condition, and how it impacts everyday life, prompted them to support the charity which supports their friend.”

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PUPILS TOOK ACTION WITH MYEARTH PLATFORM

Schools in Lisburn and Castlereagh marked a 'Green Christmas' last month by using the new myEARTH platform to power its Eco-Schools projects and inspire pupils to take meaningful environmental action.

Launched earlier this year, myEARTH is Northern Ireland's new digital hub for environmental action. Developed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful in partnership with Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL), the platform makes it easier for schools, families and communities to discover and take part in sustainability projects, connecting them to a growing network of local environmental organisations.

This year marks the first full cycle of Eco-Schools activity being coordinated through myEARTH, with 308 schools now using the platform to plan, track, and showcase their environmental projects. Supported by a network of more than 40 delivery partners – including the National Trust, Ulster Wildlife, RSPB NI and The Weatherbys – schools have access to resources, events, and expert guidance, helping pupils and Eco-Committees bring their sustainability initiatives to life across topics such as waste, energy, biodiversity, and climate.

A key feature of the platform is its digital Action Cards, which provide step-by-step instructions aligned with Eco-Schools topics. With these tools in place, schools can now use the platform to manage their projects, monitor their progress, and celebrate their achievements – and McKinney Primary School, an Eco-Schools Ambassador School that celebrated its 10th Green Flag and received the Silver Sustrans School Mark this year, has been leading the way.

The school highlighted its environmental achievements and spread festive sustainability through activities across Outdoor Learning, Transport and Healthy Living. Highlights include additional staff training in Forest Schools, a thriving Nature Rangers Club, and a partnership with the National Trust, enabling all year groups to take part in outdoor activities on Divis Mountain.

McKinney's commitment to sustainable travel and wellbeing is equally



strong. Now in its final year of the Walk, Wheel and Cycle Trust programme, the school recently produced a video for the Department for Infrastructure showcasing the programme's impact, particularly for a pupil with additional needs - the video has already received over 9,000 views. In addition, pupils organised a whole-school fitness day this term, raising over £2,000 to fund a defibrillator for the Dun-

drod community, reflecting McKinney's focus on both environmental action and community wellbeing.

Managed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and supported by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Eco-Schools programme in Northern Ireland has reached a milestone this year, with over 50% of schools now flying a Green

Flag. The success of schools like McKinney Primary demonstrates the crucial role platforms such as myEARTH play in supporting the next generation of eco-conscious leaders.

The myEARTH project is funded through a £488,557 grant from Dormant Assets NI, which is delivered by The National Lottery Community Fund.

For more information visit www.myeearth.org.uk

NI Water Opens Applications for Entry Level Academy

NI Water is launching its search for 27 new apprentices, higher level apprentices (HLA) and graduates as part of its September 2026 Entry Level Academy intake.

The recruitment drive opened end January and covers a wide range of opportunities across many of NI Water's business areas. These include Water Utilities, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Engineering Plant Operators, Science, Construction Engineering, Hydraulic Modelling and Internal Audit.

NI Water is inviting applications from school leavers (current Years 12, 13 and 14), graduates, and individuals seeking a fresh start in a role where they can make an impact. Successful candidates will enjoy a comprehensive benefits package from the outset, featuring a competitive salary, structured career development and fully

funded qualifications

The acclaimed NI Water Entry Level Academy has garnered significant recognition, including as part of the Best Employee Development Programme (Large Business) at The Irish News Workplace and Employment Awards 2024, and receiving a Highly Commended accolade in the Corporate Community Champion category at the Belfast Telegraph Business Awards 2024.

Geraldine Hume, Entry Level Academy Manager at NI Water, explained: "NI Water's Entry Level Academy demonstrates our dedication to developing talent and maintaining high standards in water services. We're excited about welcoming applications from passionate individuals who are committed to making a difference to their communities, the



environment and the water industry. They'll join over 100 other Apprentices, HLAs and Graduates at NI Water who are enjoying a rewarding educational and career journey with us, starting with a six-week bootcamp through to graduation where achievements are celebrated with pride."

Ciara Louise McLaughlin from Lisburn joined NI Water's Higher Level Apprenticeship in Science after her A-levels. Ciara said: "Attending a local apprenticeship fair inspired me to seek hands-on experience in NI Water

alongside my studies. I've found my NI Water practical training - ranging from lab work and equipment checks to site visits - has been incredibly rewarding. These experiences have given me valuable insights into the field, and I'm excited to continue my journey towards a career in analytical chemistry or research and development with NI Water."

For more information about NI Water's award-winning Entry Level Academy, visit the company's website www.niwater.com/careers/entrylevelacademy

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First job fair of 2026 could help local employers build a winning team

Local employers have the opportunity to connect with prospective employees at the upcoming Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council’s Labour Market Partnership job fair.

The in-person recruitment event takes place on Thursday 26th February from 10.30am until 2.30pm at Lagan Valley LeisurePlex in Lisburn. It will help local employers fill vacancies faster and find better quality candidates to choose from.

Councillor Claire Kemp, Regeneration and Growth Chair, is encouraging local businesses to get involved: “I urge recruiters across all sectors to sign up to the job fair and meet directly with candidates looking for their next career move. It’s a valuable opportunity to discover emerging talent, promote your organisation as a workplace, and contribute to the continued growth of our economy.

“This initiative reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting local businesses, addressing recruitment needs, and helping people access meaningful employment. Job hunters should also save the date and come along. They can hear firsthand about competitive salaries, excellent benefits, opportunities for promotion and extensive learning and development programmes.”



The job fair offers exhibiting employers from across all sectors to showcase their current vacancies. Previous employers have included hospitality, IT, customer service, public services, construction and transport.

The job fair is supported by the Department for Communities, which also

funds Labour Market Partnerships. These are to create targeted employment action plans for council areas, allowing collaboration at both local and regional levels to support people towards and into work.

A full list of exhibitors will be made available online before the event.

Register your interest in booking a free exhibitor space before Friday 30th January 2026 at this link: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/lccc-job-fair-2026-registration/>

You can also register or find out more information by emailing dfcemployerservices@communities-ni.gov.uk

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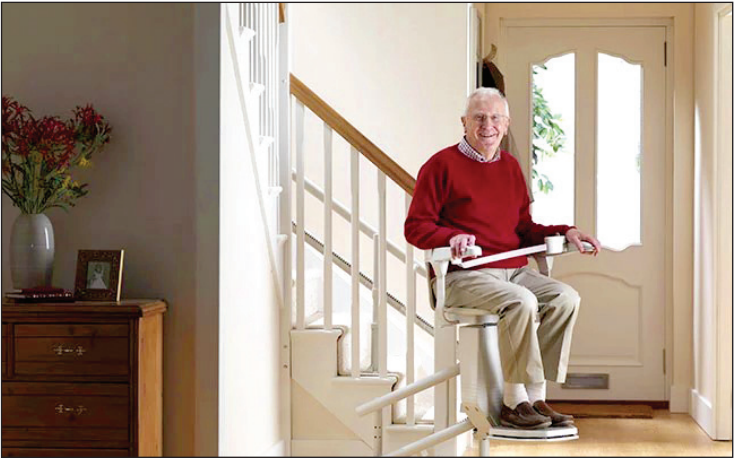
Olympic Lifts; making steps safer one stairlift at a time.

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 and a range of straight and curved (single and double rail) stairlifts. Our strategic location allows us to provide rapid and efficient maintenance and support throughout Ireland, with vehicle tracking ensuring the closest technician is dispatched in the event of a fault.

A key area of our expertise lies in Stairlifts, for which Olympic Lifts. Our extensive range of products is designed with a refreshingly modern aesthetic to integrate beautifully into any home, whether classic or contemporary. We offer Stairlifts for all types of staircases, including:

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 - Straight stairlifts: Reliable and space-saving options for straightforward staircases.
- Beyond Stairlifts, Olympic Lifts also supplies, installs, tests, and maintains Passenger Lifts, Access Lifts, Goods Lifts, escalators, and Moving walkways. We are proud to have completed almost 20,000 projects over



the past four decades. Recently, we launched our new machine room traction drive access passenger lift (the Eclipse), a versatile Hybrid Lift suitable for both domestic and commercial properties, offering numerous sizes and finish options.

Our commitment to continuous development, investment, and product advancement ensures that Olympic Lifts offers the most up-to-date, highest quality products and services. This dedication translates to an improved purchasing

experience, enhanced efficiencies, and cost savings for our valued customers. For more information on our range of Stairlifts and other lifting solutions, please contact us at 02892 622331 or visit our website at www.olympiclifts.co.uk.

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?”

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.

Scan the QR code, sign the petition, and add your voice to the demand for change.

Hope cannot be scaled back.

Link to petition: <https://c.org/BstPKMTc8f>

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

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Suicide Prevention Ireland

Too many lives lost to suicide. Sign the petition.

Scan the QR code to sign.

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So whether you're planning a quiet couple's getaway, a mid-season recharge, or a chance to explore one of Northern Ireland's most iconic landmarks, the Winter Warmer offers a little bit of everything.

To book, call us on 028 2073 1210 or visit our website at www.thecausewayhotel.com

Let the coast call you back this winter.

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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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

Sweetheart Season: Belfast's Valentine's Treats Take Centre Stage

Belfast is proving that the way to the heart really is through the stomach this Valentine's Day, as local bakeries, cafés and chocolatiers roll out an irresistible line-up of sweet treats.

Across the city, shop windows have transformed into displays of handcrafted chocolates, heart-shaped biscuits and pink-topped cupcakes. From the cosy corners of the Cathedral Quarter to the busy high streets of South and East Belfast, customers are opting for gifts that are indulgent, local and packed with personality.

Independent chocolate makers have reported a surge in demand for

handmade boxes filled with truffles, salted caramel bites and dark chocolate classics. Many are using locally sourced ingredients, adding flavours inspired by Northern Ireland favourites — honeycomb, Irish cream, raspberry and sea salt, often presented in elegant packaging tied with red ribbon.

Meanwhile, cafés are embracing the season

with themed menus featuring chocolate-dipped strawberries, iced traybakes decorated with love hearts, and rich hot chocolate topped high with marshmallows and cream. Bakeries have also been busy crafting seasonal specials, including chocolate brownies, Valentine's gift hampers and treat boxes designed for sharing.

But it's not just couples filling the queues. Many shoppers are buying

treats for friends, children and even workmates — embracing a broader celebration of affection and appreciation.

One local business owner summed up the spirit perfectly: "Valentine's Day here isn't just romance — it's gratitude, good craic, and great chocolate."

As the city prepares for its sweetest day of the year, one thing is certain — Belfast loves love, but it also loves treats.

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Paul Clayton

HANNON Coach & Sail is perfect for a city break in Glasgow this New Year!

Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station.

An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for a New Year city break in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in 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 of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, the Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost alternative



to flying.

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

Saturday Slimming World Lisburn

Saturday Slimming World Lisburn returned to its original building in Harmony Hill Presbyterian Moss Rd last July.

Session times are 8am, 9.30 + 11am. Linda, the Consultant, said, "it's been

lovely being back with the Saturday group and with Slimming World. I returned to this role a year, and a half ago and I have been blown away by Members dedication to their health and by the weight loss achieved and life changing differences Members have gained as a reward. It has been truly humbling and a joy to be part of such a positive, friendly and supportive group. I love starting my weekend with the buzz and chatter on a Saturday morning. I am still amazed how much craic can be had this early in the morning along with genuine support and

ideas, it really is a great place to be."

At Slimming World you can lose weight without going hungry with out better than ever healthy eating plan and tuck into tasty food your whole household can enjoy. Our new book with changes is now available in group. The exciting changes, particularly to the healthy extras, allows more flexibility while staying on track.

Linda says she is "so proud of what the members have achieved. We have members who have lost between 1 stone and 10 1/2 stone currently, including health benefits from reduced medication, reduced blood pressure, improved lung function, pain reduction in



joints, remission from type 2 diabetes and much more, not to mention improved energy levels and improved sense

of well-being. Everyone is welcome along", concludes Linda.

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Food and Drink Academy opens for applications

Northern Ireland's food and drink industry is opening doors to fresh talent in September 2026.

The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), in partnership with the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA), is proud to announce the application period for the Food and Drink Academy is now open.

With training delivery at Loughry Campus, Cookstown in conjunction with Northern Ireland food businesses, the Academy could be a gateway to an exciting career in a thriving sector.

The Food and Drink Academy is a unique 'study first' Apprenticeship programme designed for school leavers who want to combine university-level study with real-world food and drink industry experience. Students will spend their first year on campus at Loughry enjoying student life while building a strong academic foundation. They then progress into three years of blended study and work, gaining hands-

on training with some of Northern Ireland's leading food and drink companies. On completion of the programme, successful participants graduate with a BSc (Hons) Degree in Food and Drink Manufacture, validated by Ulster University.

One of the key attractions of the course is that students earn while they learn. Learners on the Food and Drink Academy are employed from day one, receiving a salary of £22,000 per annum while completing their studies at Loughry Campus. They will build industry connections and develop their transferable skills with top local employers, setting themselves on a pathway for success. On completion of the four-year programme students will graduate with a degree and have four years of professional experience.

The Food and Drink Academy offers ambitious school leavers a chance



to step straight into a career that blends science, innovation, and creativity within Northern Ireland's largest manufacturing sector. Students will be supported by both CAFRE's lecturing staff and trusted local employers, while also gaining financial independence. The Food and Drink Academy is more than a degree – it is a launchpad into one of Northern Ireland's most dynamic industries.

With opportunities to study, earn, and grow, this is the perfect choice for ambitious young

people ready to take their next step after school.

If you, or someone you know are completing A-levels this summer and are interested in gaining an Honours Degree with no academic fees and getting paid in the process, we are hosting an online webinar to discuss the Food and Drink Academy on Thursday 5 February at 7:00pm. For more information and to apply to the CAFRE-NIFDA Food and Drink Academy, please visit: www.cafre.ac.uk/student-courses/food-and-drink-academy/.

Moira Dental Care 35 years on the Main Street

As you travel up the Main Street in Moira, you can't help but admire the 18th century buildings which have been carefully restored and conserved.

Standing tall amongst them is 77 Main Street, which houses Moira Dental Care.

Established in 1988, Moira Dental Care started out with a single dentist working out of his basement surgery. Over the last 35 years, they have loyally served the community of Moira and surrounding areas. They are proud to even have patients who lived in the house at one stage of their lifetime.

When Marilyn Todd took the helm of the business in 1999 as a young dentist, her dream to expand the clinic took wings. Over the years she and her

husband have carefully handpicked a team of skilled dental care professionals. Today, Moira Dental Care boasts four modern surgeries with a clinical team comprised of six dentists and a dental hygienist. The team provide a diverse range of treatments ranging from routine dentistry to cosmetic treatments like dental implants, orthodontics and facial aesthetics.

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KP RE-OPENS BANK OF MCCOY'S

£125,000 in crisp cash to help beat the credit crunch

NORTHERN Ireland as KP Snacks re-opens its popular Bank of McCoy's – offering local consumers and retailers over the next few months

an opportunity to make a crisp cash withdrawal from the bank's £125,000 prize vault.

As the cost of living continues to soar, the on-pack campaign, which goes live today (January 26), gives fans of McCoy's, the UK's number one ridged crisp, a chance to win instant cash prizes of up to £1,000 from the Bank's £100,000 vault or free crisps.

Local retailers can also cash in, with a dedicated £25,000 prize fund offering them the opportunity to win up to £1,000 in cash or free stock.

Running across McCoy's popular Price-Marked Packs (PMP) and Grab Bag formats from now until April 6, shoppers can check their balance very simply by purchasing a promotional pack of McCoy's and following the on-pack instructions to discover if they've won.

One thing that retailers can bank on is that the campaign will again be supported by eye-catching

on-pack designs, in-store POS and digital activity, ensuring McCoy's stays front of mind – and in shopping baskets – across the province.

Worth £199m in the UK and growing at +5%*, the McCoy's portfolio continues to expand with the introduction in 2026 of a brand new flavour McCoy's Salted, reflecting the fact that 20% of bagged snack sales are now from 'salted' flavours***.

Last year saw the successful launch McCoy's Hot & Spicy in Northern Ireland in response to the growing demand for spicy foods – with more than 50% of UK consumers saying they love it****.

McCoy's Hot & Spicy is now firmly established as a key flavour in McCoy's' core range and will feature the Bank of McCoy's promotion on-pack – as will new McCoy's Salted.

For more information on Bank Of McCoy's, visit www.bankofmccoy.co.uk. McCoy's is owned by parent company KP Snacks Ltd, the UK's number one manufacturer of nuts and popcorn, and number two manufacturer of bagged snacks.

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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In the fast-evolving landscape of the local property market, staying compliant with ever-changing safety regulations can be a daunting task for landlords and letting agents.

Certsure Property Services is a leading solution, providing a comprehensive "one-stop-shop" for property certification and safety requirements across the country.

A History of

Reliability Certsure Property Services was founded with a clear mission: to simplify the complex world of property compliance. Recognizing that property owners often struggled to coordinate

multiple contractors for different safety checks, the company established itself as a centralized hub for legal certifications. Over the years, they have built a robust network of qualified

engineers and accredited assessors, growing from a regional provider into a trusted nationwide partner known for professionalism and efficiency.

Comprehensive Service Offerings The company specializes in ensuring that residential and commercial properties meet all statutory requirements. Their core services include:

- Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICR): Ensuring fixed electrical installations are safe and compliant with current standards.
- Gas Safety Certificates (CP12): Mandatory annual inspections for gas appliances and flues.
- Energy Performance Certificates (EPC): Assessing energy efficiency to meet legal rental standards.
- PAT Testing: Safety testing for portable electrical appliances.
- Fire Safety & Alarms:

Professional installation and maintenance of smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide detectors to protect inhabitants.

What Customers Say The company's dedication to customer service is reflected in their feedback. One satisfied landlord, Sarah M., recently shared:

"I've used Certsure for my entire portfolio. They handle the EICRs and Gas Safety checks seamlessly, and their booking system is incredibly efficient. It's a huge relief to know my properties are legal and my tenants are safe without having to chase multiple tradespeople."

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Little Weavers Day Care: learn, grow, and thrive

Little Weavers Day Care is a warm, nurturing environment where every child is encouraged to learn, grow, and thrive.

We believe that childhood should be filled with wonder, creativity, and joyful discovery, and our dedicated team work to provide a safe and inspiring space for each child in our care.

At Little Weavers, we understand that every child is unique and our carefully planned activities are designed to support individual development, while building confidence, curiosity, and independence. Through play-based learning,

children explore the world around them, develop essential social skills, and form strong foundations for future education. From arts and crafts to outdoor play and early literacy, every day is a learning opportunity for meaningful learning and fun.

Our experienced and caring staff are fully qualified and passionate about early childhood development. They create strong, trusting relationships with both children and

parents, ensuring open communication and peace of mind. We pride ourselves on offering a welcoming atmosphere where families feel valued and supported.

Located conveniently in Hilden Lisburn, Little Weavers Day Care provides a safe, secure, and stimulating settling equipped with age-appropriate resources. Our facilities are designed to promote exploration, imagination, and active play, helping children



develop physically, emotionally and socially. We also place great importance on routine, structure, and consistency, giving children a sense

of stability and security. Healthy meals and snacks are provided, supporting children's wellbeing and energy throughout the day.

Little Weavers Day Care promotes quality care,

compassionate staff, and a place where children are truly cherished. We are dedicated in weaving early foundations for your child's future one happy moment at a time.

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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!

The benefits of these extra minutes aren't just in our heads—they are in our biology.

- Vitamin D & Immunity: Even weak winter sun helps trigger Vitamin D production, essential for bone health and keeping the immune system robust during flu season.

- The Serotonin Boost: Natural light increases the brain's 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.

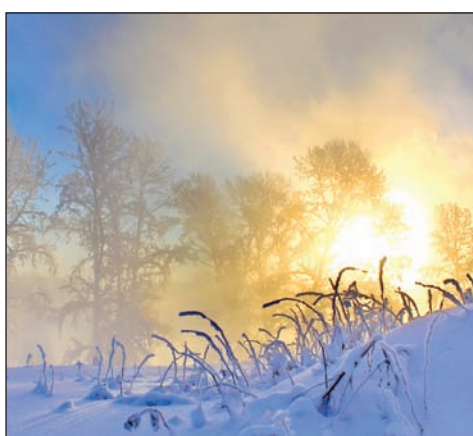
It's a common question this time of year: When do we actually get our hour back? As we operate on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) during

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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Little Weavers Day Care is Registered with Early Years - South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust

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Fort Hill Integrated College: To educate, integrate, and inspire

At Fort Hill Integrated College, we strive to welcome and educate students of all religious backgrounds, and none, providing them with the opportunity to grow and learn with, about and from each other.



Our vision is simple yet powerful: To educate, integrate, and inspire pupils to achieve their full potential in a supportive, safe, and inclusive community.

Guided by this vision, we foster an environment where students from all

backgrounds learn side-by-side. This commitment to excellence was recently echoed by ETI, who praised our use of "responsive conversations well to resolve conflicts, promote responsible decision making and foster empathy amongst the pupils."

If you missed our Open Night, why not contact us to arrange a tour and discover how we prepare young people for a bright, confident future in an atmosphere where every individual is valued. We look forward to welcoming you!

THOMPSON LEISURE: DRIVING IRELAND'S MOTORHOME LIFESTYLE FORWARD

Thompson Leisure has firmly established itself as Ireland's largest and most trusted motorhome and campervan dealer, setting the benchmark for quality, choice, and customer care.

For decades, the company has been at the heart of Ireland's growing touring and staycation culture, offering customers not just vehicles, but complete freedom to explore the open road.

With an extensive range of new and used motorhomes and campervans from leading European brands, Thompson Leisure caters to every type of traveller, from first-time adventurers to seasoned touring enthusiasts.

Backed by knowledgeable staff and a reputation built on reliability, customers can buy with confidence,

knowing expert advice is always close at hand.

Thompson Leisure has a very successful rental department called TLL Rent. TLL Rent allows customers to experience the motorhome lifestyle without commitment, making it ideal for holidays, festivals, or trial runs before purchase. Fully equipped and meticulously maintained, the rental fleet reflects the same high standards found across the business.

Beyond sales and rentals, Thompson Leisure offers comprehensive aftersales support. Its state-of-the-art workshop provides



full habitation checks, mechanical servicing, repairs, and upgrades, ensuring motorhomes and campervans remain safe, comfortable, and road-

ready year-round. The company also offers secure outside storage, giving owners peace of mind when their vehicle is not in use.

From purchase to

aftercare, Thompson Leisure continues to lead the way, supporting Ireland's motorhome community every mile of the journey.

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."



Pictured with Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald in the Coleraine home of Sammy Aiken, who has benefitted from the scheme are (L-R) Peter Russell, Executive Director, Utility Regulator, homeowner, Sammy Aiken, and Dawn Weir, NI Programme Manager, Energy Saving Trust.

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 benefited 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

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Why choose a career path in home based Childcare?

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- The option to stay at home and care for your own children as well as caring for others
- Become self-employed
- Support the development of children up to 12 years of age
- Be eligible to benefit from the Tax Free Childcare scheme

What are the eligibility criteria?

- Must be over the age of 18
- Have the right to work in the UK
- Willing to commit and fully participate in all aspects of the academy

Places are limited and applications may need to be prioritised. Whilst every effort will be taken to accommodate all enquiries, submitting an application does not guarantee a placement on the academy



Ready to take the next step?
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STENA LINE POSTS RECORD FREIGHT VOLUMES ON BELFAST ROUTES

Stena Line posts record freight volumes on Belfast routes

2025 was another record year for Stena Line freight volumes on its three Belfast services with growth of 1.0% increasing volumes to almost 600,000 freight units shipped from Belfast to Cairnryan, Liverpool (Birkenhead) and Heysham.

The record freight volumes were set in the year Stena Line marked 30th years of operations from Belfast Harbour following its move from Larne in 1995.

Demand for freight

services to and from Belfast has been increasing steadily in recent years with the Belfast-Liverpool (Birkenhead) route in particular growing in popularity as evidenced by a record number of freight units being shipped, over 270 000.

Stena Line's Belfast to Heysham 2025 freight service also recorded its highest volumes in the last 5 years. Stena Line anticipates further significant growth on this route in the year ahead with the

introduction of the newly built Stena Connecta on 23 January.

Stena Connecta will operate alongside sister ship Stena Futura which was launched onto the route in November 2025. Both ships will provide an additional 40% freight capacity when fully operational with a choice of 24 sailings per week.

Paul Grant, Stena Line Irish Sea North Trade Director, said: "The 2025 results underscore Belfast's position as one of the



most strategically important business hubs across the Stena Line network.

"These routes Sea business has been transformed over the last three decades through a combination

of fleet and port investments along with the continued support of our customers.

"It was fitting that we were able to name and launch a new purpose-built ship, Stena Futura in Belfast Harbour in our record 2025 year, and our 30th anniversary year in Belfast Harbour.

"Stena Line continues to have a positive outlook for its Belfast services which is why we are about to introduce a second purpose-built ship Stena Connecta on

our Belfast-Heysham service."

Stena Line is the largest ferry operator on the Irish Sea, with the biggest fleet providing up to 242 weekly sailings offering the widest choice of routes including: combined passenger and freight services from Belfast to Cairnryan and Liverpool, Dublin to Holyhead, Rosslare to Fishguard, in addition to the dedicated freight-only routes from Belfast to Heysham and Dublin - Liverpool.

NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

TITANIC Belfast has announced the launch of a series of new accessibility initiatives as part of its continued commitment to ensuring an inclusive and welcoming visitor experience for every guest.

With accessibility and inclusion a key focus for the world-leading visitor attraction, it has announced the introduction of Sensory Backpacks and Quiet Sessions, expanding its range of accessibility supports designed to enhance comfort, independence and enjoyment for visitors with additional needs.

These new initiatives build on Titanic Belfast's continued investment in inclusion infrastructure and visitor services in recent years - which has included Changing Places facilities, multimedia guides featuring British Sign Language and close working relationships with a range of charities and organisations including Mencap and Orchardville.

The new Sensory Backpacks are available to borrow free of charge and aim to support neurodiverse guests and individuals who may benefit from additional sensory resources during their visit.

They have been designed primarily for children aged five - 12, although they are available to support any visitor who requires and have been thoughtfully themed

around animals associated with Titanic. Each backpack contains a variety of items including ear defenders, sunglasses for brighter areas, emotions and senses cards, a range of fidget and sensory toys, drawing materials, smelling cubes with aromas associated with Titanic, a visual contents list and a sensory trail.

In addition, Quiet Sessions have been launched to support visitors who may prefer reduced noise, softer lighting and a more relaxed atmosphere. The sessions will give guests the opportunity to discover the Titanic Experience in a calm and sensory-friendly environment in an inclusive way to explore the galleries

at their own pace. Afternoon sessions will take place on Monday 26th January and Monday 23rd February and a morning session is scheduled for Sunday 22nd February.

For more on Titanic Belfast's accessibility information or to book a Quiet Session please go to www.titanicbelfast.com.



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Each learner, each journey, every success at Crumlin Integrated College.

Crumlin Integrated College is a school where young people are truly known, valued and inspired to be their very best.

As an integrated school at the heart of our community, CIC proudly brings together pupils from different traditions and backgrounds, creating an inclusive, welcoming environment where respect, understanding and ambition thrive every day.

Crumlin Integrated College champions every learner by empowering them with the confidence to flourish. We nurture and celebrate personal excellence and achievements as each

individual thrives on their unique journey towards a bright future.

We are committed to the ethos and values promoted through the provision of integrated education to educate young people in the present and to build a shared community for the future.

This is reflected in the fantastic relationships between pupils and our dedicated, caring staff, who go above and beyond to ensure students feel supported,

challenged and encouraged to succeed both academically and personally. High-quality teaching is enhanced through the use of Bedrock Literacy Support, helping to build strong reading and vocabulary skills across the curriculum and setting pupils up for lifelong learning.

Life at Crumlin Integrated College extends far beyond the classroom. Our excellent extra-curricular provision offers something for

everyone, from sport and music to drama and leadership opportunities. A free breakfast club ensures pupils start the day nourished, settled and ready to learn, reinforcing our commitment to wellbeing and inclusion.

October 2025 marked an exciting milestone with the opening of our new classrooms and modern facilities, providing bright, engaging learning spaces fit for the future. The vibrancy of school life was also on full display in December,

when our production of Matilda the Musical was a phenomenal success, showcasing the confidence, creativity and talent of our pupils.

Applications for post-primary places open at noon on Tuesday 27th January. To apply, visit www.eani.org.uk. For further queries or to book a private tour, please email administration@cic.crumlin.ni.sch.uk. Crumlin Integrated College is a place where potential is nurtured and futures are shaped.

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Everyday Benefits of AI in 2026

By 2026, Artificial Intelligence has moved beyond simple chatbots to become a foundational "utility" in our daily lives—much like electricity or the internet.

The shift from reactive tools to Agentic AI means our systems no longer just answer questions; they execute tasks. Here are ten ways this transformation is providing tangible benefits today.

Autonomous Personal Assistants

The "digital assistant" has evolved into a proactive agent. It doesn't just remind you of a meeting; it cross-references your contacts' calendars, negotiates a time, and handles the logistics of booking a venue or sending a video link, acting as a high-level executive assistant for everyone.

Adaptive Learning for All

Education has become hyper-personalized. AI tutors now analyze a student's progress in real-time, pivoting the teaching style (from visual to kinesthetic, for example) to match the learner's specific neuro-type and pace, closing the achievement gap.

The "Second Brain"

AI now serves as a secure, local index of your life. It can instantly recall a specific detail from a three-year-old email, find a photo based on a vague description, or summarize the key points of a long-running project you haven't touched in months.

Advanced Medical Triage

Before a patient even enters a clinic, AI-driven triage systems analyze symptoms and history to provide doctors with a pre-diagnostic report. This significantly reduces wait times and ensures that critical cases are prioritized immediately.

Ambient Health Monitoring

Wearable technology now provides "coaching" rather than just data. Using biometric indicators like cortisol levels and heart rate variability, AI can suggest a short meditation or a walk before you reach a state of high stress.

The Rise of Agentic Coworkers

In the workplace, AI agents act as digital teammates. While humans focus on creative strategy, AI "coworkers" handle deep-data crunching, routine administrative "slop," and complex knowledge retrieval across massive corporate databases.

Real-Time Multimodal Translation

Language barriers have

effectively collapsed. Whether in a boardroom or on a street corner, AI provides seamless, real-time voice and text translation that preserves tone and nuance, allowing for truly global collaboration.

Smart Grid Orchestration

On a community level, AI-managed smart grids optimize energy distribution. By predicting peak usage and managing renewable sources, these

systems lower utility costs and significantly reduce a household's carbon footprint.

9. Predictive Home Maintenance

Homes are now "self-diagnosing." Sensors in HVAC systems, plumbing, and appliances use AI to predict mechanical failures weeks in advance, automatically scheduling a technician before a breakdown occurs.

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Countryside Services Limited has been appointed to deliver key knowledge transfer elements of the Farming for Sustainability Scheme.

Countryside Services will support the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), delivering face to face training and themed peer to peer group facilitation to farm businesses across Northern Ireland.

"The appointment of Countryside Services will help ensure farmers have timely, practical and accessible training that supports productivity, environmental outcomes and resilience across the sector," commented Albert Johnston, Head of Knowledge Advisory Service, CAFRE.

The first training to be delivered by Countryside Services will be associated with the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme. It is now necessary to complete this training to receive future Farm Sustainability Payments. If you have still to complete the training, you can do so through online training at: www.cafre.ac.uk. If you would prefer to complete the training in person, new dates and venues across the province and booking information can be found at: www.cafre.ac.uk/snh.

training and at: www.countryside-services.com.

"We're delighted to partner with CAFRE in delivering high quality training and facilitated peer learning to support farm businesses increase both efficiency and care for our environment," remarked Dr Andrew Kerr, Countryside Services Limited.

If you would like further information on relating to the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, please visit the Business Support area of: www.cafre.ac.uk.



Dr Steven Johnston and Albert Johnston, CAFRE discuss Farming for Sustainability Scheme training programmes with Dr Andrew Kerr and Philip Cargill from Countryside Services Limited ahead of the launch of new dates for Soil Nutrient Health Scheme Training events.

Draft Strategy to protect nature for future generations

Members of the public are to be consulted on a draft Nature Recovery Strategy to restore, manage and protect Northern Ireland's habitats for future generations.

DAERA Minister Andrew Muir launched a public consultation today on the draft strategy, which sets out how the department will meet international and national ambitions on biodiversity up to 2032.

Nature is in decline across the world, including Northern Ireland, where many habitats and species are under threat with 40% of the flora and fauna in our most protected sites falling short of 'favourable condition' standards.

Only one of 49 priority habitat types here are considered to be at

favourable conservation status (fourth UK Habitats Directive Report), while one in nine (12%) of Northern Ireland species are currently threatened with extinction (State of Nature 2023).

The draft Nature Recovery Strategy contains five strategic objectives and clear actions to help deliver transformation across government, business and society to safeguard and restore nature and biodiversity. This includes actions that have already been agreed or are in development in existing strategies and policies,

as well as additional new actions that have been identified to further promote nature restoration.

The proposed additional actions for 2026 include:

- Publishing a Tree Planting Action Plan
- Development of a new All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for 2026-30
- Development of a Protected Sites Delivery Plan
- Publishing a Plastic Pollution Plan
- Launching a Public Consultation on Northern Ireland's first Clean Air Strategy

• Publishing the report on latest Northern Ireland Countryside Survey (2022-2025)

When preparing for the delivery of this strategy, DAERA will work to convene a Nature Recovery Forum to oversee its successful implementation.

The Strategy and Consultation documents are available on the DAERA website - <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-nature-recovery-strategy-daera>. Responses should be submitted before the deadline on 18 March 2026.



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TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND LAUNCHES SIGNATURE WALK

Tourism Northern Ireland is delighted to announce the launch of the region's first Signature Walk.

Working in partnership with the National Trust, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, the inaugural walk is located at Downhill Demense, near Coleraine.

Starting at Castlerock Train Station, the scenic 4.2 mile walking experience offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy wild and rugged headland and take in fabulous clifftop views along the stunning north coast before arriving at Downhill Estate where they can explore its collection of intimate gardens, ruins and Mussenden Temple.

During the two-hour circular walk, visitors can spend time at the iconic temple, which is perched dramatically on a 300ft cliff top, high above the Atlantic Ocean on the north-western coast of Northern Ireland.

The location offers spectacular views westwards over Downhill Strand, towards Magilligan Point and Co Donegal and to the east, Castlerock



(L-R): Laurentiu Ghisoiu from the National Trust, Sheena Dickson from Tourism NI, Oliver McMullan, Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens and Mel McQuitty of Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust.

beach towards Portstewart, Portrush and Fair Head.

Research shows walking has consistently been the top activity that visitors to Northern Ireland want to do as part of their trip.

Statistics reveal 48% of visitors from Northern Ireland and 33% of ROI visitors experience scenic or interesting walks as part of their break to the region, with 86% stating their

experience was good or excellent.

In addition, 77% of visitors from overseas want to explore new places, landscapes and cultural activities from their trip, with beauty of the landscape being the key reason to visit the island of Ireland.

The launch of the first Signature Walk in Northern Ireland will contribute

to Tourism NI's goal of creating sustainable, world-class experiences that meet the current needs and demands of the market. It is hoped this will be the first in a series of iconic walks.

Sheena Dickson, Landscapes & Activities Tourism Manager at Tourism NI, said: "Tourism NI is delighted to be involved in the launch of the Signature Walk and

there cannot be a more picturesque and dramatic headland in Northern Ireland than Downhill Estate for the start of this exciting project.

"Developing these signature routes will help showcase some of our most special outdoor assets and tell the story of our iconic places by inviting our visitors to get their walking shoes on."

The first signs of spring

Winter doesn't exit with a grand flourish; it retreats with a slow, muddy exhale. In the countryside, spring isn't a single date on a calendar but a series of subtle "handshakes" between the earth and the sun.

If you're tired of the grey-scale landscape, it's time to stop looking for big changes and start noticing the small, quiet rebellions against the frost.

The first move belongs to the snowdrops. These are the undisputed MVPs of the season, equipped with a natural "antifreeze" that lets them punch through frozen soil without shattering. They are soon joined by the "green mist"—that strange, ethereal aura that settles over the treeline. It isn't an optical illusion; it's the result of sap rising and millions of tiny buds swelling simultaneously, changing the horizon's color before a single leaf has even unfurled.

Look toward the hedgerows and you'll see hazel catkins, often called "lamb's tails," dancing in the wind. These long, yellow-green tassels are designed to flick pollen into the breeze before the summer foliage grows thick enough to block its path. On the ground, the yellow stars of Celandines begin to pepper the ditches. These are the countryside's sun-seekers, opening wide during bright spells and clamping shut the moment a cloud dares to pass over.

The silence of winter breaks first in the canopy. The "Dawn Chorus" returns, led by the Great Tit's rhythmic, two-note "teacher-teacher" call. You'll notice a new, frantic energy as rooks squabble over nesting rights in the treetops and blackbirds dart through the undergrowth with beaks full of dried grass. Even the water stirs; clumps of frogspawn—clear jelly with obsidian centers—appear in the shallows of ponds, signaling that the underwater world has officially woken up.

Finally, there is the scent. As the soil warms and dries, it releases a distinct, earthy perfume known as petrichor. It's

a primitive aroma that signals the ground is ready to support life again. Combined with

the sight of "wobbly" newborn lambs in the fields, these signs confirm that the cycle has

turned. Spring is here—you just have to look down at the ditches and up at the buds to see it.



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‘Field to Fork’ programme

Mash Direct, the award-winning Northern Ireland food producer, has partnered with the Learning and Engagement team from W5, Northern Ireland’s award winning science and discovery centre, to launch the ‘Field to Fork’ education programme, an interactive initiative helping children understand where their food comes from and the role of sustainable farming.

The pilot scheme has now officially launched and is already being delivered in local classrooms, with visits completed at Comber, Kilcooley and Carradore Primary Schools. Pupils have been taking part in hands-on activities that bring the journey of food from field to plate to life, exploring growing conditions, soil health, climate and environmental impact while making clear links between science and the food they eat every day.

Delivered by W5’s expert Learning and Engagement team and sponsored by Mash Direct, the free programme engages pupils from ten local primary schools, particularly in areas of higher social deprivation. The sessions are curriculum-linked, hands-on, and designed to spark curiosity and highlight the journey from farm to plate.

The pilot includes



W5 Learning & Education Team, Mash Direct, Comms & Events Executive and Pupils from Kilcooley Primary School

practical activities such as:

- Growing vegetables from seed and observing how soil and climate affect growth
- Cooking and tasting traditional potato bread
- Exploring balanced nutrition with the Eatwell Plate
- Investigating food miles and sustainable farming practices
- Creating video stories to share learnings

Research underscores the importance of initiatives like this. According to the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), nearly one in five primary-school children believe fish fingers come from chicken, and close to a third think cheese comes from plants - highlighting a widespread lack of understanding of food origins. Meanwhile, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development

Board (AHDB) reports that after using its “Food – a fact of life” resources, 85% of pupils were more informed about where food comes from.

As a pilot scheme, this initiative is sowing the seeds for a broader educational rollout, one that could transform how young people understand food, health and sustainability from the field all the way to their fork.

MINISTER MUIR CELEBRATES £7.91MILLION INVESTMENT IN RURAL AREAS

DAERA Minister Andrew Muir has welcomed the award of £7.91million in grants to over 2,350 rural community organisations and businesses over the past year.

The awards have been made through the Department’s Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme and Rural Business Development Grant Scheme.

Minister Muir was speaking during a visit to Moneyslane Rural Community Organisation, the recipient of a grant totalling £1,491 from the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme in 2025/2026 to modernise their Community Hub.

Minister Muir said: “I am delighted that 1,048 Letters of Offer for funding of £1.74million have been issued to voluntary and community organisations throughout Northern Ireland from the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme.

“The Scheme is a key initiative delivered through my Department’s Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework. It supports rural community-led,

voluntary organisations in identifying and implementing projects that address locally identified poverty, isolation, loneliness and health and wellbeing issues.

“I was delighted to hear how Moneyslane Rural Community Organisation have availed of the Department’s Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme over many years to enhance their facilities for the local rural community. I express my sincere gratitude to the committee and to all voluntary and community organisations across Northern Ireland for their ongoing work in maintaining and developing a wide range of opportunities and facilities for people in local rural communities.”

Minister Muir also visited BWE Equestrian Ltd, a rural micro-business in Ballyward, where he presented



Minister Andrew Muir pictured with Newry Mourne and Down Council Chair Cllr Philip Campbell, Shane O'Reilly, Manager of Ballyward Equestrian Estate and Ceto a six-year-old mare bred at Ballyward.

their Letter of Offer of £5,850 from the Rural

Business Development Grant Scheme to enable the purchase of a ‘Shockwave’ linear soil decompaction machine.

Minister Muir said: “I want to take this opportunity to highlight the significant investment of £6.17million, also from my Department’s Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework, to 1,310 rural businesses through the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme.”

He added: “It’s been great to meet the staff of BWE Equestrian Limited, a first-time applicant to the Scheme, and to hear how the grant will help their business’s sustainability and increase their potential for growth. This is exactly the type of support the scheme aims deliver across Northern Ireland.”

The Minister concluded: “Both the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme and the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme are important contributors to my commitment to build strong, sustainable and diverse rural communities where people want to live, work and invest.”

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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.

DRIVERS PLAGUED BY CRUMBLING ROADS

Northern Ireland’s most pothole-ridden areas have been revealed, with the latest data showing that the region’s broken roads continue to pose a danger to motorists.

Potholes are a persistent source of frustration for drivers, leading to costly repair bills for thousands of motorists in Northern Ireland every year. They are also a major safety concern, increasing the risk of serious accidents and injuries on our roads.

With the arrival of National Pothole Day (January 15), the car insurance experts at CompareNI.com have sifted through the latest government data to identify the worst-hit areas in 2025 and find out which local councils made the most progress in carrying out repairs.

While there was a slight drop in the number of potholes reported over the last 12 months – down 3% from the previous calendar year – they continue to present a significant challenge for NI motorists, accounting for 80% of all road claims received by Stormont last year.*

The statistics show that of the 127,109 surface defects recorded on NI roads in 2025, a staggering 77% (97,897) were related to potholes.**

Although around two thirds (67%) of all reported potholes were fixed last year, the repair rate varied wildly between

council areas – with Fermanagh and Omagh tackling 87% of defects compared to 44% in Belfast.

Overall, Belfast emerged as the area with the highest number of reported potholes, with 16,856 in 2025 – a significant rise of 38% from the previous year.

Newry, Mourne and Down was the next hardest hit area at 15,249, followed by Mid Ulster, which recorded 12,683 potholes.

While four of the 11 local council areas saw an increase in potholes year-on-year, the majority experienced a decrease. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon enjoyed the biggest year-on-year drop of 35%, while Lisburn and Castlereagh recorded the fewest potholes overall at 3980.

Potholes are a consistent bugbear for motorists, with a CompareNI survey finding that 91% of drivers here have issues with potholes in their area, with 96% of respondents saying they weren’t being fixed quickly enough.

Decades of chronic under-investment in NI’s road maintenance has led to a surge in potholes over recent years and created



a massive repair backlog, particularly on rural roads.

While potholes can sometimes be an unavoidable part of driving, there are some preventative measures drivers can take to help reduce the risk of damage, such as regularly maintaining tyre pressure, being wary of puddles and checking navigation apps for problem areas.

To report potholes, drivers can contact

the Department for Infrastructure – they can also seek compensation for damage to help with repair costs. However, they will need proof the damage came from a pothole, so it is important to take photographs and measurements to use as evidence in the claim.

CompareNI.com gives drivers the tools to shop around and find savings on car insurance, as well as niche items such as van and taxi insurance.

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 recently 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.

This strategy, the first in over a decade, shows a government that is not just listening, but leading and together, we can build a safer future for all road users.

Independent road safety campaigner, Meera Naran MBE, whose 8-year-old son Dev died in a road traffic collision, said:

I welcome this much-anticipated road safety strategy and am pleased to see a number of measures set out to reduce road deaths and serious injuries.

I am especially grateful to the Secretary of State for giving me her word that she would honour Dev and

recognise the importance of legislative change to adopt the General Safety Regulations, as Dev’s Law and for delivering on that commitment. I look forward to working closely with the department to ensure that the appropriate steps are taken to establish a robust and effective framework.

Over the past decade, 22

European countries have made more progress than the UK in reducing road fatalities, causing Britain to slip from third to fourth in European road safety rankings.

This strategy, therefore, sets out a new approach to reverse a decade of stalled progress.

The bold strategy adopts the internationally recognised Safe System approach, which acknowledges that while human error is inevitable, deaths and serious injuries are not.

Rather than placing responsibility solely on individual drivers, the system ensures that road design, vehicle safety, enforcement and education work together to protect all road users.

A new Road Safety Investigation Branch will analyse collision patterns and inform prevention strategies, drawing on linked police and healthcare

data to identify root causes and target interventions more effectively.

The strategy also mandates 18 new vehicle safety technologies, including autonomous emergency braking and lane-keeping assistance. This will ensure drivers and road users in Great Britain benefit from access to these cutting-edge technologies and support growth by requiring manufacturers to meet the

same requirements across Europe.

Edmund King OBE, Director of The AA Charitable Trust and AA president, said:

This is a positively radical reframing of road safety, which is long overdue. We commend the government for its wide ranging and ambitious strategy and ambitious targets, which we hope will save the lives of thousands of people.



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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.

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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.

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.

• Clean Refrigerator Coils: Dust buildup on the coils at the back or bottom of your fridge forces the compressor to run longer.

- 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. 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.

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