



Department for  
**Communities**

An Roinn

**Pobal**

Männystríe o

**Communities**

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

**STRATEGY 2020 - 2025**



Supporting  
people

Building  
communities

Shaping  
places



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# Ministerial Foreword

**I am pleased to introduce the Department for Communities' new five year Strategy for the period 2020 – 2025. It sets out how we will work across government, our Arm's Length Bodies and with communities in delivering our common purpose of Supporting People, Building Communities, Shaping Places. It is designed to build on and support delivery of the objectives of the Executive's New Decade, New Approach.**

We must develop better ways of engaging with communities and in particular those communities that are the most marginalised and vulnerable. We will therefore strive to increase the capacity of communities to engage with us, placing their inclusion at the heart of all we do.

Working together, tackling deprivation and inequality will also require the participation and



support of an active civic leadership from voluntary organisations, the business world, churches and trade unions. We will support local councils who have a particular role to play in building on their knowledge and partnerships to ensure the needs of their communities are addressed. We need those who have achieved success to help those less fortunate, setting good examples, giving direct support and providing effective leadership to enable them to achieve their own success. Councils are well placed to encourage and support those who are so placed, to bring their knowledge and success to build strength across their communities.

This is particularly relevant in the challenges that have come with COVID-19. To date the Executive, communities and civic society have faced this challenge well, working together using our skills and experience to help us all to stay safe. The next



**Our plan sets out long term outcomes over four cross cutting themes of Anti-Poverty, Wellbeing & Inclusion, Sustainability & Inclusive Growth plus Agility & Innovation, and priorities that are aligned to the Executive's plans for COVID-19 recovery and renewal...**

five years however will be a challenging period, with ongoing financial constraints and massive, and at this time unknown, changes to the ways we live.

The Department for Communities and its Arm's Length Bodies will play a critical role in contributing to this long term societal and economic recovery. Therefore our plan sets out long term outcomes over four cross-cutting themes of Anti-Poverty, Wellbeing & Inclusion, Sustainability & Inclusive Growth plus Agility & Innovation, and priorities that are aligned to the Executive's plans for COVID-19 recovery and renewal, and New Decade, New Approach commitments.

At the heart of this Strategy are three core objectives. First, addressing the increased poverty that is a consequence of the impact of austerity policies over the last ten years. Second, to build a culture of collective will and collective responsibility within the Department and with those with whom we work. Finally, building stronger communities through providing the

means and opportunities for those who are deprived and vulnerable to engage with, and where necessary challenge, government to provide and improve public services that meet their needs. That means we will work to strengthen the invaluable role the community and voluntary sector plays in empowering those who experience poverty. The Department for Communities aims to change the circumstances of those who are currently in poverty and to enable them to be part of wealth building in the community.

I will seek to develop a culture of strong leadership, harnessing the collective potential of our people across the organisation and creating an environment where together, we can develop solutions to the complex challenges we face and can continue with my core mission to empower communities, help to eradicate poverty and deprivation, and ultimately to improve people's lives.

CARÁL NÍ CHUILÍN

**Carál Ní Chuilín MLA**  
**Minister for Communities**



# Permanent Secretary Foreword

**As we launch our Department's five year strategy for 2020 – 2025, despite the challenges we face, I am very optimistic about what we can achieve during this period. This is because I believe that with all of our 8,600 people and our Arm's Length Bodies working together against a common set of strategic priorities we have a real opportunity to make a difference. Every one of us has a role to play in ensuring the Department's Strategy is delivered and that we deliver against this opportunity.**

The last eight months have been difficult for many and no one could have predicted that COVID-19 would have such an impact on our society, our economy and on our health and wellbeing. Unfortunately the impacts of the pandemic are expected to be long-lasting, but I believe that the Department's Strategy provides a roadmap to ensure that

we are using our resources and ingenuity to deliver supports and interventions that can tangibly and practically improve lives and the communities we live in.



During the COVID-19 response I saw the incredible dedication, commitment and innovation of Departmental staff and our delivery partners across the public, private and third sectors, to rapidly deliver essential support for those who needed it. I believe that this Strategy will enable us to build on the good work already delivered and focus on the longer term outcomes where we need to make an impact.

Our Strategy sets out the four key cross-cutting themes of Anti-Poverty, Wellbeing & Inclusion, Sustainability & Inclusive Growth and Agility & Innovation. By delivering on these themes,

we will create a better environment for society and also a modern and innovative Department which everyone will be proud to be a part of.

I have seen how the Department has responded to COVID-19 with innovation and agility and has demonstrated how it is reshaping into an organisation that is working smarter. I look forward to our Department becoming even more modern and responsive over the next five years as it responds to this Strategy with the same agility and passion. We will invest in our people to further develop our high performing, motivated and skilled workforce, and we will build greater agility in deploying resources to meet our priorities and to be better leaders. We can't ignore the changing



**I believe that this Strategy will enable us to build on the good work already delivered and focus on the longer term outcomes where we need to make an impact.**

environment around us and it is important that we maintain flexibility so we can respond as required.

Key to this will be the leadership skills which we demonstrate and build in our people so they can flourish into future leaders and respond to our Ministerial priorities with certainty. I believe that by working better, smarter and together we will continue to deliver on our common purpose **'Supporting People, Building**

**Communities, Shaping Places'** with a focussed, agile and determined approach.

*Tracy Meharg*

**Tracy Meharg**  
**Permanent Secretary for Communities**

# About the Department for Communities

## WHO WE ARE

The Department for Communities delivers a diverse range of functions that impact on the lives of everyone in our society. Our common purpose is to make this a great place to live for everybody by supporting people, building communities, shaping places.

**Supporting  
people**

**Building  
communities**

**Shaping  
places**



**We will work together for a fair and inclusive society by transforming support for people, communities and places to improve lives and deliver generational change.**



## OUR WAY

**Our Department is itself a community with approximately 8,600 staff working together; supporting each other and our partners to deliver for a fair and inclusive society.**

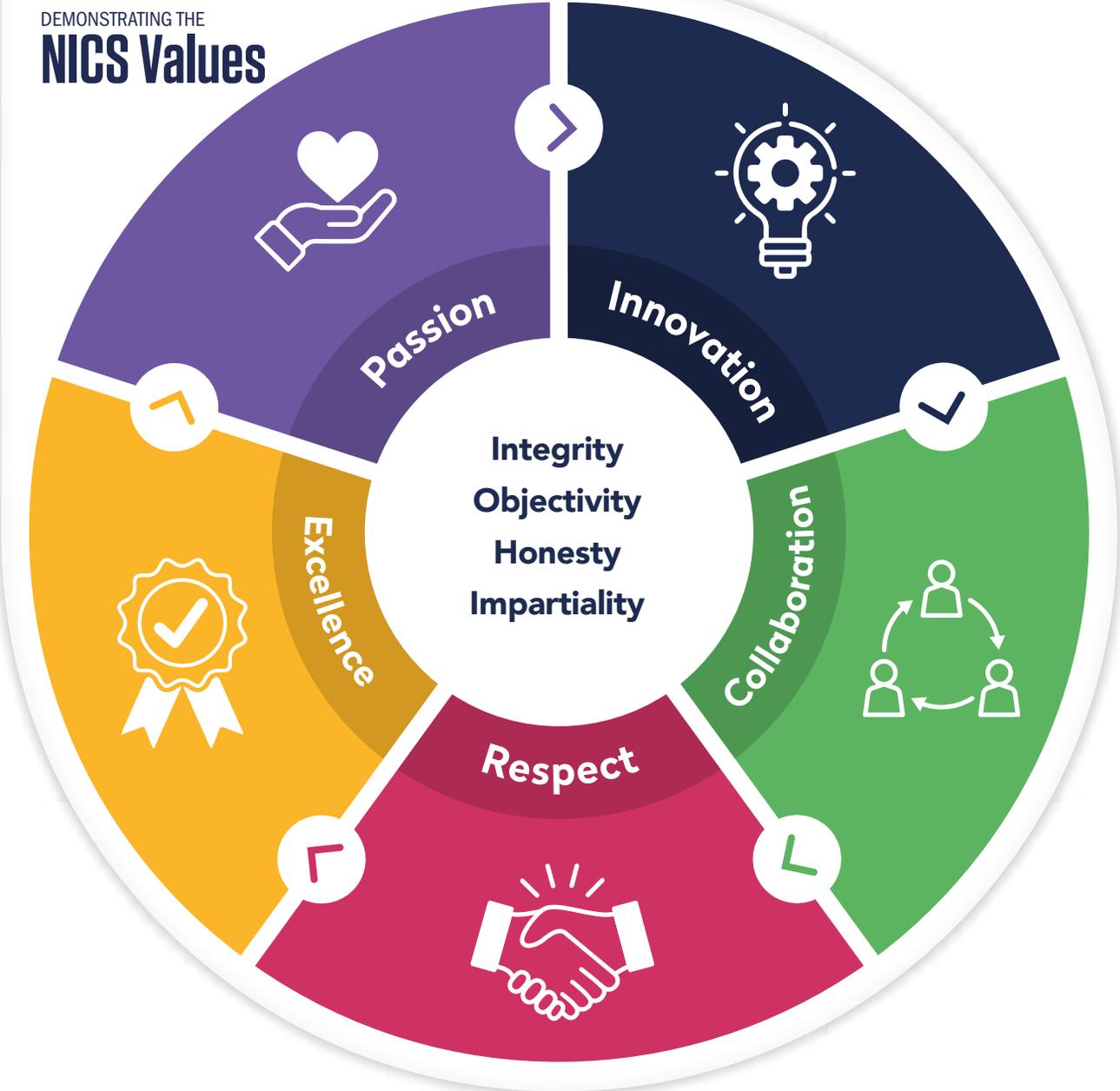
Our people are the driving force behind the Department's achievements to date and our future success. We are a diverse organisation made up of communities of staff who develop policy, deliver services and provide support to the internal workings of the Department. Our teams have broad

and varied roles which together enable us all to contribute to our common purpose.

Throughout our working day, we live the NICS values and demonstrate these through our passion, innovation, collaboration, respect and excellence.



DEMONSTRATING THE  
**NICS Values**



## WHAT WE DO

**The Department provides support to meet the needs of some of the most deprived people, families and communities here.**

**Our areas of responsibility include:**

- delivery of the social security system including child maintenance support and pensions
- providing advice and support for those seeking employment and for those who are unable to work
- ensuring the availability of good quality and affordable housing
- encouraging diversity and participation in society
- promoting social inclusion within the community to encompass:
  - Anti-Poverty
  - Gender Equality
  - Sexual Orientation
  - Disability
  - Child Poverty
  - Active Ageing
- promoting sports and leisure within our communities
- supporting local government to deliver services
- identifying and preserving records of historical, social and cultural importance to ensure they are available to the public and for future generations
- realising the value of our built heritage
- supporting creative industries, and promoting the arts, language and cultural sectors
- providing free access to books, information, IT and community programmes through our libraries
- maintaining museums
- revitalising town and city centres

**There are many definitions of community. At its simplest, a community is a structure that brings people together because they share something - a place, a set of ideas, or a common activity.**

**Being “for communities” means making sure that everyone can take part in society and that no-one is left out.**

**Our Arm's Length Bodies perform many vital and significant functions and it is through them that the Department will deliver much of its work to:**

- support, develop, improve and promote a knowledge and appreciation of the Sciences and Arts
- champion the rights of older people and children & young people
- act as the Regional Housing Authority
- provide supported paid employment to people with disabilities
- promote languages including Irish, Ulster Scots and Sign language
- promote Culture and Heritage
- manage the Local Government pension scheme

- lead in the development of, and access to, sport in Northern Ireland
- increase the capacity of the Social Housing Development Programme and better target its output at areas of high housing need, in line with New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) commitments

As part of the NDNA commitment to transform public services, the Department of Finance will lead a review of Arm's Length Bodies with a view to their rationalisation. Our Department's Arm's Length Bodies will fall within the scope of that review.







## OUR IMPACT

The Department has played an important role in supporting people, building communities and shaping places since its creation in 2016. The impact of some of our work is outlined below:



Supporting **20,000** vulnerable people each year to live independently



Over **£101.6m** additional benefits claimed as a result of the **Make the Call Wraparound Service**



**£76.4m** collected for the benefit of children through child maintenance for **60,505** children



Nearly **£24b** in social security benefits paid



**71,220** JSA customers helped into employment



Advanced the Departmental Priority of **Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion** within Communities

**Building communities**



**4,871** affordable homes provided and **5,910** social home new-builds started



Sport and creative activity projects delivered to **25,197** young people through **T:BUC\***



**4m** visits to public libraries each year



In excess of **100** organisations funded through Arts Council for Northern Ireland on average each year



Support for more than **300** community festivals each year



On average **£11.4m** provided annually to deliver **Sport matters**



Neighbourhood Renewal and Areas at Risk programmes deliver services to tackle deprivation and disadvantage with an investment of **£18m** supporting some **300** projects across **65** areas of deprivation

\*includes those participants who benefitted from the Strategic Interventions grants programme in 16/17

**Shaping places**



**£64m** invested in regenerating towns and cities in the last four years



**190** Historic monuments managed with nearly **800,000** people visiting each year



Over **800,000** visitors to museums each year



Responded to and determined **4,800** planning applications, excavation licences and scheduled monument consents

Most recently the Department has had to quickly respond to those in our society who were most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is a summary of the work carried out by DfC from March 2020 to September 2020.



Period 16 March 2020 - 27 September 2020 (unless otherwise stated)

### Universal Credit



**107,275**

UC Claims Since COVID-19



**550,620**

Payments Made Since COVID-19



**49,126**

Advances Approved Since COVID-19

### Discretionary Support



**£2.0m**

Total COVID-19 Fund Awarded (Since w/c 23 March)



**14,133**

Total COVID-19 Awards (Since w/c 23 March)



**£139**

Average COVID-19 Award Amount

### Jobseeker's Allowance & Food Parcels



**7,231**

JSA Claims Since COVID-19



**204,006**

Food Parcels Delivered to Councils (06/04 - 31/07)





**Period 16 March 2020 - 27 September 2020** (unless otherwise stated)

<p><b>COVID-19 Community Helpline (09 April - 29 Sep)</b></p>	 <p><b>24,057</b> Phonecalls to Helpline</p>	 <p><b>5,137</b> Emails to Helpline</p>	 <p><b>1,798</b> SMS to Helpline</p>
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<p><b>Additional Funding Announced</b></p>	 <p><b>£60.3m</b> Executive Allocation to Councils</p>	 <p><b>£29m</b> Culture Recovery Support</p>	 <p><b>£7m</b> COVID Enterprise Fund</p>
	 <p><b>£1m</b> COVID Safe Sports Packs</p>	 <p>Re-opening of the Organisations Emergency Programme (OEP) to help arts organisations (03 Sep - 17 Sep)</p>	 <p>From 01 Oct the Sports Hardship Fund has reopened for applications</p>

NB: Please note this Management Information and may be subject to change

While the Department provided a fast and impactful response from the outbreak of COVID-19, we recognise that there will be long term and significant societal, economic and health & well-being impacts that will take time for our communities to recover from. DfC will continue to play a critical role in providing much needed targeted support and interventions as our communities begin to recover, and indeed renew.

Our five year strategy will become our roadmap to recovery and renewal, and will help to ensure that we continue to respond to COVID-19 and deliver NDNA commitments with the help of our Arm's Length Bodies and our delivery partners, so that we can continue to support our people, build communities, and shape places.



# Our Strategy



Our **Strategy** outlines the impact the Department aims to have on society and how this change will be enabled.

Our **Vision** and **Purpose** set out the reason for our existence and what we want to achieve.

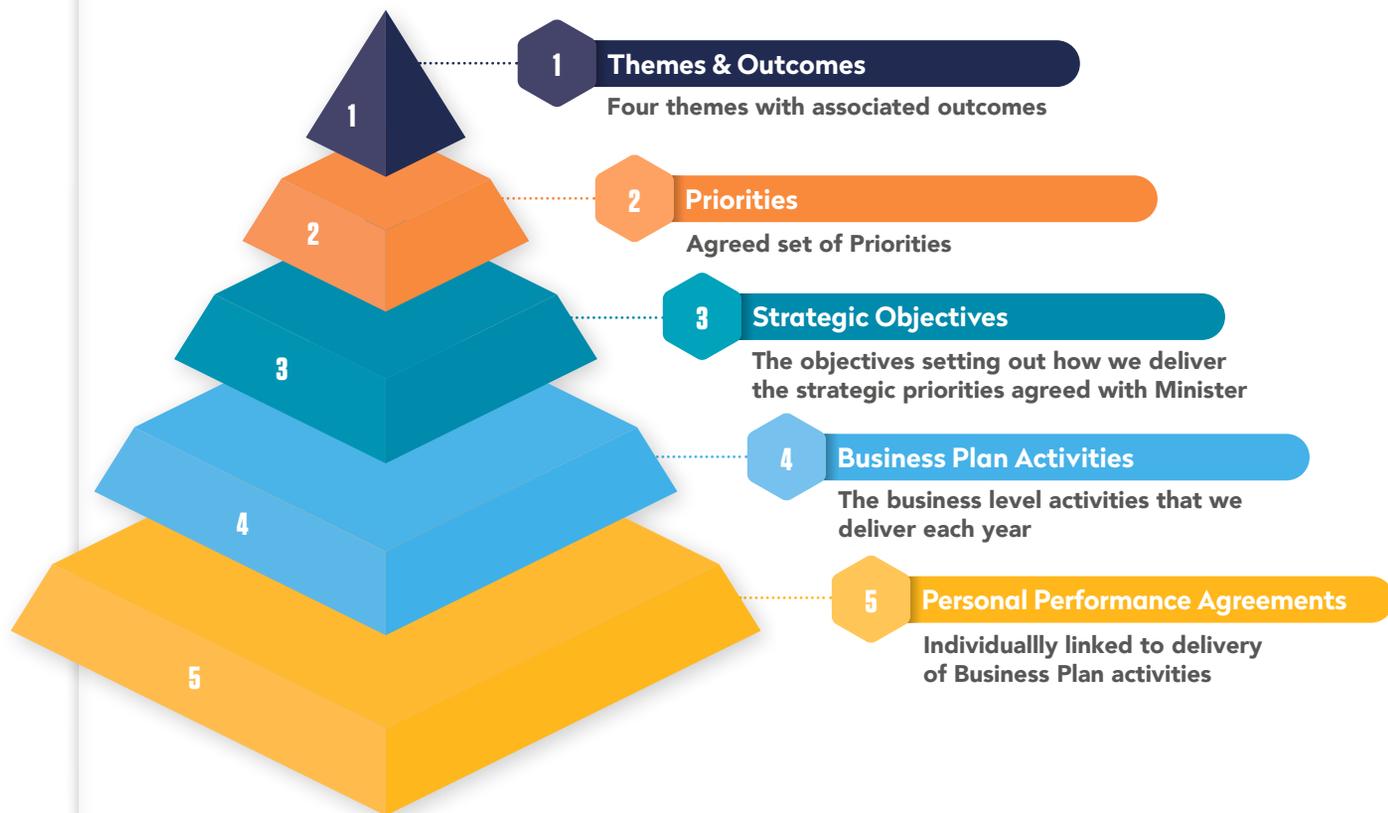
## Our Vision

**We will work together for a fair and inclusive society by transforming support for people, communities and places to improve lives and deliver generational change.**

## Our Purpose

**Supporting People  
Building Communities  
Shaping Places**

# How we deliver



## CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

We have identified four **Cross-Cutting Themes** which capture the essence of what the Department wants to accomplish in the long-term. The cross-cutting themes are:



The inclusion of people and communities will be at the heart of all we do, with the principles of co-production and co-design embedded in our work.

## WHAT WE WILL DO



### ANTI-POVERTY

### Outcome Statement

We reduce the number of citizens who are living in absolute and relative poverty through a range of cross-cutting interventions, ensuring vulnerable people, those facing poverty and communities have access to the support they need, based on our enhanced understanding of the causes of poverty.

### PRIORITIES

- Lead the co-design, development and delivery of a cross Department anti-poverty strategy supported by evidence-based policy proposals to deliver targeted interventions based on need
- Collaborate with other Departments and deliver with partners on cross-cutting issues, including homelessness, place and deprivation-based approaches, and employability to deliver a sustainable and effective set of anti-poverty interventions
- Through co-design and co-delivery, develop and implement services and policies that provide modern and progressive social security for citizens
- Discharge our responsibilities under the terms of the future relationship with the European Union, to ensure that vulnerable people and communities can access important services and support



## WELLBEING & INCLUSION

### Outcome Statement

We help everyone within our communities live positive, fulfilled lives surrounded by diverse opportunities to work, enjoy themselves and get involved. This supports physical and mental health at an individual and community level.

### PRIORITIES

- Support cultural and community confidence, participation and wellbeing through direction and support to the creative industries, museums, libraries, sport and arts, culture and heritage sectors
- Increase and incentivise participation in the labour market and wider society through targeted, sustainable interventions, delivering these alongside community-based partners and other sectors
- Incentivise, support and enhance community empowerment through an innovative and sustainable community and voluntary sector
- Promote and develop indigenous languages to support wider access to opportunities, experience and services



## SUSTAINABILITY & INCLUSIVE GROWTH

### Outcome Statement

We support citizens and communities by working with them in achieving their maximum potential through a range of economic, cultural and environmental interventions such as increasing work opportunities for citizens and the development of heritage locations as community assets. Provision of an increased supply of affordable and sustainable homes, and improved access to housing solutions that meet the need of citizens.

### PRIORITIES

- Grow and scale community wealth building to support economic recovery
- Build and strengthen the resilience of our towns and cities by creating places where people want to live and work, to visit and invest
- Build financial capability and sustainability of Local Government to ensure they can deliver key public services and support aligned to Programme for Government
- Drive inclusive growth through our rich and diverse cultural heritage
- Invest in regeneration, community assets and all parts of our housing economy, including making best use of public land for housing, maximising social value and adopting a people-centred approach to investment in our towns and cities
- Secure the long-term future of the Housing Executive's social housing stock for future generations
- Develop and support sustainability and Green Growth



## AGILITY & INNOVATION

### Outcome Statement

We drive performance with the citizen at the heart of all that we do. We set clear targets, we have in place strong and collaborative delivery structures, maximising technology, maintaining and enhancing skills, energy and commitment throughout the organisation, and exercising strong leadership.

### PRIORITIES

- Enhance citizen focused services and interventions through an ongoing process of customer insight, data analytics, research and analysis
- Transform service delivery by offering access to a range of channels collaborating with partners and leveraging technological solutions
- Utilise sustainable and effective structures for the delivery of services through collaboration and partnerships, including our Arm's Length Bodies
- Transform how DfC operates by harnessing the collective potential and expertise of our people, empowering them to help shape and drive forward innovation
- Grow and sustain centres of excellence to deliver high quality public services
- Invest in leveraging our resources to optimise financial and asset management to ensure effective, proper and efficient use of public funds

## MAKING IT HAPPEN

### To achieve our goals we will work to:

- better understand the needs of the people we serve, putting them at the heart of our services in order to achieve better outcomes
- strive to deliver the highest standard of service in everything we do
- provide a range of modern and accessible channels for our services
- deliver connected services with our Arm's Length Bodies, either directly or through collaboration with other public, private or community organisations
- invest in our talent to further develop high performing, motivated and skilled people to become a modern innovative Department

We will take account of the external and internal factors which have to be managed so that

our Department can perform to the best of its ability. Our focus will primarily be on the social, economic and wellbeing recovery and renewal of our communities to improve the lives of citizens. To achieve this we will invest in and enhance the skills and knowledge of our workforce, our tools and resources, and our work culture.

**These are the things that will empower us to be a modern, responsive, forward-looking organisation that works better, works smarter, and works together.**



# ENABLERS

The Enablers listed below will support us in delivering our strategic priorities:



## CITIZEN

Citizen First  
Citizen & Community Engagement  
Citizen Experience



## PROCESS

Operating Model | Strategy & Business Planning  
Policy Development | Governance of Risk  
Delivery Transformation



## TECHNOLOGY

Technology Exploitation  
Digital Progression & Innovation  
Data Utilisation & Protection



## PEOPLE

Organisational Development | Agility & Innovation  
Staff Engagement & Communication  
Capacity & Capability



## COLLABORATION

Ministerial Engagement | NICS-Wide Collaboration  
DfC Group collaboration | ALB Partnerships  
Council, Private & 3rd Sector collaboration



## BUDGET

Allocation  
Budgetary Planning  
Leveraging Innovative Funding

## THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

**The people we serve are at the heart of all that we do. To deliver inclusion for everyone, we will:**

- take a citizen first approach to our work
- be innovative in our methods of stakeholder engagement to co-design and co-deliver
- streamline, simplify and modernise the services we deliver to make it easier for people to interact with us
- be agile in responding to the needs of society



## PARTNERSHIP

**Working together – internally and externally - makes us a smarter, more efficient organisation, and enables us to improve our policies and services.**

Effective partnership working ensures that we can make the best use of our resources, deliver value for money and become more than just the sum of our parts.

**We will enhance and improve how we work collaboratively and in a joined up way across the Department and with:**

- Ministers and the Assembly
- other Government Departments
- our Arm's Length Bodies
- local government
- the private sector
- the community and voluntary sector
- communities



## OUR PEOPLE

**Our people are key to the Department's ability to deliver and improve. We will foster a working environment that supports leaders at all levels of the organisation. We will transform our organisation and look to the future with engaged and empowered people.**

**We will value our people by:**

- setting a clear vision and direction for our work
- communicating and engaging effectively at all levels
- providing excellent career development opportunities
- creating a versatile and innovative working environment
- establishing a culture of ownership and trust



## PROCESS

**We will develop and implement processes that work positively for our Department and those we serve.**

**We will deliver lasting change by:**

- being outcomes-focused
- making the best possible use of our resources
- effectively monitoring and reporting on our performance
- modelling good governance
- designing a fit-for-purpose organisational structure



## TECHNOLOGY

**We will optimise the use of technology to continually improve our performance, streamline and enhance our working practices and improve our customer service.**

**We will use digital solutions to:**

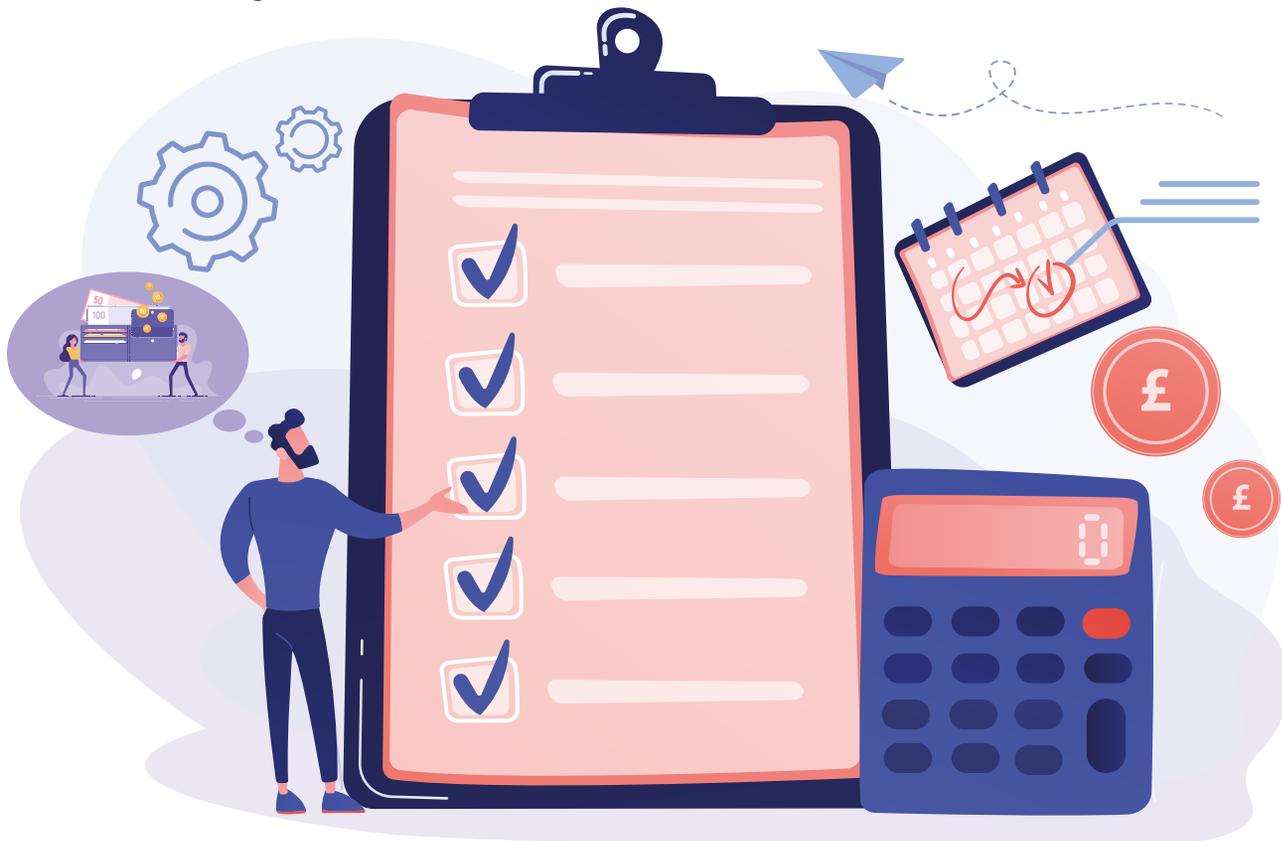
- promote innovation and flexibility in our services and processes
- seek efficiencies
- improve people's experience in accessing services
- make evidence-based decisions supported by data
- keep the information we hold safe



## BUDGETS

Through planning and innovation, we will make the best use of our budgets. We will be open and transparent about how our money is spent. We will invest in the right things in order to:

- effectively prioritise and fund our work
- deliver on our agreed outcomes
- target our expenditure where it will have the most impact







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