

Building a brighter future

The Sustainable Northern Ireland Strategy 2025 – 2030



Sustainable
Northern Ireland

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Executive Director's Foreword



Our new strategy is driven by a simple idea: Collaboration. Over the past year, our partners have shared their insights with us. We've heard loud and clear their concerns about the climate crisis and the health of the environment. We've also heard about the pressure points and extraordinary work going on in public sector organisations working behind the scenes to drive the transition to net zero.

We're excited to announce our new strategy. It starts with our vision of thriving, fair economy that meets the needs of all people without compromising the planet. Our strategy reaffirms our commitment to promote and enable the adoption of sustainable principles by individuals and organisations and in doing so, build a more sustainable future for Northern Ireland. As we step forward, we're building on what we've learned over the last 25 years and we'll retain the local convening and coordinating approach we know is so highly valued. But we want to make a bigger impact. Bolder change demands deeper partnership working. We don't expect to have all the answers but by working with others, together we'll be more than the sum of our parts.

Our strategy is built around four central pillars of work.

Inform

First, we're doubling down on our efforts to build capacity in the people and organisations at the forefront of the green transition. We'll develop and improve our communication and training offering, to educate and empower others to contribute to a cleaner, greener way of living and working.

Reform

Second, we know policy reform is critical to tackling some of the biggest environmental challenges we face. We'll engage policy-makers and hold them to account on their climate and sustainability commitments, through the All-Party Group that we facilitate and by engaging with government consultations.

Transform

Third, we'll simplify the way that organisations deliver sustainability, assisting with strategy development, and encouraging them to focus on simple, practical and effective actions.

Grow

Fourth, we know we need to make a bigger impact and to do that, we need to grow. We need to increase our resources, our capabilities and our reach. We'll be selective in where we draw our funding from so that we retain our independence whilst offering maximum flexibility to develop our services where they are most needed.

We believe Northern Ireland has a massive opportunity – we have the natural resources, the technology and the talent to make us an exemplar in the race to net zero. Our modest scale is an advantage – enabling us to move fast. Our abundance of wind and geothermal energy, combined with ground-breaking local technology, can provide sustainable, reliable, and affordable green energy, and remove our reliance on imported fossil fuels.

Northern Ireland is unique in that single institutions hold majority control over electricity, gas, water, and public transport. This means that, in theory at least, we can be swift and efficient, making sweeping changes at scale. That theory is already becoming a reality, with Translink on schedule to decarbonise its bus fleet by 2040. NI Water is also leveraging its assets

to deliver green energy solutions, and the Housing Executive is retrofitting 300 of its houses with energy efficiency measures, low carbon heating, renewable power, and storage with improved householder awareness. Local Authorities are also taking action, publishing ambitious targets and plans to act on climate change. And with a Public Body Reporting Duty now in place, the rest of the public sector will surely follow suit. By harnessing public assets, and public procurement, the sector is ideally placed to drive the green transition.

Our 2030 strategy focuses on supporting Northern Ireland's net zero efforts, building on our existing work with the public sector to make an even greater difference in the years ahead. We want to support other sectors too, bringing the passion, purpose and expertise of our people to accelerate our shared goal to protect our environment and its resources, strengthen society, and improve lives. Let's make our green region the envy of all, paving the way to a brighter, cleaner, more prosperous future. The journey starts now and it starts with collaboration.

Nichola Hughes, Executive Director
Sustainable Northern Ireland



Our purpose

Meeting our needs, without compromising the planet

Sustainable NI is a charity dedicated to promoting and supporting sustainable development across Northern Ireland.

We work with councils, government, and businesses to influence policy, deliver projects, and inspire change through education, advocacy, and practical solutions.

We are founded on collaboration, sharing our knowledge and expertise. However our goal is not change; it is transformation. By addressing the root causes of environmental and social challenges, we advocate for a systemic shift to sustainable decision-making.

Our vision is an economy that meets the needs of all people without compromising the planet.



"Our national climate targets are extremely challenging. Sustainable NI is a trusted partner to help public bodies understand and implement the transition in a locally appropriate and consistent way, in line with national priorities, ensuring good practice is shared widely."

Emma Adair, Assistant Development Manager (Environment)
Ards and North Down Borough Council



The challenge

We are living in a global climate, biodiversity and health emergency; the emergent features of unsustainable economic systems that urgently need reform. Northern Ireland has been slow to act on climate change due to political instability and the stop-start nature of government. Despite this, a Climate Change Act was introduced in 2022 committing the Northern Ireland Executive to Net Zero by 2050 and, for the first time, placing duties on public bodies to act and report on climate

change. This has renewed momentum on sustainability within Northern Ireland, with a Green Growth Strategy, Energy Strategy and Circular Economy Strategy now in place to drive the decarbonisation of our economy. These strategies and action plans, alongside insights from our clients, have formed the basis of our strategy up to 2030, guiding our work and focussing our efforts.



Insights

In 2023/24, Sustainable NI carried out a Needs Analysis Workshop involving 11 key public sector organisations in Northern Ireland to gather insights about what the public sector needs help with to tackle climate change and drive progress on sustainability.

Key insights are that public bodies require:

1. Clear and consistent leadership and policy - A clear vision, strategy and delivery plan, aligned with national targets, providing clear duties to follow.

2. Consistent methodologies - Improved access to guidance, tools and improvement frameworks to deliver Net Zero.

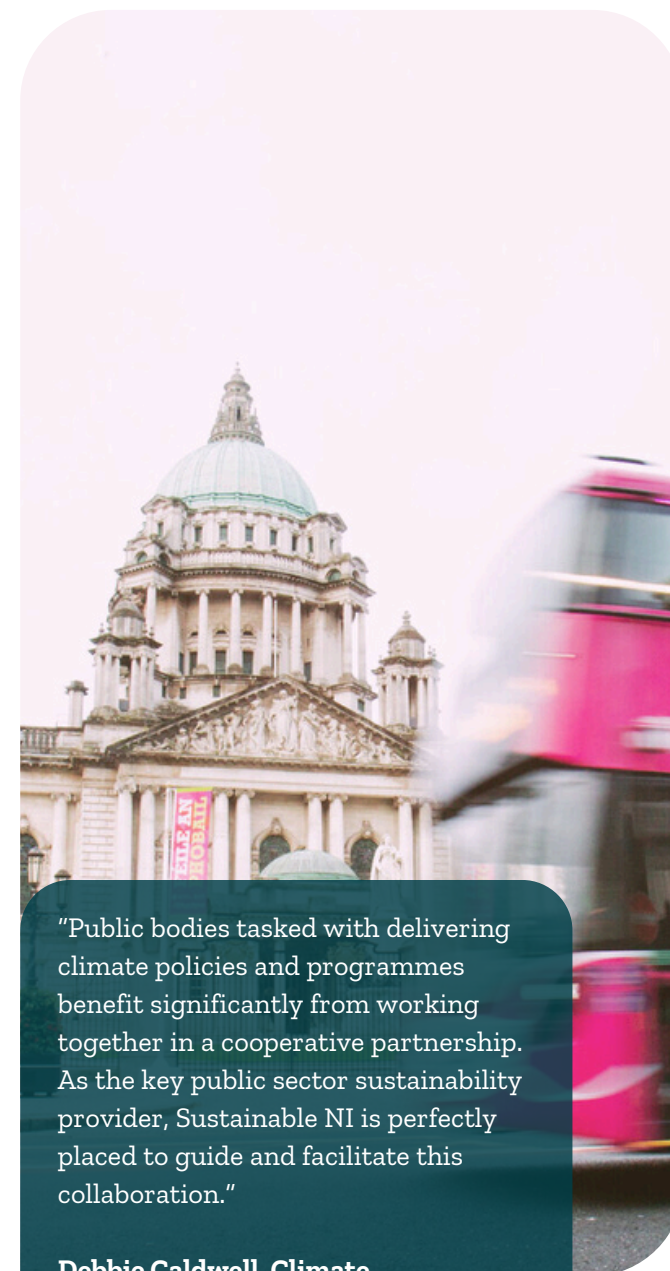
3. Increased capacity through skills development - More support to change the culture of their organisations, through staff training and capacity building.

4. Relevant, up-to-date information and best practice - Signposting to information and support, including peer-to-peer support, and exchange of knowledge and best practice with others in a similar position.

5. Funding for coordinated and targeted projects and programmes - Scaled up finance and investment for climate action in their area as well as facilitated collaboration on climate projects and programmes to improve efficiencies of scale across the region.

6. Support to improve monitoring, reporting and verification - Consistent reporting methods and standards for more effective decision-making.

These six insights have informed our strategy, making it client-led and client-focused.



"Public bodies tasked with delivering climate policies and programmes benefit significantly from working together in a cooperative partnership. As the key public sector sustainability provider, Sustainable NI is perfectly placed to guide and facilitate this collaboration."

Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner
Belfast City Council

Our four strategic priorities

Our conversations over the last year and insights from stakeholders have informed and shaped our strategic priorities to:

- **inform** people to make better choices
- **reform** policy to ensure it supports sustainability
- **transform** how organisations deliver sustainability
- **grow** our capacity and influence



Facility visit to Passivhaus development, Belfast



We'll inform people to make better choices

We understand the power of education and information in driving improvement. That's why we'll offer training, tools, resources and forums, to support individuals and organisations in embedding sustainability into everyday practices - turning aspirations into reality. Sustainability education teaches people to think about the long-term impact of their actions on the planet and to make choices that help protect it for future generations. Through tailored communications, engaging training courses, and interactive forums, we'll strive to inspire individuals and organisations to adopt eco-conscious habits and contribute to a cleaner, greener way of living and working.

We'll provide services that:

- inspire people to act on climate breakdown by sharing solutions and best practice
- inform organisations about key policy developments
- improve the knowledge and skills of those delivering the green transition through training and development opportunities
- enable collaboration and peer-to-peer learning through regular meetings

"Sustainable NI did an outstanding job developing a comprehensive sustainability-focused training course for council officers delivering our capital programme. Based on our discussions about how we deliver capital projects, the course was thoughtfully designed providing clear and practical insights into sustainability best practices. Francesca's expertise was evident making the training accessible and engaging. The focus on real-world applications has made this course invaluable for officers looking to implement sustainable practices in their projects. Sustainable NI is passionate about sustainability and dedicated to empowering others to make a lasting impact."

David Leemon, Capital Projects Manager,
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council



Repair cafe, Belfast



We'll reform policy to ensure it supports sustainability

Climate change is the “most pervasive threat to the natural environment and societies the world has ever experienced” (UN, 2022). While many environmental challenges are global, there is huge potential to make a difference locally. This starts with policy. We'll advocate for policy reform to advance our environmental and social aims. We'll engage policymakers at a local and national level and challenge them to embed climate and sustainability considerations into government policies and plans, and hold them to account when they fail to do so.

We'll provide services that:

- influence policies in all sectors so that they help build a more sustainable society
- empower elected representatives to initiate policy reform and hold the government to account on climate and sustainability commitments

“I'm immensely proud to Chair the All-Party Group on Climate Action. Local politicians have a significant role to play in the green transition, raising ambition and holding the government to account for its climate commitments. Whilst we are significantly behind other nations, public and political support for climate action is there. The work that Sustainable NI does is invaluable, inspiring us with best practices and supporting the organisations leading the transition.”

Danny Donnelly MLA, Chair
All-Party Group on Climate Action





We'll transform how organisations deliver sustainability

Climate compliance is a challenging process for any organisation. It requires business strategy and decision-making to be aligned fully with net zero, and for processes and policies to be put in place to support the transformation. We'll support organisations, primarily in the public sector, to integrate sustainability seamlessly into their operations. From crafting bespoke sustainability and climate strategies to conducting an independent review of governance arrangements, we'll offer comprehensive support in all areas of sustainability. By leveraging our expertise, the public sector will alleviate the need for external hires - delivering better value for money for the public purse.

We'll provide services that:

- help organisations to effectively monitor and report their sustainability performance
- empower organisations to optimise their sustainability performance by providing consultancy advice, tools and resources

"Omagh Enterprise's mission is to support start-up, growth and social economy businesses in the Omagh area. Sustainable NI supported us in our transition towards sustainability, with the goal to future-proof our organisation while addressing major environmental issues. The Sustainability Audit provided a baseline that we are using to improve and measure progress. We will follow up in a year to evaluate the impact of Sustainable NI's recommendations."

Nichols O'Shiel, CEO
Omagh Enterprise





We'll grow our capacity and influence

We recognise that our staff are our primary asset. They help maintain our reputation as a trusted and impartial expert organisation. However, we need to grow our capacity and influence to ensure we thrive in a rapidly evolving world. At Sustainable NI we have the skills and expertise to support the race to net zero. We'll diversify and grow our funding, to expand our services and reach a wider audience. We'll invest in our staff, developing our capabilities so that we can share our expertise with others. In doing this we'll not only grow the organisation but we'll also be more resilient to future financial shocks.

We'll provide services that:

- are universal and replicable to a wide range of organisations and sectors to facilitate growth
- celebrate our achievements and the achievements of others to increase awareness of our work

"In a rapidly changing world, it's a tremendous honour to serve on the Board of Sustainable NI. I believe Sustainable NI is uniquely placed to provide additionality to its stakeholders as we focus on delivering the Climate Change (NI) Act. With it's level of expertise, the Public Body Reporting Duty is just one area were Sustainable NI is suitably competent and poised to provide support."

Robert Clements, Head of Sustainable Development
Northern Ireland Housing Executive



**Launch of the Housing Executive
Sustainable Development Strategy**

How we work

We **inform** and empower individuals and organisations to embrace sustainable practices by providing engaging communications and training.

We **reform** policy by championing sustainability principles in new and existing policy frameworks.

We **transform** how organisations deliver sustainability by providing support and guidance on strategy development and reporting.



Our values

We have worked with our team and board to examine what is important to us and define our values. These values underline the way that we work and what's important to us as an organisation. They will be brought alive by our people, guiding how we conduct ourselves and how we do business:

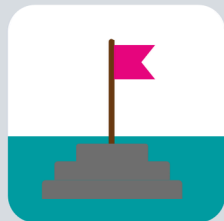


We are trusted

We are professional, confident experts and we hold ourselves to account



How we're seen

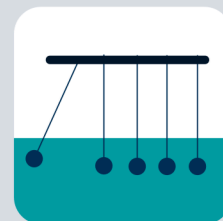


We are passionate

We are committed to sustainability and stand by our beliefs



How we feel



We collaborate

We know that impact is greater when we work with others on shared goals



How we behave



We are fair

We are committed to justice, respect and equality for all



How we think

Our ways of working



Deliver change through others

We collaborate with and support organisations but also challenge them, to help make great things happen.



Simplify sustainability

Sustainability can be complex. Our goal is to simplify it, making it more accessible, engaging and practical.



Prioritise impact

We work with any organisation that needs us but prioritise our efforts where there is the most potential for impact.



Champion sustainability

We promote long-term solutions focused on environmentally, socially and economically positive actions.



Promote skills and learning

We use evidence to guide our communications and training and share what has and hasn't worked elsewhere.



Make connections

We build partnerships that unite organisations around a common purpose and encourage collaboration.

Our 2030 ambition

The ambition through this strategy is to unite key public and community sector stakeholders, delivering expert support to accelerate the adoption of green practices, and applying a social lens to ensure the transition to net-zero is fair. But we want to make a bigger difference in the next five years.

Our goal for 2030 is for Sustainable NI to become a recognised catalyst of sustainable progress in Northern Ireland and the partner of choice for climate and sustainability support.

To deliver greater impact, we will:

- **grow our capacity** - by increasing funding by 50% on current levels and working towards a more diverse funding mix, broadly in thirds (see p.19)
- **increase our capability** - by increasing training undertaken by staff and board members by 100% on current levels
- **extend our influence** - by promoting our services to new audiences, including the general public, increasing our reach by 100%

"As a relatively small local authority with limited resources, Sustainable NI assisted us in developing our Climate Change and Sustainable Development Action Plan. They also keep us informed about policy and funding developments and provide us with opportunities to engage with others in the public sector and give our views to the Government on environmental matters, which is an important function for us."

Marcella Kinsella, Lead Climate Change and Sustainable Development Officer
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council



Funding and Governance

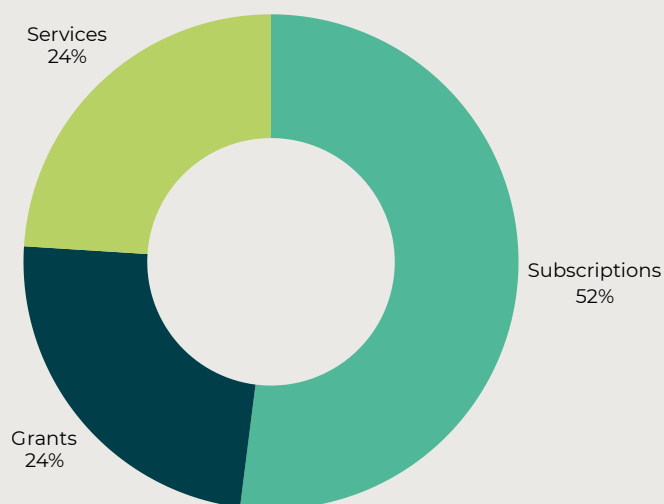
Funding

Sustainable NI operates a hybrid funding model. This includes 'core' funding from councils and public bodies through subscriptions for support. This core funding enables Sustainable NI to have stability and to provide a base level of support to the public sector. Sustainable NI also receives other sources of funding from commercial contract work (services) and projects (grants). These funding sources will vary over time however we aim to have a more diverse funding mix in place, broadly in thirds, by 2030.

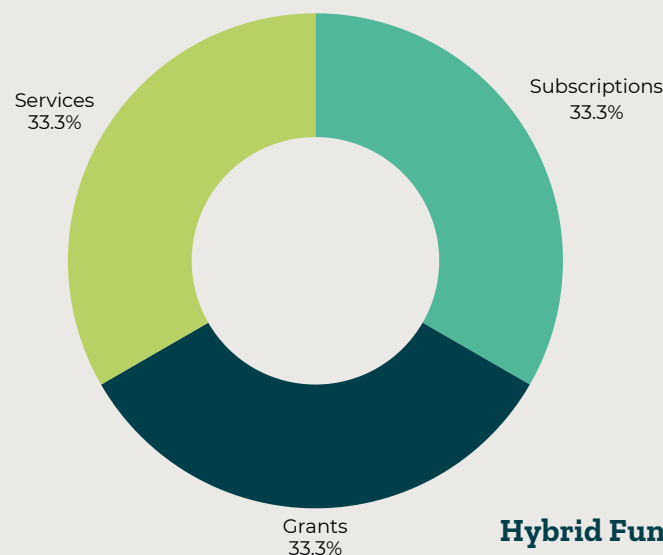
Governance

Sustainable NI is an independent, non-profit organisation, registered as a charity (Charity No NIC103426) and a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (Company No NI038784). Our Board of Directors comprises representatives from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors who scrutinise our finances, risks, strategy and operations. The Board also ensure legal compliance. We publish our accounts and a report outlining the work we've carried out each year, to ensure full transparency.

Current Funding Mix



Optimal Funding Mix



Hybrid Funding Model



Zero Emission Bus, Belfast



Sustainable NI was formed in 1998 to promote and enable the adoption of sustainability principles by local authorities and other agencies of government and in doing so, build a more sustainable future for Northern Ireland.

Find out more

Visit our website: sustainableni.org

Email: info@sustainableni.org

Call us: 028 9590 2500

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