



Department for the
Economy
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An Roinn
Geilleagair



ENERGY STRATEGY

**THE PATH TO
NET ZERO ENERGY**

ACTION PLAN 2025

MARCH 2025

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

This year, 2025, marks a major milestone in the advancement of our ambition to achieve self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy.

While much progress has been made since the publication of the *Energy Strategy – Path to Net Zero Energy* in 2021, market volatilities have served to highlight the importance of our need to accelerate towards self-sufficiency in affordable and clean energy, breaking the link with global energy prices and our long-standing reliance on fossil fuels.

I am pleased, as Minister for the Economy, to launch the Energy Strategy Action Plan 2025, detailing the planned actions for the year ahead, alongside a commitment to review the ten-year Energy Strategy at the midway point to ensure that we are focused on delivering our decarbonisation targets and Climate Change Act commitments.

Delivery of the Energy Strategy has a critical role to play in my department's four key priorities of delivering more good jobs; addressing regional imbalance; increasing productivity; and delivering decarbonisation. In addition, delivery of the Energy Strategy underpins the draft Programme for Government commitment to 'Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy'.

As the 2025 action plan sets out, delivery on 2030 targets and beyond will require cross-government and multi-stakeholder actions, and will serve as a roadmap to give confidence to our commitment to drive change.

Key to the strategic priority of *Accelerating the Delivery of Affordable Renewable Energy* will be the publication of the Final Scheme Design for the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme to enable the first auction in 2026, and the progress of a draft bill on Offshore Renewable Energy Installations in 2025.

The publication of a smart meter design plan will help enable an *Electricity Grid Ready to Support Delivery of the 80% Renewable Electricity Target by 2030*.

As we deliver on our ambitions for net zero energy, this transition must *deliver for citizens and communities*. The inclusion in this action plan of an all-of-Government approach to deliver a plan to produce community benefit through a community energy pathfinder project, alongside the action to establish a communications group led by the Consumer Council, to bring together key consumer stakeholders and partners to inform and protect consumers during the energy transition, is very welcome.

This is just a flavour of the wide ranges of actions planned for the year ahead. Through the 2025 Action Plan, the Energy Strategy is now focused on delivery. Realising the economic and environmental potential of self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy requires a significant step change from us all.

This 2025 Action Plan can serve as a roadmap for collaborative action, with a renewed sense of urgency, to ensure that the economic potential of an integrated decarbonised energy system can be reached.



CONTEXT

The Energy Strategy recognises the targets and commitments established in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which requires government to urgently reduce emissions.

Since taking up office in February 2025, Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald is continuing to spearhead the Economic Vision with four key priorities which are all interconnected. They are delivering more good jobs; addressing regional imbalance; increasing productivity; and delivering decarbonisation.

Following the release of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) in September 2024, the Energy Strategy has a significant role to play in driving forward the Economic Vision across all four priority areas and in particular, decarbonisation.

The Executive's Energy Strategy will deliver the decarbonisation of the energy sector in Northern Ireland (NI) through bringing forwards the Strategy's ambition of achieving *self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy*.

In doing so, the Strategy contributes to the draft PfG priorities: *Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy* and *Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing*.



FOUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities for progressing the Energy Strategy this year focus on:

- Accelerating the Delivery of Affordable Renewable Energy;
- Electricity Grid to Support Delivery of the 80% Renewable Electricity Target by 2030;
- Improving Energy Efficiency;
- Delivering for Citizens and Communities.

These four priorities will advance the delivery of the Energy Strategy targets: 80% of electricity consumption to come from renewable sources by 2030; Deliver energy savings of 25% from buildings and industry by 2030; and, double the size of our low carbon and renewable energy economy to a turnover of more than £2 billion by 2030. These four priorities will be taken forward through 18 actions that will be achieved in 2025. Action 19 is the strategic review of the Energy Strategy as per the commitment made in the Strategy publication in 2021 to conduct a mid-term review.

ACTIONS

Accelerating the Delivery of Affordable Renewable Energy

Self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy is the long-term vision of the Energy Strategy. We will break the link between energy prices and imported fossil fuels and achieve long-term affordability through home grown renewable energy.

	Action	Detail	Lead
1	DfE will publish the Final Design (Q2 2025) and consult on Terms & Conditions (Q3 2025) for the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme for NI to support the 80% by 2030 target.	The Final Design and Terms & Conditions are on the pathway to launching the support scheme's first auction. The 'Contracts for Difference' support scheme is an important lever in supporting regional renewable electricity generation and stabilising prices for consumers.	DfE
2	DfE will bring forward the initial stages of a draft bill on Offshore Renewable Energy Installations (OREI) and confirm arrangements for connection of Offshore Renewable Energy to the grid.	<p>OREI policy is an essential part of the overall strategic framework for the development of offshore renewable energy projects in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>This draft bill will outline legislative changes and policy options which are being considered to establish provisions for OREI decommissioning, safety zones and rights of navigation in NI territorial waters. DfE will also confirm arrangements for connection of Offshore Renewable Energy to the electricity grid.</p>	DfE
3	DAERA will consult on changes to the environmental assessment process for offshore wind projects to include strategic compensation measures and the use of a Marine Recovery Fund.	DAERA will explore policy proposals to implement the Energy Act 2023 provisions for the environmental assessment of offshore wind projects and the use of a Marine Recovery Fund.	DAERA

	Action	Detail	Lead
4	DAERA will commence market engagement into the potential of forests to contribute to renewable energy generation by the end of Q1 2025.	DAERA will commence market engagement with onshore wind energy suppliers to assess the potential for forestry land use to contribute to renewable energy generation.	DAERA
5	DfE will publish a scheme design in Q3 2025 for future low carbon heat and energy efficiency support in residential buildings.	This strategic plan will set out the principles for future domestic support for energy efficiency and low carbon heating.	DfE
6	DfE will support the sustainability of biomethane being utilised in the gas network.	This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - progressing Support Mechanisms; - consulting on options for Gas Network Connection Costs; and, - investigating Standards/Certifications. 	DfE
7	DfE will publish a hydrogen policy consultation in Q2 2025.	This consultation will provide the policy direction for hydrogen production, storage, transport and use in NI.	DfE
8	DfE will introduce a draft Bill to the Assembly to ban Onshore Petroleum Licensing in Q4 2025.	DfE will consult on legislation to ban onshore exploration and extraction of oil and gas and introduce a draft Bill to the Assembly.	DfE
9	DfE will implement the delivery of the Green Skills Action Plan.	Working across the public sector and with industry partners DfE will support the delivery of the Action Plan through its existing programmes as well as the new Skills Fund established as part of the DfE Business Plan 2024-25. Green skills are critical to the delivery of the DfE Minister's Economic Vision as well as the Energy Strategy.	DfE

Electricity Grid Ready to Support Delivery of the 80% Renewable Electricity Target by 2030

	Action	Detail	Lead
10	DfE will publish decision paper and next steps on socialisation of connection policy in Q2 2025.	This will increase socialisation of connection reinforcement costs on the electricity distribution network reducing the connection cost barrier to adoption of Low Carbon Technologies and installation of renewable generation. This will help facilitate NI achieving the 80% by 2030 target.	DfE
11	DfE will establish a Grid Development Monitoring Group to ensure the electricity grid development is in line with the 80% by 2030 target.	The group will Track and Monitor the key grid developments and upgrades planned for 2030 and beyond. Assess the timing and progress of key grid developments. Ensure that grid developments planned are sufficient in the context of 80 by 30.	DfE
12	DfE will publish smart meter design plan in Q2 2025 and establish smart meter oversight group with UR to ensure that smart meters are implemented in NI in a timely fashion.	DfE recently consulted on the roll out of Smart Meters. The new oversight group will ensure Smart Meters are implemented in NI in a timely fashion, to achieve maximum benefit for consumers here.	DfE

Improving Energy Efficiency

	Action	Detail	Lead
13	DfE will complete a mid-term review of the Energy Management Strategy and Action Plan to 2030 for central Government.	The Energy Management Strategy is decarbonising central government estates. This five-year review will be undertaken to establish progress against objectives and present recommendations for a new Action Plan for 2025-2030.	DfE

Delivering for Citizens and Communities

	Action	Detail	Lead
14	The NI Utility Regulator will consult on amendments to the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service, including in relation to incidents of adverse weather.	The Utility Regulator will consult on a range of issues and bring their conclusions to DfE who will work to update the existing legislation where required.	UR
15	DfC will bring the final Fuel Poverty Strategy for NI to the Executive for approval in Q4 2025.	The consultation on a draft Fuel Poverty Strategy will close in early 2025 and a new Strategy will be brought to the Executive for approval. This will provide a long-term framework for reducing fuel poverty. The Fuel Poverty Strategy will have positive impacts on both mental and physical health, especially for the most vulnerable in society. It will contribute to improving energy efficiency in homes and provide support and protection for those living in or at risk of fuel poverty.	DfC
16	DfC will publish a consultation on a new Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Scheme by Q4 2025.	Consultation on a new Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency scheme and new Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants Regulations. The new fuel poverty energy efficiency scheme will replace the Affordable Warmth Scheme and continue to act as the Department for Communities primary mechanism to tackle fuel poverty. The new scheme will continue to provide advice and support with energy efficiency measures to those low-income households in fuel poverty, while also reducing emissions by the introduction of clean heating and renewable energy technologies.	DfC
17	DfE will lead an all of Government approach to deliver a plan to produce community benefit through a community energy pathfinder project.	Working with academic and industry partners, DfE will drive the urgent planning, development and delivery of a community energy pathfinder project. This pathfinder project aims to use industrial decarbonisation to support the decarbonisation of local communities.	DfE
18	DfE will establish a communications group led by the Consumer Council, to bring together key consumer stakeholders and partners to inform and protect consumers during the energy transition.	DfE will establish a communications group led by the Consumer Council to bring together key consumer stakeholders and partners to protect consumers and deliver information and advice to overcome the barriers and challenges that consumers face in actively participating and benefitting from the energy transition.	DfE

Energy Strategy Mid-Term Review

In December 2021, The Executive approved the Energy Strategy, which runs through to 2030. It contained a commitment to carry-out a mid-term review. The Energy Strategy Mid-Term Review will commence in 2025 and complete within the year. It will assess progress to date and outline the key milestones in the period to 2030. It will be provided to the Executive for information once completed.

	Action	Detail	Lead
19	DfE will conduct the Energy Strategy Mid-Term Review in consultation with delivery partners and stakeholders and publish the milestones to deliver by 2030.	The Energy Strategy Mid Term Review will commence in January 2025 to ensure the remaining 5 years to 2030 use up-to-date data and insights, bringing a renewed focus on affordable renewable energy. The Review will report on progress from 2021 to date and will establish clear milestones in the period to 2030.	DfE

ROLL-OVER ACTIONS (FROM ENERGY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2024)

	Action	Detail	Lead
R1	DfE will publish the results and analysis from the first stage of the Geothermal Demonstrator feasibility studies in Q2 2025.	The published results, analysis and recommendations from the geothermal studies will be used to identify potential geothermal solutions and inform the next steps for delivering geothermal heat at the selected locations if feasible.	DfE
R2	DfE will publish a consultation on the future of domestic energy efficiency support and delivery in Q2 2025.	The consultation will provide the foundational policy direction for cross-departmental delivery relating to energy efficiency.	DfE
R3	DoF will publish feedback on its Phase 2 discussion document on energy efficiency and related areas of the Building Regulations in Q2 2025 and will continue to progress the development of a Phase 3 Uplift.	The publication of the feedback on the Phase 2 discussion document will inform development of Phase 3 and subsequent work leading to 'net zero ready' standards for new buildings with low carbon heating in 2027.	DoF
R4	DfE will identify areas for potential development of offshore renewable energy for Northern Ireland. This work is continuing into 2025.	As part of OREAP 2024 delivery DfE will complete a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment (SEA/HRA) for offshore renewable energy in the NI Marine Area. This will enable plans for potential leasing areas to be developed, through ongoing Steering Group collaboration, and an updated OREAP published confirming actions moving forward towards delivery of the target for at least 1GW of offshore renewable energy from 2030.	DfE
R5	DfI will publish a new Regional Strategic Planning Policy. This is now expected in Q1 2025.	Publish new regional strategic planning policy on renewable and low carbon energy.	DfI

MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

It is important to be able to identify to what extent the Energy Strategy's Strategic Priorities and Actions are being achieved and what impact this plan has had on the decarbonisation of the energy sector in NI.

The Energy Strategy's targets for renewable electricity consumption; energy efficiency; and turnover in the low carbon and renewable energy economy are monitored on a regular basis. The Energy Strategy Action Plan 2024 report that has been published alongside this year's Action Plan contains a detailed progress report on metrics and targets and can be accessed on the departmental website: [Energy Strategy Action Plan 2025 and Action Plan Report 2024 | Department for the Economy](#)