



Action Plan 2024

THE PATH TO NET ZERO ENERGY

**SECURE.
AFFORDABLE.
CLEAN.**



MARCH 2024

Ministerial Foreword

This Energy Strategy Action Plan for 2024 outlines some of the key actions being delivered as part of the Executive's Energy Strategy - *The Path to Net Zero Energy*. Published in December 2021, *The Path to Net Zero Energy* plots the route to ending the use of fossil fuels and becoming self-sufficient in affordable renewable energy.

The Energy Strategy is being delivered in the context of the 2022 Climate Change Act which requires government to urgently reduce emissions. Economic initiatives such as regional City Deal investments, a proposed Investment Zone and the development of a Net Zero Accelerator fund will be leveraged to increase success. There has been a lot of work over the past two years in rolling out the Strategy and I expect progress to accelerate in the coming years.

Renewable energy sources, including wind, biomethane and geothermal, will end the import of fossil fuels. It will also ensure that consumers pay a fair price for the energy produced locally, breaking the link with global commodity prices which has not served our people well.

The innovative technology solutions needed to achieve net zero are also needed by our neighbours and indeed the rest of the world. Being at the forefront of these technologies therefore provides significant opportunity to grow good jobs in our local economy.

My Department will play a leading role and will work across government, business, academia, and civil society as part of the collective effort required to achieve net zero.

2024 Actions

In delivering this Action Plan, we will continue to put consumers at the heart of the Energy Strategy and every action will include consideration of the protection of current energy consumers and future generations. In delivering the Energy Strategy, we aim to keep people informed, supported and protected while empowering them to transition to affordable decarbonised solutions for all their energy needs.

The 2024 Action Plan focuses on the strategic priorities:

- Replacing Fossil Fuels;
- Improving Energy Efficiency;
- Growing Renewable Electricity;
- Supporting the Electricity Grid; and
- Growing the Green economy.

Reduce emissions from energy by replacing fossil fuels with indigenous renewables to decarbonise power, heat, and transport.

	Action	Detail
1	DfE will develop policy to ban Onshore Petroleum Licensing.	DfE will complete consultation on a proposed moratorium and legislative ban on onshore exploration and extraction of oil and gas; publish a report on responses to the consultation; and develop a final policy position for Executive consideration and approval.
2	DfE will publish the results and analysis from the first stage of the Geothermal Demonstrator feasibility studies.	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.
3	DfE will publish a call for evidence for Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and Biofuels in supporting the heat decarbonisation transition.	This Call for Evidence will ask for detail, including costs, on potential sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels such as heating oil and LPG and seek to understand what role they could play in the transition pathways to decarbonising heat for homes and businesses.
4	DfE will analyse the Biomethane Call for Evidence Results and develop a plan for next steps.	A Call for Evidence asked for key information on the management of feedstocks, the economics of biomethane production and the treatment of costs relating to gas connections. We will analyse this evidence base and liaise with other Departments to shape future policy for biomethane production and usage.

Supporting consumers by focusing on energy efficiency and fuel poverty to reduce energy use and seek to reduce energy bills.

	Action	Detail
5	DfE will launch an energy and resource efficiency support programme for businesses (SMEs).	Through its delivery partner, Invest NI, DfE will introduce a programme providing tailored information, advice, technical consultancy and financial support, to support the delivery of energy efficiency and energy decarbonisation in businesses (SMEs).
6	DfE will assess options to scale up the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) by augmenting its existing budget.	Focusing on lower income and vulnerable households, NISEP helps to tackle fuel poverty resulting in more positive health outcomes while also reducing household carbon emissions. NISEP funding supports the energy efficiency supply chain, directing money into the local economy and sustaining green jobs.
7	DfE will publish a consultation on the future of domestic energy efficiency support and delivery.	The consultation will provide the foundational policy direction for cross departmental delivery relating to energy efficiency.
8	DoF will publish feedback on its Phase 2 discussion document on energy efficiency and related areas of the Building Regulations.	This will inform development of Phase 3 and subsequent work leading to ‘net zero ready’ standards for new buildings with low carbon heating by 2026/27.
9	DfC will consult on Fuel Poverty Strategy.	Pre-consultation stakeholder engagement will be undertaken to inform policy development for a new Fuel Poverty Strategy Jan – Jun 2024. Launch a public consultation on a new draft Fuel Poverty Strategy to support a Just Transition (by Dec 2024).
10	DfC will engage with stakeholders to inform the development of a replacement Affordable Warmth Scheme to enable public consultation in 2025.	Pre-consultation stakeholder engagement will be undertaken to inform policy development for a new fuel poverty intervention to replace the DfC Affordable Warmth Scheme by Sept 2024. Public consultation is expected to be launched by March 2025.

Strengthen Electricity Grid and System

	Action	Detail
11	DfE, in conjunction with UR, will publish a call for evidence response and continue delivery of the plan to update Grid Connection Charging Policy.	Jointly with UR, DfE will develop and publish a public consultation on the next steps, analyse the results, and plan to implement the recommendations.
12	DfE will consult on Smart Metering design and publish high level design and next steps.	This includes appointing a contractor to develop and finalise a plan for the design and roll-out of smart meters.
13	DfE will publish the Smart Systems Flexibility Plan consultation response.	Following analysis of the results of the public consultation, DfE will refine and finalise the plan based on the consultation feedback and publish a final plan.
14	DfE will commission research into the costs and benefits to the NI Consumer for different Interconnection scenarios, multiple Energy Storage options and the 80% Renewable Electricity target up to 2030 and beyond.	In partnership with UR, commission and analyse research to consider the implications and impact of interconnection with other jurisdictions, local energy storage, flexibility services and how they impact on the planned increase in renewable electricity generation and within the SEM.
15	DfE will work with DfI to plan a support scheme to future proof electrical capacity at key strategic sites along Key Transport Corridors.	Using the KPMG report on the Rapid EV Charging Pilot Project, work with DfI to identify suitable sites along transport corridors and put in place measures to resolve electrical capacity constraints at these proposed locations.

A focus on the delivery of the Climate Change Act target of least 80% of electricity consumption from a diverse mix of renewable sources by 2030.

	Action	Detail
16	DfE will identify solutions to rapidly increase the quantity of onshore renewables on the electricity grid.	Establish a collaborative delivery partnership, with relevant departments and delivery partners, to enact change necessary to facilitate 80% of all renewable electricity consumed in NI to come from renewable sources by 2030.
17	DfE will complete modelling work and financial assessment for a future renewable electricity support scheme.	Working with consultants to model and assess potential impacts and options is the next phase of scheme development to incentivise investment in renewable electricity and ensure consumers pay a fair price for electricity produced locally.
18	DfE will identify areas for potential development of offshore renewable energy for Northern Ireland.	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 1GW of Offshore renewable energy from 2030.
19	DfI will publish a new Regional Strategic Planning Policy.	Publish new regional strategic planning policy on renewable and low carbon energy.

Create an environment encouraging the creation of good jobs, investment, and growth of a skills base for the low carbon economy through innovation, support and focusing on our competitive strengths.

	Action	Detail
20	DfE will facilitate an industry-led Green Skills delivery plan based on the Energy Skills Audit published in June 2023. A copy of the report, which is titled “Transitioning to a greener economy – a skills perspective”, is available in the publications section of DfE’s website ¹ .	<p>The delivery plan for green skills for Northern Ireland will initially focus on the Built Environment and Utilities.</p> <p>The Audit identified the need for long term planning and collaboration across the UK, a requirement for courses in the curriculum from year 8, and that the skills needed for energy transition are, generally, an upgrading/expansion of the current skills as new technologies are developed and deployed. 90% of the 2030 workforce are currently in employment so the focus must be on reskilling.</p>
21	DfE will work with the Strategic Investment Board to develop the Net Zero Accelerator Fund.	This will establish a government support fund to facilitate the development of innovative net zero technologies, intellectual property and solutions.

1 <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/transitioning-greener-economy-skills-perspective>