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Colin Barkley, Chairman of Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust (NICLT), Paddy Raff, Pete Snodden, and Gerry Kelly, President of NICLT

90k fund to support Social Economy

Belfast City Council has opened the Social Economy Incentive Fund worth £90,000 to help support Belfast based social enterprises and co-operatives.

The competitive fund offers grants of up to £10,000 to boost the social economy and address social deprivation in the city.

There are two categories aimed at new social enterprises and those who are operating for over 3 years.

The application process includes a short application form and participation in a Dragons' Den style pitching event.

Shortlisted organisations will be invited to make a five-minute pitch on Monday 24 November 2025 to a judging panel

of local social enterprise stakeholders, outlining the social value and impact the award would have on their organisation and beneficiaries.

Winners will be selected based on their application and pitch to receive a grant depending on whether they are competing for the start up or growth award.

The deadline for online applications is Tuesday 11 November 2025 at 4pm.

For more information and to access the online application, go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/socialincentivefund

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CELEBS JOIN CHRISTMAS CHARITY EFFORT!

Two of Northern Ireland's most recognisable personalities have pledged their support to a local charity that creates unforgettable experiences for children living with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions.

Pete Snodden, long-time presenter of Cool FM's flagship breakfast show, and multi-award-winning comedian Paddy Raff have been announced as new ambassadors for the Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust (NICLT).

They join a growing list of high-profile supporters including rugby legend Tommy Bowe, country music star Nathan Carter, and former Northern Ireland Women's Football Team captain Marissa Callaghan.

As ambassadors, Pete and Paddy will play a key

role in raising awareness and vital funds for the charity's work—not just at Christmas, but all year round.

Now in its 17th year, Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust is preparing for its annual trip to Lapland

in December - a magical journey that has brought joy and respite to over 1,700 children across Northern Ireland, with only two breaks due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Continued on
page 4**

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📍 Rossmore Forest Park

Countdown is on to NI's biggest holiday fair

The 33rd annual Holiday World Show Belfast in association with Bookit by NI Travel News makes a welcome return to ICC Belfast at The Waterfront Hall from Friday January 9 until Sunday January 11, bringing a world of travel under one roof for a weekend of holiday inspiration, expert advice and exclusive offers.

Holiday World Show Belfast in association with Bookit by NITN has become a staple in the Northern Ireland events calendar, attracting thousands of visitors eager to explore destinations near and far.

More than 50 exhibitors from the travel industry will converge in the heart of Belfast's city centre in January to showcase a vast array of holiday options at home and abroad to an expected 10,000 visitors.

From sun-soaked escapes and cruise adventures to family breaks and staycations, the show is a 'one-stop shop' for travel lovers, connecting them with trusted experts and giving people a chance to check out the latest holiday trends and bag an exclusive bargain in the process.

Holiday World Show Belfast in association with Bookit by NI Travel News will play host to international tourist boards, destinations, airlines, cruise & ferry companies, hotels and B&Bs, visitor attractions, travel agencies and a vast range of service providers.



One of the fastest growing areas of the holiday industry is undoubtedly the cruise sector - which is reflected at the show, with a dedicated cruise showcase hosted by local specialist Oasis Travel.

New for 2026 is a dedicated USA Pavilion, hosted by leading local tour operator Travel Solutions and featuring a wide range of holidays across the Atlantic.

And for those who like to holiday closer to home, Holiday World Show Belfast in association with Bookit by NI Travel

News also features a wide range of hotels and accommodation providers, visitor attractions and tourism organisations from across Ireland and the UK.

Holiday World Show Belfast in association with Bookit by NI Travel News will open its doors to the public from 12.30pm to 5pm on Friday January 9, and from 10am until 5pm on Saturday January 10 and Sunday January 11.

Tickets cost £5 for adults; £4 for Senior Citizens and £3 for Students. A special family ticket gives admission

for two adults and up to four children for just £10 and a 2-for-1 ticket deal is available online at <https://holidayworld.registrationdesk.ie/2-for-1-voucher-belfast/>.

The Trade and Media morning in partnership with Belfast International Airport will take place on the Friday morning from 10am to 12.30pm, with all travel trade and media invited to register at <https://holidayworld.registrationdesk.ie/belfast/>.

For more information and all the latest event updates, visit <https://holidayworldshowni.com/>.

ORANGEFIELD
PRIMARY SCHOOL
AND NURSERY UNIT

Come and see what Orangefield Primary School and Nursery Unit have to offer

Orangefield Nursery Unit Open Event -
Wednesday 26th November 2025 at 9.15am
Orangefield Primary School Open Event -
Thursday 27th November 2025 at 9.15am

Individual guided tours with the Principal can be arranged by contacting the school office on - 028 90 704 822
All prospective new families welcome

Cameronian Drive, Belfast, BT5 6DF | info@orangefieldps.belfast.ni.sch.uk

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10:00 – 11:30am

Looking for a Primary School?

We would love to welcome you to Leadhill Primary School. We have a range of ways to provide you with the information you need:

Visit our school website.

Come to our Stay and Play sessions from 2:30 - 3:15 on 21 & 28 Nov 2025 or 9 & 16 Jan 2026

Attend our Open Days on 2 December 2025 or 9 January 2026

Arrange to take a tour of the school. Visits can be arranged by appointment throughout the year.

Take part in our Toddle Time group each Wednesday from 9 -11am.

Find out about our Wrap-Around childcare solutions.

Find out about our Pre-School Playgroup for children from 2 years and 10 months.

'Children are offered a range of opportunities to shine, which highlights all children's gifts. Leadhill is a great family school.'
(Parent comment)

Limited spaces available in playgroup and P1-7

Visit our school website for further information.
Casaeldona Park, Belfast, BT6 9RD Tel: 028 90401101 www.leadhillps.com

Leadhill P.S.
Castlereagh

MLAS STAND WITH LADIES WITH LETTERS CAMPAIGN GROUP

MLAs stood with the Ladies with Letters campaign group at Stormont to support the group's call for a statutory public inquiry into the cervical screening scandal.

It's over two years since 17,500 women in the Southern Health & Social Care Trust (SHSCT) area received letters advising them that their smear tests

were being reviewed.

The letters were issued following a report by the Royal College of Pathologists, which uncovered serious failings

in cervical screening carried out by the SHSCT over a 13-year period.

As part of its ongoing campaign for a statutory public inquiry into the

scandal that denied women the opportunity for early detection and treatment, the group has launched a dedicated campaign webpage. The site provides further information and contact details for those seeking support.

The group is asking members of the public who are empathetic to the cause and who share its concerns to visit ladieswithletters.co.uk and help strengthen the call for accountability by writing to their elected representatives using the template letter available on the website.

The group has also published an open letter to the Health Minister Mike Nesbitt, respectfully urging him to establish an inquiry to uncover the truth and reform the system.

Ladies with Letters, a collective of women directly impacted by the cervical

screening review, came together to campaign for transparency and demand accountability. The group has been tirelessly searching for answers as to what went wrong and how a litany of failures was allowed to continue for so shockingly long. Yet, despite their efforts, they are still no further forward in having these concerns properly addressed.

To date, it has cost two young mothers their lives, Erin Harbinson from Tandragee and Lynsey Courtney from Portadown. Eight other women whose smear tests were misread by screeners went on to develop cancer and a further 11 women's tests were found to have pre-cancerous cells and required treatment.

The UK's leading gynaecological cancer charity, The Eve Appeal, supports the call for



more information and transparency around this issue. Athena Lamnisos, CEO said:

"Cervical cancer is the only cancer with an effective screening programme (to detect high risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV) which causes nearly all cervical cancers and, if this is present

on cervical screening tests, any precancerous cells), offering us the opportunity to prevent cancer development or to detect it at the very earliest stage. It's shocking that the quality assurance and other systems within screening, let women down in Northern Ireland – and over such a long period

of time. As a charity, we fully support transparency and accountability across healthcare. This is a patient group who need answers. Undoubtedly, more may develop this disease in the years to come.

We look forward to the Northern Ireland Minister's response on this issue in the coming weeks."

Volunteer roles open for Belfast Fleadh in 2026

Tune in, turn up – be the heartbeat of the Fleadh! The search is on for volunteers to help with the smooth running of the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann will make history by coming to Belfast for the first time in 2026, from Sunday 2nd to Sunday 9th August.

Volunteer Now, the leading voice of volunteering in Northern Ireland, has opened recruitment for the momentous event.

Organised by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) in partnership with Belfast City Council and Ards CCÉ, the Belfast Fleadh

will feature an eight-day programme of concerts, competitions, street performances and exhibitions. A range of volunteering roles will be available including street ambassadors, team leaders and customer services.

Denise Hayward, CEO, Volunteer Now said: "The Fleadh always brings such an exhilarating energy with it and its arrival in Belfast will mark an exciting moment for the city and beyond.

We have decades of experience recruiting volunteers for other major events, such as the 153rd Open and Balmoral Show, so we know that volunteers are the secret ingredient to success. Thanks to their commitment, energy, professionalism and fun, volunteers make events like Fleadh smooth, safe and enjoyable for everyone involved. We will be providing extensive training to successful volunteer applicants

to ensure they have a wholly positive and memorable experience as a volunteer.

"As well as being part of the delivery team, our volunteers will get to enjoy, up-close, the incredible spirit of the Fleadh and see firsthand how the city comes to life through music, dance, and culture. We would encourage anyone interested in volunteering to apply early, as we anticipate demand for these roles will be high. We can't

wait to celebrate this special moment together in Belfast next August and hope many people apply to be at the very heart of it!"

Successful applicants will receive bespoke training from Volunteer Now, beginning in early 2026. With interest set to be high, anyone keen to be involved is advised to apply before the end of the year.

To find out more and to apply, visit the Volunteer section of the Fleadh Cheoil website.

EASTSIDE ADVERTISER

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Bethlehem Nursery School



OPEN DAY

TUESDAY 6TH JANUARY 2026

9.30AM - 11AM

PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE INVITED TO VISIT.

If you have any queries, please telephone the school and speak to the Principal,
Mrs Jacqueline Mallon.



028 9064 0406

514 Ravenhill Road, Belfast, BT6 0BW

Continued from page 1

This one-day trip to Rovaniemi, Finland - the official hometown of Santa Claus - offers children living with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions and their families a chance to escape the challenges of daily life and create lasting memories.

As part of its "Days to Remember" programme, the charity also organises a special, unforgettable trip to Disneyland Paris for a smaller group of children who are unable to join the annual Lapland adventure. They are accompanied by their parents and medical professionals.

The charity's annual Lapland trip—departing from Belfast International Airport—is also made possible thanks to generous contributions from TUI, Belfast International Airport, Swissport, Santa Park, Wild Nordic in Rovaniemi, and

an incredible team of healthcare professionals and volunteers.

Accompanied by a parent or carer, the children experience a truly magical day filled with reindeer and husky rides, snowmobile safaris, sleigh rides, and a memorable visit with Santa Claus.

Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust remains 100% self-funded and continues its work through the kindness of individual and corporate donors.

To learn more or to support the charity, visit: <https://nichildrentolapland.com>



THE WOOL DEN

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The Wool Den

Contact:
Elizabeth
078 3337 1000

OPENING HOURS:
Tues to Fri 10am-5pm *
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3 Chilton Drive, Ballynahinch

CULINARY JOURNEY AT TITANIC BELFAST FOOD AND DRINK SHOWCASE

TITANIC Belfast has hosted a month-long celebration of food with **Flavours of Titanic: A Journey Through Taste, Seasoned with Stories**, featuring a calendar of festivities which ran every weekend from 4th October - 2nd November.

Visitors were taken on a culinary journey inspired by the story of Titanic and the Edwardian period to celebrate Northern Ireland's rich culinary heritage, local traders and finest produce - blending food, drink and storytelling in an immersive series of events across the iconic attraction.

From free talks and tastings to family trails and themed food specials, Flavours of Titanic showcased the richness of the local food culture while connecting it to the ship's famous story. Some local suppliers that featured across the month included Irish Black Butter, Maine Soft Drinks and Burren Balsamics.

Every week a different theme featured including 'First Class Flavours', 'Clangers and Craft' and 'Port to Plate'. Titanic Belfast aimed



Pictured at the launch were Titanic Belfast's Executive Head Chef, Garreth Wilson; Associate Commercial Director, Eimear Kearney; Phil McAlister from The Spirit Circle and 'Docker' Mark Clane, Visitor Experience Crew.

to shine a spotlight on its wide range of local suppliers, with demonstrations and sampling, including Belfast shipyard lunches, beverages and traditional Irish fayre. Bespoke dishes were also available to enjoy in The Pantry and Galley cafe, as well as retail exclusives in the Titanic Store.

Crew Talks took place across the weekends exploring Titanic's food stories from provisioning and cargo to dining across the ship's classes and there was also be a dedicated pop-up exhibition highlighting the ship's menus, cargo and culinary contrasts offering visitors a fresh perspective on Titanic's history through the lens of food.

For further information on Flavours of Titanic or to purchase tickets for Titanic by the Glass, go to www.titanicbelfast.com

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NOVEMBER

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JIMMY BUCKLEY

11.30PM-1.30AM

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1.30AM

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Braniel Primary & Nursery School

Open Day

Tuesday, 16th December

10.00am - 11.00am

1.15pm - 2.15pm

4.30pm - 6.00pm

Prospective pupils and their families are warmly invited to join us for a relaxed tour of the school. Come along and experience our whole school family in a way that only a personal visit can do.

Find out more!

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FUNSTATION HOSTS FIRST VIP DAY IN BELFAST FOR RAYS OF SUNSHINE FAMILIES

Funstation recently welcomed 8-year-old Lily and her family for its first-ever VIP Day at Odyssey Place, Belfast, filled with games, treats and unforgettable experiences.

Belmont Barbers

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ESTABLISHED 1994

The event celebrated Funstation's longstanding partnership with the children's charity Rays of Sunshine and reinforced the company's commitment to giving back to the local community.

From the moment they arrived, Lily and her family were treated like VIPs. They were greeted with pre-loaded Funcards, lanyards and gift bags filled with treats and merchandise, ensuring they could enjoy the day to the fullest. The

family began their day exploring Funstun's interactive arcade, playing classic prize-winning games, testing their skills on the Giants-inspired Hockey Table and enjoying the immersive Pixel Floor. The VIP Day offered a chance for Lily and her family to relax, play and create memories together, showcasing the meaningful impact of Rays of Sunshine's work in Northern Ireland.

A highlight of the day

was a special visit from Belfast Giants players Patrick Grasso and Garrett McFadden. The family had the opportunity to meet both players and take part in a fun "Play Against the Giants" session on the Giants' Inspired Hockey Table. Patrick, proudly sponsored by Funstation, also gifted Lily and her family tickets to the upcoming Champions Hockey League, extending the excitement beyond the day itself.

In keeping with its tradition of giving back, Funstun presented a £2,500 donation to Rays of Sunshine, helping the charity bring joy to seriously ill children in Northern Ireland. Each year, Rays of Sunshine brightens the lives of young people across the UK by granting wishes and creating uplifting experiences both in hospital and at home.

Amy Chambers, CEO of Rays of Sunshine, highlighted the significance of the partnership:

"The Funstation team have been loyal supporters of Rays of Sunshine for many years, and we were delighted to be able to join them at their Belfast arcade and receive a generous donation at the same time. We rely on the generosity of our partners to brighten

the lives of seriously and terminally ill children when they need it most and we are so grateful for their continued support.

Watching wish child Lily and her family enjoy the amusements was a huge highlight, and we know so many other children in Belfast and beyond will love what Funstation has to offer!"

The family's VIP experience continued across Odyssey Place, starting with a giant pizza lunch at Little Wing Sliced and a round of family-friendly competition at Lost City

Apocalypse Adventure Golf. Sweet treats awaited at Titanic Desserts, where Lily built her own waffle and milkshake, before returning to Funstation for more arcade fun. Cineworld also contributed by gifting tickets for a future film of the family's choice, keeping the magic going.

The family's joy was clear throughout the day. Lily's mum, Madeline McAloran, shared:

The VIP Day was made possible thanks to the support of Funstation, Belfast Giants Patrick Grasso and Garrett

McFadden, Little Wing Sliced, Lost City Apocalypse, Titanic Desserts and Cineworld, who together created a seamless day of entertainment, food and lasting memories.

Funstation continues to champion family-friendly experiences while giving back to local communities. The Rays of Sunshine VIP Day highlights the charity's real-world impact and Funstation's mission to create magical, memorable moments for children and families across Northern Ireland and the UK.



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Open Day 2025
Thursday 27th November
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www.stjosephsps.co.uk stjoesps@gmail.com

Principal's address at 10.30am
Guided Tour at 10.50am
Ends at 11.30am

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EAST BELFAST DRIVERS MISS OUT ON BIG SAVINGS AS INSURANCE PRICES DROP

Young drivers in east Belfast and across NI are facing higher car insurance costs than almost anywhere else in the UK, according to new data.

In a dramatic turnaround, while NI boasted the most competitive car insurance prices for young drivers at the start of this year, the region is now the most expensive outside London.

Research by car insurance experts at CompareNI.com revealed drivers aged 17-24 here are forking out £1,318 on their annual premiums – around 18 per cent more than the national average for that age group.

The latest quarterly data shows that while insurance premiums for young drivers in NI have dropped by £92, that decline has not kept pace with Great Britain – where prices have plummeted by as much as £354.

On a local council level, young drivers in Belfast face the steepest prices at £1,622, with Derry City & Strabane close behind at £1,529 and Lisburn & Castlereagh taking third spot at £1,369.

At the other end of



the scale, the cheapest district council area for car insurance is Causeway Coast & Glens (£1,186), followed by Ards & North Down (£1,203) and Mid & East Antrim (£1,204).

While premiums fell across the board in all parts of the UK, NI saw one of the smallest decreases, with overall prices across all age groups dropping by 6% to £557 on average – pushing the region up to 6th place in the league table for most expensive

car insurance.

In comparison, Londoners saw prices slashed by 13%, while those in the West Midlands saved 11% on their premiums.

South West England takes the title as cheapest region in the UK with premiums at £473, followed by Wales (£496) and Scotland (£506).

Young drivers are typically hit hardest by car insurance costs because, statistically, they are involved in

more accidents. This is particularly true in Northern Ireland, where drivers aged 16-24 accounted for over two-fifths (41%) of all speed-related casualties.*

While the average insurance cost for young drivers in NI has fallen by over £400 since the end of last year to £1,318, it is still £200 more than the UK average, which is now £1,116 for 17-24-year-old drivers.

For more information see compareni.com





Brooklands Primary School

OPEN WEEK

Monday 1st December to Thursday 4th December 2025

We look forward to welcoming you into Brooklands, to meet our pupils and see our school in action.

Guided tours of the school available each day at the following times - 9.30am - 10.30am | 1.00pm - 2.00pm - Please email the office to book your visit

Brooklands Primary and Nursery School is a warm and welcoming place where every child is valued, listened to and respected, and we hope that we will be welcoming your child in to the Brooklands family from next year.

Our pupils' successes are possible, due to the trusted relationships we have with our parents and the whole school community, where we all work together to achieve the very best outcomes for the children, where they reach their potential and thrive, as confident, independent learners who care for one another, and the world around them.

For working families we have Wrap Around Care which opens at 8.00am with Breakfast Club and runs through until 5pm each afternoon.

Our After School Club is staffed by our own dedicated team of classroom assistants and includes a healthy snack with indoor and outdoor activities.

Brooklands Primary School
Brooklands Avenue, Dundonald, Belfast, BT16 2PA
Telephone: 02890 487 589
Email: info@brooklandsp.s.belfast.ni.sch.uk

Celebrating our success





Open Evening

Thursday 4th December, 2025 6:30-8:00pm

Open Morning

Friday 16th January, 2026 10:30-12:00noon



Inchmarlo

RBAI Preparatory Department



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NEW CHAPTER FOR BRANIEL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Braniel Primary School, a dynamic educational institution in East Belfast, is embarking on an exciting new chapter under the leadership of its new Principal, Mr. Niall Manogue.

Mr. Manogue takes the helm of a school deeply committed to providing a caring, supportive, and stimulating environment for all its pupils, preparing them not just

for the next stage of their education, but for life itself.

Braniel Primary School's mission and ethos are centred on nurturing the whole child

and fostering a strong sense of community.

The school's Mission Statement is:

"We aim to establish an environment where the worth and value of each child is respected, children learn mutual self-respect, have a sense of belonging, and where children are equipped for today and empowered for tomorrow."

The school strives to create a happy, positive climate where everyone feels valued and encouraged. Key elements of their ethos include:

- Facilitating effective learning and teaching.

- Promoting learning for all the pupils.

- Enhancing the pupils' self-esteem and fostering self-respect and respect for others.

- Securing an environment in which the children's considerations and needs are paramount, ensuring they are supported physically, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and socially.

Braniel Primary School sets itself apart through its commitment to innovative learning spaces and its inclusive community focus.

One notable USP is its Nursery Unit attached to

the school, which helps ensure a smooth and seamless transition for the youngest learners into primary education.

Furthermore, the school has shown a creative approach to maximising its campus, including transforming an unused, sloped woodland area into an engaging play space. This area now features a custom-designed outdoor obstacle course (agility trail) that leads up to a robust climbing structure like the Jungle Dome. This innovative play space encourages physical challenge,

mental engagement, and strengthens cross-coordination skills while seamlessly blending with the natural landscape. This focus on natural, adventurous play is a significant draw for the school.

The curriculum at Braniel Primary School provides a broad, balanced, and relevant education that caters to individual differences. Their stated aims indicate a strong focus on Holistic Development, Developing Key Life Skills, Literacy and Numeracy, Citizenship and Community and Inclusivity.



Specsavers Connswater optometrist receives award for Clinical Excellence

Paula Cunningham, ophthalmic director at Specsavers Connswater has been honoured by Specsavers founders, Doug and Dame Mary Perkins with the Doug Perkins Medal for Clinical Excellence.

Paula has been an optometrist for 25 years and a store partner at Specsavers Connswater

for 23 years, alongside store partner and dispensing director, Lynsey Caldwell. The store recently relocated from the shopping centre to the bustling retail park, enhancing its offering locally with a £600,000 investment.

In the past 10 years,

Paula has completed professional courses in post-cataract care, medical retina and glaucoma. As well as running in-store clinics, Paula has also volunteered her time to Simon Community, providing essential healthcare services to



people experiencing homelessness locally, alongside support for the Macular Society with educational events. Speaking of her award

win, Paula commented, 'I enjoy the variety of patients I get to see as a Specsavers director. In Northern Ireland we have integrated

provision for the diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of glaucoma patients and those with ocular hypertension. I enjoy caring for these patients as the service is convenient and offers them reassurance that if they go on to develop glaucoma it will be caught early. I am immensely proud of our store and the clinical excellence that our team provide and am delighted to have been recognised through receiving this award.'

She adds, 'I'm proud that Specsavers Connswater is a key part of the neighbourhood health service. We have built strong relationships within the community, working closely with key healthcare providers and are working together to improve quality of life for local people.'

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Let the coast call you back this winter.

Applying for a School Place

Visiting a school is an important step in choosing a school, and this personal touch reflects Leadhill's approach in supporting families.

As a smaller, nurturing school in the Castlereagh area, working to support parents and children is central to what Leadhill has to offer. Leadhill parents recognise the value of a primary school setting where every adult knows every child. Leadhill welcomes and supports children from all backgrounds and promotes inclusivity and child-centred approaches.

This year, Leadhill are offering a range of flexible opportunities to visit. Bring your nursery-age child to 'Stay and Play' sessions on Fridays from 2:30pm to 3:15pm on 21 and 28 November or 9 and 16 January. Come along to one or all the sessions – whatever suits best. Parents can enjoy a cuppa and a chat while children enjoy a range of activities in the P1 classroom.

Come along to our Open Days on 2 December or 9 January, or arrange for a visit at a time that suits you, throughout December and January. Mrs Millis, the Principal will take the time to tailor your visit to address the things that matter to your family. Visiting Leadhill during the school day gives a fantastic opportunity to experience the nurturing, family atmosphere and meet the fabulous staff and pupils.

For younger children, Toddler Time - Leadhill's toddler and adult group, meets every Wednesday during term time from 9 - 11am.

The Leadhill Website provides a useful window into life in Leadhill. Visit us on www.leadhillps.com.

Leadhill would love to welcome you for a visit. Contact the school office on 028 90401101 or email Mrs.Millis@amillis370@c2kni.net to arrange for a suitable date and time.



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The future for modern day Raptors

Wildlife, from tiny insects to elephants, have evolved over thousands, indeed millions of years, and yet even in the last 50 or 60 years the lives and prospects of two of our native birds of prey have changed. One is a hawk, the other a falcon.

Hawks and falcons are from the group of birds that kill other vertebrates for food, sometimes referred to as raptors (from the Latin rapio, meaning to seize or take by force) but hawks, such as the common buzzard, have broad wings and rounded tails, and are strong gliders, while falcons, such as the kestrel, have narrow, pointed wings and slender bodies, and are faster and more agile.

Buzzards became effectively extinct in Ireland more than 100 years ago, mainly through persecution and poisoning by gamekeepers, but since the 1950's, and later legal protection, have re-established themselves by flying over from Scotland and are now commonly seen soaring on thermal currents in the sky or sitting on telegraph poles along rural roads.

Conversely, kestrels, once commonly seen hovering throughout our countryside and alongside motorways, are in serious trouble.

I'm not a scientist, merely an observer of nature, but it seems likely that habitat change and how birds feed might explain how one raptor can prosper and another decline.

Common buzzards, which nest in woodland, are raptor generalists. While they will kill small mammals, including rabbits, and birds, they are also scavengers, feeding on carrion, and can even be seen eating earthworms on ploughed fields.

On the other hand, kestrels are birds of open countryside, mainly living off small rodents and large insects, both of which are also in decline, along with the vast scale of hedgerow...and habitat...removal over the past few decades, and the growth in the use of poisons (rodenticides).

Maybe legal protections emerged just in time to save buzzards, but radical changes in agriculture seem to be imperilling kestrels. Or possibly it's a case of the generalist, the creature best able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment that will prosper, while specialists struggle. Time will tell...

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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 a shopping trip. 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











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10 Ways to Get Into the Festive Mood

As the days tick closer to December 25th, it's the perfect time to trade the stress of the everyday for the spirit of the holidays.

If you need a spark to ignite your festive cheer, here are 10 essential activities to help you embrace the joy and make your countdown to Christmas truly memorable.

1. Curate the Perfect Holiday Soundtrack

Nothing shifts your mood faster than music. Start your countdown by creating a Christmas playlist that blends the classics, modern hits, and maybe a few sentimental favorites. Whether it's carols while you clean or upbeat tunes during a commute, let the sounds of the season become the backdrop to your month.

2. Dive Into Decoration Day

Make a dedicated day or weekend to deck the halls. Pull out the boxes of ornaments, untangle the lights, and fill your home with festive cheer. The act of decorating, especially with loved ones, is a tradition that instantly boosts the festive feeling. Don't forget to light some holiday-scented candles or use diffusers for

an extra sensory layer!

3. Host a Cozy Christmas Movie Marathon

Grab a big blanket, a thermos of hot chocolate (extra marshmallows are mandatory), and settle in for a night of festive films. From the nostalgic classics to modern holiday comedies, a movie marathon is a low-effort, high-reward way to bask in the Christmas spirit.

4. Bake Your Way to Bliss

The aromas of Christmas are just as important as the sights and sounds. Baking holiday treats—gingerbread cookies, sugar cookies, or mince pies—will fill your home with a welcoming, festive scent. Plus, you get to enjoy the delicious results (and maybe leave some for Santa).

5. Plan a Random Act of Kindness

Embody the true spirit of giving. Dedicate some time during your countdown to a random act of Christmas kindness. This could be donating a toy, volunteering at a local charity, shoveling

a neighbor's driveway, or simply leaving a generous tip for a service worker. Giving back is one of the most heartwarming parts of the season.

6. Get Lost in the Lights

Bundle up, grab a hot drink, and take a drive or a walk through your local neighborhood to admire the Christmas lights. There's something undeniably magical about seeing houses transformed into sparkling winter wonderlands. Many towns also host special lighting displays or festivals—make it an annual outing!

7. Send Out Holiday Cards

Take an hour to sit down and write personalized Christmas cards. While digital messages are easy, a handwritten card arriving in the mail is a truly special gesture. It gives you a moment to reflect on the important people in your life and spread a little extra cheer.

8. Set Up a Festive Reading Nook

The darker, colder days

are perfect for curling up with a good book. Create a cozy corner with twinkly lights, a soft cushion, and a stack of Christmas-themed stories or novels. Slowing down and savoring a holiday story can be a much-needed break from the seasonal hustle.

9. Create a Christmas Countdown Tradition

Start a simple daily tradition, like opening an Advent calendar (chocolate, toy, or even a scratch-off activity calendar). The small, daily moment of anticipation helps build excitement and makes the countdown feel more intentional.

10. Indulge in Some Holiday Crafting

Get creative and make a few homemade decorations or gifts. This could be anything from simple paper snowflakes to salt dough ornaments or a DIY wreath. Crafting engages your hands and mind in a fun, festive way, and the resulting decorations will carry a special, personal meaning.

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Beyond Stannah 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, a versatile Hybrid Lift suitable



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For those looking to unwind, the Winter Season Sale offers

the perfect getaway! Enjoy an overnight stay with a wholesome full Irish breakfast to start your day and toast the season with the Cocktail of the Month in the stylish Still Bar & Restaurant. Indulge in a sleep-in with late check-out until 1pm, make the most of the award-winning Leisure Club, and enjoy complimentary car parking throughout your stay. With a flexible 48-hour cancellation policy (prior to 12 noon), you can book with confidence and ease.

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So, whether you're raising a glass with friends, making memories with family, or simply treating yourself to a winter retreat, we invite you to celebrate the most wonderful time of the year with us.

To book your stay or for more information about all our Christmas festivities, contact the team on info@4seasonshotel.ie, visit www.4seasonshotel.ie, or call +353 (0)47 81 888.

TRANSFORM YOUR HOME FOR THE HOLS WITH THE BLIND SPOT

The festive season is fast approaching, and as the nights draw in and the Christmas lights begin to twinkle, there's no better time to turn your house into a warm, stylish haven.

For over 30 years, The Blind Spot has been Belfast's trusted name for custom-made window coverings, and this year, they're helping you create the perfect winter sanctuary by launching a brand-new curtain department!

Founded in 1990 by manager Krystina Bradford's mum and grandfather, this family-run business has always focused on manufacturing and fitting top-notch window solutions. While they're already experts in venetian, vertical, roller, and roman blinds, their new offering allows for even more flexibility in styling your space.

Their new curtain department provides beautiful made-to-measure curtains and curtain rails, complete with a full measuring and fitting service. Whether you're dreaming of plush, thick drapes for a traditional Christmas feel or



lighter, elegant fabrics to frame your windows, The Blind Spot now has every solution covered.

As the temperature drops, your windows become a crucial defence against the chill. Did you know that investing in quality blinds and shutters can significantly improve your home's thermal insulation? By choosing products from The Blind Spot, you can say goodbye to wasted heat and hello to a warmer, cozier home this winter,

saving energy while staying snug.

Beyond traditional coverings, The Blind Spot also offers innovative solutions for modern living, including:

- Motorised blinds to streamline your daily routine—perfect for those hard-to-reach windows.

- Blindscreens, manufactured in the UK, which offer total blackout and bug-free access on any window or bi-fold door, revolutionising how you manage your connection to the outdoors.

To ensure your home is perfectly dressed and ready for all your Christmas visitors, remember that made-to-measure quality takes time. The Blind Spot takes pride in crafting every order with precision, and they can deliver and install many orders within 6 weeks.

To guarantee your new blinds, curtains, or shutters are fitted before the holidays, it is essential to place your order as soon as possible. Don't delay—get ahead of the seasonal rush to secure

your installation slot!

The Blind Spot offers a free measuring service across all of Northern Ireland, ensuring a perfect fit every time. Their mission is to provide affordable prices without compromising on quality or choice. You can explore a wide range of styles, fabrics, and colours, including their beautiful Sante Fe shutters, which can be installed in as little as six weeks.

Stop by the new showroom at 4 East Belfast Enterprise Park, Belfast BT5 4GX, to browse their extensive range and get a true sense of the quality and colour choices available.

The showroom is open throughout the week and also on Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The team is always ready to help you schedule a home appointment for a personalised quote.

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Deck the Halls... and the Hedges! Inspiring Ideas for Your Display

When it comes to Christmas lights, the possibilities are as endless as Santa's list! Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing:



Integrated Advice Partnership Launches to Support Lisburn and Castlereagh Communities

A new collaborative initiative, the Integrated Advice Partnership, has officially launched in Lisburn and Castlereagh, led by Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh (formerly Citizen's Advice Bureau). This innovative partnership brings together a diverse range of local organisations to offer coordinated, community-based advice and support services to those most in need.

The project includes key partners across Lisburn and Castlereagh such as the Simon Community NI, Atlas Women's Centre, Lisburn Social Supermarket, Resurgam Trust, Ballybeen Women's Centre, Ballybeen Improvement Group, and Housing Rights. Together, they aim to improve access to services relating to advice on benefits, housing, debt, budgeting and general wellbeing which is delivered through trusted local organisations.

At the heart of the Integrated Advice Partnership is a shared vision: to increase awareness of, and access to, free regulated debt advice services. By working collaboratively, Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh offers comprehensive, person-centred financial advice that is tailored to the specific needs of individuals.

"This partnership is holistic; it supports improvements in financial health, well-being, and empowerment for individuals accessing the programme," said Carol McCabe, Manager for Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh. "Very often financial challenges can have a negative impact on mental health. World Mental Health Day which takes place on the 10th October 2025 aims to raise awareness of positive mental well-being. We're proud to be working alongside such a committed group of partners in addressing debt through financial health and mental well-being initiatives to meet the growing needs in our area."

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact communities across Northern Ireland as well as the onset of colder days looming, this partnership offers a timely and much-needed response, building a stronger and more integrated network for everyone in Lisburn and Castlereagh.

For more information or to access support, contact Community Advice Lisburn and Castlereagh based at Bridge Community Centre, 50 Railway Street, Lisburn, BT28 1XN. E: calc@calcni.com T: 028 9266 2251

Classic White Elegance: For a sophisticated and timeless look, stick to warm white lights. Drape them along rooflines, window frames, and around trees and shrubs for a soft, inviting glow.

Festive Colour Pop: Embrace the traditional Christmas colours with red and green lights, or go for a playful multi-coloured display. These work wonderfully on evergreen trees and bushes, and can add a cheerful touch to your porch.

Themed Displays: Have a favourite Christmas story or character? Why not create a themed display? Think twinkling reindeer pulling a sleigh, a glowing nativity scene, or even an army of illuminated snowmen!

Pathways and Borders: Guide visitors to your door with illuminated pathways. Stake lights, net lights over low bushes, or even strings of lights woven through garden borders can create a welcoming and magical entrance.

Window Wonders: Don't forget your windows! Suction cup lights, window silhouette decorations (like stars, candles, or Santa), and even simple strings of lights draped inside can add to the outdoor magic.

Architectural Highlights: Draw attention to your home's best features. Wrap lights around pillars, outline gables, or drape them over prominent architectural details to create a stunning

visual impact.

Inflatable Fun: For a truly impactful and often humorous display, consider inflatable decorations. These larger-than-life characters and scenes are sure to bring a smile to passers-by.

The Nitty-Gritty: Electrical Practicalities and Safety First

Safety should always be your top priority when installing outdoor Christmas lights. Here's what to keep in mind:

Outdoor-Rated Lights: Always, always use lights specifically designed for outdoor use. These are built to withstand the elements and are clearly marked as such.

Extension Cords: Just like your lights, any extension cords used outdoors must be outdoor-rated. Ensure they are in good condition, without any frayed wires or exposed connections.

GFCI Outlets: Plug your outdoor lights into Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) protected outlets. These will trip and cut power if a fault occurs, preventing electric shocks. If you don't have outdoor GFCI outlets, consider using a portable GFCI unit.

Avoid Overloading: Don't plug too many strings of lights into one outlet or extension cord. Check the wattage recommendations on your lights and extension cords to prevent overloading and potential fire hazards.

Secure Connections: Keep all connections



off the ground and away from puddles or snow. Use waterproof covers for connections if necessary.

Ladder Safety: When hanging lights, use a sturdy ladder and have someone spot you. Don't overreach, and ensure the ladder is on stable ground.

Cable Management: Securely fasten wires and cords to prevent tripping hazards and to keep them out of the way of lawnmowers or foot traffic. Use plastic clips, zip ties, or staple guns designed for electrical cords.

The Grand Unveiling: When to Go Live with Your Lights

While there's no strict rule, most people tend to switch on their Christmas lights at the beginning of December. This gives you a good month to enjoy them and allows for plenty of time for others to admire your efforts. Some enthusiastic decorators might go live in late November, especially if

they have a grand "switch-on" event planned.

It's usually best to take them down shortly after Twelfth Night (January 6th), to avoid bad luck according to tradition, and to free up your garden for the rest of the year!

Lighting Up for a Cause: Can You Raise Money for Charity?

Absolutely! Your festive display can become a brilliant way to give back to the community and raise money for a charity close to your heart. Here's how:

• **Collection Box:** Place a clearly marked and secure collection box near your display with information about the charity you're supporting.

• **Signage:** Put up a sign explaining that your display is raising money for charity and encourage donations. Include the charity's logo and a brief description of their work.

• **Online Donation Link:** If you're comfortable, create a QR code linking directly to your chosen charity's

donation page or a personal fundraising page (e.g., JustGiving).

• **Local Press/Social Media:** Share photos and information about your display on local social media groups or contact your local newspaper. They often love to feature community fundraising efforts.

• **"Switch-On" Event:** Turn your initial light-up into a small event. Invite neighbours, offer some festive treats, and use the opportunity to collect donations.

• **Collaborate:** Encourage neighbours to join in! If several houses on your street participate, you could create a "Christmas Lights Trail" and collectively raise money for a chosen charity.

So, whether you're planning a minimalist glow or a full-blown festive extravaganza, remember to have fun, stay safe, and perhaps even spread some extra cheer by supporting a good cause. Happy decorating!

Winter could be Perfect to Redecorate!

Winter is actually the ideal time to tackle a project many people put off: redecorating your home.

Take advantage of Light and Texture

Winter's inherent mood is all about warmth, texture, and comfort. This gives you a natural, immediate focus for your design choices.

You can test the lighting: Unlike summer's bright, forgiving sun, winter light is low and moody. This is the perfect time to evaluate how your current paint colour and lighting fixtures truly look. If a room feels drab on a cloudy afternoon, you know exactly what needs fixing, whether it's adding a dimmer switch, a new floor lamp, or switching to a warmer-

toned bulb.

Embrace texture: Winter is the season of layers. Adding or swapping textiles—think a new faux fur throw, a velvet cushion, or a jute rug—can instantly transform a space without a massive overhaul. These smaller projects are satisfying and easy to complete in a weekend.

Contractors and Tradespeople Are More Available

One of the biggest headaches of a renovation project is scheduling. During the spring and summer months, contractors, painters, and

other tradespeople are often booked solid with outdoor work and major renovations.

Winter, however, is typically the slow season. This means: Better availability, potentially better rates and possibly even faster project completion.

Take Advantage of Seasonal Sales

The period right after the holiday rush and leading into the new year is a goldmine for savvy shoppers. Retailers know that people are spending less, so they offer deep discounts to clear out

inventory.

The "White Sale": Black Friday and January are famously good times for "white sales," offering fantastic deals on bedding, towels, and linens—essential elements for updating bedrooms and bathrooms.

Instead of viewing winter as a time to simply wait for spring, see it as a three-month design studio. With better contractor availability, excellent sales, and the natural desire to make your space as cosy as possible, winter is, without a doubt, the best-kept secret for transforming your home.

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FINDING YOUR PERFECT CHRISTMAS TREE

Few things encapsulate the spirit of Christmas quite like a beautifully adorned tree. But before the ornaments come out, a crucial decision awaits: which tree will be the heart of your holiday home? Both real and artificial trees offer distinct advantages

For many, nothing beats the sensory experience of a fresh, natural Christmas tree. The unmistakable aroma of pine or fir fills the air, creating an immediate festive atmosphere. Choosing a real tree often involves a cherished family outing to a tree farm, selecting the perfect specimen, and the satisfying ritual of bringing it home.

Pros: Authentic scent, classic holiday experience, supports local tree farms, biodegradable (when disposed of properly).

Cons: Requires watering, needles can shed, potential for sap, limited lifespan (typically 3-4 weeks indoors), can be a fire hazard if not properly maintained.

Popular Varieties: Fraser Fir (strong branches, good needle retention), Balsam Fir (classic Christmas tree scent), Noble Fir (sturdy branches, long-lasting), Scotch Pine (good needle retention, strong branches).

To keep a real tree fresh, ensure it's placed in a sturdy stand with a large water reservoir and check the water level daily.

On the other hand artificial trees have come a long way from their often-chintzy predecessors. Modern artificial trees boast incredible realism, durable construction, and a host of convenient features.

Pros: Reusable for many years, no watering or needle shedding, hypoallergenic, pre-lit options save

decorating time, consistent shape and fullness, often easier to set up.

Cons: Lacks natural scent (though sprays are available), made from non-biodegradable materials, initial cost can be higher.

Types: PVC (traditional artificial look), Polyethylene (PE) (more realistic, often moulded from real branches), fiber optic (integrated lights).

When choosing an artificial tree, consider the material, the number of tips (more tips generally mean a fuller look), and whether you want a pre-lit option.

Once you've selected your tree, the fun of decorating begins! Whether you prefer a cohesive theme



or an eclectic collection of cherished ornaments, there are endless ways to make your tree uniquely yours.

Traditional Red & Gold: Timeless and elegant, this theme evokes a sense of nostalgia. Think deep red

baubles, shimmering gold ribbons, frosted pinecones, and warm white lights.

Winter Wonderland:

Embrace the beauty of a snowy landscape with silver, white, and icy blue ornaments. Add glittery

snowflakes, frosted berries, clear glass baubles, and perhaps some faux fur elements for a cosy touch.

Shopmobility Belfast: Your Key to Independent City Exploration

Empowering Mobility in Belfast

Shopmobility Belfast is a registered charity dedicated to making Belfast City Centre and its surrounding areas more accessible to individuals with mobility challenges. By providing free daily rentals of mobility scooters and wheelchairs, the organisation ensures that people with disabilities or mobility difficulties can enjoy the city without barriers to shop, attend appointments, meet friends and connect with their community.

Julie Guilar, Director of Shopmobility Belfast, emphasises the importance of their service:

"By utilising mobility scooters and wheelchairs, our unique and specialised service is vital to help people with disabilities or mobility difficulties access Belfast City Centre

and beyond with greater freedom, independence, and dignity."

Services Offered

• **Mobility Equipment Hire:** A wide range of mobility scooters and wheelchairs are available for both short-term and long-term use;

• **Accessibility Advocacy:** Shopmobility Belfast collaborates with businesses and organisations to enhance accessibility throughout the city, ensuring smoother experiences for individuals with mobility needs;

• **Training and Support:** Users receive training and support from experienced staff, helping them operate the equipment with confidence;

• **Outreach Programs:** The charity works with community groups to raise awareness about

mobility issues and promote inclusive practices.

• **Repair and Servicing:** If you have your own mobility equipment Shopmobility Belfast can now service, maintain and make repairs, test and fit new batteries etc. As an established charity we guarantee to offer the best prices available.

Benefits of Using Shopmobility Belfast

• **Independence:** Explore Belfast City Centre and surrounding areas at your own pace;

• **Accessibility:** Easily access shops, restaurants, attractions, and public transportation, overcoming physical barriers;

• **Cost-Effective:** Take advantage of the free daily rental of high-quality mobility equipment and low-cost repairs and maintenance costs for your own equipment;

• **Support:** Receive expert guidance and assistance from the Shopmobility team.

How to Access the Service Membership with Shopmobility Belfast is free and open to anyone with mobility difficulties, regardless of age or disability status. To become a member, you can register in person at one of their locations, on-line or by contacting them directly.

Locations Shopmobility Belfast operates from multiple convenient locations across Belfast City Centre and the surrounding areas.

Contact Information For more details, to register as a member, or to check equipment availability, visit their website or contact them directly:

Website: shopmobilitybelfast.co.uk

• Phone: 028 9080 8090 (Great Northern Mall)

• Email: info@shopmobilitybelfast.co.uk

Shopmobility Belfast is a vital resource for those with mobility challenges, enabling full participation in community life and ensuring that everyone can enjoy all that Belfast has to offer.

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If so, get in touch, we would love to hear from you. Shopmobility Belfast is seeking volunteers in the Ards, Bangor and Belfast areas to help run our schemes and develop our work

"Our Mission is to help people with mobility problems to use the facilities of Belfast City Centre and surrounding areas with greater freedom, independence, and dignity".

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Brooklands Primary School, Dundonald: Placing Children at The Heart of Everything

Mrs. Fiona Smart is the newly appointed Principal at Brooklands Primary School, Dundonald. Mrs Smart is also part of the Senior Leadership Team, the Pastoral Care Team, and the SENCO Team at the school.

Previously, she served as the Vice-Principal. One of her celebrated contributions to the school is that she along with her family, has fostered the school's therapy puppy, Peanut! She has been involved in training Peanut and integrating him into the school community which has been a measure approved by pupils!

The introduction of a school dog has had many benefits including encouraging pupil attendance, assisting children who may have emotional and behavioural needs and enabling reluctant readers to read aloud to a kind listening ear!

Brooklands Primary School is a vibrant and forward-thinking educational setting dedicated to nurturing the potential of every child. Located on Brooklands Avenue, Dundonald, this is a controlled primary school and it has an accompanying Nursery Unit.

Brooklands Primary School operates with a clear and ambitious vision: "To enable our children to be the best they can be." This mission goes beyond

academic results, focusing instead on holistic development. The school aims to encourage students to recognize and build on their strengths, while also working to improve areas where they may be less confident.

The school's ethos, which places the children at the 'HEART' of everything they do, is built on the key principles: High Expectations, Enjoyment, Aspiration, Respect and Trying New Things.

Brooklands is committed to a broad and balanced curriculum, with a strong emphasis on fostering mental strength and well-being alongside academic excellence. The school encourages a culture of resilience, confidence, and responsible risk-taking, often incorporating outdoor learning and exploration.

The school's dedication to a healthy lifestyle is evident in its Physical Education (P.E.) programme, which aims to provide the foundations for lifelong participation in physical activity. This includes timetabled lessons and extra-curricular opportunities designed to develop



positive attitudes towards both participation and competition. Furthermore, the school uses initiatives like its Sports Premium to invest in diverse sports equipment, promote physical activity during playtimes, and offer cooking opportunities to educate children on healthy eating.

The school includes a Nursery Unit, providing an integrated start to the primary journey. Brooklands is also recognised by the Education Authority

for offering specialist provision options for Social Communication/ Autism, highlighting its commitment to inclusive education tailored to individual needs.

Through its dedicated leadership and staff, Brooklands Primary School and Nursery Unit strives to create a supportive, stimulating, and challenging environment where all children are encouraged to unlock their passions and discover their 'best self' from an early age.

Young artists' Brand A Bus designs take to the roads for climate action

Eight brilliant young artists from across Northern Ireland saw their creative vision burst into life on a newly wrapped Translink double-decker bus at Belfast Grand Central Station today.

Chosen from more than 1,000 entries, the wonderfully creative winning pieces themed around 'painting a greener future' are now set to travel far and wide.

Excitement built as the eye-catching bus rolled into the station; the big reveal marked the first time the young artists had seen their winning designs brought to life on such a scale, creating a striking new addition to the Translink fleet.

For the eight young winners, the thrill didn't stop at seeing their artwork 'on the move'. Each received a bumper art pack prize to fuel their creative journey and enjoyed an inspiring illustration workshop led by local artist and competition judge Rory Quigg.

Belfast Grand Central Station provided the perfect backdrop for the unique celebration as this month the iconic facility marks its first year anniversary since opening. Over the past 12 months, the station has welcomed over 8 million people through its doors and helped deliver more than 4 million extra passenger journeys across the wider public transport network, demonstrating how more



Pictured L-R: Emily, age 11 from Ahoghill, Eva Rose, age 12 from Bangor, Tom, age 7 from Derry-Londonderry, Chris Conway, Translink Group Chief Executive, Tiarna, age 9 from Belfast, Rory Quigg, local artist, Ruby, age 9 from Newry, Nathan, age 14 from Omagh and Cassy, age 9 from Newry.

people are making the switch to sustainable travel.

Speaking at the bus reveal, Chris Conway, Translink Group Chief Executive, said: "The response to our first ever 'Brand A Bus' competition has been fantastic and for over 1,000 young people from all corners of Northern Ireland to have taken part is quite an achievement. This campaign really showcases how younger generations see the world around us: hopeful and unafraid to dream big. I think when people see this bus on local routes, it will

be a true eye-opener as we continue the fight against climate change. I'd like to congratulate the competition winners and thank everyone who took part."

Local artist and competition judge Rory Quigg added: "The standard of entries was incredible; the imagination and talent shown by these young people was inspiring. To see their work celebrated on something as visible and everyday as a double decker bus is fantastic. It means thousands of people across Northern Ireland will get to

enjoy their creativity and hopefully it will encourage the artists to keep going with their ideas and inspire more people to take climate action."

The Brand A Bus competition encouraged children to imagine a sustainable future for Northern Ireland, with an emphasis on encouraging greater public transport use. Entries were received from six regions across NI and the campaign also supports ambitions outlined in Translink's Climate Positive Strategy.



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We offer a Breakfast Club from 8:00am each morning and a wide range of afterschool clubs & activities.

During our recent ETI Inspection Report (May 2025), they reported that:

- Teachers have high expectations of the children's behaviour, contributions and engagement in their learning.
- The wellbeing of the children is evidenced through the high levels of care, the high expectations for every child and the supportive working relationships across the school.
- The carefully planned, purposeful and highly effective integration opportunities provided across the deaf unit and mainstream classes impacts positively on the inclusion and learning experiences of the children.
- The enriching provision for deaf children is at the core of inclusion in this school.

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As the vibrant colours of autumn fade, a gardener's work isn't done.

The final months of the year are a crucial time for preparing your garden to survive the cold and lay the groundwork for a spectacular spring. By taking a few key steps now—from thoughtful cleanup to strategic protection—you can ensure your plants emerge healthy and

strong when warmer weather returns.

The Great Fall Cleanup

Think of this as putting your garden to bed. A thorough cleanup now can prevent a host of problems later, from pests to diseases.

Remove Dead Material: Pull up spent annuals and any plants that showed signs of disease during the growing season. Composting healthy plant material is a great idea, but be sure to dispose of diseased foliage to prevent it from overwintering and reinfecting your garden next year.

Tackle the Weeds: Weeds may seem to die off in the cold, but their seeds can survive and sprout with a vengeance in the spring. Clear out as many weeds as possible, making sure to remove the roots.

Rake and Rake Again: A thick blanket

of fallen leaves on your lawn can suffocate the grass and lead to fungal diseases. Rake up leaves and use them to make a valuable garden amendment called leaf mold, or shred them with your mower and add them to your compost pile or garden beds.

Don't Be Too Tidy: While some cleanup is essential, leaving a few spent plant stalks or seed heads provides shelter and food for beneficial insects and birds. This is a great way to support local wildlife through the colder months.

Protect Your Plants and Soil

The harsh combination of freezing temperatures, wind, and dry air can be lethal to vulnerable plants. Here's how to provide a protective blanket.

Mulch Your Beds: After the first hard frost, apply a generous 2- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch—such as shredded leaves, straw, or wood chips—around the base of perennials and shrubs. This acts as an insulating blanket, protecting roots from freezing and thawing cycles that can heave plants out of the ground. Be sure to keep mulch a few inches away from plant



stems to prevent rot.

Protect Tender Plants: For plants that are not fully hardy in your climate, consider wrapping them. Use burlap or a breathable horticultural fleece to create a protective shield against windburn and ice. For container plants, move them to a sheltered spot, like against a warm wall, or bring them into a shed or garage for the winter. Grouping pots together can also provide mutual insulation.

Water Wisely: Give evergreen trees and shrubs a deep watering just before the ground freezes. This helps prevent "winter burn" from dry, cold winds by ensuring their roots have a sufficient water

supply.

Mind Your Tools and Hoses: Don't let your tools rust or your hoses burst. Clean and sharpen all your gardening tools and apply a coat of oil. Drain all water from hoses, irrigation systems, and outdoor faucets before storing them in a dry place.

Plan for a Flourishing Spring

Fall is not just about putting the garden to sleep; it's also about getting a jump start on next year's growth.

Plant Spring Bulbs: Now is the ideal time to plant spring-flowering bulbs like tulips, daffodils, and crocuses. Get them in the ground while the soil is still workable, following the packaging instructions

for depth and spacing.

Amend the Soil: After clearing out your vegetable garden beds, spread a layer of compost or manure over the soil. The winter months will allow it to break down and enrich the soil with vital nutrients, giving your spring plantings a head start.

Divide and Conquer:

If you have overgrown perennials like hostas, daylilies, or irises, fall is a great time to dig them up and divide them. This rejuvenates the plants and gives you new ones to spread to other areas of your garden or share with friends.

Draw a Map: Take a few moments to assess your garden. Note what thrived this year and what didn't. This is the perfect opportunity to sketch out new garden layouts, plan for new plantings, or decide where to add new features next year.

By investing a little time and effort in the fall, you're not just preparing your garden for winter; you're setting the stage for a healthier, more vibrant, and more beautiful garden in the spring.

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DACIA SPRING: STRONGER PERFORMANCE, SAME GREAT EVERYDAY RANGE

Dacia is delivering on all the promises made for Spring, its first all-electric model, with a series of updates that include two, new, more powerful motors that offer stronger performance, without sacrificing everyday drivability or range.

A promise to make zero-emission* mobility more affordable. Since its launch in 2021, Spring has sold more than 179,000 units in Europe (up to June 2025). In 2025, Spring performed strongly with over 17,000 vehicles sold, securing second place in the European market for electric vehicles sold in the retail channel (segments A, B, B-SUV). These results reflect the success of a car that is still the most affordable on the all-electric market, tailored to the real needs of customers.

A promise to make this all-electric model even more appealing with substantial improvements every year. Although not coming to the UK initially, Spring benefited from substantial improvements every year. These included the new Dacia identity in 2022, new more efficient 65 hp powertrain in 2023, and a major upgrade in 2024 including a fully renewed design and a more digital experience.

A promise met once again today. Spring takes a major step forwards with an enhanced driving experience, more fun, greater safety and increased versatility for everyday use.

An all-rounded compact car, Spring gained a number of upgrades



in 2024 to optimise performance, including: electric power steering settings retuned for increased precision and feedback, new 15-inch wheels and a new steering wheel for better grip.

Today, Spring is taking this process to new levels with structural changes contributing to a fully renewed and enhanced driving experience.

The chassis houses a new battery in its reinforced central section. These changes make the structure stiffer and optimise weight distribution between front and rear to improve the overall balance of the vehicle.

Braking is safer thanks to more powerful assistance. The 15-inch wheels also contribute to improving the Spring's road handling.

Spring also gains an

anti-roll bar for the first time, standard on all versions. The car's stability in corners is thus improved and further enhanced by the adoption of new settings for the shock absorbers and suspension springs.

*Zero CO2 tailpipe emissions, excluding wear parts, in compliance with the WLTP certification cycle

In addition, Spring has undergone various aerodynamic improvements.

A NEW POWERTRAIN RANGE FOR EVEN MORE ENJOYABLE STRESS-FREE DRIVING

Two new motors, 70 hp/52 kW and 100 hp/75 kW, replace the previous 45 hp/33 kW and 65 hp/48 kW units. These offer more power and torque between 50 and 75 mph (up to +20%). This means that

Spring can travel with ease in less urban areas and fit naturally into motorway traffic for a more comfortable driving experience.

Charging is optimised with a new 40 kW DC onboard charger, compared with 30 kW previously. Available on the Extreme trim level, it charges the battery from 20% to 80% in just 29 minutes. A 7 kW AC charger is still standard on all Spring models which, combined with the new battery, allows for faster charging from 20% to 100%: 3 hours 20 minutes instead of 4 hours on a 7kW wall box, and 10 hours 11 minutes on a domestic socket.

The new 70 hp powertrain is available with the Expression trim, while the new 100 hp powertrain is available with Extreme.

New C5 Aircross Plug-In Hybrid

New C5 Aircross Plug-In Hybrid is now open for orders, with prices starting from £38,855 OTR MRRP. The plug-in hybrid powertrain joins the hybrid and electric powertrains already available for customer orders.

New C5 Aircross represents Citroën's boldest step yet in the mid-sized SUV segment, offering outstanding comfort, on-board space, and value for money.

Welcoming a new and bold chapter in Citroën design, New C5 Aircross range features a more assertive and aerodynamic look that enhances performance and road presence. At the front, Citroën's striking new three-point LED light signature is set within a strong horizontal structure that widens the stance, while a redesigned grille and streamlined bumper elements optimise airflow and visual impact. New C5 Aircross delivers exceptional practicality without compromising on style. A generous 2.78m wheelbase contributes to a spacious interior feel, particularly in the second row, where passengers enjoy improved leg and headroom. The boot capacity is among the best in its class, from 651 litres (565 dm3 VDA) with the seats up to 1,985 litres (1,668 dm3 VDA) with the rear bench folded, offering the flexibility of a true family SUV. Thoughtful design touches like a wide-opening boot, split-folding rear seats, and a flat load area make loading and everyday practicality effortlessly simple.

New C5 Aircross Plug-In Hybrid features rechargeable hybrid technology, combining two energy sources: a



150hp turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine and a 125hp electric motor that powers the front wheels. Depending on driving conditions and selected modes, the engine and motor operate independently or together. In Electric mode, the vehicle runs exclusively on electric power, making it ideal for city driving and low-emission zones. In Hybrid mode, the system intelligently switches between electric and petrol power or uses both based on performance needs. When operating together, the petrol engine and electric motor generate a peak power output of 195hp.

The plug-in hybrid system features a 21kWh

battery – nearly double that of the previous generation – enabling the car to drive solely on electric propulsion for up to 53 miles (WLTP EAER Combined). Equipped with a 7.4kW single-phase onboard charger, the battery can be fully recharged in just 2 hours and 55 minutes using a 7.4kW AC charger.

The plug-in hybrid powertrain is being launched exclusively on the MAX trim. As standard, the MAX trim comes equipped with a 360-degree camera, an extended head-up display, heated front seats and steering wheel, hands-free electric tailgate, and Drive Assist Pack 2.0 with semi-autonomous features.

At the heart of the cabin is a new 13-inch 'waterfall' HD touchscreen, uniquely mounted in a vertical cascade that flows from the dashboard into the centre console. This floating display has both fully customisable and fixed sections for quick and easy access to essential functions at all times.

Along with the plug-in hybrid powertrain, New C5 Aircross is available with an electric and hybrid powertrain, offering greater choice for customers. New C5 Aircross Hybrid and e-C5 Aircross are already open for orders, with prices starting from £30,495 OTR MRRP for the hybrid and £32,565 for the electric, including the Electric Car Grant.

EVs in the Cold: A Guide to Winter Performance and Range

As the days get shorter and the temperatures plummet, a common question arises for electric vehicle (EV) owners and prospective buyers: How do EVs perform in the cold?

The answer is nuanced, but with a bit of knowledge and preparation, an EV can be a reliable and even advantageous choice for winter driving.

The Science Behind the Winter Drop

The primary challenge for EVs in winter is the lithium-ion battery. These batteries are an intricate system of chemical reactions, and like many chemical processes, they are sensitive to temperature. The optimal operating temperature for an EV battery is typically around 21.5°C. When the mercury drops, the chemistry slows down.

- **Reduced Range:** In cold weather, the electrolyte fluid inside the battery becomes more viscous, which hinders the movement of lithium ions. This means the battery's ability to store and release energy is less efficient, leading to a noticeable reduction in range. Studies and real-world data suggest that a drop of 15-20% is common, though this can be more significant in extreme cold.
- **Slower Charging:** Just as discharging is

less efficient, charging also slows down. A cold battery has higher internal resistance, so it can't accept the same rate of charge as a warm one. This is why you might notice that a fast-charging session takes longer in winter, as the car's thermal management system must first use energy to warm the battery to an optimal charging temperature.

Winter-Proofing Your EV: Practical Tips

Driving an EV in winter doesn't have to be a struggle. With these simple tips, you can maximize your car's efficiency and stay safe.

1. **Pre-Condition While Plugged In:** This is perhaps the most important tip. Most modern EVs have a pre-conditioning feature that allows you to warm the cabin and the battery while the car is still plugged into the charger. This uses energy from the grid, not the battery, ensuring you start your journey with a warm battery at its peak efficiency.
2. **Use Heated Seats and Steering Wheel:** If your car has them, use these



features instead of blasting the cabin heater. They are much more energy-efficient and directly warm the occupant, conserving

battery power.

3. **Charge Smartly:** Don't let your battery level drop too low in cold weather. Keeping it topped up,

especially above 20%, allows the car's thermal management system to maintain a healthy temperature for the battery.

It's also best to charge immediately after a drive while the battery is still warm.

4. **Drive Smoothly:** Just like with any car, smooth acceleration and gentle braking are key to safety and efficiency in winter. For EVs, this is even more critical as it helps conserve battery power and can make the most of regenerative braking, which recovers energy during deceleration.

5. **Park Indoors:** If you have access to a garage, park your car inside. This simple action can help keep the battery from reaching extreme low temperatures overnight, improving its performance and reducing

the energy needed to warm it up in the morning.

In conclusion, while electric vehicles do face a unique set of challenges in cold weather, they are by no means unsuitable for winter.

With an understanding of how the cold affects their performance and by implementing a few proactive habits, EV drivers can navigate the winter months with confidence and efficiency.

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Three Ways to Make Your Home Cozy for Winter

As the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, there’s nothing better than a warm and inviting home to escape the cold.

Turning your living space into a cozy sanctuary for the winter months is all about embracing comfort, warmth, and a touch of seasonal charm. Here are three simple ways to make your home feel extra cozy this winter.

Embrace Warm Textures and Layers The quickest way to add warmth to a room is by incorporating soft, inviting textures. Think beyond the standard sofa and add layers of blankets and throws made from materials like wool, fleece, and faux fur. Drape a chunky knit blanket over the arm of your couch, pile up some plush cushions on a reading chair, and place a soft rug underfoot to add instant warmth and comfort. Don’t forget the bedroom—layer your bedding with flannel sheets, a down duvet, and a beautiful quilt to create a true haven for chilly nights.

Play with Lighting and Scent Harsh, bright overhead lights can make a room feel cold and unwelcoming. For



a cozier ambiance, switch to warmer, softer lighting. Use lamps with dimmable bulbs, string up some fairy lights for a subtle glow, or, for an even more magical effect, light a few candles. The soft flicker of a flame not only adds visual warmth but can also fill your home with a delightful scent. Opt for candles with winter-themed fragrances like cinnamon, pine, vanilla, or spiced orange to engage another one of

your senses and create a truly immersive cozy experience.

Bring Nature Indoors While the outdoors may be frosty, you can bring the beauty of nature inside to create a fresh and lively atmosphere. A simple bouquet of dried flowers, a few pine cones in a bowl, or a centerpiece made from evergreen branches can add a rustic, natural element to your décor. Potted plants like a holiday cactus or a

cyclamen can also thrive indoors during the winter and add a touch of green life. These natural elements not only connect you to the outdoors but also add an organic, calming feel to your space, making it feel more grounded and serene during the colder months.

By incorporating these simple tips, you can transform your home into a warm, inviting retreat that you’ll love spending time in all winter long.

THE BEST WAYS TO PREVENT MOULD AND MOSS OUT OF DOORS

As the colder, wetter months approach, gardens become susceptible to the growth of mould and moss.

These growths not only make surfaces unsightly and slippery but can also cause damage over time. However, with some preparation and a bit of effort, you can protect your outdoor spaces.

Pre-Winter Cleaning The single most effective step you can take is a thorough clean-up before winter begins. Using a pressure washer is the quickest way to remove existing dirt, moss, and algae from hard surfaces like patios, paving, and walls. For a deeper clean, consider using a specialized outdoor cleaner or a solution of water and white vinegar. For wooden surfaces like garden furniture or sheds, a stiff brush and a wood-specific cleaner are recommended. Ensure all surfaces are completely dry before moving to the next step.

Improve Drainage and Reduce Moisture Mould and moss thrive in damp conditions. Improving drainage is a key preventative measure. Check that your gutters and downpipes are clear of debris, and



ensure that water is draining away from your patio and the base of your shed. Rake leaves and sweep away other organic matter from surfaces, as they hold moisture and provide a food source for mould.

Apply Protective Sealants or Treatments Once surfaces are clean and dry, applying a protective sealant or treatment can prevent future growth. For paving and patios, a patio sealer creates a barrier that makes it harder for moss and weeds to take root. For wooden furniture and sheds, a wood preservative or stain

will repel water and protect against fungal growth. Some treatments contain biocides that actively inhibit mould and moss growth. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions carefully.

Ensure Good Air Circulation and Sunlight Exposure

Mould and moss prefer shady, still environments. Pruning back overhanging branches or shrubs that shade your patio, walls, or shed will allow more sunlight and air to reach the surfaces. This helps them dry out more quickly after rain. If possible, rearrange garden furniture so it’s

not permanently in the same damp spot.

Regular Maintenance Even with all these preventative steps, regular maintenance is crucial. A simple sweep of the patio and paths a few times over the winter will help to remove any new organic debris. Keep an eye out for any new moss or mould and treat it promptly with a spot cleaner to stop it from spreading.

Following these steps will not only keep your outdoor areas looking great through the winter but will also save you time and effort come springtime.

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The Draft-Buster Guide: Sealing Air Leaks to Keep the Cold Out

When winter winds howl, the last thing you want is that chilling breeze sneaking into your living room.

Those tiny gaps and cracks around windows and doors are silent thieves, robbing your home of warm air and dramatically increasing your heating bills. Sealing these air leaks is one of the quickest, cheapest, and most effective ways to winter proof your home.

1. Pinpoint Your Problem Areas Before you can fix a draft, you need to find it. An easy way to detect air leaks is to perform a “draft test” on a cool, breezy day:

- The Hand Test: Simply hold a damp hand near the edges of all windows, around

door frames, and near any wall penetrations (like cable lines or dryer vents). If you feel a noticeable chill, you’ve found a leak.

- The Incense Test: Light a stick of incense or a thin candle and slowly move it around the frame of a window or door. If the smoke suddenly blows sideways or the flame flickers violently, cold air is entering.
- 2. The Solution for Fixed Gaps: Caulking Caulking is the go-to solution for sealing gaps that don’t move, such as where window frames meet the exterior siding or where trim boards

meet the wall.

- Choose the Right Caulk: For exterior applications, use silicone or polyurethane caulk, as these are flexible, durable, and resistant to extreme temperature changes and moisture. For interior cracks, acrylic latex is easier to clean up and paint over.
- Prep the Surface: For maximum adhesion, make sure the surface is clean, dry, and free of old, cracking caulk. You may need a utility knife to scrape away the old material.
- Apply a Smooth Bead: Cut the caulk



tube nozzle at a angle, making a small opening. Apply steady pressure as you draw the gun along the gap, then smooth the bead

with a moistened finger or a caulking tool for a professional seal.

3. The Solution for Moving Gaps: Weatherstripping

Doors and operable windows (the ones that open) require a solution that seals the gap when they’re closed but compresses

to allow movement when they’re opened. That’s where weatherstripping comes in.

4. Temporary Fixes for Extra-Drafty Windows If you have very old or single-pane windows, caulking and weatherstripping might not be enough. For these situations, temporary measures can provide a significant boost in insulation:

- Plastic Window Film Kits: These inexpensive kits use a clear plastic film applied to the interior window frame and shrunk tight with a hairdryer. They create

a layer of still air between the window and the film, which acts as excellent insulation.

- Insulated Curtains: Heavy, thermal-backed curtains or cellular shades can be drawn at night to block the cold radiating from the glass. Remember to open them during the day to capture any solar heat! By taking a few hours to become your home’s draft-buster, you’ll ensure the heat generated by your furnace stays inside where it belongs, keeping your family comfortable and your energy bills manageable.

Smart Heat: Maximizing Efficiency with Programmable and Smart Thermostats

As the days get shorter and the furnace starts to kick on, your home’s heating system becomes your biggest energy drain.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to lower your winter utility bills while boosting comfort isn’t an expensive replacement—it’s upgrading the brain of your heating system: the thermostat. By replacing an old manual thermostat with a programmable or, even better, a smart model, you gain granular control over your home’s temperature, ensuring you only heat the house when you need to.

The Case for Programmable Savings. A programmable thermostat allows you to set customized heating schedules that automatically adjust the temperature throughout the day. This simple feature prevents your furnace from running unnecessarily while you’re away or asleep.

The core principle is setback: intentionally lowering the temperature during periods of low activity.

- When You’re Away: There’s no reason to keep your house a cozy when everyone is out at work or school. Setting the temperature back by to for eight hours a day can save you up to 10% on your

heating bills annually.

- When You’re Asleep: Your body naturally lowers its core temperature overnight. A setback of to while you sleep not only saves energy but can also promote better rest.
- The Sweet Spot: Don’t turn the heat off completely. Setting the temperature too low forces your system to work overtime to reheat the house in the morning, negating the savings. A moderate setback is far more efficient.

Stepping Up to Smart Technology. While programmable models are great, smart thermostats offer an even greater leap in efficiency, convenience, and control. These Wi-Fi-enabled devices learn your routines, monitor your HVAC system, and can be adjusted from anywhere using your phone.

Programming Tips for the Winter Season. To get the most out of your smart or programmable thermostat, follow this simple scheduling strategy:

1. Morning Warm-Up: Set the heat to turn on about 30 minutes before you wake up. This ensures the



house is warm when you step out of bed, without wasting heat all night.

2. Daytime Setback: Program the heat to drop as soon as the last person leaves the house for work or school.
3. Evening Warm-Up: Set the heat to rise about 30–60 minutes before you arrive home. This allows the house to warm up gradually and efficiently.
4. Nighttime Setback: Program the temperature to drop once

everyone is under the covers, typically around 10:00 PM.

By setting up a customized, automated heating schedule with a smart or programmable thermostat, you take the human error out of energy management. It’s an investment that pays for itself quickly through lower utility bills and provides a more consistently comfortable home all winter long.

Why Your Boiler Needs Its Annual Check-Up Now

Before you rely on your boiler for months of consistent warmth, a comprehensive annual service is not just recommended—it’s essential.

Getting ahead of the winter rush ensures safety, efficiency, and peace of mind.

When is the best time to book your annual service?

Reasonable Notice: Most heating engineers recommend booking your service during the late summer or early autumn (August to October). This allows you to avoid the inevitable rush of emergency call-outs that begin as soon as temperatures drop (typically from November onwards).

The Winter Rush: During peak winter months, a plumber or heating engineer’s schedule fills up rapidly, often dominated by emergency repairs for broken-down systems. While you might need only a few days’ notice in summer, in winter,



you could be looking at a wait of a week or more for a non-urgent service. For an annual service, aim to give your chosen professional at least 2-4 weeks’ notice in the lead-up to winter.

Boiler servicing is a

routine cost of home ownership, and the price can vary based on your location, the type of boiler, and the engineer. Based on current estimates, the average cost for a one-off annual boiler service in the UK is typically:

£80-£100 for a gas boiler and £90-£140 for an oil boiler. Crucially, never allow an unqualified person to service your boiler. Always ask to see the engineer’s official ID card (Gas Safe or OFTEC) before work begins.

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