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BCC, other local authorities, Translink, NI Water, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, the Department for Infrastructure, the NI Housing Executive, Education Authority, Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) and the Office of Government Procurement (Ireland) are among those taking part in the forthcoming Meet the Buyer event on Wed 25th March.

'MEET THE BUYER' AND HEAR ABOUT NI-WIDE PUBLIC SECTOR PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Businesses from across Ireland have been invited to hear about upcoming procurement opportunities available within the public sector in Northern Ireland.

A 'Meet the Buyer' event will take place in Belfast City Hall on Wednesday 25 March, 9am-1pm, organised by Belfast City Council, in partnership with InterTradeIreland.

Open to businesses, social enterprises

and voluntary and community organisations across the island of Ireland, the event will highlight a wide range of public procurement opportunities, including contracts available through the £850 million Belfast Region City

Deal.

The council, other local authorities, Translink, NI Water, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, the Department for Infrastructure, the NI Housing Executive, Education Authority,

Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) and the Office of Government Procurement (Ireland) are among those taking part.

Continued on page 4

Make a splash in Diabetes UK challenge

Diabetes UK is putting a call out to people from across Belfast and farther afield to take part in a sponsored swimming challenge which raises vital funds for the charity.

Swim22 runs between 22 March and 22 June and involves swimming a total of 22 miles – the distance from England to France. Participants can take on the challenge at their own pace, in their local pool or the open water, accumulating the 22 miles across the course of the 12 weeks.

All funds raised will go towards Diabetes UK's work, funding life-saving research and helping people living with diabetes to get the care and support they need.

People taking part can swim in their local pool or the open water, alone or with family, friends, or

colleagues.

In addition to the standard 22 mile distance, there are also two other challenges to choose from. Participants can do 'The Half', covering 11 miles or more experienced swimmers may wish to take on 'The Double' – swimming 44 miles.

There are some amazing rewards on offer for challengers, including three unique distance medals, a Swim22 tote bag and exclusive water bottle.

To register for Swim22, visit swim22.diabetes.org.uk. There is no registration fee and no minimum sponsorship

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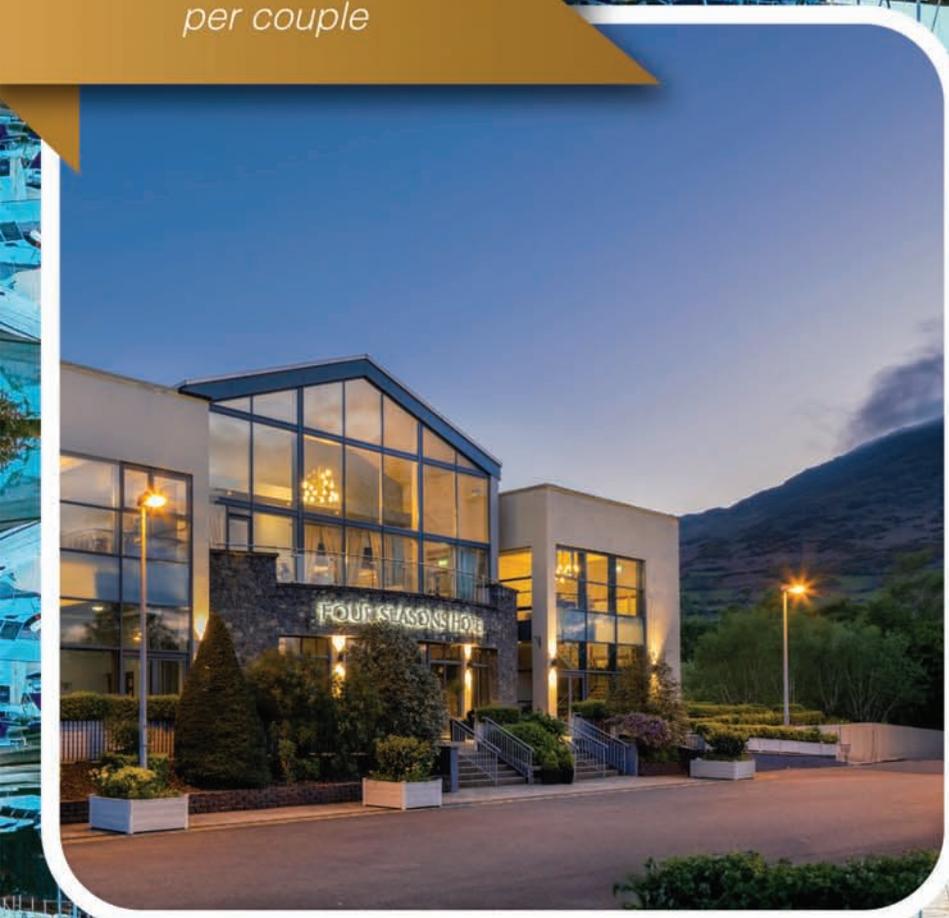
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Belfast secures \$1 million to help transform alleyways

Belfast has been selected as one of only 24 cities worldwide to receive \$1 million (approximately £750,000) through the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge 2025 - 2026, supporting an ambitious programme to transform how the council and neighbourhoods work together to manage and improve the network of alleyways across the city.

The funding will support council to redesign a core service using innovative, community-driven approaches and use these public spaces as a testbed for a new, scalable model of community service delivery.

Selected from more than 630 applications worldwide and 50 global finalists, Belfast is among a cohort of cities representing 20 countries and more than 35 million residents.

This follows extensive community engagement carried out during the Bloomberg-supported development phase, including an online survey, conversational AI agent presented as a wheelie bin and a series of face-to-face engagement sessions. These conversations confirmed strong public interest in being more involved in shaping and caring for shared spaces close to home, while recognising that every alleyway, and every community need is different.

Belfast's proposal will focus on redesigning how the council and



Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tracy Kelly, with Shane McLaughlin who has been working with his wife, Olivia McIntyre, to regenerate an alley in the Stranmillis area which has been named Foxglove Alley.

communities collaborate and will introduce new tools and mechanisms such as local resource hubs, using recycled materials, digital and data tools, and small grants to support resident-led action. Together, these elements aim to move away from reactive responses toward a more sustainable way of maintaining alleyways.

Michael R. Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg

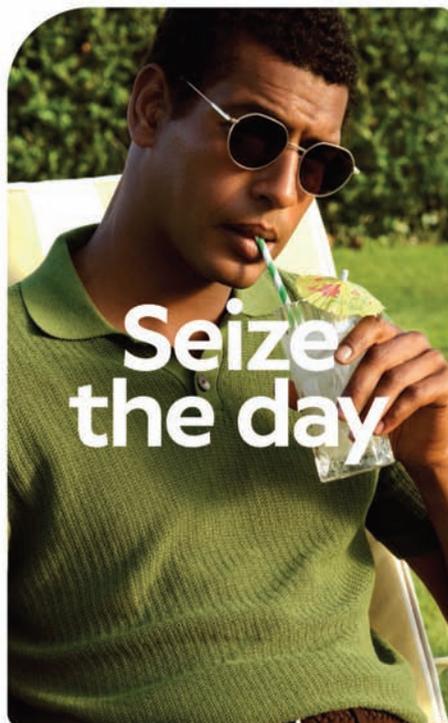
Philanthropies and Bloomberg L.P., and three-term mayor of New York City, said: "The most effective city halls are bold, creative, and proactive in solving problems and meeting residents' needs, and we launched the Mayors Challenge to help more of them succeed."

"We look forward to supporting this year's 24 winners as they bring their innovative projects to life

and to seeing their ideas spread to more cities around the world."

If you live near an alleyway and would like it to be considered as part of the Bloomberg-funded project, visit the Alleyways page on the council website for more information.

To learn more about the 50 finalist proposals, visit the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayor's Challenge website.



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Belfast Ensemble brings the acclaimed production back to the Lyric

The award-winning Belfast Ensemble is gearing up to perform **GROUP!** at the Lyric Theatre from 24 March to 4 April.

The outrageous musical comedy, created by Conor Mitchell and Matthew Hurt, has delighted audiences in New York, Philadelphia, Australia and London, but will now return to the Lyric for the first time since 2002 as part of the theatre's 75th anniversary celebrations. The two-act musical comedy is a rapturous audience experience likened to *The Book of Mormon* and *Avenue Q*, with its intensely funny, sharp script, Broadway-like big numbers, and unforgettable score which won "Best Score" at the New York Musical Awards in 2006.

GROUP! is set in a typical Belfast community centre. Despite the relatively uninspiring backdrop, the plot follows eccentric

individuals attending a weekly therapy session with each confessing their funniest, scariest, darkest and most embarrassing moments. It delves into familiar yet uncomfortable themes in a way that only Belfast humour can.

Jean is a volatile, untrusting woman attending on the advice of her GP after a violent public outburst, whilst Frank, a taxi driver, tries to deal with his divorce and PTSD through unconventional tactics. Chris, an unemployed incel with obsessive tendencies is planning a grand public gesture because he is suffering from the unrequited love of a certain local celebrity. The group dynamics are disrupted by the introduction of a new



Members of the cast of **GROUP!**

member, Amy, the friend and IVF nurse of Jackie - a heavily pregnant, outspoken professional unhappy in her marriage. Emmet, the incompetent group counsellor struggles to keep things on track, while Babs, the unfiltered oldest member of the group throws curveballs with inappropriate jokes destined to keep audiences on their toes.

Originally written and performed in 2002, with such a small budget that seven chairs had to be borrowed from a local Belfast bar, **GROUP!** has stood the test of time and evolved into a unique production that Belfast, and Northern Ireland, can

be proud of.

Co-writer and director Conor is also the founder of the Belfast Ensemble and is celebrated locally and internationally for his ability to craft vivid "total theatre". He blends difficult themes such as queer identity and current affairs with theatrical innovation, ensuring his works resonate on multiple levels.

Jimmy Fay, Executive Producer at the Lyric said, "It is a great joy for us to be working with the Belfast Ensemble again. Conor Mitchell has proven a master at using mischievous, theatrical élan to analyse our social morals and cultural malaise. He is one of our great poetical voices in this new age of anxiety, and his work acts as both

a balm and a tonic while being marvellously fun too."

With support from Arts Council NI, the Belfast Ensemble has a team of almost 40 local people working on **GROUP!** - a feat almost unheard of in the local arts sector today.

Belfast Ensemble is a pioneering force in cross-disciplinary theatre, seamlessly uniting music, theatre, and visual storytelling for audiences in Northern Ireland. Its production of **GROUP!** will run from 24 March to 4 April at the Lyric Theatre with tickets priced from £16. It is recommended for audiences aged 15 and above. For more information and booking visit lyrictheatre.co.uk/whats-on/group

Community and creative grant launched to help shape Belfast Stories

Belfast City Council is inviting Belfast-based community and cultural organisations to apply for funding through the new **Belfast Stories Community Grants Programme - a £250,000 initiative to support story-based projects across the city.**

The Programme will offer ten small grants of up to £10,000, and five creative project grants of up to £30,000, to support initiatives across a broad range of creative fields that explore cultural identity, heritage and creativity through storytelling. Applications open today, Thursday 19 February 2026 and close at 4pm on Tuesday 14 April 2026, with projects anticipated to run between June 2026 and March 2027.

Belfast Stories, the flagship Belfast Region City Deal tourism and regeneration project, is expected to open by 2030 at the Art Deco former Bank of Ireland building and the surrounding 5,000 square metre site on the corner of Royal Avenue and North Street. Described as a public space, visitor attraction and creative hub, the multi-purpose destination is anticipated to attract more than 700,000 visitors per year.

Central to the project is a commitment to support communities to tell their own stories across the city, as well as creating opportunities for people to discover new stories.

Lord Mayor of Belfast,



Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tracy Kelly was at the Belfast Stories site to launch the Grants Programme

Councillor Tracy Kelly said, "Belfast Stories is an ambitious project that is rooted in celebrating the people of Belfast and preserving the stories and experiences that connect them to this place. This grants programme creates meaningful ways for people to share their stories, whilst ensuring that Belfast Stories will be inclusive and representative of the many communities that make up our city."

Groups are encouraged to develop projects that get local people involved in gathering, sharing or creatively responding to stories connected to their

community. Information sessions will take place across the city and online in late February and early March. For guidance and application details, email belfaststories@belfastcity.gov.uk or visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/funding

Earlier this month, a pre-application Community Consultation, sharing updated proposals and designs for public comment, was completed in advance of a planning application being submitted later this year.

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Continued from page 1

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and Belfast Chamber, to hear more about how the procurement process works within the public sector in Northern Ireland and get practical advice and support on how to find and submit tender bids.

"This is a really

unique cross-border event, bringing together public sector buyers here with suppliers throughout Ireland," said Councillor Natasha Brennan, Chair of the council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

"In Belfast, we've worked hard to ensure our own council procurement processes are making a positive difference

to local communities, with 85% of our annual spend now going towards small and medium businesses.

"We're keen to share our learning with others and do what we can to encourage more businesses to tap into exciting opportunities available with us, and other public sector organisations, both now and in the future. And, by listening to

local firms, including those interested in cross-border trade, we can continue to refine our processes further and make sure they are responsive to evolving market needs."

Places for the 'Meet the Buyer' event are limited, and registration is essential.

To sign up, visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/meetthebuyer



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Jean-Christophe Novelli's Role in ITV's New Series The Heat

AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast is celebrating its association with renowned chef Jean-Christophe Novelli as he appears in ITV2 and ITVX's brand-new reality format, The Heat.

Hosted by Olivia Attwood, The Heat sees ten ambitious chefs travel to Barcelona to work under award-winning chef Jean-Christophe Novelli, as he opens an exclusive restaurant and mentors the next generation of culinary talent.

As the home of Novelli at City Quays, the signature restaurant led by the celebrity chef, AC Hotel Belfast will mark the show's broadcast run with subtle Heat-inspired touches, bringing elements of the show's energy and creativity to the guest dining experience.

Novelli at City Quays continues to offer its all-year-round Mediterranean influenced menu, while guests visiting during the broadcast period can expect flavour-led menu specials, drawing inspiration from The Heat and Jean-Christophe's continued creative influence.

The timing also aligns with the hotel's seasonal transition, as AC Hotel Belfast prepares for the reopening of The Terrace, its popular outdoor dining space overlooking the River Lagan. Returning for summer, The Terrace will



Paula Stuart, General Manager at AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast is pictured with Jean-Christophe Novelli, whose signature restaurant, Novelli at City Quays, is based at the hotel.

feature once again relaxed tapas-style dishes and BBQ-led menus, complementing the Mediterranean influences synonymous with Novelli at City Quays.

Jean-Christophe Novelli, whose signature restaurant Novelli at City Quays is based at AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast, said:

"I couldn't be more thrilled to join this exciting

new show and help support and develop the next generation of culinary talent. Known for my drive and intensity in the kitchen, I'll be using my passion and unique teaching style to push these young chefs to dig deep, stay sharp and prove they have what it takes to grow, evolve and make their mark.

"It's fantastic that the team

at AC Hotel by Marriott Belfast will be reflecting the spirit of The Heat at Novelli at City Quays during the run of the series, with dishes inspired by the energy and creativity of the show. It's going to be a wild ride, and I know we'll discover some true culinary stars along the way. I'm ready. Let's do this. Allez, Allez – bon appétit!"

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A FEAST OF FLAVOURS WITH 'COOK IT' PROGRAMME

The kitchen at Lough Moss Leisure Centre in Carryduff was filled with colour, flavour and enthusiasm recently as Community Facilitators rolled up their sleeves for the South Eastern Trust's Cook It! Programme, commissioned by the Public Health Agency.

The Health Improvement Dietetic Team's role is to train and support Tutors to deliver evidence-based nutrition and practical cooking skills programmes across the community, organisations and health care settings, helping to build confidence and promote healthier lifestyles.

Those in attendance at the morning session set about preparing a freshly cooked, hearty three course lunch incorporating fresh, lean meat, vegetables

and fruit as a delicious Chicken Curry, Cheesy Bean Crunch and Summer Fruit Fool were served.

South Eastern Trust Health Improvement Dietitian, Jennifer McBratney described the course as a, "Hands on, very fun way to deliver nutrition and cooking skills to our Tutors so that they can take the learning back to their communities and deliver it to their own areas."

"Each Tutor receives a comprehensive manual containing 95 recipes and we make

sure they feel fully confident to deliver the programme. We have Cook It! Tutors working across a variety of settings throughout the Trust including SureStart programmes, foodbanks, social supermarkets and Healthy Living Centres."

Jennifer added, "Taking part in the programme is a fun way of getting the nutritional messages across in a really practical style. The recipes are not complicated and they are family friendly and cost effective. People who take part tell us

how much they love it and often they do not want the programme to end after six weeks!"

Putting the finishing touches to her Fruit Fool, Family Lead/Group Facilitator in Down SureStart, Rachael Magee shared how she will be able to bring back the skills and knowledge to local parents. Rachael commented, "The session today has been great. We are learning how to make nutritious food at home and the importance of cooking from scratch. The session is great to show how families can get involved. We are cooking Chicken Curry,

so instead of the take-aways, you can make your own at home."

Rachael explained how through her role as a Group Facilitator and by taking part in the Cook It! Programme, she hopes to encourage more families to rediscover the joy of home cooking. "I want to get families back into the kitchen, empowering them to cook fresh, delicious meals that they can sit down to enjoy together as a family around the table."

For more information on the Cook It programme email Training.dietitians@setrust.hscni.net



L-R South Eastern Trust Health Improvement Dietitian, Jennifer McBratney, Family Lead/Group Facilitator in Down SureStart, Rachael Magee and Dietetic Assistant Practitioner Tracy O'Hara

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1,000 volunteers now signed up for this summer's Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

Belfast has reached an impressive milestone on its journey to hosting the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture – with 1,000 volunteers now signed up to support the delivery of this summer's Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

Those recruited will play a vital role as street ambassadors, competition support and other key positions as they help welcome the iconic event to the city for the first time from Sunday 2 to Sunday 9 August.

Volunteers have signed up from all parts of Belfast, Ireland and across the world, following a successful recruitment drive from Volunteer Now, together with Belfast City Council, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and Ards CCÉ.

Opportunities for additional volunteers

to sign-up will remain open for another few weeks, with further information available at fleadhcheoil.ie/volunteer

With over 800,000 visitors expected, the council is also ramping up engagement with individual sectors across the city to plan a vibrant, safe and welcoming event.

In-person information sessions for city centre organisations will take place on Thursday 5 and Friday 6 March at the MAC from 10am to 11.30am. These will look at proposed road closures, traffic management



arrangements and licensing processes, and offer businesses the chance to ask questions and provide feedback.

A specific briefing for hotels, bars, restaurants and cafés will also take place on Monday 23 March at City Hall from 12pm to 2.30pm.

This session will share insight on visitor flows and peak demand times from previous Fleadhs to help guide business planning, as well as providing ongoing support around outdoor trading and entertainment plans.

For more information

about the business information sessions and to register, visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/fleadh

For those unable to attend the events in person, further online information sessions will be delivered in the coming weeks.

Monday 23 March is also the closing date for applications to the council's Bank of Ideas scheme which is inviting residents to submit creative ideas that support the event through its theme of 'Celebrating Together'.

More information can be found at belfastcity.gov.uk/culturefunding

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BELFAST TEEN THROUGH TO FINALS OF UK'S TOP YOUNG CHEF

A young aspiring chef from Belfast is celebrating after being crowned the regional winner as part of a national competition to find the UK's top young chef.

Hanna won a spot in the final after impressing the judges during the regional heat, hosted at Belfast Met's Titanic Quarter.

Hanna Asish, 14, from Our Lady and St Patricks College in Belfast, beat tough competition from local students and will now head to London this March to represent Northern Ireland in the UK-wide Springboard FutureChef 2026 final.

Now in its 27th year, Springboard FutureChef is the UK's largest school culinary competition, with a long list of successful alumni, including Poppy O'Toole, the self-titled 'Potato Queen' of Instagram, Tom Hamblet, winner of Masterchefs the Professionals and Young MasterChef finalist, Bobby Odu, the owner of Bobby Bakes. Throughout the competition, participants are mentored and judged by all-star Springboard FutureChef Champions and supporters, with Lead Judge for 2026 being the multi-award-winning Chef, Chantelle Nicholson.

Hanna blew judges away with her main course of Manor Farm, thyme butter roasted chicken, herb and sesame crusted chicken

lollipop, hasselback comber baby potatoes, tender stem broccoli and carrot puree, followed by Granny Smith apple and baked oats crumble with aerated vanilla custard and pannacotta and baby toffee apple for dessert. Speaking about the impressive win, Hanna said: "This has been such an amazing competition and overall experience. I can't believe I've won. My mentor Garreth has worked so hard with me in preparation for today, helping and guiding me, as well as teaching me the culinary skills I needed to prepare my meals today. So excited to have won and now going to London to represent Northern Ireland at the UK finals".

Designed to develop the next generation of chefs, the programme connects students from diverse backgrounds with chefs, employers and mentors. It provides early access to skills, guidance and real-world experience, supporting long-term career progression and building a more diverse, resilient workforce.

FutureChef Lead Judge 2026, Chantelle Nicholson comments: "For our



industry to grow in a way that is innovative, resilient, and genuinely sustainable, we must open doors for everyone. Programmes like Springboard FutureChef play an essential role in encouraging young people from all backgrounds, helping them overcome obstacles and find their place in the kitchen. It's a privilege to be part of an initiative that supports such a vibrant and representative new generation of chefs."

Finalists from the regional heats advance to the National Final in March. The National Final

celebrations begin with a dinner on 22 March 2026 at the Mandarin Oriental, Hyde Park, followed by the National Final itself on 23 March 2026 at Capital City College in Westminster.

Springboard FutureChef headline sponsors include Savoy Educational Trust, Worshipful Company of Cooks and Country Range. Henderson Foodservice is the regional sponsor for Northern Ireland. To see the full list of sponsors, visit <https://futurechef.uk.net/sponsors>

For more information on FutureChef, visit <https://futurechef.uk.net/>

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WHAT WE CAN ALL DO FOR HEDGEHOGS.

As their name indicates, hedgehogs mostly live in or around hedges, and that has been their downfall, as rural hedges have been increasingly removed to accommodate intensive agriculture.

It's estimated that hedgehog numbers in farmland have fallen by more than 50% in the last 20 years. While they have been adaptable by occupying urban and suburban gardens and parks, even there their numbers are declining.

Anybody with a garden can help.

First, if you have a hedge, please don't remove it and replace it with a fence. I

know it can be a bit of a chore to trim, but hedges are not just useful to

hedgehogs, they are shelters and nesting places for other wildlife, particularly birds.

Hedgehogs travel about a mile every night to find food, being the gardener's

friend by gobbling up slugs and insects, and if they're blocked by fences, then,

inevitably, they will die. So, if you must have fences, just do one simple



thing:

leave a small, roughly 13cm x 13cm (5" x 5"), gap at the bottom of them. You can even get hedgehog highway signage to display over the gaps. And

why not encourage your neighbours to do the same and create a really useful hedgehog-friendly habitat?

Second, leave some areas of lawn or garden to simply grow, revealing

native

grasses and other plants, including wildflowers (which will also help bees and other insects). A scrubby corner could be hedgehog paradise!

Third, stop using slug pellets, which not only kill hedgehog prey, but the hedgehogs themselves. If you're lucky to have garden hedgehogs they'll happily deal with the slugs.

Finally, if you have a suitably dense hedge (even under those pesky leylandii!),

why not buy or make a hedgehog home: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-hedgehog-home>

Think about what you can do. You'll make Beatrix Potter's Mrs Tiggly-Winkle happy and be doing your bit for wildlife recovery.

JVA

SALE OF MARGEY ORIGINALS AT THE MALONE HOTEL THIS WEEKEND

North Coast artist Adrian Margey will host a major exhibition and sale of his original work at The Malone Hotel on Eglantine Avenue, South Belfast, from Friday 20th – Sunday 22nd March 2026.

Recently reopened following a stunning multi-million-pound renovation, The Malone (formerly Malone Lodge) offers an elegant setting for this significant sale of work.

Margey's latest collection celebrates some of the island's most iconic landmarks and landscapes. Visitors can expect striking Belfast cityscapes, including depictions of Queen's University Belfast, Botanic Gardens, and tranquil scenes along the Lagan Towpath. Sweeping vistas of the Mourne Mountains, Donegal and the North Coast will also feature prominently.

Renowned for his versatility, Margey moves seamlessly between bold, high-energy compositions alive with colour and more impressionistic works rendered in a softer, naturalistic palette. His main influences include the Fauves, the Irish Impressionists and indigenous South



Artist Adrian Margey ahead of his exhibition and sale of work at The Malone Hotel on Eglantine Avenue.

American artists. The exhibition will include large-scale statement canvases, smaller original pieces and a selection of limited edition prints, ensuring a range of options for collectors and first-time buyers alike.

Margey holds a PhD from Queen's University and has exhibited in Washington, D.C. and live painted for Tourism

Ireland's prestigious "Experience Ireland" showcase in Milan in recent years, further cementing his growing international reputation.

The artist will be in attendance throughout the weekend to discuss the works on display and explore potential commissions. Opening Times: Friday 20th March: 6pm – 9pm Saturday 21st March:

11am – 9pm Sunday 22nd March: 11am – 6pm. Admission is free – everyone welcome. On-street parking is available on Eglantine Avenue, with additional parking at the rear of the hotel accessed via Wellington Park Avenue. For further information visit www.adrianmargey.com or telephone the Portrush studio on 07841 593762

Minister announces plans to tackle welfare fraud and error

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has launched a new drive to tackle fraud and error in the benefits system.

Speaking in the Assembly, Minister Lyons said: "Fraud is not a victimless crime. As I've said before, when individuals cheat the system they are taking support from those who need it most – family, friends, neighbours and their fellow citizens.

"At this time of significant budget constraint, we must be united in ensuring that public money is directed to our key services – to help families in financial distress, to the homeless, to those who are sick and to educate our young people. Not to criminals."

The latest measures come after the Minister reintroduced the practice of naming those who have been convicted of benefit fraud.

Minister Lyons said: "I have taken away a shield of anonymity from those who steal from all of us and the response from the public to shining a light on these stories has been overwhelmingly positive."

The Minister commissioned a specialist working group within his Department to examine

the issue. This group has made a number of recommendations designed to enhance prevention of fraud and take swift action when it occurs.

The Minister said that in line with the recommendations of the Report, his Department will:

- Enhance and expand current fraud and error activities.
- Strengthen the specialist training and support for staff to double-down on fraud and error, including mistakes made by officials.
- Maximise technology solutions in conjunction with DWP and other



Communities Minister Gordon Lyons pictured in Parliament Buildings as he announced a new drive to tackle benefit fraud.

Departments, at Westminster and locally, to aid investigative efforts.

• Increase the public's understanding of benefit fraud and to share in our zero-tolerance approach.

Minister Lyons warned that some measures are subject to funding bids and said they cannot proceed without the necessary financial support.

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TRUST CANCER TEAM HELPS PARENTS NAVIGATE CANCER CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN

Receiving a Cancer diagnosis can be life-changing.

One of the most challenging issues for parents is finding the right way to explain the diagnosis and what lies ahead to their entire family, particularly children.

To mark World Cancer Day, staff at the South Eastern Trust's Macmillan Cancer Unit are highlighting the support available to help families navigate these difficult but vital conversations.

South Eastern Trust, Haematology/Adolescent and Young Adult Clinical Nurse Specialist in the Macmillan Cancer Unit, Lisa Callender explained how the Team provides guidance, support and signposting to parents faced with the prospect of explaining a cancer diagnosis to their children.

"As we mark World Cancer Day, it is important to remember that Cancer does not just affect the patient, it also affects their families, including children, young people and Grandparents.

"It is important to remember that children and young people are always listening and always picking up subtle clues. It is not always what you say but how you say it. We would encourage patients to explain what their diagnosis is and how this is going to impact them going forward."

Lisa stressed the importance of honesty when explaining a Cancer diagnosis

to a child or young person. "Children do not tend to live in shades of grey, they see things in black and white. They respond much better when you are honest with them. The best place for a child or young person to get information is from the people they trust and love the most, their parents or carers."

One of the many things a Cancer diagnosis brings is uncertainty. Lisa emphasised the importance of helping children understand what to expect. "It is important for children to know that Mummy or Daddy may go through some difficult times. Their appearance might change, they may be feeling very sick and have less energy, but they haven't changed who they are. They are still Mummy, they are still Daddy. They are still the person that brought you into this world. They are the person who got on their hands and knees and played with you or chased you around the park. They might not be able to do that as well as they have done in the past but they are still here and will want to do that again in the future."

Macmillan Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator, Karen Kelly highlighted the role of the Support Centre within the Unit, which provides a wide range of



information and practical help for families. "Receiving a Cancer diagnosis can be incredibly challenging on a personal level. It is not a standalone experience, it affects the people closest to you and those you love most.

"It is not uncommon for us to meet people who are overwhelmed by the thought of having that conversation with their children. Parents are often very aware of how a child might cope with the diagnosis and how it could affect the whole family."

Karen explained that the Unit recognises how crucial it is for families to receive the right support at the right time. "We can offer parents the opportunity to bring their children into the Unit, show them around and help

them understand where Mum and Dad are going to be. This can help reduce fear of the unknown and make the experience less daunting."

Karen continued, "We talk to parents about the importance of being open with their children. Many parents want to be honest but often struggle to find the words and they just appreciate a little bit of guidance.

"We provide literature and booklets which help parents begin those conversations in a way that is appropriate for the child or young person. When it comes to a Cancer diagnosis, it's not always what you say, it is how you say it. We encourage the use of plain language and avoiding sugar coating the situation.

Karen encouraged anyone with concerns about talking to their children about a cancer diagnosis to reach out for support. "There is so much we can do to help both you and your family. We can provide information, practical tools and guide families to professionals with expertise in supporting children and young people through this experience.

"We all know that children can pick up so much and they can become very aware when they feel something is being hidden from them. When parents whisper, children listen harder. Being clear and honest from the beginning helps children feel included and makes them feel safe, knowing they understand what is happening."

STRUMMING FOR SUCCESS

Picking up a guitar is far more than a quest for rock stardom; it is a profound investment in your cognitive health.

When you learn to navigate the fretboard, you are essentially putting your brain through a high-intensity workout. This process fosters neuroplasticity by forcing the mind to multitask—simultaneously reading notation, maintaining rhythm, and coordinating complex finger movements.

These mental gymnastics sharpen your focus and have been shown to improve long-term memory, effectively rewiring your brain to process information more efficiently.

Beyond the mental perks, the guitar serves as a powerful tool for emotional regulation. Engaging with the instrument allows players to enter a "flow state," a form of active meditation where the stressors of daily life fade into the background. The tactile sensation of the strings and the resonance of the wood provide a



physical outlet for expression that can significantly lower cortisol levels. Whether you are strumming a gentle folk tune or shredding a cathartic solo, the act of creation acts as a reset button for the soul.

Finally, the guitar offers physical and social rewards that last a lifetime. Developing the fine motor skills required for intricate chord shapes builds incredible hand-eye coordination and

finger dexterity. This newfound skill often translates into a surge of self-confidence that spills over into social settings. As a universal language, music creates instant bridges, whether you are jamming with a local band or simply sharing a song with friends. Even a few minutes of daily practice transforms the guitar from a piece of wood into a lifelong companion for growth and connection.

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Tullywest Manor is celebrating over 30 years in business!

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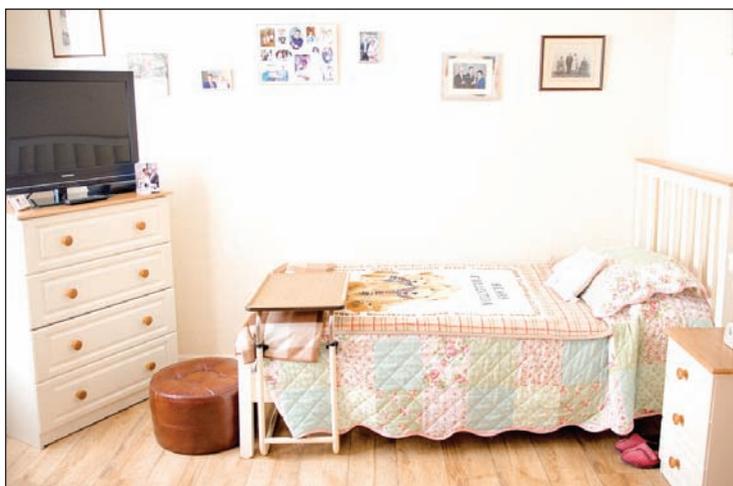
It opened its doors to its first residents on 17th March 1989. The aim is to provide high quality services catering for the individual needs of each resident, ensuring that privacy, dignity and respect of each resident is maintained at all times.

Residents coming into care here encouraged to maintain their normal social interests, hobbies and outings with relatives and friends as well as participate in activities and outings arranged by the home

Residents views and suggestions for social activities, outings are sought at Resident meetings and actioned if appropriate

Tullywest Manor features a large lounge, dining room, entrance hall with seating area and a spacious conservatory, where residents can circulate and meet with each other and relatives.

Each tastefully decorated



bedroom, most with en-suite, offers complete privacy where residents are encouraged to express their own personal tastes.

Tullywest recognises the need for a person-centred approach to care. Encouraging staff to learn more about the Residents

lives helps us tailor our care to each individual need.

Tullywest Manor recognises that residents are individuals with family and relatives of their own and encourage this bond to continue. They aim to create a comfortable atmosphere of homeliness happiness and

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BELFAST SET TO BE 'CITY OF SPORT.'

Belfast is gearing up for a landmark year in 2026. As the designated European City of Sport, the atmosphere is already electric, and the calendar for the spring and summer seasons is packed with more than just your average local fairs.

Whether you are a resident navigating the school holidays or a visitor looking for that perfect mix of culture and chaos, the city has evolved into a world-class playground for families.

Easter Sunday falls on the 5th April, triggering a wave of "egg-centric" activities. For those who prefer a tech-forward spring, W5 is hosting a massive LEGO Big Build throughout the latter half of the month, challenging kids to help construct a sprawling transport network. If you prefer a bit of old-world charm, the Ulster Folk Museum remains the go-to spot to experience a traditional 1900s Easter, complete with egg-rolling and the chance to see newborn lambs in the paddocks.

Summer 2026 is where Belfast's "City of Sport" title truly shines. The high-energy Moy Park Belfast City Marathon gets things moving on



The colourful Belfast Mela is set to be a highlight of the summer

May 3rd, followed by the legendary Balmoral Show from May 13th to 16th. Even if you aren't a "farming family," Balmoral is a rite of passage, offering everything from high-stakes stunt shows to the famous Food Pavilion. By July, the action moves indoors to the SSE Arena for the 3ICE World Cup. This high-speed, three-on-three ice hockey tournament is a global first for the city and is specifically designed to be fast, loud, and incredibly engaging for kids who might find traditional sports

a bit slow. For a change of pace, the Summer Rose Fair at Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park in early July offers a quintessentially Belfast weekend of live music and fairground rides set against one of the world's finest floral displays. Music fans should also keep an eye on the Belsonic lineup at Ormeau Park; while it's often seen as a late-night venue, the 2026 roster includes family-friendly icons like Michael Bublé and The Beach Boys, offering a great excuse for a first "big concert"

experience for the older kids.

The season reaches its crescendo in late August with the Belfast Mela, which celebrates its 20th Anniversary in 2026. This multicultural extravaganza transforms the Botanic Gardens into a global village on August 30th. It is arguably the most colourful day in the city's calendar, filled with food, dance, and music from every corner of the world. It's the perfect way to soak up the last of the summer sun before the school bells start ringing again.



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Advanced Glaucoma Care in the heart of Royal Hillsborough: Glaucoma Laser

A new service has been launched in Affidea Hillsborough Private Clinic to help patients suffering from Glaucoma, under the care of Mr Jonathan Bonnar, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon with a Specialist interest in Advanced Cataract and Glaucoma Surgery.

Proven Benefits of Glaucoma laser
 - up to 70% of patients did not need drops at 6 years.
 - Less likelihood for glaucoma to progress than those taking drops.
 - Less likelihood to require glaucoma surgery than those taking drops.
 - Effects can last up to 6 years, and the procedure can safely be repeated if needed to try and keep you free from drops.

Data taken from a recent, extensive UK study. Unlike invasive eye

surgery, this laser option:
 - Causes no permanent tissue damage
 - Has a low risk of complications
 - Doesn't require incisions— return to normal activities the next day.

Who is it for?
 SLT laser is now the NICE recommended first line treatment for open angle glaucoma and high eye pressure (OHT), in preference to drops.

The majority of patients with open angle glaucoma or OHT are eligible.



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COUNTDOWN BEGINS TO 2026 BALMORAL SHOW

The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) has today officially launched the countdown to the 2026 Balmoral Show, announcing that Ulster Bank will return as principal sponsor as part of a new three-year partnership agreement.

The renewed sponsorship deal will see Ulster Bank continue its close association with the agri-food event through to 2028, reinforcing the bank's commitment to the local farming community and wider rural economy.

Taking place at the Eikon Exhibition Centre, Lisburn from 13-16 May 2026, this year's show promises an exciting programme of competitions, entertainment plus food and farming showcases. Visitors can look forward to a range of new attractions, including a stunt display show from Bolddog FMX in the main arena, a revamped horticulture area, and the usual mix of family entertainment and livestock events designed to inspire the next generation of farmers and food producers.

Looking ahead to the event, RUAS Group Operations Director Rhonda Geary said:

"Preparations are already well under way for what we expect to be another

outstanding Balmoral Show in 2026. As always, the show is a celebration of the very best of our local agri-food industry, and we are continually growing and evolving to ensure there is something new and exciting to see whether you are a longstanding visitor or coming to the show for the first time.

"We are delighted to welcome Ulster Bank back on board as our principal sponsor. Their long-term support has been integral to the success and growth of the event, and this new three-year agreement underlines the strength of that partnership."

Cormac McKervey, Senior Agriculture Manager at Ulster Bank, added:

"2026 will be Ulster Bank's 18th year as principal sponsor of the Balmoral Show and we are proud to continue our longstanding association with the event. The agri-food sector is a significant contributor to the overall economy here and supporting



Rhonda Geary, RUAS Group Operations Director and Cormac McKervey, Senior Agriculture Manager, Ulster Bank, kick off the countdown to the 2026 Balmoral Show in partnership with Ulster Bank. The pair are joined by county Antrim farmer, John Cross, who received the award for Champion Clydesdale at the 2025 event.

farmers, growers and rural businesses, remains a key priority for us.

"Through our specialist agriculture teams and tailored financial solutions, we are committed to helping the industry meet challenges and plan for growth in what is an ever-evolving sector. The Balmoral Show provides a unique platform for us to

connect with the farming community, celebrate success and highlight our network of expertise. We are pleased to extend our partnership with the RUAS and to play our part in making the 2026 show another memorable event."

The Balmoral Show remains Northern Ireland's largest annual agri-food event, attracting more

than 100,000 visitors each year and providing an unrivalled showcase for livestock, machinery, food, horticulture and rural life.

Further announcements on competitions, attractions and ticket sales for Balmoral Show 2026 will be made in the coming months. For more information, visit www.balmoralshow.co.uk

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Company Director Aodh Hannon says the

service's popularity comes down to convenience and simplicity.

"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."

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TURNING OLD INTO GOLD: HOW ROBINSON GOLDSMITHS ARE REDESIGNING HEIRLOOMS SUSTAINABLY

What do you do with a broken chain that belonged to your mum? Or a gold ring that's not your style but holds a lifetime of family stories?



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In their family-run workshop, old jewellery is given a second life through a thoughtful and skilled process. The gold is melted down - a mesmerising sight - not to erase its past, but to prepare it for a new chapter.

"Working with customers to design and create unique jewellery is a real privilege," says Jennifer Robinson, partner at Robinson Goldsmiths. "Often, inherited jewellery is just sitting in a box somewhere, unseen and unused, as it's not the right style or size. By using these items to create something new, the customer gets a custom piece of jewellery which is all the more special knowing the history behind it."

Once molten, the gold is poured into a mould, cooled, then carefully rolled, shaped, and crafted into something entirely fresh.

Whether it becomes a sleek new ring, a modern pendant, or a bespoke design co-created with the team, each piece is reimagined but still deeply rooted in your story.

"Over the years we've turned broken and unloved jewellery into rings, necklaces and brooches," adds Gillian Robinson, shop manager. "These pieces are lovingly designed and created in our workshop from our family to another. By reusing these precious metals and stones, we're also offering a sustainable option for eco-conscious shoppers."

This is sustainable jewellery at its most meaningful: no new mining, no waste just precious materials already rich with history, transformed into something you'll wear every day and perhaps pass on one day yourself.

So if there's old gold tucked away in a drawer, maybe it's time to bring it in, melt it down, and start a new chapter.



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Specsavers Connswater celebrates 25 years of Style in East Belfast

This spring, Specsavers Connswater and its team of local experts will be celebrating 25 years of business in style!

Store partners, Paula Cunningham and Lynsey Caldwell lead the team who all hail from the Belfast area, and have built a reputation not only for clinical expertise, but for warm welcomes and community spirit.

This spring also marks two years since they relocated from Connswater Shopping Centre into a new premises within the retail park, beside Ulster Bank and McDonalds, marking a £650,000 investment, committing even more care for the local community, providing tailored advice, early detection support and ongoing aftercare.

Ophthalmic Director, Paula Cunningham commented; "We are really excited to mark 25 years of our practice, and are very proud of the accessible eye and hearing care we bring to east Belfast and beyond, including comprehensive eye testing, hearing care clinics and wax removal clinics, alongside a range



of designer frames."

Dispensing Director, Lynsey Caldwell added; "Spring is the perfect time to celebrate, coming out of winter as the sun makes a reappearance. It's this time of year that we often see customers looking for a new style, and of course, choose some new frames for their prescription sunglasses."

Whether you're drawn to bold, statement

silhouettes, or sleek, minimalist lines, Specsavers Connswater carries lines from Tommy Hilfiger, Kylie Minogue, Marc Jacobs and Karen Millen, alongside exclusive collections from partnerships with Elton John and Millie Bobbie Brown.

Paula finished; "A quarter of a century on, the whole team at Specsavers Connswater

remains proud to serve East Belfast and develop our services to suit our local customers. We combine clinical excellence with contemporary style, providing accessibility and value, which we will continue for years to come!"

Specsavers Connswater is open seven days a week, with late opening on Thursdays.

YOUR ULTIMATE CARLINGFORD ESCAPE

The Carlingford Lough Greenway stretches from King John's Castle and Carlingford Marina towards Newry, offering a safe and scenic route perfect for walkers, cyclists, and families looking to explore at their own pace.

Bike hire is readily available in the village, making it easy to set off on a relaxed coastal cycle or a fun family adventure.

Located just minutes away, the newly renovated Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford is the ideal base for a break that blends outdoor adventure with comfort and relaxation.

Beyond the Greenway, Carlingford is packed with activities with something for everyone. Spend a sunny afternoon at the beach, where little ones can paddle safely while thrill-seekers enjoy pier jumping and refreshing sea swims. For something truly memorable, experience the popular Hot Box Sauna beside the lough and take the staircase straight into the sea for an invigorating dip.

If you prefer to stay on land, there are beautiful hiking trails and scenic picnic spots all around the Cooley Peninsula, ideal for laid-back afternoons with breathtaking views.



The nearby Carlingford Adventure Centre offers even more excitement with kayaking, paddleboarding and land-based adventures to keep all ages entertained throughout the summer months.

Back in the medieval village, explore winding streets steeped in history, browse independent

boutiques, enjoy a visit to King John's Castle, or treat yourself to one of the many welcoming cafes and restaurants. As evening falls, soak up live music in a cosy pub or enjoy a relaxed dinner together.

After a full day of adventure, retreat to the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford, where guests

can enjoy complimentary access to the hotel's leisure facilities, including the swimming pool and sauna — the perfect way to unwind and recharge. With warm hospitality and cloud-soft beds awaiting you, it's a destination that offers the perfect balance of fun, summer adventure, and peaceful relaxation.



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Family Activities in and around Carlingford

As the days grow longer and the gorse begins to bloom on the Cooley Peninsula, the historic village of Carlingford transforms into a vibrant playground.

Located between the shadow of Slieve Foye and the shimmering waters of the Lough, this medieval gem offers a rare mix of high-octane adventure and quiet coastal charm. The village and its surroundings provide the perfect backdrop for a memorable spring or summer escape.

Thrills in the Great Outdoors

For families who prefer their holidays with a side of adrenaline, Skypark is an essential first stop. As Ireland's largest aerial adventure park, it offers a literal birds-eye view of the landscape. Instead of just watching from the sidelines, parents can join kids on multiple high-ropes courses that feature cargo nets and zip lines ranging from modest heights to a staggering 40 feet. For the younger adventurers, the "Aerial Junior" course keeps the thrills accessible for those aged four and up. If heights aren't your thing, the ground-level fun is just as engaging, with a massive maze, footgolf, and frisbee golf providing plenty of opportunities for some healthy family rivalry.

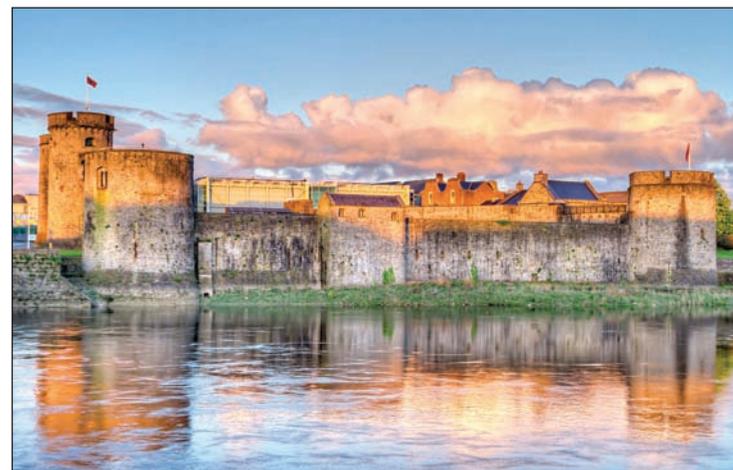
The excitement continues at the Carlingford Adventure Centre, which serves as

the village's hub for all things active. During the warmer months, the centre hums with energy, offering everything from woodland laser combat to a "Crystal Maze" style challenge that tests a family's ability to work together. Their summer camps are a local legend, often giving parents a few hours of well-deserved peace to explore the village boutiques and cafes while the kids are busy conquering the pier or the forest.

Scenic Trails and Coastal Wandering

If you prefer a slower pace, the Carlingford Lough Greenway offers one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in the country. This flat, off-road path follows the old railway line for about 7km toward the village of Omeara. It's an ideal spot for a family cycle or a long walk with a buggy, offering uninterrupted views across the water to the Mourne Mountains. You don't even need to bring your own gear; bike hire shops in the village provide everything from e-bikes to child trailers, making it easy to spend a sunny afternoon pedalling along the shoreline.

For those who want to



get their boots dirty, the lower trails of Slieve Foye Woods provide a magical canopy of green that is particularly stunning in late spring. While the hike to the summit is better suited for older children and seasoned walkers, the forest loops are perfect for younger explorers looking for "fairy doors" or hidden streams. After a morning in the woods, a short drive leads you to the sandy shores of Templetown Beach. This Blue Flag destination is sheltered and shallow, making it a safe haven for sandcastle building and brave dips in the Irish Sea.

Waves, Whimsy, and

History

No summer visit is complete without getting out onto the water itself. The Carlingford Lough Ferry is more than just a transport link to County Down; it's a mini-cruise that offers a unique perspective of the medieval skyline and the Haulbowline Lighthouse. On a clear day, you might even spot the resident dolphins that occasionally play in the ferry's wake. For a more hands-on experience, local providers offer kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) sessions, allowing families to explore the quiet coves and crannies of the harbor at their own

rhythm.

Beyond the water and the woods, Carlingford's greatest charm lies in its "open-air museum" feel. You can spend an afternoon simply wandering the narrow tholsel gates and ancient streets, imagining life behind the stone walls of King John's Castle. To add a bit of modern whimsy to the history, consider booking an Alpaca Trek. Located just a short distance from the village, these gentle, fleecy companions are expert hikers and provide a quirky, calming way to experience the countryside that kids (and your Instagram feed) will absolutely love.



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NEW DIGITAL COURSE TO HELP PUPILS STAY SAFE ONLINE

Education Minister Paul Givan has today officially launched a new online Digital Proficiency Course aimed at educating pupils and wider school communities on keeping safe online.

Provided through the Safer Schools NI platform, the Digital Proficiency Course has been designed to provide the practical tools and knowledge to empower children and young people to stay safe online.

The course has been made freely available to all education settings, pupils and parents across Northern Ireland.

Paul Givan said: "Our children and young people are engaging daily with technology, social media, and digital platforms at increasingly younger ages, and while some of these technologies offer benefits and create opportunities, they also contain potentially harmful risks.

"It is vital that we provide our schools with the resources that can support teachers and education staff to equip children and young people with the skills to navigate the digital and online world. Educating and empowering school communities is key to ensure pupils know how to access support from trusted adults or to report content when it makes them feel unsafe.

"The Safer Schools Digital Proficiency Course has been developed and designed to address this need."

The Minister continued: "This new course is part of the wider response to keeping our children safe online and compliments existing advice, guidance and information on a range of safeguarding issues available on the Safer Schools platform. I am delighted to launch the Digital Proficiency Course, and I would encourage all schools to register and sign up for this free initiative."

Colin Stitt, Head of Safer Schools, INEQUE Safeguarding Group said: "Decades ago, 'Cycling Proficiency' taught us to navigate the physical world safely; today, that 'road' has become digital. The Digital Proficiency Course is an age-appropriate, episodic video-based programme based on the five 'Five Cs' of online risk - Content, Contact, Conduct, Commerce, and Cyber Security. This certified course is free to access for parents, carers, pupils and school staff on the Safer Schools NI



Pictured (L-R) Colin Stitt, INEQUE Safeguarding Ltd, Niall Manogue, Principal at Braniel Primary School, Calum McArthur, Teacher and Safer Schools Coordinator, Daphne Wilson, Chair of the Board of Governors, Education Minister Paul Givan and pupils Jacob and Annie.

web and mobile app. The digital 'road' may have changed, but our collective commitment to safeguarding our children should always remain paramount. I urge all schools and families to use these resources to educate, empower and protect our children and young people in the digital world."

The Course was

launched during a visit to Braniel Primary School, one of the 400 schools already pre-registered to take part in the initiative, which will go live on Safer Internet Day, marked on 10 February 2026.

Niall Manogue, Principal of Braniel Primary School said: "We're delighted to be commencing the Digital Proficiency Course in our

school. We expect that it will help us identify what our children know and don't know about staying safe online and provide a structured, age-appropriate resource to help them navigate the online world."

To register your school or learn more about the Digital Proficiency Course, visit: <https://saferschoolsni.co.uk/digitalproficiency/>

Rosie's Emporium businesswoman gets dancing to raise funds for cancer charity

Rosaleen, owner of Rosie's Emporium in Bow Street Mall, is participating on behalf of Cancer Focus NI in a Strictly Come Dancing style competition.

Rosaleen is a member of Ceroc Ignite Social Dancing in Belfast, and took part in a similar Strictly style fundraiser for the charity two years ago.

Rehearsals are underway at Lisburn Leisureplex for the final of the competition at the Stormont Hotel in Belfast on March 27.

Rosaleen and her dance partner Michael Conn are well into rehearsals for the group number and couple dance which are both being kept a closely held secret to the big night.

Rosaleen has set up a fundraising page online and will be holding a bucket collection in Bow Street Mall on March 21-22, when local people can donate to help this important charity.

You can support Rosaleen's fundraising effort by donating online at <https://www.justgiving.com/page/rosaleen-stewart-2>



Rosaleen and her dance partner Michael Conn

justgiving.com/page/rosaleen-stewart-2

Cancer Focus NI is a charity close to Rosaleen's heart.

"My dad passed away from cancer 30 years ago so I know how vital the

charities are, especially now that one in every two people will develop cancer," Rosaleen explained.

"If I can raise some money to help that will be great."

New dog park at Ormeau Park

A new dog play area is now open in Ormeau Park, providing a safe and welcoming space for dogs and their owners, as Belfast City Council launches a renewed campaign to tackle dog fouling across the city.

A new dog play area is now open in Ormeau Park, providing a safe and welcoming space for dogs and their owners, as Belfast City Council launches a renewed campaign to tackle dog fouling across the city.

The new facility, located near the Indoor Tennis Centre and Ozone Complex, features play equipment, a water supply, seating for owners and two separate enclosed areas for small dogs and medium to large dogs. Some of the play fea-

tures have been creatively upcycled from playground apparatus that was no longer in use, adapted to make them dog-friendly.

The project has been funded through the Concert Social Levy scheme, which reinvests income from major events in parks back into local communities.

The opening of the dedicated dog park forms part of a wider approach to promoting responsible dog ownership, including the council's new awareness

campaign, Take the Lead - Bag It, Bin It!

As part of a wider approach to tackling the issue, the Council has increased dog warden patrols in hotspot areas, based on feedback from residents to target enforcement where it is most needed.

Dog fouling is an offence and anyone who fails to clean up after their dog can receive an £80 fixed penalty notice, reduced to £50 if paid within 10 days. If the case proceeds to court,



offenders could face a fine of up to £1,000. Dog waste can be placed in any public litter bin or in a household black bin.

Incidents of dog fouling can be reported online to the council to <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/dogfouling>

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Spring has a way of getting people thinking about what's next, the wedding you've been planning, the home improvements you've been putting off, the car upgrade you need or the holiday you deserve.

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or call 02890 643951 and speak to our friendly team for a confidential chat about your plans.

When you choose Ormeau Credit Union, you're doing more than taking out a loan. You're supporting a local organisation that reinvests in the people and places around you.

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The Zero Hero: Affordable Paths to a Net-Zero Home

In the world of home improvement, there is a phrase that sounds like a disaster but is actually the “holy grail” of modern living: the zero-energy home.

If we're being technical, calling a home “0% energy efficient” would mean it successfully wastes every single watt it pulls from the grid—a feat that would require leaving the oven open while the AC is on full blast! What most of us are actually chasing is Net Zero, the point where your home produces as much energy as it consumes, effectively bringing your energy bill's “efficiency” (or rather, its cost) down to zero.

Reaching that goal doesn't have to mean spending your retirement fund on experimental glass or high-tech batteries. By focusing on a “fabric first” approach, you can drastically reduce your home's appetite for energy before you even think about installing a single solar panel.

The “Fabric First” Foundation

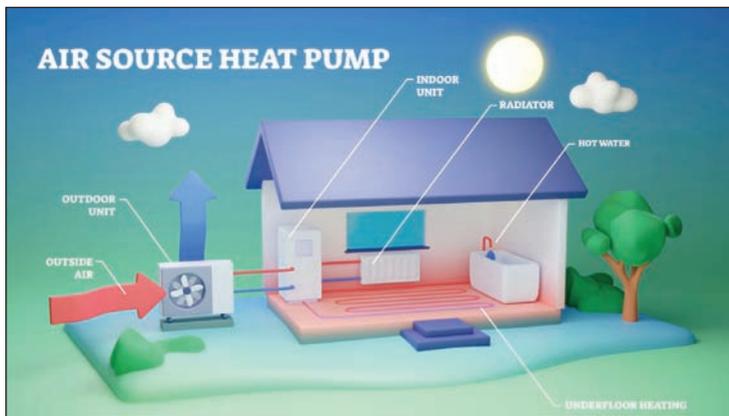
The highest-value way to reach zero is to stop the “bleeding” of heat and cooling through your walls and roof. About 25% of a home's heat escapes through an uninsulated roof, and another 33% vanishes

through uninsulated walls. Upgrading your loft insulation to the recommended 270mm is one of the cheapest projects with the fastest “payback” period—often paying for itself in energy savings within just a few years.

Beyond the big stuff, never underestimate the power of a “search and seal” mission. Draught-proofing is the low-hanging fruit of the energy world. Using weather-stripping around doors, caulking gaps in window frames, and even using a simple chimney balloon can stop the constant exchange of expensive indoor air with the “free” (but freezing) outdoor air. It's the home equivalent of putting a lid on a travel mug; it keeps the good stuff inside for longer.

Smart Efficiency and the “Ghost” Watts

Once your home is sealed tight, the next step is to optimize how you use the energy you do need. Switching to LED lighting is a classic tip for a reason: LEDs use about 75% less energy than old-school incandescent



bulbs and last significantly longer. When you combine this with smart plugs or “standby savers,” you can kill off “vampire power”—the energy your TV, microwave, and chargers suck up even when they are turned off.

Smart thermostats, like Nest or Tado, also offer incredible value by learning your habits. Instead of heating an empty house because you forgot to turn the dial down, these systems use geofencing to know when you've left for the day. By only heating the rooms you are actually using and lowering the temperature

by just one or two degrees, you can shave a massive percentage off your annual consumption without feeling a single shiver.

Harvesting the Sun and the Air

The final piece of the zero-energy puzzle is moving away from fossil fuels. If your home is well-insulated, an air-source heat pump can be a game-changer. These systems don't “create” heat; they move it from the outside air into your home, operating at efficiencies often over 300%. While the upfront cost can be high, many regions offer significant government

grants (like the UK's Boiler Upgrade Scheme) that can cover a large portion of the installation.

If you're already doing work on your roof—perhaps fixing those leaks we discussed earlier—that is the most cost-effective time to install Solar PV panels. You've already paid for the scaffolding, so the labor cost is halved. By generating your own “free” electricity during the day and using it to power your heat pump or charge your gadgets, you flip the script on the energy companies. You aren't just a consumer anymore; you're a micro-power plant.

Why Horse Racing is the Perfect Family Outing

Horse racing has evolved into one of the most vibrant and accessible family days out available.

Whether you are heading to the historic turf of Downpatrick or the polished surroundings of Down Royal, the atmosphere is less about the “punting” and far more about the “craic.” It is a rare sporting occasion where the thrill of the competition is matched by a genuine festival feel, designed to keep everyone from toddlers to grandparents entertained.

Dedicated Family Days and Activities

While every race meeting is welcoming, the specific “Family Fun Days” are where these venues truly shine. In 2026, events like the Fibus Family Race Day at Down Royal in April and the dedicated Family Fun Raceday at Downpatrick in July are highlights of the calendar. On these dates, the focus shifts heavily towards younger visitors. You can expect to find anything from falconry displays and animal farms to bouncy castles and children's discos. Many of these activities are included in the price of admission, meaning parents can enjoy the seven-race card while the children are kept busy with face painting or pony rides.

An Affordable Outdoor Adventure

One of the most appealing aspects of racing for families is the value



for money. In almost all cases across Northern Ireland, children under the age of 16 (and often under 18) gain entry for free when accompanied by a paying adult. This makes it significantly more affordable than a trip to the cinema or a theme park. Furthermore, many meetings allow families to bring their own picnics to designated areas. There is something undeniably special about spreading out a blanket on the grass, enjoying a homemade lunch, and cheering on a horse purely because you liked its name or the colours of the jockey's silks.

Seeing the Athletes Up Close

Beyond the fairground rides, horse racing offers a fantastic educational opportunity for children to learn about animals and sportsmanship. Taking a walk to the pre-parade ring allows kids to see the horses being prepared, giving them a sense of the scale and power of these animals. Watching the jockeys in their bright, multicoloured silks and seeing the bond they share with their mounts often sparks a lifelong interest in equestrianism. It is a sensory experience—the thud of hooves on the turf, the cheers of the crowd, and the sheer speed of the finish—that a television screen simply cannot replicate.

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Best places for a walk in and around Belfast

Belfast is a city that doesn't just sit in a valley; it practically hugs the hills and rivers that surround it.

Whether you're looking to burn off a Saturday morning fry or just want to see the city from a "Gulliver-sized" perspective, there's a trail for you. From rugged mountain peaks to tranquil riverside paths, the city offers a surprising variety of terrain for anyone looking to get some fresh air.

Cave Hill Country Park
Often called the "Sleeping Giant" because the silhouette of the hill looks like a reclining figure, Cave Hill is arguably Belfast's most iconic landmark. It's rumored to have inspired Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels, and it is easy to see why when you are standing at McArt's Fort. This ancient stone fort sits on a cliff edge nearly 368 meters above sea level, and on a clear day, you can see all the way across the water to Scotland.

Most walkers begin their journey at Belfast Castle, where you can grab a coffee in the castle cellar before starting the climb. It is a challenging, steep pull that requires decent boots, but the panoramic views of the shipyards and the lough make every step worth it.

Divis and the Black Mountain

If Cave Hill is the Sleeping Giant, Divis and the Black Mountain represent the city's rugged crown. Managed by the National Trust, this site offers a

wilder, more wind-swept moorland experience than the manicured city parks. The Ridge Trail is the standout here—a 4.2-mile loop that offers a 360-degree view of Northern Ireland. From one vantage point, you can spot the Mourne Mountains, Lough Neagh, and the bustling city docks.

The paths here are generally well-graveled, but the area is very exposed to the elements, so it's best to check the weather before heading up. After your walk, the Divis Coffee Barn is a must-visit; it is the highest coffee shop in Ireland and the perfect place for a post-walk traybake.

The Lagan Towpath
For those who prefer a horizontal challenge over a vertical one, the Lagan Towpath is a tranquil escape that follows the river and the old 18th-century canal system. It is a peaceful stretch of greenery where you are likely to see herons fishing in the shallows and the occasional rower gliding past. The quintessential Belfast Sunday stroll usually runs from Stranmillis toward Shaw's Bridge and the Lock Keeper's Inn.

Because the entire route is flat and paved, it is ideal for families, cyclists, and anyone looking for a meditative "dander" without the heavy breathing involved in a hill climb. It's a great way to see



the softer, greener side of the city's industrial history.

Stormont Estate
Walking through the gates of Stormont feels grand, and for good reason—it is the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, beyond the politics, the grounds are immaculately kept and surprisingly varied. The main draw is the Prince of Wales Avenue, a mile-long climb toward the Parliament Buildings that serves as a rite of passage for local walkers.

Beyond the main avenue, there are several waymarked woodland trails that feel miles away from the city noise. These paths offer a bit of shade and a chance to spot local wildlife, making it a great spot for a structured yet scenic afternoon out. The estate is particularly beautiful in the autumn when the rows of lime trees along the avenue turn vibrant shades of orange and gold.

Colin Glen Forest Park

Tucked away in West Belfast, Colin Glen is a lush "green lung" that offers everything from gentle woodland paths to high-adrenaline adventures. It follows the river through a scenic glen, providing a sense of escapism that feels remarkably remote despite its urban location. The park has gained a lot of fame recently for its Gruffalo Trail, which features life-sized sculptures of the famous characters from Julia Donaldson's books, making it a hit with younger explorers.

While most paths are easy to navigate, they can get a bit mucky after the classic Belfast rain, so it's worth wearing sturdy shoes to tackle the forest floor. Whether you are there for a quiet walk or to try out the world-class zip lines, it's one of the city's most versatile outdoor spaces.

NORTHERN IRELAND COLOUR BELT CHAMPIONSHIPS 2026

Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland, under the esteemed leadership of Master Leo Maguire, is a prominent force in the martial arts community, shaping the lives of children and adults across the province.

Master Maguire, a VI Degree Black Belt and President of the International Taekwon-Do Federation Northern Ireland (ITF N.I.), has established a network of schools dedicated to fostering confidence, discipline, and self-defense. His distinguished career as a national coach has led the Northern Ireland team to numerous medal victories at both national and international competitions.

The Taekwon-Do Northern Ireland schools offer a comprehensive program tailored to all ages, beginning with the "Little Tiger Cubs" for children aged 3 to 5. This "Learn Through Play" program introduces basic martial arts skills through a fun mixture of games and fitness drills, helping children develop improved balance, coordination, and respect.

For slightly older children, the "Active Tigers" class (ages 5 to 8) allows students to develop their Taekwon-Do skills at a more relaxed pace. The core "Tae-Kwon Do" program, for students aged 9 to adult, is designed to be safe, practical, and fun. It focuses on the fundamental tenets of the art, including self-defense and self-discipline, while building confidence and physical fitness.

Tae Kwon-Do NI are proud to announce that registration for the 2026 Colour Belt Championships is now OPEN! Make sure to scan the QR code on the advert to go to the Kihapp website to register.

This championships is open to colour belts from 9th kup to 1st kup and you can compete in Patterns, Sparring and Special technique. Our Northern Ireland Championships in September of 2025 was a HUGE success and we hope

to build on that success by seeing new faces competing and hopefully on the podium with your medals.

Here is the link to the website to see more information and registration - <https://www.kihapp.com/.../24061-northern-ireland-colour...>

Taekwon-Do NI is also very excited to announce that they are working towards sponsorship and fundraising for a trip to the World Championships that are taking place at the

end of October 2026 in Mexico! This is going to be an amazing life changing experience for the Squad and all involved with it!

With a wide range of classes available across Northern Ireland, anyone interested in experiencing the benefits of Taekwon-Do can easily get involved. To find a full list of classes and begin your journey, visit the official website at www.taekwondo-ni.co.uk or contact Leo Maguire directly at 07891 191494.

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CREATIVE BATHROOM DESIGN

Designing a bathroom is essentially a high-stakes puzzle where the pieces are made of porcelain and the mistakes can leak through your floorboards.

It is the one space in your home where “good enough” plumbing or a “mostly right” layout can lead to expensive headaches down the road. Whether you’re dreaming of a spa-like sanctuary or a high-efficiency family hub, the secret to success lies in balancing the technical demands of moisture and drainage with the aesthetic goals of a modern home.

Before you fall in love with a specific shade of artisan tile, you must nail down the floor plan. The golden rule of bathroom design is to respect the “wet zone” logic: moving plumbing lines—specifically the stack for the toilet or the drain for the shower—is the quickest way to vaporize your budget. If you can keep the fixtures in their original spots, you can redirect those savings into high-end finishes. When planning the space, try to avoid making the toilet the focal point. Tucking it behind a vanity or a stylish half-wall ensures that the first thing you see when you open the door isn’t a porcelain throne.

Furthermore, clearance is the difference between a room that feels luxurious and one that feels like a closet. You

generally want at least 30 inches of clear space in front of the toilet and vanity to allow for comfortable movement. This also includes checking the “swing radius” of your door; nothing ruins a sleek design faster than a door that bangs into the vanity or a glass shower partition every time someone enters.

One single overhead light is the natural enemy of a functional bathroom. It creates harsh, vertical shadows that make shaving or applying makeup nearly impossible. Instead, think of your lighting as a “layer cake.” You want task lighting, such as sconces placed at eye level on either side of the mirror, to provide even illumination across your face. This is supplemented by ambient lighting, usually in the form of recessed ceiling lights on a dimmer switch, which allows you to shift the mood from “bright morning routine” to “relaxed evening soak.” For a touch of hotel-inspired luxury, consider accent lighting like an LED strip under a floating vanity or inside a shower niche to provide a soft glow during the

night. A bathroom is a brutal environment of high moisture and constant temperature swings, so your material choices need to be as durable as they are beautiful. While marble is a classic choice, it is porous and prone to etching from something as simple as a splash of toothpaste. Quartz is often the smarter alternative for countertops because it is non-porous and virtually stain-resistant. For flooring, porcelain tile is the industry standard for a reason; it is denser and more waterproof than standard ceramic, making it the ideal candidate for a high-traffic “splash zone.”

Ventilation is arguably the least “sexy” part of a remodel, but it is the most critical for the room’s longevity. Without a high-quality exhaust fan to clear humidity, even the most expensive wallpaper will peel and mould will eventually crash the party. When shopping for a fan, look for a low “sone” rating to ensure it operates at a whisper rather than a roar. A smart pro tip is to install the fan on a timer switch so it can continue to run for 20 minutes after you’ve finished your shower, ensuring the air is completely dry before the fan shuts off. Finally, keep clutter at bay by building in



night.

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“invisible” storage. Rather than relying on plastic hanging racks that clutter your shower, have your contractor build a recessed niche between the wall studs for soaps and shampoos. You can apply this same logic to medicine cabinets—modern versions can be recessed into the wall so they sit flush with the tile, providing hidden storage without the bulky profile of a traditional cabinet. To go the extra mile, ask your electrician to install a power outlet inside a vanity drawer; this allows you to keep hair dryers and electric toothbrushes plugged in and tucked away, keeping your countertops pristine.

When runners choose to

“Planting the seeds of hope across Northern Ireland”

The Phoenix Energy Belfast City Marathon is proud to shine a spotlight on charities making a real difference across Northern Ireland, and recently spotlighted PIPS Suicide Prevention Ireland, a leading mental health and suicide prevention charity supporting individuals, families, and communities in crisis.

Founded in 2003, PIPS Suicide Prevention Ireland has grown to become a leading suicide prevention charity and is now also a founding partner of the National Suicide Prevention Network, in conjunction with The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales. With locations across the region, PIPS Charity delivers a wide range of services including crisis intervention, counselling, advocacy, community outreach, befriending support, and children and young people’s services in Belfast for those aged 4–18 — ensuring people can access help when they need it most.

PIPS Charity also operates a Friday night crisis helpline, providing vital support when other services may be unavailable, alongside crisis walk-in support at its Belfast offices during opening hours, offering immediate, face-to-face help for those in distress.

At the heart of PIPS Charity’s work is its mission of striving for a compassionate society free from suicide. Guided by this purpose, the charity supports thousands of people each year through some of the most difficult moments of their lives, pro-



viding professional, empathetic, and life-saving care.

Alongside frontline services, PIPS Charity plays a strong role in advocacy and public campaigning. Their recent campaign, “Too Many Lives Lost to Suicide,” calls on government to fully fund Northern Ireland’s mental health strategy following the publication of statistics showing 290 registered suicide deaths in 2024. The campaign highlights the urgent need for sustained investment in prevention, early intervention, and crisis services to help save lives.

As a charity that is non-government funded and relies heavily on fundraising and donations to maintain its services, PIPS Charity depends on the generosity of individuals, businesses and the wider community to continue delivering vital support across Northern Ireland.

When runners choose to

fundraise for PIPS Charity through the Phoenix Energy Belfast City Marathon, they are helping to ensure that people in crisis can access professional care, families can receive support through bereavement, and communities can be strengthened through prevention and education — creating lasting change and hope for the future.

Those wishing to support PIPS Charity’s advocacy work can sign the charity’s petition calling for full funding of the mental health strategy here:

Sign the petition here: <https://c.org/8yfY7jVvDZ>.

To learn more about PIPS Suicide Prevention Ireland, visit their website: <https://pipscharity.com>

To register your interest in running for PIPS Charity at the Phoenix Energy Belfast City Marathon and Team Relay 2026, please visit the Belfast City Marathon website charity tab.

British pet parents struggling to cover cost of rising vet bills

One-in-three UK pet parents delay or skip vet treatment because of high costs

Majority of dog and cat owners support an end to postcode pricing at vets

Jollyes, the UK’s leading value pet retailer, offers major savings on core vet services such as vaccinations and microchipping, making high quality pet care available to all

As the UK’s leading value pet retailer Jollyes Pets, today released new research that laid bare the concern felt by pet parents about the cost of rising vet services.

In a survey conducted last week by OnePoll[2] on behalf of Jollyes Pets, almost one-in-three (30 per cent) pet parents said they’d delayed or skipped treatment for their pet because of rising vet prices.

And almost a quarter (25 per cent) said they’d sacrificed something they wanted so they could cover a vet’s bill.

What’s more over six-in-ten (63 per cent) of UK dog and cat owners said vets should offer consistent national pricing for the services they provide.

And according to the survey, 92 per cent of pet parents want vets to follow Jollyes’ lead and introduce nationwide prices and transparent marketing, clearly putting costs on display in vet clinics and on their websites.

Jollyes Pets is committed

to making high-quality pet care a right for all, not a privilege for the few.

That’s why prices at Jollyes’ vet clinics are at the same low prices nationwide, with none of the local price variations that other big vet groups apply.

A two-course vaccination for a new puppy or kitten is just £55.00 at any Jollyes vet clinic and a booster vaccination for either a dog or cat, is a flat £35.00.

Chipping a dog or cat at is £20.00 at Jollyes Pets and a combined first vaccination course and microchip is £68.00.

Jollyes Pets chief executive officer-designate Adam Dury said:

“It’s clear pet parents across the UK are really struggling to fund vet bills that have exploded over the past five years.

“While our vet clinics offer simple services such as vaccines and microchipping, those services cover nine in ten visits to a vet – with significant savings.

“As our survey shows, customers want prices transparency and lower prices with the same price from one end of the country to the other.

“That’s why we’re focused on opening more stores to provide communities access to lower vet clinic prices for the services they need.”



The vet market is dominated by six large veterinary groups, that control 60 per cent of the market and Jollyes Pets offers a low-cost, high-quality alternative for services such as vaccinations and micro-chipping that’s the price leader, over 40 per cent better value.

In the next two months, regulation is expected that will improve price transparency in the £6.3bn sector that, according to the Office for National Statistics has seen cost of taking pets to the vet rise by almost 50 per cent since 2020.

Across its 73 vet clinics nationwide, Jollyes now offers over 20,000 hours of appointment time with Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) vets – an increase of 9.3 per cent on the previous year

and has over 100 trained colleagues (SQP) licensed to offer advice on over-the-counter medicines.

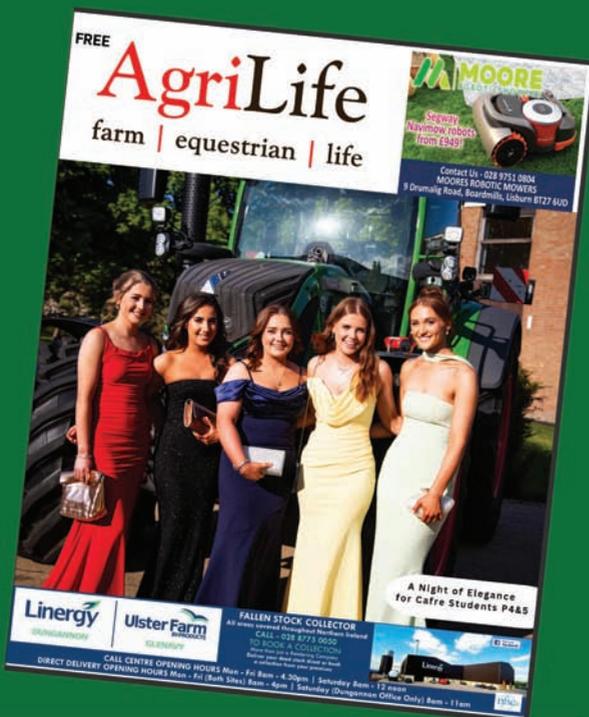
Bookings can also now be made online with fully trained Royal Veterinary College-accredited vets who work with long-term sector experts from Evile & Jones.

Over the past three years Jollyes has almost doubled the number of stores across the UK, becoming a clear challenger brand in the UK pet retail market.

Earlier this month Jollyes released strong trading results that demonstrated how significant rises in food and vet bills over the year were impacting household budgets.

In late 2025 the RSPCA reported pet abandonment and neglect cases were at a five-year high because of these economic concerns.

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SPRING HOME TREND FOR SOULFUL SANCTUARY

As we lean into the bloom of 2026, the era of “stark minimalism” and “sad beiges” has officially been retired.

This spring, home design is moving towards what experts are calling the “Soulful Sanctuary”—a thoughtful blend of high-tech wellness, raw natural textures, and a heavy dose of personal character. If you are looking to refresh your space this season, the shift is away from clinical perfection and towards environments that feel layered, lived-in, and restorative.

The Colour Story: Mineral Greens and Luminous Teals

The palette for Spring 2026 is grounded in nature but carries a distinct, digital edge. While previous years leaned heavily on sugary pastels, this season prioritises depth and energy. Transformative Teal has emerged as the defining shade of the year, acting as a blue-green hybrid that balances biological calm with technological progress. We are seeing this used boldly on kitchen cabinetry and velvet upholstery, often paired with dusty mineral greens and soft mints that serve as the new neutrals. To brighten the mood, designers are layering in Celestial Yellow accents, which mimic the soft, energising glow of early morning spring sunlight without feeling overwhelming.

The Lace Revival and Modern Heirloom Textiles

In a surprising turn towards a more traditional aesthetic, lace has become the breakout textile for 2026. However, this is not a return to your grandmother’s fussy doilies; it is being reinterpreted through a modern, minimalist lens known as “pared-back intentionality.” This trend manifests in layered linens and bedding featuring delicate broderie-trimmed edges or oversized lace patterns. When used against sleek, contemporary furniture, these textiles filter the spring light into intricate patterns across the floor, adding a sense of soft, curated nostalgia to otherwise modern rooms.

Biophilia 2.0: Integrated Nature and Wellness

We have moved far beyond simply placing a potted plant in a corner. Spring 2026 is defined by integrated nature, where the outdoors is built directly into the home’s infrastructure. Living walls and moss art are increasingly popular in transitional spaces like hallways and bathrooms, while smart circadian lighting systems have become a standard feature for home wellness. These systems automatically adjust the colour temperature of a room to match the natural cycle of the sun, helping to regulate sleep and mood



as the days grow longer. This focus on “honesty” extends to materials as well, with furniture crafted from unrefined timber, agave fibres, and innovative coffee-ground composites.

Sculptural Forms and Modern Medievalism

Furniture silhouettes are taking a dramatic turn this season, showcasing a fascinating clash between the heavy and the soft. On one hand, we see the rise of Modern Medieval influences, which utilise dark woods, wrought iron accents, and protective, grounded shapes. On the other hand, there is a continued obsession with “fat” furniture—sculptural

armchairs and sofas with exaggerated curves and “chubby” profiles that command attention. This mix of architectural edges and oversized comfort represents a departure from the “Modern Farmhouse” look, moving instead towards a sense of curated character that blends 1970s retro-pop with genuine antiques.

Stealth Tech: The Invisible Home

By 2026, the ultimate luxury in home technology is its invisibility. The goal for the spring “clean-up” is to remove visual clutter, which has led to the rise of Stone Tech. Wireless charging capabilities are

now being seamlessly integrated directly into stone countertops and wooden side tables, making tangled cables a thing of the past. Similarly, televisions are being replaced by “immersive murals” or screens that roll away entirely when not in use, ensuring that the technology in your home is felt through convenience but rarely seen as a distraction.

A Quick Tip for the Season: If you aren’t ready for a full renovation, try swapping your hardware. Replacing polished brass with sanded stainless steel or brushed chrome is one of the fastest ways to bring a room into 2026.

Finance Tips for Families

Spring serves as an ideal midpoint between the expensive festive season and the high costs of the summer holidays, making it the perfect time to dust off your bank accounts and ensure your household is on a steady footing.

Re-evaluating the Household Budget

If you set a New Year’s resolution to stick to a strict budget, March is often the month where that initial momentum starts to falter. Instead of letting old habits creep back in, take an afternoon to review your spending from the first quarter of the year. By analysing your recent bank statements, you can identify “spending leaks”—those small, recurring costs like forgotten gym memberships or excessive takeaway orders—and redirect that money toward more meaningful goals. As the weather warms up, your heating bills should naturally begin to drop; rather than letting that extra cash disappear into daily spending, try moving it directly into an emergency fund.

Preparing for the Summer Squeeze

For most families, the summer months bring a significant spike in expenses due to childcare and holiday bookings. If you wait until June to start thinking about these costs, your credit cards are likely to feel the strain. Many summer camps and activity programmes offer “early bird” discounts that expire during the spring, so booking your children’s places now can save you a substantial amount of



money. It is also wise to establish a “holiday sinking fund” by calculating the total cost of your summer plans and dividing that figure by the number of weeks left until you depart, allowing you to save in manageable increments.

Navigating the End of the Tax Year

In the UK, the arrival of spring coincides with the end of the tax year on 5 April, which presents a unique opportunity to maximise your savings. This is the final chance to utilise your annual ISA allowance, ensuring that any interest or capital gains your savings earn remain tax-free. If you

have any spare cash from a work bonus or a tax rebate, topping up your pension or your children’s Junior ISAs before the deadline can provide a significant boost to your family’s long-term financial security. Taking a few moments to check your tax code is also sensible, as errors can often lead to you overpaying without even realising it.

By tackling these tasks now, you clear away the financial clutter and create the breathing room necessary to enjoy the warmer months without the shadow of debt or overspending hanging over you.



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HYUNDAI ALL-ELECTRIC CONCEPT THREE

Concept THREE, Hyundai Motor's first compact EV concept under the IONIQ sub-brand, embodies Art of Steel design language and signals the brand's planned expansion into the European compact EV market.

Hyundai Motor Company unveiled Concept THREE, its first compact electric vehicle (EV) concept under the IONIQ sub-brand, at IAA Mobility 2025 in Munich.

The debut represents Hyundai Motor's commitment to offering exceptional EVs in a rapidly evolving global market, where the focus shifts from technological advancement to experiences of emotional fulfillment.

As the first compact EV concept under the IONIQ sub-brand, Concept THREE signals Hyundai Motor's future expansion into a new vehicle category, complementing its existing midsize and large EV models.

With Europe experiencing a surging demand for compact

EVs — driven by urbanization, sustainability regulations and the growing need for space-efficient solutions — the Concept THREE demonstrates Hyundai Motor's vision for meeting this demand by drawing on its advanced electrification capabilities.

Complementing its strategic positioning, Concept THREE's innovative design also underscores the brand's commitment to delivering a meaningful, emotionally resonant experience in an accessible and practical package.

Hyundai Motor anticipates the introduction of Concept THREE to set the tone for its next chapter of design innovation and strengthen its competitive position



in the electrification journey.

Art of Steel transforms the strength and flexibility of steel into a language of sculptural beauty. Inspired by Hyundai Motor's advanced steel technologies, the material's natural formability reveals flowing volumes and precise lines that evoke the distinctive aesthetic quality of steel —

powerful, gentle and timeless.

Aero Hatch: The sculpted body creates enveloping forms using three main surfaces, while intersecting lines add visual tension. The Aero Hatch profile delivers aerodynamic efficiency and a distinctive roofline combined with a vertical tailgate, emphasizing urban versatility.

Parametric Pixel: Parametric Pixel lightings are featured on both front and rear of the Concept THREE. The pixels are now more expressive, forming a gradient that adds depth and visual rhythm to the overall design.

Material-driven design: The exterior wears an anodized-effect finish that channels the spirit of

Hyundai's Art of Steel design language—a celebration of material as muse. Lemon-tinted glass and matching wheels forge vibrant links between exterior and interior, the cabin defined by soft yellow and grey tonalities that play across shifting textures to create a space that's both calm and expressive. Furnished Space: The

cabin design creates environments that feel warm, intuitive, and calming. By embracing soft volumes and user-focused layouts, it fosters a sense of serenity and clarity.

Customizable Experience: Modular 'Bring Your Own Lifestyle (BYOL)' widgets offer tailored experiences that allow customers to personalize their journey.

Mr. Pix: A symbolic character integrated throughout the car evokes curiosity, joy and emotional connection, offering playful storytelling through 'hidden surprises' and interactive design elements.

Sustainability: The interior envisions the use of sustainable materials such as ocean

waste textiles and lightweight aluminum foam. These materials underscore Hyundai Motor's long-term vision to reduce environmental impact while delivering premium design.

Nearly 80 percent of Hyundai Motor vehicles sold in Europe are locally manufactured, reflecting the brand's deep integration and ability to tailor solutions to the unique mobility needs of both urban areas and rural communities.

Compact EVs play a critical role in addressing Europe's urban challenges, as exemplified by the debut of the Concept THREE, underscoring Hyundai Motor's mission to make electrification accessible and attractive for European consumers.

BMW Unveils the All-New iX3

BMW has officially signaled the start of a "new era" with the premiere of the all-new BMW iX3, the first series-production model of the Neue Klasse.

This next-generation Sports Activity Vehicle (SAV) introduces a radical shift in design, sustainability, and digital architecture, aiming to skip an entire vehicle generation in terms of technological advancement.

Performance and Ultra-Fast Charging

The iX3 50 xDrive will launch as the longest-range battery electric vehicle (BEV) in the UK, boasting a WLTP range of up to 500 miles. This is made possible by sixth-generation BMW eDrive technology, featuring high-voltage batteries with new cylindrical cells that increase energy density by 20%.

Key performance and charging metrics include:

- Output: 469 hp and 645 Nm of torque.
- Acceleration: 0 to 62 mph in 4.9 seconds.
- Charging: An 800-volt architecture allows for 400 kW rapid charging, adding 231 miles of range in just 10 minutes.
- Bidirectional Charging: The iX3 debuts Vehicle-to-Home (V2H) and Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) capabilities for the brand.

A Digital "Superbrain" Architecture



The iX3 debuts a "digital nervous system" powered by four high-performance computers known as superbrains. The "Heart of Joy" unit manages driving dynamics, processing data 10 times faster than previous systems to coordinate braking, steering, and power delivery.

Inside, the cabin is defined by the BMW Panoramic iDrive and Operating System X. This setup features a full-width windscreen display (Panoramic Vision) that

projects information across the driver's entire field of vision, paired with a newly designed 3D Head-Up Display.

Sustainability and Design BMW has adopted a "secondary first" approach, with approximately one-third of the iX3 constructed from recycled materials, including marine plastics and PET textiles. Consequently, the vehicle's lifecycle carbon footprint is 34% lower than its predecessor. The iX3 will be manufactured at the fossil-fuel-free Plant

Debrecen in Hungary.

The exterior introduces a "reduced" design language, featuring vertical kidney grilles and flush door handles, while the interior is entirely leather-free, utilizing Econeer materials.

Pricing and UK Availability

The BMW iX3 50 xDrive is priced from £58,755 OTR. While series production begins in autumn 2025, the first UK customer deliveries are scheduled for 7 March 2026

Keep on Truckin'

The UK pickup market in 2026 has undergone a quiet revolution. No longer just "rattle-and-hum" workhorses for muddy fields, these vehicles have become the Swiss Army knives of the British road. Here is the story of the five best pickups currently available in NI.

The Tech-Savvy Titan: Ford Ranger

If you take a stroll through a leafy suburb or a bustling construction site, you're almost guaranteed to see a Ford Ranger. In 2026, it remains the undisputed king of the UK market. The big news this year is the Ranger PHEV, which has become the darling of the "lifestyle" crowd. It offers over 25 miles of pure electric range—perfect for sneaking through Zero Emission Zones—while still packing the 3.5-tonne towing punch needed for a weekend with the horsebox. For those who want more "oomph," the Raptor variant remains the ultimate toy, featuring Fox Live Valve dampers that make speed bumps feel like cotton wool.

The Indestructible Legend: Toyota Hilux

Further north, where the roads turn to gravel and the weather turns to spite, the Toyota Hilux is the local hero. Now in its ninth generation for 2026, the Hilux has finally embraced the future without losing its "bulletproof" soul. The new 48V Hybrid system

has smoothed out the diesel clatter, making long hauls on the M6 significantly more civilized. It's the truck you buy when you don't just want to get there, but you absolutely must get back. With Toyota's 10-year service-activated warranty, it's the closest thing to a lifelong companion you can buy on four wheels.

The Executive Suite: Volkswagen Amarok

For the business owner who needs to tow a mini-digger on Monday but host a client on Tuesday, there is the Volkswagen Amarok. While it shares its DNA with the Ford Ranger, the VW feels like it went to a much posher school. The interior is a masterclass in "truck-luxury," featuring high-grade leathers and a minimalist dashboard that wouldn't look out of place in a Touareg. It's the quietest ride in the segment, making it the premier choice for those who treat their cab as a mobile office.

The No-Nonsense Workhorse: Isuzu D-Max

If the Amarok is a tailored suit, the Isuzu D-Max



is a pair of high-quality steel-toed boots. It doesn't pretend to be an SUV. It's rugged, slightly loud, and incredibly honest. In 2026, the D-Max EV has started appearing on fleet rosters, offering a 1-tonne payload with zero tailpipe emissions—a feat many thought impossible for a dedicated 4x4. For the traditionalists, the V-Cross trim offers just enough creature comforts (like Apple CarPlay and heated seats) to keep you happy without making you feel like you're being "soft."

The Value King: KGM Musso

Finally, we have the KGM Musso (formerly SsangYong). In a world where pickup prices have crept toward luxury SUV territory, the Musso remains the champion of the "more for less" philosophy. It's unique in the UK for offering the Saracen+ model, which features an extra-long load bed that makes it a favourite for landscapers and logistics firms. It might not have the "badge appeal" of a Ford or VW, but with a refined multi-link rear suspension, it actually rides more comfortably than many of its leaf-sprung rivals.

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WARM HEALTHY HOMES STRATEGY LAUNCHED

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons recently set out a long-term, cross-government approach to tackling fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

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Speaking after visiting a home in Hopewell Crescent, Belfast to launch 'Warm Healthy Homes: A Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy 2026-2036', Minister Lyons said: "I am pleased to launch the Warm Healthy Homes strategy, a new approach that has secured Executive backing and which will help lift families out of fuel poverty.

"This is a comprehensive 10-year strategy to ensure that cold, damp homes become a thing of the past. Fuel poverty affects nearly one in four households, and its consequences are linked to poor health and financial stress, particularly for the less well off. This strategy sets out a clear pathway to change that."

The Minister continued: "Together with the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Housing Supply Strategy, the Warm Healthy Homes Strategy will tackle the root causes of fuel poverty and provide meaningful measures and actions which will make a real difference to people across Northern Ireland.

"As part of the strategy, I will introduce a new Warm Healthy Homes Fund next year, for which I intend to allocate £150million to deliver of energy efficiency investment in its first five years. This fund will transform low-income households, modernising energy inefficient homes. Through this fund, along with energy wellbeing advice from

trusted partners in the community, I want to ensure those worst affected have the information and means to upgrade their homes for the better. I also want to improve housing standards and my Department has already begun consulting on a revised Decent Homes Standard for social housing."

Householder Trevor Rainey, who had a Low Carbon retrofit upgrade fitted to his home by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive last summer, said: "Since the work was done my bills are a lot lower, the house is warmer and the hot water is great in the mornings. I'd recommend it to anyone."

The full Warm Healthy Homes: A Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy 2026-2036 document is available at: www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/warm-healthy-homes-2026-2036-new-fuel-poverty-strategy-northern-ireland

The Minister has made a written ministerial statement to the Assembly: www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/announcement-publication-warm-healthy-homes-strategy

After the Rain: Finding and Fixing Roof Leaks

The storm has finally broken, leaving behind that crisp, petrichor-scented air and a sense of relief.

But as the clouds part, a rhythmic drip... drip... drip... echoes through the house. A roof leak is rarely a sudden, dramatic event; it's usually a quiet invader that waits for the silence after the rain to reveal its path. Tracking down the source is often more of a detective's game than a handyman's chore, as water is notoriously deceptive about where it enters and where it eventually lands.

Because of gravity and the pitch of your roof, the water entering your home rarely takes a direct vertical path.

It might seep through a crack near the chimney, run six feet down a rafter, and then finally soak through your ceiling in the middle of a bedroom. When you spot a "tea stain"—those telltale brownish or yellowish rings—on your ceiling, remember that the actual hole in your roof could be several feet away from the spot on your drywall.

If you have attic access, the best time to investigate is while the roof is still wet. Armed with a flashlight, look for damp insulation or dark streaks along the wooden rafters. If the rain has already stopped, look for "shiners"—nails that missed the rafter and are now covered in white frost or rust. These cold nails often collect condensation or serve as the perfect "dripping

point" for water traveling along the underside of the roof deck.

Stepping outside provides a different set of clues. You aren't just looking for a hole; you're looking for irregularities in the roof's "armor." Missing or cracked shingles are the most obvious culprits, appearing as dark, bald patches against the uniform texture of the roof. However, the most vulnerable areas are the "penetrations"—anywhere a builder cut a hole for a chimney, a plumbing vent, or a skylight.

These areas rely on metal flashing and rubber seals that often dry out and crack long before the shingles themselves fail.

Keep an eye on your gutters as well. If you notice a heavy accumulation of black, sandy granules in the troughs, your shingles are shedding their protective layer. This is a sign of an aging roof that is becoming brittle and losing its ability to shed water effectively. Similarly, clogged gutters are a primary cause of leaks; when water can't flow away, it backs up under the shingles or rots the wooden fascia boards behind the gutter line.

The most effective way to handle a leak is to prevent it through seasonal check-ups. Ideally, you should clear

your gutters twice a year—once in late autumn and again in spring—to ensure water has a clear path to the ground. While you're up there, a quick visual check of the "pipe boots" (the rubber seals around plumbing vents) can save you thousands. These rubber components typically last about ten years, which is often half the lifespan of the shingles themselves. Replacing a cracked boot is a simple, inexpensive fix that prevents a major interior headache.

When it comes to repairs, many small issues have straightforward solutions. A single missing shingle or a small crack in the flashing can often be addressed with high-grade roofing cement or a targeted patch. However, if your roof is over twenty years old and you see widespread curling or "balding," a patch may only be a temporary bandage. In these cases, a full replacement is usually the only way to ensure the structural integrity of your home.

DIY repairs are excellent for pride and the pocketbook, but roofs are inherently dangerous. If the pitch of your roof is steep or you feel even slightly uneasy on a ladder, call a professional. No repair bill is more expensive than an afternoon in the emergency room.

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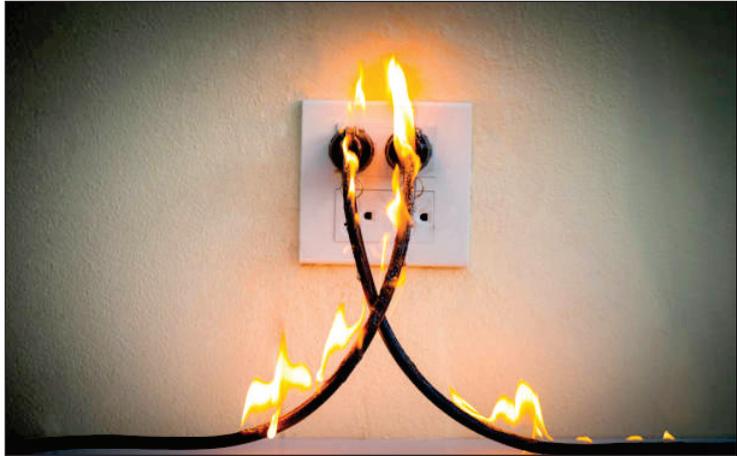
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NIFRS Reveals Highest House Fire Fatalities in 2025

2025 was the highest year of house fire fatalities in a quarter of a century with 16 losses of life.



The statistics from Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) reveal that half of the incidents were smoking material related with electrical causes contributing to 4 fatalities. A third of the incidents did not have working smoke alarms.

It is known that 75% of the fatalities were people who lived alone, and over 65% of those were also in NIFRS People at Risk group.

NIFRS is urging the public to start the year by taking extra care at home with their safety habits. Most fires are preventable and having working smoke alarms and changing behaviours that create risk can save your life.

NIFRS Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Marcus Wright said:

"Our thoughts and sympathies are with the families and loved ones of those who have died in 2025 in house fires. This is the highest number of fatalities since 1999 and is a key priority and concern for us. The fires show how quickly everyday situations can turn into life-changing emergencies leading to devastating impacts for our community.

"We are pleading with

the public to make home fire safety a priority to prevent further loss of life or serious injury.

"Smoking materials has been the leading cause of fatal house fires, accounting for a staggering 43% of such deaths over the past 10 years. We strongly advise for you to smoke outdoors at your property and to extinguish cigarettes before placing them in a suitable container, such as a metal bin.

"A majority of the fatal fires started in a bedroom followed by living room and kitchen. Therefore, we ask that you check your smoke alarms are fitted, tested regularly, and replace batteries when needed. Please also consider installing smoke alarms in the rooms you use the most. We would also advise heat detectors in your kitchen and utility.

"As we continue to be in the high-risk time of year for house fire, we are asking you to take time to reach out to vulnerable family members, neighbours and friends who may need support to stay safe from fire, especially those who live alone. If you have any concerns about this person, you can also complete our

online Home Fire Safety Check with them, or request an in-person visit.

"We are also calling on our partner agencies to make use of our referral system for Home Fire Safety Checks. You are the 'eyes and ears' in our community to helping us keep those most at risk safe from fire.

"We are currently considering what more can be done, over and above what is currently being done, to help keep those most at risk safe from fire, as we continue to educate our community and deliver engagement activities."

If you fit NIFRS Person at Risk criteria, have no access to the internet or unable to complete the online self-assessment, please contact NIFRS by phone to receive a free in person Home Fire Safety Check on 028 9266 4221.

MAINTENANCE TASKS FOR APRIL

April is nature's alarm clock, but it's also the month where your home and garden demand a little manual intervention to shake off the winter blues.

As the soil warms and the days stretch out, the priority shifts from simply surviving the cold to preparing for the "high season" of summer living. It is the bridge between the hibernation of March and the frantic growth of May, making it the perfect window to tackle tasks before they become overwhelming.

The Garden Awakening

In the garden, your primary mission is to get ahead of the growth curve. The Maiden Mow is the first major milestone; when the grass finally starts to push upward, it is crucial to set your mower blades high for these first few passes, as scalping the lawn too early can stress the root system. While you're out there, launch a proactive strike against weeds. Young, tender weeds are significantly easier to pull than the established monsters they will become by June. Once the beds are clear, applying a thick layer of mulch will act as both a weed suppressant and a moisture-lock for the warmer months ahead. Don't forget the "room" outdoors either—April is the ideal time to scrub down the patio furniture and check if your wooden decking or benches need a fresh seal of oil to survive the summer sun.

Shielding the Exterior
Moving to the house itself, your home's exterior has likely spent the last few months taking

a beating from wind and rain. Start by inspecting the gutters; even if you cleared them in the autumn, winter storms often deposit a fresh layer of grit and stray twigs that can lead to overflows during April showers. While you have the ladder out, give the windows and frames a deep scrub. Winter leaves a greasy film of salt and pollution on the glass that dulls the natural light entering your home. A thorough cleaning doesn't just improve your view—it allows you to inspect the seals and frames for any rot or cracks that might have developed during the freeze-thaw cycles of the colder months.

Technical Health and Safety

Inside the home, the focus should shift toward efficiency and safety. Before the first heatwave hits, service your cooling systems or at the very least, swap out the HVAC filters. A dusty filter forces the system to work harder, driving up your energy bills and shortening the unit's lifespan. Similarly, take a moment to pull your refrigerator away from the wall and vacuum the condenser coils. Dust buildup here acts as insulation, making your



fridge work overtime to keep things cold. This is also the standard time to perform your bi-annual safety check: test the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to ensure they are fully operational for the season ahead.

The Seasonal Transition

Finally, April is the best time for a functional declutter. As you rotate your wardrobe from heavy wools to lighter linens, be ruthless with what you put into storage; if you didn't wear a coat all winter, it likely doesn't deserve space in your closet next year. This seasonal swap-over is the perfect excuse to deep-clean the hidden

corners of your bedroom and storage areas that usually get bypassed. By clearing out the physical and mental "winter weight" now, you create a refreshed environment that matches the energy of the world outside.

A Quick Warning:

Before you hook up the garden hose for the first time, check your outdoor taps for hairline fractures. If water was trapped in the pipe during a freeze, the first time you turn the tap on could result in a hidden leak behind your siding or in your basement.



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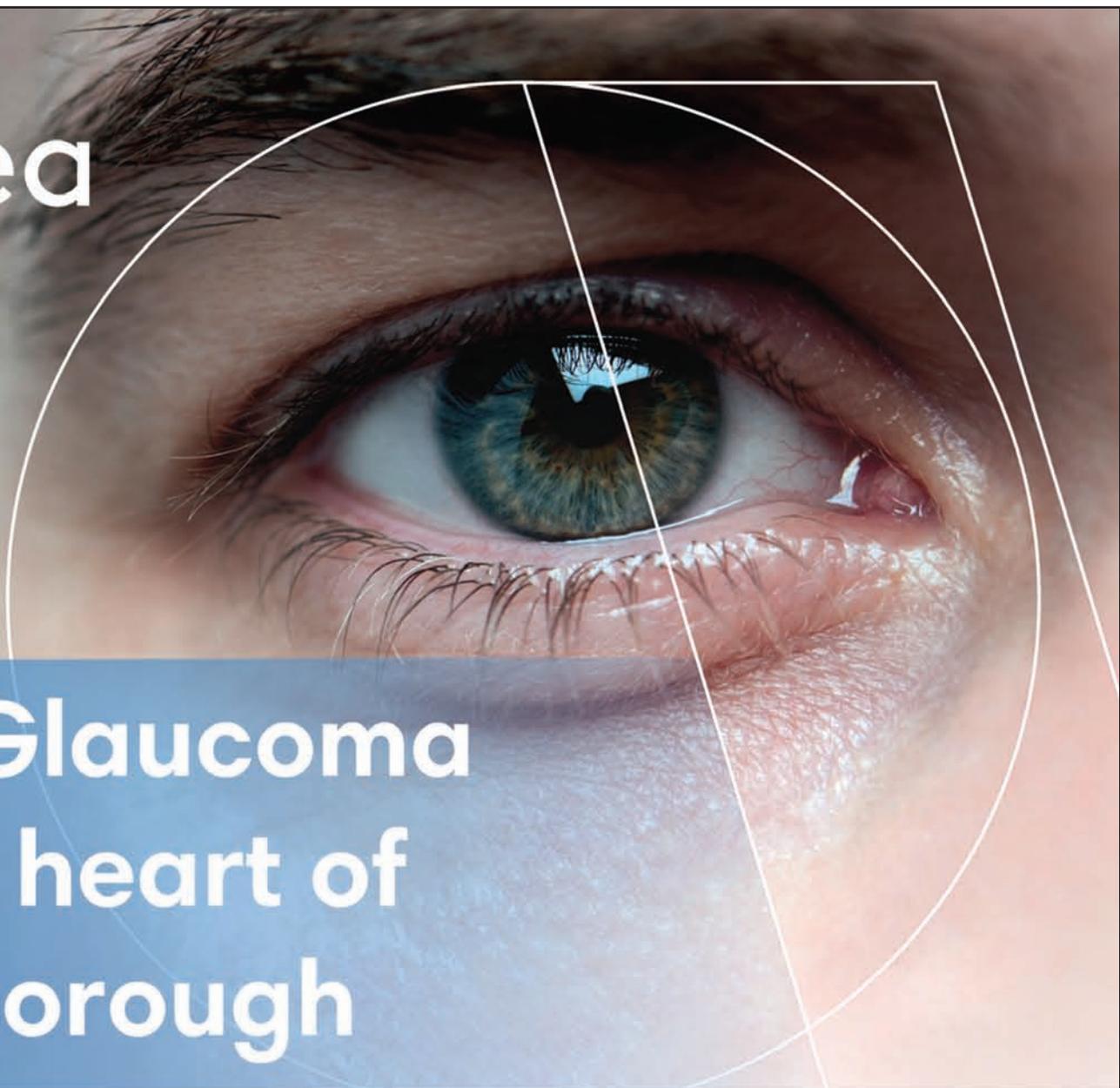
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