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Education Minister Paul Givan is pictured at Anahilt Pre-school Playgroup, Hillsborough with pupils and Dara Graham, Preschool Leader.

EDUCATION MINISTER ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION PROVISION

Education Minister Paul Givan has announced that an additional 102 pre-school settings across Northern Ireland have been approved to offer full-time pre-school education from September 2026.

This is the second cohort of settings which have been approved to move to offering full time places under the Pre-school Standardisation programme.

The Minister made the announcement following a recent visit to Anahilt Pre-school Playgroup, one of

the 102 settings approved to transition to the standardised 22.5 hours per week in September 2026.

Paul Givan said: "The Pre-school Standardisation Programme has already seen 105 settings successfully transition to full time sessions in September 2025.

It is already making a difference to over 2,500 children and their families.

"Today's announcement is another step forward in my commitment to standardise all funded pre-school education provision to 22.5 hours per week.

"A further 102 settings have been approved to

move to full time sessions from September 2026. This will mean that approximately 50% of pre-school provision, in every area of Northern Ireland, will be full time.

**Continued on
page 4**

Planning approval for over-55s housing development

Recently the Planning Committee at Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council granted approval for a social housing development for over 55-year-olds to be located on Lisburn's Moira Road.

The location of the proposed scheme is adjacent to 3 to 19 Moira Road, Lisburn.

Alderman James Tinsley, Planning Committee Chair, said: "This new development is expected to result in a high quality residential scheme, designed to complement the surrounding area. Alpha Housing, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, has identified a need for this type of housing in Lisburn.

"We are pleased to approve plans that meet the objectives of our statutory plans. The provision of much-needed social housing for over-55s in a highly accessible and sustainable location aligns with our Local

Development Plan and Community Plan."

The permitted development also includes communal amenity space, bin and cycle storage, landscaping and car parking.

The planning application was submitted by TSA Planning on behalf of property developers Bluehouse Development Ltd. Alpha Housing intends to purchase the site subject to planning.

Alpha Housing provides housing and tenant support across Northern Ireland, mostly through provision of sheltered housing for older people. It is committed to an ambitious growth phase focusing on new build projects to provide homes for 'independent older people'.

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150 years of Seymour Street Methodist Church exhibition

A new free exhibition exploring the history of Seymour Street Methodist Church has opened at the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum. ‘Seymour Street 150: Methodism in Lisburn’ is open to the public Monday to Saturday from 9.30am to 5.00pm.

There is a wide selection of objects on display relating to the early history of Methodism in Lisburn, as well as church life at Seymour Street over the course of one and a half centuries. One of the rarest artefacts is a letter written by the founder of Methodism, the Rev. John Wesley (1703-91), who preached in Lisburn’s Market House – now the museum – for the first time in 1756. He would return to Lisburn on 13 occasions.

At the official launch of the exhibition, Councillor Tim Mitchell, Communities and Wellbeing Chairman, remarked:

“As with any anniversary, planning is essential. Our museum has been working with Seymour Street Methodist for almost two years to create this exhibition to mark 150 years of their church. The museum is an appropriate location for such an exhibition, given that it is the same building that John Wesley began



Councillor Tim Mitchell (centre), Communities and Wellbeing Chairman, with the Rev. David Turtle, Minister of Seymour Street Methodist Church, and Shirley Carrington, Pastoral Assistant, at the exhibition launch.

his mission to consolidate Methodism in Lisburn when he preached here almost 270 years ago. “I would like to personally congratulate Seymour Street Methodist Church on its 150th anniversary. It is a major milestone, and like all the churches in the Lisburn and Castlereagh area, they have played and continue to play an important role

in the communities they serve.” The Rev. David Turtle, minister of Seymour Street Methodist Church, attended the launch and commented: “The story of our congregation is interwoven with the life of Lisburn, and this exhibition offers a wonderful opportunity to honour that shared heritage. We are grateful

to the museum for helping us tell this story, and we warmly encourage the whole community to come, reflect, and perhaps even rediscover their own connection to Seymour Street.” The exhibition runs until 30 April 2026. For more information, visit: <https://www.lisburnmuseum.com/events/seymour-street-150-methodism-in-lisburn/>



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CELEBRATING LOCAL SPORTING TALENT

Sport Lisburn & Castlereagh has paid tribute to local sporting talent during the 2025 Sports Awards supported by Drayne's Farm.

The annual event took place on Friday 14 November at a prestigious ceremony at La Mon Hotel and Country Club.

The event shone a spotlight on inspirational young people with an interview from special guest CBBC and multi-talented star Cara Mailey.

Broadcaster, Lynette Fay hosted the evening and helped showcase the amazing achievements and motivational stories behind each award winner.

Athlete, Sean Lavery was named Senior Sports Personality of the Year. Sean represented Northern Ireland at the World Transplant Games in Dresden, competing in the male donor 40-49-year category. His exceptional performance secured him an astonishing five medals in the 5K road race, 50m freestyle, 50m backstroke, long jump and 100m sprint. Gymnast Mollie Magennis was awarded second while James Nicholson from Carryduff Taekwondo Club collected third place.

Junior Sports Personality of the Year was won by boxer, Paige Nickels. Paige

achieved historic success, becoming the first female from Northern Ireland to win both the UK National title and Irish National title simultaneously. Her exceptional season included 11 gold medals and one silver medal across several international competitions. Tennis player, Charlie McVeigh was placed second and athlete, Ben Sykes third.

Swimmer, Siomha Brady achieved Disability Sports Personality of the Year.

Siomha represented Ireland at the 2025 World Para Swimming Championships in Singapore, competing in the S7/SM classification. Over 600 athletes from more than 60 nations took part in the Championships, with Siomha finishing an impressive sixth place across her three events. Second place was won by European Tour golfer Mark Clougherty with Boccia player Jayne Milligan picking up third place.

Colts Inclusion Football Team proudly collected Disability Sports Team of the Year. The team participated in the IFA Junior Disability Cup and LCCC



Mayor's Inclusion Cup, while focusing on the self-esteem of players. Second place was jointly awarded to Lisburn 2gether Special Olympics Club Swimming and Bowling Teams.

Sports Club of the Year was won by St Patrick's Lisburn GAC with Lisburn Taekwondo Club taking second place and Hillsborough Boys' Junior Football Club third. Senior Sports Team of the Year was awarded to Lisburn Rugby Club Women's 1st XV while Crewe United Senior Men's Football Team collected second place and Hillsborough Walking Football Team third.

Lisburn Cricket Club U13 Boys' Team picked up Junior Sports Club Team of the Year and

Lisburn City Archery Club Junior Team was presented with second place and St Joseph's Glenavy GAC U14 Girls' Gaelic Football Team third place. The School Sports Team of the Year was won by Wallace High School Boys' 1st XV Rugby Team while Ballymacash Primary School Girls' Football Team took second and Laurelhill Community College U13 Girls' Football Team third place.

John Kennedy from Lisburn Rugby Club 1st XV Women's Team was honoured with the Sports Coach of the Year Award for his outstanding work as Head Coach. Second prize was awarded to Dawn Cromie from Kaleidoscope

Gymnastics Club and third place went to Sean McCaffery from Carryduff Colts Inclusion Football Team.

The Merit Award was presented to individuals to recognise the essential and valuable service they provide to their clubs in the pursuit of success in their chosen sport. The Alison Slater Junior Merit Award was achieved by Mia Rooney from Lisburn Taekwondo Club.

The David Edwards Senior Merit Award was presented to Malachy Kearney from Phoenix Basketball Club, Adrian Williams of Lisburn Taekwondo Club, Jennifer McCormick from Lisburn City Archery Club and Sathish Kumar Manohar of Belfast Super Kings Cricket Club.

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Continued from page 1

"Providing this additional time in the day will allow the children to benefit from the rich play-based learning environment of the pre-school setting, allow pre-school staff more

time to interact with and support young learners and also provide access to a funded school meal for eligible children."

Dara Graham, Preschool Leader at Anahilt Pre-school Playgroup, said: "I am absolutely delighted that our setting has been chosen to move to the full 22.5 hours. This is a fantastic step for our children and families, and we are so proud to be part of this next stage in early years provision. As a community-run, charitable preschool, we see every day how much early education matters,

and this decision will allow us to offer even more stability, support and opportunities for our little ones."

Paul Givan continued: "This investment in our pre-school sector clearly demonstrates the value that I place on early years education in Northern Ireland."

The full list of the approved pre-school settings is available on the Department's website at: www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/ministers-decisions-pre-school-settings-requesting-transition-september-2026

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Funding launched to help end Violence Against Women and Girls

A second phase to help end Violence Against Women and Girls has been launched by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council recently.

The Momentum Fund, forms part of a seven-year strategic framework led by the Northern Ireland Executive Office to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) launched in September 2024. The framework seeks to address a range of gender-based violence, abuse and harm which is disproportionately experienced by women and girls, and which is rooted in gender inequality. Since 2020 in Northern Ireland, 28 women have been violently killed, all but one by a man, with 45 confirmed femicides since 2017 and emerging evidence shows that the majority of women and girls have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence abuse and harm, ranging from everyday misogyny, sexual harassment in a public place or workspace to more extreme violence. These numbers highlight a tragic and disproportionate reality for females of all ages. Through the Momentum Fund, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council is offering funding between £1000 and £5000 to help mobilise grassroots action,



Pictured standing on the steps of Lagan Valley Island from left to right is Inspector Sam Davidson (PSNI), Vicky Kearney (Women's Aid) & PCSP Chair Cllr Alan Martin

support innovative delivery and maximise the impact of community-led initiatives. Completed applications must be submitted online no later than 9 January 2026. The fund is open to a wide range of organisations across community, sports, arts and faith-based sectors to help them raise awareness and help end violence against women and girls across the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council area. The Momentum fund forms part of a wider additional £2.2 million

investment over a seven year period. This second phase will see a further £2.2 million shared across all 11 councils to enable them to support EVAWG action in their local areas. The Fund focuses on three key outcomes: Change the attitudes, behaviours and culture of violence against women and girls Promote healthy, respectful relationships Help women and girls feel and be safe everywhere This initiative is a continued focus on

initiatives by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council as part of the EVAWG Strategic Framework. The Council welcomes applications from a wide range of organisations across the community, sports, arts and faith-based sectors, please visit, <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-momentum-fund> for further clarification on grant information sessions, eligibility criteria, application guidance notes and the EVAWG campaign.



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LITTLE WEAVERS DAY CARE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SUPPORTS LOCAL FAMILIES

Little Weavers Day Care is a magical place steeped in history at Old Hilden Primary School. Through community working led by The Resurgam Trust in partnership with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council this historic building was reopened in 2025.

With funding secured from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, council and community support Old Hilden Primary School has been beautifully restored and now in 2025 has opened its doors to children once again. It was initially open from 1912 to 2008 as a primary school.

Little Weavers Day Care will be registered for 54 places for children up to five years of age. It will provide 'home from home' care each Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm. Through its curriculum the needs of individual children will be met through a variety of learning opportunities with a particular emphasis on children enjoying the outdoors. This stunning day care facility includes a beautiful natural play space where the children can explore nature, create mud pies and look after the wildlife, all filled with exciting learning opportunities.

Little Weavers Day Care is a subsidiary of the Resurgam Trust, which

is a community owned organisation encompassing the principles of community development.

The Mayor of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Alderman Amanda Grehan, speaking at the facility said: "Today we celebrate more than a building being restored. We celebrate what happens when people, groups and the community work together. Little Weavers Day Care is more than just childcare, it will create up to 15 new jobs and give families high quality support."

"By restoring this building, we are also restoring its purpose, a place where children are cared for, supported and brought together. Today is not just a launch, it is a renewal, a promise that our heritage will serve our future, and that this beloved building will once again be at the heart of the community."

Chairman of the Resurgam Trust Philip Dean said: "It is an absolute honour to have been part of the restoration journey of

the Hilden School and the launch of Little Weavers Day Care Ltd.

"Through this new social enterprise, we will generate local employment and provide much needed professional childcare provision. The Resurgam Trust has proudly worked with the local community for many years to deliver this new project, and I am delighted to be present here today on this very special occasion."

David Burns, CEO at Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council added: "The redevelopment of Hilden Primary School has been a key milestone project for us alongside Resurgam Trust, the local community and The National Lottery Heritage Fund."

"To combine history and the future in one community has been an amazing opportunity that will benefit our younger generation. It is through projects like this and successful partnerships that we can build better communities in a sustainable manner in line



with our community and corporate plans."

John McMullan, Chair SENI said: "The Resurgam Trust is a superb example of a local community Social Enterprise, focussed on growth, delivering real and lasting community wealth building. They deliver services that match community need, create local jobs and inject money back into their community."

"I am privileged to attend the launch of Resurgam's newest Social Enterprise and would highlight

Resurgam as a shining example of community Enterprise best practice."

Adrian Bird, Director of the Resurgam Trust said: "The refurbishment of the Hilden School and the launch of Little Weavers Day Care Ltd is another milestone in the Resurgam Trust journey. Little Weavers Day Care and the Tearooms at Hilden Mill will work together to ensure that the Hilden School becomes a vibrant community hub."

"Both new Social Enterprises, supported by the Resurgam Trust will work in partnership with our partners in the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum to promote the local history of the school and the surrounding community."

"Our school will be much more than just a Social Enterprise, it will provide much needed employment, childcare provision, education, volunteer opportunities and be a welcoming environment for everyone that visits."

Scouting for badges at Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum

In an exciting new initiative at the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum, scouts of all ages are encouraged to engage with their heritage as part of the NI Challenge Awards.

The museum's launched recently with involvement in the scheme Mayor of Lisburn &

Castlereagh City Council, Alderman Amanda Grehan and scouts from the local area.

These new challenge awards feature a badge for each scout section from Squirrels to Network. Refreshed for a modern audience, these historic badges were given a new status and look by NI Scouts.

Sponsored by NI Museums Council with funds from Department for Communities, the badges encourage young people to visit, learn and engage at local museums across Northern Ireland. Interacting with exhibitions, questioning the

guides or gaining hands-on experience, the NI Challenge Awards enable young people to develop new skills, discover new interests, and connect with their local community.

Mayor Grehan said, "I am delighted to launch our museum's involvement in the NI Challenge award for scouts. We have a wealth of heritage in our city and it is heartening to see scouts of all ages ensuring that rich history is passed on to new generations."

"I would like to thank our partners in this scheme - Northern Ireland Museums Council and Northern Ireland Scouts -



and commend the museum team for their work in developing this new strand of community engagement. Finally, I want to wish all the scouts the best of luck in achieving their new

awards!" To find out more about the initiative or the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum please visit www.lisburnmuseum.com or ring 028 9266 3377.

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Child actor Coen Carter lands his first ever acting role in Coronation Street’s anniversary special

He’s only eight years old but Coen Carter has just appeared in his first ever TV role in one of the nation’s biggest soaps.

Coen, from Lisburn, Northern Ireland, appeared in the Coronation Street 65th anniversary special recently – playing a young Finlay in a series of flashbacks involving Rovers Return landlords Maggie, Ben and Eva, played by Pauline McLynn, Aaron McCusker and Catherine Tyldesley.

The storyline unfolded as Maggie prepared to celebrate her 65th birthday when the feisty character, had her past revealed in a flashback episode featuring a whole new cast, including Coen, as her feud with Eva Price continued to intensify.

Fans were treated to the shocking details of her earlier days, as the soap geared up for its epic festive special in the following weeks with the flashback showing Maggie, who was married at the time, getting into a tense altercation on the staircase.

Coen has been attending classes at Mark Jermin, the UK’s largest and fastest-growing performing arts educational institution, and proud mum Stacy said she’s been blown away by his new-found confidence since taking up drama.

She said: “He’s been want-

ing to do it for so long and enjoys the online classes so much. His confidence has soared, even more so since landing the role in Coronation Street. It’s his first ever role and I can’t believe it was in Corrie!

“Watching him on set was really exciting and he loved filming in Manchester. I thought he’d be nervous as it was his first time on set, but he had a chaperone who was really lovely and encouraging and he was really confident. To be honest, he took to it like a duck to water. Everyone on set was fantastic and we are thrilled for him.”

Stacy said she hopes this is the start of many roles for Coen, who watched the episode at home with his family and a couple of friends. He attends classes once a week and hopes to have more TV opportunities in the future.

As well as Coen, Mark Jermin has had another bumper year of success. Its TV and film alumni includes Evie Templeton, who wowed audiences in Netflix blockbuster Wednesday, Junior Eurovision star Freya Skye, who has signed a simultaneous recording and



Coen Carter (credit: Emma Gornall Photography)

television deal for Disney +, and Aroop Shergill who stars in the lead role in the CBBC series Dexter Procter: The 10-Year-Old Doctor this month.

On stage, Mark Jermin is proud to have a number of talented child performers currently starring in Christmas ads and touring the UK in Step Into Christmas – the feelgood Christmas Concert Spectacular, spreading festive magic to audiences nationwide.

Mark Jermin, founder and director of the school,

said, “What a thrill to see another talented Mark Jermin student land a role in the nation’s biggest soap Coronation Street. Coen has a bright future ahead of him and it’s fantastic to see how much he enjoys the classes and how he’s grown in confidence.

“We’ve had another fantastic year at Mark Jermin, and we are excited for the 2026, with many more of our talented stars landing roles that are so big I can’t even talk about them, Watch this space!”



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028 9262 1339
Email: info@downroyalgolf.com

21 YEARS AGO, CAFÉ VIC-RYN OPENED ITS DOORS... AND WOW, WHAT A RIDE IT'S BEEN!

A significant transition is underway at Cafe Vic Ryn, the much-loved and quirky Lisburn eatery.

After 21 years, founder Jacqueline Evans has passed the reins of the popular café to Caleb McCready, who will be known to regulars as the café's manager for the past 15 years.

Jacqueline opened the cafe in 2004, quickly establishing it as one of Lisburn's busiest spots. Over two decades, Cafe Vic Ryn became renowned for its excellent food, iconic pink pavlova, and innovative approach to baking, particularly its selection of scones. It now offers over 50 different varieties!

Jacqueline has reflected on her journey, expressing deep thanks to the loyal customers, suppliers, and staff who supported the business throughout its history. She also highlights the café's commitment to community, noting its pride in supporting local charities and organizations such as Mencap and Stepping



Stones, which offered valuable opportunities to young people. Over the years, there's also been some amazing events - fashion shows, "Ready Steady Cook" nights with local celebs, live music, and unforgettable food evenings.

And here's a fun fact: four marriages have started at Café Vic-Ryn!

One of those special couples is Caleb (the new owner!) and his wife Hannah.

Jacqueline remains on staff to contribute her "fantastic baking skills" and provide ongoing guidance as the cafe embarks on its new chapter!

Caleb says he is "deeply honoured and

humbled" to be given the chance to continue the successful legacy she had built. He reassures patrons that the commitment to quality, service, and dedication will remain unchanged, confirming that the "brilliant team" will stay in place and that it is very much "business as usual" at Café Vic Ryn!

Mourne Living - Bringing you Furniture That Feels Like Home

There's a lovely new addition to our Lisburn community, and if you haven't popped in yet, now is the perfect time.

Mourne Living, a family-run furniture store, opened its doors a few months ago inside the House of Vic Ryn, and it's already becoming a favourite spot for locals looking to refresh their homes.

Mourne Living offers a wide range of beautifully made living, dining and bedroom furniture, with styles to suit cosy family homes, modern spaces, and everything in between. Their extensive selection of art, rugs and home accessories means you can find those perfect finishing touches that make a room truly yours, without the big price tag."

What makes Mourne Living stand out is the personal touch. As a family-run business, they pride themselves on friendly service, helpful guidance and a genuine passion for



helping customers create spaces they love.

And if you're thinking about a New Year refresh, you're in luck, their New Year

Sale is now on, with great offers across the store.

So whether you're planning a full home makeover or just browsing for

inspiration, be sure to stop by Mourne Living at House of Vic Ryn. They are ready and waiting to help you to make your house a home.



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As winter sweeps across the North Coast, The Causeway Hotel invites you to unwind with our signature Winter Warmer package with our perfect two night escape beside the world-famous Giant's Causeway.

Set against a dramatic backdrop of coastal cliffs and sea views, our historic hotel offers the ideal setting for rest and rejuvenation this season. Whether you're wrapping up for a beachside stroll, exploring the unique geology of the Causeway stones, or settling in our

cosy bar with a drink in hand, The Causeway Hotel provides a timeless, peaceful retreat. Available from £330 midweek and £350 at weekends, the package includes:

- Two nights accommodation
- A three-course dinner

on both evenings in our 1836 Ballroom

- Breakfast each morning
- Complimentary entry to the Giant's Causeway Visitor Experience

Guests can enjoy hearty food, coastal views, and the kind of warm Northern welcome that turns a short break

into something truly memorable. The charm of our cliffside location, combined with the comfort of thoughtfully designed rooms and friendly service, makes this a winter stay to savour.

So whether you're planning a quiet couple's getaway, a mid-season

recharge, or a chance to explore one of Northern Ireland's most iconic landmarks, the Winter Warmer offers a little bit of everything.

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LEARN TO SWIM

Oatlands Pool is a state of the art purpose built facility located on Artfinny Road between Hillsborough and Moira BT26 6DZ, providing swimming lessons for children and adults.

The pool dimensions are 16m x 8m and runs at a constant water temperature of 31degrees.

With UV water treatment this allows us to dramatically reduce the chlorine level in the water. There is plenty of free on-site parking and the changing facilities include 14 changing cubicles, 2 family changing rooms and a disabled wet-room. An air-conditioned viewing gallery with tables and chairs, tea and coffee facilities are available for parents to relax in while watching

their children's lesson or completing homework with other children. Free Wifi is also available.

We currently have 10 fully qualified instructors with over 60 years experience between them. There are three classes running at any one time so we work hard to get families with a variety of abilities and ages fitted into either parallel or consecutive lessons.

As a child centred learning facility we are constantly updating and renewing our equipment

so there are lots of visual aids to enhance the sensory aspect of the baby and preschool classes.

Following the STA, International Learn to Swim programme assessments are carried out twice a year, badges and certificates are awarded in January and June.

Lessons last 30 minutes, have a maximum of 6 pupils per class and pre-booked in term blocks. They currently run Monday, Tuesday & Thursday 2.30-9pm, Wednesday & Friday

2.30-7.30pm and Saturday & Sunday 8.30am-3pm.

Baby/toddler and pre-school lessons have a maximum of 8 pupils per class and have the whole pool to themselves. These classes run Monday & Tuesday 10am-12pm and Wednesday & Friday 10am-2pm.

Anyone wishing to book lessons should go to www.oatlandspool.co.uk or contact us by email oatlandspool@outlook.com; phone or text 07548706525 or through our Facebook page 'Oatlands Pool'.

Taking a gander at our winter visitors: Geese

The best time to see and hear wild geese in Ireland, north and south, is winter.

In autumn many species migrate south from Canada, Iceland and other northern countries to find food and shelter during the cold dark days, and there's something about their wild calls and easy, purposeful flight, often in V formation, which tugs at our hearts, evocative of unrestricted freedom.

Indeed, historically, people have venerated wild geese, and for instance, the term was applied to the Irish Jacobite soldiers who left Ireland in 1691 following their defeat in the Williamite War, an event commemorated as the 'Flight of the Wild Geese'.

My favourite native geese are the light-bellied brents which visit Strangford Lough and our east coasts in thousands every year, but there's another goose with an interesting mixed heritage.

Greylag geese are large... up to 3 foot in length...and it's their size which attracted humans to regard them as food, not just by killing them, but domesticating them, as we did with cows, sheep and all the rest, and they became what we might call the farmyard goose.

Yet unlike those other domesticated animals, and despite all the subsequent goose-for-food breeding programmes over centuries, greylags still exist as a species.

They still migrate south for winter from Iceland, but others stay here year-round, mating and breeding, mainly the offspring and descendants of escaped domesticated geese, what the scientists call 'feral', a word mainly used to describe domesticated animals...cats, dogs, etc... which have returned to the wild.

On a clear cold winter day, when we hear the haunting honking of geese it's hard not to stop what we're doing, to look up and admire these magical wild birds as they fly past. Perhaps part of their attraction is that they always seem to know where they're going...

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HANNON Coach & Sail is perfect for a city break in Glasgow this New Year!

Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station.

An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for a New Year city break in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, the Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost alternative to flying.



The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect travel option for Christmas shopping. There are

also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers and

with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down." said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at www.hannoncoach.com up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit www.hannoncoach.com

BOWMAN WINDOWS PAY NO VAT SALE

Bowman windows BIG Pay NO VAT Sale started on Monday 5th January 2026. We are now celebrating over 55 years in business – so you can be confident you are dealing with a well-established local family business who care.

With Pay No Vat deals on many of our products, it's the perfect time to undertake some home improvements. Why not upgrade to new 'A Rated' windows, install new fascia, soffit & guttering or design your stunning Apeer composite door. You could also eliminate all that unsightly cement mortar along your gables with our attractive PVC Dry Verge Edging System. Replace your old Velux roof window and get a bright white PVC finish inside with optional black out blinds.

Our Story – Our Team

It all began in 1970 with a small van, a few pieces of glass, some tools and a very big dream. 55 Years on Bowman Windows are still one of the leading window and door suppliers thought-out Ireland.

Julie started her career with Bowman Windows in 1995 and worked in our busy PVC production department for 20 years. But for the last

10 years Julie has been our Contracts Manager delivering on time solutions and exceptional service to all our major customers. In a tough and challenging construction sector Julie is passionate about making a difference whilst also making it happen.

Our Offer

• Pay NO VAT Sale started Monday 5th January 2026

• Low upfront costs – only a 50% deposit secures any order

• Easy upfront payment via card, bank transfer or cash

• 10 Year Guarantee

• Our own sales, survey, showroom and fitting teams

• Showroom visits can be arranged by appointment

• Celebrating over 55 years in business

Our Service

When you place an order with us you can be sure you're in trusted hands. From our first survey until your job is completed



our dedicated sale team will look after you. To help other customers we welcome your 'before and after' photographs for our social media platforms.

Bowman Windows Sale Office and Showroom is located at 50a Newry Street Banbridge BT32 3HA

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TEN YEARS OF AWARD-WINNING CARE FOR LOCAL HOME CARE COMPANY HOME INSTEAD

Home Instead Down & Lisburn is celebrating a major milestone this week as the award-winning home care company marks its 10th anniversary serving older adults and families across the local community.

Since opening its doors in Saintfield in 2015, the team has supported clients with thousands of hours of care each month, to continue living independently in their own home. From companionship and personal care to specialist dementia support, every visit is designed to offer not only practical help, but genuine connection.

Home Instead's approach is relationship-led, with minimum one-hour visits to ensure care never feels rushed. This allows time for home help, conversation, companionship, and the small details that make a big difference to someone's day.

"Our work is about far more than tasks," says Registered Manager Mahan Salgado. "It's

about trust, warmth and being a steady, thoughtful presence in someone's life. We support people to stay in the place they love – their own home – while remaining connected to their community, their routines and their identity."

Care Professionals are carefully matched with clients, receiving specialised training including City & Guilds accredited Dementia Care. Many families say the reassurance of having a familiar, consistent caregiver has transformed everyday life.

The team is gathering this week with clients, Care Professionals, and community partners to celebrate the anniversary with tea, cake and shared stories. The day reflected what Home Instead



Mahan Salgado is Registered Manager at Home Instead Down & Lisburn

stands for: kindness, respect and genuine human connection.

As the team looks to the next decade, their purpose remains unchanged: to provide

the quality of care we would want for our own families.

For more information, visit www.homeinstead.co.uk/down-lisburn or call 028 9560 9910.

Living life to the fullest following a 9st weightloss

Natasha made the final top 3 (from the UK and Ireland) for the Slimming World Woman of the Year 2025 competition. Read her inspiring story:

"In January 2023, I made an impulsive decision that ended up transforming my entire life. I was sitting on the sofa, listening to my own heavy breathing and feeling the familiar burn of constant heartburn. I stared out the window and realised that for years I hadn't truly been living. I had only been surviving. That moment of clarity pushed me to look up Slimming World groups, and by fate, there was one starting within the hour. I got up, walked out the door, and everything changed from there. I joined Christine's 7.30pm group at Trinity Methodist Church.

I jumped straight into Slimming World's generous Food Optimising plan, and the results came quickly. I never felt hungry, I never felt restricted, and I can honestly say I've eaten chocolate every single day since I began.

By January 2024, I was six stone lighter, feeling healthier, more confident, and finally starting to live again. That's when I added activity into my routine



and joined the gym. I had no idea what I was doing at first, so I signed up for classes and after that, there was no stopping me.

Fast forward to today: I am nine stone lighter and at my target weight. I feel like a completely new person. I can confidently say I am finally happy being me.

In September, I was invited to the semi-finals of Slimming World's National Woman of the

Year with 40 incredible women. I made it to the final three and attended the Slimming World Oscars awards ceremony in November, standing on stage in a figure-hugging dress with my amazing consultant Christine and Ashley Banjo from Diversity, who was the guest speaker, speaking in front of more than 1,000 people. What an incredible experience!

I've gone from a

woman who hid away, who ate secretly in her car, and who dreaded airplanes because the seatbelt wasn't fitting, to the most confident version of myself. I now enjoy food openly, shop wherever I like, and live without the restrictions that once controlled me."

I am forever grateful to my consultant Christine, who supported me every step of the way, without her, I wouldn't be where I am today."

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VITAL ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE HEALTH SERVICE

The South Eastern Trust celebrated International Volunteer Day by recognising the invaluable contribution Volunteers make every day across hospital and community services.

One of those dedicated Volunteers is Sam McFerran, who previously worked in the Trust as a Technician. After retiring, Sam felt he wanted to "give something back" and returned to the organisation, this time as a Meeter and Greeter in the Outpatients Department in Ards Hospital.

Sam's role as a Meeter and Greeter involves him helping to check in patients for their appointments using an online system, helping them to locate the clinic they need to attend and providing that listening ear to those that need it most.

Reflecting on his decision to Volunteer, Sam said, "When I became a Volunteer, I did not know much about the role of a Meeter and Greeter or what it involved. When I started out, the support I received was amazing. I was

shadowed for a few days and learned so much from that experience. Since then, I have developed my own skills as I have progressed in the role."

Sam shared how rewarding he finds supporting patients arriving for appointments, "Coming to hospital can be a stressful experience for most people and it is so good for me to help put them at ease. It feels good in your heart to know you have given someone comfort, even just a smile, to help ease what lies ahead for them."

"I love meeting people and making new friends. I have always had that desire to serve others. The staff in the Outpatients Department are wonderful to work alongside. I am here three days a week and they make it such an enjoyable experience, I feel like part of the team."

South Eastern Trust, Volunteer Services Manager, Sonya Duffy, emphasised the importance of the Meeter and Greeter role, "Having someone welcoming patients into the Outpatients Department makes such a difference and helps put people at ease. Sam's role also enables staff to focus on their clinical duties while he provides support across the Department."

"Volunteers play a crucial role across the Trust, supporting not just patients but staff as well. Many of our Volunteers tell us they have made new friends and that Volunteering prevents them from becoming socially isolated after retirement. It brings joy and purpose to their lives. We also have many young Volunteers who gain invaluable experience that helps them onto the employment ladder."



Sonya added, "As we mark International Volunteer Day, I want to thank all our Volunteers for their commitment, kindness and dedication. Every day, they help improve the lives of our patients and make our services better."

Encouraging others to consider Volunteering, Sam shared, "Come forward and

find out what it is like to Volunteer. You will fit into any of the roles, there are opportunities not just in hospital settings, but in the community as well. Give it a go!"

If you are interested in Volunteering, contact the Team at volunteer@setrust.hscni.net or call (028) 9056 4817 to find out more.

DOWN ROYAL PARK GOLF CLUB DRIVING AHEAD WITH NEW, STATE OF THE ART DRIVING RANGE

A brand new, state of the art, 18 bay driving range is nearing completion at Down Royal Park Golf Club, just outside Lisburn.

This will further enhance the golf facility which already offers both an 18 hole and a 9 hole golf course plus golf instruction programmes under the on site Golf Academy.

Down Royal Park Golf Club has been enjoying unprecedented growth so it's owners took the decision to invest further and expand the operation to include the new driving range.

Construction began in early October. The main structure is due to be completed before the end of this year and it will be fully operational by mid February, 2026.

It will have 18 fully covered and lit bays with Trackman technology and screens in every bay.



Plans are progressing well for the new driving range at Down Royal Golf Course which opens early 2026!

Greg Bailie, General Manager, explained: "This will be the perfect venue for anyone wanting to take up golf as well as more experienced golfers with both an 18 hole and a 9 hole golf course, the new state of the art

driving range and an on site Golf Academy for golf instruction."

He added, "In addition, in 2026, we are also expanding our membership to include both Juniors and Ladies so this really is a golf offering for everyone."

Linhol Beauty

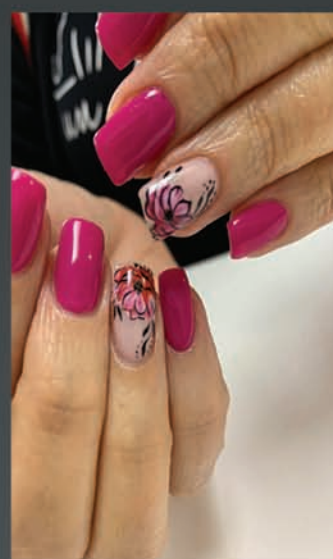
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Blooming Brilliant

When the decs come down turn to fresh flowers to revitalise your home!

As the festive sparkle of Christmas decorations begins to fade, many homes feel a little bare. But fear not, for the winter months offer a beautiful opportunity to refresh your decor with a stunning array of fresh blooms. While it's true that cut flowers generally last longer in cooler temperatures, making winter an ideal time for floral displays, the right choice of resilient flowers can ensure your home remains vibrant well into the new year.

One of the most cheerful and enduring choices for post-Christmas decor is the Tulip. Available in a vast spectrum of colours, from crisp whites to bold reds and sunny yellows, tulips bring a fresh, spring-like feel to any room. Their unique characteristic of continuing to grow and gracefully bend towards light adds a dynamic,



living element to your arrangements. Pair them with a simple glass vase for an elegant, modern look.

If you're looking for something with a striking presence, Oriental Lilies are an excellent choice. While their scent can be potent, their large, exquisite blooms and long-lasting nature make them perfect for a prominent display.

Choose varieties like 'Stargazer'

or 'Casa Blanca' for their dramatic beauty. Be sure to remove the pollen stamens to prevent staining and prolong their freshness.

Finally, don't overlook Chrysanthemums. Especially the 'Cremon' or 'Santini' varieties, these resilient blooms are winter superstars. They come in an incredible range of shapes, sizes, and colors, from dense pom-poms to delicate

daisies. They are incredibly versatile, fitting seamlessly into both traditional and contemporary settings, and will easily outlast many other cut flowers, keeping your home looking lovely long after the last of the tinsel is packed away.

Embrace the beauty of these hardy blooms to banish the post-holiday blues and infuse your home with natural elegance.

WAYS TO GET AHEAD IN 2026

To truly achieve your best life in 2026, the key is to make a fundamental shift from endless consumption to mindful curation, starting with your digital habits.

Don't simply block out time; instead, schedule short, intentional digital minutes for specific tasks. Outside of these focused windows, you must aggressively limit digital noise and notifications. Crucially, establish phone-free zones—such as the dining table, bedroom, and the first hour of the day—to protect your mental space and foster deeper relationships. This ensures that technology remains a servant to your goals, rather than the reverse.

Next, aim for Minimalist Momentum by systematically decluttering your environment and routine. A simpler environment leads to less decision fatigue. Implement the "tidy-up trio"—a commitment to remove three non-essential items daily. Simultaneously, reclaim the luxury of a less busy schedule by ruthlessly



pruning non-essential social and professional commitments. For financial simplicity, automate all routine tasks, transforming passive spending into active saving.

Build a robust Buffer Zone to handle the inevitable unpredictability of life. Financial security is the bedrock of mental calm; therefore, create a 30-day accessible savings fund that acts as a true stress reducer. Apply this same principle to your time: add a 15-minute time

buffer to all appointments, eliminating the corrosive stress of rushing. This proactive resilience is further supported by establishing an Emotional Buffer with dedicated, non-negotiable weekly time for restorative rest, not just "zoning out."

Finally, prioritize Macro-Health through consistent, enjoyable micro-habits—forget extreme changes. Commit to the "5-minute movement rule" daily, whether it's stretching or a quick walk. Make

hydration automatic by drinking water immediately upon waking, and maintain a consistent sleep wind-down routine to prime your body for rest. Couple this physical foundation with a dynamic Growth Mindset that actively schedules "skill-play" time for fun. View every setback not as a failure, but as valuable, actionable feedback, ensuring you remain curious, adaptable, and fully engaged with the opportunities 2026 will bring.

Realistic Fitness Goals for the Family

The key to successful family fitness in 2026 is setting realistic, sustainable, and fun goals using the S.M.A.R.T. framework: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely.

Instead of focusing on high-pressure resolutions, prioritize small, consistent habits that become lifelong routines. Core family targets could include scheduling three active

sessions per week (like biking or hiking) and incorporating a non-negotiable 15-minute family walk after dinner to increase daily movement and reduce screen time.

Goals should be tailored to age. For kids and teens, focus on fun and skill development, such as trying a new sport or training for a family 5k fun run. Busy



adults should aim for consistency over intensity, incorporating three 10-minute "micro-workouts" on busy days and one strength training session weekly. Older adults should prioritize balance and mobility, for example dedicating 10 minutes daily to gentle stretching or chair yoga.

To ensure long-term success, use a central tracking chart to monitor progress and celebrate effort rather than perfection.

By making movement a collaborative and non-punitive part of your routine, you will build a healthier and more connected family in 2026.

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THE BUSY PARENT’S GUIDE TO SELF-CARE

The term “self-care” often conjures images of luxurious, uninterrupted leisure: an hour-long massage, a quiet afternoon reading, or, yes, a long bubble bath.

While wonderful, these activities are often completely out of reach for the typical busy parent juggling work, school runs, appointments, and household chaos.

True parental self-care isn’t about escaping reality; it’s about making strategic, micro-adjustments to your daily life to refill your cup without needing a full-scale vacation. It’s about maintaining your emotional and physical reserves so you can show up as the parent you want to be.

Here are some Quick Wins for Instant Relief

When you only have a few minutes, focus on simple, high-impact resets that shift you out of the stress response.

The Power of the 4-7-8 Breath: When you feel tension rising (e.g., during homework struggles or traffic), use this quick calming technique: Inhale silently through your nose for a count of 4.



Hold your breath for a count of 7. Exhale completely through your mouth with a “whoosh” sound for a count of 8. Repeat 3–4 times. It physically lowers your heart rate.

Tactical Hydration: Keep a water bottle with you at all times. Taking a big drink of cold water can provide a surprisingly quick mental and physical break. Dehydration often mimics fatigue and irritability.

The “Sensory Reset”:

Engage one of your senses. Spray a scent (like peppermint or citrus oil) or listen to one specific song on headphones.

This interrupts the mental loop of worry or to-do lists and grounds you in the present moment.

Mindful Movement: Instead of sitting down, stretch while waiting for the kettle to boil or for the kids to put on their shoes. A quick 60-second neck roll, shoulder shrug, or a forward

bend releases physical tension instantly.

The most sustainable form of self-care is integrating it into your existing routine, rather than scheduling an extra activity.

By focusing on these small, consistent acts of self-care, you shift the perspective from “How can I escape?” to “How can I sustain myself?” You don’t need a bubble bath; you just need to honour your own needs within the structure of your busy life.

Dan Sten Olsson awarded Honorary Doctorate by Queen’s University Belfast

Dan Sten Olsson, Chief Executive of Stena Sphere was awarded an honorary doctorate by Queen’s University Belfast in recognition of his impact across industry and commerce through his global leadership as well as Stena Line’s long-term contribution to Northern Ireland’s economy.

The honorary degree was formally conferred during the University’s winter graduation ceremonies on Tuesday 2nd December.

Dan Stena Olsson joined Stena Sphere, the family-owned global business in 1972 and under his leadership, it has grown into one of Sweden’s largest privately owned companies. It has business interests across Europe including Stena Line ferry operations, offshore drilling, real estate and metal recycling. This year Stena Line, the largest ferry operator on the Irish Sea marked the 30th anniversary of operations in Belfast Harbour.

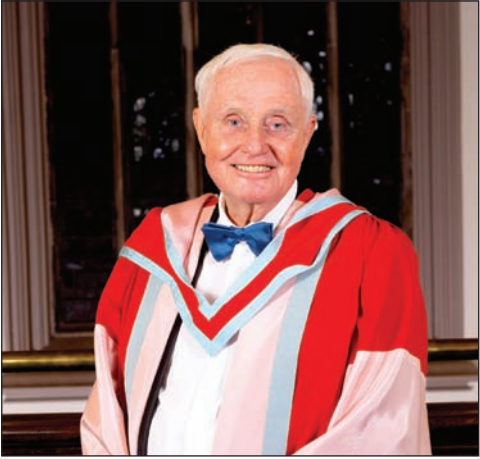
Mr Olsson commented: “I am deeply honoured and humbled to receive this recognition from Queen’s University Belfast. To be recognised by such a prestigious and internationally respected educational institution is a privilege that I accept with both joy and gratitude.”

Mr Olsson added: “The city of Belfast holds a

very special place in my heart and for 30 years, Stena Line has been proud to call Belfast one of our most important business hubs. My family and I have developed a strong and heartfelt connection to Belfast and its people, and it’s such a wonderful surprise to be recognised in this unique way by a city we hold in such high esteem.”

Queen’s University Belfast also recognised seven other inspiring honorary graduates during the winter graduation ceremony, recognising global achievement in diplomacy, business, science, the arts and community life. Among those honoured were playwright Owen McCafferty; Finnebrogue co-founder Christine Lynn; distinguished US diplomat The Honourable Barbara J. Stephenson.

Professor Sir Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen’s University Belfast, said: “Our honorary graduates



this winter represent excellence across so many fields, from diplomacy and business to medicine, the arts and community service. Each has made a distinctive and lasting contribution to society, reflecting the values of Queen’s and inspiring others to make their own mark on the world.”

Stena Line is the largest ferry operator on the Irish Sea, with the biggest fleet providing up to 238

weekly sailings offering the widest choice of routes including: combined passenger and freight services from Belfast to Cairnryan and Liverpool, Dublin to Holyhead, Rosslare to Fishguard, in addition to the dedicated freight only routes from Belfast to Heysham and Dublin. This year Stena Line celebrated 30 years of operations in Belfast Harbour and in Dublin Port.

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IT'S SHOWTIME AT THE STORMONT HOTEL

The festive season may be upon us, but Belfast's entertainment calendar is only getting started.

At the heart of this winter's live music scene is the Stormont Hotel, where an outstanding programme of 13 live tribute shows will run between December 2025 and February 2026, transforming the hotel's Grand Ballroom into a vibrant live music venue.

Located just minutes from the city centre in the leafy surrounds of East Belfast, the Stormont Hotel offers more than luxurious accommodation and dining, it's a destination for memorable nights out. Guests and local music lovers alike can look forward to an eclectic mix of tribute acts celebrating some of the greatest artists and genres in music history.

Kicking off the festive shows on Sunday 28th December is Thunder Rolls: Garth Brooks Tribute, bringing the spirit of country music to Belfast. The following night features The Björn Identity, an exuberant homage to ABBA's timeless pop classics. As we move into January 2026, the schedule continues with Dolly & Shania: Queens of Country on Friday 2nd January, the iconic Elvis Spectacular on 3rd January, and the Sensational 70s Superstars Show on 9th January. Throughout the month, audiences can also enjoy The Ratpack Revisited, Motown Sensations, Beatles For Sale, and the Neil Diamond Tribute Show. Rounding out the season are The Jerseytones and an performance by the Motown Sensations on 6th February.

Whether dancing the night away or settling in to enjoy decades of classic hits, the Stormont Hotel's tribute series offers something for every musical taste. With spacious complimentary parking and overnight show packages available, it's an ideal way to experience live entertainment this winter.

Visit stormonthotelbelfast.com for more information on the upcoming tribute shows.

Pharmacy campaign to support mental health

A new campaign has been launched in community pharmacies across Northern Ireland, encouraging people to look after their mental health and wellbeing.

Running throughout December and January, the campaign encourages people to ask themselves and others a simple but powerful question: "How are you feeling?". The campaign encourages people to check in with themselves and others, turning a common greeting into a meaningful opportunity to support mental health.

The campaign is running in over 500 community pharmacies as part of the Living Well service, with pharmacy teams supporting people to look after their mental health. Living Well is delivered in partnership with the Public Health Agency (PHA), Community Pharmacy NI (CPNI), and the Department of Health (DoH).

Using the Take 5 steps to wellbeing – Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give – the campaign promotes everyday actions that can help people feel more positive and better equipped to manage life's challenges.

Health and Social Wellbeing Senior Improvement Officer at the PHA, said: "Mental health is just as important as physical health, and looking after it is not something we should only do when we are feeling down. Research tells us that someone who practises all five steps daily feels higher levels of wellbeing, and they are things that we can incorporate in to our everyday routine which are simple, practical and proven to make a difference.

"In Northern Ireland, a fifth of adults have mental ill-health at any one time and we want everyone to know that support is available. Community pharmacies are trusted spaces where people feel comfortable and this campaign gives them the tools to start meaningful conversations."

Pharmacies will display posters, leaflets, and staff will start conversations to help the public reflect on their mental health and



direct people to further support, including local services, apps, and professional help.

Patrick McCallion, Champion Pharmacist at Bradley's Pharmacy in Claudy, said: "We see people every day who may be struggling quietly with their mental health. This campaign gives us a practical and approachable way to start conversations, share simple tools and offer support in a non-judgemental space. Community pharmacies are another trusted source of advice and support. Whether it's through a leaflet, a friendly chat, or signposting to services, we want people to know they're not alone and that help is available in their local community."

The campaign also encourages pharmacy teams to look after their own mental health, with ideas like mini-workshops, self-care challenges, and wellbeing resources for staff.

Next time you visit your local community pharmacy, look out for the campaign displays and pick up a 'How are you feeling?' leaflet for advice on looking after your mental health.

For more information and mental health resources, www.pha.site/living-well or www.mindingyourhead.info

For anyone in a crisis, Lifeline is available 24/7, call 0808 808 8000 or visit www.lifelinehelpline.info/i-need-help

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Resolutions Worth Keeping All Year

We enthusiastically sign up for gym memberships, vow to learn a new language, and promise to finally declutter the garage.

But for too many of us, the momentum fades by mid-February, leaving behind a trail of guilt and unused intentions. The secret to success isn't about setting grand, unrealistic goals; it's about adopting sustainable habits and making small, consistent shifts that compound over time. This year, instead of making a list of things

you might fail at, focus on these resolutions that are genuinely worth keeping for all twelve months and beyond. Mind and Body True long-term success stems from a foundation of good health—both mental and physical. The first essential resolution is to Move Daily (Not Just Exercise Hard).

The flawed resolution is often, "I will work out for 90 minutes, five times a week," which often leads to burnout. The sustainable commitment, however, is, "I will find ways to move my body for at least 20 minutes every day." Instead of fixating on grueling, intense workouts, aim for daily movement. This could be a brisk walk

during your lunch break, a stretching session while watching TV, or dancing while you cook dinner. Consistency in movement is far more valuable than sporadic intensity. Finance and Future Financial peace isn't achieved through one-off windfalls, but through disciplined, repetitive actions. A crucial financial resolution is to Automate Savings. Relying on willpower to manually save \$500 every month is the flawed approach. The sustainable resolution is, "I will set up an automatic transfer of 5% of my paycheck to a savings account." Make your savings non-negotiable and invisible. By automating a small, manageable percentage of your income to a separate account right after payday, you remove the decision-making proc-

ess entirely. You save money without even thinking about it, guaranteeing financial progress throughout the year. Growth and Relationships These resolutions focus on enriching your life outside of work and the gym. Resolve to Learn One New Small Skill Per Quarter. The flawed resolution is overwhelming: "I will become fluent in Mandarin this year." The more manageable and sustainable resolution is, "I will dedicate 15 minutes a day to a small, new skill (e.g., learning a new knot, practicing a basic piano chord, mastering a complex Excel formula) for three months." Focusing on one major life goal can be overwhelming. Instead, break down 'learning' into achievable, bite-sized chunks. By the end of the year, you will have four new skills and a continuous habit of growth.

The most powerful resolutions are not outcomes (like "lose 20 pounds"), but systems—the daily actions and habits that get you there. This year, ditch the all-or-nothing mindset. Start small, be consistent, and trust that a tiny, positive shift maintained daily will deliver monumental results by the time December rolls around again.

NIHF FUNDRAISER RAISES £4,115 FOR CANCER FUND FOR CHILDREN

The Northern Ireland Hotels Federation (NIHF) Fundraiser, held at the Hospitality Exchange Gala Ball, has raised £4,115 for Cancer Fund for Children.



Discussing the donation, NIHF President Vicky Green said: "We're thrilled that our members gave so generously to support Cancer Fund for Children. A childhood cancer diagnosis impacts every aspect of family life and the work this charity does to ensure no child or young person has to face cancer alone is truly remarkable. Their therapeutic, emotional and practical support brings comfort,

strength and resilience to families at a time when they need it most. We are proud to play a small part in helping them continue this vital work." Thanking the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, Sarah Clements, Partnerships & Philanthropy Lead Executive at Cancer Fund for Children, adds: "We're immensely grateful to the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation for their wonderful

support. By working together, we help ensure that children and young people across the island of Ireland never have to face cancer alone. Their generosity enables us to deliver the right support at the right time, whether that is individual, group or therapeutic care, to bring hope, strength and joy to families when they need it most." For further information visit Cancer Fund For Children.

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Ireland's Hidden Heartlands regional brand to be used in Fermanagh

Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald has announced a new licensing agreement which will see the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand used in County Fermanagh for the first time.

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is a regional marketing and experience brand that was developed by Fáilte Ireland which promotes Ireland's central heartlands, focussing on its natural assets and waterways, across the island and internationally.

The licensing agreement between Tourism NI and Fáilte Ireland will enable eligible tourism businesses in Fermanagh to use the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand and be featured in Tourism NI marketing campaigns.

The move is one of the Minister's priorities within the Tourism Vision and Action Plan, which aims to incorporate the north into Fáilte Ireland's regional experience brands.

The licensing agreement has been put in place to build on the strong cross-border collaboration which already exists between tourism businesses and public bodies in Co Fermanagh and their Ireland's Hidden Heartlands counterparts.

Laura McCorry, Chief Executive of Tourism Northern Ireland, said: "Being part of



the Ireland's Hidden Heartland's brand gives local tourism businesses a powerful promotional platform on the global stage.

"Promoting the region as an interconnected tourism experience will help attract more visitors to the area and boost the local economic benefits of tourism."

"The inclusion of Co Fermanagh, with its serene lakes, ancient landscapes, deep sense of tranquillity and welcoming communities, will enrich the overall brand, offering visitor experiences which are authentic and profoundly memorable."

Caroline Bocquel,

CEO of Fáilte Ireland, said: "This agreement creates new opportunities for tourism businesses across Ireland's Hidden Heartlands in both jurisdictions."

"By building on a strong brand identity and encouraging collaboration, it will help businesses enhance their visibility, attract more visitors and offer a more joined-up experience for those exploring the area."

Alice Mansergh, Chief Executive of Tourism Ireland, said: "At Tourism Ireland, we are proud to promote the island of Ireland overseas as a destination of choice for visitors."

"From the River Shannon to Lough Erne, interconnecting waterways and surrounding countryside provide wonderful, authentic opportunities to experience nature, greenery, communities and culture."

"We'll be promoting the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand as part of our overseas marketing programmes, in partnership with industry and agencies on the ground. Ultimately, helping overseas visitors first choose the island and then explore across geographies supports broad benefits for businesses and communities."

Young drivers train to be road ready at car maintenance event

The event was held in partnership with Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP, PSNI, Lisburn & Castlereagh Road Safety Committee, Rotary Club of Lagan Valley and Integrity Tyres & Auto Services.

The participants learnt how to check fluid levels, tyre pressures and understand vehicle warning lights. The Lisburn & Castlereagh Road Safety Committee also delivered a short presentation on road safety which focussed on the 'Fatal Five': Don't drink and drive; Slow down; Don't get careless; Belt up and Stay off your phone.

Cllr Alan Martin, Chair of Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP, commented: "I am delighted that PCSP took the lead in organising this very practical workshop to improve basic car maintenance and road safety during the week of road safety awareness."

"Similar events were held in 2024 for female drivers with extremely positive feedback received from the ladies who participated. Everyone enjoyed the fun and accessible way to build their knowledge on a very important and serious subject."

"I would like to personally thank PCSP staff, PSNI, Lisburn & Castlereagh Road Safety Committee, Rotary Club



of Lagan Valley and Integrity Tyres & Auto Services who supported this initiative."

Stephen Dickson, Chair of Lisburn & Castlereagh Road Safety Committee, said: "This road safety event underscored the vital importance of the 'Fatal Five' message, equipping young people to make decisions that protect themselves and everyone else on the road."

"We believe this

initiative can have a lasting impact fostering a generation committed to safer road use."

Ann Cully, President of the Rotary Club of Lagan Valley, added: "Members of the Rotary Club of Lagan Valley were delighted to be involved in this latest PCSP Road Safety Initiative, which offered very practical advice and information on vehicle maintenance and safe driving to young motorists."

"On behalf of

the Club, I would like to thank PCSP, Integrity Tyres & Auto Services and the other stakeholders involved for the opportunity to be involved in Road Safety Week 2025."

For more information on road safety, you can contact the PCSP Officers at pcsp@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk or call the PSNI on 101 and ask to speak with Road Policing.

You can also visit the PSNI website



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ALL-NEW LEAF HITS THE ROAD

The Nissan LEAF – the world's first mass-market electric vehicle when it originally launched in Europe in 2011 – is back, signalling Nissan's determination to be at the forefront of electric innovation.

Proudly built in Britain, at Nissan's world-class EV manufacturing site in Sunderland, the all-new third generation model has hit the roads for the first time in Copenhagen, boasting an elite level range of up to 386 miles alongside a sharp new look, integrated technology and a host of new driver assistance features.

Designed at Nissan's Global Design Studio in Atsugi, Japan and built at Nissan's Sunderland Plant, UK, the all-new LEAF presents a dynamic crossover look that blends aerodynamic efficiency and visual impact. With a drag coefficient of just

0.25, the car's clean, flowing appearance not only looks sharp and brings a real presence to the road, it also supports the model's excellent 386 miles top range and its general efficiency.

Supporting its sleek and streamlined look, Nissan LEAF boasts a host of upgraded exterior features, carefully engineered to catch the eye and confirm that our zero-emission masterpieces don't skip on style.

The cabin inside is spacious and family-ready, including up to 437 litres (VDA) of cargo space. Power liftgate and roof rail options add flexibility, while seven expressive colour



choices – including signature Luminous Teal – ensure the Nissan LEAF can be personalised to suit families, commuters,

urban explorers and weekend day-trippers alike.

Built on the CMF-EV modular platform shared with the

Nissan Ariya, LEAF delivers engaging yet comfortable driving. The suspension – MacPherson at the front and multi-link

at the rear – ensures a smooth, agile drive across city streets and motorways. At the heart of the Nissan LEAF

is a refined electric motor delivering clean and responsive performance – 215hp of power and 355Nm of torque power the LEAF from 0 to 62mph in 7.6 seconds (Sport Mode / 75kWh battery). With 4.5 miles/kWh miles energy consumption, all-new LEAF ensures effortless driving with maximum efficiency.

The Nissan LEAF is equipped with a suite of advanced safety and driver assistance features, designed to support confident driving in all conditions. From Intelligent Emergency Braking and Blind Spot Intervention to Rear Cross Traffic Alert and Lane Keep Assist, Nissan

LEAF is engineered to deliver peace of mind. Additional features such as the 3D Around View Monitor, Invisible Hood View, and Front Wide View make parking and navigating tight spaces easier and safer.

At the heart of the LEAF's connected experience is NissanConnect with Google built-in, delivering seamless integration with daily life for the modern driver.

Nissan LEAF will be manufactured in Sunderland, UK, using 20% renewable energy. Production and pre-orders to start before the end of the year, with first deliveries set for Spring 2026.

The MINI Paul Smith Edition.

Paul Smith and MINI – two traditional British brands have taken their partnership to the next level and created something great:

The new MINI Paul Smith Edition. Following the MINI STRIP in 2021 and the MINI Recharged by Paul Smith in 2022, the British designer is now bringing his world-famous design language – 'Classic with a twist' – to the new MINI family. Whether electric or combustion engine, the edition will be available for all MINI Cooper 3-door, 5-door and Convertible models, with the exception of the John Cooper Works models. The look and details not only show Paul Smith's signature style – but also the brands playful, optimistic and independent spirit.

Combining MINI design with Paul Smith's distinctive style: Exclusive exterior colours, sophisticated accents and unexpected details bring the shared history of MINI and Paul Smith into the present.

The MINI Paul Smith Edition offers a choice of three exterior paint finishes, two of which are edition-exclusive: Statement Grey is a modern interpretation of the classic Mini Austin

Seven colour from 1959 – a clear, bluish-tinted grey shade and self-confident statement of timeless modernity. Inspired White is a contemporary homage to the popular Classic Mini Beige colour, and finally the elegant and classic Midnight Black Metallic from the current MINI Family.

Regardless of the body colour, the specially created Nottingham Green paintwork – a tribute to Sir Paul's hometown – adds sophisticated accents to the side mirrors, the octagonal radiator grille, the wheel hub covers with Paul Smith lettering and as the paintwork for one of the two roof variants.

In addition to the colour variants, numerous details characterise Paul Smith's signature and make the MINI Paul Smith Edition unmistakable: The 'Signature Stripe', a central design feature of the British designer, adorns the roof in Nottingham Green at the rear of the driver's side. The alternative version of the roof features elegant stripes



in Jet Black in varying thickness, both matte and glossy. The MINI Cooper Convertible Paul Smith Edition is supplied with a black soft top.

All edition vehicles are equipped with 18-inch Night Flash Spoke black aluminium wheels with tinted clear coat in Dark Steel. The MINI logo at the front and rear is offered in newly designed Black Blue and complements the colour composition of Paul Smith and MINI.

On the black horizontal handle strip at the rear, Paul Smith's signature refers to the creative spirit behind the vehicle design.

British character is also reflected in the interior with numerous components featuring a modern, elegant look. The knitted surfaces on the dashboard and door panels appear in black, while Paul Smith fabrics in tone-on-tone stripe patterns serve as inspiration for the special structure

of the dashboard. The Nightshade Blue sports seats are made of Vescin and have knitted textile in the shoulder and headrest areas. Drawn from the Signature Stripe, the decorative stitching on the steering wheel's textile band is designed in bright colours – quintessentially

Paul Smith.

To mark the 40th birthday of the classic MINI in 1999, the fashion designer dipped an exclusive one-off in his characteristic stripe design, using 86 stripes in 26 colours.

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Is Your Caravan Ready for Winter?

As the first taste of winter sets in and those weather forecasts start warning of snow and ice, NI Water would like to remind caravan enthusiasts just how important it is to professionally drain down their caravans as part of their winter preparation.

Ongoing winter disruption can be tricky at times, but a bit of prep now means avoiding damage from burst pipes and keeping your caravan in tip-top condition for next season. This means making sure all water is fully removed from your equipment, so you don't get caught out by frozen pipes or leaks.

NI Water Education Officer Anna Killen said: "Caravan owners will know that prepping your caravans for the cold is a must. Winter can be tough on caravans, especially static ones left

empty for long periods. With exposed pipes and unpredictable weather, the risk of severe damage ramps up as temperatures drop. Taking a little time to get your caravan sorted before the cold really sets in will help keep it in great shape, ready for more adventures when the sun comes out again."

Some tips so your caravan stays safe, sound and ready to hit the road as soon as spring arrives:

- Professional Drain Down: If you're leaving your caravan for winter,



getting it professionally drained down is your safest bet - experts know how to make sure every drop is gone.

- DIY Drain Down: If your caravan park stays open and you're popping back for visits, it's wise to quickly drain down yourself each time. Turn off the water mains at the stop valve, open those drain plugs, set all taps to open, flush the toilet, and drain all water from sinks

and basins.

- Heat and Insulate: Remember to heat your static caravan by using the frost setting on your heating system and consider getting the heating system serviced. Also make sure all pipes inside and outside are insulated and make sure you are covered by insurance that protects you from the large-scale damage that mother nature can sometimes cause.

A Checklist for Hiring a Contractor

The New Year often brings plans for renovation, repair, or that long-deferred major project.

Yet, for many homeowners, the process of hiring a qualified professional—be it a plumber, electrician, or general contractor—is riddled with anxiety.

As tradesmen, we see the costly results of shortcuts and rushed decisions. We know the difference between a professional who stands by their work and one who cuts corners. To protect your investment and ensure quality, use this simple 5-point checklist, straight from the professional's perspective, before you sign on the dotted line.

1. Verify Licensing and Insurance: Your Baseline Protection

This step is non-negotiable and is your first line of financial defense. Always ask for proof of two key documents:

- Licensing: The contractor must hold a current, valid license relevant to the work being performed in your specific area. A licensed professional has demonstrated competency and is bound by industry standards and local building codes.
- Insurance: They

must carry both Public Liability Insurance (to cover accidental damage to your property, e.g., if they accidentally drop something through the ceiling) and Employers' Liability Insurance (to protect you if a worker is injured on your property). Without this, you could potentially be held financially liable for significant damages or medical bills.

Pro Tip: Never rely solely on a photocopy. Look up the license number and insurance details yourself via the relevant local trade or regulatory bodies to confirm they are active and in good standing.

2. Demand a Detailed, Written Scope of Work (Quote)

Verbal agreements invite costly misunderstandings. A professional quote—or Scope of Work (SOW)—must be more than just a single price. It should be a blueprint for the entire job.

Insist that the SOW clearly defines what is included and, crucially, what is not included. It must specify:

- Materials: Exact brand names, model numbers,

and quantities of materials (e.g., "Dulux Trade Vinyl Matt in Brilliant White," not just "paint").

- Labor: The estimated time frame and the breakdown of labor costs.

- Payment Schedule: A clear plan of payments tied to completed, verifiable milestones. Avoid large upfront deposits; a reasonable deposit is acceptable, but payments should reflect progress.

- Change Orders: A defined process for how scope changes will be documented, priced, and approved by you before the work proceeds.

3. Review Portfolio Examples of Relevant Work

While enthusiasm is great, major projects demand proven experience. Ask potential contractors for references and, specifically, photos or site visits related to the project you are hiring for.

If you are renovating a bespoke bathroom, ask to see recent bespoke bathroom renovations. If you are hiring a roofer, ask for evidence of similar-sized and similar-style roof installations. This confirms that the tradesman has mastered the specific skills and logistical challenges your job presents. A quality professional is always proud to show off their recent work.

4. Check References (and Ask the Right Questions)

Don't just ask for references; ask for the most recent references and actually call them. This is where you gain insight into

the contractor's process, not just their final product.

When you call, ask questions that go beyond "Were you satisfied?":

- Did they stick to the budget? If not, what caused the deviation?

- How did they handle unexpected issues? (The true test of a good contractor is how they solve problems, not if they run into any.)

- Was the site kept tidy and safe?

- Would you hire them again?

5. Evaluate Communication and Professionalism

The way a contractor handles communication before the job is often a perfect reflection of how they will manage the job itself. Pay close attention to these cues:

- Punctuality: Did they show up on time for the consultation?

- Clarity: Did they clearly and patiently answer your technical questions, or did they use jargon to confuse you?

- Respect: Did they respect your time, home, and budget constraints?

A successful contractor is not only skilled with tools but also skilled at project management and client relations. If you sense poor organisation or a lack of attention to detail now, those issues will inevitably amplify once the construction starts. Choosing a tradesman isn't just about the lowest price; it's about investing in trust, reliability, and quality that will last.

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SETTING YOUR 2026 HOME REPAIR BUDGET

The New Year is a time for resolutions, but for homeowners, the smartest resolution is financial: getting ahead of inevitable wear and tear.

A house isn't a stagnant asset; it's a collection of systems that require constant funding. By budgeting proactively, you replace the stress of emergency repairs with the power of planned investments.

Calculating Your Annual Maintenance Budget

The first step is establishing a baseline for routine care and unexpected small repairs. Professionals use a few rules of thumb:

- **The 1% Rule of Thumb:** Budget 1% to 4% of your home's value annually for maintenance and repairs. If your home is valued at £300,000, that means allocating £3,000 to £12,000 per year.

- **Newer Homes (under**

10 years): Stick closer to the 1% range.

- **Older Homes (over 30 years):** Plan for 2% to 4%, as major components are likely due for replacement.

- **The Component Age Method (More Accurate):** Instead of a percentage, look at the remaining lifespan of your major systems. This is the most accurate approach for long-term planning.

If a new roof costs £12,000 and is expected to last 20 years, you should budget £600 per year for the roof alone. Repeat this for your boiler, water heater, etc.

Establishing an Emergency Fund for Major Replacements

While the annual budget covers ongoing costs (gutter cleaning,



boiler service, minor plumbing), a separate Capital Replacement Fund is essential for high-cost, systems-level failures that often happen suddenly.

This includes your Boiler/heating system,

roof, water heater and exterior paint/render.

Start with a Goal: Aim to save a minimum of £3,000 to £5,000 as a readily available, "liquid" emergency fund for unexpected events like a burst pipe or

structural repair.

Fund the Future: The remainder of your calculated annual savings should go into a dedicated, high-interest savings account earmarked strictly for these major

replacements. This prevents you from taking on high-interest debt when the boiler inevitably fails in mid-winter.

The Upgrade vs. Repair Decision

When a major component breaks, you face the crucial question: Should you pay for a repair, or upgrade the system entirely? A professional should help you weigh these three factors:

The 50% Rule (Cost vs. Replacement)

If the cost of the repair exceeds 50% of the cost of a brand new, equivalent system, replacement is almost always the more economical choice. For example, if a new boiler is £4,000, but the repair

quote is £2,200, opt for the new unit. You gain a full warranty and new lifespan for a slightly higher investment.

Age vs. Efficiency (The Payback Period)

Especially for heating systems (Boilers, HVAC), age is the enemy of efficiency.

Repair if: The system is under 10 years old and the repair is minor (e.g., a simple thermostat replacement).

Upgrade if: The system is over 15 years old or you've noticed a significant increase in energy bills. New A-rated condensing boilers or heat pumps are

so much more efficient than older models that the energy savings often pay back the installation cost within a few years.

The Frequency of Failure

If you are calling a repair professional more than once a year for the same system, it is showing systemic failure and should be replaced. The cumulative cost of recurring service calls, labour, and minor parts will quickly outweigh the cost of a reliable new installation. Frequent failure is a clear sign that repair is just delaying the inevitable.

Efficiency Upgrades That Really Save You Money

When facing the costs of home maintenance, homeowners often ask: Which investments genuinely pay us back?

With rising energy prices, the greatest return on investment (ROI) often comes not from aesthetics, but from efficiency.

From a tradesman's perspective, these three upgrades are the most impactful ways to slash utility bills and increase your home's value in 2026.

Insulation: The Foundation of Savings

Before considering new technology, look at the basics. Proper insulation is arguably the best return on investment a homeowner can make. It's a one-time cost that dramatically reduces heat transfer, extending the life of your heating and cooling systems because they don't have to work as hard.

Attic/Loft: Ensure your loft meets current recommended insulation levels, focusing on the R-value (a measure of

thermal resistance). Upgrading from older, shallow insulation to modern, thick materials can cut heating bills by up to 25%.

Cavity Walls: If your home has unfilled cavity walls, insulating them is fast, relatively inexpensive, and stops a huge amount of heat from escaping. Investing in robust insulation is like putting a thermos around your home—it keeps the expensive, conditioned air in, providing immediate and consistent savings.

Smart Thermostats: Smarter Heating. Not Harder

For a relatively small initial outlay, a smart thermostat offers powerful control. These devices learn your routines, automatically adjust temperatures based on whether you're home, and can be controlled remotely.

While a smart thermostat doesn't technically generate savings, it maximizes the efficiency of your existing system by eliminating wasted energy. You stop heating an empty house. Furthermore, many models provide detailed energy usage reports, allowing you to identify and adjust inefficient habits. This technology offers a quick ROI, often recouping its cost within the first year through optimised scheduling.

The Leap to Heat Pumps

For major, long-term savings, few systems rival the Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP). Unlike traditional boilers that burn fuel to create heat, ASHPs extract heat from the outside air (even when it's cold) and use a heat exchanger to transfer it indoors.

While the initial installation cost is significant, government incentives and the unit's incredible efficiency make it a powerful investment:

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