

Media Release



Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Northern Ireland's Comptroller and Auditor General, Dorinnia Carville, has today (Thursday 27 July 2023) published the Northern Ireland Audit Office's latest 'Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.'

Today's report is the third in a series of overview reports summarising the Northern Ireland Executive's expenditure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report sets out that, at 31 March 2023, the total cost of the COVID-19 response relating to Northern Ireland is estimated to be £7.79 billion.

Spend by Northern Ireland government departments on measures to combat the impact of the pandemic is estimated to be £4.94 billion. The remaining £2.85 billion relates to the costs of national schemes which apply to Northern Ireland, including an estimated £1.72 billion covering the Northern Ireland cost of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the furlough scheme).

Almost 75 per cent of the total estimated cost of Northern Ireland initiatives relates to activities across three departments:

- £1.59 billion in the Department of Health working at the forefront of the pandemic response;
- £1.08 billion in the Department of Finance offering rates relief and other support to businesses; and
- £0.97 billion in the Department for the Economy offering support to the economy and local businesses struggling to survive as a result of the impacts of the pandemic.

The report also identifies several key lessons for departments which can be used in mainstream schemes and initiatives going forward. These include lessons on the use of self-declarations as a means of determining eligibility, the need for cross-departmental co-operation, and the importance of incorporating recovery and clawback arrangements to address potential error or fraud.

Commenting on the report, Dorinnia Carville said:

"Work is ongoing to evaluate the impact of the Northern Ireland Executive's response to the pandemic and the financial support provided. While many of the lessons identified in this report can be attributed, at least partially, to the pace

THIS STATEMENT IS ISSUED ON THE STRICT UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST BEFORE 00.01 hrs ON THURSDAY 27 JULY 2023

at which initiatives were delivered, it is crucial that these lessons are learned. Evaluating the impact of spending, identifying what worked well, or did not work, and building on this insight will help to ensure organisations are well placed to react when faced with other emergencies in the future. Oversight by the NICS Board is key to ensuring lessons are learned, shared widely and, where necessary, that processes are improved and embedded”.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). She and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. The C&AG certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. She has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. Her reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. The report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Thursday 27 July 2023.
3. This is the third report and follows previous reports, published in September 2020 and June 2021.
4. This report provides an overview of the Northern Ireland Executive’s response to the pandemic, including initiatives undertaken to support individuals and businesses, the status of those initiatives and the total estimated costs at 31 March 2023. This report does not assess the value for money of the individual measures or the effectiveness of the Northern Ireland Executive’s response to the pandemic.
5. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Patrick Barr (028 9025 1063) or Suzanne Murphy (028 9025 1125).