

Media Release



Northern Ireland Energy Strategy

Progress against the key targets in Northern Ireland's Energy Strategy is lagging considerably, despite expenditure totalling around £107 million since 2020. That is among the findings of a report published today (Tuesday 21 October) by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Dorinnia Carville's report considers the Energy Strategy, and evaluates the approach taken by the Department for the Economy to implement it.

The Energy Strategy, published in December 2021, sets out a long-term vision of net zero carbon emissions and affordable energy for Northern Ireland. It included three key targets for completion by 2030. Today's report notes that the latest data published by the Department reveals significant shortfalls in relation to two of these:

- Against a target to save a total of 8,000 GWh of energy savings by 2030, only 90 GWh of savings were reported in March 2025 (representing 1 per cent of the target).
- Against a target to meet at least 80 per cent of electricity consumption from renewable sources, the amount reported in March was 45 per cent (a 35 per cent shortfall).

The Department has spent approximately £107 million on the Energy Strategy and related initiatives since 2020 (including £85 million on capital projects). However, today's report identifies significant flaws in how the Strategy has been implemented, particularly in relation to the Department's annual Energy Strategy Action Plans. These issues include:

- A lack of clarity over how planned actions aligned with the Strategy's key targets.
- A lack of precise detail on when some actions would be completed, the actual work planned, or specific, measurable outcomes.
- A lack of interim targets or milestones in the Energy Strategy to help determine the pace of progress towards meeting key targets.

The report also notes that the monitoring of some targets by the group tasked with oversight (the Energy Strategy Oversight Group) only took place for the first time in September 2024, almost three years after the Strategy was published.

Commenting on the findings, Dorinnia Carville said:

"The Energy Strategy has a pivotal role in ensuring Northern Ireland meets its ambitions and obligations in relation to net zero, energy efficiency and tackling climate change. Successful implementation requires good governance and effective oversight, and this report highlights concerning shortcomings in these areas. It has been difficult to assess whether the significant expenditure incurred to date represents value for money, and there is a risk that key targets will not be met."

"We welcome more recent changes to the Department's reporting arrangements, which will help provide greater clarity. The Department committed to carrying out a strategic update review of the Energy Strategy in 2025. It is vital that this review is carried out and I would urge the Department to action this report's recommendations to improve implementation of Northern Ireland's Energy Strategy over the next five years."

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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 will be available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Tuesday 21 October 2025.
3. Important factors that will impact on the ultimate success of the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy are the arrangements being developed to improve Northern Ireland's energy storage infrastructure and the role of the Great Britain to Northern Ireland electricity interconnector. These two aspects are not within the scope of this report.
4. When the Energy Strategy was first published, its key target in relation to energy efficiency was to "deliver energy savings of 25% from buildings and industry by 2030". In 2024, the Energy Strategy Oversight Group decided to express this saving in GWh (8,000) rather than as a percentage.
5. The third key target in the Energy Strategy was to double the size of Northern Ireland's low carbon and renewable energy economy to a

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turnover of more than £2 billion by 2030. The Department's most recent Energy Strategy Action Plan Annual Report (published March 2025) estimated the green economy as having £1.58 billion turnover.