

Media Release



Northern Ireland City & Growth Deals

Central Government capital investment of £1.3 billion through City and Growth Deals has the potential to bring major benefits to Northern Ireland, but only if decisive action is taken to accelerate delivery and ensure value for money. That is the conclusion of a report published today (Friday 10 July 2026) by Northern Ireland's Comptroller and Auditor General.

Dorinnia Carville's report on Northern Ireland City and Growth Deals assesses how economically funds have been utilised to date, and how efficiently and effectively Deal projects have progressed. Introduced in 2018, the four Deals¹ bring together the UK Government, NI Executive, local government, and a range of other partners, to deliver major investment aimed at transforming Northern Ireland's economy and regenerating communities.

Today's report finds that, while there is evidence of constructive and evolving collaboration across the Deals, overall progress has been slower than originally anticipated. At March 2026, £1.2 billion of central government funding (out of a total £1.3 billion) remained unspent, with only a small number of projects operational. The report estimates that, assuming a three per cent annual rate of inflation, the real terms value of funding is being reduced by around £37 million for each year of delay.

Similarly, a funding timeframe of 15 years for the delivery of Deals (effective from when Deals are signed) is not currently being formally recognised and managed as a strategic risk, despite a potential risk to funding if delivery does not accelerate. Benchmarking against other UK regions suggests that Northern Ireland has progressed more slowly than in other jurisdictions.

Important areas for improvement are also highlighted. There is limited evidence that delivery costs are being fully captured, or that value for money is being properly documented and examined beyond approval at the business case stage. The report concludes that, given the scale of cost

¹ The four Deals are: the Belfast Region City Deal, the Derry and Strabane District Council City Deal, the Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal, and the Mid South West Growth Deal.

escalations and delays across the Deals, these weaknesses are limiting transparency and assurance.

Commenting on the report's findings, Dorinnia Carville said:

"City and Growth Deals represent a positive example of collaboration between central and local government, and I warmly welcome the evidence of constructive engagement noted in today's report. At the same time, progress remains slow, with much of the available funds remaining unutilised. Continued delays are eroding the value of this potentially transformative investment."

"With only a small number of projects operational, it is not yet possible to provide a proper assessment of long-term outcomes. However, there are already weaknesses in arrangements for capturing costs and ensuring value for money. Without decisive action to address these issues, there is a risk that potential benefits will not be maximised. Given the significant public investment committed, my Office will continue to closely monitor both the ongoing delivery of City and Growth Deals, and the action taken in response to the recommendations made in today's report."

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Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). 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 and is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Friday 10 July 2026.
3. Across four Deals — the Belfast Region City Deal, the Derry City and Strabane District Council City Deal, the Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal and the Mid South West Growth Deal – Central Government capital funding of approximately £1.2 billion has been committed, jointly funded by the NI Executive and the UK Government on equal partnership terms, along with a further £100m in support provided for a NI Executive Complementary Fund. In addition, Deal partners have committed more than £500 million in funding.

THIS STATEMENT IS ISSUED ON THE STRICT UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST BEFORE *00.01 hrs* ON FRIDAY 10 JULY 2026

4. This study does not consider business case development processes for individual projects, planning application work by councils, or detailed delivery activity at individual project level.