



MAKING LIFE BETTER

WELCOME

NEWS

ISSUE 11 - AUTUMN 2025

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CMO Foreword

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the MLB Newsletter.

I am pleased to introduce you to my All Departments Officials Group (ADOG) colleague Sharan Dustagheer, Transport and Road Asset Management, DfI.

In this issue you will find an article about our ADOG workshop which took place on 24 September and offered an opportunity for members to discuss the way forward for Making Life Better, our strategic framework for public health. The facilitated workshop format encouraged a good level of engagement and discussion that allowed for breakout groups to discuss issues and identify options. There will be a further update about the outworkings of this workshop in due course.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Newsletter.



(Picture above) Prof Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Department of Health

Get In Touch

If you have any questions about the content of MLB News, have work you want to share with the Network or wish to join please email:

mlbnetwork@hscni.net

Health Literacy Awareness Month

October marked Health Literacy Awareness Month, an annual initiative aimed at promoting the importance of supporting a person's skillset in navigating their personal health journey through clear, accessible health information and services.

Minister Nesbitt launched Health Literacy Awareness Month with a video address and the Regional Health Literacy Forum (RHLF) promoted a series of awareness articles about the importance of health literacy and the relaunch of the RHLF via social media platforms including LinkedIn and X and through hosting assets on the Engage website [Health Literacy - Engage](#). Statistics for LinkedIn and X show there were, jointly, 12,956 Reach/Impressions, 256 Likes/Comments/Shares, 557 Engagements and 168 Clicks. New members have joined the RHLF as a result of the awareness raised including representatives from academia.

The RHLF will build on the success of their 2025 campaign for Health Literacy Awareness Month 2026 and progress in delivering on an action plan.

All Departments Officials Group (ADOG) - Introductions

I lead the Active Travel Programme Management Office in the Department for Infrastructure, where I oversee a multidisciplinary team that supports delivery of active travel infrastructure across Northern Ireland. The Department's current priorities include finalising the Active Travel Delivery Plan, which sets out our plans for delivery in larger towns and cities, and increasing investment to meet the Climate Change Act's target of allocating 10% of the transport budget to active travel by 2030. The Department works with a whole range of public sector delivery partners, including Councils, Public Health Agency and schools.



(Picture above)
Sharan Dustagheer
Transport and Road Asset
Management
Dept for Infrastructure

Active Travel supports the Making Life Better strategy by promoting healthier lifestyle choices. Walking, wheeling and cycling more can also contribute to tackling climate change, lowering travel costs, and improving the public places we all love and want to spend time in. As the Department's representative on ADOG, I champion cross-government collaboration and look forward to building partnerships that advance shared goals.

ADOG workshop update

A workshop was held in September and, in advance of this, DoH held a series of bi-lateral discussions with ADOG members and compiled a list of suggested items for consideration for possible inclusion in the new Thematic Action Plan. The workshop, which was facilitated by Stephen Wilson from the Public Health Agency, offered an opportunity for ADOG members to review the list, include further suggestions and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

There were two presentations, one on Making Life Better and the second on the DfC and TEO led Test and Learn Collaboration. Breakout sessions followed and ADOG members considered if there was anything missing from the compiled list, if any additional information was needed and what the focus of the MLB refresh should be.

A Thematic Action Plan is now being drafted and, it is hoped, will be launched at the MLB Conference in 2026.



(Picture above)
ADOG workshop in action

Strengthening Communities for Health

Strengthening Collaboration to Address Health Inequalities

Health inequalities remain a significant challenge in our communities and tackling them effectively requires a coordinated approach, which places communities at the heart of decision-making.

This collective approach is the foundation of Strengthening Communities for Health (SCfH) - a cross-sectoral programme of work promoting community development approaches to reducing health inequalities, following the principles set out in Making Life Better.

Public Health Agency (PHA) leads on the co-ordination of the SCfH workstream and SCfH Steering Group. Through the Steering Group, Statutory and Community organisations work together to agree actions and co-design solutions which support community-centred approaches to addressing health inequalities.

One example of collective action - which is delivered by Community Development and Health Network, and commissioned by PHA - is the 'Elevate' programme, which empowers communities to address health inequalities at a local level through capacity building support including; training, grants, mentoring and peer learning.



(Picture above) Attendees of the launch of the Elevate Grants and Mentoring Programme 2025/26

A launch event took place on 9th September for the 21 community organisations being supported through the Elevate programme in 2025/26 to deliver projects which address local health inequalities. Further information on the Elevate programme can be found at:

<https://elevateni.org/>

For more information about Strengthening Communities for Health, please contact Amanda Cotter on Amanda.cotter@hscni.net

Did you know?



NISRA
Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency
Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann
um Staitisticí agus Taighde

DataPortal

The Making Life Better section on the NISRA Data Portal (data.nisra.gov.uk) now has over 400 tables and has recently been populated with tables from the PfG Wellbeing Framework which includes data across equality groups. This is the seventh article in a series which highlights the data and tools available on the NISRA Data Portal.

Making Life Better Dashboard

The Making Life Better (MLB) Dashboard on the NISRA Data Portal provides pre-populated tables and charts grouped by geography and theme, making it easy to explore data that supports the MLB strategic framework for a local area.

Finding an Area Profile

- Select a boundary - Choose from Health and Social Care Trust, Local Government District, or District Electoral Area.
- Select an area - Either click directly on the map or use the dropdown menu at the top of the map to make your selection.
- Select a theme - Statistics are grouped by themes underneath the map. Scroll down to view the themes and select one to display the relevant data.



(Picture above) MLB Dashboard

The population pyramid to the right is one of the pre-population charts available under demographic profile. You can also see a table of the data and a link is provided to the dataset on the Data Portal.



(Picture above) Population pyramid

You can find more information in [the user guide and instructional video](#) on the [NISRA Data Portal FAQs and training materials page](#).

Online training sessions will also be available.

Please contact mlbnetwork@hscni.net to register your interest.

If you need further information or assistance relating to the NISRA Data Portal, contact us at info@nisra.gov.uk

NICS staff requiring statistical input and advice should continue to contact their departmental statistics colleagues in the first instance.

News from the Network

SOCIAL FARMING



(Picture above) Minister Muir and Minister Nesbitt at Laurelview Farm during Social Farming Awareness week in early October 2025.

Social Farming is a creative and inclusive approach to agriculture that supports therapy, rehabilitation, and social inclusion. It offers an alternative to traditional day services for individuals with disabilities and learning difficulties. Rather than operating as a specialised treatment facility, the farm remains a typical working environment where participants engage in everyday farming activities within a non-clinical, supportive setting.

Delivered by farmers and their families, Social Farming enables individuals with support needs to take part in meaningful farm work. The benefits include enhanced mood, increased motivation and confidence, development of practical skills, improved physical health, and stronger social connections. Activities are part of the farm's regular routine, structured by the farmer but shaped by participant input. Seasonal tasks add variety and allow involvement in longer-term projects throughout the farming year.

Social Farming offers a more integrated, person-centred, rehabilitative, and cost-effective model of health and social care. It promotes personal choice and inclusivity, delivering physical and mental health benefits that align with the Making Life Better strategy by improving overall wellbeing and addressing health inequalities.

Currently, 19 active Social Farms operate across Northern Ireland, supporting over 100 participants. Since 2015 the Social Farming Support Service (SFSS) delivered by Rural Support and funded by DAERA through their Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework, has assisted farmers in developing and delivering Social Farming.

DAERA are also delivering a Social Farming Capital Grants Scheme (SFCGS) in 2025–2026, offering small capital grants to further support Social Farmers. Since 2016, the scheme has provided £235k to improve facilities, enhance accessibility, and support the growth of Social Farming enterprises.

More information is available on the [Rural Support website](#).