



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2029



# RESILIENCE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT





# CONTENTS

1. Forewords .....	4
2. Executive Summary .....	6
3. About Us .....	7
4. Where Are We Now? .....	8
5. Planning Process.....	10
6. Strategic Context .....	20
7. Where Do We Want To Be? ....	22
8. Strategic Framework .....	24
9. Objectives and Measures.....	25
10. Resourcing .....	28
11. Strategy Implementation.....	29
12. Summary.....	30

# 1. FOREWORDS

## The NI Sports Forum Chair

Following the conclusion of the most recent strategic cycle, we were given a very clear reminder of the impact sport can have on our community through the most successful Olympic Games for NI athletes in history. The successes in rowing, swimming and gymnastics are testament to the hard work across all levels in the sports sector and are a timely reminder of the potential for success in this region.

The high-profile success that we all enjoyed watching on TV or in Paris is only a fraction of the story. Every week there are thousands of volunteers making sport happen at a grass roots level, enhancing the physical and mental well-being of our communities, providing that social outlet or identifying and developing our next medalists on the global stage. Without the selfless commitment of our volunteers – whether they be coaches, officials, administrators or unofficial taxi drivers – sport would not function as effectively.

It is the role of our governing bodies (NGBs) of sport to support and develop the vast community of volunteers and paid officials and in turn it is the role of the NI Sports Forum to support those governing bodies in doing so. There are significant challenges ahead facing the sector and the NI Sports Forum wishes to be at the forefront in facing these and facilitating the sector to fulfill its potential and impact positively in all many aspects of our community.

The current fiscal environment provides significant challenge to sport. While we must acknowledge that we are only three years out from a global financial trauma, we also have to recognise the contribution sport has made to the COVID recovery process. We still have issues around funding, around facilities and around operational costs faced by our clubs and sporting organisations.

We are delighted to present to you the next Strategic Plan 2024-2029. We would hope that our members and stakeholders see their input reflected in its content; input which was gathered in a robust and detailed consultation period.

We hope that our members and stakeholders, or those interested in the benefits and potential of the sector, will be recognisant that through the threekey strategic priorities of finance & funding, leadership and delivery, the NI Sports Forum will continue to support the sector and continue to make a positive contribution to our community.

**Marc Scott**  
Chairperson



## Executive Manager

Sport has faced many challenges over recent years from larger shocks, including the Covid-19 Pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis, to legislative changes such as the Road Closures Order 2018 and Martyn's Law.

The NI Sports Forum has always acted on behalf of its members and the wider sports sector, reflecting the challenges and successes that sport and physical recreation brings to our community and wider society. Often this can be taken for granted by decision makers or assumptions made when progressing new policy or legislation.

The NI Sports Forum puts the sector first, raising issues, supporting and challenging where needed. In the current landscape

of increased budgetary and wider pressures on the sport and voluntary sector, this Strategy has been developed following substantial engagement with our members and stakeholders. We have heard the challenges organisations face and will look to support and develop as a key partner in the sector.

Thank you to our members and stakeholders who engaged with us to progress this piece of work. To our Board, Staff and Sheffield Hallam University, who helped undertake the work of the Strategy and consultation with the sector.

Yours in Sport

**Richard Honeyford**  
Executive Manager



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NI Sports Forum Strategic Plan has been developed following extensive consultation with Member Bodies, Stakeholders and internal reviews. The plan provides the organisation with a clear direction over the next five years in how it can best support the Sport and Recreation sector in NI in continuing to develop as a forward-thinking, resilient sector.

# 3. ABOUT US



*“the Independent Voice of Voluntary Sport in Northern Ireland”*

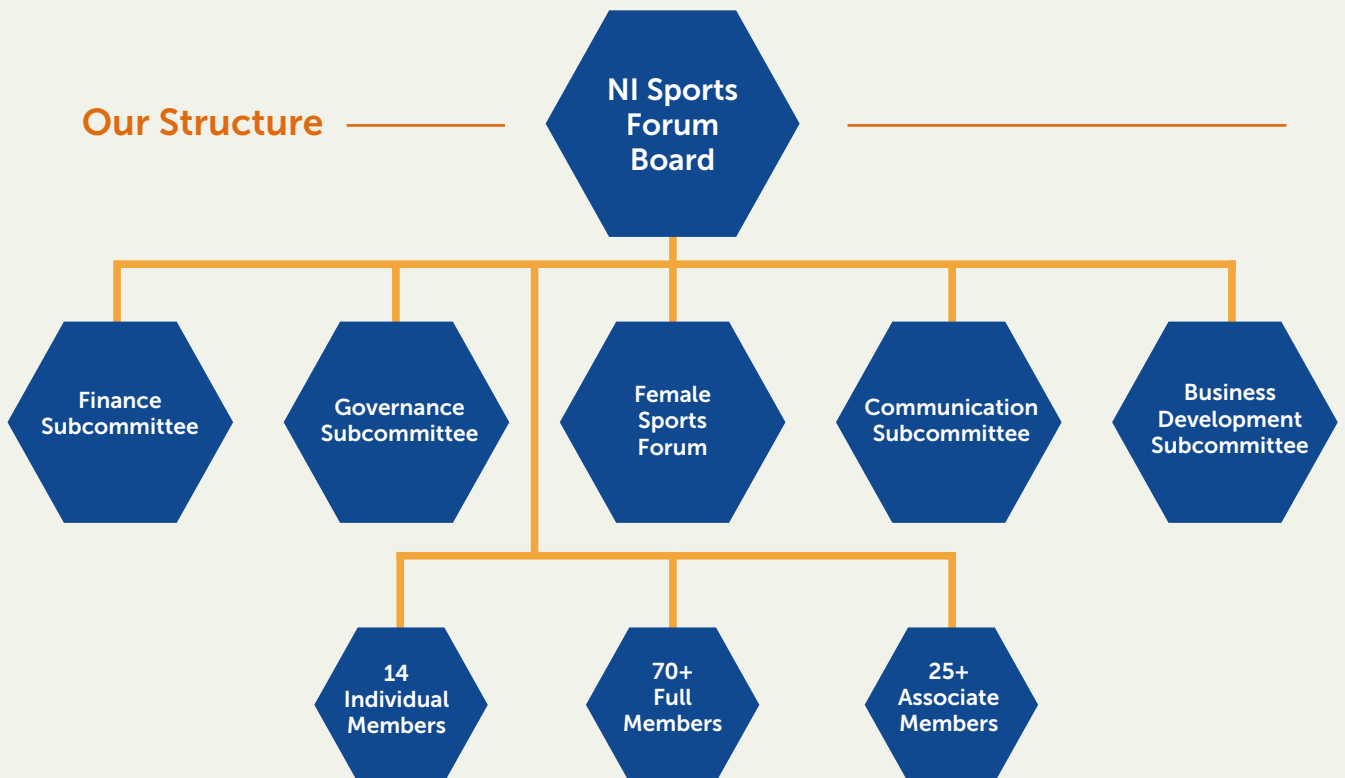
The NI Sports Forum was originally established in 1955 as the *Northern Ireland Council of Physical Recreation* and in 1997 was renamed the *NI Sports Forum*. We exist to promote amateur sport and physical recreation, which results in improved physical and mental health.

The NI Sports Forum is a voluntary association whose membership consists of 72 Governing Bodies of Sport, 26 Associate Members and 14 Individual Members with an interest in sport and physical recreation.

We are the recognised umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector of sport and physical recreation in NI and act as the “Independent Voice of Voluntary Sport in Northern Ireland”. The NI Sports Forum is a charitable company and provides secretariat to the All Party Group on Sport and Physical Recreation at Stormont. The NI Sports Forum also provides administrative support to the Female Sports Forum which is a subcommittee of the NI Sports Forum.

We are a Company Limited by Guarantee (Company no. NI 010440) and a registered Charity (Charity no. 100895).

## Our Structure



# 4. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The NI Sports Forum exists to promote sport and physical activity within a broader sector that encompasses central and local government, alongside governing bodies that operate under twin jurisdictions. The membership of the NI Sports Forum consists of 72 Governing Bodies of Sport, 26 Associate Members, and 14 Individual Members. The work of the NI Sports Forum is carried out by 3 full time members of staff, with decisions on policy and strategy taken by an 11-member board consisting of professionals, practitioners and academics.

Funding for the NI Sports Forum comes from a combination of membership fees, sponsorship, revenue from events and grants (primarily from Sport Northern Ireland). The financial position of the NI Sports Forum is strong relative to the size of the organisation, though grant income has declined in both cash and relative terms in recent years as government spending has been constrained. More generally, public sector investment in sport has stalled over recent years, to the extent that half of the governing

bodies administering sport in NI receive no government funding.

At the same time, governing bodies across NI (and beyond) are continuing to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with participation rates returning (albeit slowly) to pre-2020 levels. Nevertheless, significant shifts in participation patterns are evident, with casual, informal activities such as walking and cycling gaining ground, while more formal activities, especially outdoor team sports are showing signs of decline at club level. This reflects wider trends in both the UK and Ireland.

It is therefore crucial that the new strategy reflects the realities of a political environment which has experienced considerable upheaval and uncertainty for several years, but which is showing signs of renewed confidence in recent months. A substantial uplift in capital investment in revenue is required if sports are to develop improved facilities in support of the aim of increasing participation.

Our membership encompasses organisations from the major spectator sports such as rugby, football and golf, through to judo and swimming, right across the sector to yoga and outdoor recreation. Our full members are Governing Bodies who represent:

- Northern Ireland Bodies
- Ulster Branches of All-Ireland Organisations
- All-Ireland Bodies
- Regional Sections of British Bodies





**NI SPORTS FORUM**

**FEMALE SPORTS FORUM**



Followers  
**2347**

Reach  
**158.3K**  
(1st Jan – 12th Nov 2024)

Content Interaction  
**3.3K**  
(1277 Followers / 1749 non followers)



Followers  
**00.2K**

Reach  
**357.5K**  
(1st Jan – 8th Oct 2024)

Content Interaction  
**6.1K**



Followers  
**2927**



Followers  
**00.2K**

Reach  
**22.9K**  
(1st Jan – 8th Oct 2024)

Content Interaction  
**633**



Followers  
**1039**  
(as of 12th Nov 2024)



Followers  
**2511**

# 5. PLANNING PROCESS

The consultation process consisted of data collated from three sources:

**1** A review of existing documentation and data provided by the NI Sports Forum

**2** A survey of participants and members, delivered online between November 2023 and March 2024

**3** A series of qualitative interviews with NI Sports Forum's stakeholders

Each of these is explored in turn, with an emphasis on primary data collected early in 2024. Throughout the consultation, there were a number of recurring themes which emerged at an early stage and were echoed in the findings of both the survey and the qualitative interviews. This triangulation of data is important because it reinforces the themes and messages emerging from the work and underlines their consistency. This gives added impetus to the work and should help to ensure buy in from key stakeholders as the strategic development plan is shared and implemented.

## Review of Existing Data

In the first instance, a review of board papers and meeting minutes revealed an organisation at something of an inflection point, with changes to key personnel on the board, and conversations around a new direction for the NI Sports Forum. It is also clear that the conduct of the NI Sports Forum during the Covid-19 pandemic generated a significant amount of goodwill among the NI Sports Forum's membership and its partner organisations and stakeholders.

Nevertheless, the fundamental truth remains that the NI Sports Forum is dependent upon the support of Sport Northern Ireland for just over 30% of its income through grant funding, while membership fees generate only 15%. Income from other sources has grown significantly in the last year as a result of sponsorship from the Rank Foundation, which has funded the staffing of two new posts providing support for membership services the Female Sports Forum. The NI Sports Forum is on a reasonably firm financial footing, but would be vulnerable to any cuts in funding from Departments or Sport NI.

## Online Survey

The online survey was open from January to February 2024, and collected survey responses from around 40 Governing Bodies, clubs, educational institutions and individuals.



## Challenges

Funding: 27

COVID: 8

Leadership: 7

Clarity of role: 7

## Successes

Support: 14

Female Sports Forum: 8

Funding: 6

Covid: 5

Lobby: 4

It is notable that both “funding” and “COVID” are considered to be challenges to the organisation, and successes, suggesting the Forum has risen, at least to some extent, to the challenge posed by the situation of the last few years.



## Organisational Strengths

Support: 7

Board: 7

Staff: 6

NGB: 5

## Organisational Weaknesses

Funding: 10

Uncertainty: 4

Clarity: 4

Communication: 4

“NGB” was noted in the context of the work done to support and communicate with Governing Body members.

All of these serve to underline the strategic need to clarify the role of the organisation, and define (or redefine) its role in the sector in Northern Ireland.





## Gap Analysis of Activities

The results of a gap analysis from the survey are presented below, showing the net importance of the various elements of the NI Sports Forum’s work measured against net satisfaction. It is significant that stakeholders are generally well satisfied with the most important aspects of the NI Sports Forum’s output, with the support, networking, lobbying and advocacy functions generally well regarded. It should be noted that we have used net satisfaction and importance scores in this analysis, which account for those respondents who express a negative or neutral view.

Also of note is the current position relating to support for dispute resolution, delivery of conference and workshops and providing resources. All three score relatively poorly in terms of net satisfaction, suggesting there is scope for growth in these areas. Interestingly, they also represent a microcosm of the current position of the NI Sports Forum. Dispute resolution is a service which is used by relatively few members from year to year, but is nevertheless crucial when called upon. Conferences and workshops are in many ways the most visible aspect of the NI Sports Forum’s work, and a service that members appear to be suggesting the NI Sports Forum expands. Meanwhile, the continued provision and development of resources to support the work of NGBs and other partners requires renewed investment.

The level of stakeholder understanding of the broader policy context is perhaps best illustrated by the extent of engagement with the Department for Communities’ strategy document, “Active Living - A New Sport and Physical Activity Strategy”. Among respondents to the survey, 42% have read and the report and understand the strategy, while a further 42% have seen it but not yet digested it. Notably, one in five stakeholders have not read the report at all, of whom several were unaware of its existence. While there is no suggestion of a policy vacuum, these findings do at least indicate that some of the NI Sports Forum’s stakeholders do not see the strategic plan of the government department responsible for sport as being relevant to their own plans.

The most significant challenges for the NI Sports Forum were identified very clearly as ‘funding’ (n = 10), ongoing political instability (n = 9), and the absence of leadership in the sector (n = 8). Interestingly, several consultees also suggested that the NI Sports Forum could take a leading role in developing an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda, believing that other organisations’ were slow to act in this regard, presenting a significant opportunity. There is therefore at least some scope for the NI Sports Forum to deliver conference and workshop activities, as well as accessible resources to support the work of members and partners.

In the broader sports sector, the biggest single issue of concern was finance and funding (n = 18), followed by access to facilities of sufficient quality to encourage participation (n = 12). This latter point merits further consideration, in light of the ongoing debate relating to the redevelopment of Casement Park and the Northern Ireland Football Fund. More specifically, while Football, Rugby Union and Gaelic Games appear to have succeeded in making a substantive case for investment in facilities, the NI Sports Forum’s stakeholders would like to extend that support to other sports. It is clear however, that there are significant gaps in the evidence base, highlighting the paucity of research and data collection in the last decade.

### Biggest Issues of concern in the Sector:



**Funding**



**Access to quality facilities**

# Future Direction

Asked to identify one change to the work of the NI Sports Forum, three themes emerged:

## 1.

The need for the NI Sports Forum to establish and delineate a clear strategic direction. This is particularly important in managing the balance between responding to immediate pressures and working towards which long-term objectives:

*"I am aware for the NI Sports Forum's services to members of which we avail of some [sic.]. However, I am less clear about the strategic direction and what is success for the organisation and therefore its members."*

## 2.

Stakeholders felt that the NI Sports Forum should be more vocal in advocating on behalf of the sport sector. The NI Sports Forum's unique position in liaising between government and NGBs affords it the opportunity to lobby on behalf of its members. Much of this work is unseen and unreported:

*"NI Sports Forum is in a unique position to effect real change with government and policy makers and ensure the majority of funding is directed to the sports working from a grassroots to performance level and not funding unnecessary layers of management and administration within a government quango."*

## 3.

Stakeholders expressed the hope that the NI Sports Forum would make the most of the opportunity to lead on the agenda of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), which has emerged as a distinct policy focus in recent years. They were especially keen for the NI Sports Forum to cement its advocacy role in the sector, by taking a collaborative approach in developing its response to the issue:

*"Having spent the last year delving into EDI and creating opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in... Northern Ireland's outdoor environments, I think it would be amazing if there were more collaborations between stakeholders, Sport NI and the NGBs."*



## What Will Success Look Like?

Successful implementation of the strategy would result in an independent organisation which is respected, supported and supportive.

True independence would enable the NI Sports Forum to engage at the top levels of Government, holding it to account while advocating on behalf of its members. The NI Sports Forum itself would be a strong network of organisations, learning and sharing experience to meet the objectives of the Active Living Strategy.

This would be achieved by providing an expanded programme of support, advice and training, based on the specific needs and challenges of individual sports, identified through an ongoing programme of research.



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*"Greater engagement with individual sports to understand their specific challenges. A more inclusive and diverse sporting landscape, with sport a priority within nurseries, schools and colleges."*

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*"A robust strategy / action plan has been developed, delivered and monitored. Current services are retained and an extension of advocacy role which reflects the wider membership. Perhaps establish an advocacy group which can utilize the skills and experience of member organisations."*

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*"The NI Sports Forum recognised as a valued partner by Sport NI. A Contract for Services discussed and agreed by NI the Sports Forum/Sport NI. Female Sports Forum re-established and resourced by DfC, Sport NI and Others."*

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*"A strong network of sports organisations, learning and sharing experience to best meet the objectives of the Active Living Strategy. The NI Sports Forum has the potential to be the 'go to' resource for sports bodies in NI and could provide support, practical advice and training in this very unique and specialised sector."*





### Other comments

*"Working with the NI Sports Forum as an NGB, Richard and the staff there are excellent and have always been engaging and supportive in helping NGBs."*

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*"The re-establishment of the APG for Sport has been a great success as it showcases all that is good about Sport in NI with government."*

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*" Important that the organisation moves towards an independent chair to manage the views of many."*

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### Detailed Consultation with Stakeholders

Further to the online survey, an in-person focus group took place, involving stakeholders identified by the NI Sports Forum as having an interest in the outcome of the revised Strategic Development Plan. Subsequent to this, a series of online interviews was conducted with respondents who had agreed to engage in further research, as well as with representatives of DfC and Sport NI. This phase of the consultation followed up on the survey, by asking detailed, in-depth questions about aspects of the NI Sports Forum's work



## Focus Group

The focus group session at Newforge identified several priorities for the NI Sports Forum which reflect and build on the outcome of the survey. After reviewing the content of the stakeholder submissions from this first phase, the issues which generated the most comments were identified and grouped into themes for action. Participants were then asked collectively to place each of these themes on a matrix, estimating the effort required for the NI Sports Forum to respond to the issue at hand, measured against the potential benefits of achieving a successful outcome. A blank matrix is presented in Figure 1, and is comprised of four sectors:

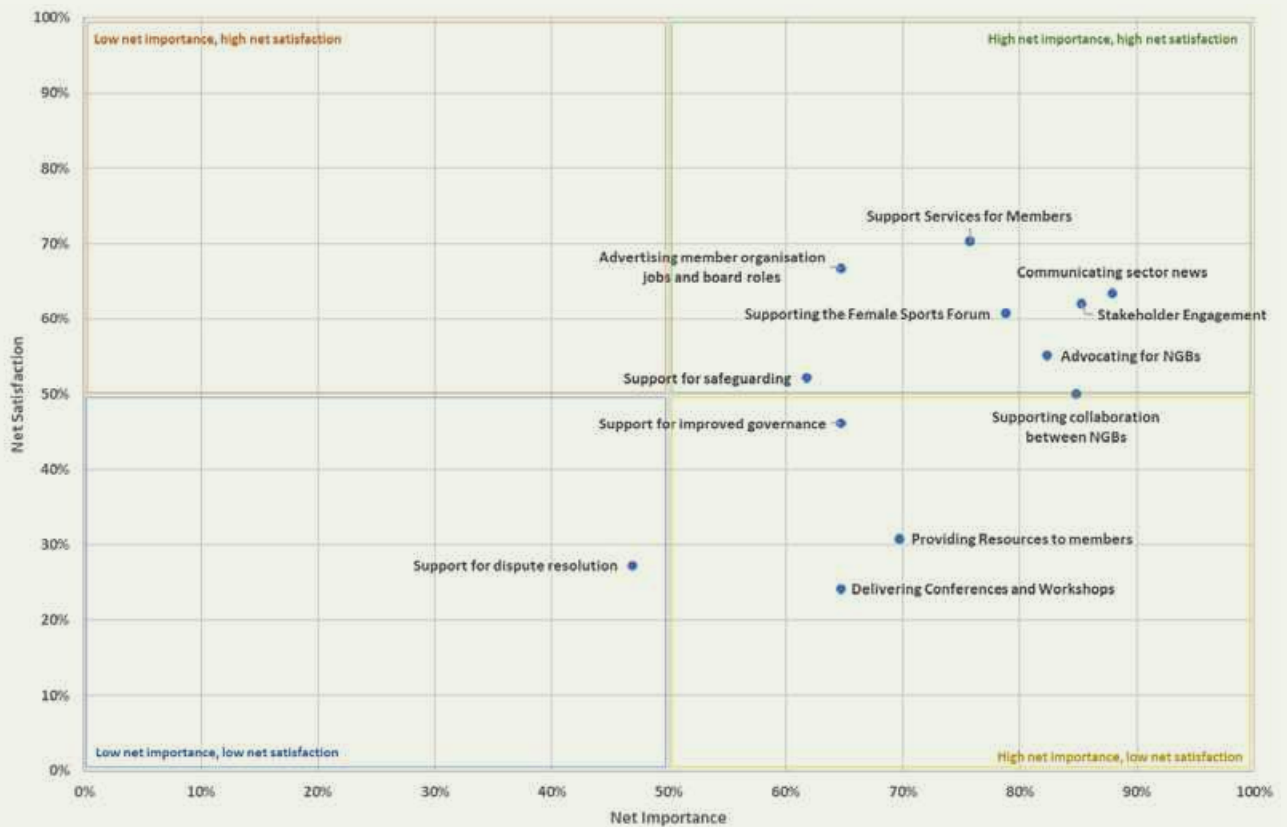
**INCREMENTAL** (low effort, low impact usually continuous actions, involving small, subtle changes

**QUICK WINS** (low effort, high impact) light touch actions with immediate benefits, often prioritised first

**BIG BETS** (high effort, high impact) long-term plans and processes which involve significant change to practice

**MONEY PIT** (high effort, low impact) processes which require significant support for little tangible benefit

Figure 1 – The Effort v Impact Matrix



The four quadrants on the graph provide a useful framework for the discussion of the findings of the consultation exercise, to which we now turn.

The overarching theme which emerged from the discussion was that the NI Sports Forum should develop a coherent, stakeholder-led

business plan with clear timescales, resource requirements, roles and responsibilities. The NI Sports Forum should make the most of the opportunity afforded by the considerable goodwill generated by its actions during the Covid-19 pandemic, and evolve into a proactive organisation which sets the agenda rather than reacting to it.

**INCREMENTAL** None of the key objectives identified by stakeholders in the focus group were placed in the incremental quadrant.

**QUICK WINS** Notably, five of the key priorities identified during the focus group were thought to be quick wins. The top priority for the stakeholders was the need to clarify the role of the NI Sports Forum, linked to the secondary objective of communicating the work of the organisation both within the sector and beyond.

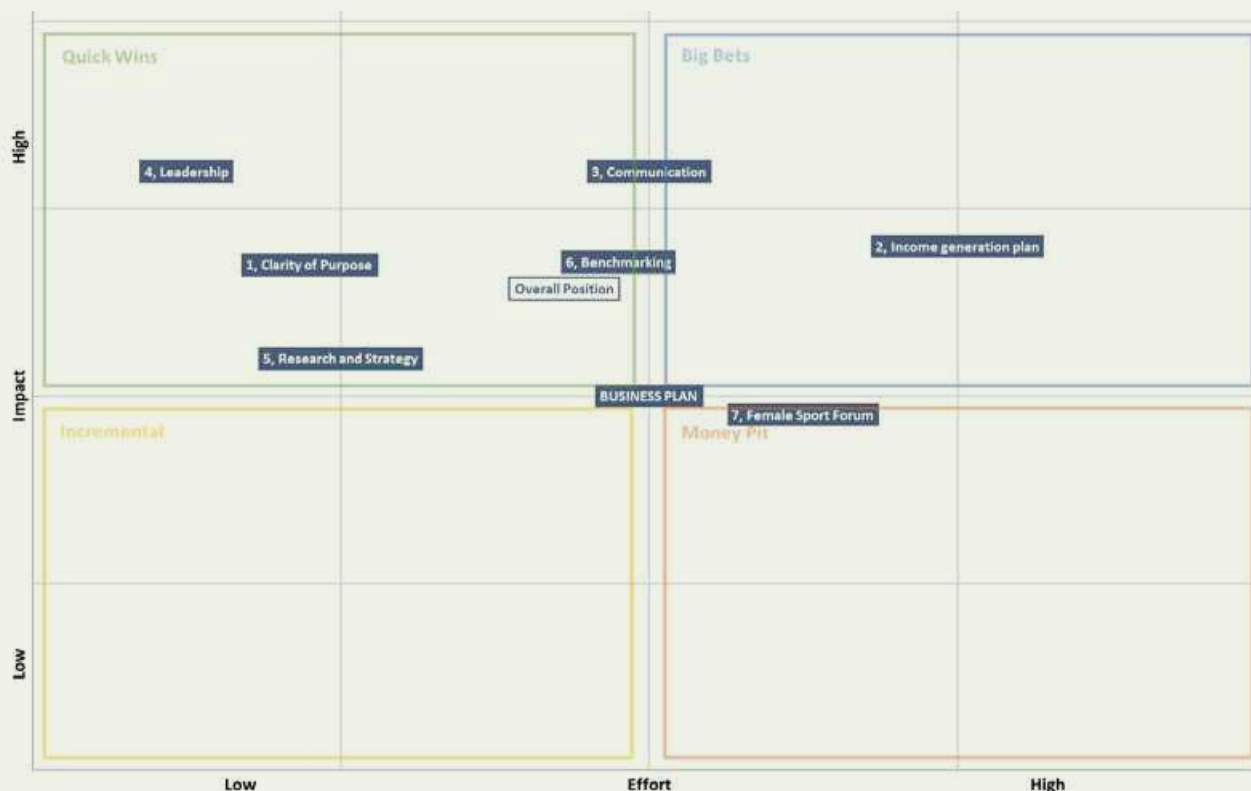
Stakeholders were also clear that the NI Sports Forum has a key role to play in providing leadership to NGBs and other stakeholders, underpinned by an ongoing programme of research, which demonstrates the strategic value of sport. Stakeholders felt that the NI Sports Forum could act as a representative voice for governing bodies, particularly those with smaller participant bases, which continue to rely on grant funding.

**BIG BETS** There is a notable desire on the part of stakeholders to develop an income generation plan which will give the NI Sports Forum long-term sustainable independence from Sport NI, financially, operationally, and politically. More specifically, stakeholders believe reduced

dependence on grant funding would increase the extent to which the NI Sports Forum could check and challenge decisions made by Sport NI in the public sphere. This would allow the organisation to be more vociferous in representing the interests of its members, and bring the NI Sports Forum into line with its counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales. Options include: increasing membership fees; generating sponsorship from external (third party) organisations; staging knowledge-sharing events for clubs, community organisations and the wider voluntary sector.

**MONEY PIT** There is evident determination to offer services through the Female Sports Forum (including workshops and partnership arrangements), which meet the demands of its stakeholders. However, the stakeholders also recognised that this work is dependent on defining more clearly the position of the Female Sports Forum, which may require a separate consultation process. This is therefore a longer term aim, though no less urgent than any other objective.

Figure 2 - Outcome of Stakeholder Focus Group



## Qualitative Interviews

Further to the focus groups, the tentative aims and objectives which emerged from the discussions at Newforge were explored in more detail through one-to-one interviews with stakeholders at Chief Executive or director level in a range of governing bodies and partner organisations, including Sport NI and the Department for Communities.

These conversations have confirmed that these aims and objectives have broad support from both Forum members and the branches of the Executive with responsibility for sport. There is significant goodwill towards the organisation from NGBs in particular, as a result of the extensive work undertaken during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, giving the NI Sports Forum some latitude in articulating its expanded remit. Similarly, all stakeholders are supportive of the idea that the NI Sports Forum should seek greater financial independence by diversifying its income streams, though opinions vary on the precise mix of activities which might achieve this, and stakeholders are keen to ensure the NI Sports Forum does not overreach itself, given its existing capacity constraints in terms of personnel.

There is little (if any) opposition to the idea of increasing membership fees, reflecting the general perception that the support and services provided by the organisation are good 'value for money'. There are some concerns that increased costs should not fall disproportionately on smaller governing bodies (i.e. those managing sports with fewer participants and clubs). In this context however, it is important to note that more than half of the NI Sports Forum's member NGBs are in the lowest band of fees at just over £100 per year.

Any increase in fees is likely to lead to a concomitant increase in expectations however, and this would require careful management, at least to begin with. Nevertheless, the potential for the NI Sports Forum to become a more prominent voice for sport, with the ability to check and challenge policy decisions affecting governing bodies, appears to have some appeal among NGBs. Crucially, they are also keen for the NI Sports Forum to develop and promote good practice in terms of leadership and governance as part of a widened portfolio of activities.



# 6. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The NI Sports Forum acts as an enabler for local member sports organisations, with our fundamental purpose "To guide, support and empower our members in their role to govern and promote sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland". We also act as the independent voice for voluntary sport in Northern Ireland.



The NI Sports Forum Strategy and plans outlined in this proposal are set in alignment with the draft Programme for Government Strategic Framework, DfC Active Living Strategy and SportNI's Corporate Plan: the Power of Sport.

### **Programme for Government**

At the time of publication the Executive Office has launched a new draft Programme for Government (PfG), the work of the NI Sports Forum has a contribution to make in achieving a number of the outcomes, most specifically under the Mission: Building New Foundations and Shaping a New Tomorrow (People). However, sport and physical recreation will also have a key part to play in a number of the nine priorities including:

- Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy .
- Cutting Health Waiting times
- EVAWG Proposed Action: Raising Awareness
- Safer Communities

The sector will also need the PfG to work for us, especially in areas such as protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment and actions around stadia and grass roots facilities.

### **Active Living Strategy**

The NI Sports Forum has been identified as one of the key stakeholders for the Active Living Strategy and provides representation at all levels of delivery from the Task and Finish Group to the Implementation and Monitoring Groups. This clearly shows the key value the NI Sports Forum can play in the delivery of this Strategy most importantly by supporting the Governing Bodies, as key delivery partners, to engage with Active Living.

Of the 19 Goals outlined under the 6 Key themes and Cross Cutting Principles, the NI Sports Forum is identified as a strategic partner in 18. The NI Sports Forum has a key role to help with the achievement of themes and subsequent goals outlined in the Strategy, particularly in acting as the link between the Strategy groups and Governing Bodies.

The NI Sports Forum Strategy and operations look to support and guide all member bodies in delivery of the Active Living plan. The NI Sports Forum also has a role to play as part of the implementation and monitoring groups, helping to relay feedback from those delivery partners in helping achieve its goals.

### **Power of Sport**

Our proposal aligns to a number of key areas within Sport NI's five year Corporate Plan and supporting the achievement of the mission: "By 2026, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all."

Specifically, the NI Sports Forum has a role to support three of the four the Cornerstones of the plan in order for NGBs to attain Outcomes 1 and 2 including to:

- Build a welcoming and inclusive sports culture, recognising the rights of everyone to access and participate in sport and physical activity;
- Promote wellness and wellbeing;
- Target sport in rural communities, in disadvantaged and amongst under-represented group

Of the six Proposed Actions laid out in the plan, the NI Sports Forum can have significant and direct impacts on:

- 1. Quality clubs and effective NGBs**
- 2. Connected Communities**
- 3. People Development**

With the NI Sports Forum's Purpose "to guide, support and empower our members in their role to govern and promote sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland", and our subsequent strategic themes, the NI Sports Forum remains in a position to support Sport NI in the achievement of the Outcomes and Actions over the course of the next four to five years.

# 7. WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

## Our Vision

***"A forward-thinking, resilient sports sector in Northern Ireland, transforming lives while building a healthy, inclusive and empowered community."***

This document outlines new objectives for the NI Sports Forum and explains how they can be achieved over the next five years. This is a plan for an exciting and sustainable future for sport, inspiring and giving more people the opportunity to engage and participate in what ever form (volunteering, active participant or coaching for example). Sports should be able to flourish and expand, with access to better facilities, supporting competition at a high level, and to be

acknowledged for their outstanding governance.

Successful execution of this plan will require additional financial resources from a wider range of funders to support an expansion in the NI Sports Forum's capacity. In the event that new funding is not forthcoming within the plan's duration, it will be necessary to reevaluate the objectives outlined here, and/or investigate other ways to achieve them.

## Our Mission

***"Our mission is to lead and champion the sport & recreation sector in Northern Ireland, creating an inclusive environment where resilience, innovation and community thrive."***

## Our Values

### Inclusive

*"We are dedicated to creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued, breaking down barriers, and fostering a diverse, inclusive community that ensures equal opportunities for all."*

### Collaborative

*"We believe in the power of partnership, working together with stakeholders to share knowledge, build strong relationships, and unite efforts to achieve shared goals within the sports and recreation sector."*

### Excellence

*"We are committed to achieving the highest standards in everything we do, striving for continuous improvement, innovation, and setting benchmarks that reflect the best practices and outcomes in the sector."*

### Advocacy

*"We passionately advocate for the sports sector, working to influence policy, secure resources, and raise public awareness, ensuring that the sector's vital role in society is recognised and supported."*

### Leadership

*"We lead with integrity, vision, and purpose, inspiring and empowering others to drive meaningful change, while cultivating strong, ethical leadership throughout the sports and recreation community."*





# Key Priorities Summarised



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## Funding and Finance

- Increase funding
- Broader range of funding sources
- Sustainability
- Widen portfolio of funded services to generate income



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## Leadership

- Step into breach left by political upheaval and instability
- Collaborative approach, taking partners along
- Single voice for sport
- Co-ordination of activities between NGB members
- Develop and support the EDI agenda
- Ongoing programme of research and knowledge exchange



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## Delivery

- Diversify activities.
- New products for the existing 'customer' (member) base
- New markets for existing products and services, e.g. clubs, community groups, local authorities
- Review, develop and improve existing products and services
- Benchmarking performance

# 8. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The consultation and stakeholder engagement reflected in this report have generated valuable insight which has shaped the strategic framework used to underpin this Plan. The Framework incorporates three integrated strategic outcomes delivered through a range

of activities designed to instigate a process of transformational change for the NI Sports Forum over the life cycle of the Plan. The outcomes relate to three key objectives:

All of the planned activities will focus on the strategic outcomes which are clearly in the NI Sports Forum's remit to influence and improve. The delivery of these strategic outcomes will require the development of annual Operational Plans that are resourced effectively to ensure progress is being measured and reported on a regular basis.

A detailed description of the three strategic outcomes and related activities, objectives and measures of success is presented in the following tables.



# 9. OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES

## Independence and resilience



Activity	# / Key Objectives	Specific Actions to achieve Objective	Measures
Cost controls and resourcing	<b>1.1.1</b> Continued management of the available budget on principles of financial prudence to maintain strict control of costs.	Annual operating budgets in place and agreed by the Board. Identify annual priorities and projects in support of members. Finance Committee meetings to review spend against budget. Review services to maintain best value for money.	Income: expenditure ratio
	<b>1.1.2</b> Identify savings, economies of scale and value for money through competitive procurement.	Identify areas of cost saving for the NI Sports Forum. Procurement Policy adhered to and reviewed regularly. Identify potential opportunities for collective procurement of services with Members.	Reduced back office costs Level of financial reserves Opportunities sought and secured
	<b>1.1.3</b> Outline staffing requirements and identify funding sources to support delivery.	Seek funding opportunities to maintain staff structure from 2025. Identify potential opportunities for new staffing in support of services. Actively source funding opportunities in support of specific projects.	# Staff and Volunteers in support of Strategy
Membership income	<b>1.2.1</b> In consultation with NGBs, review membership levies with the aim of increasing income, commensurate with value for money of services.	Review of membership structure and modelling against good practice and ensuring value for money. Assess commercial value of equivalent services. Ensure services meet needs of Members.	Review status Membership income # Members/ turnover
	<b>1.2.2</b> Increase income generated through events and services.	Review of membership structure and service model. Establish annual delivery of events (seminars, conferences, workshops) for members and non - members to generate income. Review potential for a membership (services) scheme for non NGB organisations/ NGB-affiliated Clubs to access.	Increase income from services and events (Net) # events # services
Commercial sponsorship	<b>1.3.1</b> Develop 5-year Income Generation Plan which increases total income and reduces ratio of grants from public sector funders.	Plan developed and implemented considering membership model, service delivery, commercial income and event delivery. Consider potential business forum for corporate and private benefactors in support of the NI Sports Forum's strategic objectives.	Total (non public sector funders) income increased. Public Sector Ratio reduced Commercial income as percentage of total income
	<b>1.3.2</b> Develop commercial partner and sponsor plan to generate more revenue and maximise the financial value of the NI Sports Forum.	Develop as part of Income Generation Plan Identify potential lead sponsor and additional commercial partners to support service delivery to members. Seek commercial sponsorship opportunities to develop and expand event/ service delivery.	New and prospective corporate sponsors / private benefactors Lead sponsorship agreemen
Public funding	<b>1.4.1</b> Identify and secure appropriate levels of funding from SportNI to support the delivery of effective and efficient services for the sports sector.	Establish MOU with SportNI outlining the agreed partnership means of working to best support the sector. Maintain and develop SportNI relationship in support of agreed services for sports.	Sport NI funding as a percentage of total income MOU in place
	<b>1.4.2</b> Identify and secure new sources of funding from government departments and related agencies.	New public sector grants identified, applied for and secured Align with service delivery plan in support of the NI Sports Forum projects and oobjectives.	# grants identified and secured

# Leadership



Activity	# / Key Objectives	Specific Actions to achieve Objective	Measures
Setting the leadership agenda	<b>2.1.1</b> Lead the political agenda for sport, advocating for the sector and ensuring policy aligns to needs of sport and physical activity in NI.	Deliver events to engage with sports leads and focus on key challenges facing the sector. Organise and provide secretariat to All Party Group meetings; supporting and progressing the agenda. Publication of sector briefing annually. Engage with Departments and Ministers on a key asks.	# Events Delivered # APG meetings and agenda items Annual Publication # Engagement and meetings with officials and politicians Manifesto for Sport published
	<b>2.1.2</b> Become the vocal advocate, representative voice and first point of contact for the sports sector in NI.	Engage with Departmental and political representatives on matters affecting sport. Engagement with local media. Review potential of advocacy group to be embedded within the organisation. Ensure representation on relevant Stakeholder groups. Monitor relevant consultations from local and central government, providing support to members and responding on behalf of members.	Engagement with government departments #Media outlets / journalists engaged # Stakeholder Groups represented on # Returns made per year
	<b>2.1.3</b> Create and embed a leadership network to support and develop collaboration amongst sports.	Deliver a regular calendar of events and opportunities for staff from NGBs to share knowledge and develop personal and professional networks.	# events/ opportunities with NGB discussion
	<b>2.1.4</b> In collaboration with SportNI and other key with partners, review existing arrangements relating to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda in sport in NI.	Work with SportNI and the progression of the EDI Strategy. Meaningful engagement with expert partners in the sector to create resources, share knowledge and deliver events.	# Resources developed # Events delivered
	<b>2.1.5</b> In collaboration with SportNI and other key partners, support NGBs' approach to ensure long-term access to facilities and funding for development / improvement.	Collaborate and coordinate requirements of NGBs and clubs to access adequate sporting facilities. Advocate for funding to meet facility needs for grassroots sports to create new or upgrade existing facilities.	Engagement with government departments Engagement with local political representatives Council engagement
Leading by example	<b>2.2.1</b> Engage with Member organisations to assess and develop our performance.	Annual Member Satisfaction Survey distributed. Engage with organisations for feedback on performance.	% Members satisfied with support Total number members
	<b>2.2.2</b> Operate to best practice standards in governance and management reflecting principles of Code of Good Governance.	Audit organisation against the five key principles of good governance. Recommendations agreed and advanced in Governance. Board and committee review to reflect the needs of the organisation.	Audit Complete Recommendations in place Reviews carried out
Taking a collaborative approach	<b>2.3.1</b> Co-ordinate opportunities between NGBs and other stakeholders.	No. inter NGB collaborative projects including initiatives and political engagement on key issues led/ facilitated by the NI Sports Forum.	# initiatives collaborated upon
	<b>2.3.2</b> Reinvigorate the work of the Female Sports Forum by seeking collaboration from NGBs and wider stakeholders.	Desktop review of the Female Sports Forum's (FSF) aims and objectives. New FSF Plan in place to work with partners on increasing visibility, leadership and participation in women's.	Review Completed Plan in place and promoted
	<b>2.3.3</b> Re-establish links with non-NGB stakeholders across Northern Ireland, to strengthen partnership working.	Establishment of meaningful and functional links with NI's Local Authorities, Universities and colleges Engage with local authorities and 3rd sector organisations to identify and deliver new opportunities for partnership working.	# Local Authorities engaged # Universities Engaged # 3rd Sector organisations engaged
Championing the Benefits of sport and physical recreation in NI	<b>2.4.1</b> Develop comprehensive Communications Plan in consultation with local media outlets.	Review / audit of current internal and external communications, including traditional and social media output. Develop Communications plan for internal and external Communications.	Communications Plan in place Website, Social Media reach and wider media engagement
Developing an ongoing programme of research	<b>2.5.1</b> Develop improved knowledge of the landscape with respect to voluntary club sport in NI.	Deliver Annual sector survey exploring priority needs e.g. access to facilities, volunteering, challenges, funding.	Annual Survey in place Report produced
	<b>2.5.2</b> Working with Stakeholders, develop improved knowledge of the landscape with respect to sports facilities.	Audit of NGB reports into facilities, assessing quality, management, development needs, funding, etc. Identify key gaps in research for NGBs. Develop research plan and seek funding to support sector.	# and type of research projects initiated.
	<b>2.5.3</b> Establish a knowledge-sharing partnership with educational institutions in I.	Create a research group of identified educational stakeholders meeting regularly.	No. Research Projects Initiated
Support for Good Governance	<b>3.1.1</b> Support improvement of good governance across sports.	Deliver a workshops to members and clubs that outlines and reinforces the principles of Good Governance. Create resource for sports to record and regularly review policies and procedures. Support organisations in their Governance needs.	# workshops delivered Resource in place
	<b>3.1.2</b> Facilitate delivery in Member organisations for the recruitment of appropriately skilled individuals at Board level.	Maintain and progress Board Recruitment Programme for Member organisations. Review and gain new candidates for the Board Recruitment Programme, based on needs and skills identified by sports. Advertise Board Roles on behalf of members.	# Candidates on BRP Board Roles advertised

# Effective Support and Delivery



Activity	# / Key Objectives	Specific Actions to achieve Objective	Measures
Help progress the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda across sport	<b>3.2.1</b> Deliver a programme of workshops to members and clubs outlining and reinforcing the principles of good practice in EDI.	Programme of workshops developed, engaging with experts in specific areas to support sports in progressing the agenda.	# Workshops delivered
	<b>3.2.2</b> Develop Resources to support NGBs and sports in making effective policy change to promote inclusion.	Work with SportNI and Stakeholders in the sector to identify and support EDI needs and delivery of relevant Strategy. Engage experts in identified areas to deliver support for sports in developing own policies of diversity and inclusion.	# Resources created
	<b>3.2.3</b> Support sports to increase number of women represented on Sports' Boards.	Identify and recruit women with skills to support progress of NGB Boards Develop workshops to develop and engage more women for Board roles.	# Women on BRP # Women recruited
	<b>3.2.4</b> Support sports to improve diversity of representation across Boards.	Identify and recruit individuals as part of the BoardRecruitment Programme (BRP) from ethnic minority groups, people with a disability and other minority groups.	# Candidates from minority backgrounds on BRP. Levels of Recruitment on Boards.
	<b>3.2.5</b> Support sports to increase visibility, leadership and participation in women and girls Sport.	Female Sports Forum Plan in place in support of areas including NI Role Models (athletes/ coach/ admin). Research/ survey completed into trends in women's sport. Delivery of Sports engagement event(s)/ Campaign to promote female sport. Workshop/ seminar delivery to educate and develop the women's sport agenda. Delivery of leadership programme in support of NGBs. Explore means to promote women and girls opportunities.	Female Sports Forum Plan reviewed Measures in place on the delivery of key objectives within the plan
Provide relevant and effective services in support of members	<b>3.3.1</b> Ensure effective Services and resources are in place to meet the needs of Member organisations.	Review all services against key criteria of: resource requirements, income generation and importance to the sector. Identify and develop services and resources to meet emerging needs and policy changes for NGBs.	Review Initiated and maintained against need
	<b>3.3.2</b> Support Clubs/ organisations to identify and secure public funding for revenue and capital based projects.	Update and publicise latest funding opportunities across sport. Deliver series of workshop on securing funding, engaging with funders etc 1:1 support given to specific organisations on funding applications.	# Funding opportunities advertised # workshops delivered # Clubs/ organisation supported
	<b>3.3.3</b> Support sports to meet safe recruitment requirements through AccessNI.	Maintain Umbrella Body Status for AccessNI. Provide advice and support on ANI process and requirements to sports' liaisons officers. Submit applications for AccessNI in timely manner.	# ANI Applications per year # organisations using ANI service
	<b>3.3.4</b> Support Child Protection in Sport Unit to assure sports have relevant minimum standards of Safeguarding in place.	Identify bodies that require support from CPSU for audit and standards in place. Engage with Members on Safeguarding requests for support.	# Sports referred to CPSU for support
	<b>3.3.5</b> Provision of a Dispute Resolution Service to assist members in dealing with internal disputes.	Work with other key Stakeholder (including SportNI) to support sports in dealing with disputes. Mixture of proactive and reactive measures in support of Governing Bodies. Provide workshops/ webinars on means to prevent disputes and have suitable policies and procedures in place (e.g. selection policy, governance documents). Establish Directory of suitably experienced/ qualified candidates to support sports.	# Dispute Requests received Promote service and include review of e.g. Articles # workshops delivered NGB support network in place
<b>3.3.6</b> Support sports in areas relating to emerging needs.	Monitor and react to matters impacting sports, developing resources and support mechanisms e.g. sustainability agenda.	#Resources and engagement	
Benchmarking the sector in support of Members	<b>3.4.1</b> Create service to support NGBs understand trends and matters affecting the sector.	Annual returns from Members to identify challenges and trends in the sector. Publication of report on key matters affecting sports. Data available for members to understand sector and benchmark progress. Work with key stakeholders sport and wider VCS to collate and report data.	Annual Survey completed



# 10. RESOURCING

As a membership organisation, we will prioritise value for money for all our members. We are currently facing a challenging public

sector funding environment and will have to adapt our priorities as opportunities become available.

To resource the Strategy we will utilise expertise from within and outside the NI Sports Forum:

## Board and subcommittees

The Board and subcommittees (including Governance, Finance, Business Development and Female Sports Forum) provide strategic direction and expertise to the staff of the NI Sports Forum. Our Articles of Association allow additional committees to be formed under specific Terms of reference where need is identified. The breadth of expertise from within and outside the sector help with strategic direction, high level decision-making and awareness of the needs of the sports sector.

## NI Sports Forum Staff

The Current Staff structure of the NI Sports Forum includes:

- a. Executive Manager
- b. Member Services Officer
- c. Inclusive Participation Officer
- d. Bookkeeper (PT)

The Executive Manager oversees the current areas of investment and will lead on the proposed additional areas of support in Representation, Consultation and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. Staff operational plans will focus on the objectives and activities outlined.

## Collaboration with External Stakeholders

The NI Sports Forum collaborates with a number external Stakeholders, whom it can call upon in support of specific projects where additional expertise is required. This currently includes Department for Communities, SportNI, NICVA, Volunteer Now, Sports Law NI, Sports Resolutions and the Home Country Sports Associations (UK and Ireland).

We will also be looking to work more closely with key partners including Universities and Councils to help achieve our Mission and Vision and ensure the sports sector is in a strong position in the future.

# 11. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The NI Sports Forum aims to implement its strategic priorities through a structured, phased approach with clear timelines, accountability measures, reviews and resources to ensure sustainable outcomes.

This approach will engage key stakeholders, allow effective resource allocation and monitor progress against our goals. We will also look at how best to communicate this to members and the wider community.

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To realise our vision and achieve our mission, strategic aims and objectives, we will:



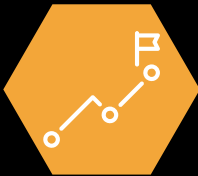
## 1: Establish a Strategy Implementation Group

We will bring together an Implementation Group to monitor and report to the Board of Directors on progress against objectives. The group will oversee the development and implementation of a framework to achieve our objectives and adapt to the changing landscape of the sector.



## 2: Develop an Implementation and Reporting Framework

With our Strategic Objectives outlined, we will develop and implement a coherent framework to support the planning and monitoring of the plan. The framework will use identified baseline data along with clear objectives and measures to report against through the course of the plan.



## 3: Develop, implement and review annual Operational Plans

We will develop detailed Operational Plans annually that outline specific activities aligned under our Strategic Objectives. This will be monitored regularly by staff and reported to the Implementation Group and Board to assess progress, identify changes needed to achieve the overall Mission and update actions to remain aligned to the key priorities.



## 4: Ensure appropriate Governance structures are in place

We will review and enhance our Governance structures to best support staff and representatives to achieve the aims and objectives of the Strategic Plan. This will assure appropriate expertise and leadership across the plan.



## 5: Invest in Resources

We will require the necessary resources in order to achieve the aims of this plan. We will seek opportunities to allow the necessary financial, human and programme expertise in order to achieve these aims, whilst adhering to financial prudence.



## 6: Communicate Progress

We will develop a Communications Plan in line with our reporting Framework to outline regular progress against our objectives. We will report annually to members as part of our annual review and AGM.

# 12. SUMMARY

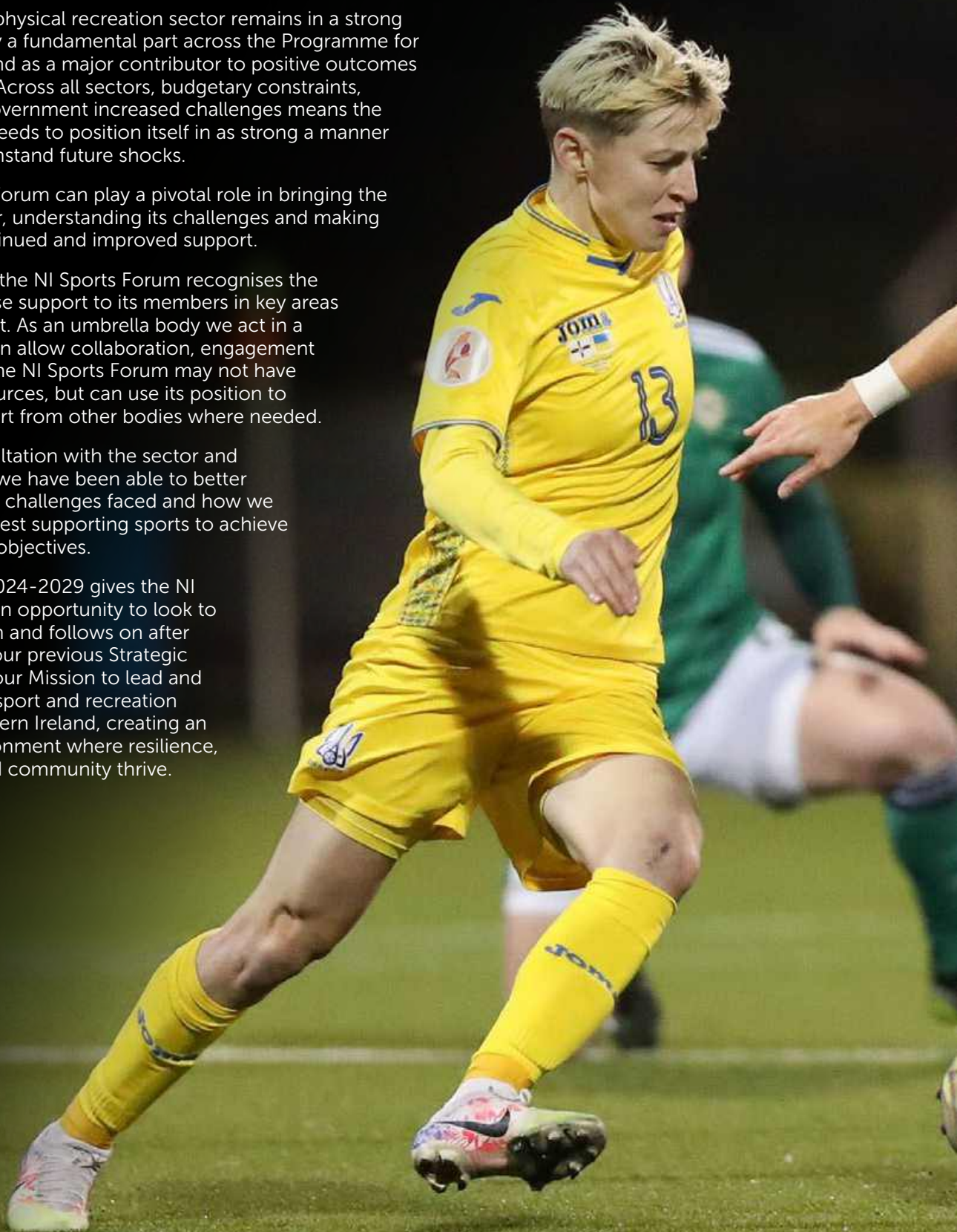
The sport and physical recreation sector remains in a strong position to play a fundamental part across the Programme for Government and as a major contributor to positive outcomes in our society. Across all sectors, budgetary constraints, inconsistent government increased challenges means the sports sector needs to position itself in as strong a manner possible to withstand future shocks.

The NI Sports Forum can play a pivotal role in bringing the sector together, understanding its challenges and making a case for continued and improved support.

Alongside this, the NI Sports Forum recognises the need to increase support to its members in key areas of development. As an umbrella body we act in a manner that can allow collaboration, engagement and support. The NI Sports Forum may not have all central resources, but can use its position to leverage support from other bodies where needed.

Through consultation with the sector and our members, we have been able to better understand the challenges faced and how we can go about best supporting sports to achieve their aims and objectives.

Our Strategy 2024-2029 gives the NI Sports Forum an opportunity to look to the longer term and follows on after Covid-19 and our previous Strategic Plan, meeting our Mission to lead and champion the sport and recreation sector in Northern Ireland, creating an inclusive environment where resilience, innovation, and community thrive.





# RESILIENCE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

