



# Corporate Plan 2025/26 to 2026/27

July 2025





Office for  
**Environmental  
Protection**

# **Corporate Plan 2025/26 to 2026/27**

July 2025

The Office for Environmental Protection is a non-departmental public body, created in November 2021 under the Environment Act 2021. Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account. Our work covers England and Northern Ireland. We also cover reserved matters across the UK.

[www.theoep.org.uk/what-we-do](http://www.theoep.org.uk/what-we-do)



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# Foreword

This plan sets out our programme of work for the years ahead, and so explains the part we aim to play to protect and improve the environment in England and Northern Ireland, by holding government and other public authorities to account. It is our fourth annual plan, and our first since we refreshed our strategy and enforcement policy in November 2024.



In the last 18 months, much has changed. We have seen the restoration of the power sharing Executive and political institutions in Northern Ireland, and a new Programme for Government is agreed with protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment a core priority. A first statutory Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) is in place, taking a further critical step to implement the national environmental governance envisaged by the Environment Act.



In the UK, a new Parliament and government has been elected with economic growth and clean energy among its core missions. A refreshed EIP is soon to be published and the Secretary of State has made cleaning up waters, rivers and seas, ensuring nature's recovery and the move to a zero-waste economy early priorities.

Yet amongst this change, much also remains the same. Our latest assessment of progress in England reports that the previous government remained largely off track to achieve commitments to significantly improve the natural environment. The window of opportunity to redress environmental harms is now closing, with the effort needed and cost of action increasing. A legally binding apex commitment to halt the decline in species abundance is some five short years hence. In Northern Ireland, we'll report for the first time on progress in 2026. Our assessment of the drivers and pressures impacting biodiversity and nature, published last year, concludes that pressures on nature are not sustainable and urgent action is needed to protect and improve the environment for this and future generations.

We explain here the role we can play. We set out priorities for our scrutiny, reports and recommendations to Parliament and the Assembly – we aim to scrutinise those areas most critical to government's goals, commitments and targets, so that it is more likely these can be achieved. We also set out how our investigation and enforcement activities will progress, in the year ahead.

We outline our continued emphasis on our contribution to nature's recovery, and clean water in England, and in the effective management of nutrients in Northern Ireland alongside work to contribute to nature's recovery at sea and an effective basis for environmental governance. We also explain how we aim to improve our organisation, so that we can make the most difference we can.

We look forward to working with and engaging with the many organisations and individuals interested in our work, in delivering the priorities set out here.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G Stacey'.

Dame Glenys Stacey  
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N Prosser'.

Natalie Prosser  
Chief Executive

# Introduction and context

The Office for Environmental Protection was established by the Environment Act 2021. We are a public body with powers to advise ministers and government departments and to hold them and other public authorities to account against their environmental responsibilities and the law. Our independence is protected in law.

Our principal objective is to contribute to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment. Our work covers England and Northern Ireland, as well as UK-wide environmental matters where reserved to Parliament.

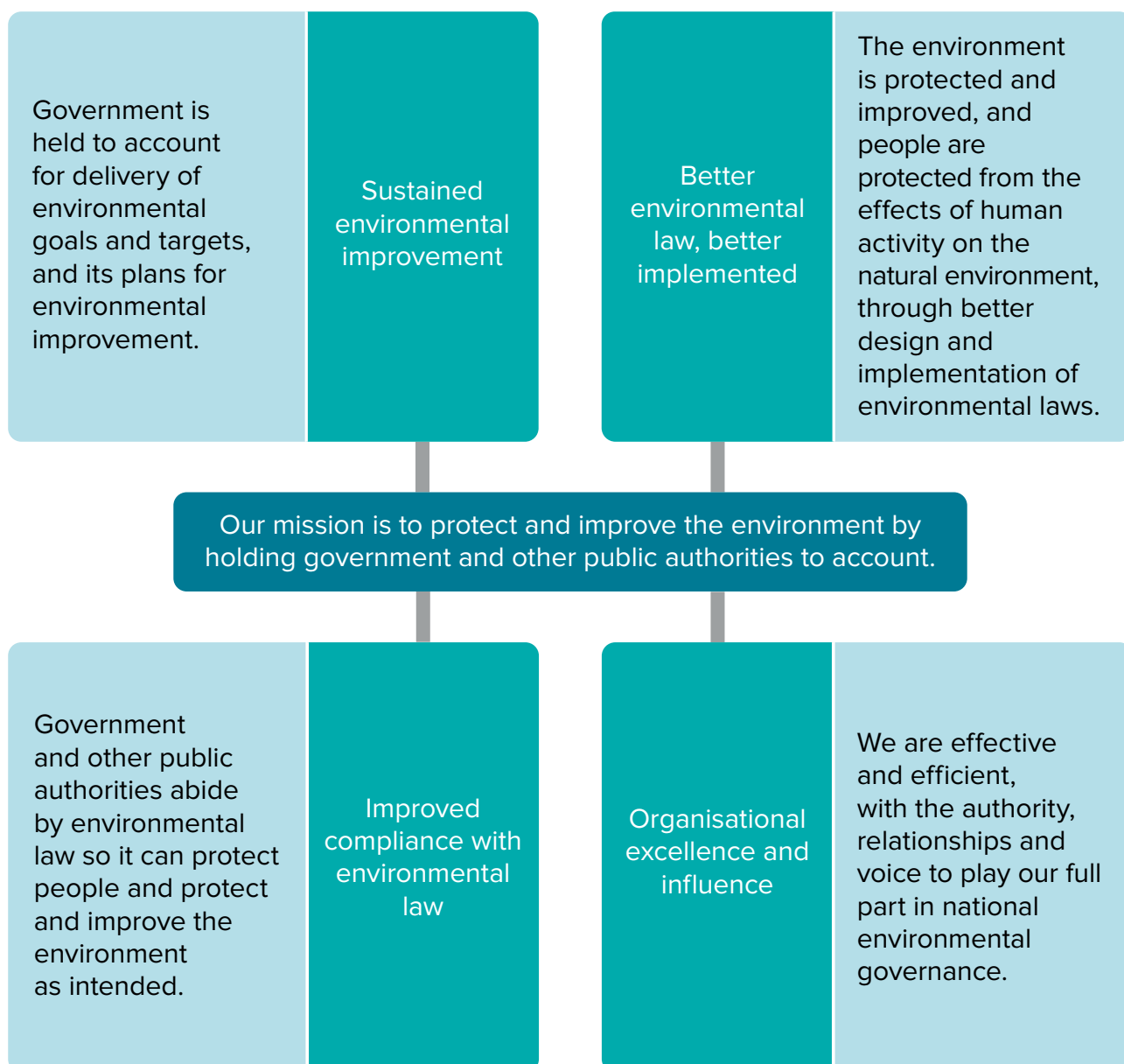
## Our strategy and approach

### Our mission

Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account.

Our strategic objectives explain the contribution we make to environmental protection and improvement.

We aim to be excellent and have influence, so we can play our full part: to hold government to account for its long-term goals and targets for the environment, contribute to better environmental law, which is better implemented, and improve compliance with environmental law by public authorities. In doing so, we contribute to environmental protection and to improvement in the natural environment which can be sustained.



To deliver our strategic objectives and mission, we take an issue-based approach to our work. This means we:

1. gather information and evidence relevant to our work to identify issues which might be addressed or improved through our activities
2. take active decisions about whether and how we respond to the issues we identify
3. take action in the way we consider will achieve the most for environmental protection and improvement.

In this way, we seek to ensure that our work is purposeful, proportionate, and effective and enables us to make the most difference we can.

We have a number of specific functions which contribute to our mission and objectives, within this issue-based approach.



**We gather information and evidence relevant to our role**



**Receive complaints**

We receive complaints about potential failures to comply with environmental law by public authorities.



**Monitor environmental states and trends**

We monitor progress in improving the environment towards EIP goals and targets.



**Monitor environmental law**

We monitor the implementation of environmental law.

**We take action in the way we consider will achieve the most to our mission**



**Report on environmental progress**

We report on progress towards delivering environmental improvement plans, goals, and targets.



**Report on environmental law**

We report on the implementation of environmental law.



**Advice**

We advise government on proposed changes to environmental law, and matters related to the natural environment.



**Enforcement**

We investigate suspected serious failures to comply with environmental law by public authorities and enforce compliance where needed.

[Our strategy](#) explains more about how we work. It explains how we prioritise, the approach we take within each of our main functions, how we work with our equivalent and other public bodies in all the nations of the United Kingdom, and how we engage with a wide range of stakeholders to fulfil our role. It also sets out our enforcement policy.

## About this plan

This plan sets out the work we will do in the year ahead, and indicates the work we will undertake in the longer-term. We prioritise each year to set an outline work plan, which we publish in this, our corporate plan. We also actively and regularly assess our priorities throughout the year in light of events and information we receive, including from complaints.

We therefore expect our priorities to change within the period of this plan and may change this year. Where we judge we can make a greater difference and secure better value for the resources provided to us by stopping or pausing work set out in this plan to pursue an issue of greater need, we will. This may include, for example, prioritising further investigative and enforcement activity in light of potential failures to comply with environmental law, or scrutiny or advisory activity where new legislative priorities emerge which may have significant consequences for environmental protection, or offer prospect for significant improvement.

In this way we aim to ensure we are responsive, and for our effort to always be targeted to where we can make the most difference. We will explain the choices we have made in our annual report and accounts.

## Sustained environmental improvement

- **We aim that government is held to account for delivery of environmental goals and targets, and its plans for environmental improvement.**

Government is uniquely placed to protect and improve the environment, through its own activities and ability to influence others.

Under the Environment Act, government in England and in Northern Ireland must prepare an Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to set out how it intends to significantly improve the natural environment. In January 2023, the UK Government set out its revised EIP and long-term statutory targets for England. As we publish this plan this EIP is being reviewed again by the UK Government following the general election in July 2024. In September 2024 the Northern Ireland Executive published its first EIP.

In the period covered by this plan we will develop how we monitor states and trends in the natural environment in Northern Ireland, ready for our first report of progress in 2026. We will further develop how we assess the prospects of each government meeting long-term environmental goals and targets, in order that we can better scrutinise government's plans and make timely recommendations for how progress can be improved. We will also develop the evidence base that underpins all our work, and supports us to focus on the specific issues where we can make the most difference in future years.

## What we will do each year

	ENG	NI	Theme
i. Publish a report to assess the UK Government's progress in improving the natural environment in accordance with its EIP and towards meeting long-term targets, making recommendations for improvement where necessary	✓		EIP monitoring

## What more we plan to do in 2025/26

	ENG	NI	Theme
ii. Scrutinise the refreshed EIP for England, and associated delivery plans to meet EIP goals and targets	✓		EIP monitoring
iii. Develop our approach to monitoring progress in improving the natural environment in Northern Ireland, and work with DAERA as it develops the evidence for monitoring progress		✓	EIP monitoring
iv. Further develop our approach to assessing the prospects of achieving long-term environmental goals and targets	✓	✓	EIP monitoring
v. Scrutinise proposals to reduce the impact of nutrients on the environment in Northern Ireland, including the Nutrient Action Programme		✓	Nutrient management
vi. Publish a synthesis of evidence gathered in respect of how Good Environmental Status in the marine environment can be achieved	✓	✓	Marine
vii. Scrutinise the barriers and enablers of achieving plans and targets for managing and creating woodland	✓		EIP monitoring
viii. Gather evidence on issues which might be addressed or improved through our activities in future years, with a focus on chemical pollution and regulation, waste management and the circular economy	✓	✓	Other evidence

## What more we plan to do in future years

	ENG	NI	Theme
ix. Each year from 2026/27, publish a report to assess progress in improving the natural environment in accordance with Northern Ireland's EIP, making recommendations for improvement where necessary		✓	EIP monitoring
x. Gather evidence on issues which might be addressed or improved through our activities in future years	✓	✓	Other evidence

## What success looks like

- Environmental trends related to EIP goals and targets will improve
- The prospects of achieving EIP goals and targets will increase
- Our annual reports will be recognised as definitive assessments of progress by Parliament, the Assembly and others

## Better environmental law, better implemented

- **We aim that the environment is protected and improved, and people are protected from the effects of human activity on the natural environment, through better design and implementation of environmental laws.**

To be effective, environmental law must be designed well to require or incentivise behaviours that can deliver the intended outcomes. It also needs to be implemented well to achieve these outcomes in practice.

Our aim is that environmental law and its implementation are well designed and delivered, so that positive outcomes for the environment and people's health and wellbeing are achieved. We aim to improve the effectiveness of existing environmental laws and support the good design and implementation of new ones.

In the period of this plan, we will publish studies of the effective implementation of existing environmental law in each of England and Northern Ireland, and provide advice to Ministers, and evidence to Parliament and the Assembly on proposed changes to the law. We set out the reports we will publish this year, and those we expect we may publish in future years. We keep our work actively in review, so as to focus our efforts where they can make the most difference.

## What we will do each year

	ENG	NI	Theme
i. Monitor the implementation of environmental law including by engaging widely with those who design, implement and are affected by it	✓	✓	Other evidence
ii. Provide advice on proposed changes to environmental law for matters we prioritise	✓	✓	tbc
iii. Apply to intervene in priority judicial review proceedings brought by others where our intervention can help clarify or determine an important point of environmental law	✓	✓	tbc

## What more we plan to do in 2025/26

	ENG	NI	Theme
iv. Publish reports on the implementation of law for the designation and management of sites protected for nature in England and in Northern Ireland	✓	✓	Nature
v. Publish reports on the implementation of inspection regimes required under environmental laws, particularly in relation to the waste operations and installations sector	✓		Environmental Governance
vi. Publish a report on the implementation of local nature recovery strategies and their contribution towards the UK Government's goals and targets in relation to thriving plants and wildlife	✓		Nature
vii. Monitor changes to environmental law proposed in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill providing advice to government and evidence to Parliament as appropriate	✓		Nature
viii. Scrutinise the implementation of environmental laws relating to diffuse pollution from agriculture, publishing a report in Northern Ireland this year, and a report in England in a future year	✓	✓	Water (Eng) Nutrient Management (NI)
ix. Scrutinise the implementation of biodiversity net gain	✓		Nature
x. Provide evidence to the independent review of environmental governance in Northern Ireland		✓	Environmental Governance
xi. Provide evidence to the independent water commission in England and consider any changes to environmental law that may be proposed in light of its findings	✓		Water
xii. Pilot improved ways to monitor the implementation of a wider range of environmental laws	✓	✓	Other evidence

## What more we plan to do in future years

	ENG	NI	Theme
xiii. Monitor the implementation of environmental principles by Northern Ireland departments		✓	Environmental governance
xiv. Report on the implementation of environmental laws following evidence gathered in 2025/26	✓	✓	Nature
xv. Contribute evidence to the post-legislative scrutiny of the Environment Act 2021	✓	✓	Environmental Governance

## What success looks like

- There will be improvements to the design of environmental law as a result of our scrutiny and advice
- Public authorities will act to improve the implementation of environmental law, where we identify weaknesses or opportunities to do so
- Significant risks to environmental protection and improvement identified in our work will be recognised by Parliament and the Assembly when making law

## Improved compliance with environmental law

- **We aim that government and other public authorities abide by environmental law so it can protect people and protect and improve the environment as intended.**

Government and public authorities should always meet all their obligations in environmental law, so that the intended outcomes of the law can be achieved. Our aim is to improve compliance with environmental law, by holding government and other public authorities to account, and challenging and correcting serious failings.

Our work will be responsive to information we receive that public authorities may have failed to comply with environmental law, from complainants and other sources.

## What we will do each year

	ENG	NI	Theme
i. Receive and assess complaints about potential breaches of environmental law by public authorities	✓	✓	
ii. Work with public authorities to resolve failures to comply with environmental law which we prioritise	✓	✓	tbc
iii. Investigate serious failures to comply with environmental law by public authorities in line with our enforcement policy and take steps using our enforcement powers to secure resolution where necessary	✓	✓	tbc

## What more we plan to do in 2025/26

	ENG	NI	Theme
iv. Decide the steps we will take in relation to the roles of Ofwat, the Environment Agency and Defra in the regulation of network combined sewer overflows, following our decision that environmental law has not been complied with	✓		Water
v. Progress our investigations into the designation of special protection areas for wild birds by Defra and Natural England in England, and DAERA in Northern Ireland	✓	✓	Nature
vi. Decide on issues of compliance identified through our investigation into the emergency authorisation by Defra of pesticides containing neonicotinoids	✓		Nature
vii. Decide on issues of compliance identified through our investigation into Defra's statutory guidance on applying the Farming Rules for Water	✓		Water
viii. Progress our investigation into Defra in relation to measures taken to achieve Good Environmental Status in marine waters	✓	✓	Marine
ix. Progress our investigation into aspects of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive regulations by Defra and the Environment Agency	✓		Water
x. Monitor the timely implementation of the provisions of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2021		✓	Environmental governance

## What success looks like

- Public authorities' compliance with environmental law overall will improve as we undertake our role
- Where we identify failures to comply with environmental law, public authorities will take the necessary steps to remedy them
- Stakeholders will have confidence in our enforcement functions as an effective route to secure compliance with environmental law

## Organisational excellence and influence

- **We are effective and efficient, with the authority, relationships, expertise, and voice to play our full part in national environmental governance.**

Our ability to succeed depends on how we work as much as what we do.

The environment and people's health and wellbeing are best served when we use our broad remit and powerful tools to their greatest effect – strategically, purposefully, expertly, and independently.

Our aim is to operate as effectively, efficiently, and influentially as we can, to deliver the most for environmental protection and improvement.

## What we will do each year

	ENG	NI
i. Actively keep the public and stakeholders informed about our work	✓	✓
ii. Prioritise our activity to where we judge we can make the most difference, and publish our corporate plan and annual report and accounts setting out how we have made good use of public funds	✓	✓
iii. Operate efficient corporate services and governance which underpin our effectiveness, deliver for our staff, support our independence and are tailored to our size	✓	✓



## What more we plan to do in 2025/26

	ENG	NI
iv. Fully implement and embed our refreshed strategy, and improve the information we make available on our performance and impact	✓	✓
v. Review and improve our approaches to stakeholder engagement to support stakeholders to hold us, government and other public authorities to account	✓	✓
vi. Improve our capabilities and approach to project and programme management, including how we manage our evidence and research activities	✓	✓
vii. Review our people strategy so that our culture and ways of working best support us to deliver our mission	✓	✓
viii. Enhance our operational efficiency, including through the application of technology and streamlining of our processes	✓	✓
ix. Improve the ways we work with public authorities to support them to fulfil their duty to cooperate with us as we undertake our role, and, when agreed by Defra and DAERA, publish and implement a framework document, setting out the governance, accountability and funding arrangements within which we work	✓	✓

## What more we plan to do in future years

	ENG	NI
x. Take further prioritised steps to improve our effectiveness and efficiency	✓	✓

## What success looks like

- Those who work for environmental protection and improvement will respect our work and value the role we play in each of England and Northern Ireland
- When we speak, those we are speaking to will hear, understand and act on what we say
- Our staff will be engaged and motivated to deliver our mission

## Measuring our performance

Our strategic objectives set out the contribution we expect to make towards environmental protection and improvement. They provide a framework which shows how our work improves environmental law, the implementation of that law by public authorities and the delivery in the long-term of government's plans for environmental improvement. In our strategy, and this plan, we set out what success looks like if this is true in practice.

We embed a focus on the impact and outcomes of our work throughout our activity, and monitor whether these are achieved in practice. Our board and senior leaders regularly

review whether we have achieved the outcomes we intend overall, and in our key work programmes, and whether we did so in the manner we expected.

We have begun a programme of qualitative evaluations of our performance. We will publish the first stakeholder perceptions survey and first independent evaluation of the impact of an aspect of our work programme in the period covered by this plan. We also gather case studies which are indicative of where we have and have not had the impact we intend.

We gather monitoring information to indicate whether we are performing as we intend. We monitor indicators of our impact including the extent to which our recommendations are adopted and influence the UK Government, Northern Ireland departments and other public authorities, and how our work is used by Parliament and the Assembly and viewed by the media. We also monitor our activity including the extent to which we deliver the priorities set out in this plan (and its predecessors), the timeliness of our reporting and advice to government, and the number of complaints and enquiries we resolve.

We publish information about our performance in our annual report and accounts so that the public and other stakeholders can see the contribution we make to protecting and improving the environment. Our website includes information on the status and outcome of cases we have progressed through our investigations and enforcement functions. In our annual report and accounts, we also make information public about the efficiency of our operations, and the effectiveness of our financial management and other controls as well as our impacts on the environment, and the progress we have made in implementing our sustainability strategy.

## Our resources and prioritisation choices

### Our resources

We are funded by Defra in relation to England and DAERA in relation to Northern Ireland. We pursue our objectives and implement our functions independently, objectively and impartially. The priorities and allocation of resources we set out in this plan have been determined independently, by us.

Each of Defra and DAERA has provided us with a budget for the year 2025/26. Like all public bodies in England, our future resources will be considered within a spending review by the UK Government, ahead of the next financial year. We apply annually to DAERA for the resources to deliver our functions in respect of Northern Ireland. We can apply for additional resources in year should we consider it appropriate to do so.

£m	2024/25	2025/26
<b>Defra revenue</b>	8.57	8.54
<b>DAERA revenue</b>	1.90	1.90
<b>Depreciation</b>	0.24	0.27
<b>Capital</b>		—
<b>Total resources</b>	10.71	10.71

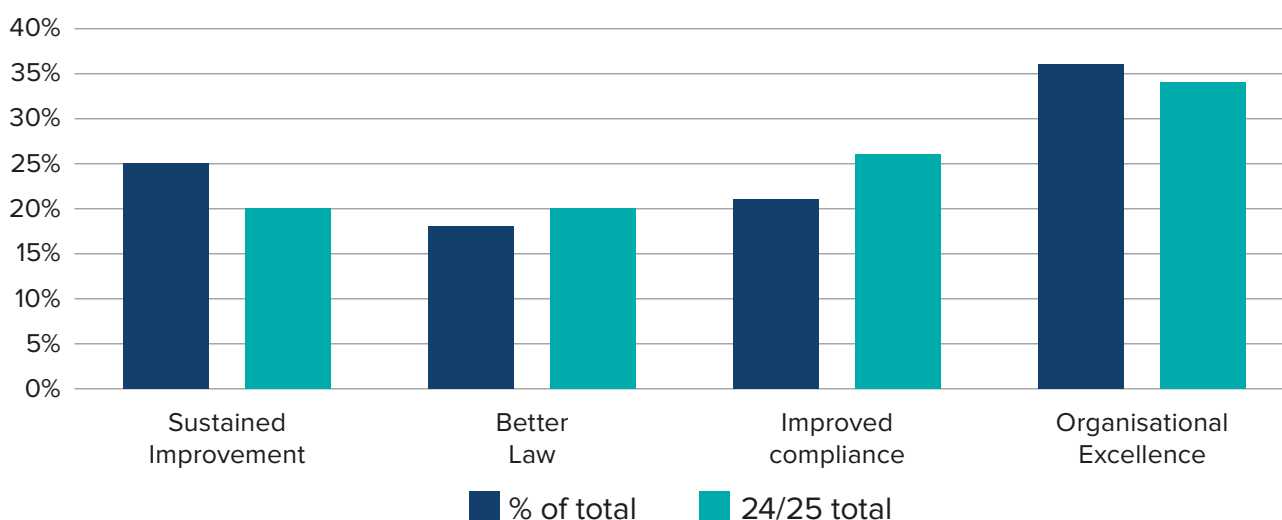
## Allocation of resources to priorities

This plan presents our priorities, based on the judgments we have made about where we can make the most difference with the resources we have. To inform our priorities, we consider evidence from the complaints we have received, our analysis of progress in improving the environment, and our monitoring of the effective implementation of environmental law. We engage with stakeholders, review issues of concern to Parliament and the Assembly. We undertake horizon scanning activities, including through our College of Experts, on how this evidence may change in coming years.

Through our detailed business planning, we estimate the indicative allocation of resources to our priorities in 2025/26 is as follows.

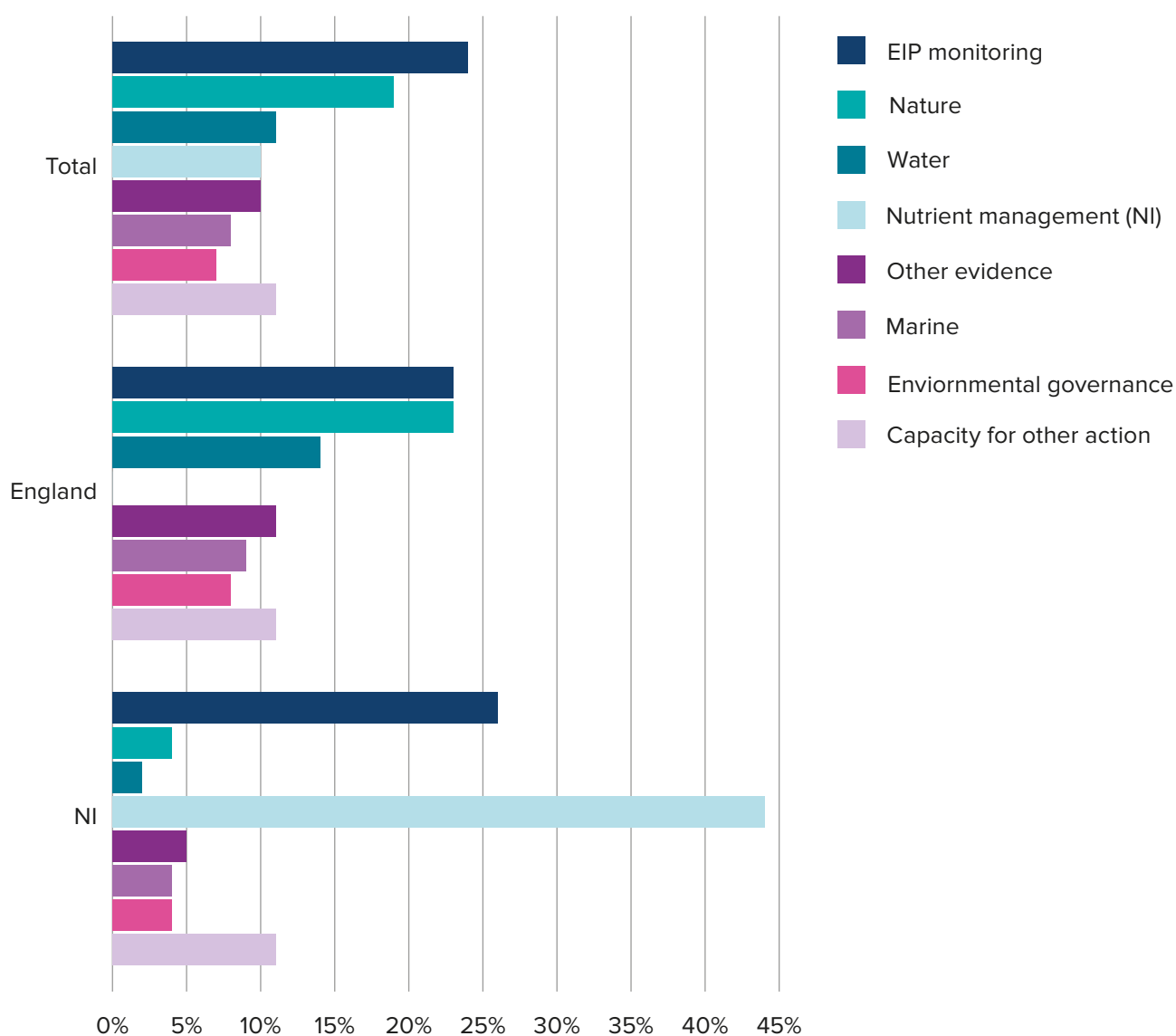
% of our total resources applied to each strategic objective	2024/25	2025/26
Sustained environmental improvement	20%	25%
Better environmental law, better implemented	20%	18%
Improved compliance with environmental law	26%	21%
Organisational excellence and influence	34%	36%

We must prepare to report on progress in improving the natural environment in Northern Ireland from 2026, and must apply more of our resources to our objective for sustained environmental improvement as a result. We will make targeted improvements to the way we manage and operate this year, so we can maximise the impact we can achieve with our resources in future years. We expect the proportion of resources we apply to organisational excellence and influence to reduce, as we embed the efficiencies from operational experience and our specific efficiency plans.



Our strategy sets out how develop our work within connected programmes of activity, so that specific outputs of our work support and reinforce other activities and together lead to better outcomes. We illustrate below how we have made choices to allocate resources to the main themes of our work in each of England and Northern Ireland – in each case excluding resources we spend to run and improve our organisation.

	EIP monitoring	Nature	Water	Nutrient management (NI)	Other evidence	Marine	Environmental governance	Capacity for other action
<b>England</b>	23%	23%	14%	0%	11%	9%	8%	11%
<b>NI</b>	26%	4%	2%	44%	5%	4%	4%	11%
<b>Total</b>	24%	19%	11%	10%	10%	8%	7%	11%



This information is intended as an illustration and is inevitably a simplification. For example our work towards clean water can support nature to thrive and biodiversity to recover; our activity towards mitigation of the impact of nutrients on the environment in Northern Ireland, can contribute to water quality. We allocate expenditure only to one category, to improve understanding of the choices we have made.

We also indicate the capacity we reserve for matters not yet identified or prioritised. This includes the resources we retain for future investigation or compliance activity, to respond to requests for advice and other similar activities.

## Our prioritisation choices

We prioritise to make the most difference we can, in each of England and Northern Ireland with the resources we have. We are committed to be transparent about the prioritisation choices we make.

In England, as last year, the work we set out in this plan is predominantly in two of the ten goal areas of Government's EIP – relating to clean water and thriving plants and wildlife. In Northern Ireland, our plan is concentrated in the strategic environmental outcomes of excellent air, water, land and neighbourhood quality and thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife.

We will monitor environmental progress and environmental law, and may respond to potential failures to comply with the law related to any environmental issue. However, we do not plan to expend significant resources in the majority of areas of the UK or Northern Ireland governments' plans to improve the natural environment. This includes important areas such as air quality, resource use, waste and soil management, climate change, biosecurity, and the public enjoyment of nature. We would do more, with more resources.

Within those areas we have prioritised, we must prioritise the specific issues where we judge we can make the most difference. There are therefore important areas of work that we would prioritise this year, had we been provided with all the resources we bid for. We will also progress work less quickly than we would, had we been provided with additional resources. Some of the important choices we have made include:

- to limit further planned scrutiny of progress in improving the marine environment, beyond the work we began in prior years
- to defer scrutiny of the Environmental Principles Policy Statement in Northern Ireland
- to progress planned work in relation to laws controlling diffuse pollution of our inland waters less quickly than we would otherwise decide
- to defer activities in connection with good environmental regulation
- to limit the extent of monitoring of trends in relation to the natural environment in each of England and Northern Ireland this year
- to deprioritise scrutiny of the laws in relation to invasive non-native species
- not to prioritise additional capacity to support investigations and other actions to respond to potential failures to comply with environmental law which we identify beyond our current capacity
- to limit the extent of our activities to improve our efficiency to the highest priority activities

We continually assess our priorities in light of information and evidence available at the time. We explain any change to our activity in our annual report and accounts.





