



Corporate Plan 2024/25 to 2025/26

July 2024



Office for
**Environmental
Protection**

Corporate Plan 2024/25 to 2025/26

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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.

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Foreword

This plan sets out our programme of work for the years ahead. In doing so, we explain 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.



Deeply concerning adverse environmental trends continue. The depleted state of the natural environment and scale and rate of climate change present an unprecedented challenge. This challenge must be acknowledged and grasped if ambitions to significantly improve the environment for future generations – so laudably crystallised in law in the Environment Act of 2021 – are to be realised.



Yet, there are many – in civil society, businesses, public bodies and the community at large – who stand ready to play their part. And in our view, consistent and suitably ambitious implementation of existing law and policy can make a material difference. Beyond that, governments have a critical leadership role. In Northern Ireland, the welcome restoration of the Assembly also offers real hope for progress. In England, a new government will now set out and implement its priorities.

We explain here how we will fulfil our own role. There is inevitably more we could do. This year, we set out more information on the choices we have made within the resources available to us.

In this plan, we build on our areas of focus in the environment to date and also set out plans for work in further areas where we judge we can make the most difference.

Our work includes a continued emphasis on the protection and restoration of nature and biodiversity, and scrutiny of those things most critical to achieving the legal target in England to halt the decline in species abundance some seven short years hence. We will also complete work relating to the laws supporting the quality of inland waters and how they are complied with, and remain committed to evaluating how effectively the overall framework of environmental governance established under the Environment Act is implemented in England and Northern Ireland.

This year, we set out a significant area of our focus in Northern Ireland is to evaluate steps to reduce the impacts of nutrients on the environment, and in England and Northern Ireland we will initiate work in respect of key factors impacting the quality of the marine environment and prospects for its improvement.

In this our third year of operation, we will conclude a review of our strategic approach, consulting on proposed changes to it. We look forward to continuing to engage with the many organisations and individuals interested in our work and are grateful for the advice and support we receive as we deliver 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.

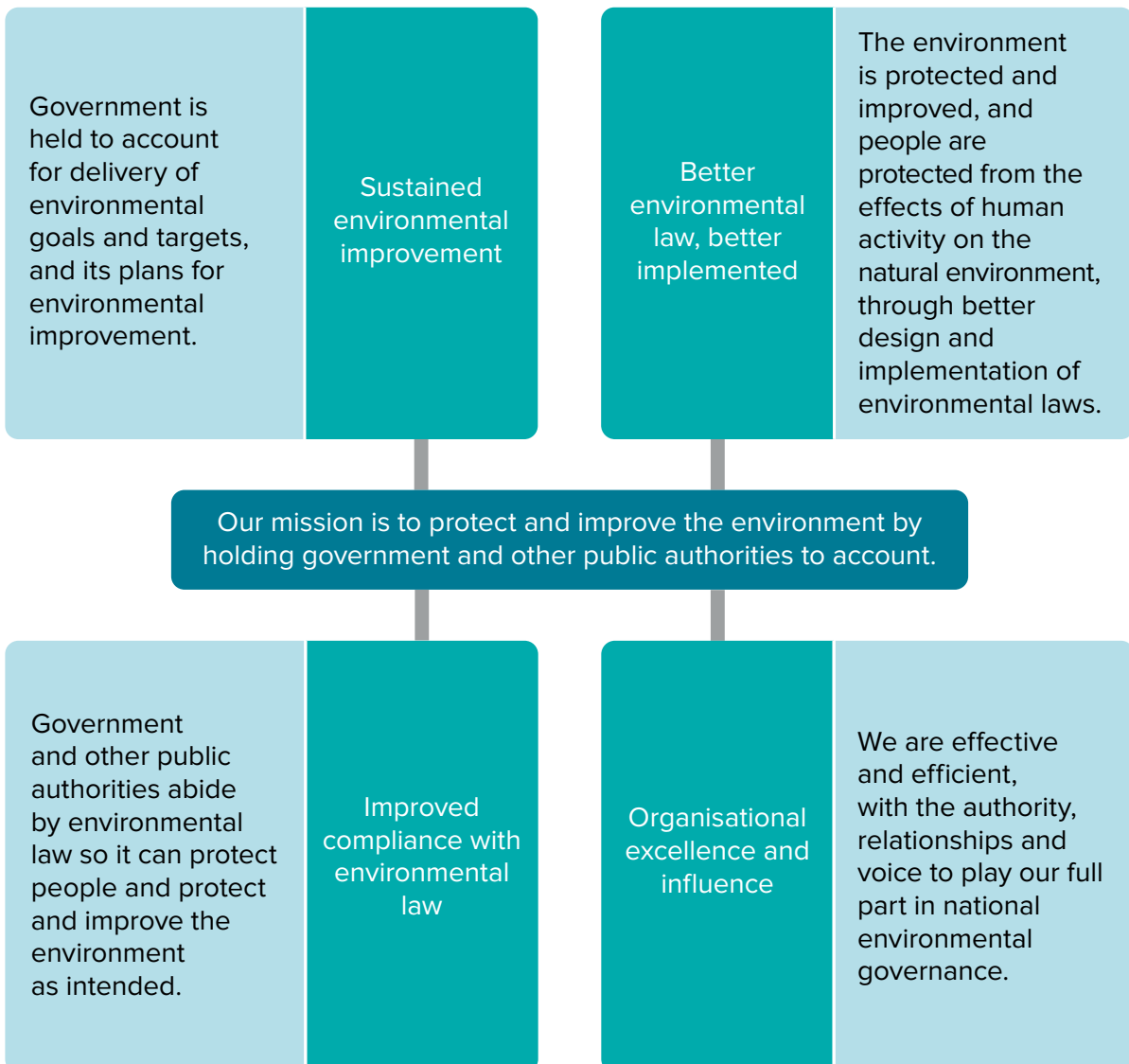
Our principal objective is to contribute to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment. Our work covers England and Northern Ireland, as well as UK-wide environmental matters where reserved to Parliament.

Our strategy and approach

Our mission

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

We have four strategic objectives to pursue this mission:



We are established with four main functions.



[Our strategy](#) explains how we work to deliver our mission and strategic objectives. We will conclude our review of it this year. 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 provides an update to the [three-year plan we published last year](#). We set out our priorities for the second two years with a particular focus on the year 2024/25, ahead of completion of a review of our strategy.

We indicate in this plan where our work relates to England and/or to Northern Ireland. The activities we undertake within some of these priorities will consider matters reserved to the UK government.

In 2024/25, we have received more revenue funding from each of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in England, and the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland than we did in 2023/24.

We welcome this, particularly in a wider context of constraints on the public finances overall.

But we are a young organisation, still growing to have the resources that Parliament and the Assembly expected that we would need when they established us. In 2024/25, we have received 86% of the resources we judge needed in England for this stage of our maturity, and 92% in Northern Ireland. We would contribute and achieve more, if we were provided with the necessary resources.

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 its ability to influence others. Our aim is that governments in England and Northern Ireland set suitably ambitious national environmental improvement plans, goals and targets and make sure they are delivered.

In England, the UK government published a revised environmental improvement plan (EIP23) in January 2023. In Northern Ireland, DAERA is to lay its first environmental improvement plan before the Assembly in the year ahead. These different stages of implementation of this new national environmental governance mean our planned work differs in each jurisdiction.

Over the period of this plan, we will develop the way we monitor and report on progress towards delivering environmental improvement plan goals and meeting long-term targets. We will build our prospective approach to assessing the likelihood and factors affecting government meeting its long-term environmental goals and targets, in order that we can better scrutinise government's plans and, where necessary, make timely recommendations for how progress can be improved.

What we will do each year

	ENG	NI	Theme
i. Publish a report to independently assess the UK Government's progress in improving the natural environment in accordance with its environmental improvement plan (EIP23) and towards meeting long-term targets, making recommendations for improvement where necessary	✓		EIP monitoring

What more we plan to do in 2024/25

	ENG	NI	Theme
ii. Publish a report on the pressures and drivers affecting biodiversity in Northern Ireland		✓	Improving nature
iii. Develop evidence for, and our approach to, monitoring progress in improving the natural environment in Northern Ireland, and review the coherence between the Northern Ireland Environment Strategy and Climate Action Plan when in place		✓	EIP monitoring
iv. Scrutinise proposals to reduce the impact of nutrients on the environment in Northern Ireland, including the required Nutrient Action Programme and the contribution of nature friendly farming		✓	Nutrient management
v. Publish an assessment of the contribution of green finance initiatives to delivering EIP23 goals and meeting long-term targets within our annual progress report	✓		EIP monitoring
vi. Publish an in-depth assessment of the progress with delivering the apex goal of EIP23 of thriving plants and wildlife, and the likely contribution of nature friendly farming to that, within our annual progress report	✓		Improving nature
vii. Further develop our approach to assessing the prospects of achieving long-term environmental goals and targets	✓	✓	EIP monitoring
viii. Develop and deliver a programme of work scrutinising the key issues preventing the achievement of Good Environmental Status in the marine environment	✓	✓	Improving nature at sea
ix. Review the available evidence in respect of the impact of chemicals on the natural environment and any gaps in that evidence that should be addressed	✓	✓	Chemicals

What more we plan to do in future years

	ENG	NI	Theme
x. Within 22 months of its adoption, and annually thereafter, publish a report to assess progress in improving the natural environment in accordance with Northern Ireland’s EIP and making recommendations for improvement where necessary		✓	EIP monitoring
xi. Publish an in-depth assessment of progress with delivering the UK Government’s ambitions for selected EIP23 goal areas	✓		Tbc
xii. Review the evidence of the state of the environment in further priority areas, and identify any gaps in that evidence that should be addressed	✓	✓	Tbc

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

In the period of this plan, we will publish studies of the effective implementation of environmental law in each of England and Northern Ireland, and provide advice to Ministers, and evidence to Parliament on proposed changes to the law.

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 to gather information and intelligence	✓	✓	Other monitoring of environmental law
ii. Where we prioritise or where we are requested by the UK Government or a Northern Ireland department, provide and publish advice on proposed changes to environmental law, and other matters related to the natural environment	✓	✓	Other monitoring of environmental law

What more we plan to do in 2024/25

	ENG	NI	Theme
iii. Publish reports on the implementation of law for the designation and management of sites protected for nature in England and in Northern Ireland	✓	✓	Improving nature
iv. Publish a report on the implementation of environmental principles by UK Government departments	✓		Environmental Governance
v. Publish a report on the implementation of inspection regimes required under environmental laws, particularly in relation to the waste and installations sector	✓		Environmental Governance
vi. Publish reports on the implementation of environmental laws that support inland water quality in England and in Northern Ireland, and evaluate the river basin management plans for England and Northern Ireland against relevant legal requirements	✓	✓	Clean water
vii. Publish reports on the implementation of environmental laws which protect bathing waters in England and Northern Ireland	✓	✓	Clean water
viii. Scrutinise the development and implementation of local nature recovery strategies and their contribution towards the UK Government's goals and targets in relation to thriving plants and wildlife	✓		Improving nature
ix. Pilot improved ways to monitor the implementation of a wider range of environmental laws	✓	✓	Baseline monitoring

What more we plan to do in future years

	ENG	NI	Theme
x. Monitor the implementation of environmental principles by Northern Ireland departments		✓	Environmental governance
xi. Report on the implementation of environmental laws in specific prioritised areas	✓	✓	tbc

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.

We expect government and other public authorities to comply with their obligations under environmental law so that the outcomes those laws intend can be achieved.

In this plan period, we expect to increase the activity we undertake to scrutinise compliance both through dialogue with public authorities, and, where necessary, our investigation and enforcement steps.

Our work will be informed by and responsive to information we receive that public authorities may have failed to comply with environmental law, from complainants and other sources, including our own monitoring and scrutiny activities. We will prioritise in line with our enforcement policy and strategy.

What we will do each year

	ENG	NI	Theme
i. Receive and assess complaints about potential breaches of environmental law by public authorities, and respond to complainants in accordance with our customer charter	✓	✓	Other complaints & investigations
ii. Work with public authorities to resolve failures to comply with environmental law which we prioritise	✓	✓	Other complaints & investigations
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	✓	✓	Other complaints & investigations

What more we plan to do in 2024/25

	ENG	NI	Theme
iv. Decide on issues of compliance identified through our investigation into the roles of Ofwat, the Environment Agency and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to the regulation of network combined sewer overflows, and progress any steps required as a result	✓		Clean water
v. Decide on issues of compliance identified through our investigation into DAERA's guidance for assessing ammonia emissions for certain livestock developments and progress any steps required as a result		✓	Nutrient management
vi. Progress our investigations into the designation of special protection areas for wild birds by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England in England, and DAERA in Northern Ireland	✓	✓	Improving nature
vii. Monitor the extent to which Northern Ireland departments adhere to important deadlines in environmental law		✓	Environmental governance
viii. Develop how we identify potential non-compliance with environmental law by public authorities from sources other than the complaints we receive	✓	✓	Baseline complaints & investigations

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.

We aim to operate as effectively and efficiently as we can, and be as effective and influential as we are able. We have designed our organisation to be responsive and flexible, so we can deliver the most we can for environmental protection and improvement with the funding we receive. We expect the proportion of resources we apply to this objective to reduce in time and will keep our operating model in review in this regard.

What we will do each year

	ENG	NI
i. Actively keep the public and stakeholders informed about our work, and continually improve our approach to support them to hold us, government and other public authorities to account	✓	✓
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	✓	✓

	ENG	NI
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 2024/25

	ENG	NI
iv. Consult on and then publish a refreshed strategy and enforcement policy	✓	✓
v. Improve the information we make available on our performance, and research stakeholders' views on our impact to date	✓	✓
vi. Review our people strategy so that our culture and ways of working best support us to deliver our mission	✓	✓
vii. Provide evidence to support Defra and DAERA consider the resources we need to exercise our functions in the way the Assembly and Parliament intended	✓	✓
viii. Implement our digital, data and technology strategy making improvements to the way we make information and intelligence available for decision making, and to the way we procure services	✓	✓
ix. Embed our College of Experts into the ways we gather, review and use information and evidence	✓	✓
x. Develop 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 agreement, setting out the governance, accountability and funding arrangements within which we work	✓	✓

What more we plan to do in future years

	ENG	NI
xi. Develop a programme of targeted evaluations and reviews to assess our work	✓	✓

Measuring our performance

We are developing a performance framework to monitor and strengthen our work. This will mature through this plan period, as we gather additional evidence about the influence of our work. We are committed to evaluating the extent to which our activity has the impact we intend for environmental protection and improvement, and to doing so effectively and transparently. We intend to consult on this as part of our review of our strategy.

Our mission is to protect and improve the environment, by holding government and other public authorities to account. We recognise that well developed evaluation of our influence

and impact are important if we are to understand the extent to which we are meeting this ambition, and so others can hold us to account.

During the period of this plan, we will develop a programme of targeted evaluations and reviews to assess the influence of our work. We will focus these on our most important activities, and those which are most indicative of our impact. We will plan these evaluations as evidence is available.

We will also develop indicators of our impact to include the extent to which our recommendations are adopted and influence the UK Government, Northern Ireland departments and other public authorities, and how we resolve matters we progress through investigation and enforcement.

Alongside our impact, we monitor indicators of 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 receive. We regularly discuss our work with stakeholders to gather feedback on our effectiveness.

We will 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 will 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.

Defra has provided us with a budget for the year 2024/25 and an indicative budget for the subsequent two years to April 2027.¹ Like all public bodies in England, we expect our future resources to be considered within a spending review by the UK Government, ahead of the next financial year.

DAERA has provided us with a budget for the current year 2024/25. 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.

¹ [Written Ministerial Statement 31 March 2022](#)

£m	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Defra revenue	8.36	8.57	7.29	7.45
DAERA revenue	1.25	1.90	–	–
Depreciation	0.17	0.24	0.25	0.25
Defra capital	1.23	–	–	–
Total resources	11.01	10.71	7.54	7.70

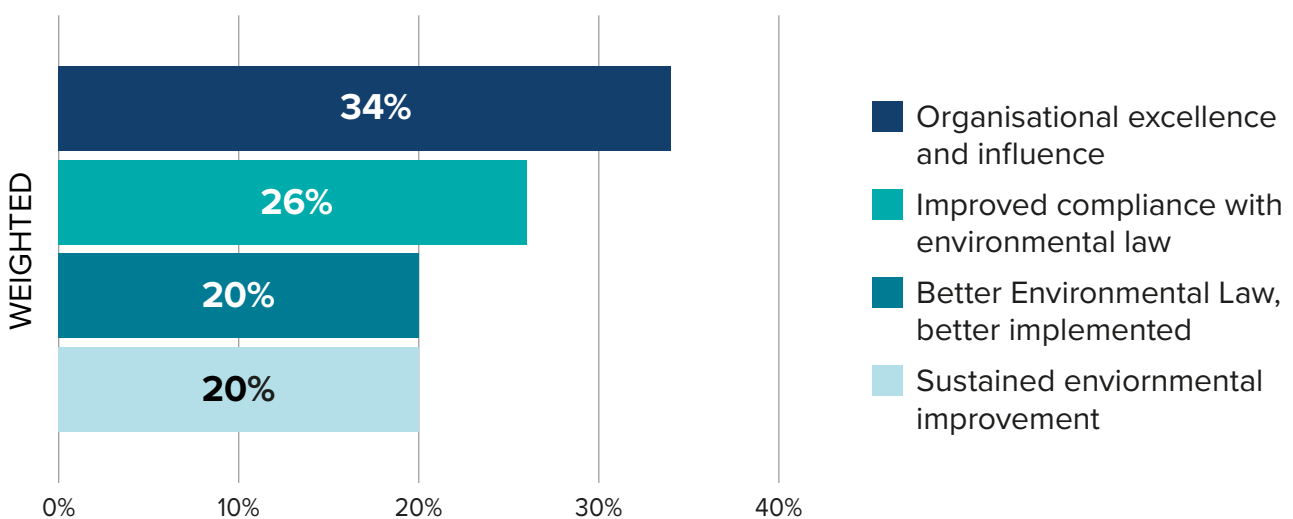
Allocation of resources to priorities

This plan presents our current 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 considered 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 engaged with stakeholders, reviewed issues of concern to Parliament and the Assembly and considered research into public priorities in the environment.

Through our detailed business planning, we estimate the indicative allocation of resources to our priorities in 2024/25 is as follows.

Strategic Objective	% of our total resources
Sustained environmental improvement	20%
Better environmental law, better implemented	20%
Improved compliance with environmental law	26%
Organisational excellence and influence	34%

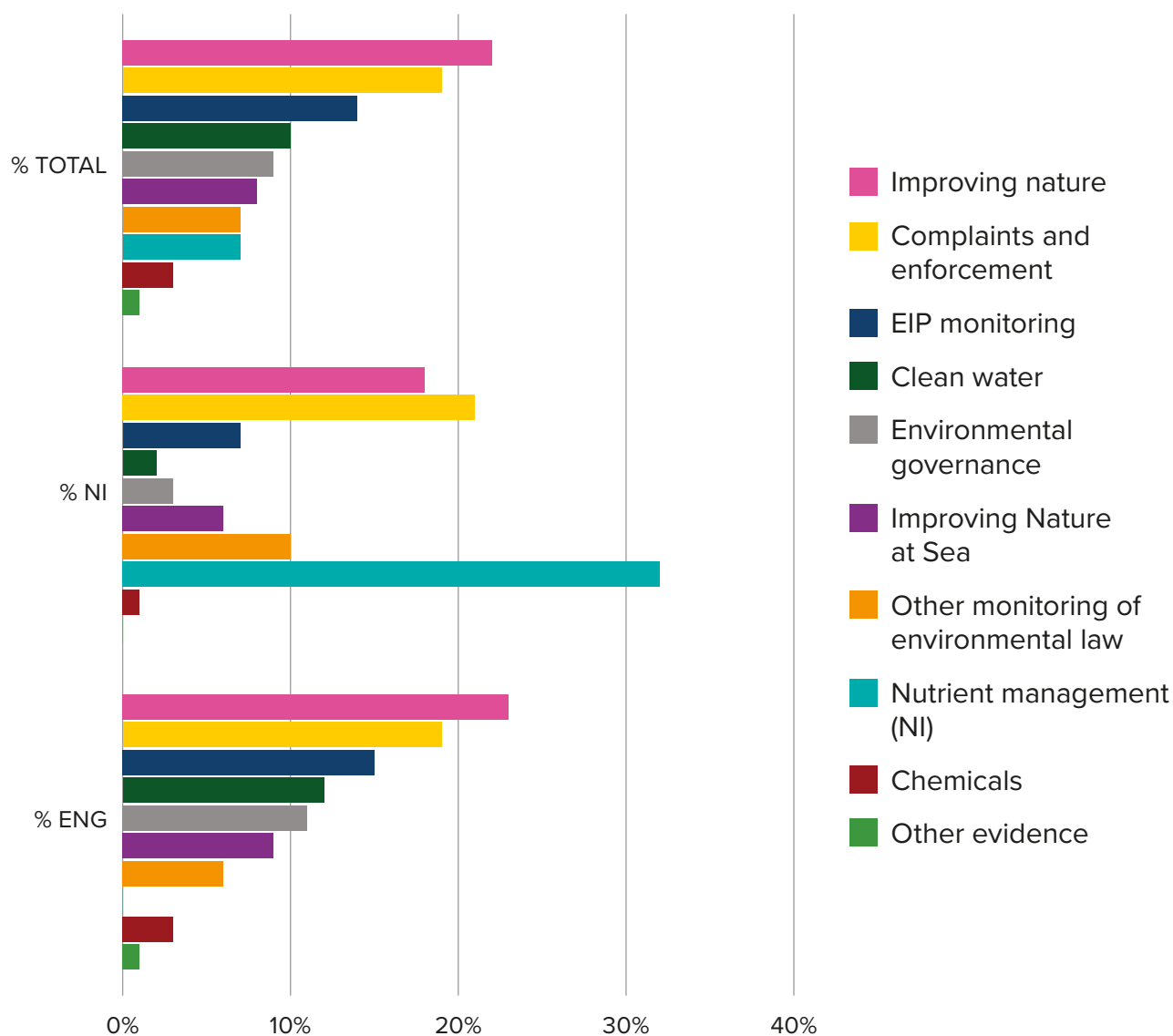
We expect the proportion of resources we apply to organisational excellence and influence to reduce, as we embed the efficiencies from operational experience and our specific efficiency plans.



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.

	Improving nature	Other complaints & enforcement	EIP monitoring	Clean water	Environmental governance	Marine	Nutrient management	Other monitoring of law	Chemicals	Other evidence
England	23%	19%	15%	12%	11%	9%	0%	6%	3%	1%
NI	18%	21%	7%	2%	3%	6%	32%	10%	1%	0%
Total	22%	19%	14%	10%	9%	8%	7%	7%	3%	1%



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, can contribute to water quality.

Similarly, our investigation into issues related to special protection areas in England and Northern Ireland is recorded towards ‘improving nature’, rather than ‘other complaints and enforcement’. That shows the resources towards our core activities and the capacity we reserve for matters not yet identified or prioritised. We allocate expenditure only to one category, to improve understanding of the choices we have made.

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, 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.

Whilst we will monitor environmental progress, environmental law and may respond to potential failures to comply with the law across related to any environmental issue we do not plan to expend significant resources in the majority of areas of government’s 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 had planned to prioritise this year, had we been provided with all the resources we bid for. These include:

- Scrutiny of the legal and regulatory frameworks controlling diffuse pollution on our inland waters
- Additional capacity to support investigations and other actions to respond to potential failures to comply with environmental law which we identify
- Further activity in relation to soil health and the sustainable management of soils in England, following an initial review we completed in 2023/24

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.

