



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Democratic Services Chief Executive Section

SERVICE PLAN - 2021 / 22

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Foreword

At the start of 2020, Northern Ireland faced the spread of the global Covid-19 pandemic, which in turn has impacted on the way, Mid Ulster District Council delivers its services to communities. The Council's initial response was to protect frontline services, support the vulnerable in the community and ensure continuity of services.

On the Council's road to recovery and reinstatement of services, we have established 'Recovery Activities' that will enable the Council to learn from the impacts that Covid 19 caused, i.e. the new and emerging challenges that services face and the opportunities that have emerged from new ways of working. These 'Recovery Activities' will support the Council's Corporate Plan and this Service Plan will also support the delivery of these higher level objectives and associated outcomes for the residents of the District.

To make sure that we are transparent in what we are aiming to achieve, there is a series of activities outlined within the Service Plan. It should be noted, that it is proposed, that this will be a dynamic service plan, in light of Council's ongoing response to the Pandemic, reflecting the changing context within which it has been developed. Any changes that need to be made to the service plan (i.e. new actions added, or actions removed) will be reported to the Director of the Department as well as being reported as part of our 'business as usual' performance monitoring activity through committee papers during 2021/22.

1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE SERVICE

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Service

Reporting to the Chief Executive, Democratic Services delivers a range of services which have a reach and impact across all Council services, and form an integral part of the Council's governance framework. The Service provides back office support to the wider Council, and facilitates the delivery of its committee system and provision of support to its elected representatives (councillors) across its 7 District Electoral Areas.

1.2 Responsibilities

The Service is specifically responsible for and charged with delivering the following functions with an organisational reach across the Council:

Committee Services – facilitation and management of council and committee meetings of Council to include the development of agendas, compilation of meeting packs, providing the summons to councillors and minute taking and follow up activity on decisions resolved

Equality, Disability and Good Relations - in ensuring that the Council meets its Equality Scheme and providing support in ensuring services are delivered in line with obligations under Section 75 (1) and (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Rural Needs - providing assistance across Council on the rural needs statutory duty under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 to consider rural needs in the development of new policies, plans or strategies and in any service design/delivery decisions.

Performance Management & Improvement – developing and embedding arrangements to support continuous improvement in the delivery of services, by embedding a culture which encourages and champions improvement in everything the Council does to meet its Performance Improvement obligations under the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. Introduction of an improvement framework, which supports council's strategic planning through reporting, validating performance data and on-going monitoring

Processing Civic Recognition Requests from Elected Representatives – receiving, processing and making recommendation to council on requests made for civic recognition.

Member Services – in providing support to councillors as required, progression and attainment of the Elected Member Development Charter

Corporate Policy – providing support and advice on the formulation of policies and corporate policy development across the Council.

Information Requests – coordinating the receipt and response to Freedom of Information (Fol) made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

1.3 Customers & Stakeholders

Customers & Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councillors and elected representatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior Management and Heads of Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members of public requesting information held by Council, committee recommendations and council decisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government Departments, agencies and bodies which include;<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Equality Commission for NI○ NI Audit Office○ Public Records Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI)○ Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)○ A wide cross section of the public and customers of the Council, as required.○ Outside Bodies with Councillor representation from Mid Ulster District Council○ Government Departments, specifically the Department for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs on the Rural Needs duty under the 2017 Act.

1.4 Performance Overview in 2020/21

The Covid-19 pandemic has been one of the most significant challenges that Mid Ulster District Council has ever faced. It has required sudden and dramatic changes to the way we work, as Councillors and officers. The previous year has seen Council hold fast with front line service delivery and the section below outlines; our response during 2020 to 2021 i.e. what we achieved, the remaining challenges, and how our service made a difference.

2020/2021 Performance Overview	End of Year Progress Status: Completed /Commenced/ Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Performance Improvement: Annual Performance Assessment Plan completed, approved and ratified by Council. Liaised with Northern Ireland Audit Office regarding their annual Performance Improvement Audit	Completed: throughout the 2020-21 period. In the context of COVID-19 pandemic there was much uncertainty as to the continuation of this service within Council as to the exact requirements to meet the statutory duty. Constant contact was had with representatives of the Department for Communities (DfC). Even though the council reverted to essential services only for much of 2020-21 the Annual Assessment was completed and published within the statutory timeframe of 30 th Sept 2021. Engagement also took place with the NI Audit Office with respect their statutory audit on the duty to improve placed on Mid Ulster Council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Information Requests: To increase the number of Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 days by 31st March 2021	Completed: The cumulative position for year-end was 87%, this is nonetheless significant in light of the COVID context in which the council was operating for the entire year and to date. A total of 107 FOI requests were received and processed in the last Quarter of 2020-21. There was, however, a downward trend on the number of those, which were responded to within 20 days during this quarter. Of the 107 requests almost one quarter

	<p>were not responded to within the 20-day period (i.e. 24%). The lower number of requests responded to within 20 days in the last quarter has contributed towards the 90% of all requests being responded to standard not being met for 2020-2021. Quarters 1 to 3 had attainment rates in the high eighty to early ninety percent. The drop in the final quarter to 76% made the 90% standard unobtainable for 2020-2021. A year end 87% attainment in the context COVID was nonetheless an achievement given the variances of working patterns and absences throughout the period.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Services: Development of arrangements to facilitate the seamless transaction of business during the COVID pandemic in 2020. 	<p>Completed: In response to the COVID pandemic Democratic Services developed and brought forward arrangements to allow meetings of council to continue to attain decision-making whilst meeting the challenges of social distancing and virtual meetings of committees and Councils. The Council has been successful in been able to meet throughout the COVID pandemic following a short suspension in April and May 2020. Meetings have been successfully held from late May 2020 throughout the rest of the period in the context of COVID restrictions and Regulations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Services: deployment of aspects of the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) 	<p>Completed: The Council has deployed a further aspect of the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), utilising the web-based functionality to publish Councillor Annual Registration of Interest Submission. Democratic Services have now pushed this facility/service online therefore no longer necessitating members of the public to make an appointment with the Chief Executive's Office to come to the Council Offices to view the Registration of Interests. Democratic Services has</p>

	<p>now also pushed members annual attendance figures at Council and Committee meetings online, likewise making the information available to the public without having to contact the office to request.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality, Disability, Good Relations and Rural Needs: To further embed a culture of equality, good relations and rural within Council decision-making across all services 	<p>Commenced & Ongoing: the embedding of such arrangements across the Council continues with the relevant Corporate Policy & Equality officers working across services to support their activities in ensuring equality, disability and rural needs form part of how they do business and decide policy direction. Activities throughout the period included provision of support in completing 13 Rural Needs Impact Assessments and 19 equality screenings of policies and decisions of Council, together with delivering bespoke training to officer teams across the council.</p>

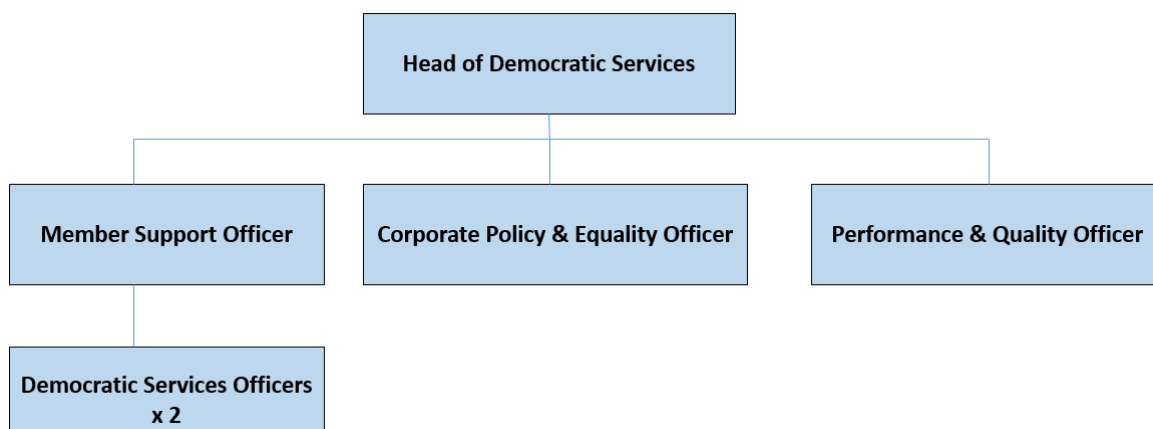
2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICE AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2021/22

The following tables confirm the resources, financial and people, which the Service has access to throughout 2021-22 to deliver its actions, activities and core business.

2.1 Budget 2021/22

Service Budget Headings	£
Contributions to Associations & Membership Fees	157,200
Corporate & Democratic Support	270,360
Members Allowances	916,803
Town Twinning	10,000
Gross Budget	1,354,363
Income	0
Net Budget for 2021-22	1,354,363

2.2 Staffing Complement - 2021/22



Staffing	No. of Staff
Head of Service	1
Managers	0
Officers	5
Remaining Team	
Total	6

2.3 Service Work Plan - 2021/22

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which will form your Service Work Plan for 2021-22. This is a high-level capture of the Service activities as well as some improvement undertakings which the service will focus on throughout 2021-22. The Plan links to the Council's new 2020-2024 Corporate Plan priorities, Annual Corporate Improvement Plan Objectives, Corporate Indicators and Mid Ulster Sustainable Community Plan themes & outcomes:

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	Develop (i) Corporate Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) - 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 for approval by Council and (ii) an annual assessment of Council's previous years' PIP for Council approval, and publish			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	Align to Corporate Plan Theme			
<i>CMP 4.2 Health & Wellbeing - We have better availability to the right service, in the right place at the right time.</i>	<i>Leadership: 1.3 We will work collectively to meet the identified needs and priorities of our citizens & connect the people of Mid Ulster</i>			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
1. Analyse & research documentation regarding potential improvement areas for Council. Develop framework for SMT to identify potential improvement areas/ themes/ activities. Liaise with CEX/SMT on potential improvement objectives, develop paper of draft objectives for committee, approval by Council.	February 2021	Performance & Quality Officer (PQO)	A performance improvement plan based on prioritised areas	1. improvement objectives paper to P & R committee for approval and ratified by Council
2. Undertake public consultation exercise of draft improvement objectives	March to April 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	A citizen and stakeholder informed PIP plan	2. Public consultation exercise undertaken on Council's new improvement objectives.
3. Following the consultation, analyse and draft consultation outworking's paper on new council improvement objectives and forward report(s) to SMT,	May 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	Engaged citizens approve new improvement objectives	3. Consultation outworking's paper on Council's

P&R and then Council for approval Post approval forward to relevant consultees (as requested).				improvement objectives approved
4. Research and draw up key performance questions paper and potential challenges, activities and measures for new improvement objectives and associated projects	Feb to March 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	Provide a challenge and focus for Senior Responsible Improvement Project leads	4. Challenge and focus Key performance questions paper produced for SRO's
5. Liaise with colleagues/stakeholders, & develop corporate performance improvement plan (PIP) for 2020/22 in line with outworking's of consultation, and in conjunction with Senior Responsible Officers for 4 new improvement projects, (assigned by CEX), forward to SMT, P&R approval and thereafter Council ratification –	April to May 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	Mainstreaming performance improvement in Council	5. Draft Two Year Corporate Performance Improvement plan (PIP) for 2021/2022 to 2022/2023
6. Publish approved Corporate Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for 2021/2022 to 2022/23 by 30 th of June 2021. <i>Due to response to Covid-19, the Department of Communities (DfC) corresponded to Councils that new Corporate Improvement plans do not have to be published by 30th June (as in required by guidance/legislation) and DfC will confirm new timeframes</i>	30 th June 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	Council transparency and compliance with legislation	6. 2021/2022 to 2022/23 Corporate Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) published on Council web-site by 30 th June 2021
7. Complete quarterly performance progress/status reports to P & R committee, to include PIP, Stat Pl's and Corporate Indicators for 2021 to 2022 performance	Quarterly	Performance & Quality Officer	Informing citizens of Council performance	7. Quarterly performance reports approved by Council
8. *Subject to guidance received from the Department for Communities; -research, collate and liaise with colleagues to develop draft annual performance assessment report for SMT, P&R committee, and thereafter Council approval	30 Sept 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	Compliance with legislation (Part 12 of the Local Govt. Act) & (DfC) and subject to further Departmental Guidance (awaiting)	8. *Annual Assessment Report Papers P&R committee approval and ratified by Council

<i>* This is subject to further guidance to be issued from the Department of Communities, as it relates to guidance received in 2020 i.e. Councils did not have to publish a PIP plan for 2020/21.</i>				
9. Subject to guidance received from the Department of Communities and seek approval (P & R committee) & ratification (Council) of Annual Assessment Report for 2020/21 publish on Council web-site – date to be confirmed	Sept 2021	Performance & Quality Officer	Compliance with legislation (Part 12 of the Local Govt. Act) & Departmental (DfC) Guidance	9. Assessment Report published on Council web-site – TBC post guidance from DfC.
10. **Prepare folders/files and liaise with Local government auditor in relation to annual inspection of Council's duty to improve <i>** Awaiting further instruction from DfC and the Northern Ireland Audit Office on Performance Improvement Audit</i>	*TBC	Performance & Quality Officer	Compliance with legislation (Part 12 of Local Govt. Act) & Departmental (DfC) Guidance	10. Unqualified audit opinion

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Review and facilitate the revision of Council's current Corporate Performance Framework (indicator sets) to align and inform the strategic direction and outcomes* of Council (i.e. through the hierarchy of strategic plans e.g. Programme for Government, Community Plan, Local Development Plan, Growth Deal, Corporate Plan, Council re-structure, Vision and Council Values). <i>While Council will focus on outcomes they are often difficult to measure. Council therefore will include measures of outputs (which are easier to measure), with</i>	Commence Q4 2022	Performance & Quality Officer	Formulated performance measures will provide: Relevance to Council's priorities, a method of comparison that can be used to tell whether performance is good or not. Base objective evidence that gives reasonably accurate & reliable picture of current performance. Sufficient	Comprehensive performance information that meets the needs of a number of audiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council will have information to support strategic decision-making and continuous improvement (efficient, effective, sustainable),

<p><i>an understanding that there is a relationship between outputs and desired outcomes & that the measures are in part, proxies for measures of outcomes. Output information is also critical for efficient and effective management of Council activities & is often the level of performance information that is of most interest to individuals who access services. It should also be acknowledges that outcomes may be influenced by factors outside the control of Council</i></p>			<p>degree of granularity to detect changes in performance highlighting response. Ability to show changes in performance levels over time.</p>	<p>within revised new structure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities will have information about Council performance and productivity • Regulators will have information to monitor compliance with relevant reporting requirements.
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Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	Implement Council's Statutory Equality and Disability Duties to include development of an updated Equality Scheme for 2021-26 (including associated Action Plans)			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	Align to Corporate Plan Theme			
<i>CMP 4.3 Health & Wellbeing - We care more for those most vulnerable and in need</i>	<i>Leadership: 1.3 We will work collectively to meet the identified needs and priorities of our citizens & connect the people of Mid Ulster</i>			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Produce an Annual Report on the delivery and implementation of the Equality Scheme during 2021/22	August 2022	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer (CPEO)	The report will identify the progress made in 2021-22 and any gaps to address for 2022-23.	Report submitted to the Equality Commission by 31 st August 2022.
Implement the Equality Action Plan 2021-26 and Disability Action Plan 2021-26	March 2021	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer	Statutory requirements met.	The actions and out-workings of the plan will be delivered
Complete and circulate Equality Screening Outcome reports	3 times annually (April, August & December)	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer	Equality Consultees will be able to provide comment on screening outcomes.	Reports will be available for review, comment and feedback.

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Increase the number of Accessibility Audits carried out on Council facilities	March 2021	CPEO	Council facilities will become more physically accessible.	The number of recommendations completed as a result of Accessibility Audits

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):		To implement Rural Needs Act to include implementing the Actions identified for Local Authorities in the, 'Review of the Implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016'		
Link to Community Plan Theme:		Align to Corporate Plan Theme		
<i>CMP 4.2 Health & Wellbeing - We have better availability to the right service, in the right place at the right time.</i>		<i>Leadership: 1.3 We will work collectively to meet the identified needs and priorities of our citizens & connect the people of Mid Ulster</i>		
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Provide support to Officers undertaking Rural Needs Impact Assessments (RNIAs)	Ongoing	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer (CPEO)	Improved Assessment	The number and quality of RNIAs completed
Provide training for Officers and Members	March 2022	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer	Improved understanding of the role of Council (in Rural Needs) and the legislation	Training evaluations
Complete Annual Monitoring Return of Assessments to DAERA	July 2021	Corporate Policy &	It will provide a baseline tool for the year ahead	Return completed

		Equality Officer		
Publish RNIA outcomes on Council's website and that the annual monitoring report includes a link to each public authority's webpage.	March 2022	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer	Increased transparency for the public and rural dwellers	Templates published on Council's website

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Continue to develop effective relationships with rural community organisations and further develop the Rural Needs Consultee List established in 2021.	March 2022	Corporate Policy & Equality Officer	Improved communication and evidence sources to complete assessments	Number of consultees.

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):		To increase the number of Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 days by 31st March 2022		
Link to Community Plan Theme:		Align to Corporate Plan Theme		
CMP 3.3 Education & Skills - We are more entrepreneurial, innovative & creative		<i>Service Delivery: 2.1 We will improve services for our citizens through the development and delivery of an innovation agenda</i>		
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
To continue to use and further deploy elements of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to process requests	2021-22 throughout	Head of Democratic Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased satisfaction with responses issued determined from the number of Internal Reviews sought over the period Contribution towards meeting the corporate indicator target set by Council 	90% of all Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 days
Utilise the Customer Relationship Management System to process Internal Reviews to their conclusion	2021-22 throughout	Head of Democratic Services		

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2020/21? (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Reporting to senior management to display achievement by Service, to identify areas for improvement and early action.	June 2021	Head of Democratic Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased satisfaction with responses issued determined from the number of Internal Reviews sought over the period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 days To attain an improvement from 2020-2021 cumulative response rate of 87%

2.4 RISK MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE

The purpose of risk management is to manage the barriers which prevents the Council from achieving its objectives. This section of the service plan includes space for the Service to input their key risks (in summary form), which have been identified during the business planning process. The Council uses risk management to maximize opportunities and minimize risks. This improves its ability to deliver priorities and improve outcomes. This is why the Council deems it important to link business planning and risk management. Risk Management aims to:

- Help the Council achieve its overall aims and objectives
- Manage the significant risks the Council faces to an acceptable level
- Assist with the decision making process
- Implement the most effective measures to avoid, reduce and control those risks
- Balance risk with opportunity
- Manage risk and internal controls in the most effective way.

This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Services business in 2021-22

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
1.	Failure to meet a range of Statutory Obligation on Equality, disability and Freedom of Information Extends to failure to comply with (i) Sec. 75(1) and 75(2) of NI Act 1998, (ii) Freedom of Information Act 2000 and (iii) disability duties under DDA 1995 and Disability Discrimination Order 2006.	4 (Low)	Mitigation extends but not limited to; Equality Scheme in place and being implemented through various action plans and activities; electronic system not being used to process and manage Freedom of Information requests; and Equality Scheme review will commence and the end of 2019-2020 in time for the required 5 year review.
2.	Failure to comply with the Local Government Act 2014 Part 12, to meet a General Duty on performance improvement, which could be caused by having inadequate arrangements in place and this identified during a NI Audit office inspection which could result in statutory recommendations issued by the Local Government	4 (Low)	Audit undertaken annually by the Northern Ireland Audit Office on the Councils improvement arrangements. No statutory recommendations have been issued to date. Improvement Objectives are being delivered by an

	Auditor (NIAO) leading to reputational risk. (General Duty on performance improvement requires Council to (i) make arrangements to improve; and (ii) ensure that improvement objectives continually remain relevant to meet the general duty (i.e. continuous improvement)		appointed Senior Responsible Owners (a member of senior management team)
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Rating	Descriptor
16 - 25	Extreme Risk (immediate action required)
10 - 15	High Risk (urgent action required)
7 - 9	Moderate Risk (action required)
1 – 6	Low Risk (keep under review)

3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

In carrying out our responsibilities, the Service is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst the Service operates, under various obligations it is however mindful of the changing context in which it operates and endeavours to mainstream the equality and rural needs duties in the design and delivery of our functions.

3.1 EQUALITY DUTY

The council and by consequence our Service is committed to contributing towards its part in working towards fulfilling obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure adequate time, staff and resources to fulfil our duties.

The Service will also work towards adherence to the council's Equality Scheme ensuring equality duties, together with promoting positive attitudes towards persons with a disability and the participation of people with a disability in public life when carrying out our functions.

3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY

The Service will be mindful of the rural needs of its customers when carrying out its functions and subsequent responsibilities, particularly in developing any new policies, plans or strategies throughout the year. In line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 we will give due regard to rurality in terms of needs in carrying out the activities within our Service.