

Draft Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 For Public Consultation

Introduction

In May 2019, a new Council began a new term in office and we began also to consider our strategic direction for the next 4 years in the form of a new Corporate Plan.

Before we can move forward, we naturally have to look back. What has been achieved in the first 4 years of Mid Ulster District Council? What has changed economically, politically, socially, technologically since 2015? Are the themes and priorities which we identified at that point in time still applicable? If so, in whole or in part? What are our priorities between now and 2024?

These are the questions which we have considered in the early stages of developing a new Corporate Plan and we now turn to our residents, our businesses, our partners and stakeholders, and our staff to obtain their views.

In this consultation document, you will find a short review of the Council's first 4 years, together with an assessment of the current strategic context in which we are working to deliver for the people of Mid Ulster.

We have then set out our vision and a set of revised values, essentially the behaviours and qualities which guide our work.

Finally, you will see the 4 themes under which we have grouped our future strategic priorities together with the outcomes we aim to achieve.

At various stages, we ask you to consider some questions and to feed back your views. And I would encourage you to let us know what you think so we can ensure our work continues to reflect the needs of the people we serve.

Councillor Martin Kearney
Chair
Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster: The First Four Years 2015-2019

From the beginning, the Council's vision has been clearly articulated: to be at the heart of our community.

Our priorities have been as diverse and far-reaching as the district we serve, spanning the economy, health and well-being, the environment, the community, and of course unifying staff from 3 long-established councils and a central government department.

Our goal in the lead-up to 1 April 2015 when Mid Ulster District Council became operational was to ensure a continuity of service to local people. That smooth transition was, in fact, our first major achievement.

In the four years which have followed, we have continued to manage considerable change, not just for our people, but in our policies, our processes and procedures, all with the aim of building a more efficient and effective organisation, better able to meet the needs of the people of Mid Ulster.

Here we focus on just some of the highlights and successes, grouped under the themes of our current Corporate Plan.

Theme 1: Delivering For Our People

- In May 2017, the Mid Ulster Community Planning Partnership launched the region's 10-year Community Plan in 2017, setting out a vision for the region in 5 themes, 15 outcomes and 76 strategic actions, encompassing everything from a healthy economy and healthy people to a sustainable environment and a skilled, educated population.
- In February 2019, the draft Local Development Plan to 2030 was published, signalling another milestone in tailoring local planning policy to meet local need.
- The Council continues to be one of the most high-performing councils in terms of its planning functions. Mid Ulster's Planning Committee considers significantly more local planning applications than any other council, accounting for 20.7% of the total number dealt with directly by committees in all 11 local authorities and also has among the highest approval rate for applications of all the councils at over 95%.
- Major development opportunities have also been explored and progressed in the Council's first term, including the release of the 4.12 acre site on Ann Street in Dungannon in March 2017 for development.
- Similarly, land at the former Maghera High School has been identified as an opportunity site, this time, for development of a business park, the first to be spearheaded by a local council here.
- And signalling the Council's ambitions for Mid Ulster most strongly was the landmark announcement in October 2018 that, together with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, work was to

begin towards a Growth Deal to boost economic growth and deliver a step change to the future prospects of the collective area.

- The Council has been steadily enhancing its leisure facilities across its first term, with allocated investment to date of over £3M.
- Drumcoo playing fields benefited from a £230K refurbishment, while new visitor facilities were unveiled the same year at the flagship Dungannon Park, following a £700K investment programme.
- In 2017, a new Disability Sports Hub was opened at the Mid Ulster Sports Arena in Cookstown and the following year, work was completed on £340K improvements at Moneymore Recreation Centre and on £120K enhancements at Maghera Leisure Centre.
- Early 2019 brought the announcement of a refurbishment programme for Dungannon Leisure Centre valued at over £2M and the programme of work has now begun.
- In its first 4 years, the Council has provided close to £3M in grant aid for the voluntary and community sector in Mid Ulster, supporting athletes, sports clubs, arts groups, community groups, cultural groups, language groups and health groups, funding projects, programmes and events.

Theme 2: Creating Growth

- We launched our £30M economic development strategy in 2015, aiming to create and sustain 3,000 jobs, support 1,500 businesses and provide employment and training opportunities for 4,000 people.

In 2016-2017, four of the strategy's business development programmes alone supported the growth of 74 businesses and social enterprises resulting in an economic impact of over £4M.

The following year (2017-2018), economic development investment of more than £3.4M was generated by the Council's activity, and that figure rose to in excess of £6.3million in 2018-2019, when for every £1 invested, an additional £10 of other external monies was leveraged.

- Substantial investment of over £10M saw 3 public realm schemes in Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt, completed.
- Dungannon's Market Square also benefited from an additional £300K improvement scheme which was coordinated by the Council to address pedestrian safety, traffic flow and parking.
- A funding package of £3.4M has been confirmed for Coalisland public realm scheme, while the initial design concepts for Maghera improvements were presented to local people in March 2019.

- More than 100 shops across Mid Ulster were able to enhance their premises inside and out through a £500K shop improvement programme.
- Beginning in April 2017 and completing in September 2018, a total of 109 properties across 46 villages benefited from a 'Village Spruce Up' funding opportunity, which grant-aided 75% of eligible costs up to a maximum of £5,000 per property.
- We launched the first Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy in May 2017 focusing on Mid Ulster's key strengths – our history and heritage, the great outdoors and our connections to one of our most celebrated writers, Seamus Heaney.
- Seamus Heaney HomePlace, the £4.2M arts and literary centre in Bellaghy, was officially opened by the Heaney family in September 2016.

More than 100,000 visitors have been welcomed to the exhibition, education and arts events since then, and HomePlace's reputation as an important cultural and literary centre has grown year on year with local, national and international audiences.

- The appeal of The Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House in Dungannon was greatly enhanced in 2016 with the opening of a new event and conferencing space, complete with a viewing tower from which visitors can take in 7 of the 9 counties of Ulster (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Derry, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan).

The development was part of a wider £7M EU Peace III funded project which also created a new community building in Railway Park in the town, as well as a 6.9km path around Dungannon which links key recreational spaces.

- Bringing together our history, heritage and outdoor offering is the new £1.2M Dark Sky Observatory and Visitor Centre, currently under construction and which will be a landmark attraction for Mid Ulster.

Theme 3: Sustaining Our Environment

- Mid Ulster has not only been at the top of the Northern Ireland recycling table every year since 2015, but was also the first Council to meet the statutory 50% target for household waste recycling - 3 years ahead of the target date of 2020.
- Investment in waste infrastructure has included a £750K refurbishment programme at Drumcoo Recycling Centre in 2015 and, in 2018, a new state of the art £1.8M waste transfer station opened, modernising how we manage our waste services.
- The new transfer station provided a direct replacement for the now mothballed Tullyvar landfill site and followed the closure of the Magheraglass landfill site near Cookstown, both serving to reduce yet further the amount of waste going to landfill.

Theme 4: Building Unity

- A total of 37 village renewal projects are being part funded under Priority 6 (LEADER) of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 by the

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the European Union, with the Council's investment across the entire programme totalling £1.2M over 4 years.

Each project, whether a renovation of a community building or a new play area, has been developed by and for local communities who have worked together to identify priorities for work which will enhance local villages and village life.

From 2016 to 2019, 21 projects in 21 villages have received support from Ardboe, Augher and Aughnacloy to Gulladuff, Glenone and Granville and from Orritor to Upperlands.

You can read the full 'End of Term Review 2015-2019' at www.midulstercouncil.org/endofterm.

Our Strategic Context

The review of the first term of the Council also serves to highlight some of the key strategic plans and approaches which have been developed since the first Corporate Plan was completed in 2015.

These include:

- The Mid Ulster Community Plan (2017-2027), an overarching 10 year plan for the region based on extensive research and community engagement to identify the needs of local people and involving over 40 partner organisations to deliver against 5 themes and 15 outcomes.
- The Draft Local Development Plan which sets out the Council's vision for planning land use up to 2030 and includes a total of 17 separate objectives, aiming to support sustainable patterns of urban and rural development and growth, and spanning housing, infrastructure, transport, tourism, community and recreational facilities, and the protection of vulnerable landscapes.
- An Economic Development Strategy (2015-2020) with a value of £30M with a focus on enabling economic growth, employability and skills, town and village regeneration, as well as infrastructure and connectivity.
- A Tourism Development Strategy (to 2021) which focusses on Mid Ulster's key tourism strengths and identifies three core strands of development around our history and heritage, the great outdoors and our connections to one of our most celebrated writers, Seamus Heaney.

All of these plans remain current and many of their stated objectives also overlap with the period of the Council's new Corporate Plan (2020–2024). Where this is the case, we have carried them forward for inclusion in our priorities for the next 4 years.

The Mid Ulster Community Plan, which spans a 10 year period, will be subject to review in the lifetime of the new Corporate Plan and together with our community planning partners, we will test its robustness against and alignment with community need. We will adjust as required, ensuring that the unique demographics of the Mid

Ulster region, with an ageing population and almost 70% of our population living in rural areas, are considered.

In terms of the wider context in which the Council operates, the new draft Corporate Plan also takes account of other factors, internal and external, negative and positive which may impact upon our work.

Like all public sector organisations, we must manage and make plans to address ever-increasing financial pressures, particularly around the loss of core central government and EU funding, against increased public expectations and demands.

We face the challenges of planning against the backdrop of political instability, whether regionally, nationally or at a European level, and as a 'border council' must also take account of the wide-reaching impacts any exit from the European Union will bring.

We anticipate that partnerships will be crucial to addressing those impacts and so our new draft plan embraces the opportunities to work with a range of other organisation to do so, including via the regional economic strategy which has been initiated as a result of confirmed 'Growth Deal' funding.

Vital, also, will be the efficacy of the Council's political leadership, optimising our role as a local, regional and national influencer to shape policy, particularly in the arena of addressing the infrastructure deficit of Mid Ulster.

We recognise equally that it has never been more important to ensure we use our existing powers, as well as any future transferring powers, to best effect.

Our Vision and Values

When Mid Ulster District Council was formed in April 2015, the Council agreed that its vision was to aspire to be 'at the heart of our community'.

At the same time, we chose 6 values which would be at the core of what we do and how we behave.

We believe that our vision to be 'at the heart of our community' still strongly represents the ethos and ambition of Mid Ulster District Council.

We have, however, reconsidered our 6 existing values (customer-focussed, innovative, quality-driven, team-focussed, professional and trustworthy). Some remain as they were, some have been broadened and re-defined, and others replaced to better reflect how we feel we operate as an organisation.

Proposed Values	What does this mean?
Customer-focussed	<i>Designing and delivering our services in response to and around the needs of our customers and within our resources.</i>
Innovative	<i>New and better ways of doing what we do.</i>
Excellence	<i>Striving to excel in every aspect of our work, delivering the best, value for money services.</i>
Trustworthy	<i>Working for our communities in a spirit of friendliness and openness by delivering fair, transparent, equitable and ethical services to all customers.</i>
Respect	<i>Treating each other, our customers and our stakeholders in the same considerate way that we wish to be treated ourselves.</i>
Inclusive	<i>Creating a culture which values, supports and celebrates diversity to the benefit of the organisation and the people we serve.</i>

Your Views On Our Vision And Values

Your Views
Do you believe that the Council's vision represents our ethos?
Do you agree that our values are the right ones to guide our work and our behaviour?

Our Future Strategic Direction

We have reviewed the themes under which we work, both in the existing Corporate Plan (2015-2019) and in the current Mid Ulster Community Plan, and considered how best now to reflect the Council's strategic focus, its ambitions and priorities for the period 2020-2024.

We are proposing to structure the new Corporate Plan under 5 themes:

Theme 1: Leadership.

Theme 2: Service Delivery.

Theme 3: Economy

Theme 4: Environment.

Theme 5: Communities.

While each theme has a clear focus and purpose, there are a range of other corporate commitments which will work across and interweave through each theme, including our commitments to:

- address rurality
- promote equality of opportunity and good relations
- continuously improve our services
- design and deliver our services sustainably
- work in partnership across the public, private, community and voluntary sector to achieve shared objectives.

Theme 1: Leadership

This theme is intended to reflect the Council's position as an organisation which has a key role to play not only in the direct delivery of services which will impact positively on people's lives, but also as a key shaper and influencer externally.

We are considering priorities, therefore, which will allow us to progress in our role as a leading influencer locally, regionally and nationally.

Priorities

- We will use our influence to shape and facilitate:
 - the delivery of strategic infrastructure schemes including the road transportation network (including bypasses for both Cookstown and Dungannon)
 - the drainage and sewerage network
 - our energy and broadband connectivity
 - the future development of health provision
 - the direction of wider policy impacting on economic growth.
- We will continue to progress towards the adoption of our Local Development Plan 2030 and delivery against the plan objectives.
- We will work collectively to meet the identified needs and priorities of our citizens and to connect the people of Mid Ulster.

Theme 2: Service Delivery

In this theme, we focus on our internal agenda in terms of our resources (people and finances) and the priorities which will ensure we are a high-performing Council, where excellence is standard.

Priorities

- We will improve services for our citizens through the development and delivery of an innovation agenda.
- We will invest in our people to create a customer-focussed, purposeful, skilled, high performing, engaged, healthy and safe work-force.
- We will enhance our financial performance and strength, identifying opportunities to increase income and reduce deficits, as well as to leverage external funding.
- We will develop and implement an Asset Management Plan for the Council and, with our partners, work to develop a public sector-wide Asset Management Plan for Mid Ulster.

Theme 3: Economy

This theme is intended to capture our priorities for growth in Mid Ulster. Our priorities encapsulate our ambitions for economic growth, both locally and as part of a wider Mid, South and West 'growth deal' economic region, as well as our plans to support that growth with other measures, from the tailored planning policies which will result from the Local Development Plan completion to the delivery of a planned programme of capital investment.

Priorities

- We will develop and deliver the Mid, South and West Regional Economic Strategy in collaboration with our partner Councils (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council).
- We will continue to build on our work to generate business diversification, innovation and expansion and increase employment opportunities.
- We will continue to support the work of our partners, including the Mid Ulster Skills Forum, to address employability and skills to ensure the existing and future needs of our region's business base are met.
- We will continue to identify opportunity sites for development proposals and to deliver against existing plans for other key strategic sites (including Ann Street, Dungannon and the former Maghera High School site).
- We will have a prioritised, sustainably resourced programme of capital investment supporting the enhancement of facilities for local people and contributing to the regeneration of our district.

- We will work to deliver tourism investment and employment concentrating on Mid Ulster's 3 identified tourism strands.

Theme 3: Environment

Our role in protecting, preserving and enhancing the environment was articulated in the first Corporate Plan and continues into the new plan, reflecting the significance of our natural landscapes and heritage and the importance of waste management as a direct council function.

Priorities

- We will continue to reduce our dependency on landfill through waste reduction and increased recycling and recovery.
- We will continue to promote and protect our environment through our environmental and anti-littering programmes of education, awareness-raising and enforcement.
- We will increase the protection of, access to and development of our heritage assets, both natural and man-made, including our strategic visitor sites.
- We will work to mitigate against the impacts of climate change by taking steps to reduce our carbon emissions as an organisation.

Theme 4: Communities

The Mid Ulster Community Plan articulates very clearly that 'the responsibility for growing healthy communities ranges far beyond the traditional health and care services and structures' and we have embraced our role in contributing to work which enables our citizens to live longer, healthier and more active lives.

This theme recognises also that health and well-being are also impacted by the viability and vitality of local communities, which includes their safety, their diversity and their prosperity.

Priorities

- We will open up and sustain accessible pathways to participation in leisure and outdoor recreation activities which enhance health and well-being by providing high quality, accessible facilities in local communities and through programmes tailored to community need and delivered by a skilled, flexible and motivated staff.
- We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests and green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking and cycling trails, and water recreation.
- We will, along with our community planning partners, work to address poverty and deprivation across the Mid Ulster region.
- We will support and promote respect for diversity and the integration of our minority communities.

- We will promote and protect regional minority languages and culture.
- We will continue, through our community development programmes, financial assistance schemes and our partnership-working, to support local communities and to build capacity in the community and voluntary sector.

Your Views On Our Themes And Priorities

Your Views
Do you agree with the Council's overall strategic direction?
Do you agree that the themes under which priorities have been grouped are appropriate/right for Mid Ulster?
Do you feel the strategic priorities identified under each themes are the right ones?
Are there any strategic priorities which you feel should not be included?
Are there any strategic priorities which you feel are missing?

Consultation Responses

We are inviting responses to the draft Corporate Plan until Friday 10 January 2020.

You can submit your responses in writing to:

Chief Executive
Mid Ulster District Council
50 Ballyronan Road
Magherafelt
BT45 6EN

By email to:

communications@midulstercouncil.org

Online by visiting:

www.midulstercouncil.org/corporateplan2020