



All Chief Executives

Director
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Causeway Exchange
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Email: Anthony.carleton@communities-ni.gov.uk

Dear Chief Executives

11 June 2020

Performance Improvement in Local Government 2020/21

The Department understands the pressure currently being expressed by councils in relation to statutory performance improvement duties for the coming months/year, consequently we have been looking at the overall legal context and have been in discussion with the Northern Ireland Audit Office to decide the way forward for 20/21.

Paragraph 45 of the current guidance for Local Government Performance Improvement (Local Government Circular 21/2016) states the suggested date for councils to publish their Improvement plan is by the end of June. The Department understands that, due to current circumstances, councils will have difficulty meeting this deadline. Therefore, it does not expect councils to publish a performance plan by 30 June 2020 for the current financial year.

The Department will be in touch with all stakeholders in the very near future to review Performance Improvement requirements over the next 2 years.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Carleton".

Anthony Carleton





All Chief Executives

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Local Government Housing Regulation Group
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Dear Chief Executive

17 August 2020

Performance Improvement in Local Government 2020/21

Subsequent to my letter dated 11 June 2020 a decision has been made to set aside the requirement to produce and publish a performance improvement plan for the 2020/21 year.

Councils will still be required to publish their performance improvement assessment report covering 2019/20, with a publication date of 30 September 2020.

We have been considering the arrangements that should be put in place for councils regarding performance improvement for the next few years. Our initial thinking, subject to taking the views of councils, is that, rather than being required to produce and publish performance improvement plans in the current difficult climate, it may be more beneficial for councils to produce plans setting out their proposals for service delivery and performance recovery.

In addition to seeking input from councils, we will also need to take the views of the Local Government Auditor before submitting proposals for the Minister's consideration.

Further work on council performance requirements is ongoing and the Department will be engaging with local government representatives to review the way forward for 2021/22 onwards.



Patrick Barr
Director

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Anne Donaghy
Chair of SOLACE

Via email to: anne.Donaghy@midandeantrim.gov.uk

30 September 2020

Anne,

It was great to talk to you and the other forum members earlier this week – thank you for inviting me.

We agreed on the call that I would write to you laying out the primary focus of our audit approach this year and the fact that the reduced audit activity would be reflected in the fee charged to Councils.

Without going into too much detail here, the primary focus of our work will be the 2019-20 Self Assessment Report. We will not be looking at the performance improvement plans as, per communication from the Department, these are not required this year. The timescales for the completion of our work are currently being extended to allow for the necessary change in legislation (discussed on our call) to be completed. That said, for most Councils we still intend to begin our work in the coming weeks and will begin circulating our information requests once finalised.

In regard the fees, I mentioned that we estimate the input required this year will be in the region of 25% to 30% of the previous years' work. This will be reflected in a reduced fee – so we aim to charge Councils 25% to 30% of the performance improvement fee outlined in the audit strategy.

As I said on the call we recognise the impact that the current situation is having on Councils and how they have responded to the challenges they face. I look forward to working with you, and the other forum members, to ensure we complete our planned work as efficiently as possible this year, and ultimately make improvements to the wider performance improvement system as we progress.

Yours sincerely



PATRICK BARR
Director

Ref: TC/ab/LK
20 October 2020

Sent via email to: Julie.Broadway@communities-ni.gov.uk

Julie Broadway
Department for Communities
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
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Dear Julie

I am writing to you as Chair of the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group, on behalf of SOLACE NI.

I would like to thank you, Lynn McCracken and Kerri O'Neil for attending the most recent meeting of the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group (PIWG) on Monday 28th September 2020. It was encouraging to hear details of the Department's 3-stage plan for moving forward with regards to performance improvement in local government. I believe that through strong partnership working, we can continue to build a culture of performance across local government in the coming years whilst navigating the long-term impacts of the COVID pandemic.

As you will recall, it was agreed that the PIWG would collectively identify the most appropriate steps to be taken in the short, medium and longer term to ensure that performance continues to maintain its valuable profile across the sector. The table below outlines some key actions that now need to be progressed.

Timeframe	Actions Required
Short Term (1 month)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarification and official correspondence on the scope, process and timeline for the Performance Audit and Assessment in 2020/21.
Medium Term (12 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarification on the scope and focus of the Performance Improvement Plan for 2021/22 and timeline for publication. Clarification on whether each Council must consult on the draft performance improvement objectives 2021/22 (or recovery objectives) and timeline for same. Clarification on the content of the Self-Assessment 2020/21, in the absence of the Performance Improvement Plan 2020/21. Clarification on the scope, process and timeline of the Performance Audit and Assessment 2021/22.

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The Braid
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□ **Planning Office**
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Chief Executive
Anne Donaghy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careful consideration of benchmarking in the current and post COVID-19 environments, specifically in relation to the nine statutory performance indicators and standards, as the statutory Waste targets have not yet been issued.
Long Term (24 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A full review of Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 The Performance Indicators and Standards Order should be reviewed alongside Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

As we move into the coming year it is vital for all stakeholders, including the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland Audit Office and local government to acknowledge that performance and improvement is a key driver for the delivery of effective, efficient and value for money services.

Over the last five years, local government has allocated a significant amount of time and resources to secure compliance with Part 12 of the Local Government Act and has raised the profile and impact of performance significantly. The process of embedding a culture of performance and improvement has gained substantial momentum across each of the 11 Councils and it is vital that this momentum continues to build.

Going forward, SOLACE envisages a clear and pivotal role for performance and improvement in the current and post COVID-19 environments, helping to address the financial challenges that the sector face and identify efficiency/income generating opportunities. Using performance as a key enabler to navigate our way through the pandemic will build on and strengthen the progress made to date within Councils. However, to be effective and responsive to the needs and aspirations of local communities and individual Councils, now is the right time to review, evaluate and streamline the legislation and guidance.

In addition to the steps outlined within the table above, there are a number of recommendations that the PIWG have outlined below, particularly for the 2021/22 year; these include:

- The group have previously highlighted that the current legislation requirements and statutory guidance on Council are time consuming, bureaucratic and resource intense. In light of changing circumstances, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a more flexible approach is required, particularly around the definition of an 'improvement objective' for 2021/22 performance plans. Objectives will focus on recovery and delivering medium and long-term improvements for the communities we serve. These objectives will be unique to each Council area; therefore, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will be ineffective. The audit and assessment process will need to take account of this flexibility.
- Whilst the annual cycle has played a key role in assisting Councils in mainstreaming/embedding performance and improvement, local government now calls for a more phased approach. The Performance Improvement Plan is a strategic document that forms part of the hierarchy of plans in place across each Council, and

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is directly aligned to the Corporate Plan and Community Plan. To remain strategic, the Performance Improvement Plan should change from an annual improvement plan to a minimum of a 2-year plan. This would allow for more realistic and tangible outcomes at a local level. A 2-year plan would also provide time to conduct a full review of Part 12 of the legislation.

- The formal consultation process should also take place on a biennial cycle. It should be noted however that councils engage on a continuous basis. Within that context, Council's should have the freedom to select and realign improvement objectives which matter most to both the organisation and local communities, focused on and responding to the internal and external environments that we face, as illustrated so pertinently by COVID-19.
- The audit cycle should be at a minimum every 2 years, with the annual Performance Self-Assessment serving as a light touch review each year, subject to the scrutiny of senior management teams and Elected Members. The effectiveness of this scrutiny process would be led by the Council and sector and would then form part of the more in depth NIAO Audit and Assessment.

I would appreciate your consideration of the points raised in this letter and am happy to further discuss any points you would like to raise. I will soon issue an invitation to you for the next PIWG meeting that is expected to take place in November.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Department in the coming months to agree and finalise a way forward that will guarantee that the momentum already established through the Performance Improvement Working Group over the last 5 years continues to develop across local government.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Anne Donaghy OBE
Clerk & Chief Executive

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Telephone: (028) 9051 5690
E-mail: Julie.Broadway@communities-ni.gov.uk
Your ref: TC/ab/LK
Our ref:
Date: 13 November 2020

Anne Donaghy
Chair of the Local Government Performance Improvement Working
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
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Dear Anne

Performance Improvement in Local Government

Thank you for your letter dated 20 October 2020 and for the recommended actions set out within the letter.

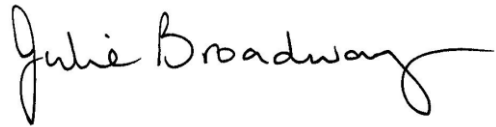
For the short term, the Department aims to bring forward legislation to regularise the legal position arising from the Minister's decision to set aside the requirement for Councils to produce and publish a Performance Improvement Plan for the current 2020/21 year.

For the medium term, we look forward to working with the Local Government Performance improvement Working Group to discuss the arrangements which should be put in place for performance improvement planning during the 2021/22 year, including proposed processes and timelines and whether any further legislation will be required to facilitate any proposed changes to arrangements.

In the longer term, and subject to the Minister's agreement, the Department will carry out a full review of Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. Many of the additional recommendations in respect of performance improvement arrangements, set out in pages 2-3 of your letter, (e.g. the movement to 2-year plans and 2 year audit cycles) would be matters for the full review of Part 12, however, it is very useful to have these issues highlighted at this stage.

I look forward to continuing to work with the PIWG over the coming months.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Broadway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the word "Broadway".

Julie Broadway