

<b>Report on</b>	Improvement Objectives 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 (proposed) and Consultation
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	P Moffett, Head of Democratic Services
<b>Contact Officer</b>	L Jenkins, Performance & Quality Officer

<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To consider the proposed improvement objectives for 2021/22 and 2022/23 as set in compliance with the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (the Act) and subsequent guidance as issued by the Department for Communities (LG21/2016 onwards), and establish timelines for a public consultation exercise relating to the proposed improvement objectives.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<p>The 2014 Local Government Act, section 84, places a general duty on the Council to “....<i>make arrangements to secure continuous improvement....</i>” in the exercise of its functions. Section 85 of the Act requires a council, for each financial year, to set itself improvement objectives for improving the exercise of its functions and to have in place arrangements to achieve those objectives. Section 87 also outlines that a Council; in deciding how to discharge its duty under sections 84 and 85 of the Act, must consult with persons appearing to the Council, “<i>to be representative of</i>”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>a); persons liable to pay rates in respect of hereditaments in the district; b) persons who use or are likely to use services provided by the council; and c) persons appearing to the council to have an interest in the district.</i></li> </ul>
2.2.	Each year the Council develops an annual Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), containing improvement objectives, with associated activity and outcomes for citizens and local communities. The plan also includes the statutory performance indicators and standards as outlined in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015, as well as Council’s suite of Corporate Health Indicators (measures).
2.3	Senior management undertook a workshop in February 2020, to look at areas for improvement, moving forward, with a focus on current and future issues for citizens, the contextual issues relating to current Council operations and short to medium term Council priorities (in relation to newly developed corporate plan 2020-

	<p>2024). The outworking's from this session were analysed and four draft improvement objectives developed, with supporting rationales, which were due to go out for public consultation running from March through to early May 2020. The proposed improvement objectives would form the basis of Council's two-year performance improvement plan (PIP) for 2020/21 to 2021/22.</p>
2.4	<p>By the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic required the Council to divert resources and attention to support the emergency response in order to help and protect the most vulnerable in society and ensuring the continued delivery of our essential services. In recognition of these exceptional circumstances, the Department for Communities proposed that Councils were not required to publish a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for the year 2020 to 2021. This was confirmed in a letter from, Department of Communities, to Chief Executives on 11th June 2020 (refer to previous December 2020 Policy and Resources Committee report). Council did not develop a Performance Improvement Plan or consult on the improvement objectives based on the departmental guidance.</p>
2.5	<p>Subsequently the Department has engaged with the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group, chaired by a SOLACE representative, to discuss the arrangements to secure continuous improvement moving forward into 2021/22 year (short term) as well as medium to long-term issues. The thinking, subject to taking the views of councils, was that, rather than being required to produce and publish performance improvement plans in the current difficult climate in 2021 to 2022 it would be more beneficial for councils to produce plans setting out their proposals for service delivery and performance recovery.</p>
2.6	<p>During a meeting held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, between DfC, NIAO representatives and members of the LGPIWG, the Department envisaged that;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Councils proceed with a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for 2021/22 and during discussions it was mooted by the Department that it would; in light of the pandemic, understand that performance plans may require a "broader definition", as they would likely include both recovery and improvement objectives for each Council. The department and the LGPIWG recognised that all Councils would be in different stages of recovery and have various contextual issues/factors unique to their areas.</li> <li>2. In addition, the Department suggested as part of accepted good practice that an accompanying consultation process regarding the proposed performance improvement/recovery be undertaken while recognising that the consultation process would be restricted this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>3. The Department also outlined that Departmental guidance as opposed to a change in legislation (Part 12 of the Local Government Act) would be required to facilitate any proposed changes to arrangements.</li> </ol> <p>During the meeting, the LGPIWG Chair requested that expectations for the consultation process this year were 'realistic' and that this would be understood, by both the Department and the NIAO during the audit process.</p>

2.7	<p>The chair of the LGPIWG then wrote to DfC post the meeting of the 20<sup>th</sup> January to DfC (Appendix One), outlining the issues discussed. The chair also sought further clarity regarding updated guidance being issued to Council's as well as flexibility in terms of publication dates of performance improvement, while taking account of the impact this may have on the annual performance cycle. Other issues were also highlighted in the letter relating to the risk that the standards for the statutory performance indicators will not be met this year as a result of the pandemic and other factors. Again, flexibility was sought in terms of achieving the standards and that this be built into the audit process so that local government are not negatively impacted as a result of not meeting the targets set. In addition, standards for the 2021/22 year need to be confirmed as soon as possible for all statutory performance indicators.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b>General Duty to Improve and Departmental Guidance</b></p> <p>The Department for Communities (DfC) on taking forward the general duty on improvement requires that the council consult on their improvement objectives. This requirement on consultation falls from section 87 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. There is no statutory duty to consult on the improvement plan, but rather the improvement objectives.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Review of Improvement Objectives for 2021/22 to 2022/23</b></p> <p>A self-analysis exercise was undertaken by Council to review the previous year's draft improvement objectives to establish their continued relevancy for the period 2021/22 to 2022/23. The exercise was undertaken in order to ensure that the improvement objectives were based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thorough, evidence-based understanding of communities Council serves,</li> <li>• Local needs and Council's capacity to address those needs.</li> <li>• Improvement objectives correspond directly with the council's priorities for improvement in the hierarchy of plans, and</li> <li>• The context of the Covid-19 pandemic</li> </ul>
3.3	<p><b>Proposed Performance Improvement Objectives 2021/22 to 2022/23</b></p> <p>Senior management were content with the review of the proposed improvement objectives, which are outlined below in table one. Further detail of the improvement objectives is available in Appendix Two (Proposed Performance Improvement Objectives: 2021-22 and 2022-23). Also included is a summary of the rationale for undertaking the improvement objectives, how the objective links to the wider District Community plan and a brief outline of the proposed activity. Each improvement objective will have an assigned Senior Responsible Officer, along with a project</p>

team, to develop and embed a body of work to deliver improvement outcomes for citizens specific to the improvement objectives.

#### **Proposed Improvement Objectives 2021/22 to 2022/23**

1	Mid Ulster District Council will seek to reduce the environmental impacts of our own activities and will contribute to the improvement of the wider environment through local action
2	We will ensure a more connected Mid Ulster where new technologies and ways of working, empower citizens to get the best services that matter to them
3	To create cleaner neighbourhoods, where everyone takes responsibility for their waste and environment
4	We will contribute to the on-going regeneration of our district by delivering a capital investment programme, enhancing facilities and opportunities for local people

#### **Consultation & Improvement Plan 2021/22 to 2022/23**

3.4

It is recommended that arrangements to consult on the Improvement Objectives, as referred to in section 3.1 above, commence following the Committee meeting and run from March to early April 2021. The following is an outline timeline for the consultation and development of the 2021-22 and 2022-23 Improvement Plan:

- Consultation from Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> March to Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2021.
- Outcomes Report on the Consultation considered by May P&R Committee
- Draft Performance Improvement Plan (2021-2022 to 2022-2023) to be considered at June P&R Committee

4.0

#### **Other Considerations**

4.1

#### **Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**

Financial: N/A

Human: N/A

Risk Management: The social and economic disruption caused by COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our District, our citizens, our services and the way we provide them and will continue to do so in the short to medium term. In the coming months and into the next financial year, with increased testing, vaccination programmes and adherence to social distancing rules, all of our will services gradually recover, by transitioning and adjusting to the 'new' normal. Effective planning will determine how well the organisation adapts to the

	challenges and opportunities within the current and post COVID-19 environments, i.e. recovery planning (which will assist in the mitigation of risk).
<b>4.2</b>	<b><u>Screening &amp; Impact Statements</u></b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	That members' consider and approve the four draft improvement objectives for 2021-22 to 2022-23, and the initiation of consultation together with associated timeline.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	Appendix One: Letter DfC of 28 <sup>th</sup> January 2021 from Chair of LGPIWG.  Appendix Two: Proposed Improvement Objectives 2021-22 to 2022-23