



## Northern Ireland Audit Office

*1987-2017 - Promoting better use of  
Public Money for 30 years*

Our purpose...

Promoting better use of public money, through independent professional scrutiny, underpinned by our commitment to:

- Integrity
- Equality
- Openness
- Innovation

To make a difference for the people of Northern Ireland.

The Department for Communities, with the consent of the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, has designated Mrs Louise Mason as the Local Government Auditor. She, and the Northern Ireland Audit Office, are totally independent of Local Government. She certifies the accounts of all Local Government bodies in Northern Ireland and is also responsible for councils' performance improvement audits and assessments.

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Appendix A

### MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

#### AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2017-18

**A REPORT TO THE COUNCIL AND THE  
DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES UNDER  
SECTION 95 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
(NORTHERN IRELAND) ACT 2014**

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## Section 1

### Introduction and status of this report

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#### Introduction

- 1.1 Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) sets out that all councils are under a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. It sets out a number of council responsibilities under a performance framework. It also sets out key responsibilities for the Local Government Auditor. The Department for Communities (the Department) has published ‘*Guidance for Local Government Performance Improvement 2016*’ (the Guidance) which councils and the Local Government Auditor have to follow.

#### *The improvement audit*

- 1.2 Each year the Local Government Auditor has to report whether each council has discharged its duties in relation to improvement planning, the publication of improvement information and the extent to which each council has acted in accordance with the Department’s Guidance. The Local Government Auditor’s procedures to do so are called “improvement audits”.

#### *The improvement assessment*

- 1.3 The Local Government Auditor also has to assess annually whether a council is likely to make the required arrangements to secure continuous improvement in that year. This is called the “improvement assessment”. The Local Government Auditor also has the discretion to assess and report whether a council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years (see paragraph 2.5).
- 1.4 Improvement audits and improvement assessments are undertaken in accordance with the Local Government Auditor’s statutory responsibilities<sup>1</sup> and the Department’s Guidance. They are planned and conducted in accordance with the performance improvement Audit Strategy issued by the Local Government Auditor to councils, her Code of Audit Practice for Local Government Bodies in Northern Ireland and the Statement of Responsibilities.

#### Status of this report

- 1.5 This report has been produced by staff of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the NIAO) on behalf of the Local Government Auditor in discharging her duties under section 95 of the Act. It certifies that she has carried out an improvement audit and improvement assessment for 2017-18 and states whether, as a result, she believes that the Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement duties.
- 1.6 This report has been prepared for the sole use of the Department and the Council. The Local Government Auditor and NIAO do not accept responsibility to any third party for losses arising from reliance being placed on this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Sections 93 and 94 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

## Section 1

### Introduction and status of this report

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#### Other performance improvement reports by the Local Government Auditor

##### *The Annual Improvement Report on the Council*

- 1.7 The Act requires the Local Government Auditor to summarise all of her work carried out (in relation to her responsibilities under the Act) at the Council, in an “annual improvement report”. This will be published on the NIAO website in due course, making it publicly available.

##### *Special inspections and statutory recommendations*

- 1.8 The Local Government Auditor may also, in some circumstances, carry out special inspections which will be reported to the Council and the Department, and which she may publish, or make statutory recommendations.

## Section 2

### Matters required to be reported on

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#### Matters required to be reported on

##### *Improvement audit and improvement assessment*

- 2.1 The Local Government Auditor's audit opinions in relation to the improvement audit and her improvement assessment are in the Annex to this report.
- 2.2 In the Annex, the Local Government Auditor certifies that she has performed the improvement audit and improvement assessment for the Council and that, as a result of this work, she is satisfied that the Council has discharged its statutory performance improvement and reporting duties and that it acted in accordance with the Guidance.
- 2.3 She also reports that, as 2017-18 was the second year in which councils were required to implement the new performance improvement framework, the Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement are, as is to be expected, still in various stages of development and implementation. The Council is strengthening its arrangements to secure continuous improvement, and delivered measurable improvements to its services in 2016-17. However, until the Council's arrangements mature and it can demonstrate a track record of continuous improvement the Local Government Auditor is unable to determine, the extent to which improvements will be made.
- 2.4 The Local Government Auditor anticipates that the Council should be able to demonstrate that it is meeting its responsibility to continuously improve over the next couple of years, with the benefit of mature performance improvement arrangements, particularly in relation to the collection and use of data.
- 2.5 The Local Government Auditor has decided at present not to perform the discretionary assessments of whether councils in Northern Ireland are likely to comply with the requirements in future years. She will keep this decision under review as the new framework establishes itself and the track records of councils accumulate.

##### *Special inspections and statutory recommendations*

- 2.6 No special inspections or statutory recommendations were required at the Council this year.

##### *Other matters*

- 2.7 Whilst the Local Government Auditor has no statutory recommendations to make and there is no requirement for a special inspection this year there are some areas which could be developed. These are set out under Section 3 'Key audit and assessment findings' of this report.

## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### Key audit and assessment findings

- 3.1 This section outlines observations arising from the thematic areas of the Council's audit and assessment. Some findings, where relevant, give rise to proposals for improvement. These are not formal recommendations, which are more significant matters which require action to be taken by the Council in order to comply with the Act or Guidance.
- 3.2 Proposals for improvement include matters which, if accepted, will assist the Council to meet its performance improvement responsibilities. The Local Government Auditor believes that agreed proposals to the Council, should be implemented and will follow them up in subsequent years.
- 3.3 Our procedures were limited to those considered necessary for the effective performance of the audit and assessment. Therefore, the Local Government Auditor's observations should not be regarded as a comprehensive statement of all weaknesses which exist, or all improvements which could be made.
- 3.4 Each year we review progress the Council has made on the proposals and it is recommended that the Council's Audit Committee should monitor and track their progress.

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## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### 1. General duty to improve

Section 84 of the legislation requires the Council to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of all of its functions. These arrangements should enable the Council to understand local needs and priorities, collect performance data and as a result, use this information to identify and prioritise those functions which will benefit most from improvement. This will enable it to select its improvement objectives and in turn, make best use of its resources and capacity to deliver outcomes and assess improvement of its actions.

The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement - including Community Planning, Corporate Plan, Service Plans, and its Performance Improvement Framework and processes within - incorporate the seven aspects of improvement into its assessments of functions and services. The Council engaged with the public through its District community planning consultation process to strengthen its understanding of community needs and what its citizens and stakeholders want. This process fed into its arrangements to secure continuous improvement and has enabled the Council to build and develop its arrangements. Key improvement areas designated by the council within its Performance Improvement Plan include: economic development, leisure, customer service and waste functions across the organisation and these are aligned to its District community plan outcomes. The Council's general duty to improve is therefore linked clearly to its community planning outcomes.

The Council has taken action to address a number of issues raised by the Local Government Auditor in last year's report. These have either been implemented or, given their nature, are still being progressed towards full implementation.

Although still relatively early in the development of the Improvement framework the Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement this year are becoming more established and continue to be developed. For example the Council has committed to develop a performance improvement policy in 2017-18 and is looking to further develop the capture and use of service data (or other qualitative data) to enable performance measurement and benchmarking of its services and functions. Once embedded fully these should enable increased collection and use of a range of performance information and measures across all functions and services over time and compared with other councils.

As the Council's arrangements to meet its general duty develop and mature we would expect to see the arrangements through which functions/services which would benefit most from improvement are identified become more refined and mature. It is important that in the interests of additional openness and transparency, the logical evidence base and documented process to support the general duty to improve and its selection of priority areas for improvement continues to develop.

Going forward in order to assist the Council we recommend the following proposal for improvement:

- The Council needs to prioritise the development of its Performance Improvement Policy and performance management system and processes to support the general duty to improve. This will enable the performance management data across all its functions and services to be measured, benchmarked, and reported on to ensure the process of identification and selection of those areas which would benefit most from improvement is robust, transparent, well documented and subject to appropriate levels of scrutiny.

## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### 2. Governance Arrangements

It is important that the Council's governance arrangements support robust and effective decision making in relation to the Council's statutory responsibility to have arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement in its functions. Performance improvement arrangements, systems and processes are still developing and the Council continues to develop governance arrangements to help it meet these responsibilities.

The Policy & Resources Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the Council's performance improvement duties, which includes consideration and approval of improvement objectives and Improvement Plan. On a quarterly basis the Chief Executive and the Head of Democratic Services report to the Policy & Resources Committee on the delivery and achievement of the council's improvement arrangements and legislative duty, statutory Indicators and Corporate Indicators. Recommendations from the Policy & Resources Committee are subsequently reviewed at the next available full Council meeting.

The Audit Committee has responsibility to ensure that arrangements for good governance are in place and operating effectively. This year the Audit Committee has begun to exercise greater oversight and monitoring of its performance improvement responsibilities. This should also include tracking of progress against any issues and proposals for improvement included in our reports on performance improvement. Whilst performance improvement is now a regular agenda item their terms of reference still do not fully reflect the Audit Committee's oversight and monitoring role given the Council's performance improvement statutory responsibilities.

Each improvement objective been assigned to a Director with overall responsibility for its delivery of action to achieve outcomes for citizens. Monitoring of the Improvement Plan is made through the quarterly reporting of services' operational improvement objectives, contained within the annual service improvement plans with the Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) reporting to the Chief Executive on progress, with Senior Management receiving quarterly management improvement reports.

In our report last year, we recommended a number of proposals for improvement some of which have been actioned. For example: the Terms of Reference for Policy & Resources Committee have been updated to reflect performance improvement responsibilities; and performance improvement features as a regular item on the agenda of both Policy and Resources Committee and the Audit Committee.

### **3. Improvement Objectives**

The Council is required to establish improvement objectives each year and we assess these in line with legislation and supporting statutory guidance. Councils are expected to determine their own priorities for improvement based on a thorough understanding of the communities they serve. The legislation requires councils to establish arrangements to deliver their improvement objectives. Guidance states that objectives should ideally both describe the overall purpose and the scope of action to deliver it (e.g. “we will provide more and better opportunities for citizens to engage in physical activity”). It also requires improvement objectives to be legitimate, clear, robust and deliverable. Councils can set objectives which span more than one year, perhaps with intermediate milestones, provided that these are reviewed annually to ensure their continued relevance.

The Council has set a number of annual improvement objectives and associated programs (projects and activities) for 2017-18 and 2018-19 which aim to improve the exercise of its functions and bring about improvement. The improvement objectives and key improvement programs set out the Council’s contribution to the sustainable Community Plan for the District; and also align to the Council’s Corporate Plan 2015 - 2019, which contains the council’s strategic direction and main priorities.

The Council has selected four improvement objectives which were developed following public consultation and consideration by the Council and were constructed with regard to at least one of the seven criteria. The objectives and details of these are set out within the Council’s Performance Improvement Plan 2017-18 & 2018-19. They include three of last year’s objectives carried forward, albeit slightly amended to improve the scope of action to deliver, together with an additional objective in relation to healthier lifestyles. These objectives are closely linked to the functions the Council has chosen to improve.

Under each objective is a narrative highlighting why the improvement objectives have been chosen, what the Council has done thus far in relation to these, what it intends to do, and how it will “know” the outcomes or difference made for citizens. This includes a range of indicators which should allow the Council to measure and report the extent of any improvement.

Each objective is legitimate and generally well worded and includes projects and activities which could deliver short term improvements. Some of the underlying arrangements and actions may not deliver improvement until the out workings of these are implemented, because they are output focused (for example developing plans and strategies). However, the successful delivery of these longer term activities should contribute towards achieving their related improvement objectives.

At this relatively early stage in the development of the Council’s performance improvement framework, it does not yet have all the data and information to support all of the objectives’ indicators or all of the underlying projects and activities. The Council recognises the need for a more developed performance management framework and performance management system. Once developed and embedded this should enable it to establish baseline data and set standards against which future improvement can be demonstrated.

To assist the Council we recommend the following proposal for improvement:

- additional clarity over the level of improvement expected for each objective and how it will be measured would improve the objectives. This could be achieved by establishing baselines, and setting challenging and realistic standards at the objective level, against which the associated key performance indicators and measures would be used to measure improvement in terms of outcomes.



## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### 4. Consultation

We looked at how well the Council involved local people and those that work with and for it, in deciding its priorities for improvement. The Council conducted extensive consultation during its community planning and corporate planning processes to identify and understand community needs. This consultation and engagement activity, along with other previous research undertaken, then informed the development of the 2017-18 improvement objectives.

The Council consulted over an eight week period and this included a survey facilitated online or in hard copy. The process was promoted through a variety of communication channels including: social media outlets; internal staff meetings; staff intranet; the Council magazine; the council website and press releases. Details were provided from the consultation papers and a consultation report which included a synopsis of responses was brought to Policy & Resources Committee as part of improvement objective and plan consideration and approval.

The Council has met its statutory duty to consult on its improvement objectives.

It is the Council's responsibility to promote and encourage its citizens and stakeholders to engage with it. In last year's report we shared a number of good practice methods for raising the public profile of the concept of performance improvement along with ways to improve the consultation process, which if adopted, should encourage more citizens and stakeholders to participate in future consultations. The Council has taken action to implement these proposals.

## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### 5. Improvement Plan

The purpose of the improvement plan is to show citizens, and other stakeholders, how the Council intends to deliver on its duty to secure continuous improvement. It does not need to describe everything the Council plans to improve but should focus on functions or services it has selected under its general duty, their related improvement objectives and any statutory requirements placed upon the Council by central government. An improvement plan should be both transparent and meaningful, setting out how citizens and other stakeholders within the area will be better off.

The Council's Performance Improvement Plan for 2017-18 and 2018-19 was approved in Council and published on 23 June 2017 and is available on the Council website. Whilst the plan is available on request in alternative formats, this is not signposted on the Council's website.

The plan contains a high level description of the Council's performance improvement framework and its arrangements for securing continuous improvement includes its four improvement objectives. The plan outlines for each objective: how it was chosen; what consultation told them; why it was chosen; what the Council has done so far; what it is going to do; and how it will know if it has succeeded.

In addition the improvement plan also states how council will annually report on:

- performance measures (statutory indicators and standards)
- a number of corporate (local, non-statutory) performance indicators.

The plan is clear and transparent in respect of setting out the Council's improvement objectives and its arrangements to achieve them, along with a high level description of how it will achieve continuous improvement.

In addition, there is a list of the statutory indicators and standards that the Council is required to meet, and at a number of points in the plan the Council includes how it intends to exercise its functions to meet most statutory performance standards (as required by section 92(4) of the 2014 Act). Without providing additional clarity and transparency in its future plans, the Council is at risk of not being fully compliant with the legislation.

The Council has included a list of statutory indicators and standards and alongside these, the Council has identified three local (non-statutory) indicators and standards. Taken together these ten measures are the Council's Corporate Performance Improvement Indicators and act as a barometer of how the Council is improving corporately.

**6. Arrangements to improve**

The Council is required to establish arrangements to deliver on its improvement objectives each year. The Department for Communities' guidance states that the Council should be able to understand and demonstrate the impact of its arrangements for continuous improvement on the outcomes for citizens.

The underlying projects in relation to the improvement objectives are supported by delivery plans and budgets. These are being project managed and have lines of accountability to senior management and members. Whilst arrangements are in place to deliver its improvement objectives it is too early in the annual performance improvement cycle to determine the likelihood or extent of any improvement as:

- some elements of the improvement objectives are in the early stages of delivery; and
- the Council does not yet have an audited track record of improvement to date.

## **7. Collection, use and publication of performance information**

The collection, use and publication of performance information is critical within the performance improvement framework. It enables the Council to measure and evaluate improvement, assists in the identification of priority areas, facilitates comparison and benchmarking and supports the communication of outcomes and progress with its citizens and other stakeholders.

The Council had additional responsibilities this year specifically, in relation to carrying out of a self-assessment of its performance improvement in 2016-17 and reporting this by 30 September 2017.

The type of information required to be collected, used and reported falls under three key areas:

- the general duty to improve – reflected by local, non-statutory performance indicators and standards;
- the improvement objectives – with specific associated performance measures and indicators; and
- statutory indicators and standards.

In relation to local performance indicators and standards the Council is also now required to make year on year internal comparisons to measure its performance and demonstrate the extent of any improvement, both in relation to its general duty for continuous improvement across all of its functions and any standards and indicators in relation to its individual improvement objectives. In relation to those local performance indicators and standards associated with the general duty councils should make comparisons with other councils, where it is reasonably practical to do so.

Some councils have told us that they are unclear as to the purpose or extent of the collection, use and reporting of local performance information. Clearly, some aspects of this responsibility would benefit from additional clarity and formal guidance from the Department for Communities. This would enhance councils' current understanding of the legislation's requirements and also the Department for Communities' expectations of councils.

The Local Government Auditor's interpretation of this part of the legislation currently is that:

- a council is expected to select a small range of local indicators and set associated standards across its functions, with baselines and targets established for improvement. This will help to identify its improvement priorities and objectives, and will be required to fully meet its responsibility to collect and use information in relation to the general duty to improve across all of its functions;
- in relation to local performance indicators and standards, a council must publish the results of its performance and provide a year on year comparison within its annual self-assessment report;
- in relation to comparisons with other councils, the Council must continue to work with the Department for Communities and the other councils to agree a suite of local indicators to facilitate comparison. Until this is agreed and implemented, it will not be practicable to publish meaningful comparisons.

This was the first year that councils were required to meet this responsibility. The Local Government Auditor's current view is that, to encourage councils to comply fully and to allow more time for the framework to mature, she will not issue any statutory recommendations in relation to this matter this year. Instead 'proposals for improvement' will be used to highlight any matters of non-compliance. If not addressed by councils, these may become statutory recommendations next year.

## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### *Performance information*

Each improvement objective is aligned with an improvement project and is under the direction of senior responsible officer, and contains in total 48 priority improvement actions/measures for the next two years in which measureable improvement should be demonstrated in 2017-18.

The Council has made arrangements for the collection of information which will allow it to measure its performance during the financial year in relation to a suite of improvement actions and measures and its statutory performance indicators. It has also begun to set local indicators and standards to monitor its general duty to improve. As outlined above, the Council has identified three local performance improvement indicators and standards for 2017-18 which were published in its Improvement Plan, for example Prompt Payments to suppliers.

Taken together these ten measures are the Council's Corporate Performance Improvement Indicators and act as a barometer of how the Council is improving corporately which were reported on in their first self-assessment report in 2016-17. However they are limited in scope and do not cover all of the Councils functions and services and their general duty to improve. A wider range is necessary so that it can demonstrate to citizens and stakeholders its commitment to continuously improving all of its functions, and facilitate wider comparisons with other councils. It is hoped that with the development of its performance management system the Council will develop and publish a wider suite of local indicators reflective of all functions and its general duty to improve.

As noted earlier the Council is developing its performance management system and processes. The Council is liaising with other councils and the Department for Communities to agree a range of local performance indicators to facilitate effective comparison. However, this collaborative work is at a very early stage of development and it is too early to draw any conclusions about the extent to which this will benefit the Council.

The Local Government Auditor makes the following proposal for improvement to enhance the collection and use of information:

- the Council should continue working with other councils and the Department to agree a suite of self-imposed indicators and standards as soon as practicable. This will enable meaningful comparisons to be made and published in line with its statutory responsibility as well as to demonstrate its general duty for continuous improvement across all of its functions and services.

## Section 3

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### *Publication of performance information*

The Council is required each year to publish a report, or reports, to include a self-assessment of its performance in a financial year:

- in discharging its general duty to improve;
- in meeting its improvement objectives for that year;
- by reference to its local and statutory performance indicators; and
- meeting its local and statutory performance standards.

In addition, the Council's assessment of its performance and its published report should include a comparison of its performance with previous years, and where reasonably practicable, with other councils. The key purpose of the report is to show citizens, and other stakeholders how the Council is discharging its duty under legislation to secure continuous improvement as set out in its 2016-17 Improvement Plan. It enables the Council to communicate progress against its improvement objectives and to highlight what visible improvements it has made to its functions and services.

In September 2017 the Council published its 'Annual Performance Report 2016-17'. It focused on performance in relation to the projects which supported the Council's 2016-17 improvement objectives and includes a section on its performance in relation to the statutory indicators, as well as some limited comparisons against other councils in Northern Ireland. Many of the listed outcomes for projects are described in terms of outputs rather than the associated outcome not quantified, and it is not therefore always clear what actual improvement looks like.

The Council is not yet able to draw comparisons as the information collected is baseline information relating to the 2016-17 year and it will not be until next year that comparisons can be made. In addition, due to the absence of an agreed regional suite of performance standards it has not yet been practicable for the Council to compare the performance of its functions with the similar functions of other Councils. It also does not include a specific clear and transparent self-assessment of its performance in discharging its general duty to improve. The Council will need to address these omissions next year.

The Local Government Auditor has made a number of observations and good practice suggestions for consideration in future self-assessment reports. These will be shared with councils as a separate publication later in the year. If adopted, these would further enhance the transparency of council's performance improvement to citizens and stakeholders.

The Local Government Auditor makes the following proposals for improvement to enhance the transparency and clarity of future self-assessments:

- self-assessment reports must include a self-assessment of performance in relation to the general duty to improve as required under the legislation; and
- self-assessments should not focus solely on the underlying projects, but also include an assessment of the Council's progress in delivering outcomes against its improvement objectives.

## Section 4

### Key audit and assessment findings

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#### Statement on personal data

- 4.1 During the course of the audit and assessment we may have access to personal data to support our audit testing. We have established processes to hold this data securely within encrypted files and to destroy it where relevant at the conclusion of our audit. We can confirm that we have discharged those responsibilities communicated to you in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### Independence, integrity and objectivity of auditors

- 4.2 The NIAO's policy to ensure independence, integrity and objectivity of our auditors was set out in our Audit Strategy. Overall, the threat to the audit arising from issues affecting our independence, integrity and objectivity is low, and the safeguards in place ensure that the likelihood of any impact is low.
- 4.3 We have complied with APB Ethical Standards and, in our professional judgement, we are independent and our objectivity is not compromised. There are no relationships between NIAO and the Council that we consider to bear on our objectivity and independence.

#### Complaints procedure

- 4.4 NIAO seeks to ensure that, when carrying out its audit work, it complies with the principles developed by the Public Audit Forum in its paper "What Public Sector Bodies can expect from their Auditors".
- 4.5 NIAO also wishes to gauge public sector bodies' perceptions of its audit processes in order to promote continuous improvement. In particular, it undertakes to act quickly on any complaint and ensure that the underlying causes of problems are addressed to prevent them recurring. In the first instance, complaints can be addressed to the member of the Directorate responsible for the audit within which the concern has been raised.
- 4.6 Failing resolution of the problem to the satisfaction of the complainant, the Chief Executive of the Council can then write directly to the Local Government Auditor will ensure that a further review of the case will be undertaken.

## **Audit and assessment of Mid Ulster District Council's performance improvement arrangements**

### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Mid Ulster District Council's (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2016-17 and its 2017-18 improvement plan in accordance with section 93 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) and the Code of Audit Practice for local government bodies.

I also certify that I have performed an improvement assessment for 2017-18 at the Council in accordance with section 94 of the Act and the Code of Audit Practice.

This is a report to comply with the requirement of section 95(2) of the Act.

### **Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Local Government Auditor**

Under the Act, the Council has a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions and to set improvement objectives for each financial year. The Council is required to gather information to assess improvements in its services and to issue a report annually on its performance against indicators and standards which it has set itself or which have been set for it by Government departments.

The Act requires the Council to publish a self-assessment before 30 September in the financial year following that to which the information relates, or by any other such date as the Department for Communities (the Department) may specify by order. The Act also requires that the Council has regard to any guidance issued by the Department in publishing its assessment.

As the Council's auditor, I am required by the Act to determine and report each year on whether:

- The Council has discharged its duties in relation to improvement planning, published the required improvement information and the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the Department's Guidance in relation to those duties; and
- The Council is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its duties.

### **Scope of the audit and assessment**

For the audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information or whether the improvement plan published by the Council can be achieved. My audits of the Council's improvement plan and assessment of performance, therefore, comprised a review of the Council's publications to ascertain whether they included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the documents complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing them.

For the improvement assessment I am required to form a view on whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act. My assessment of the Council's improvement responsibilities and arrangements, therefore, comprised a review of certain improvement arrangements within the Council, along with information gathered from my improvement audit.



## **ANNEX**

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 93 to 95 of the Act cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

### **Audit opinion**

#### **Improvement planning and publication of improvement information**

As a result of my audit, I believe the Council has discharged its duties in connection with (1) improvement planning and (2) publication of improvement information in accordance with section 92 the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

#### **Improvement assessment**

As a result of my assessment, I believe the Council has as far as possible discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

2017-18 was the second year in which councils were required to implement the new performance improvement framework. The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement, as is to be expected, are still in various stages of development and implementation. The Council is strengthening its arrangements to secure continuous improvement, and has delivered some measurable improvements to its services in 2016-17. However, until the Council's arrangements further develop and begin to mature and it can demonstrate a track record of ongoing improvement in relation to the framework, I am unable to determine, the extent to which improvements will be made.

I have not conducted an assessment to determine whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act in subsequent financial years. I will keep the need for this under review as arrangements become more fully established.

#### **Other matters**

I have no recommendations to make under section 95 (2) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.

I am not minded to carry out a special inspection under section 95 (2) of the Act.

**LOUISE MASON**  
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**106 University Street**  
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**BT7 1EU**

30 November 2017

## **Audit and assessment of Mid Ulster District Council's performance improvement arrangements**

### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Mid Ulster District Council's (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2016-17 and its 2017-18 improvement plan in accordance with section 93 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) and the Code of Audit Practice for local government bodies.

I also certify that I have performed an improvement assessment for 2017-18 at the Council in accordance with section 94 of the Act and the Code of Audit Practice.

This is a report to comply with the requirement of section 95(2) of the Act.

### **Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Local Government Auditor**

Under the Act, the Council has a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions and to set improvement objectives for each financial year. The Council is required to gather information to assess improvements in its services and to issue a report annually on its performance against indicators and standards which it has set itself or which have been set for it by Government departments.

The Act requires the Council to publish a self-assessment before 30 September in the financial year following that to which the information relates, or by any other such date as the Department for Communities (the Department) may specify by order. The Act also requires that the Council has regard to any guidance issued by the Department in publishing its assessment.

As the Council's auditor, I am required by the Act to determine and report each year on whether:

- The Council has discharged its duties in relation to improvement planning, published the required improvement information and the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the Department's Guidance in relation to those duties; and
- The Council is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its duties.

### **Scope of the audit and assessment**

For the audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information or whether the improvement plan published by the Council can be achieved. My audits of the Council's improvement plan and assessment of performance, therefore, comprised a review of the Council's publications to ascertain whether they included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the documents complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing them.

For the improvement assessment I am required to form a view on whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act. My assessment of the Council's improvement responsibilities and arrangements, therefore, comprised a review of certain improvement arrangements within the Council, along with information gathered from my improvement audit.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 93 to 95 of the Act cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

#### **Audit opinion**

##### **Improvement planning and publication of improvement information**

As a result of my audit, I believe the Council has discharged its duties in connection with (1) improvement planning and (2) publication of improvement information in accordance with section 92 the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

##### **Improvement assessment**

As a result of my assessment, I believe the Council has as far as possible discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

2017-18 was the second year in which councils were required to implement the new performance improvement framework. The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement, as is to be expected, are still in various stages of development and implementation. The Council is strengthening its arrangements to secure continuous improvement, and has delivered some measurable improvements to its services in 2016-17. However, until the Council's arrangements further develop and begin to mature and it can demonstrate a track record of ongoing improvement in relation to the framework, I am unable to determine, the extent to which improvements will be made.

I have not conducted an assessment to determine whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act in subsequent financial years. I will keep the need for this under review as arrangements become more fully established.

##### **Other matters**

I have no recommendations to make under section 95 (2) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.

I am not minded to carry out a special inspection under section 95 (2) of the Act.



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30 November 2017