

Ref: TC/ab/LK

28 January 2021

Sent via email to: [Julie.Broadway@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Julie.Broadway@communities-ni.gov.uk)

Julie Broadway  
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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 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

It was helpful to hear the Department's response to the concerns and suggestions put forward by the PIWG with regards to moving forward with performance improvement in local government for 2021/22.

I would like to summarise discussions from the meeting on 3 key points:

- 1. Improvement Objectives for 2021/22** - during the meeting we discussed that objectives for this year will require a broader definition as they are likely to include both recovery and improvement objectives for each Council. In addition, the consultation process will be restricted this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, local government would request that expectations for the consultation process this year are realistic and that this would be understood by both the Department and the NIAO during the audit process.
- 2. Publication date for the Performance Improvement Plans for 2021/22** - since Councils have to undertake a consultation process for 2021/22 and updated guidance is yet to be issued, we discussed that flexibility will be granted in terms of the 30<sup>th</sup> June publication date. However, we are aware that this may impact on the annual performance improvement cycle and that a sensible resolution for all parties should be reached.

Please reply to:

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The Braid  
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□ **Larne Office**  
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Chief Executive  
**Anne Donaghy OBE**

3. **Statutory Performance Indicators** - during the meeting, concerns were raised by local government that there is a risk that the standards for the statutory performance indicators will not be met this year as a result of the pandemic and other factors. For example, enquiries for business start-ups have contracted significantly in 2020, due in part to COVID and the uncertainty around the implications of the NI Protocol impacting negatively on people actively pursuing self-employment. Waste arisings generally have increased as a result of people staying at home and changes in lifestyle due to the pandemic. Again, flexibility in terms of achieving the standards needs to 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.

Finally, it is important that the Statutory Guidance is issued as soon as possible, and, as discussed, the PIWG will nominate members to work with the Department and NIAO using the multi-stakeholder approach that has been successful in the past. I would be grateful if you could advise when it would be suitable to arrange a meeting over the coming weeks.

Following this immediate revision of the Guidance, I look forward to working with you on the longer term review of Part 12 of the legislation to determine future requirements that are satisfactory to all involved.

I would appreciate your consideration of the points raised in this letter and am happy to discuss further.

I believe that through continued strong partnership working, we can continue to build a culture of performance improvement across local government.

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

Yours sincerely



**Anne Donaghy OBE**  
**Chair, Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group**

**CC     Jacqui Dixon, Chair of SOLACE**

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## Proposed - Corporate Performance Improvement Objectives: 2021-22 and 2022-23

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	<b>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.</b>	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Community Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Head of Environmental Services</b>	<b>Theme 2:</b> Infrastructure  <b>Outcome:</b> We increasingly value our environment and enhance it for our children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a rolling programme of projects and actions to work towards and contribute to a more sustainable Council and District.</li> </ul>

### ***Why we are doing it?***

As we navigate through and ultimately emerge into a post-pandemic era, how we reshape our world will have key implications for our ability to address climate change this decade. The global response to the Covid-19 crisis has had little impact on the continued rise in atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub>, says the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). This year carbon emissions, have fallen dramatically due to lockdowns that have cut transport and industry severely (carbon emissions fell by 17% at their peak), but this has only marginally slowed the overall rise in concentrations, the scientists say<sup>1</sup> and the overall effect on concentrations has been very small.

Climate change has been recognised internationally as the most important environmental challenge that we currently face it is a large scale, long-term shift in the Earth's weather patterns and average temperatures. Scientific consensus recognises human activity<sup>2</sup> as a major cause of recent unprecedented warming and climate projections, show that past, current and future gas emissions will influence the climate for decades. The Climate Change Act, passed in 2008, committed the UK to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050 when compared to 1990 levels. This approach has now been used as a model for action across the world, and is mirrored by the United Nations' Paris Agreement. The next world climate summit is to held in Glasgow towards the end of November 2021 and during the last 11 years, the Summit has become a key platform for connecting markets with policies, to flatten the climate curve<sup>3</sup>.

The intergovernmental panel on climate change predicts increases in extreme weather events over the twenty first century and attributes this to a result of greenhouse emissions and rising surface temperatures. The latest U.K Climate Change projections (UKC P18)<sup>4</sup> predict that Northern Ireland will experience warmer, wetter winters and hotter drier summers by the 2050's, with extreme weather events becoming more frequent<sup>5</sup>.

We recognise the key role and contribution that the Council has in supporting and promoting local actions and local people, businesses and partners in the move to a low carbon future. Taking action to protect the environment for future generations is a priority for Mid Ulster and is recognised in the Districts Community Plan and Corporate Plan. We care about the environment and understand our legal duty to protect it. We seek to minimize the environmental impacts of our own Council activities and work with other partners and stakeholders to protect and enhance our local environment. Subject to procurement regulations, we can also choose to buy local produce which not only supports our local economy, it also reduces carbon emissions from freight transport and travel. Climate change is a collective issue and we can all make changes to our lifestyles to reduce the impact on the environment..

1. [https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice\\_display&id=21795#.YJCJTnzFxc2w](https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=21795#.YJCJTnzFxc2w)

2. <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>

3. <https://www.worldclimatesummit.org/>

4. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/download-data>

5. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/UK-CCRA-2017-Northern-Ireland-National-Summary.pdf>

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	<b>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.</b>	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Community Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Head of Communications &amp; Marketing</b>	<b>Theme 1:</b> Economic Growth  <b>Outcome:</b> We prosper in a stronger and more competitive economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of framework/roadmap to optimise how the Council uses digital design/technology to work efficiently, collaborate, make informed decisions, adapt and innovate our service provision.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Why we are doing it?</i></b></p> <p>Since the start of the global pandemic, digital technologies has been the driving force for change in how we connect across the globe and with each other. COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on the lives and fortunes of every consumer. It has impacted on the way people live, work, study, have fun, connect, transact and communicate. We are a long way from business as usual these days, as many of us juggle work and home responsibilities, having video conferences interrupted by our kids, dogs barking and kitchen appliances whirring in the background.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought about a renewed focus on enhancing citizen and customer experiences, especially as more services must be delivered remotely. Customer experience is especially important for industries such as banking and finance, retail, supply chain, logistics, healthcare as well as local council service delivery and there is now an enhanced need to transform how these organisations engage with customers through digital platforms. This increasing use of digital channels is here to stay. Citizens now have higher expectations of online council services and want a digital customer experience similar to that provided by retailers.</p> <p>We want to harness the potential of digital design, data and technology to work efficiently, transform the relationship between residents and the Council, and make Mid Ulster a leading destination for sustainable growth, opportunity and quality of life. To embrace such opportunities we are developing a roadmap to define how our future use of technology and human resources will be optimised to enable the efficient delivery of our business and community priorities to the businesses and citizens of Mid Ulster. Technology is only an enabler, transformation involves changing how we work, how we organise ourselves and how we serve our citizens. We will have real opportunities to radically rethink, and redesign our services, as we are move towards being a more agile and flexible organisation, with staff able to work from any location as we make more efficient use of physical space and mobile technology. We can and will learn lessons from innovative digital practice utilised as a response to the Pandemic. More of our high volume, low contacts that we deal with, should be completed at our customer’s convenience, enabling Council staff to focus on more completed and sensitive enquiries that benefit from the human touch. All of this can help us manage the rising cost and demand pressures the Council is facing.</p> <p>Whist we want everyone to become digital citizens, we recognise that not all residents have the means or skills to take up digital. The council aims to grow and develop its digital inclusion work to provide skills and confidence in this area for staff, and our customers will always be able to speak to a person when they need to, and the person they speak to will be able to provide improved customer service. We will not leave anyone behind, however, we must continue to maximise technology to drive better services and lower delivery costs. As a Council, we already offer online access in a number of areas, however we need to push further, faster with our digital approaches, data and technology, to ensure the district thrives through the fourth industrial revolution. The Council in order to make the right choices post pandemic, will need to think differently and – crucially – put citizens, data and insight, and technology at the heart of change.</p>		

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	<b>3) To create cleaner neighbourhoods, where everyone takes responsibility for their waste and the environment.</b>	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Community Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Head of Environmental Health</b>	<b>Theme 2:</b> Infrastructure  <b>Outcome:</b> We increasingly value our environment and enhance it for our children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop and deliver programmes/activities in conjunction with our partners &amp; communities to ensure clean neighbourhoods.</li> </ul>

#### ***Why we are doing it?***

Pre pandemic we all used public spaces every time we left home. These include the footpaths and streets we walk or drive along each day, the parks our children play in and the outdoor areas we go to exercise or relax in. Many of our daily decisions and activities are influenced by our perceptions of the quality and cleanliness of the public areas we encounter. The importance of clean, green and blue (our rivers, canals, loughs etc.) spaces, parks, cannot be underestimated. Many benefits derive from a pleasant environment. The covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns has shown just how important it is for us to have easy access to open space for recreation and exercise and has had a huge impact on everyone in the district, region and world-wide. At its peak, half of the world's population was made to stay at home or restrict movement in public (<sup>1</sup>Sandford, 2020). The importance of safe, accessible and well-connected green and blue spaces for improving quality of life has never been more pertinent, and for those without gardens the value of these spaces is amplified.

Good quality parks and attractive open space contribute economic benefits to towns and villages. As Mid Ulster competes with others to attract growth, tourism and inward investment a clean, green and pleasant environment plays an important role in marketing the District as a place to live in, move to and visit. Businesses are drawn to places with good quality environment as this in turn attracts customers, employees and services into the local area. In addition well maintained towns and villages has a positive impact on commercial and domestic property values.

Regionally and locally increases in obesity, are linked to more sedentary lifestyles including lower levels of outdoor activity. Patterns of exercise in adults are set early in life, so obesity and inactivity in childhood can led to poor health in later years. Good quality public open space is required to encourage healthier lifestyles by providing opportunities for walking, cycling and other outdoor pursuits, as well as being beneficial to mental well-being. Clean and well maintained play areas, parks and open space provide important beneficial opportunities for children to learn and develop (their social and emotional development) and stay healthy. Apart from access, the quality of green space is crucial too. Quality of facilities – including toilets and cafes; regular maintenance; organised activities can help ensure a green space supports the wellbeing of its citizens equally

Clean neighbourhoods engender social pride, add vibrancy, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, all of which are essential to the development of strong prosperous neighbourhoods. Anti-social behaviour can be seen through dog fouling, littering, abandoning vehicles, graffiti, and fly tipping etc. We are very much aware that many of our clean and green services are demand led, whilst much of this demand is inevitable, it is also clear some of it is avoidable. We want to be clear about our service promises, standards, and the response times we aim to achieve to ensure our communities understand what levels of service they can expect. On its own the Council cannot deliver a cleaner and greener environment for residents. We want to work collaboratively, with residents, communities, visitors and businesses and through active citizenship we hope to see reduced demands on our services and more residents taking greater pride in and ownership of their local environment. This is more necessary then ever as overall public sector expenditure reduces at an unprecedented rate, combined with the economic fallout arising from the pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> Sandford, A., 2020. Coronavirus: Half of humanity now on lockdown as 90 countries call for confinement. Euronews

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	<b>4. We will contribute to the ongoing regeneration of our district by delivering a capital investment programme, enhancing facilities and opportunities for local people</b>	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Community Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Head of technical Services</b>	<b>Theme 4:</b> Economic Growth <b>Outcome:</b> We prosper in a stronger and more competitive economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development and delivery of a place shaping capital economic regeneration programme across the District.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Why we are doing it?</i></b></p> <p>The additional challenges facing Mid Ulster’s most vulnerable communities due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic means there has never been a more important time to strengthen the economic, social, and physical wellbeing of our places, lasting effects will be felt for many years to come. We must look to a period of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We have had to lead our lives locally, pulling together more as communities, to see off the many challenges arising from coronavirus. The Council’s capital programme of local projects will maintain our ongoing support for vibrant, accessible village/ town centres, open spaces and communities.</p> <p>Regeneration is a long-term process and is delivered through a wide range of projects, programmes, partnerships, infrastructure initiatives. Since the late 1990s, policymakers have recognised the wider social factors that affect the success of regeneration schemes, but this is even more vital in the current economic climate. Infrastructure is a valuable and efficient economic stimulus. Every £1 of investment in infrastructure generates a potential further £2.70<sup>1</sup> due to economic multiplier effects. Making the most of existing social capital and providing opportunities for local people to be involved in regeneration is a vital part of making the best use of limited resources.</p> <p>As a Council we support locally developed place based regeneration projects, we continue to invest in Mid Ulster, as well as providing essential services paid by your rates. Our Capital investment programme is our commitment to addressing the economic downturn and making the District a better place to live, work and invest. The programme includes major schemes to boost the economy, create jobs and improve the quality of life for our citizens.</p> <p>Quality of place matters in economic, social, cultural and emotional terms. A sense of place helps establish strong social infrastructure which supports people to improve their prospects and maximize their potential. We are taking a “Whole District” approach creating places that are attractive, well-designed and well managed. Our approach focuses on tailored solutions for settlements within the District and also business locations. We recognise our major assets as those that have the potential to deliver the greatest impact. Building on and investing in these assets alongside complementary interventions will release the District’s potential for growth and connect areas of growth with deprived places in need of generation. By following a planned phased approach across the District we will be able to deliver greater impact for each locality, using the resources available to best effect. This work has never been more important as we look to rebuild from the devastating impact of COVID-19.</p> <p><sup>1</sup>-Further detail can be found here: <a href="https://www.ice.org.uk/getattachment/news-and-insight/policy/infrastructure-as-a-stimulus/post-crisis-infrastructure-investment-insight-paper-covid-19.pdf.aspx#_ga=2.179966759.2015985077.1591167730-1129742483.1567513176">https://www.ice.org.uk/getattachment/news-and-insight/policy/infrastructure-as-a-stimulus/post-crisis-infrastructure-investment-insight-paper-covid-19.pdf.aspx#_ga=2.179966759.2015985077.1591167730-1129742483.1567513176</a></p>		