

Parks Service Leisure & Outdoor Recreation

SERVICE PLAN - 2021 / 22

Date

Consulted within staff team

23/03/2021

Discussed & signed off by Director

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1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE SERVICE

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Service

The scope, diversity and potential developmental capacity accessible to Mid Ulster District Council Parks Service is both tremendously exciting and challenging. The greatest importance is sustaining a welcoming, safe environment and raising quality standards for parks and open spaces, together with the provision of facilities that are sufficient to meet the varied recreational demands of a growing residential population. This needs to be achieved in the context of increasing pressure on public expenditure, alongside encouraging greater community ownership and involvement.

The Parks Service is committed to the achievement of quality standards across parks and open spaces in line with the Green Flag status through the attainment of additional Green Flag Awards for suitable sites. The Parks Service will support achievement of sustainable development in line with approved management and maintenance plans delivering on the protection and enhancement of the natural qualities of parks and open spaces, embracing positive biodiversity for the benefit of future generations.

The Parks Service will endeavour to actively support volunteering opportunities within parks and open spaces and encourage greater community involvement and additional partnership working between agencies, groups and organisations, exploring opportunities (where compatible with corporate priorities) to provide high quality parks and open spaces that are enjoyed by all who visit or live within our shared community.

The Parks Service is part of the Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Directorate, and is made up of the following service areas:

- Public Parks and Open Spaces
- 2. Davagh Dark Skies Park
- 3. Play Areas
- 4. Countryside Access
- 5. Forest Recreation
- 6. Water Recreation
- 7. Camping & Caravanning

1.2 Responsibilities

PUBLIC PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Mid Ulster District Council manage sixteen public parks of varying sizes and facilities the largest of which are Dungannon Park and Ballyronan Marina. Some one hundred and twelve play park/playground amenities are provided and maintained across the towns, villages and hamlets of the district.

- Public parks provide our local communities with the opportunity to be physically active
- Parks with the capacity to attract day visits have true economic benefit to surrounding towns and villages
- Parks provide vital green space in urban landscapes
- Parks preserve wildlife habitat
- Parks and recreation facilitate social interactions
- Leisure activities in parks improve moods, reduce stress and enhance a sense of wellness
- Playing outside helps children to develop their learning abilities. Outdoor play encourages children's creativity and provides numerous health benefits as opposed to indoor environments.

DAVGH DARK SKIES PARK

Davagh has one of the 'darkest skies' in Ireland, which means there is so little light pollution that there are crystal clear views of star constellations.

The new centre will give visitors a unique opportunity to experience the night sky as it is rarely viewed – and as it would have been seen centuries ago by our ancestors. Combining the latest tech, from holographic installations to virtual reality headsets with colourful, accessible interpretation panels and hands-on activities, visitors to the centre will be able to explore our solar system from our sun and moon to our stars and the planets.

The centre piece of the space will be a star-gazing telescope, opening up the opportunities to view the night sky without light pollution and establishing Davagh as the only official 'dark sky' reserve here and establishing Davagh as the only official 'dark sky' reserve in Northern Ireland.

FOREST RECREATION

Mid Ulster District Council are engaged with Forest Service Northern Ireland through the development of Licence Agreements to increase quality recreational access to forest lands in the district. The council currently hold five licence agreements with Forest Service for recreational use. The contribution of forest recreation province wide was measured in a recent survey completed by Forest Service in 2019.

An estimated 8.97 million visits were taken to forests on the Forest Service Forest Estate in 2019. An average of £24.60 (including accommodation) was spent during

visits taken to the surveyed forests, of this total an average of around £3.98 was spent within the forest, 78% of visitors are adults (aged 16 or older)

The estimated total annual spend during trips that involve visiting a publicly accessible Forest Service location (including any amounts spent on accommodation) is £172 million. The most popular activities on visits to the surveyed forests were walking (65% of visits) and dog walking (41% of visits).

COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS AND WATER RECREATION

Mid Ulster District Council manages one significant water recreation facility at Ballyronan Marina, almost 150 kilometres of cycle and walking trails along with 22 kilometres of designated canoe trail and nine angling facilities (two game and seven coarse) across the district. These include amenities such as the Coalisland Canal Trail, Clogher Valley/Carleton Trial, riverside walks at Dunamore, Augher and Cots Lane and Ardtrea. Angling facilities at coarse waters Creeve, Enagh and Carrick Lough and Game fishing at Dungannon Park and Bradley lake and mountain bike activity centres at Davagh Forest and Blessingbourne Estate offering over 41 kilometers of trails for riding and walking enthusiasts.

In addition to this the Council has a statutory responsibility to manage Access to the Countryside under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983, district councils have a duty "to assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment, any public right of way....". They are also given discretionary powers to repair and maintain rights of way, to create, divert or close public paths and to make access agreements or orders to open land.

The socio-economic and wider health benefits attached to access to outdoor activities and recreation is widely known that sport helps to reduce incidents of heart disease and obesity. According to 'Sport Matters: The Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland, 2019', sport and recreation is one of the best investments that can be made in preventive medicine. Significantly the strategy adds: "Outdoor recreation is widely recognised as a positive force. It can build lasting relationships between people and often people from different social and religious backgrounds." There are many UK studies that highlight that outdoor recreation has a positive impact on:

- Health and fitness;
- Quality of life;
- Work ethic and productivity;
- Inward investment; and
- Reduction in crime.

In May 2020 Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) conducted an online survey in response to the new social distancing measures encouraging the public stay at home, and only leave their homes once a day to exercise in their local area.

Nearly half (47%) the population of Northern Ireland are spending more of their free time outdoors now, than they did this time last year and 51% expect to do more after lockdown. A recent survey* conducted by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland, has highlighted an unprecedented rise in the use of the outdoors during the COVID 19 lockdown. The survey of 1,487 people, undertaken earlier this month, highlights the importance of outdoor recreation for people's health and wellbeing during this time.

CAMPING AND CARAVANNING

Visitors to Mid Ulster can choose from three council managed campsite facilities, Dungannon Park, Ballyronan Marina and Round Lake, Fivemiletown.

Forty-four serviced caravan pitches are available for hire throughout the thirty week season. Larger groups can be accommodated such as caravan clubs at Dungannon Park with capacity to welcome in excess of eighty units. Covid-19 restrictions throughout 2020-21 required camp sites to close for the most of the season. This had a significant impact on figures at Dungannon Park, Ballyronan Marina and Round Lake. Records for 2020-21 indicate 1163 caravanning units for the season a decrease of 2,414 on 2019-20. The potential to increase visitor footfall through campsite development is an option being considered with Forest Service The following list of contacts illustrates the nature and range of stakeholder relationships that exist between the Parks Service and other Council functions, public and private sector organisations, the community and voluntary sectors and is not inexhaustible given that new situations and opportunities arise throughout the

The section is specifically responsible for the following functions:

1.3 Customers & Stakeholders

Customers & Stakeholders
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
ELECTED MEMBERS
• STAFF
ENVIRONMENT & PROPERTY SERVICES
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
TOURISM & EVENTS
• FINANCE
TECHNICAL SERVICES
COMMUNITY SERVICES
HUMAN RESOURCES
LEISURE SERVICES
ARTS & CULTURE
LEGAL SERVICES
PLANNING SERVICES

•	ICT
•	HEALTH & SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT
•	POLICING & COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP
•	MARKETING & COMMUNICATION
•	VISITORS/TOURISTS
•	GENERAL PUBLIC
•	FOREST SERVICE NI
•	OUTDOOR RECREATION NI
•	PSNI
•	COMMUNITY GROUPS
•	DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE
•	SPORTS CLUBS/ANGLING, CYCLING, RUNNER AND WALKERS
•	TOURISM NI
•	SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES (NI) INTER-ANGENCY FORUM
•	DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS
•	WATERWAYS IRELAND

1.4 Performance Overview in 2020/21

The following table provides a progress summary and the impact made by last years' Service Plan (2019-2020). It also details key successes, a summary of the end of year progress, remaining challenges for the Service and how it made a difference.

The following table provides a progress summary and the impact made by last years' Service Plan (2019-20120). It also details key successes, a summary of the end of year progress, remaining challenges for the Service and how it made a difference.

2020/21 Performance Overview		End of Year Progress Status:		
		Completed/Commenced/Other		
•	Completion of Five Year Parks and Play Strategy 2020 – 2025 which was an	Council approved Five Year Strategic Plan in December 2019. Year one play		
objective on the Council's Corporate		development projects were on hold due		
	Improvement Plan	to Covid-19		
•	Completion of Five Year Outdoor	Council approved Five Year Strategic		
	Recreation Strategy 2020 - 2025 which	Plan in March 2019. Year one access		
	was an objective on Council's Corporate	development projects were on hold due		
	Improvement Plan	to Covid-19.		
•	Establish an extension of Licence	Completed		
	Agreements with Forest Service NI	Amended Lease Agreements with FSNI		
	<u> </u>	completed for Pomeroy Forest		
		development Project.		

Access to the Countryside development via long distance trails	Completed Landowner and stakeholder Lease Agreement completed for Davagh Solar Walks. Permissive Path agreements for Moy Riverside Walk.
 Deliver event and activity programmes at the core MUDC venues Deliver Parks Marketing Plan in conjunction with MUDC Marketing & Communications 	Council Events as part of Parks Service calendar were cancelled and marketing plan placed on hold due to Covid-19.
Davagh Forest Dark Skies Project	Due to Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions Official Opening was postponed.
Clogher Valley and Ulster Canal Greenway proposals	No further development, subject to funding.
Reservoirs Management	Commenced Conformity to The Reservoir Act (NI) 2015 Water Regulations requirements commenced, ongoing programme of works.
Play Parks Improvements Programme	Completed Eighteen play park enhancements in conjunction with Village renewal RDP Programme.

2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICE AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2021/22

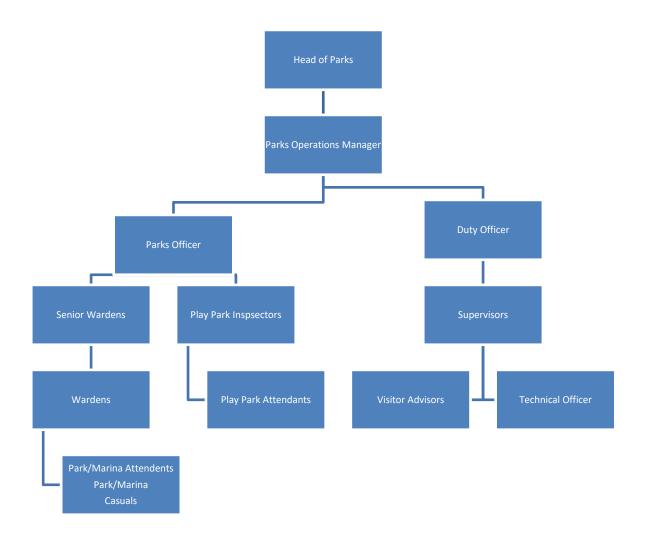
The following tables confirm the resources, financial and people, which the Service has access to throughout 2021-22 to deliver its actions, activities and core business.

2.1 Budget 2021/22*

Service Budget Headings	£
Salaries and Wages	915,868.00
Parks Service Operational Budget	237,228.00
Gross Budget	1,152,914.00
Income	(168,795.00)
Net Budget for 2021-22	984,119.00

^{*} Final 2021/22 budget not yet circulated – above figures represent 2020/2021 pre-Covid budget and this is anticipated to be reflective in the 2021/22 year as a result of recent rates process. Budget is subject to review and in year service savings that may be required to reflect the financial pressures identified.

2.2 Staffing Complement - 2021/22



Staffing	No. of Staff
Head of Service	1
Managers	1
Officers	2
Receptionists 2PT/2Casual	4
Senior Wardens	2
Supervisor	2
Play Park Inspectors	3
Technical Officer	1
Park Wardens	2
Visitor Advisor	4
Park/Marina Attendants	11
Play Park Attendants	14
Park Attendants (Casual)	7
Total	54

2.3 Service Work Plan - 2021/22

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which will form your Service Work Plan for 2021-22. This is a high-level capture of the Service activities as well as some improvement undertakings which the Parks Service will focus on throughout 2021-22, mindful of the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Plan links to the Council's new 2020-2024 Corporate Plan priorities, Annual Corporate Improvement Plan Objectives, Corporate Indicators and Mid Ulster Sustainable Community Plan themes & outcomes:

SERVICE WORK PLAN 2021/22

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	e.g. Write service objective here				
Link to Community Plan Theme:	Align to Corporate Plan Theme				
CMP 4.1 Health & Wellbeing - We are better enabled to live longer healthier & more active lives	Communities: 5.2 We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forest green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking cycling trails & water recreation.				
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)	
Delivery of year one objectives of Council's 5 Year Parks and Play Strategic Plans	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Creation of new and inclusive play opportunities for children across the council district. Improvement to parks and open spaces environments Improved Quality Standards for Council managed Parks and Open Spaces	Upgrade existing play locations Enhancement programme on existing play locations Capital Parks development programme at three identified public park locations	

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in	By When	Lead	What difference will it make?	How Will we Know? (Measures)
2021/22 (actions):	(Date)	Officers(s)	(Outcomes/outputs)	
Parks and Play Improvements Programme	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Complete upgrades and refurbishment of children's play parks as part of an annual MUDC rolling works programme Increasing inclusive play equipment provision across MUDC	Upgrade 4 existing play locations Enhance 7 low scoring children's play parks Tender/procurement of schemes within budget allocation Installation of items of new inclusive play equipment to
Davagh Forest Dark Skies Project	Completed by October 2022	P Bailie A Reid K Gordon	Creation of a Visitor Centre and Dark Sky Observatory including a range of interpretation linking the heritage of the area with the night sky. Development of the visitor hub/trail head area i.e. ancillary facilities/services and car parking.	achieve an increase of 5% Contribute to long-term economic growth through the development of the economy of the Council area, offering a distinct and complementary sustainable outdoor recreation product to that already being offered within the Council area. EA Targets Income £30,000 Visitor Footfall 30,000
Reservoirs Management	Completed by October 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Conformity to The Reservoir Act (NI) 2015 Water Regulations	Appointment of Panel Engineers and review of Dungannon Park Lake and Ballysaggart Lough Section 10 Survey reports Introduce monitoring system, staff training and emergency plan for MUDC Reservoirs Submission of action plan reports to Dfl Rivers

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	e.g. write service objective here				
Link to Community Plan Theme:	Align to Corporate Plan Theme				
CMP 2.2 Infrastructure - We increasingly value our environment & enhance it for our children	Communities: 5.2 We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests & green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking cycling trails & water recreation.				
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)	
Delivery of year one objectives of Council's 5 Year Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Creation of new and improved access to the Countryside opportunities for multi discipline users groups across the council district.	Undertake Master Planning and Feasibility Studies for selected Regional and Local Forest Recreation projects	
			Improvements to visitor facilities in council managed Forest Parks	Establish three additional Forest partnership Agreements with FSNI	
			Improved access to water recreation for paddle craft, angling and sailing activities	Capital development programme for two Forest Recreation projects Moydamlaght and Iniscran Forests	

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22 (actions):	By When (Date)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Establish an extension of Licence Agreements with Forest Service NI	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Projects in partnership with local community groups with a proposal of three new agreements at Altmore, Dunmolye and Drumcairne Forests	Significant increase for public access to quality outdoor recreation opportunities and the countryside (%)
Undertake Master Planning and feasibility studies for selected MUDC Regional and Local Multi-Activity Hubs	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Significant increase for public access to quality play, outdoor recreation opportunities and the access to the countryside	Completion of Master Plan for Traad Point and one selected Regional Forest Hub project.
Access to the Countryside development via long distance trails	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Creation of a Blueway Trail on the Lower Bann from Portglenone to Newferry in partnership with Waterways Ireland (WI), Forest Service (NI) and community stakeholders	Creation of seven kilometres of off-road public path. Provision and refurbishment of 180 angling stands. Projects to progress on the basis of Council approval and subject to landowner agreements and sourcing available funding
Progress Active Travel Projects and Greenway/Blueway proposals for long distance walking/cycling routes	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Contribution to making our communities more liveable improving the economy through tourism and civic improvement preservation and restoration of open space and provision of opportunity for physical activities to improve fitness and mental wellbeing across our communities	Investigate landowner issues, concept design and cost options appraisal for potential projects Projects to progress on the basis of Council approval and subject to sourcing available funding

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	e.g. write s	serv	ice objective	here			
Link to Community Plan Theme:		Align to Corporate Plan Theme					
CMP 4.1 Health & Wellbeing - We are better enabled to live longer healthier & more active lives	Communities: 5.2 We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking cycling trails & water recreation.						
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)		Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)		
Audit of planned outdoor recreation events and programmes	Completed March 2022	by	P Bailie A Reid K Gordon AMcGuckin	Inclusion of Davagh OM Dark Skies Park in to visitor and event programming	Monitor data of facility visitor numbers/ footfall fluctuated during lock-down but recorded a marginal increase of 1.9% on 2019/20. Increase parks footfall by 5% to 811,727		
				Develop and deliver health and wellbeing programmes at specific locations	Develop role of Parks in the health agenda through enhanced partnership with the Health Trusts		
				Review facility activity programme and promotions at specific locations	No events delivered in 2020/21 due to Covid-19. A significantly revised (reduced) summer programme will deliver 12 events		
				Implement an online customer survey for users of parks and outdoor recreation facilities	Visitor satisfaction percentage (%) Mystery visit indicator feedback (%) Increase by 3% to 85%		
				Maintain 'Green Flag' status Standard across Parks	Retain 4 'Green Flag' status at designated Park Locations		

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22 (actions):	By When (Date)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Deliver event and activity programmes at the core MUDC venues Support event and activity programmes in Forest & Countryside venues managed by Mid Ulster District Council	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid K Gordon AMcGuckin	Programme of varied events and activities across Parks Service / MUDC venues throughout the spring/summer/autumn period seeking to engage a broad spectrum of participant and spectator audience	Facilitate 80 Council/Public Events as part of Parks Service calendar (reduced from 190) Establish Parks identity and increased Parks Service profile through seasonal specific event campaigns

Performance Measures: Should include any measures as outlined in work above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate, Performance Improvement Plan, Statutory, Corporate Health Indicators etc.	Is the Measure, Statutory, Corporate, Existing, or New?	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20	2022/22 Target/Standard
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes Visitor footfall across MUDC Parks and Outdoor Recreation facilities	Existing Measure	576,660	766,019	773,074	811,727
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes Annual Mystery Visitor Survey	Existing Measure	77%	82%	No data due to Covid-19	85%
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes Internal Programmes and Events	Existing Measure	26	83	No data due to Covid-19	12
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes Green Flag/Blue Flag Standard Accredited Awards	Existing Measure	3	4	4	4

3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

In carrying out our responsibilities, the Service is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst the Service operates, under various obligations it is however mindful of the changing context in which it operates and endeavours to mainstream the equality and rural needs duties in the design and delivery of our functions.

3.1 EQUALITY DUTY

The council and by consequence our Service is committed to contributing towards its part in working towards fulfilling obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure adequate time, staff and resources to fulfil our duties.

The Service will also work towards adherence to the council's Equality Scheme ensuring equality duties, together with promoting positive attitudes towards persons with a disability and the participation of people with a disability in public life when carrying out our functions.

3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY

The Service will be mindful of the rural needs of its customers when carrying out its functions and subsequent responsibilities, particularly in developing any new policies, plans or strategies throughout the year. In line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 we will give due regard to rurality in terms of needs in carrying out the activities within our Service.

3.3 RISK MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE

The purpose of risk management is to manage the barriers which prevents the Council from achieving its objectives. This section of the service plan includes space for the Service to input their key risks (in summary form), which have been identified during the business planning process. The Council uses risk management to maximize opportunities and minimize risks. This improves its ability to deliver priorities and improve outcomes. This is why the Council deems it important to link business planning and risk management. Risk Management aims to:

- Help the Council achieve its overall aims and objectives
- Manage the significant risks the Council faces to an acceptable level
- Assist with the decision making process
- Implement the most effective measures to avoid, reduce and control those risks
- Balance risk with opportunity
- Manage risk and internal controls in the most effective way.

This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Services business in 2021-22.

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
1.	A lack of, or untimely, maintenance of Parks and Open spaces with the possibility of creating an unsafe environment for public users with potential for injury claims.	6 (3x2)	Currently managed through Property Services. This function of the Council has an extensive remit, responsible for the maintenance of all council lands and property.
2.	Accident occurs on play area	8 (4x2)	Majority of playgrounds are inspected weekly by council staff. Independent annual inspections by ROSPA or RPII Inspectorate. Significant number playgrounds have been replaced or upgraded in recent years and evidence of current good and safe practices reflect in low claim levels. Comprehensive Audit has been completed Play Strategy being developed by Parks Service. Council approval pending
3.	Parks budget under pressure – includes impact of COVID on income	6 (3x2)	Monthly Budget Management Reports. Networking with potential partner organisations to advise on funding environment. Selection based on greatest need or H&S assessment and annual resource availability. Continue to manage and monitor monthly reports throughout financial year.
4.	Play area equipment etc. is inadequate/outdated	6 (3x2)	A designated officer is responsible for ensuring and monitoring the use and condition of safety materials, particularly around play equipment. Parks service has developed a detailed strategy to ensure that adequate leisure facilities are provided. Programmed internal and external inspections of parks and open spaces are carried out to ensure that standards of maintenance are maintained and the facilities available are up to the required standards. There are documented consultation procedures to ensure that public expectations are identified. There is a planned maintenance programme that is documented and

5.	Fraud, theft or bribery occurring within Parks service.	6 (2x3)	communicated to maintenance staff. There is compliance with industry health and safety standards to ensure the latest materials are used/introduced on a timely basis. All Ballyronan financial transactions managed by Council staff. Approx 70% of bookings - Marina and Caravan Park dealt with as
			online bookings by World Pay. Cash & Cheque Handling @ Dungannon Park • Segregation of duties takes place. • Financial procedures followed • Checks and audits take place at random intervals IT solution that centralises bookings introduced. Review of Service Level agreement at Ballyronan Marina allowed the transfer of all cashier duties from community group to council staff.
6.	Water Safety general. Risk to general public/visitors and council employees in relation to water recreation facilities owned and managed by MUDC	8 (4x2)	MUDC Water Safety Policy in place. Water Safety Equipment deployed on designed sites. Programmed Site Inspections. Audited Inspection software records. Damaged or Missing safety Equipment replaced Immediately from stock.

Rating	Descriptor
16 - 25	Extreme Risk (immediate action required)
10 - 15	High Risk (urgent action required)
7 - 9	Moderate Risk (action required)
1-6	Low Risk (keep under review)