

**Outworking's from Consultation
on
Mid Ulster District Council's
Performance Improvement Objectives
for
2019-20**

March 2019

Summary

As required under Section 84 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 (hereafter referred to as 'The Act'), the Council is placed under a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. Part 12 of the Act sets out a series of provisions which the Council should be mindful of in "making arrangements to secure continuous improvement", under section 85, the Council is to identify and set itself corporate level performance Improvement Objective(s) for improving the exercise of its functions and to have arrangements in place to achieve these objectives. Under section 87 of the Act, the Council is also required to consult on our improvement objectives.

This year the consultation exercise ran from the 8th of February to the 15th of March 2019 and focused on our proposed objectives. Under each improvement objective, the Council asked whether respondents agreed with the objective or disagreed with the objective. Respondents were also asked to provide any related commentary they had regarding the proposed improvement objectives.

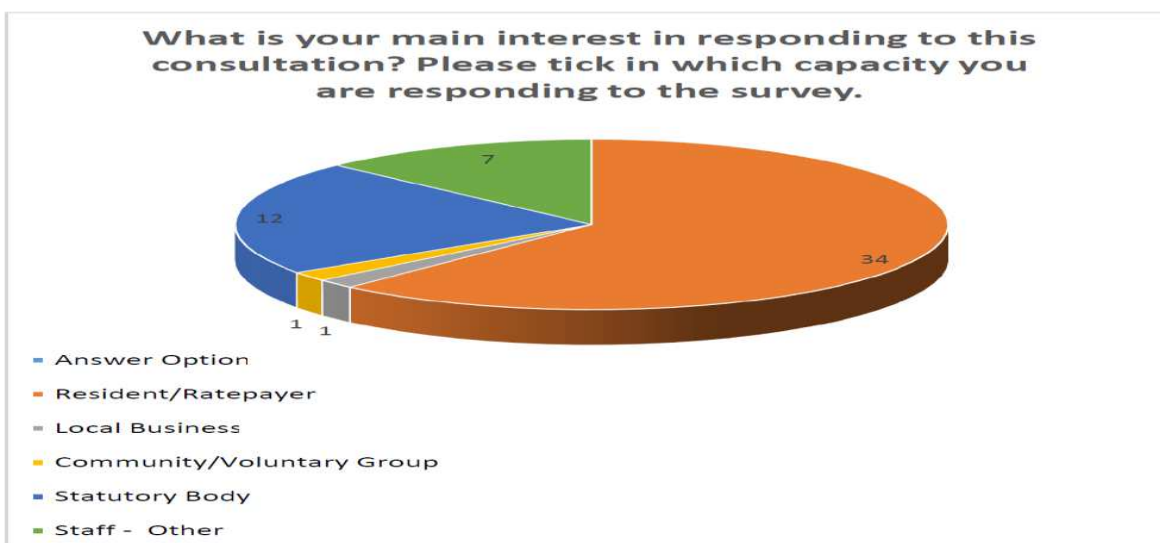
The consultation survey also asked respondents to outline any improvements the council should consider in the future. The final question asked respondents to provide any further comments relating to the draft Improvement objectives

The consultation exercise was promoted via a variety of communication channels including social media, our Council website, e-mail/ internal staff meetings and press releases in local newspapers. In total, there were 55 responses from consultees.

QUESTION 1

What is your main interest in responding to this consultation?

Capacity in which responding to survey	Responses (Numbers)	Responses (%)
Citizen/Ratepayer	34	61.82%
Local Business	1	1.82%
Community /Voluntary Group	1	1.82%
Statutory Sector	12	21.82%
Other	7	12.73 % (all staff)



QUESTION 2

Do you agree that the proposed Performance Improvement Objectives are appropriate for our district?

Improvement Objective One

1. To assist in the growth of the local economy by increasing the number of visitors to our district.

Number of Responses AGREED	54	98 %
Number of Responses DISAGREED	0	0 %
Number of responses skipped question	1	2 %

Why we are doing it?

Tourism is a major engine for job creation and a driving force for economic growth and development, as highlighted by recent figures. There has been a steady growth in overall tourism in Northern Ireland from 2011¹. In the year ended March 2018, visitors spent £939 in the local economy², with 70% coming from external visitors, making tourism worth £662m as an export business. Overall tourism represents 5.4% of total jobs (supporting 1 in every 18 jobs), across Northern Ireland. The Programme for Government has set one of its outcomes as wanting Northern Ireland to “...create a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest”, and one of its indicators is to, “Improve Northern Ireland’s attractiveness as a destination”.

Tourism is recognised as an economic driver, to stimulate growth by the Council, to deliver jobs and investment. We want to increase the number of the 3,000 plus local tourism and tourism related jobs in the district³. Opportunities for tourism growth lie in building on existing and new tourism propositions into a single tourism product or destination by capitalising on Mid Ulster’s central position in Northern Ireland, within an hour’s drive of the Causeway Coast, North West, Fermanagh Lakes, Belfast and many cross border destinations. Mid Ulster has scope to grow within the tourism marketplace; it is a developing destination and as such has not yet fulfilled its potential.

We will work with our partners and others to promote Mid Ulster as a successful tourist destination. We want to assist with establishing good communication and collaborative relationships between stakeholders with an interest in sites, facilities, hospitality, skills development, quality standards, attractions and marketing. We want to ensure a welcoming and clean public realm, including public toilets, street furniture, signage etc.; all that is necessary to facilitate the quality of the visitor experience. We will work to seek improvements in skills development and coordinated approaches to vocational education and training, enhancing the sectors image and service quality. The challenge is to bring together Mid Ulster’s tourism assets and attributes, support the dispersal of visitor spend and investment across the area and provide an offering for visitors to visit and stay in our district.

¹ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2017. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Annual-Tourism-Statistics-Publication-2017%20.pdf>

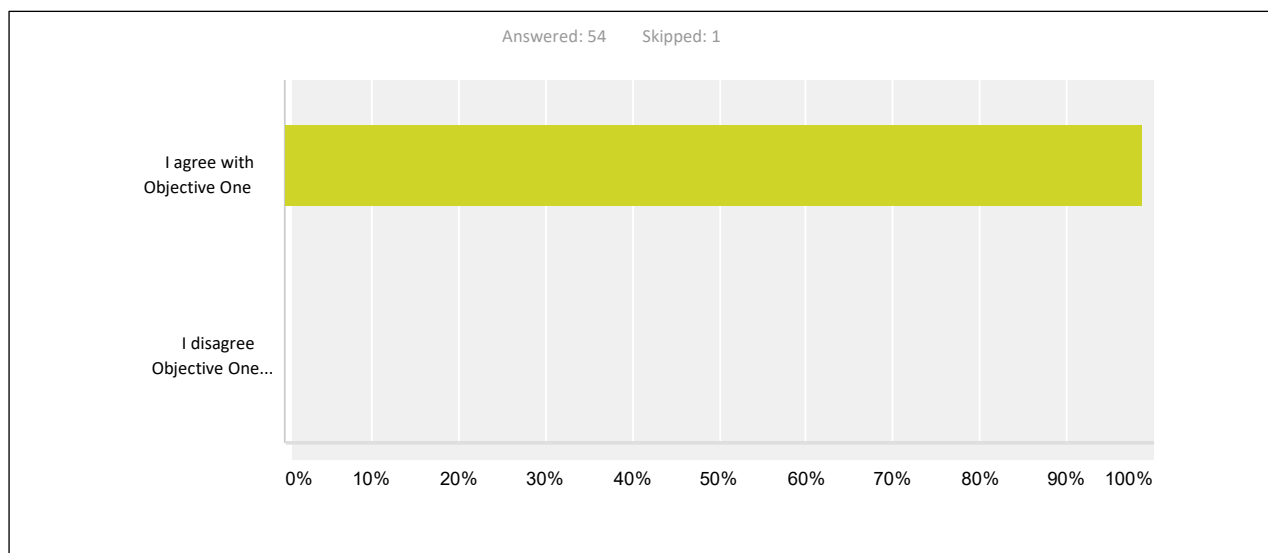
² Department for the Economy. Tourism Performance for the year ended 31march 2018. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/tourism>

³ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. NI Local Government District tourism Statistics 2017. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Local-Government-District-Publication-2017.pdf>

Comments: - There were 6 responses in total	
Hard copy	
	NONE
Electronic	
	Depends on how this objective is to be achieved
	Improving the Road infrastructure may help also. Provision of Multi Storey in town centre could make shopping more attractive
	There is good growth opportunity in this sector; Seamus Heaney Centre, Davagh, Beaghmore Stone Circles, Sperrins AONB, Lough Fea, Lough Neagh. Attracting outside money to be spent within Mid Ulster makes good business sense and could provide additional investment opportunities to further grow this sector. I was the Planning Officer with approving the Observatory at Davagh which if developed would attract more visitors to this area. Myself and another member of staff ensured the wind turbine development would not have a negative impact on the observatory. This area of Davagh is renowned for its Dark Skies, of particular interest to star gazers.
	I agree with this objective if it receives fair distribution of funding and all is not spent on one centre.
	Always good to get more visitors to the area, this will bring more revenue for local businesses and keep people in jobs.
	This is about the whole tourism industry working together to improve what the area can offer visitors; that will be the key to success. There is a need to continue to strengthen the calendar of local events year on year. The quality of where people can visit, stay and dine coupled with how these are promoted, requires a shared approach in order to get better all the time.

Improvement Objective One:

One: To assist in the growth of the local economy by increasing the number of visitors to our district.



Do you agree that the proposed Performance Improvement Objectives are appropriate for our district?

Improvement Objective Two:

2. To improve the average processing time of Local Planning Applications.

Number of Responses AGREED	52	94.55 %
Number of Responses DISAGREED	3	5.45 %
Number of responses skipped question	0	0 %

Why we are doing it?

We want to make the process of applying for planning permission better, thereby making our residents' lives easier. The outcome of a planning application has the potential to influence the applicant hugely. People unable to make the changes they want to their home will sometimes move altogether. If you can get it right for the one-time, householder applicant, who simply wants to build a new room, then you can get it right for everyone. We recognise that sometimes it is ostensibly minor improvements that can make a difference to people's lives. There are some big, complicated planning applications made each year, but there are many more household applications. Each one may be small, but if we can make a difference with such a high volume, we can have a huge impact.

The number of Local planning applications received in Northern Ireland during 2017/18 was 12,770 representing a decrease of 1.0% in 2016/17¹. Across Councils, Belfast City (1,788), Newry Mourne & Down (1,562) and Mid Ulster (1,397) received the highest number of local applications during 2017/18². These Councils also received the highest number of applications the previous year. Mid Ulster Council was below the regional average for all councils of 15.2 weeks average processing time for local planning applications during 2017/18. During 2017/18, Belfast City Council (1,779), Newry Mourne and Down Council (1,779) and Mid Ulster District Council (1,189) issued the most local decisions across the 11 Local Authorities. This in part reflected by the high volumes received in these Councils. During 2017/18, the average processing time to bring local applications to decisions or withdrawal was 15.2 weeks, across all the councils, an improvement of 1.0 week on the average time taken in 2016/17.

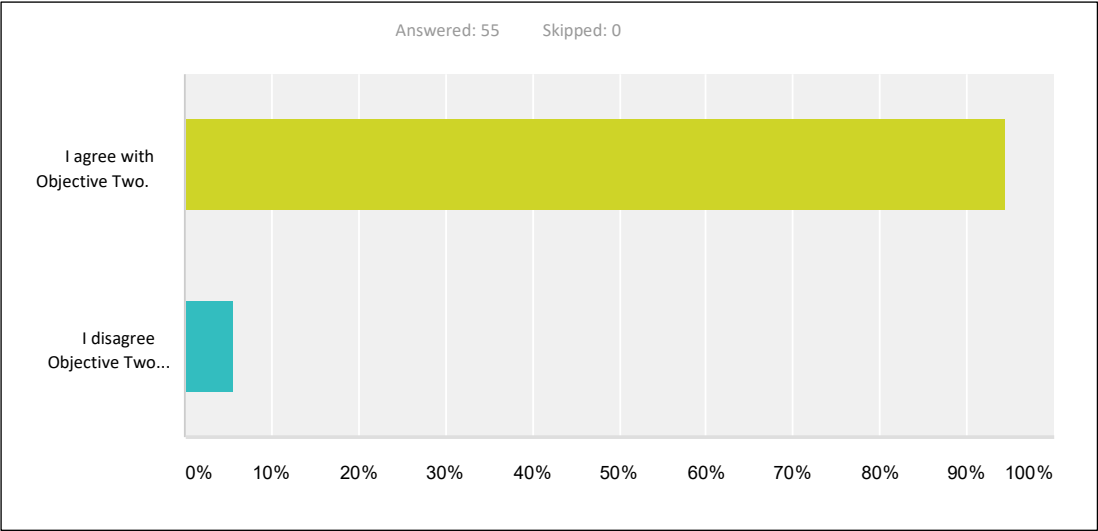
In 2017/18, Mid Ulster (14.4 weeks) along with four other Councils, Mid-East Antrim (9.6), Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.1) Fermanagh and Omagh (12.4), and Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon (14.0) were within the 15-week statutory target. The shortest processing time taken by Mid-East Antrim (9.6 weeks) , with Lisburn and Castlereagh having the longest processing times (21.6 weeks) and Causeway Coast and Glens (20.4 weeks). Performance at 14.4 weeks has been the same for Mid Ulster Council for the past two years, with this in mind we want to improve the average processing time for applicants.

¹ Local applications means an application in the category of local development within the meaning of the Planning (development Management) Regulations (NI) 2015, and any other applications for approval or consent under the Planning Act (NI) 2011 (or any orders or regulations made under the Act

² Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency. NI Planning Statistics 2017/18 Annual Statistical Bulletin. <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/infrastructure/planning-statistics-2017-18-bulletin.pdf> for further information).

Comments: - There were 6 responses in total	
Hard Copy	
	NONE
Electronic	
	<p>I consider the quality of the decisions more important than the time taken to process them. Are small issues such as house extensions really, where the Council's priorities should lie? The larger planning applications are more likely to have greater impacts and affect a greater number of people so surely, if planning application-processing time needs to be, improved major planning applications should also be included. Having looked at the annual report performance improvement plan self-assessment, MUDC is already meeting the local applications target but not the major target it seems that this objective has been selected as an easy win. The target seems short sighted and not very aspirational</p>
	<p>However, I do understand the average processing time of local applications had significantly decreased in the past year. I do believe that you have to be realistic and bear in mind to a degree there has been a major improvement in this objective already to date.</p>
	<p>I am a planning officer and deal with the processing of planning applications on a daily basis. Some things are outside of our control when processing planning applications, such as waiting on agents/architects to provide further information (some submissions are poor) and awaiting consultation replies (Environmental Health are under resourced to deal with the levels of planning consultations presented). For a period last year, there were staffing issues, which severely impacted planning application processing times. To ensure processing times are improved, proper resourcing of staff needs to happen. Caseloads per case officer reached the high 80's at one stage. The level of workload is not sustainable, and a quality service cannot be provided when numbers are this high. By keeping other applications moving through the system, applications that have missed their target seem to suffer. While caseloads are now around 50-60 per officer, this is slightly more manageable, but to see real improvements in performance caseloads need to be around 40-50 per officer, which means more staff. In the long-term, benefits to the economy are significantly improved through a strong and efficient planning department, which should represent value for money for the Council.</p>
	<p>Is this significant enough to be a corporate objective? Is it not something that would naturally be worked towards regardless?!</p>
	<p>Planning applications can be daunting enough and you want everything to run as smoothly as possible especially around turnaround timeframes as you have to look ahead to get trades booked in advance etc.</p>
	<p>Agree so long as there is sufficient time given to consideration of applications to ensure they are dealt with properly and fairly.</p>

Improvement Objective Two:
To improve the average processing time of Local Planning Applications.



Do you agree that the proposed Performance Improvement Objectives are appropriate for our district?

Improvement Objective Three

3. To improve the accessibility of our services by increasing the number available online

Number of Responses AGREED	52	94.54 %
Number of Responses DISAGREED	1	1.81 %
Number of responses skipped question	2	3.63 %

Why we are doing it?

The internet has transformed almost every aspect of private, public and work life. It is changing the way workplaces communicate, creating new industries and helping to improve public services and transparency. The Internet (or world wide web, which celebrates its 30th anniversary in March 2019), provides the public with the ability to conduct business at their convenience and at their own pace, without the need to travel to a Council office or wait to meet with one of our staff. In addition to being convenient, increased use of online services benefits the public and the Council by reducing the average time our employees spend processing forms, payments, applications, claims etc., freeing them to handle workloads that are more complicated. Online services are vital to good public service.

Over the last few years, we implemented several new, secure and easy-to-use online services, which allow us to handle applications, bookings, and payments better. Our goal is to continue increasing the variety of online services, we offer, including the ability to apply, pay for and book a range of services, and access information instantly. We are committed to making our online services secure and easy to use.

Developing online services for a population with a variety of experiences and comfort levels with technology presents a unique challenge. We solicit stakeholder input using a variety of methods prior to developing our services. Focus groups/discussions are common tools we use to engage our external stakeholders. We also consult with our employees when developing online services. Once we implement new online services, we continue to engage the public by soliciting their feedback using various methodologies. We will continue to provide appropriate support for those who interact with our services in non-digital ways such as face-to-face, written correspondence or by telephone.

Comments: - There were 10 responses in total

Hard Copy

NONE

Electronic

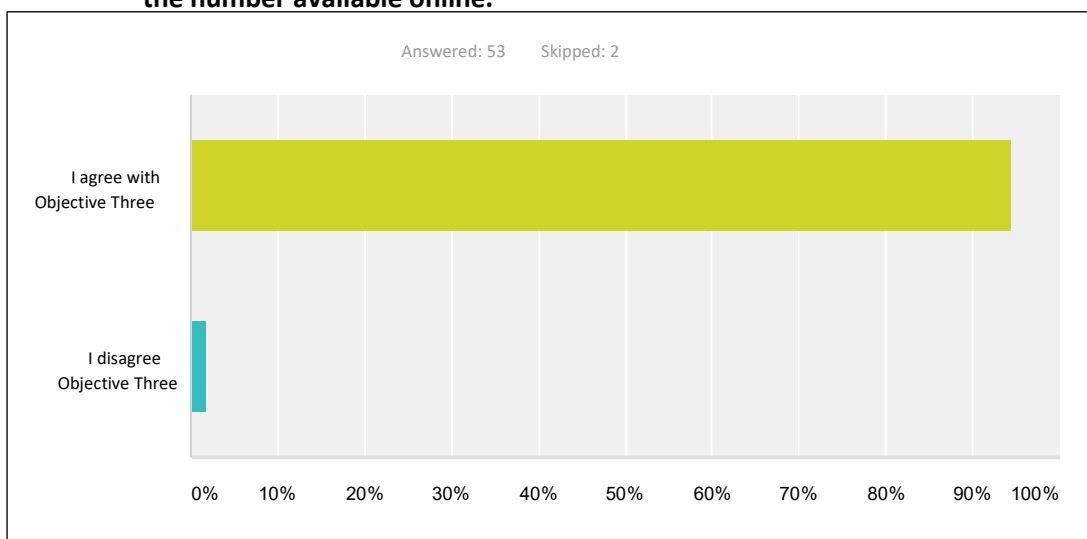
Surely, the availability of services online should have been achieved years ago! How behind the times we are?

I would also say that it's not just about increasing the number of service available online, but rather how the Council conducts its business and that as much need to be done as possible for services to be easy to complete. The process of some services is very cumbersome, and there are many public sector examples where technology has been adapted to make it more convenient for people to access services.

	I agree, to a degree, there is a lot of people within MUDC's district that either don't use the internet or are foreign nationals. The older generation, don't tend to use online services. I do think that accessibility of the Council's services needs to be improved by other means also.
	One way to improve services would be to develop a system where agents/architects can pay for and submit their planning applications online. Pay for a dog licence online.
	The website needs to be improved and made more user friendly – there needs to be clear “buttons” to get straight to the most popular services – the menu list along the left hand sides buries all the links so they are nigh impossible to find.
	This would be greatly assisted if the whole district council avail of reasonable broadband speeds.
	I agree that more Council services should have on line facilities; however, I also believe that the Council shouldn't push users online by concealing offline contact details or limiting access to offline support. If a large number of users are choosing offline routes, then the Council needs to find out why and take an informed action to change how they access the services.
	Leisure activities need to be bookable online. A very small number are currently online but bigger summer activities need to be online also. Payment up front at the time of booking means less build-up of people at reception on the first day and a smoother start.
	Website needs to be more user friendly too much information on line can be a “mine field” for the public when they are trying to look for a service.
	I agree with services being provided online provided there is choice for those who are unable to access services online or who prefer not to. Some people find it satisfactory to deal with real people rather than via technology and not everyone has access to appropriate technology or high quality broadband etc. The needs of older people and people with certain disabilities need to be taken into account.

Improvement Objective Three:

To improve the accessibility of our services by increasing the number available online.



Improvement Objective Four

4. To support people to adopt healthier lifestyles by increasing usage of Council recreational facilities

Number of Responses AGREED	53	96.36 %
Number of Responses DISAGREED	2	3.64 %
Number of responses skipped question	0	0 %

Why we are doing it?

People in the UK are around 20% less active now than in the 1960's¹. If current trends continue, we will be 35% less active by 2030. We are the first generation to need to make a conscious decision to build physical activity into our daily lives. Fewer of us have manual jobs. Technology dominates at home and at work, the two places where we spend most of our time. Societal changes have designed physical activity out of our lives and an increase in car usage has meant a 25% reduction in travel by foot or bicycle. Council wants to help people to adopt and continue to develop healthy lifestyles. We have chosen this objective based on what our local communities have told us, whilst taking into account our identified health inequalities within the district, accessibility opportunities and participation rates.

Locally, core wellbeing levels are below Northern Ireland averages, and while 80% of the population rate their health as good (Northern Ireland wide those rating their health stands at 79.5%), approximately 20% of the population have life limiting illnesses. In absolute terms, long-term health issues continue to exert pressure on communities, affect overall health outcomes within communities and create challenges for the delivery of public services (i.e. the significant burden of chronic disease in health and social services). Sedentary behaviour is a risk factor for poor health, with just over 25% of adults in Northern Ireland lead a sedentary lifestyle by sitting for extending periods². Within our district, obesity rates in children and adults are increasing, coupled with it being an area with the highest proportion of deaths due to circulatory diseases, points us towards a need to increase participation in local health and well-being programmes.

Promoting active healthier lifestyles for Mid Ulster residents, can help address the important challenges facing us locally today. Increasing physical activity and promoting active lifestyles have the potential to improve the physical and mental health of Mid Ulster residents. Being active can help us live longer and feel better, improve our mood, help improve our sleep and even reduce the risk of conditions like diabetes and coronary heart disease. Even small changes can make a big difference to health and make people feel better.

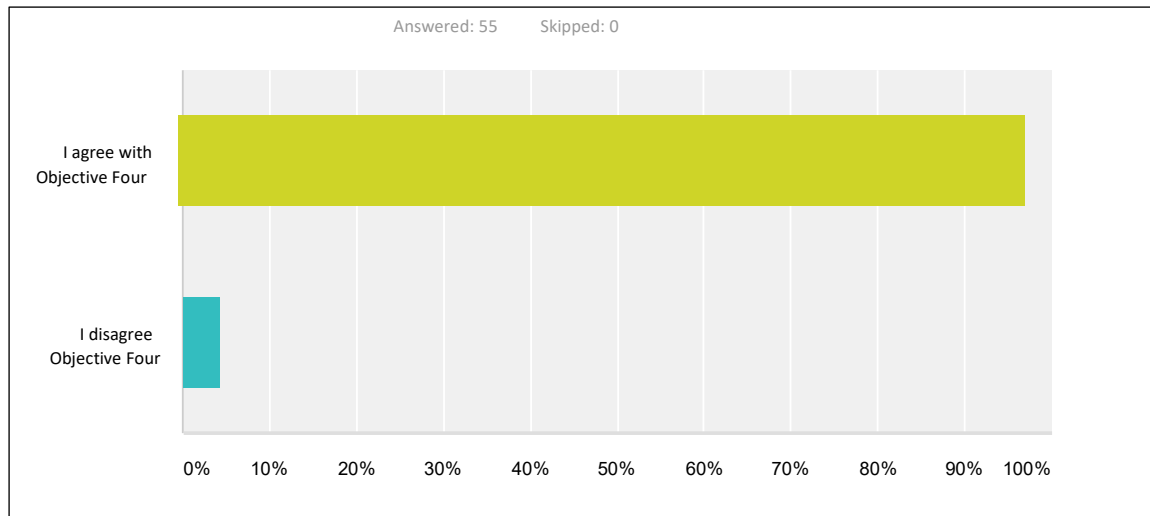
¹ Public Health. Gov.UK. Health matters: getting every adult active every day. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-getting-every-adult-active-every-day/health-matters-getting-every-adult-active-every-day>

² Western health and Social Care Trust. Physical Activity. <http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net/livewell/3189.html>

Comments: - There were 11 responses in total	
Hard Copy	
	NONE
Electronic	
	Loyalty cards/discounts for classes. There seems to be a difference in membership fees between the three leisure centres. Would be beneficial if the membership allowed you to use the other facilities within Council.
	Any measure to promote the use of existing facilities should be encouraged.
	Need to improve the quality and quantity of local sports provision. Perhaps Council can back existing sports facilities in local schools, for community use. New leisure centre on a spacious site would be a winner also.
	Mid Ulster Council, takes proactive role in health and wellbeing. I commend the recent activities and BBQ. that took place at Ballyronan. Concessionary fees for staff using the leisure facilities are also welcome, as is the health and well-being programme.
	I don't see it as Council role to address healthy lifestyles. This is surely role of public health agency. It is only Council's role to provide the facilities that are required to meet demand.
	A healthy lifestyle will help people to live longer, feel good about themselves and keep people away from GP's so the more we can offer them and get involved the better for everyone.
	The website used to promote the local Council leisure facilities are practically non-existent and booking on line is awful. I am glad to see that Council is investing in some of the centres though.
	The leisure facilities at Greenvale Leisure Centre are fantastic; however, the swimming pool temps are ridiculously cold. The learner pool needs to be warmer for families to use the facilities, as it is too cold for younger children. They simply aren't active enough in the water to maintain a decent body temp as they can't swim yet. Also for those with health conditions or disabilities that inhibit them in any way it is too cold and simply just not user friendly. When I am taking my younger children to the pool we drive to Antrim instead as the pool temp is more suitable for younger ones. We shouldn't be driving past our local swimming pool to go to another one miles away. On another note. I take my older children to GLC every week for a swim but for three consecutive weeks, I have been charged three different amounts for admission. This ranged from approx. £5 - £9. Prices need to be consistent unless there are promoters running. Gymnastics is a massive selling point at present and all classes continue to be fully booked for the younger age group. If possible, an additional class needs to be put on to deal with the demand at this young age.
	Works to Dungannon Leisure Centre could be planned better i.e. carry work out in phases to enable parts of the facilities to stay open to the public.
	Members of the public who purchase leisure centre memberships should be able to use it at any of the 4 leisure centres. People living in rural areas are at a disadvantage as recreational facilities are within towns. Community centres/ halls in rural areas could be supported and utilised to encourage rural people to participate in physical activity, which would address isolation and mental health issues.
	People on very low incomes may need to be supported to enable them to access recreational facilities. Not everyone has transport to access key facilities, which is a deterrent.

Improvement Objective 4:

To support people to adopt healthier lifestyles by increasing usage of council recreational facilities.



QUESTION 3.

Please outline any improvements that you feel could be made by Mid Ulster Council in the future

Comments: - There were 15 responses in total	
Hard Copy	
	NONE
Electronic	
	There seems to be regular communication via social media particularly twitter however there should be more regular communication with residents using traditional methods. I have received an insight magazine in the past but it needs to be more frequent to keep residents informed. I find the stats in relation to lost time due to sickness absence truly shocking! 8,816 days were lost due to sickness absence during 17/18 – that is 24 years! And also that 106 employees were absent due to long-term sickness absence. It would be interesting to see this in context of total employees. Surely there needs to be an objective to address this or perhaps Objective 4 should be specifically tailored to MUDC staff in an effort to reduce sickness absence.
	More consideration could be to families of children with special needs such as autism when attending Council organised events in town.
	Include environmental issues such as reduce litter n our roadsides, dog fouling on our footpaths, graffiti on our buildings, fly tipping etc.
	Sound language
	Mid Ulster District Council is missing out on what the ratepayer really cares about, reducing littering in our district, tackling fly tipping, getting people to recycle more and throw away less. Council needs to step up and start enforcing littering fines and actually following up on fly tipping incidents. At the moment, people can drop litter and dump what they like, where they like. Council cleans it up, using endless amounts of ratepayer's money but isn't tackling the root cause of the problem. Has Blue Planet passed the Council by? There is a wave of social awareness about the global, as well as local, effects of litter, waste and single use plastics. So many individuals and community groups are actively out cleaning up their areas, but the Council isn't backing their work up by tackling the people who continue to litter and dump. Yet none of the Council's objectives reflect this or even anything environmental.

	No other issues
	Develop the household membership across all of the sites
	A membership option that allows use in all the council leisure centres
	More publicity around what is available to people. Affordable prices for people to access facilities
	Improved access to council facilities for disabled users especially at leisure facilities e.g. leisure centres etc.
	In general, I always go to the website for information using my phone and this really could be doing with being more interactive, it's difficult to navigate and information remains static.
	Objective 4 I agree with but I would consider improving the facilities and maintenance of Cookstown Leisure Centre. I attend the swimming pool twice a week (Monday – swimming lessons with my daughter and then I attend a swimming class on Friday evening) the changing rooms are very unclean and the hairdryers are mostly out of order. The children's pool is freezing and I have a 3 year old that can barely stay in it for long because she is so cold. When attending the main pool on Fridays there is an awful smell that comes from the main pool to the extent, I have had to purchase a nose clip. If the facilities and maintenance would improve and the cleaning more frequent it may assist increasing usage of facilities.
	As much as possible online – information on what's on, process, as well as booking. MUSA site is also fantastic but lacks a play park like the one Meadowbank has. There is no facility for younger kids when possibly older siblings are participating in an activity onsite.
	Telephone communication difficult, inability to pick up calls within the hunt system leaves callers with quite a long wait before it can be answered.
	Improvement of operating times of council facilities (particularly leisure facilities) on Sundays – very restricted.

QUESTION 4

Please use the following space to provide any further comments relating to the draft Corporate Improvement objectives

Comments: - There were 3 responses	
Hard Copy	
	NONE
Electronic	
	Why limit the number of improvement objectives to 4? Is reducing waste still not a priority? According to the Annual Report 98% of respondents agreed with this objective during the previous consultation, therefore I don't understand why it hasn't been included. Still quite a significant amount of waste (26,514 tonne in 2016/17) going to landfill. Surely more needs to be done to address this. Personally, I consider there to be still quite a bit of confusion regarding what can and can't be recycled. I really would have liked to have given more positive comments but really feel that the objectives should strive for much better!
	Just to reiterate – council needs to realise the actual environmental quality of the district is what really matters most to people and will have the greatest impact on improving their overall quality of life. Tackle littering and dumping at source – instil some pride!
	nothing else to add