



Friday, 30 January 2026

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee to be held in The Chamber, Cookstown and by virtual means at Burn Road, Cookstown BT80 8DT on Thursday, 05 February 2026 at 19:00 to transact the business noted below.

A link to join the meeting through the Council's remote meeting platform will follow.

Yours faithfully

Adrian McCreesh  
Chief Executive

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## AGENDA

### OPEN BUSINESS

1. Notice of Recording  
This meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast on the Council's You Tube site [Live Broadcast Link](#)
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest  
Members should declare any financial and non-financial interests they have in the items of business for consideration, identifying the relevant agenda item and the nature of their interest.
4. Chair's Business

### Matters for Decision

- |    |  |        |
|----|--|--------|
| 5. | Requests to Illuminate Council Properties  | 3 - 6  |
| 6. | Proposed Performance Improvement Objectives for 2026-2027 and Timeline for Public Consultation | 7 - 14 |
| 7. | Member Services  |        |

### Matters for Information

- |    |  |         |
|----|--|---------|
| 8. | Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 8 January 2026                                     | 15 - 22 |
| 9. | Performance Improvement: Local Government Auditor's Audit and Assessment (Section 95) Report 2025-26 | 23 - 56 |

10. Performance Overview Exception Report Q1 – Q3 2025- 57 - 74  
26

**Items restricted in accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. The public will be asked to withdraw from the meeting at this point.**

Matters for Decision

11. Insurances Renewal 2026/27 – Update
12. Redemption of Council Loans
13. Staffing Matters for Decision
14. Realignment of Staff – Development Department
15. Information Technology Infrastructure Update

Matters for Information

16. Confidential Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 8 January 2026
17. Financial report for 9 months ended 31st December 2025
18. Treasury Management Update
19. Contracts and DAC Registers - Update
20. Staffing Matters for Information
21. Managing Employee Attendance

<b>Report on</b>	Request(s) to Illuminate Council Property
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	5 February 2026
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Joseph McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Eileen Forde, Committee and Member Services Manager

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>  To consider requests received to illuminate and light up the Council's three designated properties to raise awareness for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chest Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation – Chest Heart &amp; Stroke Awareness day: Friday 6 March 2026. Colour: Red</li> <li>• Take a Pain Check Foundation – World Young Rheumatic Disease (WORD) Day: Saturday 14 March 2026. Colour: Blue</li> <li>• Make a Wish Foundation – World Wish Day. Wednesday 9 April 2026, Colour: Blue</li> <li>• World ME Day and International ME – CFS Awareness Day – Tuesday 12 May 2026 Colour: Blue</li> <li>• Nerve Tumours UK - World NF Awareness Day 'Shine A Light On NF – Sunday 17 May 2026 – Colour: Blue</li> <li>• The Bronchiectasis &amp; NTM Association – World Bronchiectasis Day – Wednesday 1 July 2026 Colour: Blue</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	The Council has a policy and procedural arrangements in place to facilitate the illuminating/lighting-up of its designated properties from requests made by charitable organisations for charitable causes. The designated properties are the Burnavon, Bridewell and Ranfurly House.
2.2	The policy confirms that requests are considered by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee. Should the scheduling of the committee not permit requests being considered within the timeframes for determination, they can be presented to monthly Council.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	The Council has received correspondence from organisations requesting that consideration be given to lighting up our three designated council properties.  Requests for consideration and recommendation by Committee:

3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chest Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation – Chest Heart &amp; Stroke Awareness day: Friday 6 March 2026. Colour: Red</li> <li>• Take a Pain Check Foundation – World Young Rheumatic Disease (WORD) Day: Saturday 14 March 2026. Colour: Blue</li> <li>• Make a Wish Foundation – World Wish Day. Wednesday 9 April 2026, Colour: Blue</li> <li>• World ME Day and International ME – CFS Awareness Day – Tuesday 12 May 2026 Colour: Blue</li> <li>• Nerve Tumours UK - World NF Awareness Day 'Shine A Light On NF – Sunday 17 May 2026 – Colour: Blue</li> <li>• The Bronchiectasis &amp; NTM Association – World Bronchiectasis Day – Wednesday 1 July 2026 Colour: Blue</li> </ul> <p><b>Scope of the Council Arrangements</b></p> <p>The policy scope extends to requests made by charitable organisations for the promotion of its charitable cause on a given date or set of dates.</p>
4.0	<b>Other Considerations</b>
4.1	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial: Not applicable</p> <p>Human: Not applicable</p> <p>Risk Management: Not applicable</p>
4.2	<p><b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b></p> <p>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>Council policy and procedural arrangements have been referred to.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>Not applicable</p>
5.0	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	<p>That it be recommended to Council to light up designated buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chest Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation – Chest Heart &amp; Stroke Awareness day: Friday 6 March 2026. Colour: Red</li> <li>• Take a Pain Check Foundation – World Young Rheumatic Disease (WORD) Day: Saturday 14 March 2026. Colour: Blue</li> <li>• Make a Wish Foundation – World Wish Day. Wednesday 9 April 2026, Colour: Blue</li> <li>• World ME Day and International ME – CFS Awareness Day – Tuesday 12 May 2026 Colour: Blue</li> <li>• Nerve Tumours UK - World NF Awareness Day 'Shine A Light On NF – Sunday 17 May 2026 – Colour: Blue</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Bronchiectasis &amp; NTM Association – World Bronchiectasis Day – Wednesday 1 July 2026 Colour: Blue</li></ul>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	None



<b>Report on</b>	Proposed Performance Improvement Objectives for 2026-2027 and timeline for public consultation.
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2026.
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	J Mc Guckin, Head of Strategic Services & Engagement
<b>Contact Officer</b>	L Jenkins, Corporate Performance & Quality Officer

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To consider and agree the proposed improvement objectives for 2026/27 as set in compliance with the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (the Act) and timelines for the associated public consultation exercise.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<p>The 2014 Local Government Act places a general duty on the Council to “...<i>make arrangements to secure continuous improvement...</i>” in the exercise of its functions, hereby referred to as “The Act”. Section 85 of the Act requires a council, for each financial year, to set itself improvement objectives for improving the exercise of its functions and to have in place arrangements to achieve those objectives. Section 87 of the Act also outlines that a Council; in deciding how to discharge its duty under sections 84 and 85 of the Act, <u>must consult</u> with persons appearing to the Council, “<i>to be representative of:</i></p> <p><i>a); persons liable to pay rates in respect of hereditaments in the district; b) persons who use or are likely to use services provided by the council; and c) persons appearing to the council to have an interest in the district.</i></p>
2.2.	Each year the Council develops an annual Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), containing improvement objectives, associated activity, measures and outcomes for citizens and local communities. The PIP plan, to comply with the Act, must be published by the 30 <sup>th</sup> of June each year. The PIP plan also includes the statutory performance indicators and standards as outlined in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022, as well as Council’s “set by us” performance indicators (measures - contained in Council’s Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028).
2.3	The council previously approved three improvement objectives at its February meeting in 2025 (outlined below in table one), which were then incorporated into two-year corporate improvement projects. The improvement objectives and associated improvement projects were structured as a two-year performance

improvement initiative (led by Senior Responsible Officers i.e. Assistant Directors and Heads of Service). The improvement initiative has planned activities, measures and outcomes over the two years, i.e. spanning 2025/2026 to 2026/2027.

**Table One - Improvement Objectives 2025 - 2026 to 2026 - 2027**

Proposed Improvement Objectives	
1.	Enhance the experience of our customers by working to embed a culture which puts them at the centre of how services are offered and accessed. Ensuring Council services are accessible, efficient and responsive to the needs of communities across our District.
2.	Provide diverse opportunities for children and *young people to access inclusive and engaging activities that promote skills development, physical health and well-being, encourages creativity and supports active community participation”.
3.	Achieve a reduction in Council’s carbon emissions through implementation of our Sustainability Strategy and Climate Action Plan

*\*The United Nations defines young people as those aged 15 – 24 years*

2.4 A light touch review was commenced in November 2025 regarding the current improvement objectives and associated PIP plan to ensure their continued relevance/viability moving forward into 2026/27. Appendix One details the draft Corporate Improvement Objectives for 2026-2027, together with a section entitled “Why are we doing it?” i.e. the rationale. Each improvement objective has an assigned Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), along with a project team, who develop and embed a body of work to deliver improvement outcomes for citizens, specific to the improvement objectives. The current improvement objectives are also aligned with Council’s current Corporate Plan (2024 – 2028) and the Community plan.

**3.0 Main Report**

3.1 Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Communities to Councils on taking forward the general duty on improvement, requires that the council consult on a yearly basis on their improvement objectives. This requirement on consultation falls from section 87 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

3.2	<p>There is no statutory duty to consult on the improvement plan, but rather the improvement objectives. Three new improvement objectives have been proposed for a two-year period from 2025 - 2026 to 2026 - 2027. Each improvement objective and their assigned SRO will conduct a review at the end of 2026 to ensure that the improvement objectives and associated milestones and activities are still relevant.</p> <p>A report on the delivery of the current three improvement objectives (2025 to 2026 – that is a retrospective report), detailing the key performance outcomes will be provided in September 2026, (that is within Council’s Annual Assessment Report).</p>
3.3	<p><b><u>Consultation on new Draft Improvement Objectives and Development of Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2025/26 to 2026/27 - Year Two.</u></b></p>
	<p>It is recommended that arrangements to consult on the Improvement Objectives, as referred to in section 2.3 above, commence following the Policy &amp; Resources Committee and Council meetings In February.</p> <p>The following is an outline timeline for the consultation and development of the Council’s 2025-26 and 2026-27 Performance Improvement Plan (PIP):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council’s Improvement Objectives Consultation to run from Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February to Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 12:00 (Midday).</li> <li>• Outcomes Report on the Consultation considered by May P&amp;R Committee</li> <li>• Draft Performance Improvement Plan (2025-2026 to 2026-27 - Year Two) to be considered at June P&amp;R Committee</li> </ul>
4.0	<p><b>Other Considerations</b></p>
4.1	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p>
	<p>Financial: N/A</p>
	<p>Human: N/A</p>
	<p>Risk Management: In order to comply with Section 85 of Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 (The Act). The legislation requires a council, for each financial year, to set itself improvement objectives for improving the exercise of its functions and to have in place arrangements to achieve those objectives. Section 87 of the Act also outlines that a Council; in deciding how to discharge its duty under sections 84 and 85 of the Act. <u>must consult</u> with persons appearing to the Council, “<i>to be representative of:</i></p> <p><i>a); persons liable to pay rates in respect of hereditaments in the district; b) persons who use or are likely to use services provided by the council; and c) persons appearing to the council to have an interest in the district</i></p>
4.2	<p><b><u>Screening &amp; Impact Statements</u></b></p>
	<p>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications: N/A</p>

	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	That members consider and approve the three improvement objectives for 2026 - 2027 and the initiation of consultation together with associated timelines.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	Appendix One – Rationale for Corporate Improvement Objectives 2025-2026 to 2026-2027

## Appendix One: Corporate Performance Improvement Objectives: 2025-26 and 2026-27

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	1). <i>Enhance the experience of our customers by working to embed a culture which puts them at the centre of how services are offered and accessed. Ensuring Council services are accessible, efficient and responsive to the needs of communities across our District.</i>	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Corporate Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Philip Moffett:</b> Assistant Director of Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance.	<b>Theme :</b> Our Service Delivery <b>Outcome:</b> Citizens and customers will benefit from streamlined, more user-friendly services that are more inclusive, quicker and tailored to community needs, strengthening trust and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a rolling programme of projects, measures and actions to work towards embedding a culture of customer excellence.</li> </ul>

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

We want to put our citizens and customers first and to do so, we need to understand what people want, need and value. Embedding a positive customer experience journey into our service delivery will ensure that we put our customers at the heart of everything we do and we serve their needs. It is critical to the sustained growth of our Council. Mid Ulster Council has a substantial offering of leisure, outdoor recreation and arts, cultural and literary provision which includes our leisure centres, parks, green spaces, play areas, theatres and cultural sites. These services are at the core of Council's direct service delivery to our citizens. We want to increase customer satisfaction, accessibility and participation in our leisure, outdoor recreation and arts, culture and literary facilities by March 2028. We want to hear from, listen to and act on (co-design) what our citizens tell us so that our community-based leisure and outdoor recreation facilities and programmes meet their needs.

Council serves diverse communities, implementing customer centric principles and customer voice will ensure that our services respond to the unique needs of our residents and customers. Services should be easy to access, operationally efficient, with a reduction in waiting times and move to minimise duplication of effort across Council departments. It is about moving beyond traditional service models and recognising resident expectations for on-demand services. This will encompass the use of technology, through leveraging digital optimisation, alongside the development and collation of data relating to 'customer insights'. Council by concentrating on customer experience, in effect recognises entire customer journeys, from first point of contact through to post interaction/purchase. . We will also commit to review our processes and current systems in tandem with our customer touchpoints, as well our staff knowledge and skills sets, marketing, web-site navigation, products, service quality, and brand perception.

Council is committed to the core customer service principles of; accessibility, responsiveness, transparency, fairness and respect. We will strive to ensure consistency in the application of defined service standards, while embedding core values of staff being polite, knowledgeable and helpful. The UK government's Communications Service<sup>1</sup> defines 'customer insight' as, "a deep truth about the customer based on their behaviour, experiences, beliefs, needs or desires, that is relevant to the tasks". We want to gather and act on public feedback, including customer 'pain points' which focus on problems or frustrations from customer experience and will use 'customer insights', (both qualitative and quantitative) from demographic data, surveys, focus groups, consultation exercises, service usage data and complaints, compliments and comments etc. Having a comprehensive understanding of our customers based on 'insight' is a starting point to answer the challenge of delivering services aligned to our customers' needs and expectations.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hypeinnovation.com/blog/what-is-a-good-customer-insight>

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	2) <i>Provide diverse opportunities for children and young people to access inclusive and engaging activities that promote skills development, physical health and well-being, encourages creativity and supports active community participation”</i> .	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Corporate Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Joseph Mc Guckin: Head of Strategic Services &amp; Engagement.</b>	<b>Themes:</b> Our Service Delivery and Being the Best Council <b>Outcome:</b> Greater participation of children and young people in inclusive activities that enhance skills, well-being, creativity and community engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop and deliver programmes/activities in conjunction with our partners &amp; communities that provides opportunities for our children and young people to enhance skills, well-being, creativity and community engagement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why we are doing it?</b></p> <p>The last census in 2021 has seen a demographic shift in terms of size of population by Council area<sup>1</sup>. Mid Ulster is expected to grow from 150K (2021) to 165K by 2030 relative to population size, with a substantial proportion of this increase coming from young people. Mid Ulster has a significant proportion of its population under the age of 30 (35%) compared to the other 10 Council areas, and has the highest percentage of residents under the age of 15 (21.7%). In effect this means the district has a youthful population, i.e. in the early stages of education or career development. We want to ensure a continued commitment to providing diverse opportunities for children and young people. We see this as a strategic investment in the future workforce, the social and physical wellbeing of our present and future generations, which in turn contributes to the Districts’ social and economic prosperity in the coming decades.</p> <p>To enable children and young people to be healthy, independent and resilient, many of our current Council service provision offers this demographic, the opportunity to attend additional educational opportunities/programmes<sup>2</sup> (heritage, arts, cultural, environmental etc.), take part in social activities and contribute to their communities. Our sports, outdoor facilities and parks promote access to recreational activities which help children and young people by fostering social interaction, encourages physical fitness<sup>3</sup>, provides access to sports/recreational activity that may otherwise not be available, builds confidence, teamwork, all of which are vital for personal development and later career opportunities. Many facets of our service provision creates inclusive and supporting environments for youth to thrive in both recreational and competitive settings.</p> <p>Focusing on youth development ensures long–term sustainability of the regions workforce helps address issues like youth unemployment and skills gaps, creating pathways to employment and skills. The Labour Force Survey (2021) cites youth unemployment in Northern Ireland is higher than the national average. Young people in NI have historically faced higher unemployment rates compared to older age groups. Council is a large employer within the district with a vast array of posts, qualifications and skill sets, we want to ensure that our pathways for young people to gain, experience and job opportunities (through our on job experience, and student, graduate placement programmes) form part of our workforce development plan. Council will also include alignment and collaboration with our Community planning partners to ensure that children and young people’s opportunities remain as part of our place shaped work.</p> <p><sup>1</sup> <a href="https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census/2021-census">https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census/2021-census</a>      <sup>2</sup> <a href="https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/raise-programme-summary-document">https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/raise-programme-summary-document</a>  <sup>3</sup> <a href="https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/active-living-sport-and-physical-activity-strategy-northern-ireland">https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/active-living-sport-and-physical-activity-strategy-northern-ireland</a></p>		

<b>Corporate Improvement Objective</b>	<b>3). Achieve a reduction in Council's carbon emissions through implementation of our Sustainability Strategy and Climate Action Plan</b>	
<b>Senior Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Community Plan Theme &amp; Outcome</b>	<b>Project (Action)</b>
<b>Mark Mc Adoo: Assistant Director of Environment.</b>	<b>Theme:</b> Our Service Delivery  <b>Outcome:</b> Reduction in Council carbon emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To implement Councils plan/programmes/activities to achieve a 20% reduction in Council's carbon emissions by March 2028</li> </ul>

**Why we are doing it?**

The impact of climate change on water availability, food production, the environment and the livelihoods of the global population is growing. We know the risks around Climate Change will continue to increase if we do not take steps to cut our carbon emissions. We must act now as what we do today will affect the lives of our children and future generations. Our Climate Change Adaptation Plan sets out how we will assess and adapt to the risks and opportunities from climate change. Recycling waste protects the environment and saves on, or reduces, the costs of disposal. Recycling and/or reusing waste benefits the environment by lessening the need to extract resources or source new materials. It lowers the potential for contamination and saves energy.

Locally the Stormont Executive through the Climate Change Act<sup>1</sup> (2022); hereafter referred to as 'The Act', sets out ambitious commitments to achieving net zero that aligns with commitments in Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and the European Union, and also recognises the need to achieve a transformational transition to net zero in a way that is fair and balanced for everyone by supporting the cost of a 'just' transition. The Act sets a target of at least 100% reduction in net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 (i.e. net zero emissions by 2050) for Northern Ireland compared to baseline, along with interim targets in net emissions by 2030. DAERA must also, review and potentially set updated 2030 and 2040 interim emissions reduction targets to ensure that they are in line with the 2050 net zero target. The Act also sets other sectoral targets including 2030 targets at least 80% of electricity consumption from renewable sources (DfE) and 70% of waste is recycled (DAERA) as well as a target for a minimum spend of 10% of overall transport budgets on active travel (DfI).

The Act came into effect on the 6th of June 2022 and specifies the Waste Management<sup>2</sup> sector as a priority area for the reduction of GHG emissions to contribute to NI's Net Zero ambitions. The waste management sector is responsible for 4% of NI's total emissions and includes a key aim of achieving 70% recycling by 2030, the affected stakeholders are local authorities, central government and waste management operators.

1. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/climate-change-act-northern-ireland-2022-key-elements>

2. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/recycling-climate-change-act-northern-ireland-2022-recycling-net-zero-targets>



**Minutes of Meeting of Policy and Resources Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 8 January 2026 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt and by Virtual Means**

**Members Present**

Councillor Cahoon, Chair

Councillor F Burton, J Burton\*, Brown, Corry\*, Gildernew\*, McAleer, McConnell\*, McLernon, S McPeake, Martin\* Molloy\*, Quinn\*, Totten\*, Wilson

**Officers in Attendance**

Mrs Campbell, Strategic Director of Environment (SD: Env)  
Mrs Canavan, Strategic Director of Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance (SD: ODSP)  
Mr McGuckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSSE)  
Mrs McNally, Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Finance (AD: CS&F)  
Ms Dyson, Head of Human Resources (HoHR)\*  
Mr O'Hagan, Head of IT (HoIT)  
Mr Hill, ICT  
Mrs Forde, Committee and Member Services Manager

\* Denotes members present in remote attendance

\*\* Denotes Officers present by remote means

\*\*\* Denotes others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

*The Chair, Councillor Cahoon welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Councillor Cahoon in introducing the meeting detailed the operational arrangements for transacting the business of the committee in the Chamber and by virtual means, by referring to Annex A to this minute.*

**PR001/26 Notice of Recording**

Members noted that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast on the Council's You Tube site.

**PR002/26 Apologies**

Councillor McLean

Mr Moffett, Assistant Director: Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance (AD: ODSP)

**PR003/26 Declarations of Interest**

The Chair, Councillor Cahoon reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest.

**PR004/26 Chairs Business**

None

**Matters for Decision**

**PR005/26 Request to Illuminate Council Properties**

The Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSSE) presented previously circulated report which sought approval to illuminate and light up the Council's three designated properties to raise awareness for the following:

- Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on Tuesday 27 January 2026. Colour: Purple
- World Encephalitis International: Sunday 22nd February 2026, World Encephalitis Day. Colour Red
- OG Cancer NI: OG Cancer Awareness Month: Monday 9 February 2025: Colour: Green

Councillor McLernon welcomed the light up for World Encephalitis Day and said her nephew had suffered from this when he was just three and such a serious condition can lead to serious neurological disorders.

The Chair, Councillor Cahoon said it was good for Council to support charities and often when people see the publicity and illumination of properties, they realise they are not alone.

Proposed by Councillor Brown  
Seconded by Councillor F Burton and

- Resolved** That it be recommended to Council to illuminate the three designated Council properties as follows –
- Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on Tuesday 27 January 2026. Colour: Purple
  - World Encephalitis International: Sunday 22nd February 2026, World Encephalitis Day. Colour Red
  - OG Cancer NI: OG Cancer Awareness Month Monday 9 February 2025: Colour: Green

**PR006/26 Member Services**

No issues.

**Matters for Information**

**PR007/26 Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 4 December 2025**

Members noted Minutes of Policy & Resources Committee held on 4 December 2025.

**PR008/26 Six Month Progress Update on the Council's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP plan: Q1 to Q2 – 2025/26)**

The Head of Strategic Services and Engagement (HoSSE) presented previously circulated report which provided monitoring information on the review of Council's performance against its seven statutory performance indicators/standards and two Council benchmark performance measures (Sickness Absence and Prompt Payments- benchmarked across all eleven NI Councils) for the first six months of 2025/26. The report also provided a performance progress summary against the Council's three corporate improvement objectives and their associated project plans (known as CIP plans). The indicators/standards, benchmark measures, six-month Corporate Plan measures overview and the three improvement projects are contained within our Performance Improvement Plan (PIP plan) for 2025/26.

Councillor Brown drew attention to areas on the appendix to the report were throughout the first two quarters the action is shown to be red and asked if there had been pre-defined standards set, what they are, the areas of shortfall and had adequate measures been put in place to address.

The HoSSE advised that the report encompasses actions of improvement of all council directorates and thus he could not give a definitive response this evening but gave an assurance that the senior officer team meet regularly to see that actions are on target, he advised some although listed for the year may not be actioned until the third or fourth quarter but he was content actions would be met. In relation to statutory indicators the HoSSE advised they are continually reviewed and in areas of slippage officers endeavoured to bring about improvement. He concluded that if the Member forwarded specific queries, he would seek clarification from the appropriate directorate and report back.

Councillor Brown drew attention to item 3.1 of the report and requested specific detail on figures outlined in Quarter One and Quarter Two and what projects they related to, where did projects fall short, and how are they going to be addressed?

The HoSSE advised that officer team continue to work to meet the targets as set by Council but sometimes this isn't feasible and out of our control. He assured Members that directorates are working to ensure measures are delivered on and concluded that he would bring a report to a future committee meeting to provide detail on actions labelled red.

The Strategic Director of Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance (SD: ODSP) advised that in recent weeks measures have been put in place including additional resource to deal with deferred planning applications. In relation to sickness absences the SD: ODSP said pre-covid the target of 5% was realistic but since then sickness has slipped largely due to several long-term absences mostly relating to cancer and cognizance also had to be given to age profile. It was noted that Council

continued to provide services such as Westfield, Counselling and Coaching, mental health talks and are preparing to launch a health and wellbeing strategy all of which would hopefully address some of the causes for rising sickness. The SD: ODSP concluded that there were a few ill health retirements and redeployments, and this would hopefully see a decrease in sickness absence figures.

In response to Councillor McAleer's comments on internet safety for primary schools and recent coverage regarding AI video imaging the HoSSE said he would report directly to the Member.

Councillor S McPeake acknowledged the broad explanations given and commentary provided in Appendix 2. He concurred with the SD: ODSP comments in relation to planning. He said that Council has the highest overall approval rate but to achieve this you cannot always be expedient, new processes had been introduced, and it was hoped this would help. Regarding the GoForIt programme he said that sometimes timeframes clash and again he was satisfied with explanations given and commended officers on their work.

Councillor Wilson said he was not a member of planning committee but in listening to comments on deferrals he highlighted the grants process and said if the relevant information was not made available within timeframe the application is rejected and perhaps planning should look at this.

The Chair, Councillor Cahoon thanked officers for the update report and said in relation to updated planning scheme it would be interesting to view the next quarters figures.

**Resolved** That it be recommended to Council that a report be brought to future committee to provide detail on actions labelled red.

*Live broadcast ended at 7.17 pm.*

## **Local Government (NI) Act 2014 - Confidential Business**

Proposed by Councillor McLernon  
Seconded by Councillor Brown and

**Resolved** In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst Members consider items PR009/26 to PR019/26.

### **Matters for Decision**

PR009/26	Land and Property Matters
PR010/26	Staffing Matters for Decision
PR011/26	Staff Resourcing Matters for Decision
PR012/26	Information Technology Grant System Contract Extension and Services update January 2026
PR013/26	Financial report for 8 months ended 30 November 2025
PR014/26	Debt Management Policy - Review

**Matters for Information**

- PR015/26 Confidential Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee held on 4 December 2025
- PR016/26 NIAO Annual Audit Letter 24/25
- PR017/26 Contracts and DAC Register – Update
- PR018/26 2026/2027 Rate Estimates Process - Update
- PR019/26 Staff Matters for Information

**PR020/26 Duration of Meeting**

The meeting was called for 7.00 pm and ended at 8.20 pm.

Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Annex A – Introductory Remarks from the Chairperson

Good evening and welcome to the Council's [Policy & Resources/Environment/Development] Committee in the Chamber, [Cookstown/Magherafelt] and virtually.

I specifically welcome the public watching us through the Live Broadcast. The Live Broadcast will run for the period of our Open Business but will end just before we move into Confidential Business. I let you know before this happens.

Just some housekeeping before we commence. Can I remind you:-

- If you have joined the meeting remotely, please keep your audio on mute unless invited to speak and then turn it off when finished speaking
- Keep your video on at all times, unless you have bandwidth or internet connection issues, where you are advised to try turning your video off
- If you wish to speak please raise your hand in the meeting or on screen and keep raised until observed by an Officer or myself
- Should we need to take a vote this evening I will ask each member to confirm whether they are for or against the proposal or abstaining
- When invited to speak please introduce yourself by name to the meeting
- For any member attending remotely, if you declare an interest in an item, please turn off your video and keep your audio on mute for the duration of the item
- If referring to a specific report please reference the report, page or slide being referred to
- Lastly, I remind the public and press that taking photographs of proceedings or using any means to enable anyone not present to see or hear proceedings, or making a simultaneous oral report of the proceedings are not permitted

Thank you and we will now move to the first item on the agenda - apologies and then roll call of all other Members in attendance.





<b>Report on</b>	Performance Improvement: Local Government Auditor's Audit and Assessment (Section 95) Report 2025-26
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2026
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	J Mc Guckin, Head of Strategic Services and Engagement
<b>Contact Officer</b>	L Jenkins, Corporate Performance & Quality Officer

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update the committee and members of the key findings of the Local Government Auditor's Audit and Assessment (Section 95) Report 2025-26.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
	<b><u>Local government Auditor's Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2025 - 26</u></b>
2.1	Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 ('the Act') places a duty on Councils' to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. This includes setting improvement objectives for each financial year and putting in place arrangements to achieve those objectives, as well as publishing annual progress reports.
2.2.	The Act places a statutory duty on the Local Government Auditor (LGA) to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Report (via their Annual Improvement Audit) 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. During the course of this work the LGA may make statutory recommendations under section 95 of the Act, and</li> <li>b) Assess annually (via the annual Improvement Assessment) whether a Council is likely to make the required arrangements to secure continuous improvement in that year. 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.</li> </ul> <p><i>*This refers to LG Circular 21/2016 - Guidance for Local Government Performance Improvement 2016 onwards – hereafter referred to as "The Guidance".</i></p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<b><u>Audit and Assessment Report (Section 95) 2025 to 2026</u></b> The Local Government Auditor, Colette Kane (LGA) of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) issued correspondence on the 1 <sup>st</sup> of December 2025, which included a letter to the Chief Executive (Appendix One), the correspondence clarified in summary that:

- a) The NIAO proposed an ‘unqualified audit’ opinion, without modification and,
- b) The LGA also states that, as a result of their undertaking an improvement audit and assessment, she believes Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2024-25 and its 2025-26 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.
- c) In terms of audit assessment, the LGA has assessed whether the Council is likely to comply with its performance improvement responsibilities under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act). This is called the ‘improvement assessment.’ In her opinion the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26 and has demonstrated a track record of improvement.
- d) No statutory recommendations were made in respect of the Council under the Act, nor was there a requirement for a special inspection, and
- e) The LGA made two proposals for improvement. These represent good practice which should assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement.

Accompanying the letter was a copy of the Final Audit and Assessment (Section 95) 2025-26 Report (refer to Appendix Two), also forwarded was an original Audit and Assessment Certificate of Compliance (Appendix Three).

The Local Government Auditor had also forwarded the Council’s letter and Audit and Assessment Report to the Department of the Communities (DfC).

By 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2026 the LGA will publish an Annual Improvement Report on the Council on the NIAO website, making it publicly available. This will summarise the key outcomes in this report.

### **3.2. Certificate of Compliance and NIAO Audit Assessment Report (S95) 2025 – 2026**

#### **Audit Opinion – Improvement Audit**

The LGA has certified the performance arrangements with unqualified opinion, without modification.

She certifies an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA states that as a result, she believes that Mid Ulster District Council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2024-2025 and its improvement plan for 2025-2026, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.

#### **Improvement Assessment**

As a result of the assessment, the LGA believes the Council has discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities’ guidance sufficiently. They are also of the opinion, the Council has demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement, and they believe that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2024-25. The LGA has not conducted an assessment to determine whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act in subsequent years and they will keep the need for this under review.

**Audit Findings and Status of the Audit**

During the audit and assessment, the LGA identified no issues requiring a formal statutory recommendation under the Act. The LGA made two proposals for improvement (refer to Appendix Two - page 6/7). Proposals for improvement represent good practice which should assist the Council meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement. The LGA is not minded to carry out a special inspection under section 95(2) of the Act.

**3.3 LGA Proposals for Improvement**

Following significant engagement with relevant council officers throughout October to November 2025, no formal recommendations were issued to the Council as a result of the NIAO audit.

Two proposals for improvement were introduced, as outlined under the thematic area of, “Governance Arrangements” and “Demonstrating a Track Record of Improvement” (refer to page 6-7 in Appendix Two).

Thematic Area	LGA Issue	Proposal For Improvement	Management Response
Governance Arrangements	Internal Audit do not carry out any work on the Performance Improvement function there is therefore no data validation on figures within the Self-Assessment Report (SAR).	Performance Improvement should be seriously reconsidered as a subject for Internal Audit reporting. Although an external audit is completed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office this does not include data validation. An Internal Audit report would provide assurance over the integrity of the Council's performance improvement framework as well as data validation over figures used in the SAR.	Council's Internal Audit Manager has responded by proposing the following, <i>“The audit plan for 2026/27 includes contingency days, so I can assign some audit days to validate the accuracy and reliability of a sample of the data used for performance measurement, to provide assurance that the council's reported performance is based on credible information etc.”</i>  The Corporate Performance & Quality officer is going to undertake an exercise, with other Council Performance Improvement Officers to ascertain the role that their internal audit plays regarding their Council's performance improvement framework (i.e. assurance) and collate responses with regard to internal audit reporting.

	<p>Demonstrating a track record of Improvement</p>	<p>The Council has not met statutory planning indicators for the second year in a row. In the 2024-25 period all three indicators have demonstrated a downward trend.</p>	<p>Council should consider an in-depth analysis of its current planning system to see what action could be taken to improve average processing times (for major and local planning) and increase the percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks. This may require introducing a performance improvement objective with a focus on the planning function.</p>	<p>In relation to the Planning system, it is proposed that under Council's current Performance Improvement Objective (outlined below), and its related Improvement Project (CIP One Project) that is to:</p> <p><i>“Enhance the experience of our customers by working to embed a culture which puts them at the centre of how services are offered and accessed. Ensuring Council services are accessible, efficient, and responsive to the needs of communities across our District.”</i></p> <p>That a review of current planning activities, which support customer experience, accessibility, transparency, responsiveness, and system efficiency is undertaken and activities and measures arising from this appear in the CIP One improvement project moving forward. The CIP One project forms part of Council's Performance Improvement Plan. The approach will give consideration in acknowledging that Councils are not solely responsible for all elements of major application timescales, due to the reliance on external consultees. Major planning applications often require detailed technical assessments, on a range of issues such as; environmental impact, traffic, noise, flood risk, and ecology issues to help ensure sustainable development. Many of these are assessed by</p>
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			external statutory bodies not linked to Council, and against timeframes, which Council, have little or no control over. Councils, however, remain held accountable for the achievement of the 30-week statutory target.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>		
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>		
	<b>Financial:</b> not applicable, arrangements being delivered within existing resource		
	<b>Human:</b> not applicable, arrangements currently being delivered within existing resource		
	<b>Risk Management:</b> Will assist in council's compliance with Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014		
<b>4.2</b>	<b><u>Screening &amp; Impact Statements</u></b>		
	<b>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications:</b> Not applicable No specific implications neutral impact on S75 groups and neutral impact on promotion of good relations		
	<b>Rural Needs Implications:</b> not applicable		
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>		
5.1	That the committee notes the findings of Audit and Assessment (Section 95) Report 2025-26.		
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>		
	Appendix One: LGA Correspondence to Chief Executive dated 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025 Appendix Two: Final Audit and Assessment Section 95 Report 2025-26. Appendix Three: Certificate of Compliance		



**By Email**

Mr Adrian McCreesh  
Chief Executive  
Mid Ulster District Council  
Ballyronan Road  
Magherafelt  
BT45 6EN

1 December 2025

Dear Adrian,

**Mid Ulster District Council: IMPROVEMENT AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT – FINAL  
AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2025-26**

I have now certified the improvement audit for the Council with an unqualified opinion on 29 November 2025. In terms of the assessment, I have concluded that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) during 2025-26. No statutory recommendations will be made to the Department this year in respect of the Council nor is there a requirement for a special inspection.

The report sets out the findings and conclusions from our work, it includes the audit and assessment certificate as an Annex. I also attach a copy of the original certificate I have signed. Our audit and assessment procedures may not have brought to light all areas in which improvements could be made and our findings should not be seen as comprehensive in this respect. Responsibility for determining whether they should be implemented, and the effects of such implementation, necessarily rests with management.

This letter and attachments have been copied to the Department for Communities as the legislation requires. I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance and cooperation we received throughout the audit.

*Yours sincerely,*



**Colette Kane**  
**Local Government Auditor**

## **Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26**

### **Report to the Council and the Department for Communities under Section 95 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014**

**Mid Ulster District Council**  
29 November 2025

# Contents

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*We have prepared this report for Mid Ulster District Council's sole use. You must not disclose it to any third party, quote or refer to it, without our written consent and we assume no responsibility to any other person.*

# 1. Key Messages

## Summary of the audit

<b>Audit outcome</b>	<b>Status</b>
Audit opinion	Unqualified opinion
Audit assessment	The LGA has concluded that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) during 2025-26.
Statutory recommendations	The LGA made no statutory recommendations
Proposals for improvement	The LGA made two new proposals for improvement

This report summarises the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA) on the 2025-26 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Mid Ulster District Council. We would like to thank the Chief Executive and his staff, particularly the Corporate Performance and Quality Officer, for their assistance during this work.

We consider that we comply with the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) ethical standards and that, in our professional judgment, we are independent, and our objectivity is not compromised.

## Audit Opinion

The LGA has certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. She certifies an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2024-25 and its 2025-26 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.

## Audit Assessment

The LGA has assessed whether the Council is likely to comply with its performance improvement responsibilities under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act). This is called the 'improvement assessment'.

In her opinion, the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26 and has demonstrated a track record of improvement. The LGA did not exercise her discretion to assess and report whether the Council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

## **Audit Findings**

During the audit and assessment, we identified no issues requiring a formal statutory recommendation under the Act. We made two proposals for improvement (see Section 3). These represent good practice which should assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement. Detailed observations on thematic areas are provided in Annex B.

## **Status of the Audit**

The LGA's audit and assessment work on the Council's performance improvement arrangements is now concluded. By 31 March 2026 she will publish an Annual Improvement Report on the Council on the NIAO website, making it publicly available. This will summarise the key outcomes in this report.

The LGA did not undertake any Special Inspections under the Act in the current year.

## **Management of information and personal data**

During the course of our audit, we 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 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **Other matters**

## **Sustainability and Climate Change**

Under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, Councils are required to prepare prospective reports on how they are adapting to climate change in the exercise of their functions. The reports are designed to help aid well-informed action to tackle climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce the impact of climate change.

The first report covers the four-year period beginning January 2026. At present individual councils are at varying stages in their journey toward the NI Executive's target of a 48 per cent reduction in their baseline emissions by 2030.

If Councils are to link climate change and sustainable action to their performance objectives or even as part of their wider continuous improvement arrangements in future years, it will be necessary to consider arrangements to improve, including ensuring adequate resourcing and gathering of accurate data.

## **Benchmarking**

As I have reported in previous years, whilst councils have undertaken work to improve benchmarking, for example by participating in the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Performance Networks, more progress needs to be made by the sector to allow a broader range of functions to be compared to support councils with their General Duty to Improve, in accordance with section 84 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.

## 2. Audit Scope

Part 12 of the Act provides all councils with 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; and
- key responsibilities for the LGA.

The Department for Communities (the Department) has published 'Guidance for Local Government Performance Improvement 2016' (the Guidance) which the Act requires councils and the LGA to follow. Further guidance to clarify the requirements of the general duty to improve was issued by the Department during 2019.

The improvement audit and assessment work is planned and conducted in accordance with the Audit Strategy issued to the Council, the LGA's Code of Audit Practice for Local Government Bodies in Northern Ireland and the Statement of Responsibilities.

### *The improvement audit*

Each year the LGA 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 procedures conducted in undertaking this work are referred to as an "improvement audit". During the course of this work the LGA may make statutory recommendations under section 95 of the Act.

### *The improvement assessment*

The LGA also has to assess annually whether a council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act, including consideration of the arrangements to secure continuous improvement in that year. This is called the 'improvement assessment'. She also has the discretion to assess and report whether a council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

### *The annual improvement report on the Council*

The Act requires the LGA to summarise all of her work (in relation to her responsibilities under the Act) at the Council, in an 'annual improvement report'. This will be published on the NIAO website by 31 March 2026, making it publicly available.

### *Special inspections*

The LGA may also, in some circumstances, carry out special inspections which will be reported to the Council and the Department, and which she may publish.

### 3. Audit Findings

This section outlines key observations in the form of proposals for improvement, arising from following thematic areas of the Council’s audit and assessment:

- General duty to improve;
- Governance arrangements;
- Improvement objectives;
- Consultation;
- Improvement plan;
- Arrangements to improve
- Collection, use and publication of performance information; and
- Demonstrating a track record of 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. Proposals for improvement include matters which, if accepted, will assist the Council in meeting its performance improvement responsibilities. The LGA may follow up how key proposals have been addressed in subsequent years. We recommend however that the Council’s Audit Committee track progress on all proposals for improvement.

Our procedures were limited to those considered necessary for the effective performance of the audit and assessment. Therefore, the LGA’s observations should not be regarded as a comprehensive statement of all weaknesses which exist, or all improvements which could be made.

Detailed observations for the thematic areas can be found at Annex B.

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
Governance Arrangements	Internal Audit do not carry out any work on the Performance Improvement function there is therefore no data validation on figures within the Self-Assessment Report (SAR).	Performance Improvement should be seriously reconsidered as a subject for Internal Audit reporting. Although an external audit is completed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office this does not include data validation. An Internal Audit report would provide assurance over the integrity of the Council’s performance improvement framework as well as data validation over figures used in the SAR.

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
Demonstrating a track record of improvement	The Council has not met statutory planning indicators for the second year in a row. In the 2024-25 period all three indicators have demonstrated a downward trend.	Council should consider an in-depth analysis of its current planning system to see what action could be taken to improve average processing times (for major and local planning) and increase the percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks. This may require introducing a performance improvement objective with a focus on the planning function.

## **4. Annexes**

### **Annex A – Audit and Assessment Certificate**

#### **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 2024-25 and its improvement plan for 2025-26 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 2025-26 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 requirements of Part 12 of the Act.

### **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, informed by:

- a forward looking assessment of the Council's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and
- a retrospective assessment of whether the Council has achieved its planned improvements to inform a view as to its track record of improvement.

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 of 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 discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

In my opinion, the Council has demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement and I believe that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26.

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 years. I will keep the need for this under review.

## **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.



Colette Kane  
Local Government Auditor  
Northern Ireland Audit Office  
106 University Street  
BELFAST  
BT7 1EU  
29 November 2025

## Annex B – Detailed observations

Thematic area	Observations
General duty to improve	<p>Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) has demonstrated that it has adequate arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement in exercising its functions. A description of how the Council will discharge its duty as outlined in the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (the Act) [section 84(1)] has been included in the published Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for the 2025-26 period (section 3.1). The Council has provided further evidence in the PIP of existing arrangements in the form of the statutory performance indicators and standards (Appendix one) and the draft Corporate Plan indicators (Appendix two).</p> <p>The Council has chosen performance improvement objectives (PIOs) which clearly demonstrate a link to the seven aspects of improvement laid out in the Act. The three PIOs that have been selected for inclusion in the PIP 2025-26 are detailed in section 5 and under each is a sub-heading <i>'performance improvement aspects which this objective aims to deliver against'</i>. All three objectives are linked to all seven improvement aspects.</p> <p>There is a link in the PIP (section 5) between each PIO and the key strategic policies of the Council- evidenced under the sub-headings <i>'link to the community plan theme and outcomes'</i> and <i>'link to the corporate plan themes'</i>.</p> <p>The Council updated its Performance Improvement Policy in July 2025, and this is used to encourage and secure continuous improvement, defining it as an <i>"activity that enhances the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities"</i>. The policy contains a 'step approach' to managing performance which is outlined in the strategic planning framework (presented in diagram form within the</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>policy and narrative in the PIP, section 3.2) which shows how key policies and plans of the Council work together. The process for selecting functions is robust and reasonable. The PIP for 2025-26 marks the beginning of a new two-year performance cycle for the Council; of the three PIOs two are new (PIO 1 and 2) and one has evolved from prior year (PIO3). PIO3 has been amended to ensure progress continues in the area of climate and sustainability and that actions reflect the Council’s newly developed Sustainability Strategy and Climate Action Plan (2024-28).</p> <p>Council is active in engaging staff in performance improvement and have designed promotional bulletins that are available on the intranet making staff and elected members aware of performance improvement responsibilities, legislation and guidance available.</p> <p>The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2024-25 has been published by the statutory date and fulfils the Council’s general duty to improve in relation to improvement arrangements. The SAR provides figures and commentary on performance improvement objectives (section 5), statutory indicators (section 6) and self-imposed indicators and standards (section 7). There is an overall assessment for 2024-25 (section 8) which collates the performance for the period.</p>
Governance arrangements	<p>The performance improvement function within the Council falls within the Organisational Development, Strategy and Performance Directorate, comprising of a Corporate Performance and Quality Officer (CPQO) who reports to the Head of Strategic Services and Engagement who is in turn accountable to the Strategic Director of Organisational Development, Strategy and Performance. The CPQO is fully qualified to undertake the role, overseeing the development, monitoring and reporting of performance improvement objectives in an effective way. A proposal for improvement was made in the 2024-25 S95 report in relation to the isolated nature of the CPQO and lack of business continuity arrangements in place. At present there are no new members of staff</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p data-bbox="562 240 1944 312">in the performance improvement team. The CPQO has produced a 'How to Guide' for performance improvement activities in year to be used by staff should the need arise.</p> <p data-bbox="562 360 2007 699">There are adequate governance arrangements in place for the performance improvement function, and these continue to operate effectively. The performance improvement arrangements of the Council are affirmed in the PIP (section 2). The operational responsibility for the performance improvement function is maintained by the Policy and Resources committee who meet on a monthly basis. Members of senior management report to the committee on milestones and achievements throughout the performance improvement life cycle including consideration of proposed PIOs, consultation plans and the PIP; quarterly progress reports on final PIOs selected; and the self-assessment report.</p> <p data-bbox="562 746 1984 975">Oversight of the performance improvement function is carried out by Council's Audit Committee. The Audit Committee provides scrutiny over reports issued by the external auditor including the S95 report following the annual performance improvement audit. Full Council ratifies decisions from both the Policy and Resources Committee and the Audit Committee through the receipt of minutes and formal approval of the PIP formally after the consultation period.</p> <p data-bbox="562 1023 2007 1209">The Council Constitution (Part 2: Responsibility of Functions) covers the responsibilities and terms of reference for each committee. Performance improvement is under the remit of Policy and Resources and is a standing agenda item for meetings. Minutes have been provided that show key decision making, monitoring of progress and challenge; all are available publicly via the Council website.</p> <p data-bbox="562 1257 1984 1326">The chosen PIOs for the period all have a senior responsible officer (SRO) attached who has responsibility for collating data and updating an overall progress tracker held by the</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p data-bbox="562 240 1962 312">CPQO. The tracker is used to inform discussion on achievement and progress at senior leadership team (SLT) meetings.</p> <p data-bbox="562 357 2007 544">SLT are involved in drafting, developing and selecting PIOs. The selecting of objectives for the draft PIP used as part of the consultation is based upon a thorough understanding of the community served by Council, the economic environment and key Council policies. The CPQO acts as a liaison between staff in different service areas and drives PIO selection and reporting.</p> <p data-bbox="562 592 2007 895">We noted in the prior year S95 report that Internal Audit carry out no specific work on performance improvement, choosing instead to take assurance over the external audit of performance improvement. This continues to be the case. The work completed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) is focussed on whether Council meets its legislative requirements for performance improvement and we complete no data validation over figures that are used in the published SAR. We have made a proposal for improvement that Internal Audit should seriously consider an audit in the area of performance improvement to provide assurance over the data being used.</p> <p data-bbox="562 943 1995 1286">As part of our audit fieldwork, we select a sample of PIOs from the period to test, given the small number of PIOs (three) we carried out sample testing on all three. The sampling sought to assess whether PIOs are clear; realistic; have lines of accountability; are sufficiently scrutinised; risk assessed; and that identified issues are recorded and managed. From our review of all the PIOs there was evidence that the Council has clearly identified and outlined targets and these targets are realistic, with links to key Council policies (including the Community and Corporate Plans). There is demonstrable involvement by elected members and sufficient challenge. The sample testing provided assurance that Council objectives are adequately planned, managed and resourced.</p>

Thematic area	Observations
Improvement objectives	<p data-bbox="562 236 1995 432">For the PIP 2025-26 the Council has identified three PIOs against which it seeks to achieve improvement. One of these has been retained from prior year (PIO3) and the other two represent new areas for improvement. The inclusion of two new PIOs is in line with the information provided in the 2024-25 SAR which indicates that the objectives from the PIP in the period under review were substantially achieved.</p> <p data-bbox="562 472 1995 820">In drafting the proposed PIOs research was initially carried out by the CPQO who analysed Corporate Plan priorities, service plans and completed environmental scanning to determine potential objectives with a wide-ranging benefit to Council. The CPQO then met with the Head of Strategic Services and Engagement, the Strategic Director of Organisational Development, Strategy and Performance and the Chief Executive (CE) to discuss her draft PIOs (four initially). The CE reduced and amended the number of PIOs to ensure achievement (three carried forward). A position paper was then presented to the senior management team to discuss and consider. SROs from the prior year were consulted to provide feedback on the experience.</p> <p data-bbox="562 860 1995 1054">A workshop was held with participation from the senior management, assistant directors and heads of service to 'flesh out' the proposed objectives and determine how far reaching to make the actions associated with each. A draft performance improvement objectives document was prepared and presented to the Policy and Resources Committee who ratified it and circulated it for public consultation.</p> <p data-bbox="562 1094 1995 1209">The results of consultation show that all three PIOs received in excess of 82 per cent respondent support. The objectives were formally adopted by full Council as part of the approval of the PIP in June 2025.</p> <p data-bbox="562 1249 1995 1362">Each of these PIOs is clearly laid out in the PIP (section 5) in a way which shows the objective to be legitimate, clear, robust, deliverable and demonstrable. The objectives take in a wide selection of Council service areas and functions and can be seen to relate</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>to the improvement of these services for the benefit of citizens of the district. The objectives are presented in a format which answers the key questions; why chosen/ what we are going to do/what difference will it make/ how will we know.</p> <p>Within the published PIP each of the three PIOs is connected to all seven key improvement areas from the Act [section 85 (3)] under the sub-heading '<i>Performance Improvement Aspects which this improvement objective to deliver against?</i>' (section 5). The objectives are also aligned to themes and outcomes in the District Community Plan themes from the Corporate Plan (section 5).</p> <p>Progress continues to be tracked using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. More sophisticated software for performance improvement reporting is being considered by the Council. Reporting is done on a quarterly basis to SLT and the Policy and Resources Committee. The risks associated with the achievement of PIOs is tracked via the Corporate risk register which is a standing agenda item at each SLT meeting.</p>
Consultation	<p>The Council has complied with its statutory duty to consult on its general duty to improve and proposed improvement objectives for inclusion in the 2025-26 PIP. The consultation was a transparent exercise, and the Council has provided evidence of the process for audit fieldwork. The Council has seen an increase in public consultation responses, 41 compared to 28 in prior year.</p> <p>Public consultation on the draft PIP was undertaken between 28 February 2025 and 25 April 2025 (eight weeks). Council has a written consultation policy (last updated June 2023) and this has a suggested consultation timescale of 12 weeks but also states that "smaller scale, targeted consultation will not need this length of time" The consultation was made available and promoted through a range of methods, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• via social media channels;</li> </ul>

Thematic area	Observations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Council website;</li> <li>• a public survey, available in hard or electronic copy;</li> <li>• staff meetings held by assistant directors and heads of service;</li> <li>• promoted via the employee intranet;</li> <li>• Council e-zines; and</li> <li>• press release.</li> </ul> <p>Having received responses a consultation report was prepared and presented to the Policy and Resources Committee - indicating support of over 82 per cent for each of the three proposed objectives. The draft PIP was approved by full Council, the published version contains details on how to provide feedback.</p>
Improvement plan	<p>The published PIP for 2025-26 is fully compliant with the Act and subsequent Department for Communities (DfC) guidance.</p> <p>The PIP was ratified by full Council on 26 June 2025 and published on the Council website on 27 June 2025, within the deadline. The plan contains an outline of the three PIOs in a clear and concise way, breaking each one down into why/ what/ how terms. The document is available on the Council website and other formats are available upon request. Details of the strategic services and engagement team are provided including contact email address, contact phone number and physical address, feedback is encouraged.</p> <p>The PIOs are aligned to the key aspects of improvement from the Act and the Community and Corporate Plans. This provides a demonstrable contribution to the Council goal of improving the quality of life for all citizens. Details of the public consultation exercise and the results are provided (sections 2.2 and 2.3).</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>The PIP is transparent and contains sufficient detail for stakeholders regarding why the objective is considered necessary and what will be done to achieve it (section 5 under sub-heading '<i>why have we chosen this improvement objective</i>').</p> <p>The PIP further provides detail on the statutory performance indicators of the Council with sufficient description and disclosure of each of these (Appendix one). It also contains detail of draft Corporate Plan indicators (Appendix two).</p> <p>The information within the plan is easily understandable and alternative formats can be requested.</p>
Arrangements to improve	<p>The arrangements that the Council has in place to achieve improvement objectives and statutory indicators, and as a result comply with the general duty to improve legislation, are adequate.</p> <p>DfC guidance states the Council should be able to understand and demonstrate the impact of its arrangements for continuous improvement on the outcomes for citizens. The Council's obligations under legislation are outlined in the published PIP (section 3.1).</p> <p>The Council's indicators are supported by detailed actions of what, in the view of the Council, constitutes achievement. These are clearly laid out in a table format with a column addressing activity ('<i>what are we going to do?</i>') alongside the outcomes ('<i>what difference will it make</i>'). The attainment of the prescribed actions is monitored on a quarterly basis and narrative is included to give context to progress. Quarterly reports are sent to both the SLT and elected members to ensure there is sufficient challenge and, where deemed necessary, corrective action taken. The CPQO liaises with all departments and service areas within Council to maximise the success of the chosen objectives.</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>There are clear lines of accountability for each PIO which can be seen in the progress tracker. Any risks or issues that emerge are escalated to the Council’s Corporate risk register or can be flagged in Director completed assurance statements. When identified appropriate safeguards can then be implemented.</p>
<p>Collection, use and publication of performance information</p>	<p>The arrangements that the Council has in place for the collection, use and publication of data are sufficient. This is evidenced by the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) published by Council on its website by 30 September 2025. The SAR as a document is transparent and understandable. The SAR contains details on the progression and achievement of outcomes through a colour coded system. An overall assessment for the year is provided (section 8).</p> <p>The collection and use of information that is both timely and relevant is essential to ensure the operation of an effective performance management function. Only when prior performance has been measured can future performance be tracked and given context. The Council has developed new corporate health measures aligned to the updated corporate plan (2024-28). Council have noted that the recent introduction of these measures will not have established baselines for the current year (section 7.1).</p> <p>There are three types of information collected and these are presented in the SAR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance improvement objectives – projects (section 5);</li> <li>• statutory indicators and standards 2024 to 25 (section 6); and</li> <li>• benchmarking and self-imposed indicators and standards during 2024-25 (section 7).</li> </ul> <p>The SAR 2024-25 fulfils its legislative requirements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discharging its general duty to improve;</li> </ul>

Thematic area	Observations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussing the progress in attaining improvement objectives for the year alongside any issues or reasons where not fully attained;</li> <li>• referencing self-imposed and statutory performance indicators; and</li> <li>• meeting self-imposed and statutory indicators (four have not been met and reasoning has been provided).</li> </ul> <p>During the year an Internal Audit review of the 'Go Succeed' programme was carried out by Belfast City Council (BCC). BCC is responsible for collating the economic development figures for all Councils across NI. The figures are then used as the basis for the Department for the Economy's statutory indicator figures for Economic Development. The Internal Audit review identified that the figures relating to 189 business plan approvals (approximately 7.5 per cent of the total approvals for the year) are not reliable. Mid Ulster District Council's report did include a comment that the economic development statistics were not reliable.</p> <p>BCC is undertaking further work on these figures to assess whether some or all of the information can be included in the statistics for economic development.</p> <p>The SAR serves its key purpose of demonstrating to stakeholders and citizens how the Council discharges its legislative duties and communicates the progress and improvements made to functions and services. Where improvement has not been achieved there is sufficient analysis on what Council needs to do to improve.</p>
Demonstrating a track record of improvement	<p>The Council has reported on the achievement of all three sets of outcomes in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR).</p> <p><b>Performance Improvement Objectives - Projects</b></p> <p>There were four performance improvement objectives (PIOs) selected in the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for 2024-25. The Council has assessed these</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>objectives on a RAG system with five colours denoting various stages of achievement. The four PIOs were broken down into a total of 39 actions associated with their achievement. Of the 39 actions; 16 were blue, meaning fully achieved (41 per cent), 16 were green, meaning substantially achieved (41 per cent), six were peach, meaning partially achieved (15 per cent) and one was lilac, meaning re-prioritised (3 per cent). Notably no actions were not achieved (pink). These results indicate that considerable progress has been made in terms of achievement. The objectives have been suitably supported with a <i>'what we delivered'</i> narrative for each.</p> <p><b>Statutory Indicators</b></p> <p>The Council has assessed its statutory objectives using a combination of graphs and narrative information, with an arrow that demonstrates whether performance has improved, remained the same or declined. Only two out of seven indicators show an upwards trend from the prior year, three have declined, and the economic development indicator was not classified due to queries around the figures circulated.</p> <p>There are seven statutory indicators against which Council must report performance, of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one has been rated as green, or fully achieved (W1), the other two (W2 and W3), although not rated in the SAR, are achieved when judged against the previous standard which has yet to be replaced;</li> <li>• three are red, not achieved (P1, P2, P3); and</li> <li>• one not been rated due to verification issues, likely to be not achieved as the target of 153 was not met with actual promoted jobs figure at 99 (ED1) and is unlikely to change dramatically when verified.</li> </ul> <p>The Council has supplied additional narrative in respect of the queried indicator. The statutory indicator information has been provided with narrative and in a graphical form to illustrate performance relative to other councils in Northern Ireland.</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>The performance in year in planning is particularly disappointing. For the second consecutive year statutory indicators have not been met and are displaying a downward trend. This is concerning and we have raised a proposal for improvement to encourage Council to take action to avoid a repeat of this in the 2025-26 SAR.</p> <p><b>Self-imposed Indicators</b></p> <p>There are total of 55 identified key performance indicators which include the statutory indicators. Of the 55:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2/55 were complete (4 per cent);</li> <li>• 28/55 were on track/ achieved (51 per cent);</li> <li>• 3 were not achieved (5 per cent); and</li> <li>• 22/55 had no results or were establishing a baseline (40 per cent).</li> </ul> <p>We are cognisant of the fact that Council have increased the amount of KPIs being measured and may need time to establish baseline results. Improvement can still be seen in 55 per cent of KPIs.</p> <p>From the results available we can say that the Council has been able to demonstrate a track record of continuous improvement.</p>

## **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 2024-25 and its improvement plan for 2025-26 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 2025-26 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 requirements of Part 12 of the Act.

## **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, informed by:

- a forward-looking assessment of the Council's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and
- a retrospective assessment of whether the Council has achieved its planned improvements to inform a view as to its track record of improvement.

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 of 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 discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

In my opinion, the Council has demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement and I believe that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26.

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 years. I will keep the need for this under review.

## **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.



Colette Kane  
Local Government Auditor  
Northern Ireland Audit Office  
106 University Street  
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29 November 2025

<b>Report on</b>	Performance Update – Exception Overview: Context and Improvement Measures Q1 – Q3 2025/26
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2026
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	J Mc Guckin, Head of Strategic Services & Engagement
<b>Contact Officer</b>	L Jenkins, Corporate Performance & Quality Officer

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	The report provides members with a performance update, in relation to members queries/comments regarding exception reporting of some 'set for us' (Statutory – Planning, Economic Development) and 'set by us', i.e. self-imposed (Absence) performance indicators in Q1 – Q2 2025/26.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<b><u>The Statutory Framework for Performance Reporting</u></b> Under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, (the Act) councils are required to plan for and secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. This statutory duty provides the legal basis for performance reporting and the use of performance indicators: <i>Section 84</i> sets the general duty of improvement for councils to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. <i>Section 89</i> empowers the Department to specify performance indicators and performance standards by order, and councils must make arrangements to exercise their functions so that applicable performance standards are met.
2.2.	The Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 sets out statutory indicators and minimum standards, including in areas such as planning, economic development and waste management. <i>Section 90</i> requires councils to collect information to measure performance against statutory and self -imposed indicators (e.g. Absence). <i>Section 91</i> requires Councils to use this information to compare performance with previous years and, where reasonably practicable, with other councils, and to decide on steps for improvement. <i>Section 92</i> requires council to publish performance information/ assessments (such as Council's Annual Assessment report published by 30 <sup>th</sup> September each year), so performance is open, transparent and accessible.
2.3	Performance information and KPI's under the statutory framework are intended to support continuous improvement, transparency and accountability of council systems and processes, consistent with objectives set under the Act. There is

2.4	<p>also Guidance issued under this framework, Circular LG 21/2016 - Guidance for Performance Improvement 2016 onwards (Department for Communities). The Guidance is designed to assist Councils to meet performance improvement requirements set out in the Act. It emphasises that Councils must gather, assess and report performance data to demonstrate improvement in service delivery over time.</p> <p>During the January 2026 Policy and Resources committee meeting, there was some query/commentary, arising from some performance indicators, falling short of predefined standards as outlined in Councils Six Month Progress Update paper on the Council's Performance Improvement Plan and the associated Appendix Two - Statutory and Benchmark Performance Improvement Indicators, six-month report. The Head of Strategic Services and Engagement informed members that an additional report would be brought to the next committee, giving an overview of the context and improvement activity regarding the statutory and self-imposed indicators 'falling short of pre-defined standards', (to include statutory indicators regarding Planning, Economic Development- Jobs promoted and the 'self-imposed' indicator of Absence). The attached appendix one includes performance information/updates relating from Q1 to Q3 2025/26.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b><u>Interpreting Performance Indicators – Performance Update Exception Overview – Context and Improvement Measures (Appendix One).</u></b></p> <p>Key performance indicators (KPI's) such as the statutory indicators and standards relating to planning, jobs promoted and self-imposed indicator of absence are critical indicators of progress towards results. Appendix one to the attached report (Performance Update Exception Overview – context and improvement measures) contains many aspects relating to the KPI's context and interpretation. Firstly, at the bottom of each KPI template, it outlines the lead Officers managing, monitoring, reporting, and collating the KPI information and also outlines the 'purpose' of the and what its actually measuring.</p> <p>The overview, as outlined in Appendix one should be considered within the setting of the related KPI's, that is, numerical data (headline figures) must be understood in context via narrative or qualitative commentary, (such as operational challenges or policy changes affecting figures). The analysis provided under each KPI, within the appendix (the KPI reporting templates), in effect looks at contextual issues.</p> <p>The KPI templates, within the Appendix overview, also include comparison with others (e.g. benchmarking with other councils, our peers, where possible, data permitting, to look at potential issues) that might reflect local issues or wider sector trends, or sectoral averages. The KPI template overview also includes time series benchmarking (councils own data over time – historical trends which may identify patterns or seasonal effects etc) - through graphical representation of the KPI.</p>

	<p>Information is also considered as to why performance is up or down, using a 'direction of travel' arrow (signifies whether the measure is improving, declining or remaining stable by quarter). The KPI template can include context - such as service pressure and any external/ mitigating third party factors. This means in practice that even though the council reports on the KPI, it may not control every step needed to meet the standard. For example, delays can arise perhaps because applicants submit incomplete information, or statutory consultees respond late or require further information, creating bottlenecks in the process. With additional contextual information this then allows the KPI's to be read in a more dynamic way e.g. how today's inputs, early flags, affect tomorrows outputs and outcomes, as opposed to a single snapshot or number.</p> <p>KPI's that are red or amber, show emerging issues. Analysis is then provided in a narrative format, highlighting such issues as external pressures, or timing differences in data collection and verification (leading to lag times in validated data etc.). Officers highlight any root causes and in doing so include activities which endeavours to bring the standard 'back on track' that is improve the KPI (actions proposed to address issues) via the context and improvement activity section.</p> <p>The KPI templates in the overview, also highlights if a 'higher' number means 'better performance' or a 'lower' number means 'better performance'. The use of RAG reporting (Red, Amber, Green) is a quick visual summary; in brief green signifies performing as expected amber some concern or emerging risk and red, off target or requires attention. Red rating usually triggers questions (acts as a warning light) with understanding required of root causes, discussions on action to improve (as outlined in context and improvement activity sections).</p> <p>KPI's are utilised within the attached overview, in general as diagnostic tools to identify where attention is needed, such as where systems are under strain, understand where intervention or support is needed, test whether policies or resources are aligned with demand, and monitor that improvement activity is working. The attached overview provides broader review/explanation of current underperforming KPIs (as outlined in the report and associated appendix), and the overview is used to understand system performance and to inform improvement actions, with due regard to external dependencies and benchmarking where practicable.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial: N/A</p> <p>Human: N/A</p> <p>Risk Management: The data quality contained in the Mid Ulster District Council's Performance Update – context and improvement activities is provisional, as</p>

	unaudited “data” and is characterised as management information. All in-year results may be subject to later revision.
<b>4.2</b>	<b><u>Screening &amp; Impact Statements</u></b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	Members review the performance achieved, and assess progress and performance against the standards/targets and provide commentary as necessary.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	Appendix One – Performance Update Exception Overview – Context and Improvement Measures Q1 to Q3 2025/26.

**Mid Ulster District Council**

**Performance Update**

**Exception Overview – Context &  
Improvement Measures**

**Q1 to Q3 -2025 / 2026**

## Performance Measures 2025 to 2026 - Statutory & Corporate Performance Indicators

### Statutory Indicators – Set for Us

Under the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023\*, that is the statutory performance indicators and standards have been set as part of the performance improvement arrangements for district councils (i.e. set for us). Performance measures have been specified for the functions of: Economic development, Planning and Waste management.

The aim of the performance measures\* is to promote the improvement of service delivery. The information is currently collated by the Department for the Economy, Department for Infrastructure and DAERA (Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) respectively and published on their websites. Once released to Council, this information is published for citizens and other stakeholders to assess Council's performance in these areas. Until validated by the Departments aforementioned, data will remain as management information.

### Corporate Plan Performance Indicators – Set by Us

The new Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 has now been published. The current plan has a series of broad ranging performance measures\*. These measures, moving forward, will be reported through Policy & Resource committee by the Assistant Director of OD, Strategy and Performance. The Freedom Information measure, which previously would have appeared in this report, will now also be reported through Corporate Plan Performance Updates.

- *All measures are treated as management information (i.e. may be subject to change) until such times as data is validated (usually in lag terms that appears in the following financial year)*

### Benchmarking With Other Councils

Work is continuing within the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group on the development of an overarching regional benchmark framework for Northern Ireland Councils. Council currently benchmarks the statutory performance indicators and standards as well as the average Days Lost p.a. (shows the percentage of total time available that has been lost due to any type of absence during a certain time period). Prompt payments are also benchmarked (they speed up cash flow from the public sector to its suppliers, particularly SME's). Benchmark data appears where the information is available in this report and is contained in Council's Annual Performance Assessment Report. Data quality is a central part of the Council's operational business and performance management. Performance measures information is used every day across the Council to help inform management decisions, plan services, benchmark performance and cost, and inform target setting.

*\*\*This introduced modified performance metrics and replaced the former Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (NI) 2015. The key change was the Economic Development standard which reflects changing business environments.*

## Rag Status, Target Direction and Performance Trend – Colours, Symbols and Descriptors.

Table One – RAG Status and Descriptors

Status – Evaluated As	Explanation
<b>GREEN</b>	Met or exceeded target
<b>AMBER</b>	Missed target narrowly
<b>RED</b>	Missed Target Significantly
<b>PURPLE</b>	Information not available

Table Two – Target Direction

Target Direction	Descriptor
More Is Better	A bigger value for this measure is best
Less Is Better	A smaller value for this measure is best

Table Three - Performance Trend

Direction of Travel		
The direction of travel shows if performance has improved, declined, or been maintained relative to previous quarter.		
Performance Improved	Performance Remained Same	Performance Declined
↑	↔	↓

# STATUTORY INDICATOR & STANDARD Ref. No. ED1: - MORE IS BETTER

. \*New is 153 jobs promoted -NI Executive ratification into legislation), this will replace the current 210 jobs standard.

ED1: TIME SERIES GRAPH - The number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity from April 2016 to December 2025										Quarter	**Standard	Achieved	Trend	Status using*153
<p>No. of Jobs Promoted through Business Start-Up Activity April 2016 to December 2025</p>										Q3 2025/26	*153 jobs	46	↓	Yellow
										Q2 2025/26	*153 jobs	54	↑	Yellow
										Q1 2025/26	*153 jobs	20	↓	Red
										Q4 2024/25	*153 jobs	25.8	↔	Red
<p><b>ANALYSIS: MORE IS BETTER.</b>                      Belfast City Council (BCC lead council) reported activity by the Contractor (ENI) indicates mentoring activity has been near target Quarters One, two and three (est 200 Plans-120 Jobs). Due to a lag in submissions by ENI, BCC has yet to verify claim Nov&amp; Dec so figures for the Quarter end Dec 25 will not be available until Feb2026. The Contract Management Team (BCC) liaise regularly with the Contractor (ENI) to review performance. It is important to note that the mid-year figures for the current year 2025/26 show a marked uplift in the number of clients engaging, along with an increase in Plans completed for 2025/26. By 30 September 2025, 124 Business Plans had been completed (subject to verification), equating to 74 jobs which is almost 50% of the annual target of 153.</p> <p>Due to the lag time from the completion of Plans and the submission of ENI Claims to BCC, confirmed data and verification is not available for up to 3-4 months. Figures provided are from ENI 'Activity Reports', subject to BCC verification. BCC has initiated a plan for 'catch up' i.e. in addition to retrospective claims they are accepting current claims from ENI to expedite these. Therefore, the data in this report should be treated as management information, (estimates only) i.e. may be subject to change post verification. At 75% stage of related activity, that is in Quarter three – estimated data shows 78% of target is achieved (i.e. Management information may be subject to change).</p>														
Comparator (annual)	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025					
NI Councils Average	208	159	164	157	129	169	161	100	127					
<p><b>Lead Officer: Fiona Mc Keown Assistant Director Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes.</b> Purpose of Performance Indicator (PI): The number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity (Business start-up means the delivery of completed client led business plans under the Department of the Economy Regional Start Initiative or its successor Programme</p>														

**ED1:** - The number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity

## ANALYSIS

### Comparison with others and last year's same reporting period:

Estimated Q3 activity (to 31/12/25) is higher than Q3 in 2024.25 and generally on target (subject to verification from BCC) to meet the Statutory Jobs target. At 75% stage 78% of target is achieved. Mid Ulster is one of six Councils which did not meet its Statutory Target in 2024/25, and the figures should be noted in the following context: -The new 'Go Succeed' Service was still in the early stages of mobilisation from November 2023, which involved a new process of uploading /reporting data. The 'Jobs' figure is calculated from a formula agreed with the Department and is based on the number of Business Plans completed and approved, multiplied by 0.6 (formula informed by previous evaluations of start-up provision). The new Service has adopted a 'client-centred' approach which seeks to meet the broader needs of entrepreneurs, some of whom may not require a Business Plan and have received mentoring support only to progress their idea.

### Context and Improvement Activity

Belfast City Council (BCC) have been engaging with DfE on an ongoing basis to change the approach from reporting Statutory Performance Targets, to better align with the new Service provision, as DfE have acknowledged that this indicator (i.e. 'Plans') is no longer an accurate reflection of the support required by new start clients as it only reflects one output. -

BCC meets the Contractor (ENI) quarterly to review performance and identify issues, and BCC also facilitates local Council Quarterly meetings with the Local Enterprise Partners who present updates and outline their work in progress.

Council's Strategic Programmes Service Manager and Business and Investment Officer met with Managers and Advisors from the local delivery partners (Cookstown Enterprise Centre, Workspace Enterprises and Marketing NI Ltd) in relation to the 2024/25 figures on 9 September 2025 to review performance and also on 15 September 2025 regarding the CRM system for recording start-up mentoring activity and Business Plans delivered. A further follow-up meeting is planned to take place in early January 2026. Moving forward into Q4 and beyond Council Economic Development Team have scheduled meetings with the three delivery partners, ref. monitoring and managing performance and any issues arising regarding improvement activities.

**Lead Officer: Fiona Mc Keown Assistant Director Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes.** Purpose of Performance Indicator (PI): The number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity (Business start-up means the delivery of completed client led business plans under the Department of the Economy Regional Start Initiative or its successor Programme).

**STATUTORY INDICATOR & STANDARD Ref. No. P1: - LESS IS BETTER**

P1: TIME SERIES GRAPH - Major planning applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawn within an average of 30 weeks April 2016 to December 2025											Quarter	Standard	Achieved	Trend	Status																										
<p><b>P1 - Average Processing Time Major Applications Weeks - April 2016 to December 2025</b></p> <table border="1"> <caption>Key Data Points from Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Quarter</th> <th>Average Processing Time (Weeks)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Q1 16.17</td><td>~70</td></tr> <tr><td>Q3 16.17</td><td>~80</td></tr> <tr><td>Yr End 17.18</td><td>77.5</td></tr> <tr><td>Q1 18.19</td><td>135.6</td></tr> <tr><td>Q1 20.21</td><td>137</td></tr> <tr><td>Yr End 21.22</td><td>63.4</td></tr> <tr><td>Q4 21.22</td><td>~300</td></tr> <tr><td>Q1 22.23</td><td>93.4</td></tr> <tr><td>Yr End 23.24</td><td>68.1</td></tr> <tr><td>Q1 24.25</td><td>68.1</td></tr> <tr><td>Yr End 25.26</td><td>71.4</td></tr> <tr><td>Q3 25.26</td><td>45.9</td></tr> </tbody> </table>											Quarter	Average Processing Time (Weeks)	Q1 16.17	~70	Q3 16.17	~80	Yr End 17.18	77.5	Q1 18.19	135.6	Q1 20.21	137	Yr End 21.22	63.4	Q4 21.22	~300	Q1 22.23	93.4	Yr End 23.24	68.1	Q1 24.25	68.1	Yr End 25.26	71.4	Q3 25.26	45.9	Q3 2025/26	30 weeks	45.9 weeks	↑	
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Q2 2025/26	30 weeks	No majors issued	↓																																						
Q1 2025/26	30 weeks	75.2 weeks	↔																																						
Q4 2024/25	30 weeks	75.2 weeks	↓																																						
<p><b>ANALYSIS: LESS IS BETTER.</b>                      Unvalidated statistics show four *Major applications issued. One new major application was received this quarter meaning we have reduced total major cases by three</p> <p>What in effect does this mean?                      There have been an improvement over previous two reporting periods for this year. Twenty – nine Major applications now in the system to determine</p> <p><i>* Major Developments have important economic, social, and environmental implications. Most major applications are multiple housing, commercial, and government and civic types of development</i></p>																																									
Comparator (annual)	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025																																
NI Council Average	69 weeks	50 weeks	59 weeks	52.8 weeks	61.4 weeks	49.8 weeks	57.8 weeks	46.5 weeks	39.6 weeks																																
<p><b>Lead Officers: Karen Doyle &amp; Melvin Bowman – Planning Service Leads.</b> Purpose of PI: Planning Department deals with MAJOR Planning applications faster - [An application in the category of major development within the meaning of Planning (Development Management Regulations (NI) 2015(a)].</p>																																									

## **P1: Major planning applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawn within an average of 30 weeks**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **Comparison with others and last year's same reporting period and other councils:**

A total of 23 major planning applications were received in Northern Ireland during Q2 2025/26, down from the number received in the previous quarter (25) and the same period a year earlier. The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2025/26 (September end) was 34.0 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 30-week target but represents a decrease of nearly seven weeks from the average processing time reported for the same period a year earlier (40.9 weeks). The processing time within Mid Uster Council has improved from 62.9 weeks in quarter three in 2024 to 2025 to 45.9 weeks in quarter three 2025 to 2026.

#### **Context and Improvement Activity**

There are currently 29 Major applications in the system to determine. Overall numbers have reduced by 3 over the quarter as a result of issuing 3 cases and receiving 1 case. At Year to date for end of Q2 the Council has received 5 new Major applications, the joint second highest across all 11 Councils.

It should be noted that external delays by Consultees remains the single biggest reason as to why major applications processing times are failing to meet target, to the extent that, the Heads of Planning have written to NIEA on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2025, seeking a meeting and stating Councils are experiencing very significant delays with NED providing a consultation response to many applications, resulting in extended processing times against statutory KPIs for Local and Major planning applications. This is evidenced from the Statutory Consultations Quarterly Performance Report issued by DfI showing a steady decline in performance over the reported business year (Q1-Q3) and significantly impacting on major planning applications where only a staggering 37% of responses were received on time during Q1-Q2 of 2024/25.

Validation checklist - members have agreed at a workshop in Jan 2026 to proceed with a validation checklist which when implemented formally will improve the quality of and better front load applications when received. A 4-week consultation period with the agents is due to begin in coming weeks.

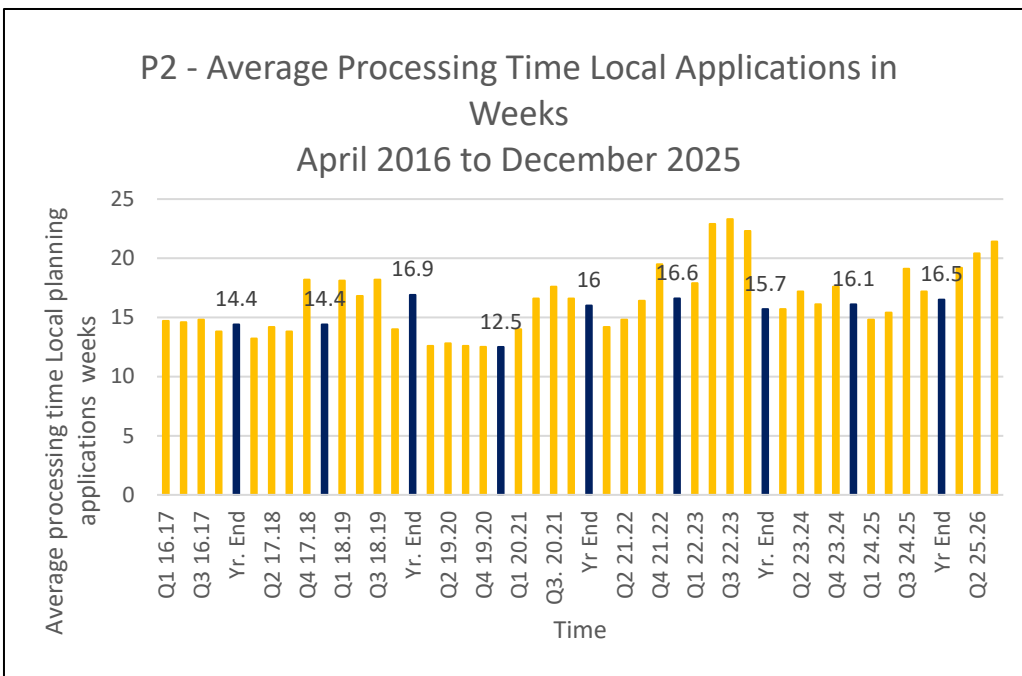
Members have agreed to delegate authority to officers to issue refusals of planning permission where information requests are not being met - this reduces unnecessary delay and allows a swift issuing of these where information has not been forthcoming. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2026, a meeting held with NIW, and party leads on industrial development Cookstown and overall lack of waster/ water capacity for all development in MUDC with an aim to better understand constraints and seek solutions. In January 2026 - NIW have provided more details to planning relating to water connection constraints on industrial lands outside Cookstown to help better inform and predict likely future issues with connections for industrial proposals there.

**Lead Officers: Karen Doyle & Melvin Bowman – Planning Service Leads.** Purpose of PI: Planning Department deals with MAJOR Planning applications faster - [An application in the category of major development within the meaning of Planning (Development Management Regulations (NI) 2015(a)].

**STATUTORY INDICATOR & STANDARD Ref. No. P2: - LESS IS BETTER**

**P2: TIME SERIES GRAPH - Average processing time of Local Planning Applications from date valid to decision or withdrawn within an average of 15 weeks from April 2016 to December 2025**

Quarter	Standard	Achieved	Trend	Status
Q3 2025/26	15 weeks	21.4 weeks	↓	
Q2 2025/26	15 weeks	20.4 weeks	↓	
Q1 2025/26	15 weeks	19.2 weeks	↓	
Q4 2024/25	15 weeks	17.2 weeks	↑	



**ANALYSIS: LESS IS BETTER.**  
 Although performance continued to slow in October it did improve in both November and December. In Q3, 259 applications were received, and 256 decisions were issued. Year To Date (YTD) performance currently sits at 21.4 weeks. In Q3 39% (i.e. 29) of the 75 applications that were presented for the first time before the Planning Committee were deferred. In Q3 40% (i.e. 10) of the 25 deferred applications that were presented before the Planning Committee were deferred for at least a second time. At the end of Q3 we were carrying a total of 235 deferred planning applications. Official figures published at the end of Q3 (but excluding Q3) show MUDC to have received the 3rd highest number of local applications but yet we have issued the 2nd highest number of decisions for local applications and continue to issue the highest rate of approvals of all Local Authorities.

Comparator (annual)	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
<b>NI Council Average</b>	16.2 weeks	15.2 weeks	14.8 weeks	14.0 weeks	17.8 weeks	17.2 weeks	19 weeks	20.8 weeks	19 weeks

**What does this mean:** It is clear the statutory target will not be met for 25/26 on local planning applications. Pleasingly though we continue to issue more decisions than applications received for YTD which is key to improving performance. It is a challenge to continue to carry an increasing number of deferred applications, and should this number continue to increase it will hamper performance on delegated planning applications.

**Lead Officers: – Karen Doyle & Melvin Bowman Planning Service Leads.** Purpose of PI. Planning Department deal with LOCAL Planning applications faster - Local applications means an application in the category of local development within the meaning of the (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).

## STATUTORY INDICATOR & STANDARD Ref. No. P2: - LESS IS BETTER

**P2: - Average processing time of Local Planning Applications from date valid to decision or withdrawn within an average of 15 weeks**

### ANALYSIS

#### Comparison with others and last year's same reporting period:

Average processing times has continued to slow in comparison to last year from 16.4 wks. to 21.4 wks. Contrary to comparable period last year we have issued more decisions than applications received which is encouraging. The official published figures from DfI in December 2025 (which again excludes Q3) we can see that for the same reporting period we received the second highest number of planning applications (now 3rd highest), we were 3rd highest in the number of applications decided (now 2nd highest) and we continue to issue the highest rate of approvals of all Local Authorities and this remains unchanged.

#### Context and Improvement Activity

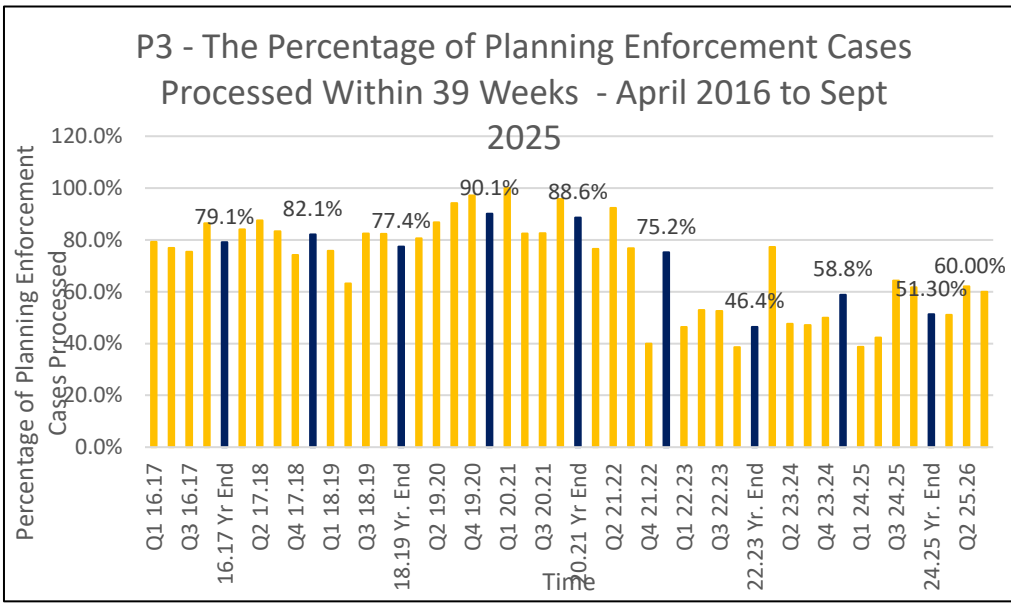
The Scheme of Delegation is under review and DfI have been informed that refusals can be issued under the Scheme in December. An information session is being arranged in November to inform agents of the amended Scheme and to advise on the introduction of Validation Checklists in February 2026. Members were agreed that a specific workshop on the Validation Checklist should be arranged with Service Leads in January 2025. An officer was appointed on a temporary promotion in November 2025 to address the considerable deferred application list. The substantive post has not been backfilled so this may have consequences for the remaining case officers to process the local applications in a timely fashion. However, their appointment will allow both the Principal Planning Officers for Magherafelt and Dungannon to work closely with their teams and focus on processing the local applications as expeditiously as possible.

**Lead Officers: – Karen Doyle & Melvin Bowman Planning Service Leads.** Purpose of PI. Planning Department deal with LOCAL Planning applications faster - Local applications means an application in the category of local development within the meaning of the (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).

**STATUTORY INDICATOR & STANDARD Ref. No. P3: - MORE IS BETTER**

**P3: TIME SERIES GRAPH – Percentage of Planning Enforcement Cases Processed within 39 weeks from April 2016 to December 2025**

Quarter	Standard	Achieved	Trend	Status
Q3 2025/26	70%	60.2%	↓	
Q2 2025/26	70%	62.0%	↑	
Q1 2025/26	70%	51.1 %	↓	
Q4 2024/25	70%	61.7 %	↑	



**ANALYSIS: MORE IS BETTER.**

The percentage of cases closed this quarter (unvalidated) is 60.2%, therefore short of 70% target, with a slight decrease from 64.3% last year (same Q3

What does this mean:

Whilst we closed 128 cases - Year To Date (YTD) that working through a high number of planning appeals and hearing, and serving a high number of notices at the end of 2025 has had an effect.

Comparator (annual)	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
NI Council Average	80.7 %	77 %	81 %	81.4 %	69.9 %	70.4 %	74.2 %	76.4 %	70.7 %

**Lead Officers: Karen Doyle & Melvin Bowman Planning Service Leads.** Purpose of PI: Planning Department bring more enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks. Enforcement cases are investigations into alleged breaches of planning control under Part 5 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 (or under any orders or regulations made under the Act.

### **P3 - Percentage of Planning Enforcement Cases Processed within 39 weeks**

#### **ANALYSIS**

##### **Comparison with others and last year's same reporting period:**

The number of enforcement cases opened in Northern Ireland during the second quarter of 2025/26 was 846; down by 8.6% over the quarter (926) and up by 35.6% when compared to the same period a year earlier (624). The number of cases closed during Q2 2025/26 was 570; down by 7.8% from the previous quarter (618) and down by 14.8% from the same period a year earlier (669). Across councils 75.1% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first six months of 2025/26, meeting the 70% target. This represents an increase from the rate recorded for the same period in 2024/25 (68.4%). Individually, six of the 11 councils were meeting the 70% target after the first six months of 2025/26.

##### **Context and Improvement Activity**

The closure of 128 cases is a strong performance, at end Quarter Two we were 7th amongst all Councils in relation to cases closed, 91 at that time. A high number of Notices were issued this quarter to address impending immunity risks as well as the team successfully defending enforcement appeals. There is an ongoing focus on monthly group meetings to increase closures towards target.

**Lead Officers: Karen Doyle & Melvin Bowman Planning Service Leads.** Purpose of PI: Planning Department bring more enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks. Enforcement cases are investigations into alleged breaches of planning control under Part 5 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 (or under any orders or regulations made under the Act).

**STATUTORY INDICATOR & STANDARD Ref. No. CORP 03: - LESS IS BETTER**

CORP 03: TIME SERIES GRAPH - Lost time Rate (LTR) Absence of 5% or less from April 2016 to December 2025									Quarter	Standard	Achieved	Trend	Status
									Q3 2025/26	=>5%	7.62%	↑	Red
									Q2 2025/26	=>5%	7.04%	↓	Red
									Q1 2025/26	=>5%	5.71%	↑	Yellow
									Q4 2025/26	=>5%	7.46%	↓	Red
<p><b>ANALYSIS: LESS IS BETTER</b></p> <p>The current percentage loss rate for Q3 is 7.62% which totals 3,474.50 days lost, this has increased slightly compared to Q2 - 7.04%. However, it has increased significantly compared to Q3 24/25 - 6.79%.</p> <p><b>What does this mean:</b></p> <p>The top three reasons of sickness for this period are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Musculoskeletal Problems - 22.42% - 779 days lost</li> <li>Stress, depression and fatigue syndrome – 17.04% - 592 days lost</li> <li>Chest and respiratory – 12.10% - 420.5 days lost</li> </ol> <p>Musculo-skeletal is currently the highest cause of sickness absence (Q3) with 22.42% this has reduced slightly from 23.98% in Q2.</p> <p>Stress and depression related absences remains consistent, and we continue to provide the relevant support services when required.</p> <p>The most notable change in absence is the increase in “Chest and Respiratory” this accounted for 420.5 days and 54 incidents in Quarter Three.</p>													
<b>Comparator (annual)</b>	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24					
<b>NI Council Average</b>	Not Available (NA)	NA	NA	6.46%	4.79%	NA	NA	NA					
<p><b>Lead Officer: M Canavan Strategic Director OD, Strategy &amp; Performance</b> - Purpose of PI: Lost Time Rate (LTR) shows the % of total time available that has been lost due to sickness absence during a certain time period. The indicator is based on full time equivalent (FTE) employees, useful as a general measure of the significance of sickness absence levels</p>													

## CORP 03: Lost time Rate (LTR) Absence of 5% or less

### ANALYSIS

#### Comparison with others and last year's same reporting period:

For the same period in Q3 in 2024/25 Chest and respiratory only accounted for 276.5 days and 9.12%. This increase seems to be due to a spike in "severe chest infections" this could be considered seasonal. The Local Govt. Audit report published 11/12/2025, stated that absence figures for 2024/25 of all 11 councils was still not available (benchmark data is in days lost as opposed to %LTR). LGA did state that in 2023.24 the average number of days absence per councils staff member across all 11 Councils was 17.1 days, the lowest was Fermanagh and Omagh with 12.3 days, MUDC was second lowest with 13.2 days and Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest with 23.9 days. In 2024/25 MUDC had risen to 15.3 days and to date 12.17 days by Q3 end.

#### Context and Improvement Activity

The HR Team will continue to work closely with the managers to monitor absence levels and provide help and support to both managers and staff. As outlined in our commentary, Chest & respiratory accounted towards Q3 sickness absence statistics; Based on Public Health Agency health reports as of late 2025/early 2026, there was a significant surge in respiratory illnesses across NI during the 2025/2026 winter season. Official figures described the situation as an "epidemic" in early December 2025, with confirmed flu cases among adults and children more than trebling in a two-week period. The Council continues to promote to its Staff that they can recoup up to £20.00 towards the cost of the flu vaccine given by a community pharmacy.

Musculo-skeletal related sickness absence also continues to contribute to a high percentage of our sickness absence. Musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders are identified through research data as a leading cause of workplace sickness absence, with prevalence and associated time off work increasing significantly with age (i.e. the annual risk of long-term sickness absence). Data indicates that the annual risk of long-term sickness absence due to MSK disorders rises from 3.7% in women under 30 to 11.3% in those 50 and older, with similar trends in men. Occupational absence) e.g., heavy manual work is identified as a key risk factor and driver of MSK disorders, and within MUDC we have a significant workforce required to fulfil heavy manual work, with statistics that evidence the average age of our Environment Directorate workforce (approx. 330 employees) to be 52years of age. Preventive and management strategies include workforce adjustments, which we actively promote, through seeking suitable alternative employment, a period of amended or lighter duties, reduced hours etc.

The third constant high contributor towards the Council's sickness absence figures is stress and depression related absences. The Council has invested in an increased range of support services available to employees, to promote early interventions. Such support services are also available via the Council's website:

<https://www.midulstercouncil.org/resident/health-wellbeing/mental-health-support-services>. Human Resources Team, in conjunction with Communications Dept have developed a Health and Wellbeing Strategy which will include a yearly calendar of Health and Wellbeing Events which we aim to launch in February 2026. As part of this strategy and launch we will be looking for more health and wellbeing group members and representation across the various Council departments to help deliver both on the strategy and the various events/initiatives organised. In the absence of a Strategy, the Health & Wellbeing team have initiated and delivered on a range of events, which have all been well received and supported by our staff. During October to December 2025, these included: Mental Health Awareness Sessions for operational staff, Information sessions on Recognising Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control, Cancer Focus Health Checks, Financial Wellbeing sessions, Women's Health Event, Staff Christmas and Breakfast Events.

**Lead Officer: M Canavan Strategic Director OD, Strategy & Performance** - Purpose of PI: Lost Time Rate (LTR) shows the % of total time available that has been lost due to sickness absence during a certain time period. The indicator is based on full time equivalent (FTE) employees, useful as a general measure of the significance of sickness absence levels

