

January 10th, 2025

**NOTICE OF MEETING**

You are requested to attend a meeting of the

Mid and East Antrim Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee

to be held on **Monday, 13th January 2025 at 6:30 pm** in **Council Chamber, The Braid, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena and via remote access.**

Yours sincerely



Valerie Watts  
Interim Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

# Agenda

## 1 NOTICE OF MEETING

## 2 APOLOGIES

## 3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members and Officers are invited to declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, including gifts and hospitality, they may have in respect of items on this Agenda.

## 4 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION

### 4.1 Policy Briefing - circulated

- [\*Policy Briefing - CRPG Jan 2025.pdf\*](#) *Page 1*
  
- [\*Appendix 1 Consultation Summary Report.pdf\*](#) *Page 4*
  
- [\*Appendix 2a ICO Consultation.pdf\*](#) *Page 6*
  
- [\*Appendix 2b Proposed Response.pdf\*](#) *Page 9*

### 4.2 Events Update and Review of Autumn Events - circulated

- [\*Events update and review of Autumn Events.pdf\*](#) *Page 11*
  
- [\*Appendix 1 Photos of Halloween Events 2024.pdf\*](#) *Page 16*
  
- [\*Appendix 2 Photos of Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024.pdf\*](#) *Page 21*

### 4.3 NIAO Performance Audit and Assessment 2024-25 - circulated

- [\*NIAO Performance Audit & Assessment 2024-25 CRPG.pdf\*](#) *Page 26*
  
- [\*Appendix 1 MEA Perf Assessment 2024-25 Cert Cover Letter.pdf\*](#) *Page 28*
  
- [\*Appendix 2 MEA Audit Certificate 2024-25.pdf\*](#) *Page 29*
  
- [\*Appendix 3 MEA Final S95 Report 2024-25.pdf\*](#) *Page 31*

### 4.4 Approved Notices of Motion January – December 2024 - circulated

- [\*Approved Notices of Motion January - December 2024.pdf\*](#) *Page 55*

#### 4.5 Sickness Absence Scrutiny Review - circulated

Recommendations from Scrutiny Review - Sickness Absence.pdf

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Appendix 1 - A&S - Scrutiny Review - Sickness Absence.pdf

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Appendix 2 - Recommendations.pdf

Page 69

#### 4.6 Diversity Ambassador Network - circulated

Diversity Ambassador Network.pdf

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Appendix 1 - Diversity Ambassador Network Terms of Reference.pdf

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### 5 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

### 6 TABLED QUESTIONS

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*Closed Committee - In accordance with Council policy, representatives of the Press will not be in attendance for this section of the Meeting.*

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### 7 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION – CLOSED COMMITTEE

#### 7.1 Procurement Update - circulated

Procurement Update - Corporate Resources Policy and Governance Committee - 13012025 Mh.pdf

Not included

#### 7.2 Quarterly Budget Monitoring – Q2 - circulated

Quarter 2 ended September 24 Management Accounts.pdf

Not included

Appendix 1 - CRPG P6 Sept 24 Management Accounts.pdf

Not included

### 8 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – CLOSED COMMITTEE

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*Open Committee*

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### 9 FORWARD PLAN FOR CORPORATE RESOURCES, POLICY & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - circulated

CRPG Forward Plan - Jan 2025.pdf

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**Council/ Committee:** Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee  
**Date:** 13 January 2025

**Report Title:** Policy Briefing

**Publication Status:** Open  
**Author:** Sarah Williams, Assistant Director – Business Services  
**Approver:** Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members in respect of matters that fall within the remit of the Policy Team.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. Within the Corporate and Support Services directorate, the Policy team is responsible for managing Council's responsibilities in relation to information governance (Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection/UK GDPR), complaints, public consultations, equality & diversity and rural needs.
- 2.2. Policies and guidance for Elected Members are available in the 'Policies' section of MinutePad.

## 3. Key Issues for Consideration

### 3.1. Public Consultations

Public consultations published by the NI Executive are centrally registered by the Policy team and considered by the relevant service areas, with responses drafted to those that are relevant to Council and/or the Borough. Draft consultation responses are submitted to the most relevant Committee for Elected Members to review and approve the response prior to submission.

A summary of these consultations is produced to the Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee each month. This month's consultation summary is set out in Appendix 1.

- 3.2 A proposed response to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) consultation on the revised approach to public sector regulation is attached at Appendix 2, together with the consultation document to provide context. This consultation focuses on the ICO's review of their two-year trial of a revised approach to working more effectively with public authorities across the UK.

### 3.3 Information Governance

A programme of work has been designed to ensure Council's compliance in all areas of information governance. The redesign of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate will support the team in taking forward this significant programme of change.

An Information Governance Framework was approved by the CRPG Committee on 4 December 2024. A training programme for staff and which will also include elected members is currently being rolled out. The Bi-Annual Information Governance Performance Report will be brought to the committee meeting in April 2025.

### 3.4 Complaints

Council implemented NIPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure from 1st January 2024. A summary of Council's complaints data is reported quarterly to CRPG and published annually at each year end. The report for Q2 was presented at the December meeting and Q3 will be presented at the February 2025 meeting.

### 3.5 Equality & Diversity and Rural Needs

Council's internal EDI Network of officers continues to meet quarterly and report on the progress of Council's Disability Action Plan and Equality Scheme to the Inclusion & Equality Sub-Committee. The Policy team sends an update report on equality and diversity to CRPG twice per year.

Council has commenced publishing its equality screenings and rural needs impact assessments on its website in line with best practice, to ensure transparency and accountability.

### 3.6 Training Modules

As noted above, the Policy team launched a new programme of 10 training modules on 10 December 2024.

The aim of the training is to provide staff with the appropriate tools to carry out their responsibilities in handling data lawfully and in compliance with council policies and procedures as well as how to manage complaints and fulfil Council's screening obligations.

## 4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1 Responding to relevant public consultations is necessary for Council to publicly demonstrate its policy position and work towards achieving optimum outcomes on behalf of the residents of the Borough.

- 4.2 The training modules will assist Council in achieving its information governance, complaint handling and screening obligations which in turn will minimise any associated risk.

**5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1. N/A

**6. Recommendation or Decision**

It is recommended that Elected Members:

- (i) Note the Public Consultation summary report at Appendix 1.
- (ii) Review and approve the proposed consultation response to ICO's consultation on the revised approach to public sector regulation.

**7. Appendices / Links**

- Appendix 1 Consultation Summary Report
- Appendix 2a ICO's revised approach to public section regulation
- Appendix 2b Council's proposed consultation response



## Consultation Register Summary Report Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee

13<sup>th</sup> January 2025

### A. Consultations where Council is the stakeholder

<b>Consultations for Response by MEABC</b>		
<b>Title and Closing Date</b>	<b>Consulting Department/Organisation</b>	<b>Proposed Dept and Committee</b>
Consultation on Repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824 and the Vagrancy (IRELAND) Act 1847  Deadline: 21/01/2025	Department of Justice	Head of Public Protection, Health and Wellbeing  Neighbourhoods & Communities Committee  14 <sup>th</sup> January 2025
Corporate Plan 2025-2030 Consultation  Deadline: 03/03/2025	Northern Ireland Policing Board	Community Planning & Development  TBC
Using Biofuels to Transition Away from Fossil Fuels for Heating  Deadline: 04/03/2025	Department for the Economy	Facility Management & Maintenance  TBC
Consultation on policy changes to the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Scheme  Deadline: 02/03/2025	Department for Communities	Community Planning & Development to review  TBC
Consultation on a new Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland  Deadline: 06/03/2025	Department for Communities	Head of Public Protection, Health and Wellbeing  TBC
Review of Trust Ports	Department for Infrastructure	Regeneration & Strategic Projects to review



Deadline: 10/03/2025		TBC
Private Member's Bill on improving tree protections in Northern Ireland		Regeneration & Strategic Projects to review
Deadline: 06/03/2025		TBC
ICO consultation on the revised approach to public sector regulation	Information Commissioner's Office	Policy Team Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee
Deadline: 31/01/2025		13 <sup>th</sup> January 2025

## **B. Consultations being conducted by Council**

Title	Consulting Department	Comments/Link to Consultation Documents
Trees & Woodland Consultation  Deadline: 31/01/2025	Parks and Open Spaces	We are currently developing a Tree and Woodland Strategy, and as part of the consultation process are seeking the views of staff and Elected Members through a number of channels, such as workshops and a questionnaire.  <a href="https://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/council/policies-and-documents/consultations">https://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/council/policies-and-documents/consultations</a>



# ICO consultation on the revised approach to public sector regulation

Consultation Start Date

**05 December 2024**

Type

**ICO consultation, Open**

**This consultation closes on 31 January 2025;**

In June 2022, the Information Commissioner [published an open letter to public sector leaders](#), where he announced a two-year trial of a revised approach to working more effectively with public authorities across the UK.

We refer to this as the 'public sector approach', which saw the use of the Commissioner's discretion to reduce the impact of fines on public bodies and aimed at improving data protection standards in this sector through guidance and proactive engagement.

We reviewed the two-year trial and [published our findings report](#), which presents evidence on impact and learning from the trial to inform our future decisions on regulating public sector organisations. The review also identified that the scope and parameters of the public sector approach could be articulated more clearly.

Based on the findings, we are now inviting all stakeholders who may have an interest in our approach to help inform some proposed updates to the public sector approach.

In the meantime, we will continue to apply the approach outlined by the Commissioner in his June 2022 open letter.

## Proposed updates to the public sector approach

[The Commissioner intends to continue with the public sector approach as a standard part of our overall regulatory approach](#). Although the aims of the approach remain the same, we intend to adjust it in line with the learnings from the trial period and the responses and input received from this consultation.

We want to provide greater clarity to organisations on how the public sector approach should be applied, and we have identified two areas where stakeholders have asked for further guidance. We are seeking views on:



## 1) Organisations in scope of the public sector approach

We recognise that the term 'public sector' is broad in scope and is open to interpretation. To provide certainty to organisations in understanding if they fall under the scope of the public sector approach, we will use the definition of 'public authorities' and 'public bodies' under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018).

We also recognise that there are organisations in the wider not-for-profit sector, such as charities and social enterprises, and other public bodies such as parish councils, which are not public authorities for the purposes of the DPA 2018 but that services might be similarly impacted by a fine. Our [Data Protection Fining Guidance](#) explains how we take these factors into account when setting an appropriate fine.

## 2) Circumstances that will lead to a fine under the public sector approach

We will only issue a fine to a public authority in the most egregious cases, that is where the infringements are especially serious.

Our [Data Protection Fining Guidance](#) sets out the legal framework and explains how we decide to issue penalties and calculate fines. This includes whether the imposition of a fine would be effective, proportionate and dissuasive; the nature and gravity of the infringement, including any actual or potential harm suffered by the victims of the infringement; and any mitigating actions taken by the organisation to limit damage suffered by people. This assessment takes into account whether the controller or processor is a public authority.

If the Commissioner decides to issue a monetary penalty notice, the fine amount will be calculated by applying the [five-step approach set out in the guidance](#). In particular, the fact an organisation is a public authority is relevant to the assessment of the nature of the processing, to the maximum amount of the fine, and to the financial position used to assess the fine's starting point. Taking into account these considerations ensure a consistent approach for public authorities.

When considering whether, in all the circumstances of a case, the infringement by a public authority is egregious and warrants a fine, the Commissioner will take into account the seriousness of the infringements, any relevant aggravating or mitigating factors, as well as the overarching requirement to ensure the fine is effective, proportionate and dissuasive.

While not intended to be an exhaustive list, the following may be illustrative of the types of cases which would be considered to be egregious:

- **Actual or potential harm to people:** this could be physical or bodily harm, psychological harm, economic or financial harm, discrimination, reputational harm or loss of human dignity. For example, evidence of:
  - a high risk of actual or potential harm to affected people or their family members, including a threat to life following a data breach;

- actual or potential distress or loss of dignity as a result of illegal monitoring of people; and
- actual or potential discrimination or bias arising from automated decision-making.
- **Intentional or negligence character of the infringement**, where there is evidence of intent on the part of the controller or a high degree of negligence; and
- **Relevant previous infringements, or recent infringements, by the controller or processor.**

Where the Commissioner is satisfied that an infringement by a public authority is egregious and therefore it warrants the imposition of a fine to a public authority, the fine will be calculated using the Data Protection Fining Guidance while ensuring the level of the fine is consistent with the public sector approach.

## Consultation

We are consulting on the above updates, as well as on the application and effect of the public sector approach to date, to inform and finalise our approach.

In particular, we want to hear views on:

- the definition of those organisations that will fall within scope of the public sector approach; and
- the circumstances of an infringement that is likely to be regarded as egregious, leading to the issuing of a fine to a public authority.

[Please respond to this consultation using this online survey](#)  by **31 January 2025**.

Following the consultation, we will publish our final public sector approach posture.

## Privacy statement

For this consultation we may publish a summary of the responses but will remove any personal data before publication. We will not publish responses from individuals. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our [privacy notice](#).



# ICO consultation on the revised approach to public sector regulation

## Your opinion on the public sector approach

Please respond to our questions in conjunction with our more [detailed consultation information](#)

We propose to use the definition of 'public authorities' and 'public bodies' under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) to describe organisations that fall under the scope of the public sector approach. **Do you agree with this scope?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If no or don't know, please explain the reason for your answer or provide suggestions as appropriate.

N/A

We propose to only issue a fine to a public authority in the most egregious cases, that is where the infringements are especially serious. While not intended to be an exhaustive list, the following may be illustrative of the types of cases which would be considered to be egregious:

- Actual or potential harm to people: this could be physical or bodily harm, psychological harm, economic or financial harm, discrimination, reputational harm or loss of human dignity. For example, evidence of a high risk of actual or potential harm to affected people or their family members, including a threat to life following a data breach; actual or potential distress or loss of dignity as a result of illegal monitoring of people; and actual or potential discrimination or bias arising from automated decision-making.
- Intentional or negligence character of the infringement, where there is evidence of intent on the part of the controller or a high degree of negligence; and
- Relevant previous infringements, or recent infringements, by the controller or processor.

Do you agree with the above circumstances that could lead to a fine under the public sector approach?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Please explain the reason for your answer or provide suggestions as appropriate.

N/A

If you would like to share any other comments or suggestions on the proposed updates to our public sector approach, please use the text box below.  
Are you answering as:

- A public sector organisation
- A private sector organisation
- A civil society organisation
- An individual
- Other (please specify):

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please specify the name of your organisation (optional):

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

We may wish to contact you for further information on your responses. If you are happy to be contacted please provide an email address below.

[Policy@midandeantrim.gov.uk](mailto:Policy@midandeantrim.gov.uk)



<b>Council/Committee:</b>	<b>Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee</b>
<b>Date:</b>	13 January 2025
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Events update and review of Autumn Events</b>
<b>Publication Status:</b>	Open
<b>Author:</b>	Laura Cowan, Strategic Tourism and Regeneration Manager
<b>Approver:</b>	Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report is to provide Members with a review of Autumn events including Halloween and Christmas activity and to outline the planned event on St Patrick's Day 2025.
- 1.2 Approval is also being sought to amend the Events sub committee and sponsor committee terms of reference to take account of the recent Corporate Services Directorate restructure.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Events Team delivers a calendar of large scale events across the Borough to benefit residents and visitors, providing accessible leisure activities and generating economic spend.
- 2.2. The delivery of corporate and civic events underpins Council's leadership role within the community. Events are budgeted and planned from the start of the financial year.
- 2.3. As part of the restructure of the Corporate Services Directorate, the Events Team have moved to the Tourism, Arts and Culture Team within the Development Directorate, effective from 1 November 2024.
- 2.4. A new Events sub committee has been established; the first meeting of the sub committee is scheduled for 28 January 2025.
- 2.5. An Events policy for Council was presented to and approved by the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee in April 2024.
- 2.6. At the same committee Members approved the introduction of limited charging for admission tickets at some events to cap the numbers of people at each venue.



- 2.7. Members have also called for more sensory play activities and quiet times at larger events to meet the needs of attendees with sensory issues.

### **3. Key Issues for Consideration**

#### **3.1. Implications of Corporate Services Directorate restructure**

- 3.1.1 In line with the recent restructure meaning Events now fall within the remit of the Tourism, Arts and Culture Team within the Development Directorate, it is deemed appropriate for the events team to report to the Neighbourhoods and Communities Committee rather than the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee.
- 3.1.2 The Terms of Reference for both the Events sub committee and sponsor committees need to be amended to reflect the change in reporting lines.

#### **3.2 Halloween 2024**

- 3.2.1 The Events Team delivered three large Halloween events on consecutive nights with 10,500 people attending. The programmes contained specially commissioned theatre pieces, light installations, live music, walkabout acts, kids disco, fire acts and fireworks. Customer surveys were conducted for each event.
- 3.2.2 **Larne Halloween Hooley**  
Hosted 3000 people in Town Park and saw the first fireworks display in the town for many years. 100% of those surveyed said the event was "excellent" or "very good", while 94% of those with accessibility needs said the event met their requirements.
- 3.2.3 **Hallowena in People's Park in Ballymena**  
Hosted 6000 people with 78% of those surveyed rating the event as "excellent" or "very good". This was the first year the event was ticketed to cap the attendance figures which was overwhelmingly welcomed by attendees. In previous years the event has suffered from overcrowding and poor navigation. The event sold out in under a week and the Events Team received only one complaint about the decision to charge admission. 80% of attendees with mobility issues were content with the accessibility of the venue. Delays with queuing at the entrances will be dealt with next year. The additional ticket income allowed the Team to invest in more entertainment and sensory play for the event.
- 3.2.4 **CarrickFERGUS in Shaftesbury Park, Carrickfergus**  
Sold out its 1500 tickets and was rated "excellent" or "very good" by 77% of those attending. 96% of those with mobility issues were content with the accessibility of the event.



- 3.2.5 The three parkland venues for the Halloween events allowed the Team to arrange for Quiet Times ahead of the main event when a limited number of parties with sensory or mobility issues could enjoy the stillness and space around the site before the event started. The feedback at each venue was very positive and the inclusion was appreciated by many of those who attended.
- 3.2.6 A specialist contractor in the provision of sensory play was included at each event.
- 3.2.7 All three Halloween events continue to attract large crowds and rate highly in customer satisfaction.

Halloween events were promoted on our social channels, local print media, entrance banners and 48 sheet billboards.

Capping the admission with tickets proved to be a success in making the events more manageable, more comfortable and increasing customer satisfaction. The extra income was used to buy more content for each event. It is a model the Events Team will continue with for the corresponding events in the new calendar.

The introduction of the quiet times was very warmly received by users and will be included in next year's Halloween events.

## 3.2 **Christmas**

- 3.2.1 The Events Team delivered three large Christmas Switch Ons in Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus and provided support for events in Whitehead and Greenisland.

The Christmas Switch on events were promoted on Council's social media channels, billboards and local print media.

### 3.2.2 **Ballymena**

Around 4000 watched the Santa parade and the lighting of the new artificial tree following an evening of entertainment from a local choir, ukelele group, rock band and DJ. Surveys of the retail sector by Ballymena Business Improvement District (BID) show that the sector is still in favour of the Saturday Switch On rather than Thursday. This sentiment was reflected in the survey of public attendees (68%). The survey also saw 94% of those questioned rated the event as "excellent" or "very good" and 100% of those spoken to had come to the town centre specifically for the Switch On event.

### 3.2.3 **Larne**

3000 people attended the Friday evening programme of live music, a Santa parade and family activities. 94% of those surveyed rated the event as "excellent" or "very good", while 100% of those spoken to were in the town

centre specifically for the event. All the respondents with accessibility issues said the venue met their needs.

#### **3.1.4 Carrickfergus**

3000 people filled High Street for an afternoon of entertainment from local choirs, dancers and musicians. The programme also featured a community carol service and a fireworks display after the new artificial tree was illuminated. All of those surveyed had travelled to the town centre specifically for the event which was rated as "excellent" or "very good" by 92% of respondents. 96% of those with mobility issues said the venue met their needs.

- 3.2.5 All three Switch Ons featured specialist sensory play facilities and quiet times for people with sensory issues. The quiet times were a popular addition for this year and will be repeated at future events.

### **3.2 St Patrick's Day 2025**

The Events Team is currently planning activities for St Patrick's Day at Slemish Mountain, a site with well-known connections to St Patrick. Around 2000 people are expected to climb the mountain and the Team will be providing transport infrastructure, traditional entertainment and safety measures for the popular event.

## **4 General Considerations / Implications**

- 4.1 The funding of the St Patrick's Day at Slemish event has been included in the allocated events budget for 2024/2025.
- 4.2 Screening for Equality, Rural Needs, Sustainable Development and Data Protection has been carried out for all the events discussed in this report.
- 4.3 Events provision aligns with objectives in the Corporate Plan under the categories, People, and Place.

## **5 Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 The first meeting of the Events Sub Committee is scheduled for 28 January 2025.
- 5.2 The terms of reference for both the Events sub committee and sponsor committee now need to be amended.
- 5.3 The Events Team will keep under review the need for limited charging for admission tickets at some events.

- 5.4 The Events Team will continue to ensure there is a provision for sensory play activities and quiet times at larger events to meet the needs of attendees with sensory issues.

## **6 Recommendation or Decision**

### **6.1 It is recommended that Elected Members**

- 6.1.4 Approve to amend the Terms of Reference for the Corporate Policy and Resource Committee in order that Events reports going forward will be taken to Neighborhood and Communities Committee.
- 6.1.5 Note the review of the 2024 autumn events and the benefit this brings to the residents and businesses across the Borough.
- 6.1.6 Note the Planning so far for the St Patrick's Day event at Slemish.

## **7 Appendices / Links**

Appendix 1 Photos of Halloween Events 2024

Appendix 2 Photos of Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024



### Appendix 1 Halloween Events 2024





### Appendix 1 Halloween Events 2024





## Appendix 1 Halloween Events 2024





Appendix 1 Halloween Events 2024





## Appendix 1 Halloween Events 2024





### Appendix 2 Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024



## Appendix 2 Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024





### Appendix 2 Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024





## Appendix 2 Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024





### Appendix 2 Christmas Lights Switch On Events 2024



<b>Council/Committee:</b>	Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance
<b>Date:</b>	13 January 2025
<b>Report Title:</b>	NIAO Performance Audit and Assessment 2024-25
<b>Publication Status:</b>	Open
<b>Author:</b>	Laura-Jane McCloy, Policy, Performance & Partnership Manager
<b>Approver:</b>	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. To note the findings of the Northern Ireland Audit Office *Audit and Assessment Report 2024-25*.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Local Government Act Northern Ireland 2014 (the Act) places a general duty on councils to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions". The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) audit these arrangements each year.
- 2.2. The NIAO have issued the *Audit and Assessment Report 2024-25* (Appendices 1 - 3), which summarises the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA).

## 3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The LGA has certified the performance arrangements of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (the Council) with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. She certifies that an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that the Council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2023-24 and its 2024-25 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.
- 3.2. The LGA has assessed whether the Council is likely to comply with its performance improvement responsibilities under Part 12 of the Act (the improvement assessment). In her opinion, the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2024-25 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.



- 3.3. No issues were identified requiring a formal recommendation under the Act, and there were no proposals for improvement (which represent good practice to assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement).
- 3.4. All prior year proposals for improvement have been implemented, with the exception of two:
- Proposal 1 - The Council should prioritise prior year proposals for improvement and take steps to address them.
  - Proposal 2 - The Council should continue to work with other councils and the Department for Communities (DfC) to agree a suite of self-imposed indicators and standards that would allow for meaningful comparisons to be made and published. To progress this, the Council continues to participate in meetings of the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group, whose membership includes the DfC, the NIAO, and each of Northern Ireland's 11 councils.
- 3.5. The LGA's audit and assessment work on the Council's performance improvement arrangements is now concluded.

#### **4. General Considerations / Implications**

- 4.1. Failure to comply with legislation and guidance may lead to poor service delivery, poor audit results and reputational damage.

#### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1. By 31 March 2025, 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.

#### **6. Recommendation or Decision**

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to note the findings of the report.

#### **7. Appendices / Link**

- Appendix 1: MEA Performance Audit 2024-25 Certification Cover Letter  
Appendix 2: MEA Audit Certificate 2024-25  
Appendix 3: MEA Final S95 Report 2024-25

Ms Valerie Watts  
Interim Chief Executive  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
The Braid  
1-29 Bridge Street  
Ballymena  
BT43 5EJ

**29<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

Dear Valerie,


**MID AND EAST ANTRIM: IMPROVEMENT AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT – FINAL  
AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2024-25**

I have now certified the improvement audit for the Council with an unqualified opinion. 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 2024-25. 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 of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's performance improvement arrangements**

### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2023-24 and its improvement plan for 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 2024-25.

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<sup>th</sup> November 2024



## **Audit and Assessment Report 2024-25**

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

**Mid and East Antrim Borough Council**

29th November 2024

## Contents

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*We have prepared this report for Mid and East Antrim Borough 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 2024-25.
Statutory recommendations	The LGA made no statutory recommendations.
Proposals for improvement	The LGA made no new proposals for improvement.

This report summarises the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA) on the 2024-25 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. We would like to thank the Acting Chief Executive and her staff, particularly the Planning and Performance team, 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 that an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2023-24 and its 2024-25 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 2024-25 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 did not identify any issues requiring a formal recommendation under the Act. We have made no new proposals for improvement (see Section 3). 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 2025 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

Councils have begun to address the issue of climate change and sustainability, with individual councils at varying stages of progress. 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.

My review noted that the Council have a Climate and Sustainability Action Plan (2023-2027), and one of the three main objectives in their Performance Improvement Plan this year is 'Planet' which is aimed at reducing their environmental impact and improving sustainability. They hold climate and sustainability programmes across schools, communities and businesses and have Climate and Sustainability Officers who promote sustainable practices and encourage greater awareness of their environmental impact, as well as working in partnership with Sustainable NI to promote sustainable practices.

### 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 2025, 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**

During the audit and assessment no issues were identified that required a formal recommendation under the Act. There were also no issues identified requiring a Proposal for Improvement, which represents good practice to assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance 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.



## 4. Annexes

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

#### **Audit and assessment of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's performance improvement arrangements**

##### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2023-24 and its improvement plan for 2024-25 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 2024-25 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.

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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 2024-25.

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

29th November 2024

**Annex B – Detailed observations 2023-24**

Thematic area	Observations
<p>General duty to improve</p>	<p>Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (the Council) has demonstrated that it has in place arrangements 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 2024-25 period. The Council has also provided details of the arrangements in place for both the statutory performance indicators and the self-imposed performance indicators within the PIP.</p> <p>The Council has been proactive in identifying performance improvement objectives that have links to the seven key aspects of improvement laid out in the Act. Each selected objective for the 2024-25 PIP links to at least one of the improvement areas. A 12-week public consultation was launched on 9 January 2024 and resulted in all three improvement objectives being recommended for inclusion within the PIP 2024-25. The use of this directly collected data allows performance improvement objectives to be built, developed, and evaluated in a way which takes account of stakeholder interests.</p> <p>The key strategic themes of the Corporate Plan and Community Plan are directly linked to the chosen performance improvement objectives. The self-imposed indicators are laid out within four priority areas; People, Place, Planet and Performance (Corporate plan 2024-28); and include all 3 statutory indicators (Economic Development, Planning and Waste).</p>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p>The Council continues to evaluate and assess the impact and effectiveness of its functions and services and there is a Performance Management Framework in place. Managerial and political scrutiny is carried out through the respective reporting structures - the Senior Management Team, the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance (CRPG) Committee and the full Council when appropriate. The self-imposed indicators and the consistent monitoring of these gives assurance that the Council continues to seek improvement.</p>
Governance arrangements	<p>The Performance Management Framework, first introduced in 2017, is embedded in Council policy making; and is kept under review to ensure it remains fit for purpose.</p> <p>Overall responsibility for performance improvement lies with the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance (CRPG) Committee. These responsibilities are noted with the CRPG Committee's Terms of Reference. Performance Improvement is a standing agenda item at each committee meeting, with progress reports against each objective provided each quarter.</p> <p>Operational responsibility for performance improvement rests with the Corporate Performance and Improvement Team.</p> <p>Internal Audit for the Council review governance arrangements and other aspects of performance improvement in line with the Internal Audit plan. We are satisfied that the work of Internal Audit is comprehensive and includes sufficient consideration of performance improvement.</p> <p>To test the effectiveness of governance arrangements we selected a sample of three performance improvement objectives from the PIP 2024-25. In all of the projects sampled the Council had clearly laid out the targets necessary for achievement, created a realistic service</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>plan, timetable and budget and had a clear line of accountability for the success of the project. The involvement of elected members was also noted.</p> <p>The management and governance arrangements within the Council to ensure adequate oversight and accountability are detailed in the PIP.</p> <p>The Council has in place a Corporate Performance and Improvement team which is responsible for overseeing the development, monitoring, and reporting of the performance improvement objectives. The completion of our fieldwork indicates that there are adequate governance arrangements, and these continue to operate effectively.</p>
Improvement objectives	<p>The Council has identified three performance improvement objectives in the PIP 2024-25. For each of these the Council has demonstrated the objectives to be legitimate, clear, robust, deliverable, and demonstrable. The objectives cover a range of Council areas and relate to improving services for citizens and the wider community. The objectives are clearly presented in the PIP in a format which answers all key questions; why/ what you will see/ how we will measure progress/ who is responsible.</p> <p>The PIP relates each of the improvement objectives to the seven key improvement areas from the Act [section 85 (3)].The objectives are then also aligned to key strategies including the</p>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p>draft Programme for Government, the Council’s Corporate Plan and Community Plan (aspects of improvement and strategic links sections on pages 15, 19 and 23).</p> <p>Internally each objective is tracked using a Project Initiation Document (PID) which sets out the project team for delivery, monitoring and reporting arrangements. The PID for each objective also contains targets for improvement and a risk register for the project which are regularly updated. Updates to PID’s are used to inform a quarterly update report which is presented to the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance committee.</p> <p>The proposed objectives were released for public consultation and all objectives received a high level of support. Following this the objectives were fully endorsed and approved by full Council.</p> <p>The three objectives are aligned with the priorities of the Corporate Plan, and have smaller, more detailed objectives for citizens. ‘People’ has 4, ‘Place’ has 4, and ‘Planet’ has 5, as detailed below;</p> <p><b>1. People - We will work with partners to improve the lives of citizens</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering local enterprise and economic growth.</li> <li>• Supporting skills development and improving employment outcomes.</li> <li>• Helping citizens lead healthy and active lives.</li> <li>• Supporting people who are vulnerable or marginalised, and promoting an equal, diverse, inclusive, and accessible borough.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Place - We will maintain and improve our local areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing our amenities, parks, and open spaces.</li> </ul>

Thematic area	Observations								
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bolstering our town centres.</li> <li>• Nurturing community-led tourism.</li> <li>• Delivering an effective and efficient Planning Service.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Planet - We will reduce our environmental impact and improve sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving towards cleaner energy and reducing our consumption.</li> <li>• Delivering an effective and efficient Waste Service.</li> <li>• Supporting biodiversity.</li> <li>• Reaching environmental standards and targets.</li> <li>• Sharing learning and best practice.</li> </ul> <p>The three objectives include the six objectives that were continued from the previous PIP, so nothing was taken away from the objectives by reducing the number to three (People, Place, Planet). It is not so much consolidated, more so reformatted, as follows;</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="506 911 1995 1361"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="506 911 1218 946">2023/24 objective</th> <th data-bbox="1218 911 1995 946">Where it fits within 2024/25 objectives</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="506 946 1218 1070"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing the economy and creating jobs.</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="1218 946 1995 1070"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering local enterprise and economic growth.</li> <li>• Supporting skills development and improving employment outcomes.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="506 1070 1218 1201"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revitalising our towns through regeneration activities.</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="1218 1070 1995 1201"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing our amenities, parks and open spaces.</li> <li>• Bolstering our town centres.</li> <li>• Nurturing community-led tourism.</li> <li>• Delivering an effective and efficient Planning Service.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="506 1201 1218 1361"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting MEA citizens' health and wellbeing by providing quality, sustainable, inclusive opportunities to use parks and open spaces to encourage and promote regular, safe, and responsible use'</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="1218 1201 1995 1361"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping citizens lead healthy and active lives.</li> <li>• Enhancing our amenities, parks and open spaces.</li> <li>• Supporting people who are vulnerable or marginalised, and promoting an equal, diverse, inclusive, and accessible borough.</li> <li>• Supporting biodiversity</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2023/24 objective	Where it fits within 2024/25 objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing the economy and creating jobs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering local enterprise and economic growth.</li> <li>• Supporting skills development and improving employment outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revitalising our towns through regeneration activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing our amenities, parks and open spaces.</li> <li>• Bolstering our town centres.</li> <li>• Nurturing community-led tourism.</li> <li>• Delivering an effective and efficient Planning Service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting MEA citizens' health and wellbeing by providing quality, sustainable, inclusive opportunities to use parks and open spaces to encourage and promote regular, safe, and responsible use'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping citizens lead healthy and active lives.</li> <li>• Enhancing our amenities, parks and open spaces.</li> <li>• Supporting people who are vulnerable or marginalised, and promoting an equal, diverse, inclusive, and accessible borough.</li> <li>• Supporting biodiversity</li> </ul>
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Thematic area	Observations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in partnership to support our citizens, particularly those who are vulnerable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting people who are vulnerable or marginalised, and promoting an equal, diverse, inclusive, and accessible borough.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving infrastructure to encourage electric vehicle uptake in the borough to reduce emissions and protect the environment for future generations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moving towards cleaner energy and reducing our consumption.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving customer engagement and service delivery by enhancing the Council's use of information technology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helping citizens lead healthy and active lives.</li> <li>Supporting people who are vulnerable or marginalised, and promoting an equal, diverse, inclusive, and accessible borough.</li> </ul>
<p>This was based on feedback from robust stakeholder engagement in the development of the plan. Ongoing actions from 2023-24 are also included within the outcomes.</p>		
<p>Consultation</p>	<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 2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan. The consultation was transparent, and the Council has provided evidence of the process for audit fieldwork. The Council has had an increase in public consultation responses from 146 in the prior year to 216 in the current year. An increase of 48% which is encouraging.</p> <p>Public consultation was undertaken between 9 January 2024 and 2 April 2024 (12 weeks) and was promoted through a range of methods, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an online survey published on the Council website;</li> <li>face to face surveys;</li> <li>e-mails to local businesses and community groups;</li> <li>emails to the Council section 75 consultee list;</li> </ul>	

Thematic area	Observations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e-mails to elected officials and staff from the acting Chief Executive;</li> <li>• promotion through the Council social media platforms;</li> <li>• local press and radio coverage;</li> <li>• the Council Connections magazine; and</li> <li>• the Council intranet.</li> </ul> <p>Consultation responses were received and gained a high level (+85 per cent) of support for each of the three proposed objectives.</p>
Improvement plan	<p>The PIP for 2024-25 is fully compliant with the Act and subsequent Department for Communities (DfC) guidance.</p> <p>The PIP was approved by full Council on 13 May 2024 and published on the Council website on 20 May 2024. The plan outlines the three performance improvement objectives in a clear and concise way, breaking each one down into why/ what/ how/ and who terms. The document is available on the Council website and other formats are available upon request. Details of the Performance and Improvement team alongside contact email addresses, contact number and address are given on the website. Requests for feedback are included.</p> <p>The performance improvement objectives are aligned to the key aspects of improvement from the Act as well as the Community Plan and Corporate Plan. This provides a demonstrable contribution to the Council goal of improving the quality of life for all citizens.</p>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p>The PIP is transparent and contains a sufficient amount of detail for the stakeholder regarding targets, timetables and predicted work associated with each objective. More detailed operational information for each objective can be found in the PIDs held internally which are updated on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The PIP further provides detail on the statutory performance indicators of the Council with sufficient description and disclosure of each of these.</p>
Arrangements to improve	<p>The arrangements 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. This is confirmed in the published PIP.</p> <p>PIDs are held relating to each improvement objective which include details of project team members, budgets, details on key performance indicators and timescales for delivery as well as a risk register and communication strategy. The PIDs are updated regularly and feed into the quarterly progress reports presented to the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>Committee and Senior Management Team. These quarterly updates are made available on the Council website.</p> <p>The Council's Senior Management Team also review and approve quarterly business plan updates, which include updates on the improvement objectives.</p>
Collection, use and publication of performance information	<p>The Council's arrangements to assess performance and publish the results are sufficient. The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2023-24, published by Council following evaluation of the improvement objectives from the prior year PIP (2023-24) is transparent and understandable. The SAR contains details on the progression and achievement of outcomes from the objectives in the PIP 2023-24, looks at its own performance from as far back as 2015-16 and benchmarks against other Councils where the information is available to do so.</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 framework. This enables Council to measure and evaluate improvement, assists in identifying areas of need, facilitates benchmarking and supports communication of outcomes.</p> <p>There are three types of information to be collected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general duty to improve - self-imposed indicators and standards;</li> <li>• improvement objectives - specific performance targets and measures; and</li> </ul>



Thematic area	Observations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• statutory indicators - prescribed by The Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (NI) 2015 (amended in 2022).</li> </ul> <p>Having reviewed the SAR 2023-24 we can say that the document meets its legislative requirements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discharging its general duty to improve;</li> <li>• discussing the progress in meeting improvement objectives for the year alongside issues encountered and action taken, where relevant;</li> <li>• referencing self-imposed and statutory performance indicators; and</li> <li>• meeting self-imposed and statutory indicators</li> </ul> <p>The SAR serves the key purpose of demonstrating to stakeholders and citizens how Council discharges its legislative duties and communicating the progress and improvements made to functions and services.</p> <p>The Council uses a software package to record performance management and associated actions. The system links objectives/actions/indicators to the Corporate Plan and Performance Improvement Plan. Each objective is allocated to management and KPI's to Officers, where relevant. The personal development planning process is linked directly to strategic objectives.</p>

Thematic area	Observations
<p>Demonstrating a track record of improvement</p>	<p>The Council has reported on the achievement of outcomes within the 2023-24 Annual Performance Report.</p> <p><b>Key Performance Indicators (SAR 2023-24 – Page 20/21)</b></p> <p>The key performance indicators are the means by which Council measure progress towards achieving outcomes. There were 33 indicators defined against six objectives; of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 61 per cent were achieved/on track (20/33);</li> <li>▪ 36 per cent were delayed but progressing (12/33); and</li> <li>▪ 3 per cent were not achieved or stopped (1/33)</li> </ul> <p><u>2022-23</u></p> <p>There were 26 indicators defined against six objectives; of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 58 per cent were achieved/on track (15/26);</li> <li>▪ 23 per cent were delayed but progressing (6/26);</li> <li>▪ 12 per cent were not achieved or stopped (3/26); and</li> <li>▪ 7 per cent were not due/information unavailable (2/26)</li> </ul> <p><u>2021-22</u></p> <p>There were 25 indicators defined against five objectives;; of these</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60 per cent were on track (15 out of 25)</li> <li>• 16 per cent were delayed but progressing (4 out of 25)</li> <li>• 12 per cent not achieved or were stopped (3 out of 25).</li> <li>• 12 per cent per not due/information not available (3 out of 25)</li> </ul>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p><b>Indicators (self-imposed) for period 2023-24 (SAR 2023-24 – Page 80/81)</b></p> <p>There were 61 self-imposed performance indicators; of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 75 per cent were achieved/on track (46/61)</li> <li>▪ 12 per cent were delayed but progressing (7/61)</li> </ul> <p>13 per cent were not achieved/ceased (8/61)</p> <p><u>2022-23</u></p> <p>There were 20 self-imposed performance indicators; of these</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80 per cent were achieved/on track (16/20)</li> <li>• 10 per cent were delayed but progressing (2/20)</li> <li>• 10 per cent were not achieved/ceased (2/20).</li> </ul> <p><u>2021-22</u></p> <p>There were 20 self-imposed performance indicators; of these</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65 per cent were achieved/on track to be (13 out of 20);</li> <li>• 20 per cent were delayed but progressing (4 out of 20); and</li> <li>• 15 per cent not achieved/ceased (3 out of 20).</li> </ul>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p><b>Indicators (statutory) – (SAR 2023-24 – Page 50/51)</b></p> <p>There are seven statutory indicators across three areas (waste management, economic growth, and planning); of these;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 86 per cent were achieved (6/7)</li> <li>▪ 14 per cent not achieved (1/7)</li> </ul> <p><u>2022-23</u></p> <p>There were seven statutory indicators across three areas (waste management, economic growth, and planning); of these</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 72 per cent were achieved (5/7),</li> <li>• 14 per cent were not achieved (1/7)</li> <li>• 14 per cent had yet to have figures confirmed (1/7).</li> </ul> <p><u>2021-22</u></p> <p>There were seven statutory indicators across three areas (waste management, economic growth, planning); of these</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 72 per cent were achieved (5 out of 7);</li> <li>▪ 14 per cent were delayed but progressing (1 out of 7); and</li> <li>▪ 14 per cent were not achieved (1 out of 7).</li> </ul> <p>As well as achievement information on statutory indicators for the year under review the Council includes within the SAR trend information for four prior periods (going back to 2019-</p>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p>20). From this we can see that although one indicator was unmet, all indicators showed a trend of either improvement or remaining consistent, which is encouraging.</p> <p>The Council has been proactive in securing benchmarking and trend information to provide a full picture of performance improvement achievements in a wider context. The Council has demonstrated a track record of improvement.</p>



**Council/Committee:** Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee  
**Date:** 13 January 2025

**Report Title:** Approved Notices of Motion January to December 2024  
**Publication Status:** Open  
**Author:** Sarah Williams, Assistant Director – Business Support  
**Approver:** Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report is to provide an update on the progress of Council approved Notices of Motion from January to December 2024.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's Protocol to Assess and Process a Notice of Motion includes a commitment to present a bi-annual report to Full Council. The report provides Council with a summary of the actions taken in relation to those motions agreed by Council.
- 2.2 The bi-annual reporting process ceased under the Good Governance measures introduced in 2023. However, following the 12-month review of Good Governance it was agreed to re-introduce the bi-annual report on approved notices of motion for presentation to the Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee.

## 3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1 The current update relates to Notices of Motion approved by Council between January and December 2024.
- 3.2 During this period there were nine Council meetings with ten notices of motion approved. The schedule attached at Appendix 1 summarises progress on the approved Notices of Motion

## 4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1 Financial implications – there may be cost implications associated with some of the approved notices of motion and these will be reported on an individual basis.
- 4.2 Human Resources – there may also be staffing implications.
- 4.3 Equality Screening – this will be carried out and reported on as required for the individual notices of motion.





- 4.4 Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan - submission of a bi-annual progress report ensures that Elected Members are informed of actions taken following adoption of a notice of motion.
- 4.6 Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact – this will be assessed as required.
- 4.7 UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) these will be identified in respect of the individual notices of motion.

## **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 This report and attached appendix are provided for Members' information. The next update report will be presented in June 2025.

## **6. Recommendation or Decision**

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the report.

## **7. Appendices / Links**

- Appendix 1 Mid & East Antrim Borough Council Approved Notices of Motion January - December 2024

## Mid & East Antrim Borough Council Approved Notices of Motion January - December 2024

Meeting Date	Notice of Motion	Update	Status
08.01.24	Improved Water Safety Measures - Cllr A Barr & Ald A Wilson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MEA Officer has attended the new Water Safety Forum for NI which is attended by RNLA, MCGA, NIFRS, PSNI and other bodies.</li> <li>• The Outdoor Recreation Team have organised events during drowning prevention week, shared information from RNLI on socials, worked with Swim Ulster (Sport NI) under their Get Wet Stay Safe initiative.</li> <li>• Further discussions have taken place with the MEAqua Officer to incorporate messages into swimming lessons.</li> </ul>	Closed
19.02.24	Action to reduce deaths due to road traffic accidents - Cllr J Minford & Cllr A Barr	<p>The MEA PCSP carries out a programme of work in this area on an annual basis. Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MEA PCSP Action Plan includes the following programme "Enhancing Community Confidence in Road Safety Programme".</li> <li>• The PCSP works with key PCSP statutory partners such as PSNI and NIFRS who are actively involved in detecting speeding and responding to Road Traffic Incidents on roads within the Borough.</li> <li>• This project comprises a Speed Indicator Devices Programme and Support for Education and Awareness with young people.</li> <li>• "Kill your Speed Signs" are also available to PCSP Members for use in local communities across the Borough</li> <li>• Work is underway with New Driver NI to deliver education and awareness sessions to post primary schools across the Borough</li> <li>• Staff are also working to support Road Safe NI in their work with Primary School age children across MEABC.</li> <li>• The PCSP Chair and Vice Chair with PSNI and NIFRS also supported Road Safety Week in Nov 2024</li> </ul>	Closed



Meeting Date	Notice of Motion	Update	Status
13.05.24	Cardiac Arrests, Defibrillators and CPR Training - Ald A Wilson & Cllr A Barr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further to a report was taken to Neighbourhoods &amp; Communities Committee in October, Council will be progressing the actions that were approved by the committee including a replacement programme, registration of all council devices, implementation of a new AED council policy (from 01 April 2025) and taking steps to create a partnership approach within the borough for community resuscitation.</li> <li>An invitation has been extended to Michael Allen (NIAS) to give a presentation to February Neighbourhoods &amp; Communities Committee to give further information/detail on this topic.</li> </ul>	Update planned for N&C Committee
13.05.23	Congratulations to Larne Football Club and reception - Cllr G McKeen & Cllr A Clarke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Mayor conveyed congratulations to Larne Football Club and a small reception was held in May 2024 with club personnel.</li> </ul>	Closed
10.06.24	Encouragement to Cancer Sufferers - Ald B Adger & Cllr R Glover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recorded in published minutes and available on website</li> </ul>	Closed
10.06.24	Temporary Closure of DfI Roads Depot at Kilwaughter – Cllr G McKeen & Cllr A Smyth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An update report is due to be submitted for January Full Council</li> </ul>	Update to be provided to Council
02.09.24	Trauma Informed Borough - Cllr M Donnelly & Cllr B Ferris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trauma Informed Practice training sessions have been delivered within local communities in Mid and East Antrim as part of the recently delivered Asylum and Refugee Support Programme. With the recent approval to accept monies from the Refugee Integration</li> </ul>	Update to be provided to Council

Meeting Date	Notice of Motion	Update	Status
		<p>Fund, there may be an opportunity within the work that will be carried out through this tranche of funding to again look at Trauma Informed Practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training for staff and elected members will be discussed with colleagues within Corporate and Support Services and any associated costs will be considered within the wider discussion as part of the rate setting process.</li> <li>• Details of a conference on a Trauma-informed approach in Jan 2025 will be circulated to Elected Members.</li> </ul>	
14.10.24	Purchase of Dog Faeces Collection & Disposal Units - Cllr L Philpott & Cllr G McKeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers are currently progressing a financial assessment, due to come back to Full Council in 2025</li> </ul>	Update to be provided to Council
25.11.24	Opposition to the UK Government's Winter Fuel Payment policy change – Cllr R Beggs & Ald A Wilson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter issued to the Prime Minister. Posters issued for display in leisure centres and community centres and mailshot issued to community groups re checking eligibility for Pension Credit.</li> </ul>	Closed
25.11.24	Increasing public concern around overgrown grass verges, paths and hedges – Cllr P Johnston & Cllr G McKeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's GIS system currently holds information on all Council owned and leased lands, along with some ownership information from other government bodies such as the Department, NIHE etc. It also holds a record of maintenance in terms of roundabouts in the Ballymena Area. It is hoped to get all grass cutting mapped onto the system in the future. Officers are happy to show elected members what information is held on the GIS system.</li> </ul>	Closed

**Council/Committee:** Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee  
**Date:** 13 January 2025

**Report Title:** **Recommendations from Scrutiny Review – Sickness Absence**

**Publication Status:** Open

**Author:** Sarah Williams, Assistant Director – Business Support

**Approver:** Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to present members with the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review into sickness absence which was brought to Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2024.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Audit & Scrutiny Committee recently completed its first Scrutiny Review which addressed the area of sickness absence.
- 2.2. The Scrutiny Panel comprised the following Members:
  - Alderman Reid
  - Councillor Armstrong
  - Councillor Beggs
  - Councillor Harwood (chair)
- 2.3. The Panel met on 19 September and following discussion about the issue of sickness absence, it was requested that officers carry out field work and present a draft report for consideration by the members of the Panel.
- 2.4. Members of the Panel highlighted the following areas to be considered when addressing sickness absence in the Scrutiny Review:
  - To ensure that the Council meets the target set
  - To learn from best practice from other Councils eg Mid Ulster
  - To examine the cost of absence
  - To address an ageing workforce eg targeting younger staff, work placement policy
  - To ensure that the Council is implementing the Attendance Policy
- 2.5. A second meeting of the Scrutiny Panel was held on 18 November where the findings were discussed and it was agreed the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel would present this report to the Committee for consideration. This report is set out at **Appendix 1**.



- 2.6. The Chair of the Scrutiny Panel presented the report to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 10 December where it was agreed to refer the recommendations to Corporate Resources Policy and Governance Committee.

### 3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The recommendations from the Scrutiny Review are set out in **Appendix 2**.
- 3.2. These recommendations are arranged under the four key principles recommended by NIAO for addressing sickness absence in their 2020 [Managing Attendance in Central and Local Government](#) report:
- Organisations should **develop and promote a strong attendance culture**
  - **Prevention and early intervention** are a cost-effective way of reducing long-term absence
  - Organisations should focus on reducing and managing **long-term absence**
  - Organisations should **measure, analyse and understand the impact** of sickness absence

### 4. General Considerations / Implications

- a. Financial implications: the cost of an Invest to Save Scale 6 project post would be £21,382.50 for 6 months and £42,765.74 for 12 months.
- b. Human Resources: The HR & OD function, following the implementation of the Corporate and Support Services Restructure, will have newly created roles to lead on some of these recommendations.
- c. Equality Screening: Any equality implications will be identified using the Council's usual screening process.
- d. Assets: N/A
- e. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan: this supports the Performance corporate objective.
- f. Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact: Any rural needs implications will be identified using the Council's usual screening process.

### 5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1 Members are asked to:

- Agree to accept the proposed recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel for action and monitoring. An update on these actions will be provided to CRPG Committee in the next Sickness Absence report later in the year.

### 6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1 It is recommended that members accept the recommendations in **Appendix 2**.



**Mid & East  
Antrim**  
Borough Council

## **7. Appendices / Links**

**Appendix 1** - Scrutiny Review – Sickness Absence Report brought to Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2024

**Appendix 2** - List of recommendations



<b>Council/Committee:</b>	Audit & Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	10 December 2024
<b>Report Title:</b>	Scrutiny Review – Sickness Absence
<b>Publication Status:</b>	Open
<b>Author:</b>	Sarah Williams, Assistant Director – Business Support
<b>Approver:</b>	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to present the Audit & Scrutiny Committee with the findings of the Scrutiny Review into sickness absence. It is presented on behalf of the Scrutiny Panel for consideration.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Scrutiny Panel comprising the following Members:
  - Alderman Reid
  - Councillor Armstrong
  - Councillor Beggs
  - Councillor Harwood (chair)
- 2.2. The Panel met on 19 September and following discussion about the issue of sickness absence, it was requested that officers carry out field work and present a draft report for consideration by the members of the Panel.
- 2.3. Members of the Panel highlighted the following areas to be considered when addressing sickness absence in the Scrutiny Review:
  - To ensure that the Council meets the target set
  - To learn from best practice from other Councils eg Mid Ulster
  - To examine the cost of absence
  - To address an ageing workforce eg targeting younger staff, work placement policy
  - To ensure that the Council is implementing the Attendance Policy
- 2.4. A second meeting of the Scrutiny Panel was held on 18 November where the findings were discussed and it was agreed the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel would present this report to the Committee for consideration.





### 3. Key Issues for Consideration

#### Facts and figures

3.1. Sickness absence at MEA for 2023-24 is 17.04 days lost per FTE against a target of 14 days.

3.2. The trend showing previous years is set out below.



3.3. 64.37% of employees had no sickness absence in 2023-24. 82% of sickness absence is long-term with 18% related to short-term sickness absence.

3.4. The top 3 reasons for sickness absence are:

Absence Reason	Number of Days	%	No of Absentees
Stress, depression, fatigue	3,218.5	31.43%	65
Musculo-skeletal ex back+neck	1,780	17.38%	40
Stomach, liver, kidney	987	9.64%	60

3.5. The most recently published figures by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) for the 11 Councils is set out below.

COUNCIL	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Antrim & Newtownabbey	11.9	13.7	13.2	11.1	19.7
Ards & North Down	16.2	14.2	14.2	10.6	14.2
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	16.1	16.7	18.3	15.7	20.5
Belfast	13.7	13.7	13.6	10.9	16.3



COUNCIL	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Causeway Coast & Glens	15.8	17.1	17.7	12.4	19.2
Derry City & Strabane	14.0	12.3	14.5	10.4	16.8
Fermanagh & Omagh	12.9	10.4	13.8	9.7	13.1
Lisburn City & Castlereagh	16.7	13.3	13.8	11.5	13.6
Mid and East Antrim	17.1	12.5	10.6	4.7	15.2
Mid Ulster	12.4	12.9	11.7	9.7	12.1
Newry, Mourne & Down	17.1	14.7	15.8	13.6	20.7

### **Current Attendance Policy**

- 3.6. The Council introduced a new Attendance Policy in April 2019. Under this policy, line managers are responsible for managing absence with a high level of support from HR. The policy introduced a strict absence notification procedure with warnings issued after a certain number of days' absence for short and long-term absences. The Council's policy is one of the few policies in local government in NI that allows the Council to issue warnings for long-term absence.
- 3.7. **Support for line managers:**
- Each manager has a dedicated HR Advisor to provide advice and guidance on managing absence cases
  - Independent medical advice is provided by the Council's Occupational Health provider
  - Ongoing training and coaching is available for line managers
- 3.8. **Support for employees:**
- Employee Assistance Programme: this provides year-round 24-hour confidential telephone support line, face-to-face, telephone and online counselling services
  - Access to an online digital wellbeing hub
  - Healthcare cash plan: employees and children (with option to add a partner) can claim 100% reimbursement of health costs such as dental, optical, health screening, wellbeing and chiropody
  - Introduction of a network of 15 Mental Health Champions
  - E-learning and support for staff and line managers made available and publicised by the ACHIEVE Health and Wellbeing sub-group
  - Manual Handling Train the Trainer programme delivered to allow in-house training

### Findings from Fieldwork

- 3.9. There is a high level of support provided to line managers from HR. In many cases however, HR is leading the absence management process rather than managers.
- 3.10. There is a lack of consistency in the application of the policy particularly in the use of discretion and in the timeliness of stage meetings and regularity of check-in meetings arranged with the employee. Discretion in compliance with the triggers is currently very much an individual manager's decision. This leads to an inconsistent approach and could, in some cases, indicate a reluctance by a manager to deal with the absence, and not recognizing the impact of continued absence in the services ability to deliver.
- 3.11. Training for line managers on the Attendance Policy is mandatory with two major roll-outs of training over the past few years. Currently the training is undertaken once but it is good practice for managers to undertake regular "management of sickness absence" training and as such would benefit from a rolling programme of refresher training undertaken annually. The 2022-23 Management Development Programme also includes a HR MasterClass which covers management of absence but this applies currently to only those managers who undertake the Development Programme.
- 3.12. The Attendance Policy is reviewed annually and was last reviewed in 2023 to include Chief Executive absence management. No changes have been made to the trigger points.
- 3.13. There is a high level of long-term absence related to NHS waiting lists.
- 3.14. The extent on long term absence in the council over time may have had an impact on the culture of sickness absence periods. There may be a view that it is "normal" to have extended periods of sickness for some reasons e.g. bereavement.
- 3.15. Covid will no doubt have had an impact on sickness absence levels: whilst during the lock down periods sickness absence was at a significant lower rate, a return to the office for hybrid working has changed the views on when it is appropriate to be off work ill due to the risk of infecting colleagues.
- 3.16. Occupational Health reports are provided only to HR, not to line managers, which means the manager is not fully apprised of all of the facts regarding the employee's illness or potential return to work. This approach is not good practice across organisations elsewhere in the public sector.



## Benchmarking / Best practice

### UK-wide public and private sector

- 3.17. There has been an increase of sickness absence across the public and private sectors. According to the most recent annual survey by CIPD ([September 2023](#)) UK employees were absent an average of 7.8 days over the past year. This is the highest level they have reported in the last ten years with a two-day increase from before the pandemic.
- 3.18. As a result, the CIPD is calling on organisations to have an open and supportive culture where people can speak to line managers about health issues and access helpful support and adjustments such as flexible working options and health services.

### Northern Ireland Public Sector

- 3.19. The NIAO produced a report called [Managing Attendance in Central and Local Government](#) in November 2020. This recognises that almost one quarter of the Northern Ireland workforce is employed by the public sector and that there has been an increase of 10% in the Civil Service to 13 days lost for each employee and with local councils experiencing even higher levels of sickness absence with a significant variation between different councils ranging from 10 to 17 days.
- 3.20. The report notes that key issues are an ageing workforce, mental health conditions and the high levels of long-term absence.
- 3.21. NIAO identifies the following key principles in attendance management for public sector organisations:
1. Organisations should **develop and promote a strong attendance culture**
  2. **Prevention and early intervention** are a cost-effective way of reducing long-term absence
  3. Organisations should focus on reducing and managing **long-term absence**
  4. Organisations should **measure, analyse and understand the impact** of sickness absence

## Recommendations

- 3.22. Recommendations based on the four key principles recommended by NIAO are set out in **Appendix 2**. The HR & OD function, following the implementation of the Corporate and Support Services Restructure, will have newly created roles to lead on some of these recommendations.

#### **4. General Considerations / Implications**

- a. Financial implications: the cost of an Invest to Save Scale 6 project post would be £21,382.50 for 6 months and £42,765.74 for 12 months.
- b. Human Resources: these actions will be taken forward by staff as set out in report.
- c. Equality Screening: Any equality implications will be identified using the Council's usual screening process.
- d. Assets: N/A
- e. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan: this supports the Performance corporate objective.
- f. Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact: Any rural needs implications will be identified using the Council's usual screening process.

#### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

Committee is asked to:

- Consider the proposed recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel
- Refer the recommendations to CRPG for action

#### **6. Recommendation or Decision**

It is recommended that members consider the recommendations above.

#### **7. Appendices / Links**

**Appendix 1** – Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference

**Appendix 2** – List of recommendations

## Scrutiny Review into Sickness Absence

### Recommendations

Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Deadline
<b>1.</b>	<b>Develop and promote strong attendance culture</b>		
<b>1.1</b>	Develop rolling programme of mandatory training for line managers on how to manage sickness absence (first session - half day and annual two-hour refresher). This would also include training on IT system used to record absences. The compliance of this should be reported to CRPG	OD and Talent Manager	Full implementation End December 26
<b>1.2</b>	Support HR Advisers to coach line managers to be able to deal with absence, as is required by their management role. HR involvement at the early stages will be minimal but will advise on aspects of managing an employee's attendance including regular contact with employee. Consideration of letter from Director to the employee off ill, after a certain number of days, offering support and concern regarding absence from work.	HR & OD Manager	End March 26
<b>1.3</b>	Create an Invest to Save funded 6/12-month fixed term project assistant post to focus on compliance with sickness absence policy e.g. monitoring current absences and compliance of managers of each stage of absence actions / oversight of every absence case requiring managers to provide regular data. This temporary post would have the following deliverables: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly/daily updating of sickness absence statistics for a monthly management report for SMT</li> <li>• Weekly/Daily contact with managers responsible for sickness absence tasks – requiring confirmation of completion</li> <li>• Monitoring of sickness absence training compliance (first training and refresher)</li> <li>• Reviewing sickness absence record keeping templates</li> </ul>	Assistant Director – Business Support	End Jan 25



Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Deadline
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 month review on whether the temporary role has impacted positively on sickness absence rates.</li> </ul>		
1.4	Ensure the Return to Work process is robust and effective and encourages employees to proactively commit to positive actions in their return to work.	HR & OD Manager	End March 26
1.5	Review the application and use of discretion by line managers to ensure consistency across the organisation, making clear recommendations for any improvements	HR & OD Manager	End March 26
<b>2.</b>	<b>Prevention and early intervention</b>		
2.1	Develop and implement an employee wellbeing action plan e.g. promoting wellbeing initiatives as well as training for line managers on recognising wellbeing issues.	Employee Inclusion and Wellbeing Officer	End March 26
2.2	Promote access to existing employee support such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the UK Healthcare Cash Plan. HR&OD to monitor the demand of the EAP services.	Employee Inclusion and Wellbeing Officer	End Jun 25
2.3	Explore the cost / benefit analysis of Council contributing to the costs of procedures for longer-term treatable conditions such as musco-skeletal absence delayed by long NHS waiting lists. This includes reviewing the costs of providing employees with higher levels of cover in the UK Healthcare Cash Plan.	Assistant Director – Business Support	End Jun 25
2.4	Continue engagement with HR Managers from other Councils to share best practice	HR Manager (Employee Relations) and HR	Ongoing

Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Deadline
		Manager (Policy and Projects)	
2.5	Explore options for recognition for employees with full attendance which are section 75 compliant.	Employee Inclusion and Wellbeing Officer	End Jun 25
2.6	Develop a Workforce Strategy Action Plan to address ageing workforce.	Workforce & Resourcing Manager	End March 26
2.7	Embed promotion of mental health and resilience and discussion on attendance into annual Personal Development Review process.	OD and Talent Manager	End March 26
2.8	Provide regular all employee bulletin regarding sickness absence data and promotion of seasonal relevant advice to keep well.	Employee Inclusion and Wellbeing Officer	End March 2025
<b>3.</b>	<b>Long-term absence</b>		
3.1	Review current practices for management of long-term absence for improvement including policy review - eg share OH report with line managers.	HR Manager (Employee Relations) and HR Manager (Policy and Projects)	End Jun 25
<b>4.</b>	<b>Measure and analyse impact</b>		
4.1	Continue with monthly meeting with HR and HoS to discuss absence	HoS and HR Advisers	Ongoing

Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Deadline
4.2	Quarterly report to SMT setting out absence levels and absence compliance by department / service allowing SMT to scrutinise and challenge Directors.	Invest to save post if agreed	End Mar 25
4.3	Continue with six-monthly update report to CRPG.	HR Manager (Policy & Projects)	Ongoing
4.4	Continue with different targets for the Operational department recognizing the nature of the work and also ageing workforce.	HR Manager (Policy & Projects)	Ongoing
4.5	Ensure that new ERP system supports line managers to record and monitoring management of sickness absence.	Assistant Director – Business Support	End March 26



<b>Council/Committee:</b>	Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance
<b>Date:</b>	13 January 2025
<b>Report Title:</b>	Diversity Ambassador Network
<b>Publication Status:</b>	Open
<b>Author:</b>	Laura-Jane McCloy, Policy, Performance & Partnership Manager
<b>Approver:</b>	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. To update Elected Members on the establishment of the Local Government Diversity Ambassador Network.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Local Government Equality and Diversity Group aims to prioritise and influence equality, good relations, diversity and inclusion initiatives across local government in Northern Ireland.
- 2.2. Between October 2023 and November 2024, a series of best practice events and information sessions were held by the regional group, offering opportunities to exchange insights and engage with subject experts.

## 3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. A key recommendation of the regional group was the establishment of a formal network of Diversity Ambassadors to actively advance the equality and diversity agenda within councils.
- 3.2. Council's current Diversity Ambassadors are Alderman Beth Adger MBE and Laura-Jane McCloy, Policy, Performance & Partnership Manager.
- 3.3. It is proposed that the network will convene every four months, and the purpose of the network will be reviewed annually.
- 3.4. A copy of the Terms of Reference for the network have been included at Appendix 1.

## 4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Participation in the Diversity Ambassador Network will assist Council in the delivery of the People pillar within the Corporate Plan, namely the objective of *"Lead by example to improve equality, accessibility and inclusion across the borough by embedding it into everything we do."*



## **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1. The Diversity Ambassador Network will be established, with updates provided to Elected Members as appropriate.

## **6. Recommendation or Decision**

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to note this update on the establishment of the Local Government Diversity Ambassador Network.

## **7. Appendices / Link**

Appendix 1: Diversity Ambassador Network Terms of Reference



## Equality & Diversity in Local Councils

### Diversity Ambassador Network – Terms of Reference

#### Context

Local Government has an important role in promoting equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion. The regional Equality and Diversity Group has responsibility for the development of the overall strategic direction for equality and diversity initiatives in local government. A key feature of the work of the Equality and Diversity Group is the establishment of the Diversity Ambassadors' Network.

#### Vision for Local Government

To create a fully inclusive and diverse local government service where the workforce reflects the community it serves, where as a sector diversity and inclusion are recognised, supported, and celebrated, and where staff are comfortable to be authentically themselves in the workplace.

#### Objectives and Delivery

The objective of the Network will be to support Elected Member and Officer Diversity Ambassadors. Diversity Ambassadors will be supported to champion diversity and inclusion in their councils to create positive impacts on this agenda in services and local communities, specifically to:

- Continue to build capacity for Diversity Ambassadors
- Promote and encourage EDI agendas in individual councils including at Elected Member level, linking to the EDI Strategy and Action Plan 2024 – 2027
- To assist councils to improve cross departmental working within councils, (across Good Relations, Human Resources and Equality)
- To assist collaborative working across all 11 councils

The delivery of these objectives will be done by creating a forum for Diversity Ambassadors to gather and share best practice, engage with the work of others on this agenda, develop skills to support and influence innovative practices, and embrace the opportunity to work in collaboration with existing and new partners in the delivery of this programme of work.



## Operational Arrangements

The Network will meet at least three times a year and will work in the following ways:

- Members of the Network are encouraged to suggest items for the agenda and to suggest expert speakers and key stakeholders to contribute to the Network
- Non-members may be invited to join the Network, permanently or temporarily, to aid discussions on topics
- Decisions will be made by consensus, but if that is not possible the Co- Chairs will make the final decision
- Diversity Ambassadors are expected to attend, and apologies should be given in advance where possible
- Hybrid Meetings will be offered with at least 1 meeting per year, in person only.

## Membership

The Network will consist of the nominated council and NILGA Elected Member and Officer Diversity Ambassadors.

## Chairing of the Network Meetings

The Network will be Co-Chaired by an Elected Member and Officer Diversity Ambassador. The Co-Chairs will ensure that the proper running of meetings in a timely, fair transparent and inclusive manner and will have the final say on the finalisation of minutes. Items on the agenda should be alternated between the Co-Chairs.

Location of meetings are to be rotated around each council area.

## Accountability

The Co-Chairs be expected to report regularly to the regional Equality and Diversity Group on the work of the Network either verbally or through reports.

## Secretariat

The Local Government Staff Commission will serve as the secretariat for the Network until 31 March 2026. From that point onward, the hosting council of each meeting will assume the secretariat role for the respective meeting.

## Network Values

Members of the Network will:

- Treat all other Members with respect
- Act in a courteous and ethical manner at all times,
- Improve communication on and within Network
- Not disclose any matter that the Network is satisfied should remain confidential

**Review**

The Network will review the relevance and value of the terms of reference and its work on a regular basis.

### **Co-Chair Role**

- Both should be treated as equal in the role, Officer and Elected Member
- Co-Chairs should remain in place for at least 1 year
- Schedule of meetings to be approved at least 1 year in advance
- Meetings which are being held every 4 months should be hosted by a different council. Practical issues for the host council include ensuring ICT and accessibility are appropriate and hospitality is agreed with Co-Chair
- Pre-meetings should take place 2 weeks in advance of the meeting to agree the agenda items and liaise with secretariat
- The Co-Chair should make space for diverse viewpoints to be heard and support challenging discussions
- The Co-Chair should agree and track actions, communicating outcomes either prior to or the following meeting dependant on their urgency
- The Elected Member Co-Chair is encouraged to contact other Elected Member to encourage participation.



## Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee Forward Plan

### 1. Planned Agenda Items Next meeting (24 February 2025)

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Policy Briefing	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Quarterly Complaints Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Performance Improvement Plan Q3 Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Treasury Management Annual Outturn Report	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Information Governance Update Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Dunfane Playing Fields Report	For noting	Philip Thompson

### 2. Future Meetings

Meeting Date	Item	Purpose
7 April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Briefing</li> <li>• Quarterly Communications update</li> <li>• Licences /agreement enacted under Scheme of Delegation</li> <li>• Procurement Update</li> <li>• Events Sub Committee Adoption of Minutes</li> <li>• Quarterly Events Update &amp; Corporate Events Annual Plan 2025-2026</li> <li>• Bi-Annual Information Governance Report (this will cover Q3 &amp; 4 2425)</li> <li>• Quarterly Budget Monitoring – Q3</li> <li>• Workplace Charter Domestic Violence – Annual Update</li> </ul>	<p>For noting For noting For noting</p> <p>For noting For noting For noting</p> <p>For noting</p> <p>For noting For noting</p>
19 May 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Briefing</li> <li>• Quarterly Complaints Report</li> <li>• Procurement Update</li> <li>• Health &amp; Safety Annual Report</li> <li>• Licences/Agreements enacted under Scheme of Delegation</li> </ul>	<p>For noting For noting For noting For noting</p>
June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Briefing</li> <li>• Council Publication Scheme</li> <li>• VAT Update</li> <li>• Procurement Update</li> <li>• Members' Annual Training Programme (including mandatory)</li> <li>• Annual Equality Commission Submission</li> <li>• Members Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Constitution – Annual Update</li> <li>• Performance Improvement Plan – 2024/25 Year End Report</li> <li>• Business Cases</li> </ul>	<p>For noting For noting For approval For noting For approval</p> <p>For noting For noting For noting</p> <p>For approval</p>



### 3. Items to be Programmed

Item	Purpose
Customer & Digital Strategy	
Consultation & Engagement Strategy	
Communications & Marketing Strategy	
Social Value Report	
Annual Investment Strategy	
Annual review: Statutory Equality and Good Relation duties	
Dual Language Street Naming Policy	
Annual Events Programme	
Notices of Motion - Update	
HR Policies / Strategic projects / industrial action as required	
Health and Safety Policies as required	
Staff survey actions (full council?)	
Learning and Development Policies as required	
IT Strategy	