

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Consultation and Engagement Report on the Performance Improvement Objectives 2026-27



Introduction

The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 sets out a General Duty of Improvement, whereby all District Councils must put in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions and set performance improvement objectives for each financial year. Each Council also has a statutory duty to consult key stakeholders on the proposed performance improvement objectives.

The five draft performance improvement objectives were considered and approved by the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee in February 2026. This was followed by an extensive consultation and engagement process which encouraged key stakeholders, including residents, Elected Members and partner organisations to have their say on the proposed performance improvement objectives.

This report provides an overview of the consultation and engagement methodology and an analysis of the responses which were received.

Consultation and Engagement Activity

Between 13 February – 17 April 2026, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council carried out a nine-week consultation and engagement process with key stakeholders on the draft performance improvement objectives 2026-27 through the following mechanisms:

- Electronic survey and documentation on the consultations section of the Council website, which was promoted through the Council's social media channels
- Public Notices in local newspapers
- Engagement with the following stakeholders:
 - Crotlieve DEA
 - Mournes DEA
 - Slieve Croob DEA
 - Downpatrick DEA
 - Rowallane DEA
 - Newry and Mourne and Down Youth Voice
 - Age Friendly Alliance

This process was further supplemented by the consultation and engagement which was carried out to support the development of the Corporate Plan 2024-27.

- Residents Survey (September 2022)
- Consultation and engagement on the Corporate Plan 2024-27 (March – May 2024)
- Consultation and engagement on the draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2025-26

Analysis Methodology

A total of 54 surveys were received in response to the consultation and engagement on the Council's draft performance improvement objectives 2026-27. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the draft performance improvement objectives and if they had any comments to make regarding each objective. Respondents were also asked to put forward their suggested priorities for future improvement.

In carrying out the quantitative and qualitative consultation and engagement, a structured process was used to capture responses around each of the five draft performance improvement objectives 2026-27. This was supplemented by an engagement process with 68 key stakeholders, as outlined below:

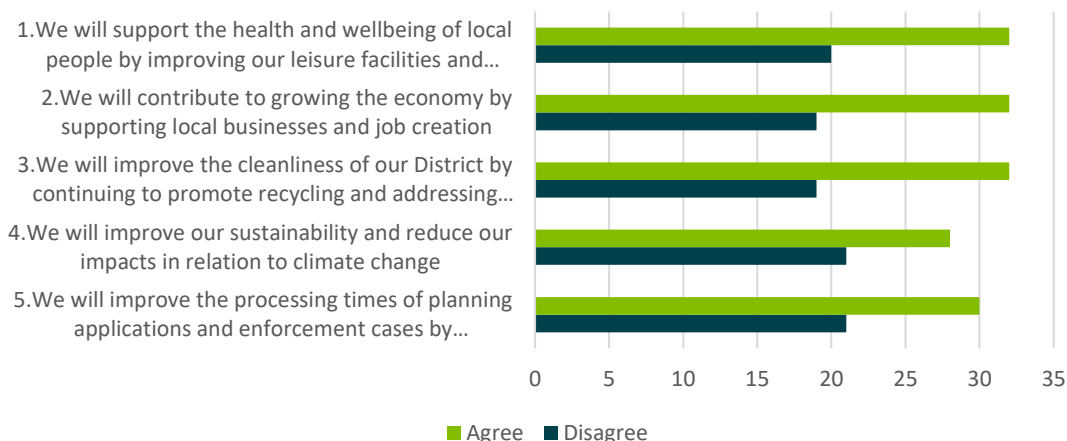
Consultation and Engagement	Details
Mournes DEA Forum	10 participants – 24 March 2026
Crotlieve DEA Forum	11 participants – 14 March 2026
Downpatrick DEA Forum	7 participants – 14 April 2026
Rowallane DEA Forum	5 participants – 14 April 2026
Slieve Croob DEA Forum	3 participants – 24 February 2026
Age Friendly Alliance	15 participants – 27 February 2026
Newry and Mourne and Down Youth Voice	17 participants – 14 April 2026
Residents Survey (September 2022)	764 residents aged 16+ with quotas applied for age, gender, social class and District Electoral Area

Consultation and Engagement Findings

Analysis of Findings

Responses to the draft performance improvement objectives 2026-27 have been received from residents, elected members, local community organisations, statutory organisations and others including those that work in and visit the district. There has been a positive response to the five proposed performance improvement objectives, with the majority of respondents agreeing with each objective.

Agreement on Performance Improvement Objectives 2026-27

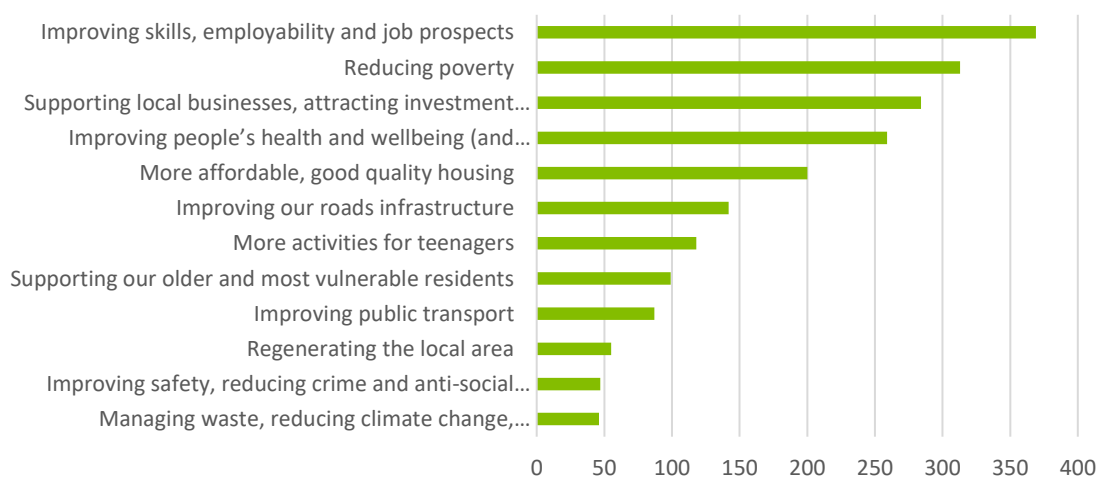


Residents Survey (2022)

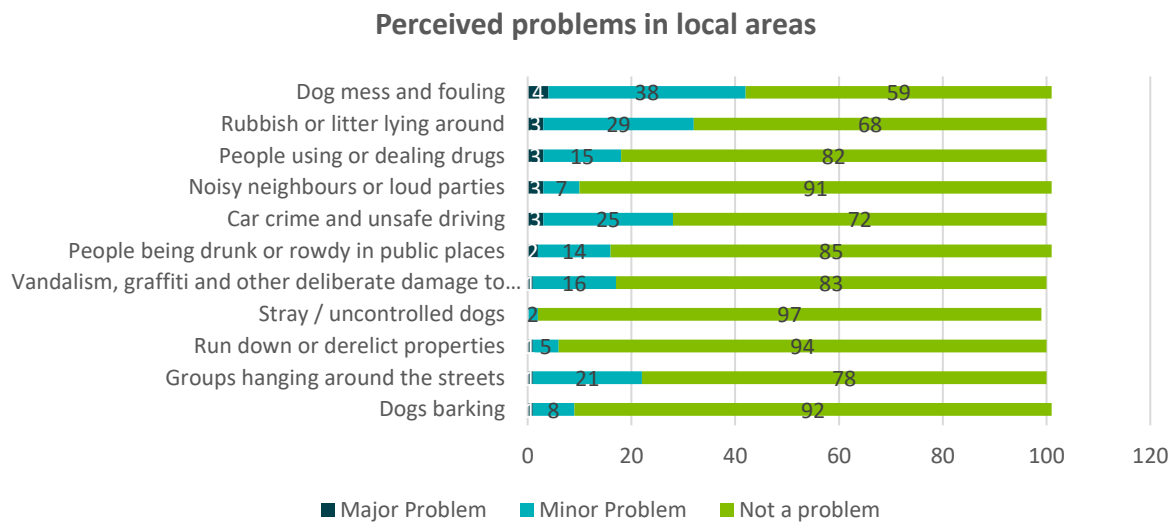
These findings are further endorsed by the results of the Residents Survey which indicate that the performance improvement objectives broadly address the top improvements identified to make somewhere a good place to live.

- The local economy, health and wellbeing, housing, infrastructure, public transport, protecting the environment, climate change and managing waste are amongst the top priorities for improvement.
- Supporting communities, educational provision, accessible leisure centres, accessible arts centres/theatres and museums and opportunities for volunteering are amongst the lesser priorities for improvement.

Top priorities for Improving the local area



These findings are further reinforced by the fact that residents identify dog mess and littering as the top perceived problems in the local area.



You Said, We Did - Overview of Consultation Feedback

Performance Improvement Objectives

An analysis of the consultation and engagement findings indicates that the issues raised will be addressed through the proposed 2026-27 performance improvement objectives, 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', or as part of the Council's business planning process. An overview of the amendments and revisions that have been made to the performance improvement objectives, throughout the consultation and engagement process are highlighted below.

	You Said	We Listened	We Did
Consultation Survey	Survey layout is quite biased towards agreement of objectives and should be changed.	Council will review the consultation layout and present a different format for next year.	
We will support the health and wellbeing of local people by improving our			Included a new measure on 'Number of attendances'

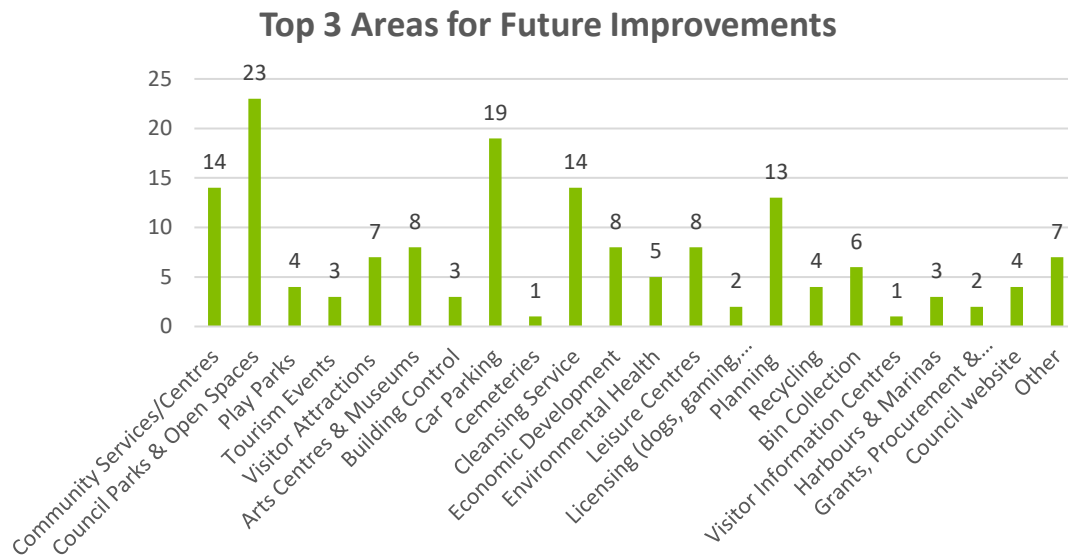
<p>leisure facilities and services</p>			<p>recorded at Donard Park multisport hub'</p> <p>Included an action on working towards achieving disability accreditation at a Tier 1 site.</p>
<p>We will contribute to growing the economy by supporting business growth, job creation and pathways to employment</p>			<p>Targets for economic development programmes have been revised due to the reduction in the budget from DFI</p>
<p>We will improve the cleanliness of our District by continuing to promote recycling and addressing littering, fly tipping and dog fouling incidents</p>	<p>The target for supporting clean ups should be 100%.</p>		<p>To further address the issue of cleansing, the Council has included an action on the rollout of compactable street litter bins.</p> <p>An online dog fouling tool has also been developed.</p> <p>Target has been changed to 100%.</p>

<p>We will improve our sustainability and reduce our impacts in relation to climate change</p>	<p>'Again, too vague. How will this be achieved? What measurable steps will be taken?'</p> <p>'Please state objectives in a way that this can be measured Meaningless, generalised statement.'</p>		<p>Council has set a target for the reduction of its carbon footprint.</p> <p>Council have now reviewed and amended this objective to make it clearer what we are trying to achieve and how we are going to achieve it.</p>
<p>We will improve the processing times of planning applications and enforcement cases by implementing the Planning Service Improvement Programme</p>	<p>'Applications for both minor and major developments take far too long,</p>		<p>Council will review its Enforcement Strategy</p> <p>In conjunction with DFI, the Council will explore the development of a training programme for staff and members as part of the Council's performance improvement programme.</p> <p>Council have now introduced a validation checklist to improve the</p>

	often exceeding reasonable timeframes.'		processing times of validating applications and have set a target of 6 weeks.
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Suggested Areas for Improvement

As part of the survey, and similar to previous years, respondents were asked to put forward their suggested areas for improvement. 'Council parks and open spaces', 'Car Parking', 'Community Services/Centres' and 'Cleansing Services' are the top priorities for improvement in 2026-27.



Next Steps

Based on the feedback obtained through the consultation and engagement process, as well as the ongoing developmental work around each performance improvement objective 2026-27, there has been an amendment to the climate change and sustainability objective as well as changes to a number of 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', as outlined in the Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27.

The Consultation and Engagement report will be published on the Council's website by 30 June 2026, alongside the Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27. It will also be circulated to key stakeholders to support the business planning process.

A summary of the consultation and engagement feedback is provided below.

Summary of Consultation and Engagement Feedback

Performance Improvement Objective 1

- Strong dissatisfaction with perceived ineffectiveness and delays (e.g. Newry pool reopening), and lack of progress on long-promised projects like Warrenpoint Baths and the Newry park.
- Particular frustration that places like Warrenpoint lack basic amenities such as a community centre, despite smaller areas having them.
- Existing leisure centres, parks, trails, and attractions are not being properly maintained, with closures and deterioration risking reduced visitor numbers and revenue.
- A lack of facilities and activities for young people—especially beyond traditional sports—as well as a call to cater for all age groups, not just families with children.
- Mixed views on whether leisure services should be publicly funded, with some arguing they should be left to the private sector.
- Concerns that poor transport links and accessibility barriers prevent people, particularly those with disabilities, from using leisure facilities.
- Perception that areas like Newry are deteriorating (e.g. potholes, lack of attractions), with calls for investment to boost footfall, economic activity, and community wellbeing.

Performance Improvement Objective 2

- Frustration that there are too many vape shops, nail bars, and similar businesses, with calls for better checks and more support for genuine local businesses.
- Views that excessive regulation and costs (e.g. National Insurance increases) are harming employers, leading to job losses and reduced business activity.
- Many feel economic development should sit with central government, questioning why the council is involved and how rates are being spent.
- Strong perception that Newry is deteriorating, with empty buildings, poor cleanliness, and lack of investment making it unattractive for businesses and visitors.
- Concerns that developments like the Newry Civic Centre could negatively impact the city, and that external contractors are used instead of local firms.
- Calls for initiatives such as a nighttime economy strategy, attracting independent retailers and multinationals, improving tourism infrastructure, and increasing footfall.

- Support for bringing derelict buildings back into use, improving infrastructure, and focusing council spending on visible benefits for local ratepayers and job creation.

Performance Improvement Objective 3

- Give 100% as a target for community clean ups
- Advertise what the Council can provide for community groups in terms of clean ups.
- More frequent road sweeping, drain clearing, and general maintenance of public spaces is needed.
- Hire more cleansing staff, improve productivity of existing workers, and better advertise vacancies.
- Roadsides, rural areas, and key routes are heavily affected by rubbish, including fly-tipping and waste from local businesses.
- Lack of action on dog fouling and fly-tipping, with calls for stricter monitoring, enforcement and prosecution.
- Public toilets, amenity sites, and key roads are poorly maintained or inadequate.
- Dirty streets and littered landscapes harm the area's appeal compared to neighbouring regions.
- Greater investment, community pride and cross-border collaboration to address litter, waterways, and biodiversity issues.

Performance Improvement Objective 4

- Some view climate change initiatives as ineffective, politically driven, or a misuse of public funds.
- Fears that sustainability measures (e.g., Net Zero) will place financial strain on households.
- Doubts about the council's ability to deliver meaningful or effective climate action.
- Perceived contradiction in supporting sustainability while allowing waste-related activities (e.g., Re-Gen operations).
- Feedback that plans are too vague, with calls for tangible solutions like better public transport and cycling infrastructure.
- Support for climate initiatives if they are realistic, sensible, and cost-effective.

Performance Improvement Objective 5

- Bat survey issues and biodiversity issues that are being requested to be carried out has significantly increased the financial implications of submitting an application. These surveys /issues used to be at the discretion of the planning officer and now they appear to be mandatory.
- The whole system needs to be looked at. Blanket approach to planning.
- Applications for both minor and major developments take far too long, often exceeding reasonable timeframes.
- Decisions appear inconsistent, with unclear or shifting requirements and poor communication throughout the process.
- Strong criticism of the council's track record, with doubts about its ability to improve or deliver effectively.
- Calls for earlier clarification of issues, and faster handling of straightforward applications.
- Concerns that existing infrastructure (e.g., water systems) cannot support development, and that enforcement and decision-making need to be stronger and more effective.

Other comments

- Re-do consultation form to make it less biased – hard to disagree.
- Strong demand to focus on roads, healthcare, housing, rivers, and essential services rather than broader or global issues.
- Widespread perception that money is being wasted on “vanity projects” instead of practical improvements residents value.
- Residents want reduced rates bills, and clearer evidence of value for money.
- Significant dissatisfaction with council leadership, including calls for accountability and leadership change.
- Support for parks, cycling paths, improved public transport, and refurbishment of existing assets over new developments.
- Strong desire for the council to listen more closely to residents and reflect their priorities in decision-making.
- Need for better support for rural areas, improved connectivity, and more services for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities.

Other improvements

- Strong demand to fix roads, improve waste collection, maintain waterways, and address flood management issues.
- Criticism of “vanity projects” (e.g., civic buildings, gondolas) and calls to reduce costs, reuse existing buildings, and lower rates.
- Ongoing issues with litter, poor maintenance, and lack of green spaces, including calls for more parks and better upkeep of public areas.
- Residents want meaningful consultation, clearer communication, and more openness in decision-making processes.
- Need for affordable, reliable public transport and better connectivity, especially for non-drivers and people with additional needs.
- Greater emphasis on local needs, including community events, inclusive services, and balanced investment across all areas.
- Calls to reduce political influence, improve leadership accountability, and ensure decisions reflect the priorities and consent of local residents.