

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Consultation and Engagement Report on the Performance Improvement Objectives 2021-22



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.

Through the consultation and engagement process, five performance improvement objectives were considered and approved by the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee in March 2021. This was followed by extensive consultation and engagement activity which encouraged key stakeholders, including residents and Elected Members 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 15 March–10 May 2021, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council carried out an eight week consultation and engagement process with key stakeholders on the draft performance improvement objectives 2021-22, through the following mechanisms:

- Electronic documentation and survey on the Council's website and social media channels
- Public Notices in local newspapers
- Engagement sessions with the following stakeholders:
 - Seven District Electoral Area Forums
 - Older Persons Forums in Newry and Downpatrick
 - Newry and Mourne Youth Council
 - Cedar Foundation

This process was further supplemented by the consultation and engagement process which was carried out to support the development of the Corporate Plan 2021-23:

- Residents Survey (September 2018)
- Consultation and engagement on the Corporate Plan 2021-23 and impact of COVID-19 (September 2020)

Analysis Methodology

A total of 41 completed surveys were received in response to the consultation and engagement on the Council's draft performance improvement objectives 2021-22. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the draft

performance improvement objectives, if they had any comments to make regarding each objective and 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 2021-22. This was supplemented by the consultation and engagement process outlined below, which:

- Provided 100 stakeholders with the opportunity to have their say on the proposed performance improvement objectives 2021-22.
- Engaged 1,345 stakeholders through the Residents Survey and consultation on COVID-19 and the Corporate Plan 2021-23

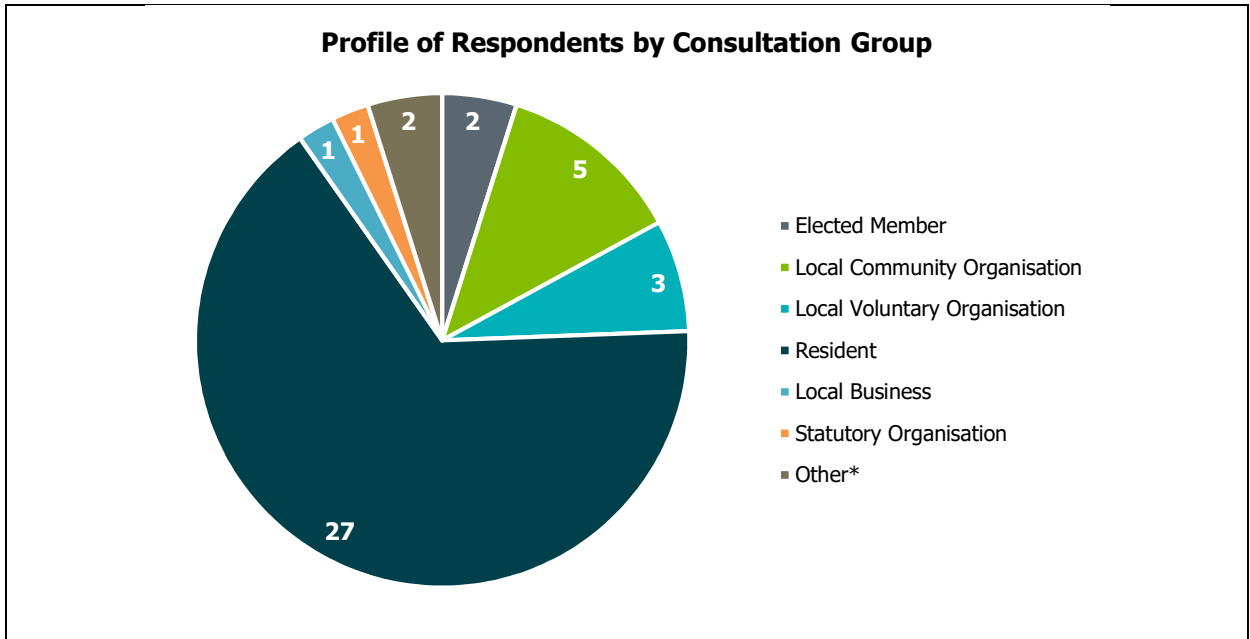
Consultation and Engagement	Details
Newry and Mourne Older Person's Forum	30 March 2021
Mournes DEA Forum	31 March 2021
Slieve Gullion DEA Forum	13 April 2021
Downpatrick DEA Forum	13 April 2021
Cedar Foundation User Forum	13 April 2021
Newry DEA Forum	15 April 2021
Crotlieve DEA Forum	20 April 2021
Slieve Croob DEA Forum	20 April 2021
Down Senior Forum	22 April 2021
Newry and Mourne Youth Council	11 May 2021
Residents Survey (September 2018)	764 residents aged 16+ with quotas applied for age, gender, social class and District Electoral Area
Consultation on COVID-19 and the Corporate Plan 2021-23 (September 2020)	560 individuals completed the online survey / 21 residents participated in three focus groups

Consultation and Engagement Findings

Performance Improvement Objectives 2021-22

Profile of Respondents

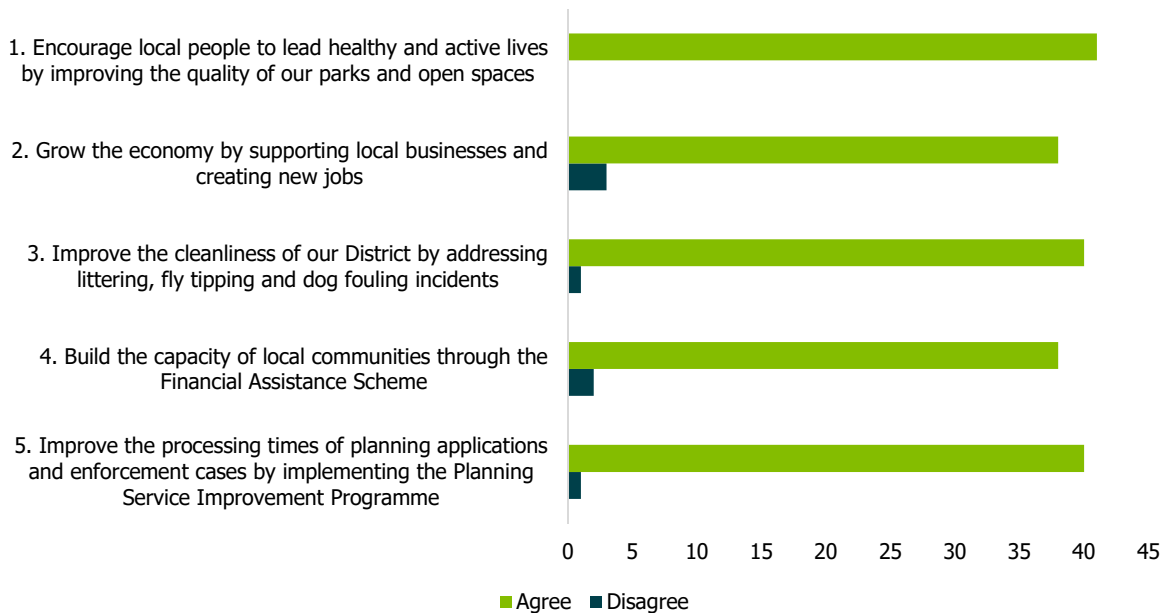
Responses to the draft performance improvement objectives have been received from a range of key stakeholders, with the highest number of responses submitted by residents and local community organisations, as outlined in the following chart.



Analysis of Findings

There has been a positive response to the five proposed performance improvement objectives, with almost all respondents agreeing with each objective.

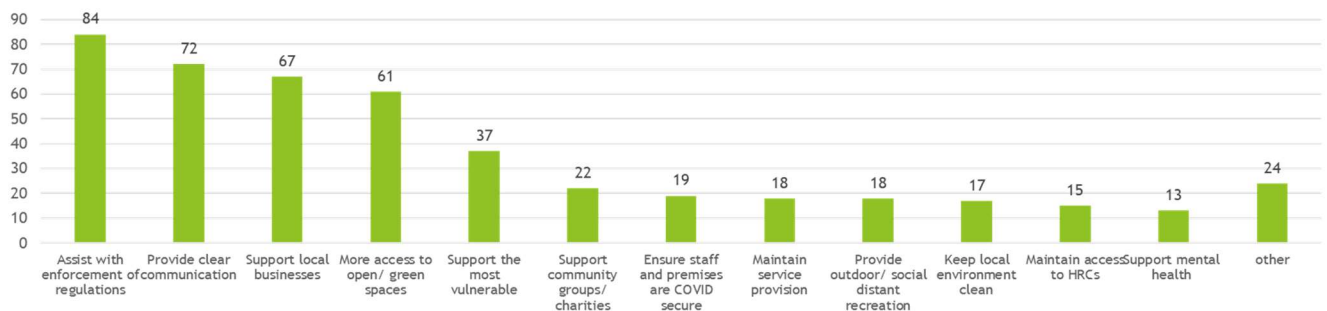
Agreement on Performance Improvement Objectives (2021/22)



Consultation on COVID-19 and the Corporate Plan 2021-23 (2020)

These findings are endorsed by the results of the consultation and engagement on the impact of COVID-19 and the Corporate Plan 2021-23, which reinforces the alignment between the performance improvement objectives 2021-22 and the top concerns identified by residents.

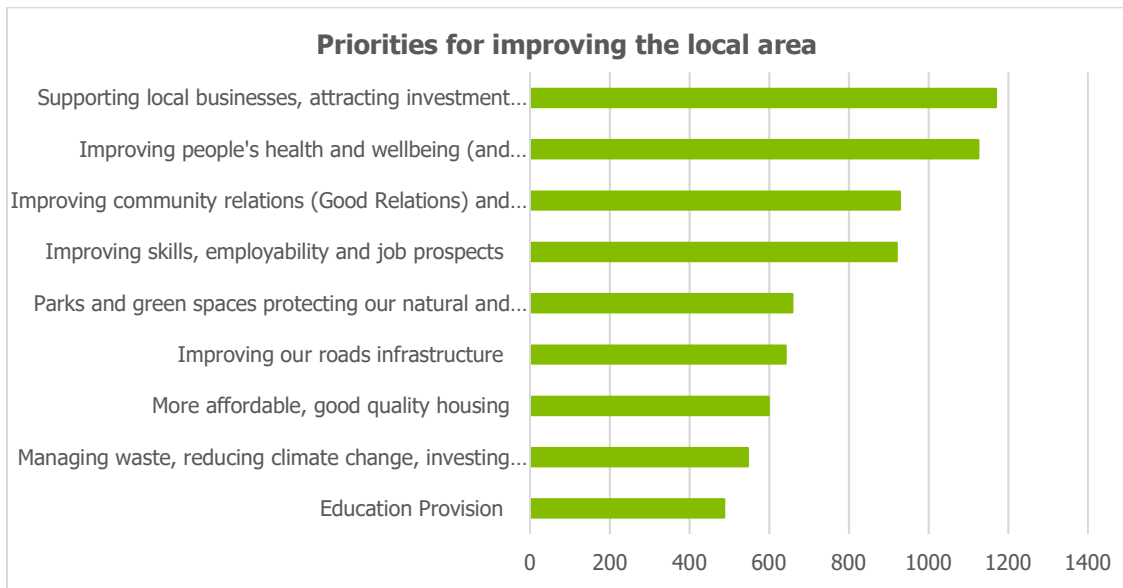
Specific things which the Council can do to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19 locally



- The top concerns for residents include the impact of the pandemic on local businesses and employment, mental health and wellbeing, economy, lack of enforcement of COVID-19 regulations and the spread of the Coronavirus.
- To alleviate the impact of COVID-19, the Council can continue to support local businesses, provide access to open/green spaces and support local community groups.

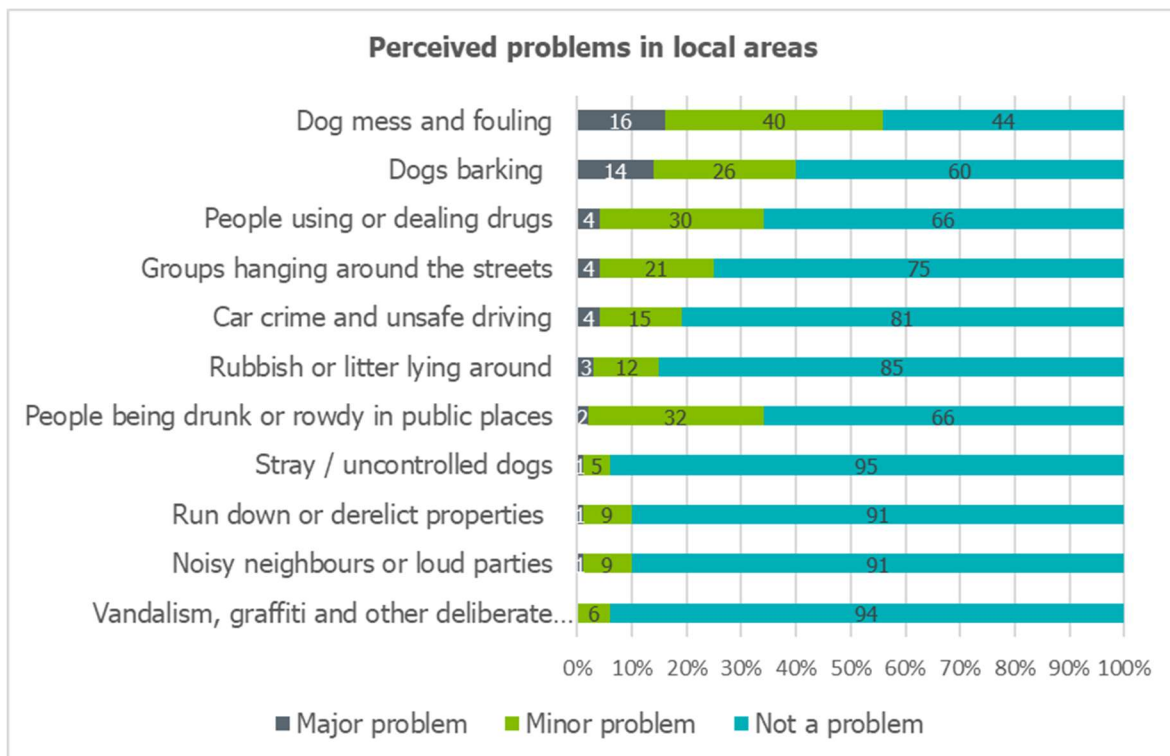
Residents Survey (2018)

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, community relations, good relations, community safety, protecting the environment and managing waste are amongst the top 10 priorities for improvement.
- A cleaner, more attractive area, regeneration, accessible leisure centres, tourism and participating in cultural activities are amongst the lesser priorities for improvement.

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

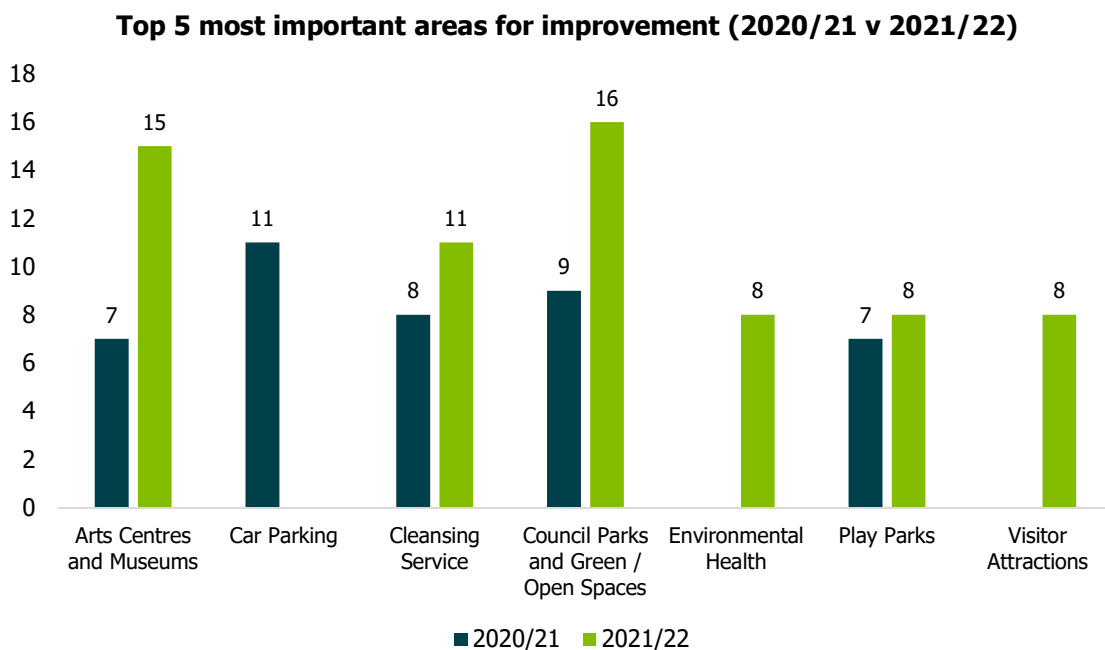
Performance Improvement Objectives

An analysis of the results of all consultation and engagement processes indicates that many of the issues raised will be addressed through the proposed 2021-22 performance improvement objectives, 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', or as part of the Council's business planning process. An additional action and measure in relation to community trails has been proposed as part of performance improvement objective 1.

	You Said	We Did
Performance Improvement Objective 1: We will encourage local people to lead healthy and active lives by improving the quality of our parks and open spaces	Community trails should be referenced and incorporated	Action: Complete and launch 5 community trails Measure: Number of recorded visits at community trails

Suggested Areas for Improvement

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to put forward their suggested areas for improvement for 2021-22.



- 'Parks and green spaces' and 'arts centres and museums' are the top priorities for improvement in 2021-22.
- Car parking was only identified as a priority for improvement in 2020-21.
- Environmental Health and Visitor Attractions have been identified as new priorities for improvement in 2021-22.

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 2021-22, this report includes one recommendation to update the actions and measures within the Performance Improvement Plan 2021-22.

The Consultation and Engagement report will be published on the Council's website by 30 June 2021, alongside the Performance Improvement Plan 2021-22. It will also be circulated to key stakeholders to support the business planning process.

Summary of Consultation and Engagement Feedback

Performance Improvement Objective 1

Older Peoples Forums

- Why does Warrenpoint beach not have a blue flag?
- Does the Council plan to introduce car parking charges at forest parks and Warrenpoint Car Park? If so, this may have a negative impact on tourism.
- There is an entrance charge for Delamont Country Park and access to other forest parks is free.
- Derrymore Woods is an excellent regeneration project. However, it has attracted more visitors and there is an issue with car parking along the Derrymore Road.
- The Council should be congratulated on the Greenway which is an excellent asset with plenty of litter bins for visitors.
- Clonallon Park in Warrenpoint is not referenced within this objective. Additional seating and an outdoor gym should be considered.
- Additional seating and litter bins are required on the Towpath.
- The play park at Bessbrook Pond should be upgraded.
- The temperature in Newry swimming pool at Newry Leisure Centre is too low, especially for those with mobility issues.

Mournes DEA

- There has been an issue with overcrowding in parks and open spaces during the pandemic which needs to be managed in the future.

Slieve Gullion DEA

- The issue with car parking at Derrymore Woods needs to be resolved, as visitors are parking on the road.

Cedar

- Slieve Gullion Forest Park and access to the play park is very steep and challenging for those who are less able and those with mobility issues. Car parking at Slieve Gullion is very good.
- There are not many parks in Newry City. When the Council consults on the Albert Basin Park in Newry, disability groups should be engaged to ensure the new park is accessible to all. Accessibility to parks and open spaces is also dependent on transport and the transport connections from rural areas are not frequent enough. Accessibility and affordability may therefore become key issues in the future.
- Issues were raised in relation to the accessibility of Ulsterbus buses and the need to book wheelchair access in advance, which is dependent on the spaces available.

Downpatrick DEA

- This is a good, relevant objective. However, some villages do not have parks and Downpatrick has no park, which raises questions around the equal distribution of investment across the District.

- There is an opportunity to reference community trails and links to long distance parks, as many villages or towns in our area do not have safe circular walking routes. As most settlements in East Down in particular have either the Ulster Way or the Saint Patrick/Saints Way running through them in a linear manner, it would be fairly easy to liaise with DfI to ensure that roads and pavements were configured to 'loop back' to create a circular walk. However, the emphasis needs to be ease of application. Once community groups have applied, the system should automatically remember items such as constitutions, health and safety and child protection and not require these documents to be uploaded anew every time, unless they have changed.

Newry DEA

- There should be more reference to the footfall and improvement works underway at the Towpath and Greenway.
- The Council is committed to working with community groups to provide community gardens, allotments and green spaces, as a way to support local people throughout the pandemic.
- The Council is supporting 'no mow May' to help facilitate bee pollination.

Slieve Croon DEA

- Forest parks have been an excellent lifeline to local communities during the pandemic and require effective management going forward.
- Emphasis on mental health and wellbeing as this will be a key issue for the District in the future and the Council need to plan ahead accordingly.

Rowallane DEA

- This objective should make reference to Delamont Country Park as it is one of the main forest parts across the District. Consultation was recently carried out at Delamont and work is underway to upgrade the park, in a three staged approach. Delamont has been a lifeline for many residents during the pandemic and the Council should recognise the role that nature can play in promoting wellbeing. There is also an issue with charging at Delamont and a District wide approach to charging for entry at forest parks is required. The Council needs to ensure that all parks remain accessible.

Newry and Mourne Youth Council

- Parks should remain accessible and free of charge for all visitors, in order to help ensure residents lead health and active lifestyles.
- There should be a focus on maintaining, and where required, upgrading the smaller parks, such as Clonallon Park.

Performance Improvement Objective 2

Older Peoples Forums

- Free wifi in Newry and Warrenpoint is working.
- Do the new jobs created include positions with zero hours contracts?

- The lockdown restrictions have had a huge impact on local coffee shops as office workers are generally working from home. Are there any plans to get workers back to the office?

Mournes DEA

- Can we encourage residents to shop local online? Is there support available to do this?
- Are the economic development programmes open to all businesses across the District and all industry sectors?

Slieve Gullion DEA

- Essential skills are lacking for some residents, in relation to maths and English. Can the Council work with SRC to make courses more accessible for residents?
- Is the Council delivering any programmes with DKIT?

Cedar

- Small businesses are dependent on the local economy – will they survive?
- There is a lack of diversity in businesses across Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The Council should continue to liaise with the business community to maintain and retain local jobs.
- Any potential loss of income will have a negative impact on accessibility to facilities and increased community isolation.
- The Council supported a local business to offer 'Al Fresco' dining in the market in Newry. This was an excellent, innovative initiative and experience for customers, helping the local economy.
- 'Neighbourhood Food Newry' is an excellent concept to support local businesses and encourage people to shop local.

Downpatrick DEA

- This objective should focus on the 'Green Economy' and jobs for the future, similar to the progress neighbouring Councils have made in this area, which may lead to an increase in the rates base. Suggest: 'Put a plan in place to ensure NM&D maximises the benefit of the New Green Economy to ratepayers in our District and maximises employment from these areas'.
- Newry should capitalise on its geographic location and Downpatrick should focus on increasing public sector employment.
- The support to businesses should be more than the distribution of COVID-19 grant aid.

Newry DEA

- This objective should focus on the support provided for social enterprises in the District, beyond the Social Enterprise Programme.

Crotlieve DEA

- There is a need to ensure that small businesses that wish to diversify can access the COVID-19 Revitalisation Grant Scheme to get support.

- It is unclear how the NI 'Go For It' programme supports the creation of business starts and jobs as it only provides advice.

Newry and Mourne Youth Council

- This is a very relevant objective and the Council has been successful in supporting local businesses during the pandemic.

Performance Improvement Objective 3

Older Peoples Forum

- Bins should be extended to rural areas, all litter bins should be emptied regularly and bags should be placed on top of dog fouling bins.
- Additional education, marketing and publicity around responsible dog ownership is required.
- A toilet and additional litter bins are required at Monks Hill Cemetery.
- The Belfast Road in Downpatrick does not have enough litter bins and more bins should be provided. Does the Council have a Litter Bin Strategy and a Dog Fouling Strategy?

Mournes DEA

- The Council should make it clear that it can only support community groups with the necessary public liability insurance to carry out community clean ups.
- The Mourne Esplanade has numerous dog fouling incidents. Can we target hot spots?
- Can we educate people on environmental crime?

Slieve Gullion DEA

- Is there an option to provide walkers with litter picking equipment on their walks? This equipment could be stored in community buildings.

Cedar

- There are not enough litter and dog bins at Derrymore Woods and the bins are overflowing.
- Can dog fouling bags be left at dog bins in the future? Can compost bags be left by brown bins to encourage food recycling in parks?
- Newry City is fairly clean and doesn't seem to have much dog fouling.
- Dog fouling can be off putting for those in wheelchairs and those with children.
- It is positive that the Council will include information on responsible dog ownership in dog licenses.
- Children are influential in reinforcing the requirement to recycle and not litter.
- There should be an onus on local businesses to provide bins and clear waste in relation to their trading and takeaway's. Can the Council have a recognition scheme for those businesses which help clean up the local area responsibly?

- Can the Council help promote the use of reusable cups as opposed to disposable cups?

Downpatrick DEA

- This is a good objective and performance should be compared with neighbouring Councils where possible, particularly Ards and North Down, Lisburn and Castlereagh and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. In particular the statistics from Ards and North Down as they have a similar area and population to ourselves but have always performed far better than our Council in this area.

Slieve Croob DEA

- Dog fouling and fly tipping are key issues for the District. Community clean ups are an excellent initiative and have been a good support in helping to keep the District clean. The Council should consider allocating more resources to street cleansing.

Crotlieve DEA

- Littering is a crime and the Council can be more proactive in monitoring and addressing litter hotspots.

Rowallane DEA

- It is positive that the Council is recognising that improvements are required regarding littering, dog fouling and fly tipping as this is a key issue for constituents. The Council should consider developing policies which target offenders through fines and signage, to reduce incidents of littering and dog fouling.

Newry and Mourne Youth Council

- There is an issue with dogs being off lead in rural areas and attacking sheep, lambs and other livestock, which needs to be addressed.
- Fly tipping is a growing issue across the District and the Council needs to come up with innovative ways to deter people from fly tipping and dumping their excess waste.
- Is there an opportunity for young people to get involved in community clean ups and record the voluntary hours accrued for their CV's or get a certificate/recognition for their participation?

Performance Improvement Objective 4

Mournes DEA

- The Electronic Grants Management System is very good and useful, and the team has been very flexible with applicants.

Slieve Gullion DEA

- The objective should reflect the ethos of the Council supporting local community groups, as an enabler, not just a funder.

- The Council should also provide support for those groups who may lack the necessary skills to submit online applications.

Cedar

- Past summer schemes in Newry were very good and accessible.
- Smaller and new community groups may need more support in completing the Financial Assistance application forms.
- The local community has become increasingly diverse and there is a need to develop projects which enable people to integrate and learn from each other, which could focus on community background, disability and age. Is there an opportunity for Newry to have a MELA festival to showcase and celebrate local diversity?

Downpatrick DEA

- There have been improvements to the Financial Assistance Scheme, and it is questionable whether this should be an objective. However, it was noted that further improvements are required to support community groups in applying for funding through the Financial Assistance Scheme.
- The Council should promote the distribution of funding through the Financial Assistance Scheme by District Electoral Area.

Newry DEA

- It is positive that more training and capacity building will be provided to community groups to help them apply for funding using the Electronic Grants Management System.

Slieve Croob DEA

- The number of applicants from rural areas to the Financial Assistance Scheme may reduce as many groups didn't apply for funding due to the uncertainty associated with COVID-19. However, the Financial Assistance Scheme is a lifeline for many community groups.

Crotlieve DEA

- There have been positive developments with the application process which should be sustained going forward.

Newry and Mourne Youth Council

- This is a good objective which supports local community groups. However, as the Financial Assistance Scheme is so popular, the Council sometimes allocates smaller amounts of funding towards projects which does not cover all the required costs and good projects may therefore not be delivered.

Performance Improvement Objective 5

Cedar

- It is positive to provide staff with the opportunity to be creative to identify areas for improvement.

- It would be useful to understand what the Planning Department is responsible for. There may be difficulties for the less able in navigating the planning process and it may be useful for Planning staff to participate in disability awareness training to understand and anticipate potential issues.

Downpatrick DEA

- This is a relevant objective as the performance of the Planning Department needs to improve.

Slieve Croob DEA

- This is a very relevant objective as the performance of the Planning Department needs to improve.

Rowallane DEA

- There is a clear need to reduce the processing times of planning applications, as there are often delays to the process which could be avoided. Consideration should be given to support the diversification of local SME's, potentially zoning industrial land for this purpose.

Other

- There is no reference to Age Friendly in the objectives.
- Mental health is an issue for young people. Access to Council Community Facilities to deliver youth activities/engagement is an issue, particularly in rural areas, as the facilities remain closed.