

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Consultation and Engagement Report on the Performance Improvement Objectives 2022-23



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 March 2022. 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 21 March–16 May 2022, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council carried out an eight week consultation and engagement process with key stakeholders on the draft performance improvement objectives 2022-23, through the following mechanisms:

- Electronic survey, ideas board, quick poll and documentation on the Speak NMD platform, which was promoted through the Council's website and social media channels
- Public Notices in local newspapers
- Engagement with the following stakeholders:
 - Seven District Electoral Area Forums
 - Newry and Mourne Youth Council
 - Cedar Foundation

This process was further supplemented by the consultation and engagement which was carried out to support the development of the Corporate Plan 2021-23 and Performance Improvement Plan 2021-22:

- Residents Survey (September 2018)
- Consultation and engagement on the Corporate Plan 2021-23 and impact of COVID-19 (September 2020)
- Consultation and engagement on the draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2021-22

Analysis Methodology

A total of 19 completed surveys were received in response to the consultation and engagement on the Council's draft performance improvement objectives 2022-23. 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 2022-23. This was supplemented by an ideas board, quick poll and engagement process with 94 key stakeholders, as outlined below:

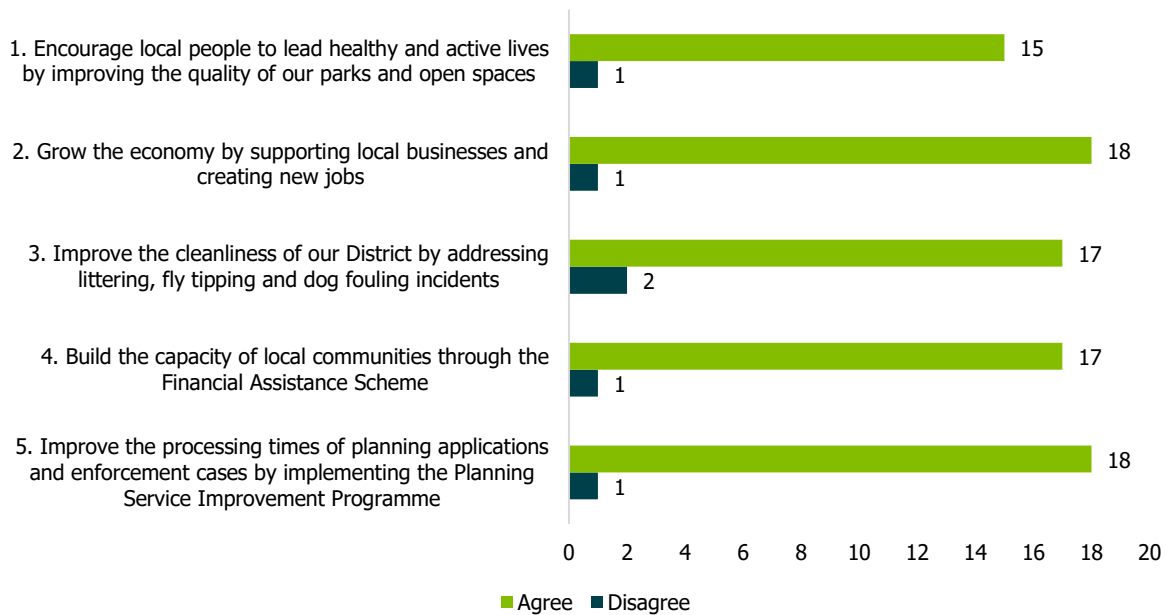
Consultation and Engagement	Details
Rowallane DEA Forum	22 March 2022
Mournes DEA Forum	30 March 2022
Slieve Gullion DEA Forum	28 March 2022
Downpatrick DEA Forum	12 April 2022
Newry DEA Forum	28 April 2022
Crotlieve DEA Forum	29 March 2022
Slieve Croob DEA Forum	12 April 2022
Newry and Mourne Youth Council	12 April 2022
Cedar Foundation User Forum	10 May 2022
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

Analysis of Findings

All responses to the draft performance improvement objectives 2022-23 have been received from residents. 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 (2022/23)



Ideas Board and Quick Poll

Through Speak NMD, an ideas board was used to enable respondents to put forward their ideas for improving Newry, Mourne and Down. The ideas put forward are outlined below:

- Classes and trips out to improve health and well-being.
- Improved theatre facilities offering a diverse range of performances, including music, plays and comedy.
- Improve engagement and democracy by letting citizens have a direct say in how Council funding is spent.
- Improve the access to and quality of outdoor activity venues other than field sports to encourage angling, kayaking, walking and target sports.

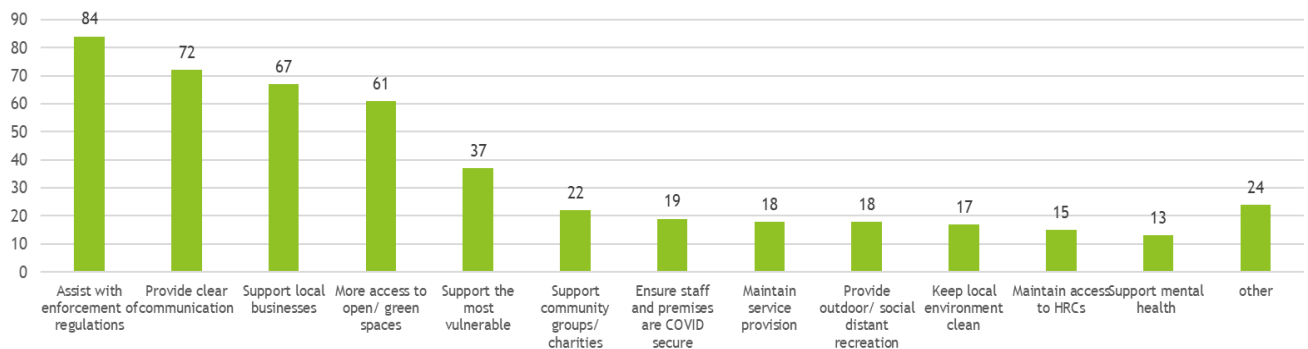
During the last week of the consultation and engagement process, a quick poll was also facilitated through Speak NMD, which asked whether consultees agreed with a specific objective on a particular day. Feedback from the quick poll revealed that:

- 8 respondents agreed with 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)
- 1 respondent agreed with performance improvement objective 2 (We will grow the economy by supporting local businesses and creating new jobs)

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.

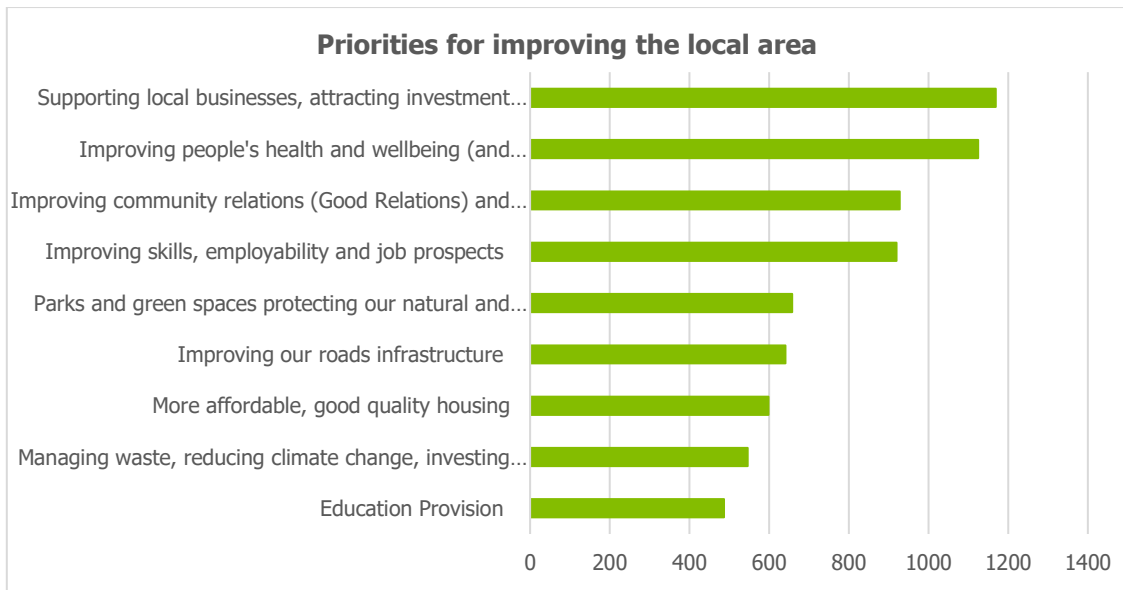
Specific things which the Council can do to help alleviate the impact of COVID-19 locally



- 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.

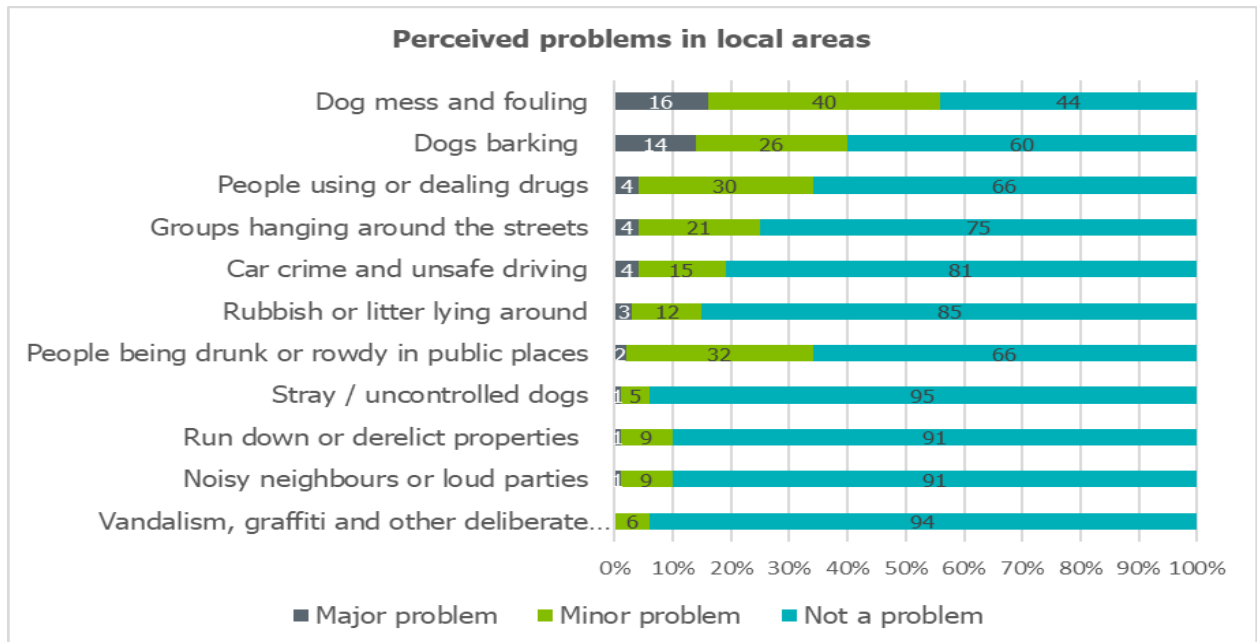
Residents Survey (2018)

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

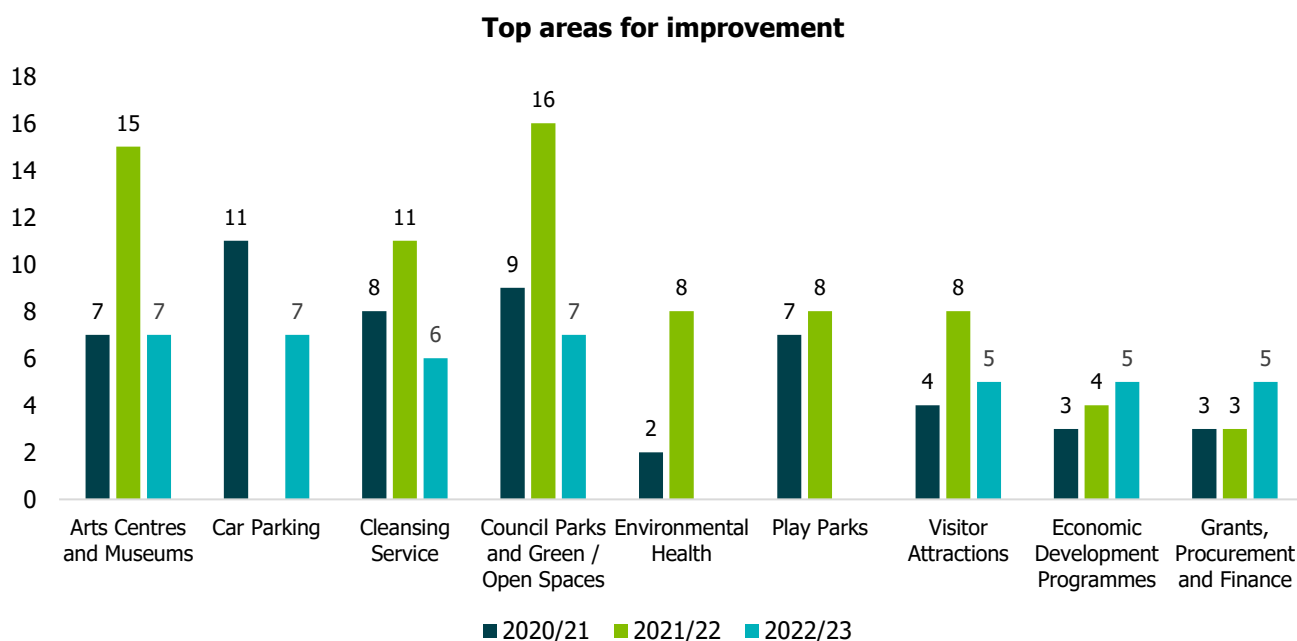
An analysis of the consultation and engagement findings indicates that the issues raised will be addressed through the proposed 2022-23 performance improvement objectives, 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', or as part of the Council's business planning process. An overview of the amendments and revisions that have been made to the performance improvement objectives, throughout the consultation and engagement process are highlighted below.

	You Said	We Did
We will encourage local people to lead healthy and active lives by improving the quality of our parks and open spaces		<p>The Q1/Q2 actual recorded visits to Kilbroney and Slieve Gullion Forest Parks have been revised and included in the 2021-22 annual figures.</p> <p>The recorded visits to community trails in previous years has been amended slightly and the 2022-23 target for recorded community trail visits has increased from 110,000 to 120,000.</p> <p>The number of new and upgraded play parks has been updated and the target has been revised.</p>
We will grow the economy by supporting local businesses and creating new jobs		<p>The figures for economic development programmes have been updated. The 'Digital Transformation' programme has been rebranded as the 'Digital Surge' programme and the 2022-23 job creation target has increased from 10 to 15.</p>
We will improve the cleanliness of our District by addressing littering, fly tipping		<p>The number of fixed penalty notices issued and paid has been updated.</p>

and dog fouling incidents		
We will build the capacity of local communities through the Financial Assistance Scheme	The target of 72% success rate was considered to be quite high.	The target for the number of successful applications to the Financial Assistance Scheme has been revised from 72% to 70%, based on further analysis and consultation feedback.
We will improve the processing times of planning applications and enforcement cases by implementing the Planning Service Improvement Programme	It was recognised that the implementation of the new planning system may have an impact on the processing times of planning applications.	The effective implementation of the new planning system has been included as a supporting action.

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. 'Car parking', 'parks and green spaces' and 'arts centres and museums' are the top priorities for improvement in 2022-23.



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 2022-23, there have been some minor amendments to the 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', as outlined in the Performance Improvement Plan 2022-23.

The Consultation and Engagement report will be published on the Council's website by 30 June 2022, alongside the Performance Improvement Plan 2022-23. It will also be circulated to key stakeholders to support the business planning process.

Summary of Consultation and Engagement Feedback

Performance Improvement Objective 1

Newry DEA Forum

- The Newry City Park is a key initiative that is being led by the Council. Whilst it may be referenced in the Performance Improvement Plan in future years, it currently sits within the Corporate Plan, as a principal, medium term project the Council will undertake.
- Clarification was requested in relation to UNESCO Global Geopark designation and the national park.

Slieve Croon DEA Forum

- There has been significant investment in the play parks and community trails across the Slieve Croob DEA which has been very welcome.
- Play parks is a tangible issue which is frequently raised by citizens.

Mournes DEA Forum

- There is an issue with the cleanliness of the community trail at Augrim Hill, Attical, specifically in relation to littering and dog fouling. Has the community trail been cleaned and are there any plans to put litter bins in the community trail?

Youth Council

- Forest parks should be accessible via public transport and should have more cycle paths.
- Newry City needs a park and there is a lack of good parks in rural areas. Bessbrook Pond is often vandalised.

Cedar Foundation

- It is positive that there is no charge to visit the forest parks in the legacy Newry and Mourne District.
- There are good facilities at some parks, particularly Slieve Gullion Forest Park and Derrymore Woods. However, the toilets and play park at Derrymore are far apart, which may be challenging for families.
- There should be more dog fouling bins in parks, which are emptied on a more regular basis with bags provided at the bins. It would be beneficial to recognise if there is an improvement in the amount of dog fouling at parks.
- There is a lack of facilities and too much litter along the Towpath. NMD/ABC Councils should work in partnership to address these issues and improve the Towpath, potentially using this waterway for barges.
- New play parks should be accessible and the Council should consider testing the accessibility with the support of those who are disabled or less able.
- Disabled parking at Council parks is good. However, there is an issue with lighting at some parks.

Website

- Partially, very little is changed with residents in mind and the natural environment, plants and animals we share our space with.
- The Newry City Park needs to be moving on now as it seems to have come to a halt or updates need to be given to the public by Council, outlining what is happening and what stage the park is at. Transport can be an issue to get to forest parks in the District and public transport can be quite costly. The Council should consider a scheme to provide free public transport or reduced cost transport to the forest parks. The park at Laonda Crescent is fantastic and provided by Council.
- The separation of annual permits for Tollymore and Castlewella forest parks is ridiculous, especially for pensioners who are being encouraged to be physically active.

Performance Improvement Objective 2

Youth Council

- The Council should work with partners to understand those school subjects which are currently popular, and gaining in popularity, in order to identify current and future skills gaps, secure investment, help plan ahead and align education and skills with the local economy.
- A standardised programme should be developed whereby local businesses visit secondary schools to explain the options which are available to young people in the future, which could include apprenticeships or university. Local businesses should promote and offer apprenticeships to young people to help them develop soft skills for the future, in relation to team work, conflict management etc, which may have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Artisan Market in Downpatrick has moved from the Down Museum to a local car park, and the current venue is not as inviting for visitors and shoppers. The atmosphere was better at the museum, as it was a more suitable location.
- The Council requires a lot of paper work to lease community halls which can often deter local businesses and community groups from exploring this opportunity.

Website

- Too many jobs are built around tourism and hospitality leading to a gig economy, zero hours contracts, low pay and no stability.

Performance Improvement Objective 3

Slieve Gullion DEA Forum

- There may be a correlation between the reduced rate of recycling and the closure of Household Recycling Centres. This potential link should be considered further as part of the review of Household Recycling Centres and the Council should focus on improving the overall rate of recycling across the District.

Crotlieve DEA Forum

- Littering remains a big issue across the District and the Council should do more to encourage people to take their litter home or use the litter bins available. There may be a correlation between purchase points and discarding litter, especially after two or three miles, and the Council should consider placing reminders, using illuminous signage, at selected locations across the District.
- The Council should be more proactive in monitoring littering and illicit dumping hotspots, issue more fixed penalty notices and consider installing cameras to identify those who litter, in order to improve the cleanliness of the District.

Downpatrick DEA Forum

- The increased target for issuing fixed penalty notices is welcome and might benefit by the introduction of a benchmarking arrangement with other local Councils, including Ards and North Down Borough Council. This would help place the performance of Newry, Mourne and Down in context with neighbouring local authorities.

Slieve Croob DEA Forum

- Dog fouling and fly tipping are tangible issues which are often raised by citizens. However, dog fouling and littering across the Slieve Croob DEA, on new walkways and community trails, is a growing issue.

Youth Council

- There are many litter hotspots across the District. The Council should do more to address the issue by putting up signs, enforcing fines, issuing fixed penalty notices and emptying existing litter bins in busy areas.
- The Council should consider offering free bulky waste collections on a regular or occasional basis and should do more to promote the benefit of community clean ups.

Newry DEA Forum

- There are issues with littering on the Tandragee Road, Newry, especially after the grass verges are cut by the Department for Infrastructure.
- There are significant issues with traffic management and littering around Damolly Retail Park, Newry, specifically in relation to the overflowing retail bins. Through the Chamber of Commerce, this issue will be discussed with the relevant stakeholders.
- There is litter along the towpath, specifically around O'Reilly Lough, which is also used as a drinking den, with discarded bottles and broken glass. This area would benefit from a clean up.
- Dog fouling continues to be a major issue across the Newry DEA and the Council should place more emphasis on addressing this issue.

Cedar Foundation

- Littering, dog fouling and fly tipping are significant issues across the District, and it is positive to see fixed penalty notices being issued as a deterrent. The Council should issue more fixed penalty notices to offenders.

- There is a significant amount of litter on Monks Hill and the Crieve Road, and areas which are poorly lit can often suffer from high levels of fly tipping.
- It is positive to encourage the local community to get involved in looking after the local environment. Tidy Towns is a good initiative to support this.

Website

- Fly tipping has become a serious issue which is being highlighted on a daily basis by local councillors. The Council needs to come up with a scheme that challenges this issue and makes a difference, as campaigns encouraging people need to take responsibility aren't working. The bulky waste scheme does not work either as people will not pay when they know if they dump unwanted items, the Council will lift them free of charge. The Council should offer free bulky rubbish pickups in communities once a quarter for residents to get rid of excess rubbish they have.
- Dog fouling is a serious issue across the District and needs to be tackled. Posters do not work. More dog bins with dog bags attached to the bin should be considered. The Council should consider using social media to publicise the amount of fines issued or photos of enforcement officers out on the streets so that people know and feel a presence. More advertising of what is and is not to be put into black/blue/brown bins is required, as this can be very confusing at times.
- The absence of wardens in Newcastle is completely counter productive. Littering and dog fouling is rife. Large wheeled bins (such as are at Tollymore Pk) at Newcastle key central locations should be used during peak periods, [potentially at the area in front of the Newcastle Centre and the area alongside Shimna boating pool. The current provision is totally inadequate.

Performance Improvement Objective 4

Slieve Croob DEA Forum

- The Financial Assistance Scheme is a lifeline for many community groups. However, community groups are getting better at completing financial assistance applications and the threshold is increasing, with 'score and rank' being introduced. Local demand for funding seems to be exceeding the funding available.

Downpatrick DEA Forum

- Issues were raised in relation to paperless applications and the need to print and upload the required documentation, as opposed to uploading documents electronically. Is there an opportunity to streamline and centralise the documents required and submitted by community groups, to avoid duplication?
- Issues were raised in relation to the timeframe for completing and submitting Financial Assistance applications for the 2022-23 financial year, whereby some community groups did not have the capacity to meet the deadlines. However, the approval process for awarding funding can take

time, which is why the Financial Assistance Call was launched in December 2021.

Youth Council

- Youth people are not necessarily aware of the Financial Assistance Scheme and more work should be undertaken to promote it.
- There is a potential issue when community groups only received partial funding and the entire project cannot therefore be delivered.
- The 72% success rate target seems to be very high.

Website

- Funding forms are complicated to complete, especially for volunteers who are not fully trained professionals and are expected to complete an extensive form. The 50% funding allocation does not work, and suggests the Council is more concerned with the amount of projects funded rather than funding quality projects. How can the council expect projects to deliver the same outcomes with half the money and a reduced impact on the community. Either the Council should reduce the amount of projects they fund to fully fund quality projects or reduce the amount that can be applied for so that groups can work within a budget they can get 100% of the funding for.

Performance Improvement Objective 5

Slieve Croob DEA Forum

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

Slieve Gullion DEA Forum

- The NI Audit Office Report in relation to Planning suggests that there is often a delay in receiving response from statutory consultee which can contribute to delays in the processing times of planning applications.

Crotlieve DEA Forum

- Since 2015, there have been historic, legacy issues with the Planning Service, which have been compounded by staffing shortfalls and staff turnover.

Mournes DEA Forum

- Resourcing and staff turnover within the Planning Department is a key issue which may contribute to delays in the planning process and should be addressed.
- The Council should explore options to allocate planning applications in similar areas to the same case officer, to ensure consistency and joined up working.
- A recent report suggests that the cost of running the Planning Service across Northern Ireland has increased and Councils are currently making up

the financial shortfall. This issue should be considered and addressed by the Department for Infrastructure.

- Will the new planning system have an impact on performance?

Youth Council

- There is a perception that it is difficult to gain planning permission, particularly in rural areas.

Website

- The planning service must first tackle the scourge of people implementing changes then applying for retrospective planning permission. It is then much more difficult to change structures and most end up staying in unsuitable spaces not in keeping with the area.

Other comments

- Tackle issues of anti social behaviour
- To support peace building initiatives and positively address the impact of segregated patterns of public life within the district.
- Number of new outdoor leisure facilities developed or upgraded not related to field sports.
- Return rate of residents after university etc to measure if job availability at graduate level
- Keep residents informed in all areas by doing a letter box notification
- agree that these performance measures are important. However who is holding council to account for not meeting these targets. Planning delays in the NMD area and the lack of communication and consultation within that dept is having huge residual problems within the area and many contractors are now refusing to work in the area due to planning issues! Also the littering and fly tipping- these are very small targets set that still are not being met. Something needs to be done about this as it is very off putting for tourism
- More action needs to cover the Down side of the council area and not just Newry & Mourne. Down area seems to be forgotten
- More emphasis on the climate crisis and sustainable living in Newry Mourne and Down.
- Commit to regular cleaning of play parks / toilets etc Commit to time frames for processing planning applications Commit to reducing poverty and health inequalities in areas of deprivation Improve citizen engagement Improve participation in council led activities - see below classes and gym opening times.
- Fair and equal distribution of community facilities and services across the district - not just concentration in the bigger towns.
- Much more engagement with residents needed to measure success of how their rates are being spent.
- Consideration should be given to volunteers at the Downpatrick Railway operating the trains, as opposed to just Council officers.

Other improvements

- Improvement of roads, fly tipping/dumping problems, walking trails in local areas
- Improve good relations and the area's tourism potential through addressing the blight of flyposting and illegally erected signage in particular that erected by political parties (Sinn Fein and SDLP are the major offenders), illegal organisations (Saoradh), Unite the Union and businesses on Council property.
- Development of districts unique natural resources for sport, leisure and tourism to attract visitors and investors. Investment in developing the skillsets of residents along with business investment to enable an increase in the manufacturing and production sector within the district to support self sufficiency of the district.
- Better job market, more tourism
- More classes to help people get out of the house and classes to help there heath and well-being
- Park in Newry and if going ahead with a civic centre the location should be changed from current proposed location.
- Environment and climate
- better town centre infrastructure for visitors and workers
- Increase memberships of leisure centres by opening later/ more activities for toddlers / children / wider range of classes inclusive ie for people with disabilities more play equipment in outdoor facilities Increase democracy by using co-production - let the people have more say
- Fair and equal distribution of community facilities across the district which can serve all age groups - for example, Crossgar continues to have no dedicated community facility despite an increasing population and an obvious need for a facility which both old and young can use. NMD/DDC have talked about this for 20 odd years and still no facility whilst other neighbouring towns and villages of a similar size have multiple facilities. Increased community focus - Council should seek to engage communities by providing leadership and resource throughout the district and not leave it to individuals within communities to try to do so with no support.
- To be less exploitative of the beautiful natural area and more protective of natural assets.
- Albert Basin Park Newry.
- Newry is in need of a decent theatre. One with capacity of around 1000 that would attract bigger name shows to the area. The theatre does not require conference facilities, there are plenty of places to cater for this across the district but not decent theatre. More parking is needed in Newry also especially around the hospital and city centre. The Newry City Park should be priority no. 1. More support is needed for community groups across the district to deliver programmes for all ages within communities.
- Street cleaning/dog and litter control in Newcastle.