

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Audit and Assessment Report 2018-19

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



Draft: 30 November 2018

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We have prepared this report for sole use of the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Department for Communities. 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

Audit outcome	Status
Audit opinion	Unqualified opinion
Audit assessment	The Local Government Auditor (LGA) has not drawn a conclusion [this year only]
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 LGA on the 2018-19 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. We would like to thank the Chief Executive and his staff, particularly the Performance Improvement Manager, 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 (see Annex A). She certifies that an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2017-18 and its 2018-19 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'.

The Council has discharged its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act as far as possible, in that its arrangements continue to mature. It remains too early for the Council to demonstrate a track record of improvement: consequently, it is not possible for the LGA to conclude as to the extent of improvement that may be made. The LGA did not exercise her discretion to assess and report whether the Council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

This is the second year in which councils have been required to fulfil their full statutory responsibilities under Part 12 of the Act. In the LGA's opinion, councils should be able to demonstrate a track record of improvement in 2019 to allow a full assessment to be made.

Audit Findings

During the audit and assessment we identified no issues requiring a formal recommendation under the Act. We made no proposals for improvement (see Section 3). Detailed observations on thematic areas are provided in Annex C and progress on proposals for improvement raised in prior years has been noted 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 March 2019 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.

The total audit fee charged is in line with that set out in our Audit Strategy.

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.

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. A multi-stakeholder group comprising of representatives of the Department and councils has been established and a subgroup of this has drafted guidance to clarify the requirements of the general duty to improve. A working draft has been agreed and further improvements to reporting on the general duty are expected in 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 March 2019, making it publicly available.

Special inspections

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

3. Audit Findings

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

- General duty to improve;
- Governance arrangements;
- Improvement objectives;
- Consultation;
- Improvement plan;
- Arrangements to improve; and
- Collection, use and publication of performance information.

These are not formal recommendations, which are more significant matters which require action to be taken by the Council in order to comply with the Act or Guidance. Proposals for improvement include matters which, if accepted, will assist the Council in meeting its performance improvement responsibilities. The LGA will follow up how these proposals have been addressed in subsequent years. We recommend that the Council's Audit Committee also track progress on their implementation.

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.

There were no proposals for improvement raised this year, however progress is still ongoing on certain proposals raised in the last two years. Information on progress on implementing proposals for improvement is provided in Annex B.

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

4. Annexes



Annex A – Audit and Assessment Certificate

Audit and assessment of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s performance improvement arrangements

Certificate of Compliance

I certify that I have audited Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2017-18 and its 2018-19 improvement plan 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 2018-19 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 as far as possible discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

The 2018-19 year was the third in which councils were required to implement the new performance improvement framework. The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement, as is to be expected, are still developing and embedding. The Council continues to strengthen its arrangements to secure continuous improvement, and has delivered some measurable improvements to its services in 2017-18. However, until the Council's arrangements mature and it can demonstrate a track record of ongoing improvement in relation to the framework, I am unable to determine the extent to which improvements will be made.

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 as arrangements become more fully established.

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.

PAMELA McCREEDY
Local Government Auditor
Northern Ireland Audit Office
106 University Street
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30 November 2018

Annex B – Follow-up on the Implementation of Prior Year Proposals for Improvement

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
	General Duty to Improve (GD)			
2016	2016GD1	Linking the forthcoming Community Plan and the ongoing processes which underpin it, with the Council's future performance improvement processes.		Implemented
2016	2016GD2	Use of performance information (e.g. service data and information) to enable performance measurement and benchmarking. This will help to identify those functions/services which would benefit most from improvement.		Implemented
2016	2016GD3	Given its statutory nature, expand upon the Council's interim corporate performance management framework to include the development of a performance improvement policy. The purpose of this will define the Council's own interpretation of the new duty.	The Council's interim corporate performance management framework has been updated, expanded and included in the Council's Performance Improvement Plan and Directorate Business Plans, to demonstrate how employees contribute to the achievement of community planning outcomes; corporate priorities and performance improvement objectives. The Council has also adopted the Performance Improvement Policy which will support the rollout and implementation of its Business Planning and Performance Management Framework. This is to be followed up with the expansion and embedding of all levels of the framework across the Council.	In Progress

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
2016	2016GD4	Cascade the framework (or policy) and performance improvement responsibilities directly to employees.		Implemented
2017	2017GD1	The Council should prioritise the development of its performance management system to enable the performance of all its functions and services to be measured, and to support the identification of those areas which would benefit most from improvement.	An outline business case for the procurement of an electronic performance management system as part of a corporate business intelligence system is due to be developed during 2018-19. An interim Excel-based system is currently in use to identify, measure and monitor progress against existing performance indicators at all levels of the framework.	In Progress
2017	2017GD2	The Council should take steps to further develop, establish and embed all elements which underpin its performance management framework more fully across the organisation, ensuring that corporate priorities and performance improvement objectives are effectively cascaded to all employees.	An integrated cycle of activity to facilitate the development and review of key strategic documents has been developed, with a view to co-ordinating activity and strengthening the alignment across key plans and strategies, including the Community; Corporate and Performance Improvement Plans. Recent staff briefings from the Corporate Services Directorate have outlined progress in delivering the 2017-18 Business Plan and highlighted key priorities for 2018-19. Additional work planned in 2018-19 will relate to service plans and individual performance appraisals, in order to cascade performance improvement responsibilities to all employees and embed the Business Planning and Performance Management	In Progress

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
			Framework at all levels within the organisation.	
	Governance Arrangements (GA)			
2016	2016GA1	The Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee and the Strategy, Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee should be updated as required to reflect their respective performance improvement responsibilities. This should include a clearly defined separation between the role of the SP&R Committee in managing and scrutinising Council performance and the role of the Audit Committee in providing assurance that the Council's arrangements are operating effectively.	The Terms of Reference of both Committees have been revised in prior years in relation to performance improvement responsibilities, and these should contribute to a renewed focus on the respective roles of each Committee's membership, going forward.	In Progress
2016	2016GA2	Performance improvement should feature as a Standing Item on both Committee agendas.		Implemented
2016	2016GA3	Senior management should also facilitate members of both Committees with training and support to discharge their new performance improvement responsibilities.	There has been some progress with internal support for Committee members (provided largely by performance improvement staff) however, formal capacity building to fulfil individual members roles, for example, through more structured training provision, is currently in the planning stages.	In Progress
2016	2016GA4	The Audit Committee should also actively assist the Council with monitoring the activity of any Committee charged with the scrutiny of performance improvement.		Implemented

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
2016	2016GA5	Senior management should ensure that both Committees are provided with appropriate performance improvement documentation to perform their scrutiny and monitoring functions.		Implemented
2016	2016GA6	Using the Internal Audit function, where required, to provide the Council with future assurance on the integrity and operation of the Council's performance management framework and to identify and recommend any supplementary areas for improvement.		Implemented
2016	2016GA7	Clearly define the relationship between the reporting of performance at a strategic level to the SP&R Committee and the reporting of performance at an operational level reporting to other Standing Committees (this may require the interim corporate performance management framework to be expanded upon).		Implemented
2017	2017GA1	The Council needs to ensure that its SP&R Committee is subjecting the Council's priorities, improvement objectives, activities, projects, risks and performance to appropriate scrutiny, challenge and evaluation, and that this is monitored by the Audit Committee. To this end, officers must provide the relevant committees with appropriate and timely information in respect of the delivery of performance improvement objectives.	The SP&R Committee is now subjecting the Council's performance improvement objectives, actions and performance measures to scrutiny, but there is still scope to extend this to challenge at individual project level and to the scrutiny of associated performance management arrangements, including risk assessments.	In Progress

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
	Improvement Objectives (OBJ)			
2016	2016OBJ1	The Council should ensure that each improvement objective is focused on outcomes for citizens in relation to improved functions and/or services.		Implemented
2016	2016OBJ2	In relation to the improvement objectives, more detail is required in the Performance Improvement Plan so that it is clear to the reader how citizens will be better off if the Council improves as it intends to.		Implemented
2016	2016OBJ3	The Council should ensure that improvement can be demonstrated and, where possible, measured through the use of meaningful performance indicators and data/collection and/or other quantitative methods. These indicators should not just concentrate around, nor be limited to, the statutory indicators and standards imposed by central government. Where possible and relevant, the Council should use baseline performance data/information against which future improvement can be demonstrated.		Implemented
2017	2017OBJ1	The Council should further enhance staff awareness of performance improvement across each Council Directorate with a view to ensuring that all aspects of the performance improvement objectives set become embedded within day-to-day service provision.		Implemented

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
2017	2017OBJ2	The Council should continue to focus on the development and appropriate use of baseline performance data and information within the existing data management system going forward, and set standards for achievement which are both challenging and realistic.	Internal baseline data is currently being collated across all services from various sources. This will be used to identify year-on-year trends, assess the achievement of targets and carry out comparisons with other local authorities. Arrangements are also being put in place to begin future target setting and ensure relevant data collation which will support the delivery of corporate priorities and performance improvement objectives. The Council is also developing an evidence base to support the identification and delivery of community planning outcomes, which has informed decision making processes and the development of indicators and measures at all levels of the community planning structure.	In Progress
	Consultation (CON)			
2016	2016CON1	Raise the profile and transparency of performance improvement throughout the year on the Council's website and other communication channels – social media; citizen magazines; engagement in respect of the Community Plan, etc.		Implemented
2016	2016CON2	Encourage citizens to contribute by providing contact details on the Council website.		Implemented
2016	2016CON3	Consider other more effective methods of obtaining views (as well as service level feedback) from citizens and organisations,		Implemented

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
		e.g. a citizen panel; stakeholder workshops; focus groups; e-platforms etc.		
2016	2016CON4	The questions in the consultation sought agreement on the objectives and provided and opportunity for comment. From our own experience of consultations, we believe that providing additional discussion points and explaining any specific matters the Council wishes to obtain comment on, or guide consultees to matters they may wish to reflect upon, encourages more meaningful responses.		Implemented
	Improvement Plan (IP)			
2016	2016IP1	The Council should ensure that the Performance Improvement Plan (and any other information on performance improvement) is more easily accessible on the website and through other channels.		Implemented
2017	2017IP1	While the Council's Performance Improvement Plan is available in a variety of formats, including social media, the ongoing absence of a search function on the Council's website which would provide ease of access to this key document continues to potentially limit access to the Plan by citizens and other stakeholders.		Implemented
	Collection, Use and Publication of Performance Information (PINFO)			
2016	2016PINFO1	The Council should ensure that the Assessment of Performance document (as		Implemented

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
		well as other information on the Council's performance) is more easily accessible on the website and other channels.		
2016	2016PINFO2	The Council should give further consideration to securing a standard format and means for reporting of performance across the Council to secure consistency in the look and feel of performance reports and to provide key audiences with concise and easily understood information. It was noted that the Council does not currently have a corporate performance management system.		Implemented
2017	2017PINFO1	The Council should continue to develop and embed its performance management framework and establish a performance management system as a priority.	The Council's framework has now been included in the Performance Improvement Plan and Directorate Business Plans, demonstrating how employees contribute to the achievement of community planning outcomes; corporate priorities and performance improvement objectives. Preliminary work has also begun on the service planning and individual performance appraisal elements of the framework, which will be progressed further during 2018-19, in order to expand and embed all levels of the framework across the Council. In addition, an outline business case will also be developed during 2018-19 for the procurement of an electronic performance management	In Progress

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
			<p>system, to form part of the broader corporate business intelligence system (replacing the current interim Excel-based system currently in place, to identify, measure and track progress with existing performance indicators).</p>	
2017	2017PINFO2	<p>The Council should continue working with other councils and the Department to agree a suite of self-imposed indicators and standards. This will enable meaningful comparisons to be made and published in line with its statutory responsibility.</p>	<p>The Council has developed and agreed suites of self-imposed indicators linked to the 2015-19 Corporate Plan; Performance Improvement Plan and Directorate Business Plans – progress on these is monitored and reported on annually. As part of its Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Performance Networks link, the Council has also collated, analysed and reported benchmarking data across a range of services over the past two years for reporting to senior management, and is now further strengthening and building upon the performance data which is collated (e.g. recent customer satisfaction surveys across the district’s six leisure centres).</p> <p>In addition, a Multi-Stakeholder Group has been established with representatives from the Department for Communities and the Councils, and is attended by NIAO. The work plan of this Group includes the consideration of benchmarking, and we expect that progress will be made by September 2019 to allow a broader range</p>	In Progress

Year of Report	Thematic Area/Reference	Proposal for Improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
			of functions to be compared with other Councils.	
2017	2017PINFO3	The Council should enhance the transparency of future self-assessments, that these, along with other Council performance information, should be clearly signposted and easily accessible on its website.		Implemented

Annex C – Detailed observations

Thematic area	Observations
General Duty to Improve	<p>The Council has made good progress since 2016-17 in the introduction of arrangements to help embed performance improvement concepts, e.g. as seen in the Council’s Performance Improvement Plan and Directorate Business Plans, which set out how Council staff contribute to community planning outcomes, corporate priorities and performance improvement objectives. Some scope remains across many aspects of the Council’s formal Business Planning and Performance Management Framework for the performance management arrangements, now more established, to be built upon and become further embedded.</p> <p>A key element in the development of the Council’s performance management system will be progression of the outline business case stage for its procurement (as part of a corporate business intelligence system) during 2018-19, to provide a solid foundation to build on. In the meantime, the Excel-based system should be operating with clearly defined arrangements around regular and secure back-up procedures, given the nature and volume of data held and ongoing analysis of that data.</p> <p>The Council has indicated that work to be undertaken in 2018-19 on service plans and performance appraisals within the context of the Business Planning and Performance Management Framework will provide a mechanism for performance improvement matters to be cascaded to all Council staff.</p> <p>A Multi-Stakeholder Group has been established with representatives from the Department for Communities and the Councils, and is attended by NIAO. A sub-group of this Multi-Stakeholder Group was tasked with drafting guidance to clarify the requirements of the General Duty to Improve. A working draft has now been agreed and we expect that further improvements to reporting on the General Duty will be made in 2019.</p>
Governance Arrangements	<p>Although the Council has made measurable progress in respect of the development of governance arrangements, areas raised in prior years’ audits which could be considered further include:</p> <p>(1) building on the existing internal support for members of the Audit Committee and SP&R Committee to address the different aspects of performance improvement (largely provided to date by performance improvement staff), progressed further through more structured training and a capacity building programme in this area, which is currently at the planning stage; and</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	(2) extending the SP&R Committee’s existing scrutiny arrangements to individual project level and associated performance management arrangements, including risk assessments, which underpin each performance improvement objective.
Improvement Objectives	<p>In relation to its ongoing work around performance improvement objectives, the Council is continuing in its efforts around:</p> <p>(1) further enhancing staff awareness of performance improvement and the links between day-to-day service provision and performance improvement objectives. To date, this has involved performance improvement staff working with staff teams to support the development; implementation and review of objectives, with a view to these teams, over time, taking responsibility to progress performance improvement concepts as part of standard working practices. The Council has also engaged with various community groupings and stakeholders in the development of performance improvement objectives and their delivery, and been proactive in communicating progress with their delivery. In addition, an evidence base has been developed to support the creation of District Electoral Area (DEA) Action Plans, which are the main delivery mechanism for community planning outcomes at a local level;</p> <p>(2) the collation of performance data and information within its existing data management system, with a view to developing new analytical processes to expand the outputs available, including trends over time and progress against set targets; and</p> <p>(3) exploring potential arrangements for future target setting linked to developments around relevant data collation, to support the achievement of corporate priorities; performance improvement objectives and community planning outcomes.</p>
Consultation	The Council currently conducts its consultation activities within its own, now well-developed Consultation and Engagement Framework, supported by a Toolkit. Annual consultations have produced a substantive level of response from citizens and other key stakeholders, both individually and within defined groupings, with ongoing contributions also being invited for consideration in-year. Nevertheless, the Council is continuing to seek out and identify innovative ways to promote performance improvement concepts around its work, in order to ensure meaningful engagement with more stakeholders.
Improvement Plan	The Council’s Performance Improvement Plan continues to be available in a wide variety of media formats, through its website and social media channels, thereby encouraging stakeholder involvement in its current and future plans, in the context of performance improvement. The Council also produces a summary document for circulation - ‘Our

Thematic area	Observations
	<p><i>Performance, Looking Back, Going Forward'</i> – which sets out the key points from its Performance Improvement Plan (and its assessment of performance).</p>
<p>Arrangements to Improve</p>	<p>Since the 2016-17 audit, the Council has further developed and refined its arrangements for performance improvement, by strengthening the links between the different aspects of performance improvement and the alignment of key strategic documents. Performance improvement objectives are now underpinned by 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', which assist in demonstrating progress towards achievement, and are also cascaded to Directorate Business Plans, in order to strengthen alignment across the Council's Business Planning and Performance Management Framework.</p>
<p>Collection, Use and Publication of Performance Information</p>	<p>In order to facilitate the cascade of performance improvement responsibilities across the organisation and embed the overarching Business Planning and Performance Management Framework, the Council is to focus its efforts on service planning and individual performance appraisal during 2018-19, while also progressing the procurement of an electronic system through the development of an outline business case.</p> <p>The Multi-Stakeholder Working Group work plan includes consideration of benchmarking. We expect that progress will be made by September 2019 to allow a broader range of functions to be compared with other councils. A sub-group of this group has also been tasked with drafting guidance to clarify the requirements of the General Duty to Improve. A working draft has now been agreed and we expect that further improvements to reporting on the General Duty will be made in 2019.</p> <p>While the Council has made steady progress in the development and use of its self-imposed indicators for internal use and to facilitate external benchmarking, scope remains to develop and extend this over time.</p> <p>In addition, the Council recognises, in its Assessment of Performance 2017-18 document, that further action is required in relation to the statutory performance indicators around Planning, which have not been met, although a degree of improvement has been recorded in the Council's Assessment of Performance 2017-18 document (Pages 50-51). These indicators relate to the:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="607 1209 1704 1238">1. <u>Average Processing Time of Major Planning Applications – target is less than 30 weeks</u> <p>The main factor here results from 'legacy' cases inherited by the Council, which are still being worked through.</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p data-bbox="607 236 1693 264">2. <u>Average Processing Time of Local Planning Applications – target is less than 15 weeks</u></p> <p data-bbox="660 308 1559 336">In this case, application volume has affected the processing levels achieved.</p> <p data-bbox="607 379 1693 408">3. <u>Percentage of Planning Enforcement Cases Processed within 39 weeks – target is 70%</u></p> <p data-bbox="660 451 1966 480">The Council recognises that sustained effort will be required to address the ongoing shortfall recorded in-year.</p> <p data-bbox="562 523 1962 624">Going forward, required actions to address these shortfalls have been set out within the ‘supporting actions’ and ‘measures of success’ under performance improvement objective 3 for 2018-19, included within the Council’s current Performance Improvement Plan.</p>