

# **Newry, Mourne and Down District Council**

## **Consultation and Engagement Report on the Performance Improvement Objectives 2025-26**

## 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 2025. 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 14 March – 09 May 2025, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council carried out an eight week consultation and engagement process with key stakeholders on the draft performance improvement objectives 2025-26, with pre-engagement consultation also carried out 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:
  - Newry DEA
  - Slieve Croob DEA
  - Downpatrick DEA
  - Rowallane DEA
  - Newry and Mourne and Down Youth Voice
  - Cedar Foundation

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 2024-25

## Analysis Methodology

A total of 33 surveys were received in response to the consultation and engagement on the Council's draft performance improvement objectives 2025-26. 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 2025-26. This was supplemented by an engagement process with 60 key stakeholders, as outlined below:

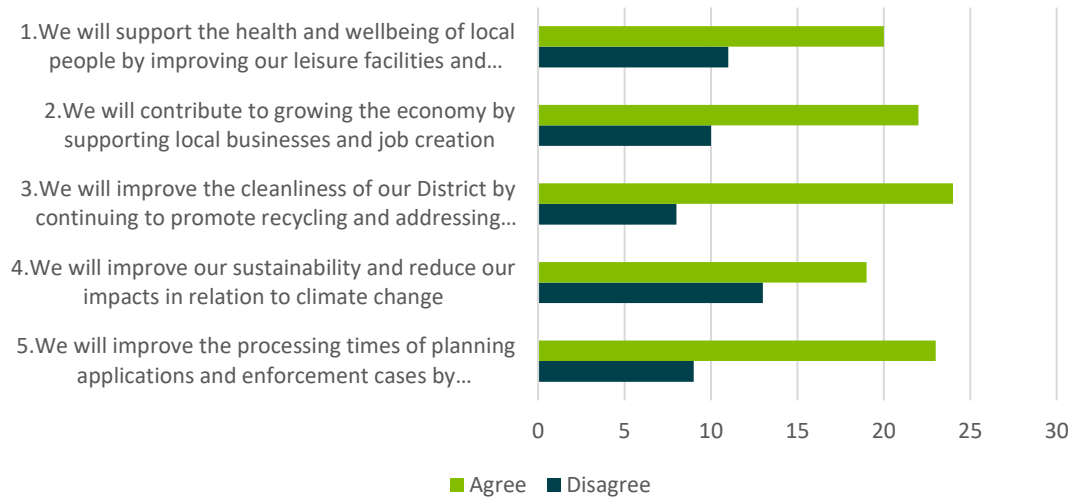
Consultation and Engagement	Details
Newry DEA Forum	11 participants – 01 May 2025
Downpatrick DEA Forum	12 participants – 08 April 2025
Rowallane DEA Forum	8 participants – 24 April 2025
Slieve Croob DEA Forum	6 participants – 29 April 2025
Newry and Mourne and Down Youth Voice	14 participants – 06 May 2025
Cedar Foundation User Forum	9 participants – 08 April 2025
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 2025-26 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 2025-26

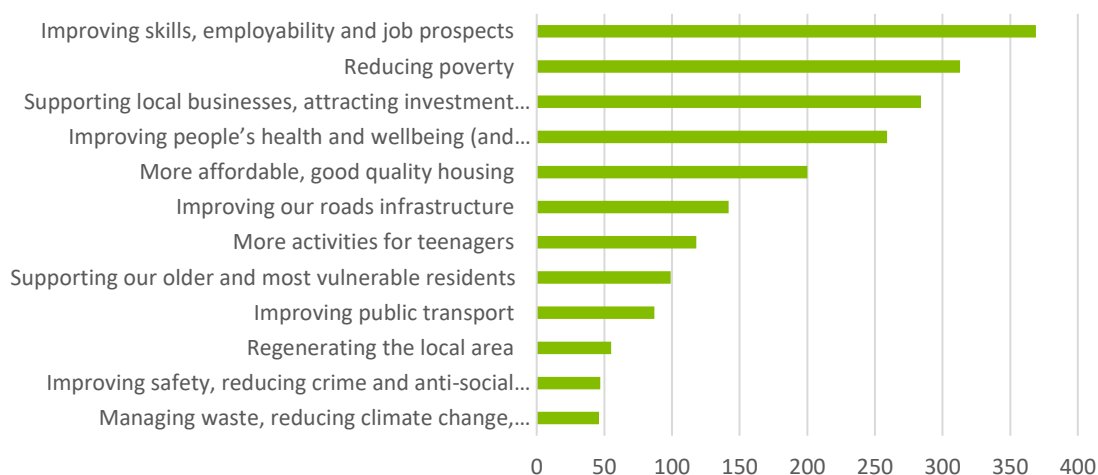


## Residents Survey (2022)

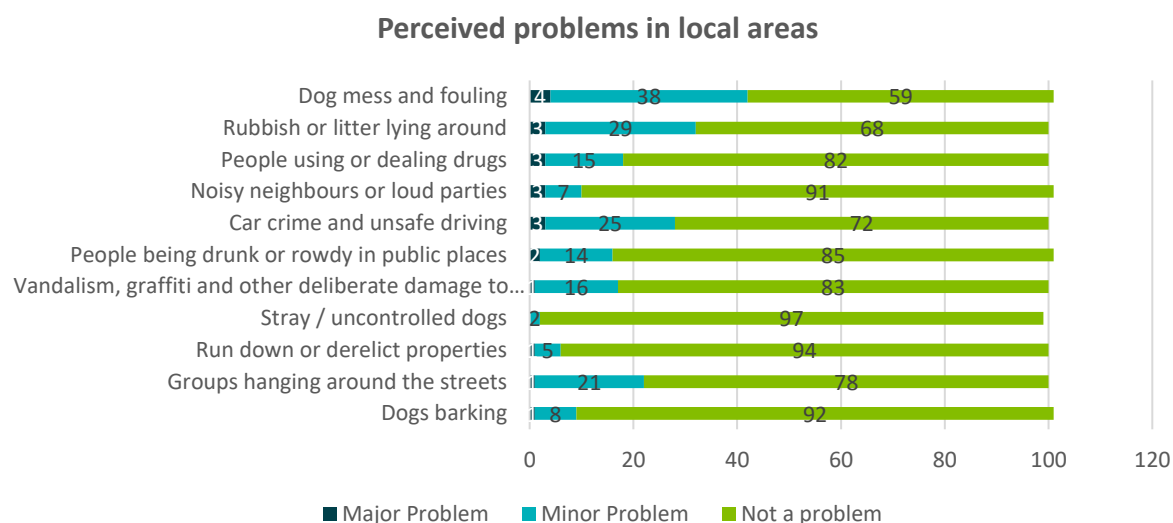
These findings are further endorsed by the results of the Residents Survey which indicate that the performance improvement objectives broadly address the top improvements identified to make somewhere a good place to live.

- 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 2025-26 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.

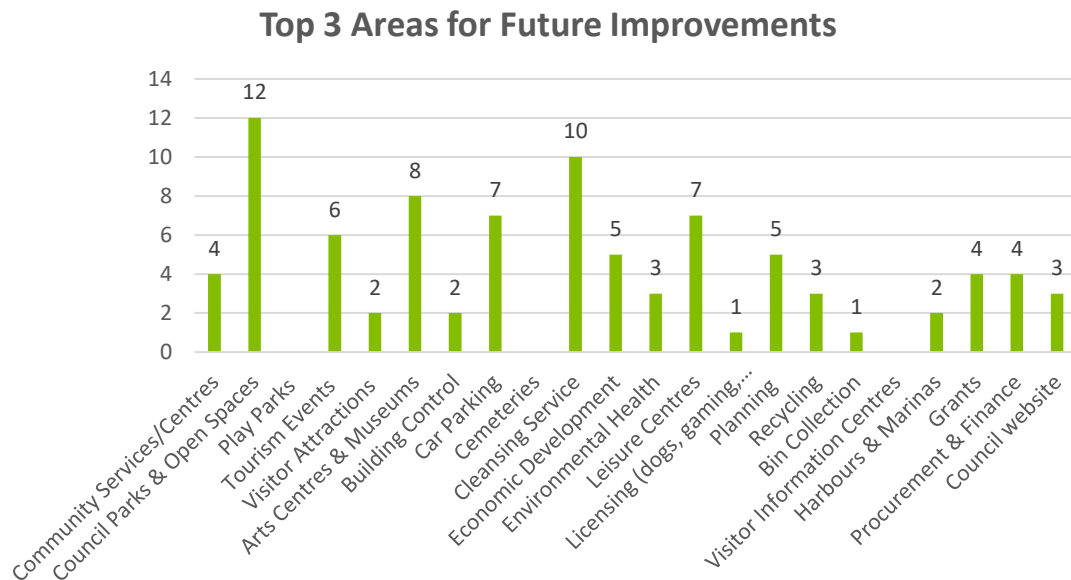
	You Said	We Listened	We Did
<b>We will support the health and wellbeing of local people by improving our leisure facilities and services</b>			<p>Included a new measure on 'Value of Financial Assistance funding allocated to sports clubs'</p> <p>Included a new measure on 'The number of play parks upgraded'</p>

	<p>The CEDAR user forum which were consulted on the draft performance objectives raised a number of queries in relation to leisure activities for those with a disability.</p> <p>A suggestion was made by members of the CEDAR user forum to be 'mystery shoppers' in the Council's leisure facilities</p>		<p>Council's Leisure Services have organised to meet directly with the user forum to look at addressing where possible the issues they raised.</p> <p>Council are keen to use the forum members as 'mystery shoppers' for the leisure centres and have included it as a new action that they aim to implement in 2025-26</p>
<b>We will contribute to growing the economy by supporting local businesses and job creation</b>			<p>Targets for economic development programmes have been revised to reflect the current environment</p>
<b>We will improve the cleanliness of our District by continuing to promote recycling and addressing littering, fly tipping and dog fouling incidents</b>			<p>Figures for fixed penalty notices issued and paid have been revised to better reflect resourcing issues within the section.</p> <p>New recycling target of 70% by 2030 and the interim target of 55% by 2025 has been included as per the Recycling – Climate Change Act</p>

	'Household recycling opening hours need extended back to pre covid levels'		(Northern Ireland) 2022  Council intend to design and launch a baseline customer satisfaction survey of the Household Recycling centre users in 2025-26
<b>We will improve our sustainability and reduce our impacts in relation to climate change</b>	'Sustainable Transportation: Further investment in public transport, active travel infrastructure, and electric vehicle incentives would support both local mobility and the reduction of emissions across the District.'		Council have included a new action under the sustainability and climate change objective with regards to reviewing with our colleagues in the economy, regeneration and tourism department Council's active travel masterplan.
<b>We will improve the processing times of planning applications and enforcement cases by implementing the Planning Service Improvement Programme</b>			

## 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', 'Visitor Attractions', 'Tourism Events' and 'Leisure Centres' are the top priorities for improvement in 2025-26.



## 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 2025-26, there has been some amendments to the 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success', as outlined in the Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26.

The Consultation and Engagement report will be published on the Council's website by 30 June 2025, alongside the Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26. 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

- Not enough dedicated sessions, classes or activities for people with a disability
- Clear and visible information on pricing and memberships needed on website
- More focus on outdoor leisure for improving health and wellbeing
- Not enough leisure facilities in Newcastle
- More leisure services in rural areas.
- More advertising needed about the teen gym as not enough known about it.
- More monitoring and maintenance of leisure facilities.

### Performance Improvement Objective 2

- Rates too high and main streets are empty
- Towns need to develop more multi-use buildings where a number of different smaller businesses can operate and share rates
- More work and engagement with exhibitors to ensure the careers fair is a more useful and engaging session for students.
- More permanent jobs for younger people needed.
- More focus on supporting rural businesses.
- Gondola project not needed.

### Performance Improvement Objective 3

- Issue with fly posting around Newry.
- Getting community clean up equipment needs to be easier so more communities can avail of it
- Issues with littering especially vapes
- Dog fouling a major issue and needs to be improved
- More staff needed to enforce littering, dog fouling and fly tipping
- More bins needed across the District for general waste as well as recycling and dog poo.
- More education needed on recycling and on separation of rubbish into correct bins
- Household Recycling Centres to be opened longer
- Better reporting processes for report incidents of dog fouling, littering and fly tipping.
- More cleansing needed especially in key tourist areas

#### **Performance Improvement Objective 4**

- A lot of damage to the trees from the storm and a loss of trees from disease in Slieve Gullion park, needs to be addressed
- opportunity to link with the EA and the various youth groups to assist in the planting of trees across the district.
- More biodiversity friendly practices across the Council area.
- More awareness raising and education on climate change and sustainability.
- Council buildings need to be more energy efficient.
- Gondola project too environmentally damaging.

#### **Performance Improvement Objective 5**

- Planning takes too long to get approved
- More staffing needed to achieve targets
- Prioritise planning applications using a fast track system
- More transparency needed in planning
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#### **Other comments**

- More public engagement needed
- More transparency, openness and accountability
- Mourne Gateway project not needed or wanted
- Public monthly reports needed
- No paid parking for town centre

#### **Other improvements**

- Fast track system for planning
- Access to grants to be easier
- Dog Exercise Areas
- Focus on Geopark and AONB's
- Progress on Rights of Ways needed
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