



November 14th, 2024

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee meeting to be held on Thursday, 14th November 2024 at 6:00 pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre.

Committee Membership 2024-2025

Councillor T Howie **Chairperson**

Councillor C King **Deputy Chairperson**

Councillor C Bowsie

Councillor P Byrne

Councillor W Clarke

Councillor C Enright

Councillor O Hanlon

Councillor A Mathers

Councillor D McAteer

Councillor S O'Hare

Councillor A Quinn

Councillor H Reilly

Councillor M Rice

Councillor G Sharvin

Councillor D Taylor

Agenda

1.0 Apologies and Chairperson's Remarks

2.0 Declarations of Interest

3.0 Action Sheet arising from Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 17 October 2024

For Information

📎 *SPR-Action Sheet arising from 2024 10 17.pdf*

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For Consideration and/or Decision

4.0 Mid Year Assessment - Performance Improvement Plan 2024 - 2025

For Decision

📎 *SPR Cover Report Mid Year Progress Report PIP 2024-25.pdf*

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📎 *Appendix 1 - PIP Mid Year Progress Report April-September 2024.pdf*

Page 7

5.0 Mid Year Assessment of Chief Executive and Corporate Services Directorate Business Plan

For Decision

📎 *SPR Cover Report Mid Year Assessment of Business Plans 2024-25.pdf*

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📎 *Appendix - CX-CS Mid Year Assessment Business Plan - GOALS Report.pdf*

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Items deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014

6.0 Funding Approval - Public Realm Scheme Downpatrick

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

📎 *SPR Report_Nov 2024_ PR Scheme Downpatrick.pdf*

Not included

📎 *Business Case_Downpatrick PR_scheme.pdf*

Not included

7.0 Contractor Appointment, Downpatrick

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 **SPR - contractor appointment- November 2024 -.pdf**

Not included

 **Appendix 1 - Evaluation Report - contractor appointment.pdf**

Not included

8.0 Sale of Land

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.


8.1 Newcastle

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 **SPR Report Sale of Land.pdf**

Not included

 **DDC154-G-1-25 Draft2.pdf**

Not included

8.2 Kilkeel

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 **SPR Report 14 Nov 2024.pdf**

Not included

 **Appendix 1 MAP 1.pdf**

Not included

 **Appendix 2 MAP 2.pdf**

Not included

9.0 Single Tender Action Approval




For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

9.1 Finance & Payroll Systems

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 Finance IT STA 2024-2026.pdf	Not included
 Appendix 1 - Finance System STA 2024-2026.pdf	Not included
 Appendix 2 - Payroll System STA 2024-2026.pdf	Not included

9.2 Health Plan for Employees

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 SPRC Health Plan 14.11.2024 .pdf	Not included
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9.3 Time & Attendance System

For Decision






This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 2024-11 SPRC - TMS Maintenance STA.pdf	Not included
 STA - TMS 01.2025 Appendix 1.pdf	Not included

10.0 Management Accounts

For Information

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 Management Accounts Q2 202425 final .pdf	Not included
 Appendix 1 - Mgt Accs by Directorate - 30 Sept 2024.pdf	Not included
 Appendix 2 - Mgt Accs by Ass Directorate - 30 Sept 2024.pdf	Not included
 Appendix 3 - Mgt Accs by Expense Code - 30 Sept 2024.pdf	Not included
 Appendix 4 - Payroll Report - 30 Sept 2024.pdf	Not included

11.0 Minutes of Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Meeting held 10th October 2024

For Information




This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

 Minutes of Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Board Mtg - 10.10.24.pdf	Not included
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For Noting

12.0 Impact of Local Government Reform on Service Delivery and Cost Effectiveness in Northern Ireland

For Information

 Impact of Local Government Reform on Service Delivery and Cost Effectiveness in Northern Ireland - Nov 2024 SPR Report.pdf	Page 34
 AC Letter to Council Chief Executives - Impact of Local Government Reform on Service Delivery and Cost Effectiveness.pdf	Page 37
 Impact of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness - 1 October 2024.pdf	Page 40

13.0 Minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board Meeting 28th August 2024

For Information

 *Minutes - Mourne Mountain Gateway Project - Programme Board 28.08.2024.pdf*

Page 77

14.0 Draft Minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board Meeting 17 October 2024

For Information

 *DRAFT - Minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Project - Project Board Mtg 17.10.2024.pdf*

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Invitees

Cllr Terry Andrews
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Cllr Callum Bowsie
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Mr Caolain Boyd
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Fionnuala Branagh
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Cllr Jim Brennan
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Cllr Pete Byrne
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Mr Gerard Byrne
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Cllr Philip Campbell
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Cllr William Clarke
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Cllr Laura Devlin
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Ms Louise Dillon
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Cllr Cadogan Enright
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Cllr Killian Feehan
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Cllr Doire Finn
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Cllr Aoife Finnegan
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Ms Joanne Fleming
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Cllr Conor Galbraith
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Cllr Mark Gibbons
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Cllr Oonagh Hanlon
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Cllr Glyn Hanna
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Cllr Valerie Harte
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Cllr Roisin Howell
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Cllr Tierna Howie
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Ms Catherine Hughes
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Ms Marina Hughes
.....
Cllr Jonathan Jackson
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Cllr Geraldine Kearns
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Miss Veronica Keegan
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Mrs Josephine Kelly
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Mrs Sheila Kieran
.....
Cllr Cathal King
.....
Cllr Mickey Larkin
.....
Cllr David Lee-Surginor
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Cllr Alan Lewis
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Cllr Oonagh Magennis
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Mr Conor Mallon
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Cllr Aidan Mathers
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Cllr Declan McAteer
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Cllr Leeanne McEvoy
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Cllr Andrew McMurray
.....
Mr Colin Moffett
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Maureen/Joanne Morgan/Johnston
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Cllr Declan Murphy
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Sinead Murphy
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Cllr Kate Murphy
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Cllr Selina Murphy
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Cllr Siobhan O'Hare
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Mr Andy Patterson
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Cllr Áine Quinn
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Cllr Henry Reilly
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Cllr Michael Rice
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Mr Peter Rooney
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Cllr Michael Ruane
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Cllr Gareth Sharvin
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Donna Starkey
.....
Nicola Stranney
.....
Sarah Taggart
.....
Cllr David Taylor
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Cllr Jarlath Tinnelly
.....
Cllr Jill Truesdale
.....
Mrs Marie Ward
.....
Cllr Helena Young
.....

ACTION SHEET – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING (SPR) –					
Thursday 18 April 2024					
SPR/056/2024	Notice of Motion – Ethical Procurement	It was agreed that NMD Council affirms to consider a section under ethical procurement and will review the Council's tender process. It was also agreed this item remain on the action sheet until such time as new Policies were forthcoming to Committee	J Kelly	Procurement Policy is being updated with new legislation. Report to be brought back to SP & R in due course.	N
ACTION SHEET – SPECIAL STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING (SPR) –					
Thursday 30 June 2024					
SPR/090/2024	Financial Assistance Programme	Officers will table a report at SPR Committee on the implications across Directorates	J Kelly	Included in Management Accounts Finance Report – November 2024 SPR Committee meeting	Y
ACTION SHEET – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING (SPR) –					
Thursday 15 August 2024					
SPR/111/2024	Newry, Mourne & Down DC Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027	It was also agreed that the LDP amendment be brought back to the relevant Committee.	L Jackson	Tabled at Planning Committee held 06/11/2024 with discussed amendments to be tabled at a future Planning Committee.	Y
ACTION SHEET – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING (SPR) –					
Thursday 17 October 2024					
SPR/160/2024	Action sheet of SPR meeting held 12.09.2024	It was agreed to approve the action sheet	J Kelly	Agreed	Y
SPR/161/2024	Officer Report on Notice of Motion – Good Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To amend the notice of motion which was considered and discussed at the Councillor's Equality and Good Relations Reference Group on 26 September 2024 to read as: <i>"That this Council recognises the vital role of Good Relations programmes in supporting the reconciliation in a society recovering from conflict, bringing communities together, creating shared spaces, challenging sectarian, racism and other forms of prejudice, and promoting respect for all cultural identities; strongly condemns the recent violence and targeting of businesses; encourages greater support and investment for sporting and cultural events as a mechanism for uniting local communities; registers its disappointment that an enhanced and fully-funded regional Good Relations Strategy has not been prioritised since the restoration of the NI Assembly; further records its disappointment that the reduction in good relations funding granted in 2023/24 to Councils by the</i> 	C Moffett	Actioned	Y

		<i>Executive Office has not been reinstated to previous levels.*</i>		Actioned	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That Council respond to the 'Consultation on the Executive Office budget allocation 2024-2025' outlining the concerns raised in the above Notice of Motion 			Y
SPR/162/2024	Sustainability & Environment – Resources Report	It was agreed to approve the recommendations as outlined in the Officer's Report	S Murphy	Agreed	Y
SPR/163/2024	Contractor Procurement & Appointment	It was agreed to commence the Invitation to Tender (ITT) procurement process to appoint a contractor and commence construction delivery.	C Boyd	Agreed	Y
SPR/164/2024	Consultant Fees Report	It was agreed to approve the additional fees for the enhanced capital project value and works identified through progression of the works on site and continued statutory consultation.	C Boyd	Agreed	Y
SPR/165/2024	Mourne Mountain Gateway Project	<p>The following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To approve the appointment of a specialist Gondola Consultant for the Mourne Mountain Gateway Project To approve the updated ICT fee as set out in section 4.2 of the Officer's Report 	C Boyd	Agreed	Y
SPR/166/2024	AHC Capital Budget Requirement	<p>The following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To approve the capital budget requirement for year 1 delivery of the play strategy review as outlined within the Officer's Report To undertake year 1 projects utilising the Council's current contractor framework 	A Patterson	Agreed	Y
SPR/167/2024	Financial Assistance	It was agreed to allocate Letters of Offer to the groups recommended for funding awards under Financial Assistance Call 2 for Sports Capital Facility grants utilising the budget allocation as set out in the Officer's Report	A Patterson	Agreed	Y
SPR/168/2024	Approval of Tender Award and Funding Applications	It was agreed to award the tender for delivery of the capital project and to accept the two grant offers from external funders as detailed in the Officer's Report	A Patterson	At Council Meeting held 04/11/2024, the following was agreed: SPR/168/2024 It was agreed to award the contract in line with procurement processes.	Y
SPR/169/2024	Funding to Sports Club	The following was agreed:	C Mallon	Agreed	Y

SPR/170/2024	Surplus Asset Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">To note the sanction panel's decision to apply a sanction that the club cannot apply or be in receipt of Council supported funding until the full amount is paid.To note the repayment plan as set out in the report.To note that the matter would be reviewed after 12 months.	A Patterson	Agreed	Y
SPR/171/2024	Minutes of SFWG Meeting held 10/10/2024	<p>The following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">To approve the marketing of the asset detailed in the Officer's Report through the D1 process for a further period of 6 months to identify any interest parties.That at the end of the 6-month period if there is no interest shown, to progress disposal of the asset through sale on the open market. <p>It was agreed to note the minutes</p>	J Kelly	Agreed	Y
SPR/172/2024	Statutory Reporting Section 75 policy screening for quarterly period July – Sept 24.	<p>It was agreed to note the statutory reporting</p>	C Moffett	Agreed	Y
END					

Report to:	Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	14 November 2024
Subject:	Mid Year Assessment - Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Gerard Byrne – Assistant Director of Finance & Performance
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Catherine Hughes – Acting Head of Performance and Improvement

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

	For decision	X	For noting only	
1.0	Purpose and Background			
1.1	<p>Through the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 and Business Planning and Performance Management Framework, the Council makes a commitment to monitor, review and report performance on a regular basis.</p> <p>This report provides an overview of the Council's progress in implementing the performance improvement objectives between April-September 2024. Where possible, performance has been tracked against the targets set within the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25.</p>			
2.0	Key issues			
2.1	<p>A significant number of 'supporting actions' and 'measures of success' within the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 are on track to be achieved. However, progress against the following has been limited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a decrease in the number of paid attendances across the Council's leisure centres and a decrease in people participating in targeted health programmes and health and wellbeing initiatives however this can be attributed to the closure of Newry Swimming Pool. • There was a decrease in the number of fixed penalty notices issued and paid. • The statutory standards for processing local and major planning applications were not achieved, and performance overall has decreased. 			
2.2	<p>It should be noted that the information contained within this report may be subject to change when the results are verified, validated and reported through the annual Assessment of Performance which will be published by 30 September 2025.</p>			
3.0	Recommendations			
3.1	<p>To consider and agree the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid Year Assessment of the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 			
4.0	Resource implications			
4.1	<p>There are no financial resource implications within this report.</p>			

5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Consultation not required.</p>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix 1 – Mid Year Assessment - Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25
8.0	Background Documents
	Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25

Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25

Mid Year Assessment



Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin

**Newry, Mourne
and Down**
District Council

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Council's progress in implementing the performance improvement objectives between April-September 2024. Where possible, performance has been tracked against the targets set within the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25.

Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-25

1. **We will support the health and wellbeing of local people by improving our local facilities and services**
2. **We will contribute to growing the economy by supporting local businesses and job creation**
3. **We will improve the cleanliness of our District by continuing to promote recycling and addressing littering, fly tipping and dog fouling incidents**
4. **We will improve our sustainability and reduce our impacts in relation to climate change**
5. **We will improve the processing times of planning applications and enforcement cases by implementing the Planning Service Improvement Programme**



Legend

Status		Legend	
	Target or objective achieved / on track to be achieved		Performance has improved since Q1/Q2 2023-24
	Target or objective partially achieved / likely to be achieved / subject to delay		Performance is similar to Q1/Q2 2023-24
	Target or objective not achieved / unlikely to be achieved		Performance has declined since Q1/Q2 2023-24

It should be noted that:

- For the statutory performance indicators for economic development, planning and waste management, performance has been compared to the same period in 2023-24.
- The information contained within this report may be subject to change when the results are verified, validated and reported through the annual Assessment of Performance which will be published by 30 September 2024.

Progress at a glance

Performance Improvement Objective	Progress	Status Trend
We will support the health and wellbeing of local people by improving our local facilities and services	330,357 paid attendances recorded across the six Council Leisure Centres	 
	155,659 visits recorded at 10 community trails	 
	9,217 leisure centre memberships recorded	 
	9,388 people participating in targeted health programmes	 
	9,153 recorded attendances of young people participating in targeted youth health and wellbeing initiatives	 
We will contribute to growing the economy by supporting local businesses job creation	69 new jobs promoted through business start activity	 
	8 new social enterprises supported, and 8 new social enterprise jobs created	 
	115 business plans created for start-up businesses and employer enterprises	 
	179 businesses supported to progress growth and scaling ambitions	 
	135 new enterprises created as a result of support.	 
We will improve the cleanliness of our District by continuing to promote recycling and addressing littering, fly tipping and dog fouling incidents	12 fixed penalty notices issued and 10 paid	 
	100% of community clean up requests supported	
	£30k awarded towards 15 environmental projects through the NI 'Live Here Love Here' scheme	
	Increase in the rate of recycling	 
	Decrease in the amount of waste sent to landfill	 
We will improve our sustainability and reduce our impacts in relation to climate change	Carbon footprint of Council estate to be progressed in line with the Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations 2024	
	1 vehicle within the Council fleet currently has an alternative fuel source. Orders are due to be placed for 10 No small electric vans.	
	30 trees planted on the Council managed estate	
	18 dual EV chargers are to be installed across the District through the collaborative ORCs.	
	70% of Council fleet younger than 8 years	 
We will improve the processing times of planning applications and enforcement cases by implementing the Planning Service Improvement Programme	The average processing time for local planning applications increased to 43.1 weeks	 
	The average processing time for major planning applications decreased to 118.5 weeks	 
	The percentage of planning enforcement cases progresses within 39 weeks decreased to 40.8%	 
	Increase in the number of planning applications in the system for 12 months or more	
	Increase in the number of enforcement cases in the system for 12 months or more	

Performance Improvement Objective 1










We will support the health and wellbeing of local people by improving our local facilities and services







Senior Responsible Officer: Director of Active and Healthy Communities

Progress:

During Q1 and Q2 2024-25, the Council:

- Ran a comprehensive summer activity programme across the District during July and August.
- Continued to work with the capital estates team on progressing the design for Jennings Park in order to submit a planning application.
- Progressed the essential remedial work at Newry Pool.
- Completed the Play Strategy review and produced a Play Strategy Review Report.
- Sports capital financial assistance call was opened and completed in Q1/Q2.

Measure of Success	2024-25		Status	Explanatory note
	Target	Q1/Q2 Actual		
Number of paid attendances at:	850,000	330,357		In the first six months of 2024-25 there were a total of 330,357 paid attendances recorded across the six leisure centres in the District. The highest number was recorded in Down Leisure Centre accounting for 38% of the total paid attendances recorded.
Newry Leisure Centre		104,406		
Down Leisure Centre		126,234		
Kilkeel Leisure Centre		39,785		
St. Colmans Sports Complex		25,625		
Newcastle Centre & Tropicana Outdoor Swimming Complex		12,329		
Ballymote Sports & Wellbeing Centre		14,116		
Number of people participating in targeted health programmes	20,000	9,388	 	During Q1 & Q2 of 2024-25 participation in targeted health programmes reached 9,388 which is 47% of the annual target. This figure does however represent a

				10.2% decrease on the figure recorded for the same period last year.
Number of young people participating in targeted youth health and wellbeing initiatives	15,000	9,153	 	Between April & September 2024, 9,153 attendances were recorded of young people participating in youth health and wellbeing initiatives across the District, achieving 61% of the annual target. This figure does however represent a 35% decrease on the figure recorded for the same period last year. These initiatives included summer sports camps, teen fitness, volleyball and £1 summer activities which have been impacted as a result of the closure of Newry swimming pool.
Number of leisure centre memberships	10,000	9,217	 	A total of 9,217 leisure centre memberships were recorded by the end of Q2 2024-25 which is a decrease of 6.9% when compared to the 9,904 memberships recorded at the end of Q2 2023-24
Number of capital leisure projects progressed	No target	8		Projects being progressed at different stages for Donard Park, Dundrum, Kilkeel Leisure Centre, Jennings Park & Dunleath.
Number of recorded visits at community trails	265,000	155,659	 	155,659 visits were recorded at the community trails across the District between April and September of this year, achieving over 58.7% of the annual target set. This figure also represents a 29% increase on the figure recorded for the same period last year.

Performance Improvement Objective 2








We will contribute to growing the economy by supporting local businesses and job creation




Senior Responsible Officer: Director of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism

Progress:

During Q1 and Q2 2024-25, the Council:

- Approved the 2024-25 Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Action Plan with two LMP meeting conducted.
- LMP Employment Pathway Job Fair event on 24th May with 50 employers; 13 support organisations; and 301 attendees, over 625 jobs were on offer and 71% of attendees were aged 18-49.
- LMP Golf Futures – Post Primary School engagement (50 pupils) Amgen Irish Open
- Recruitment commenced for LMP HGV academy.
- Received funding £192,650.00 for Multiply from UKSPF to upskill employees on numeracy
- Delivered a range of master classes (in person and online) via Go Succeed
- Delivered a Make it Local campaign in Newcastle to support the business community during Eats and Beats and the Amgen Irish Open.
- Continues to support the startup and growth of Social Enterprises in NMD.
- Continues to support artisan traders via artisan markets held monthly in Downpatrick, Newcastle and Warrenpoint.

Measure of success	2024-25		Status	Explanatory note
	Target	Q1/Q2 Actual		
Number of social enterprise start-ups supported	12	8	 	8 new social enterprise start-ups engaged, achieving 67% of the annual target.
Number of social enterprise jobs created	12	8	 	8 new social enterprise jobs created, achieving 67% of the annual target.
Number of participants engaged across all 'Go Succeed' activity	712	460		Between April and September 2024, 460 people registered for the Go Succeed Programme achieving 65% of the annual target. These registrations were across the three pillars of: Engage: 226 Foundation 55, and Growth: 179
Number of business plans created for start-up businesses and employer enterprises	361	115	 	115 Business Plans approved, achieving 32% of the annual target. These include: 102 Business Plans 13 Enterprise Action Plans

Number of new enterprises created as a result of support	195	135		226 start-ups registered for 'Go Succeed' between April and September 2024. Using the methodology developed by the programme this has resulted in 135 new startups registering to be created, achieving 69% of the annual target.
Number of new jobs promoted through business start up activity NI 'Go Succeed' <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>	170	69		69 jobs were created between April and September 2024. Go Succeed offers 3 types of plans (Basic, Enterprise Action and Business). This accounts for 41% of the annual target
Number of existing businesses supported to progress growth and scaling ambitions	220	179		179 businesses received 1-2-1 diagnostic support. Mentoring is allocated depending on growth ambitions i.e. 10 hours, 15 hours and 21 hours. Average support is 15 hours.

Performance Improvement Objective 3




We will improve the cleanliness of our District by continuing to promote recycling and addressing littering, fly tipping and dog fouling incidents







Senior Responsible Officer: Director of Sustainability and Environment

Progress:

During Q1 and Q2 2024-25, the Council:

- Received 371 service requests for incidents of illicit dumping and fly tipping (293) and dog fouling (78).
- Issued 12 fixed penalty notices (10 of which have been paid). Overall, 83.5% of fixed penalty notices have been paid to date.
- Assisted 12 voluntary organisations, community groups, sports associations, schools and individuals with community clean ups across the District.
- Supported the NI 'Live Here Love Here' scheme, through which £30,469 was awarded towards 15 environmental projects covering themes such as community clean ups, community food growing initiatives and skill sharing in horticulture and community growing.
- Recorded an increase in the rate of recycling and a decrease in the amount of biodegradable waste sent to landfill. All current statutory standards have been achieved.

Measure of success	2024-25 Target	Q1/Q2 Actual	Status	Explanatory note
LEAMS score (Keep NI Beautiful Cleanliness Index)	65	-	-	The annual Cleaner Neighbourhoods Survey results for the 2023-24 financial year have not yet been published by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. Once it is released it will be reported through the annual Assessment of Performance 2024-25.
Number of fixed penalty notices issued (littering, fly tipping and dog fouling)	120	12		The Council issued 12 fixed penalty notices, achieving 10% of the annual target. To date, 10 of the fixed penalty notices have been paid which represents 83.5% of the annual target. FPN's not paid will be referred for legal action with a higher penalty likely to apply. It should be noted that the post responsible for the management of the enforcement team continues to be vacant.
Number of fixed penalty notices paid (littering, fly tipping and dog fouling)	96	10		
Percentage of community clean up requests supported	90%	100%		The Council assisted with 12 community clean ups between April and September 2024, providing

				support to all requests from the community.
Number of 'Live Here Love Here' environmental projects	No target	15		A total of 15 environmental projects across Newry, Mourne and Down received funding through the NI 'Live Here Love Here' small grants scheme.
The percentage of household waste collected by District Councils that is sent for recycling <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>	50% by 2020	Q1 Actual 52.5%	 	In Q1 2024-25, the 2020 target has been exceeded with the rate of recycling recorded as 52.5% for Newry, Mourne and Down. This falls below the regional average of 54.5% and the Council is currently ranked 9/11 across Northern Ireland. When compared to Q1 2023-24, this represents an increase of 0.1% in the rate of recycling, from 52.4% to 52.5%.
The amount of biodegradable Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste that is landfilled <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>	<20,954 tonnes (2019-20)	51	 	During Q1 2024-25, the Council sent 51 tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste to landfill which was the second lowest across Northern Ireland and has only used 0.2% of the NILAS* allowance. When compared to Q1 2023-24, the amount of waste that was sent to landfill decreased by 90%, from 504 tonnes.
The amount of Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste arisings <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>	No target	23,250		When compared to Q1 2023-24, the amount of local authority collected municipal waste arisings increased by 3.5%, from 22,473 tonnes to 23,250 tonnes. This increase is higher than the 1.6% increase experienced at the regional level.

*NILAS: Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme.

Performance Improvement Objective 4









We will improve our sustainability and reduce our impacts in relation to climate change


Senior Responsible Officer: Director of Sustainability & Environment

Progress:

During Q1 and Q2 2024-25, the Council:

- Progressed the development of a Climate Change and Sustainable Development Strategy which will be brought to Committee for approval in Q4 2024-25.
- Continued the development of a Climate Change Adaptation Plan which will be brought to Committee for approval in Q4 2024-25.
- Progressed the development of the Newry, Mourne and Down Biodiversity Strategy (2023-30), with a publication of the strategy due in Q4 2024-25.
- Continues to implement the Fleet Replacement Programme. Fleet modernisation is delivering a significant reduction in CO2 emissions.

Measure of Success	2024-25 Target	Q1/Q2 Actual	Status	Explanatory note
Carbon footprint of Council Estate	No Target			The introduction of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 has set a target of Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 came into effect on 3rd May 2024. These regulations require Council to provide the following reports: •Climate Mitigation – Report due by 31st October 2025 •Climate Adaptation – Report due by 31st March 2026 The requirement for carbon baseline reporting commences for financial year ending 31st of March 2025.
Renewable Energy generation	No Target			
Energy Consumption Baseline	No Target			
Percentage of Council fleet younger than 8 years	85%	70%	 	70% of the Council's fleet is younger than 8 years and is an increase of 9% when compared to the 61% recorded for the same period last year.
Number of vehicles within the Council fleet that have an alternative fuel source	10	1	 	Approval has been granted for the replacement of a proportion of existing small and medium sized diesel vans with electric vehicles. Orders are now due to be placed for 10 No small electric vans. The funding has been approved for charging infrastructure, procurement for this project is currently underway.
Number of trees planted on Council managed estate	2,800	30		30 trees have been planted across the District during Q1 & Q2. In general, the planting season takes place during Q3 &

				Q4 with a number of projects planned to take place during this period.
Number of Council supported EV charging points	18	0		18 dual chargers are to be installed through the collaborative ORCs (On-Street Residential Charge Point Scheme) project, which is currently being procured, with delivery expected by the end of Q4 2024-25.

Performance Improvement Objective 5




We will improve the processing times of planning applications and enforcement cases by implementing the Planning Service Improvement Programme

Senior Responsible Officer: Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism

Progress:

During Q1 2024-25, the Council:

- Received 287 planning applications in total which is the third highest across Northern Ireland.
- The Council decided on 274 applications in Q1 2024-25, which is the second highest across Northern Ireland. 247 local planning applications were approved, resulting in an approval rate of 90.1%, which is below the Northern Ireland average of 94.5%.
- Processed 1.8% of local planning applications within the statutory standard of <15 weeks, which is below the regional average of 43.4%. This represents a decrease of 14.6% when compared to the 16.4% of applications processed within <15 weeks during Q1 2023-24.
- Received 6 major planning application, decided on 4 applications and approved 3 applications. In Q1 2023-24, 25% of major planning applications were processed within the statutory standard of <30 weeks which is below the current regional average of 43.9%. This represents an increase of 25% compared to the 0% applications processed within <30 weeks in Q1 2023-24.
- Opened 76 enforcement cases which is the third highest across NI with 71 cases concluded. As of 30 June 2024, the Council had 814 planning enforcement cases in the system, which is by far, the highest across Northern Ireland.

Measure of Success	2024-25		Status	Explanatory note
	Target	Q1 Actual		
Average processing time for local planning applications (weeks) <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>	<15 weeks	43.1 weeks		During Q1 2024-25, the average processing time for local planning applications was 43.1 weeks which is above the regional average of 19.0 weeks. When compared to Q1 2023-24, this represents an increase of 14.5 weeks for Newry, Mourne and Down.
Average processing time of major planning applications (weeks) <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>	<30 weeks	118.5 weeks		During Q1 2024-25, the average processing time for major planning applications was 118.5 weeks which is above the regional average of 38.6 weeks. When compared to Q1 2023-24 however, this represents a decrease of 394.5 weeks for Newry, Mourne and Down.
Percentage of planning enforcement cases progressed within	70%	40.8%		During Q1 2024-25, the percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks was 40.8% which is below the regional average of 69.7%. When compared to Q1 2023-24,

39 weeks <i>(statutory performance indicator)</i>				this represents a decrease of 26.5% for Newry, Mourne and Down.
Number of planning applications in the system for 12 months or more	150	397	☹️	As of 30 June 2024, Newry, Mourne and Down had 397 planning applications in the system for 12 months or more. This represents an increase of 45 applications when compared to March 2024 and 157 applications when compared to 30 June 2023. A reduction of 247 applications is required to achieve the annual target.
Number of planning applications in the system for 12 months or less	700	1,108	☹️	As of 30 June 2024, Newry, Mourne and Down had 1,108 planning applications in the system for 12 months or less. This represents a decrease of 46 applications when compared to 31 March 2024 and an increase of 84 applications when compared to 30 June 2023. A reduction of 408 applications is required to achieve the annual target.
Number of enforcement cases in the system 12 months or more	450	598	☹️	As of 30 June 2024, Newry, Mourne and Down had 598 enforcement cases in the system for 12 months or more. This represents a decrease of 1 case when compared to 31 March 2024 and an increase of 61 cases when compared to 30 June 2023. A reduction of 148 cases is required to achieve the annual target.

Report to:	Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	14 November 2024
Subject:	Mid Year Assessments of Chief Executive – Corporate Services Directorate Business Plan 2024-25
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Marie Ward - Chief Executive Josephine Kelly – Director: Corporate Services
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Marie Ward - Chief Executive Josephine Kelly– Director: Corporate Services

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

	For decision	X	For noting only	
1.0	Purpose and Background			
1.1	Directorate Business Plans provide an overview of planned activity for the year ahead, and contribute to the delivery of the Community Plan, Corporate Plan and other key plans and strategies. They form an essential part of the Council's Business Planning and Performance Management Framework, which demonstrates how corporate objectives are cascaded across the organisation and provides assurance that they are being delivered.			
2.0	Key issues			
2.1	In order to improve transparency and accountability, and facilitate a performance led approach to business planning, each Directorate has undertaken an assessment of their Business Plan 2024-25, to provide an overview of progress between April-September 2024. This exercise forms an important part of the Council's statutory responsibility to strengthen the way performance is monitored, reviewed and reported across the organisation.			
2.2	The Mid Year Assessment of the Chief Executive – Corporate Services Directorate Business Plan is outlined at Appendix 1.			
3.0	Recommendations			
3.1	To consider and agree the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mid Year Assessment of the Chief Executive – Corporate Services Directorate Business Plan 2024-25 			
4.0	Resource implications			
4.1	There are no financial resource implications within this report.			
5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)			
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations</p>			



5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i> Consultation not required.</p>
6.0	<p>Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)</p>
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	<p>Appendices</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appendix 1 – Mid Year Assessment of the Chief Executive – Corporate Services Directorate Business Plan 2024-25
8.0	<p>Background Documents</p>
	<p>Directorate Business Plans 2024-25</p>

Corporate Services

Mid-Year Assessment Business Plan 2024-25

Introduction




This report provides an overview of progress in delivering the Chief Executive - Corporate Services Business Plan 2024-25 between April-September 2024, across the following service areas:

- **Finance, including Performance**
- **Human Resources, including Safeguarding**
- **Corporate Planning and Policy**
- **Communications and Marketing**
- **Information Technology**
- **Administration, including Legal Services, Compliance and Registration Services**
- **Estates and Capital projects, including Procurement**
- **Democratic Services**

The delivery of the Chief Executive - Corporate Services Business Plan 2024-25 supports the achievement of all corporate objectives, particularly the following corporate objectives, and performance has been tracked using the legend below.

Deliver Sustainable Services
Protect and enhance our environment to secure a sustainable future
Represent the voice of the district with our partners

Legend

Status	
	Target or objective achieved / on track to be achieved
	Target or objective partially achieved / likely to be achieved / subject to delay
	Target or objective not achieved / unlikely to be achieved

Directorate objectives, supporting actions and measures of success








Key Office Objectives / Actions
<p>People & Legal – Provide an efficient and professional Compliance function meeting statutory obligations. Provide an efficient and professional Customer Services and Registration function meeting statutory obligations. Provide efficient and professional Legal Services to meet statutory and contractual objectives. Effective policy making, policy implementation, policy review and service delivery. Contribute to the continuous development of the workforce we need to deliver corporate priorities. Provide efficient and professional HR services ensuring compliant integrated and sustainable services for all stakeholders that meet the corporate priorities and contractual obligations of the Council.</p> <p>Finance and Performance - Provide a professional and efficient finance service to deliver integrated sustainable services to meet our statutory and contractual obligations. Ensure appropriate governance, audit and risk management arrangements are in place to ensure openness and transparency, while aiding decision making. Support the development of a performance culture by embedding effective performance management arrangements across Council</p> <p>Digital and Communications - Provide accessible and sustainable corporate Communications and Marketing service Provide a highly available, accessible and secure Information Technology environment to support Council services To provide technical input and support to digital transformation projects to help deliver services that are sustainable, integrated and compliant for all stakeholders that meet the corporate objectives.</p> <p>Capital and Procurement – Deliver the Strategic Capital Plan & Estate Management Strategy to assist with the development and revitalisation of our district. Provide an effective procurement service to support council, including promoting and underpinning council sustainability & social value objectives.</p> <p>Democratic Services – Support the decision making and political governance structures of the Council</p>

Department : All

(Plans = 'Chief Executive - Corporate Services')

Thursday 21st of October 2024

People & Legal			
CS1 : Provide an efficient and professional Compliance function meeting statutory obligations			
95% of responses to FOI/EIR/DP requests for information provided within statutory timeframes	Target Actual	95% 92%	95% —
Review and update current Retention and Disposal practices across Council, implementing methods to manage the review, retention and disposal of records. (SCC)	Target Progress	 Amber	 —
Review and update the Corporate Privacy Notice to help everyone understand how Council processes personal data	Target Progress	 Red	 —
CS2 : Provide an efficient and professional Customer Services and Registration function meeting statutory obligations. Provide efficient professional Customer Services and Registration functions meeting statutory obligations.			
Embed NIPSO policies, procedures and monitoring arrangements to ensure compliance with NIPSOs statutory Model Complaints Handling Procedure.	Target Progress	 Green 1.1	 —
Notes:	1 Council is compliant with the MCHP		
Deliver a Professional Registration Service providing quality customer service standards for the delivery of births, deaths and marriages.	Target Progress	 Green 1.1	 —
Notes:	1 Service is currently being provided to a professional standard.		
CS3 : Provide efficient and professional Legal Services to meet statutory and contractual objectives.			
Complete a Retention and Disposal review of historical legal files extracting information which requires to be retained (R/BS and store review) (SCC)	Target Progress	 —	 —
Work with Evidence Section to ensure all relevant Council assets are included on the ARC GIS system.	Target Progress	 —	 —
In line with Council's 'Digital First' approach move as far as possible to electronic files versus paper-based files (SCC)	Target Progress	 —	 —
CS4 : Effective policy making, policy implementation, policy review and service delivery.			
To finalise NMDDC Corporate Plan 2024-2027	Target Progress	 Green 1.1	 —
Notes:	1 Corporate Plan agreed at August SPR meeting and ratified at full Council meeting September 2024.		
Section 75, Disability and Rural Needs statutory duties implementation	Target Progress	 Green 1.1	 —
Notes:	1 Ongoing implementation		
Progress the use of the Irish language in civic life	Target Progress	 Green 1.1	 —

	Notes:	1 Ongoing Implementation		
Agreed Corporate Plan 2024-2027		Target	Yes	Yes
		Actual	Yes 	—
	Notes:	1 Agreed at August 2024 SPR meeting		
Corporate Section 75, Disability and Rural Needs statutory duties compliance		Target	Yes	Yes
		Actual	Yes 	—
	Notes:	1 Ongoing Implementation of statutory duties compliance		
CS5 : Contribute to the continuous development of the workforce we need to deliver corporate priorities				
Development of a Leadership Charter demonstrating our core values and an implementation action plan for roll out		Target		
		Progress	Amber 	—
	Notes:	1 SLT development day delivered on 2 May 2024. Draft Leadership Charter and action plan developed and will be presented to SMT on 12 November 2024. Preparations are being made to deliver items from action plan. Further SLT development days are planned for December and January to support the delivery of the Charter and action plan.		
Review statutory and mandatory training for the organisation, identifying key timelines		Target		
		Progress	Green 	—
	Notes:	1 Review of all essential training has taken place, to include categorisation of all essential corporate and departmental training and agreement reached on statutory, mandatory and specific job specific training for NVQDDC. Consequently a structured process has been developed to collate annual requests for training based on the agreed list and also to identify additional statutory/mandatory requirements.		
Refresh, Rebrand and Relaunch the eLearning portal		Target		
		Progress	Green 	—
	Notes:	1 New eLearning Portal developed with provider and launched on 1 August 2024. Pre and post launch webinars delivered to S & E and Leisure. Line Manager webinars launched and delivered in October 2024. 2 L & D Newsletters published, including testimonials for personal and professional development. L & D will continue to further develop the eLearning portal.		
Continue to support Directorates to implement PPG for all staff across the organisation		Target		
		Progress	Amber 	—
	Notes:	1 Engagement has taken place with CMT to highlight the importance of the PPG process and to encourage timely completion of PPGs. Review of the PPG process has taken place with CMT, including the documentation and tracker. Further promotion of PPG is planned to ensure completion for all levels in the organisation.		
CS6 : Provide efficient and professional HR services ensuring compliant integrated and sustainable services for all stakeholders that meet the corporate priorities and contractual obligations of the Council.				
Develop and implement a recruitment plan Q3		Target		
		Progress	—	—
Support Directorates to ensure staff absence is effectively managed to ensure appropriate and timely support for staff Q1-Q4		Target		
		Progress	Amber 	—







	Notes:	1 HR Business Partnering continue to support line managers with staff absence and ensuring compliance with the Managing Attendance Policy and associated procedures. Recommendations from the absence management audit 23/24 are being progressed through the working group. Actions relating to data are progressing and the number of outstanding return to work are reducing.		
Develop an Industrial Relations Framework and agree a workplan with Joint Trade Union Side Q2		Target		
		Progress	Amber +1	—
	Notes:	1 A draft IR Framework has been developed and consultation is ongoing		
Procure new systems and develop a project plan for new ways of working and efficient use of resources Q4		Target		
		Progress	—	—
Review and analyse current employment data and develop KPIs Q2-Q4		Target		
		Progress	Amber +1	—
	Notes:	1 Employment data remains under review to identify KPI. This will be key consideration in the new HR system.		
Identify ways to increase the number of people from disadvantaged communities who are employed by council Q2-Q4 (CWB)		Target		
		Progress	Amber +1	—
	Notes:	1 Employment data from statutory returns relating to appointments is under review to support identification of strategy to increase the number of people from disadvantaged communities employed within council.		
Finance & Performance				
CS7 : Provide a professional and efficient finance service to deliver integrated sustainable services to meet our statutory and contractual obligations.				
Pay 90% of invoices to suppliers within 30 days		Target	92%	95%
		Actual	95% +1	—
	Notes:	1 95% in Q1 and 94% in Q2		
Unqualified financial audit opinion		Target	Yes	Yes
		Actual	Yes +1	—
	Notes:	1 Accounts Certified and published to Council website on the 30 September 2024 with an unqualified Audit Opinion.		
Commence Payroll Service Review		Target		
		Progress	Green +2	—
	Notes:	1 Approval sought from SM7 in October 2024		
Standardisation of Payroll Procedures Q4		Target		
		Progress	—	—
New Expense Management system to be introduced Q2		Target		
		Progress	Amber +1	—
	Notes:	1 ongoing - go live date is now 1 December 2024		
All Payslips to communicated electronically, where possible		Target		
		Progress	— +1	—
	Notes:	1 not due until Q4 - process is ongoing.		

P2P Procedures to be updated (PECOS) and working procedures to be developed Q3	Target		
	Progress		
Accounts Receivable Procedures to be finalised, including Debt Recovery Q2	Target		
	Progress	Amber -	
Notes: 1 not yet complete - work ongoing			
Commence service review of General Finance/Accounts Q4	Target		
	Progress		
Review of Finance System – Possibility of Contract Management Project/Item Code Q2	Target		
	Progress	Green +	
Notes: 1 Meeting held with Core Financial - improvements to current system discussed in detail and date of Contract Management System to take place in Q3			
Review and update Financial Regulations of Council Q4	Target		
	Progress		
CS8 : Ensure appropriate governance, audit and risk management arrangements are in place to ensure openness and transparency, while aiding decision making.			
Review and update of Whistleblowing / Raising Concern Procedure Q2	Target		
	Progress	Green +	
Notes: 1 Completed - Policy Approved at September 2024 Audit Committee and now on Council Website			
Review and update Anti-Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan	Target		
	Progress	Green +	
Notes: 1 Completed - Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan approved at the July 2024 Audit Committee and now on Council Website			
E-Learning Governance Training for Staff/Members Q4	Target		
	Progress		
Fraud Risk Assessment to be completed for Council Q3	Target		
	Progress		
CS9 : Support the development of a performance improvement culture by embedding effective performance management arrangements			
Compliance with statutory Duty of Improvement	Target		
	Actual		
Implementation of a new electronic Performance Management System throughout Council and embed the system through training of relevant officers Q2	Target		
	Progress	Green +	
Notes: 1 The performance management system was implemented at the end of Q4 2023/24. All the actions and measures across the suite of Council plans and strategies has been uploaded onto the system and training has been provided to all relevant staff.			
Strengthen the alignment across Business Planning, Community Planning and Performance Management Framework and coordinate the business and service planning process	Target		
	Progress	Green +	

	Notes:	1 The alignment across the Business Planning and Performance Management Framework continues to strengthen through the Corporate Plan, Performance Improvement Plan, Directorate Business Plans, Service Plans and People Perform Grow which enables teams and employees to identify their contribution to achieving strategic outcomes and objectives.		
Unqualified performance audit opinion		Target		
		Actual	—	
Digital & Communications				
CS10 : Provide accessible and sustainable corporate Communications and Marketing service				
90% of media requests for information responded to within the agreed timeframes		Target	80%	90%
		Actual	90% ↑	—
	Notes:	1 Target met.		
Finalise the structures of the Digital and Communications Department Q3-Q4		Target	Ongoing	
		Progress	Green ↑	
	Notes:	1 Ongoing		
Support the development and implementation of the Council's Digital Transformation Projects (SCC)		Target	Ongoing	
		Progress	Green ↑	—
	Notes:	1 Draft Digital Transformation Strategy 2030 and associated Draft Digital Projects Procedures have been developed.		
Review and update Corporate Communications Strategy and Action Plan 2025 – 2027 Q2-Q3		Target	Q4	
		Progress	Green ↑	—
	Notes:	1 Ongoing		
Support the communications and marketing of principle projects within the Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027 (p23)		Target	Ongoing	
		Progress	Green ↑	—
	Notes:	1 Actions are updated and completed on a monthly basis in conjunction with SMT and CMT via the monthly PR Planner.		
Progress Tenders for: • Photography/Videography • Graphic Design		Target	Q4 ongoing	
		Progress	Green ↑	—
	Notes:	1 Q2 - Graphic Design with procurement Q3 – Review photography/videography RFO		
CS11 : Provide a highly available, accessible and secure Information Technology environment to support Council services				
97.5% System 'UP' Time		Target	97.5%	97.5%
		Actual	100%	—
Wide Area Network (WAN) Replace existing Wide Area Network, perimeter security and remote worker systems Q2		Target		
		Progress	Green ↑	—
	Notes:	1 Phase 3 will complete in November 2024.		
Cyber risk • Continually develop incident response plans • Continue to bolster cyber security and recovery arrangements • Seek appropriate Cyber accreditation		Target		
		Progress	Green ↑	—
	Notes:	1 CAF has been identified as the accreditation to be sought and funding secured to commence on the journey to compliance. Responses documentation is updated continually.		

Upgrade virtual server Operating Systems	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 In progress and on-target to migrate those applications/services that support Windows Server 2022.		
Implement Privileged Access Management System	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 Not started, but should still be achievable within target date.		
Plan and prepare to migrate client devices to Windows 11 Q2-Q4	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
CS12 : To provide technical input and support to digital transformation projects to help deliver services that are sustainable, integrated and compliant for all stakeholders that meet the corporate objectives.			
Finalise and seek approval of the new Digital Strategy Q1-Q2	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 Draft Digital Transformation Strategy 2030 has been developed.		
Establish and implement a governance structure for Digital (including IT)	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 Draft Digital Projects Procedure has been developed.		
Prioritisation of IT Projects and Target Completion Dates	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 Draft Prioritisation Plan has been developed. Next step is to categorise projects and assign priority and budget.		
Capital & Procurement			
CS13 : Deliver the Strategic Capital Plan & Estate Management Strategy to assist with the development and revitalisation of our district.			
Capital projects programme and budget in line with agreed parameters and Council policy	Target	Yes	Yes
	Actual	Yes 100%	—
Notes:	1 Some projects have experienced delays as a result of planning process, budget increases are in accordance with council governance and policy.		
Achieving outline planning permission on 75% of the surplus assets prior to disposal	Target	75%	75%
	Actual	70%	—
Deliver approved Capital projects through design, procurement and delivery stages providing regular updates and reports to directorates, project boards and committees. (CWB) (SCC)	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 NMDDC Capital Projects and Strategic Capital Projects are progressing with reporting provided to internal and external stakeholders in accordance to each projects Terms of Reference.		
Advise and assist departments in the identification of projects for consideration in the capital programme, including advising of project feasibility, costs, programme risks informing decision making and funding applications (CWB)	Target		
	Progress	Green 100%	—
Notes:	1 This is ongoing. Reports and costs are provided to directorates to inform committee reports and decision making.		

Continuation with the identification and disposal of council surplus assets, including the direct liaison with directorates, legals and external organisations. (CWB) (SCC)	Target		
	Progress	Green	—
Notes:	1 Ongoing between directorates and consultation with DTNI regarding assets going through the CI process.		
CS14 : Provide an effective procurement service to support council, including promoting and underpinning council sustainability & social value objectives			
Procurement policy fully implemented	Target	No	Yes
	Actual	No	—
Notes:	1 New Procurement Policy will be brought to SPR in December. The Procurement Act was delayed to Feb 2025 as a result of central government not having their Procurement Policy Statement in place. NMDDC will need to further review and revise procurement policy in 2025 following publication of central governments.		
Ensure in-depth training on new Procurement Act 2023 for Procurement team is completed before legislation comes into effect including Certified E-learning from cabinet office and Procurement law workshops. Promote Knowledge Drops corporately to enhance awareness of new legislation.	Target	September 24	
	Progress	Green	—
Notes:	1 All formal training completed by the procurement team.		
Increasing supplier outreach through attendance at Meet the Buyer type events and premarket engagement (CWB) (SCC)	Target		
	Progress	Green	—
Notes:	1 Procurement Manager presented at Supplier event to promote NMDDC and encourage local SME engagement with our tender opportunities.		
Enhancing visibility of NMDDC Tender opportunities in the marketplace through social media campaign Q4 (CWB) (SCC)	Target		
	Progress	Amber	—
Notes:	1 Procurement have liaised with Marketing team to create relevant templates for social media campaigns. These are targeted for release ASAP.		
Develop new Procurement Policy. Once training on new legislation is complete overhaul the Procurement Policy to incorporate all the changes into NMDDC processes and supporting documentation Q2 (CWB) (SCC)	Target	December 24	
	Progress	Amber	—
Notes:	1 This has started and is progressing.		
Develop new Contract Management Procedure	Target		
	Progress	Amber	—
Notes:	1 This is aligned with the update to the Procurement Policy.		
Chief Executive			
CS15 : Support the decision making and political governance structures of the Council			
The number of events hosted on behalf of the Chairperson / Vice Chairperson	Target		
	Progress	Green	—
Notes:	1 Chairperson has hosted 9 events so far this year including his Civic Awards and a joint Civic Reception for Armagh GAA All Ireland winners.		
The number of official events attended by the Chairperson / Vice Chairperson	Target		
	Progress	Green	—

Notes:	1 The Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson along with Chairs of Committees deputising have attended 120 events so far this term.
Provision of comprehensive administrative and governance support to Council, Standing Committees and ad hoc Working Groups	<div>Target</div> <div>Progress</div> <div>Green </div> <div>—</div>
Notes:	1 Despite staffing issues, the department continues to provide administrative and governance support to the Council and its Standing Committees, as well as the quarterly meetings of the Audit Committee. Action sheets for each meeting are instrumental in monitoring and tracking progress in implementing Council decisions. It has been agreed that hybrid attendance can occur by Members in exceptional circumstances since the start of October 2024.
Organisation of Annual Meeting of the Council and manage the appointment to positions of responsibility for the Council and Committees	<div>Target</div> <div>Progress</div> <div>Green </div> <div>—</div>
Notes:	1 The annual meeting of the Council took place in May 2024 and Elected Members have been appointed to designated positions of responsibility for 2024/25. These appointments are reviewed periodically with Party amendments.
Organise and publish the programme of Council and Committee meetings	<div>Target</div> <div>Progress</div> <div>Green </div> <div>—</div>
Notes:	1 The programme of Committee meetings for 2024-25 has been organised, agreed and published on the corporate website. It is always monitored for amendments as required.
Develop Elected Member Development induction, training and capacity building programme to support Elected Members in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities	<div>Target</div> <div>Progress</div> <div>Green </div> <div>—</div>
Notes:	1 The department continues to support Elected Members in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.
Develop pathway towards the reattainment the Elected Member Development Charter Q4	<div>Target</div> <div>Progress</div> <div>Amber </div>
Notes:	1 Personal Development Plans have been sent to all Elected Members to inform a Training Needs Analysis as a first step towards the pathway for the reattainment of the Elected Member Development Charter.
Support the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson in carrying out their role(s) as First Citizen(s)	<div>Target</div> <div>Progress</div> <div>Green </div> <div>—</div>
Notes:	1 The Chairperson and Vice Chairperson have a designated resource within the Council to support them in fulfilling their role(s) as First Citizen(s).

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

Report to:	SPR Committee
Date of Meeting:	14 th November 2024
Subject:	Impact of Local Government Reform on Service Delivery and Cost Effectiveness in Northern Ireland
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Josephine Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Josephine Kelly, Director of Corporate Services

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

For decision	For noting only	x
---------------------	------------------------	----------

1.0	Purpose and Background
	<p>In September 2019, a meeting was held between former Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities (Tracy Meharg), the Local Government Auditor (LGA), Solace representatives and departmental officials to discuss a draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for a review of local government reform.</p> <p>In November 2019, the agreed ToR were issued to both SOLACE and the LGA. In line with the agreed ToR a steering group was established.</p> <p>A Report on the Impact of the Reform of Local Government on service delivery and cost effectiveness in NI has been produced and is available on the DfC website from 7 November 2024.</p>
2.0	Key issues
	<p>The Report (attached) concluded that whilst annual costs have increased this should be viewed in light of significant additional functions taken on by local councils as well as the investment in capital infrastructure over the timeframe. Inflationary uplifts should also be factored into the cost increases.</p>
3.0	Recommendations u
	To note the Report that has been published on the DfC website.
4.0	Resource implications
	None at present

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i></p>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p>

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

	Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
	If no, please complete the following:	
	The policy / strategy / plan / public service is not influenced by rural needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.0	Appendices	
	1 – Impact of Local Government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness report 2 – Letter from Anthony Carleton (Director of Local Government & Housing Regulation Division) to Council Chief Executives.	
8.0	Background Documents	



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From: Anthony Carleton
Director of Local Government & Housing
Regulation Division

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1-7 Bedford Street
BELFAST
BT2 7EG

Telephone: 028 90 823346
E-mail: anthony.carleton@communities-ni.gov.uk
Our Ref: CO1/24/661304
Date: 3 October 2024

Clerk and Chief Executive of each District
Council

Dear Chief Executive,

IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM ON SERVICE DELIVERY AND COST EFFECTIVENESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

As you are aware, on 4 September 2019, a meeting was held between former Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities (Tracy Meharg), the Local Government Auditor (LGA), Solace representatives and departmental officials to discuss a draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for a review of local government reform. On 4 November 2019, the agreed ToR were issued to both SOLACE and the LGA.

In line with the agreed ToR a steering group was established and was made up of 3 council representatives (Joanne Hewitt, JJ Tohill and Catherine Leonard) together with representatives from the within the Department for Communities.

As part of the review, a Data Capture Template was issued to all councils on 11 November 2021 in order obtain detailed information around monetary and non-monetary variables agreed by the steering group.

Meetings of the steering group were scheduled for every 6 – 8 weeks during 2022 and 2023 and working drafts of the report were issued to Steering Group during this period. During 2023, working drafts of the report were also shared with all 11 councils (via the Association of Local Government Finance Officers - ALGFO).

In 2024 a working draft was issued to all 11 councils (via ALGFO) on 31 January 2024 and following comments received a revised draft report was issued to all 11 councils (via ALGFO) on 10 May 2024. The final draft report was issued to the 11 councils on 3 June 2024.

The attached report concluded that whilst annual costs have increased this should be viewed in light of significant additional functions taken on by local councils as well as the investment in capital infrastructure over the timeframe. Inflationary uplifts should also be factored into the cost increases.

For the most part local councils have stated that it is not possible to quantify current and future efficiency savings due to lack of available information / limited timeframe. Those efficiencies that could be quantified highlighted savings of circa £21.5m as well as identifying a range of potential future savings moving forward. Feedback has suggested a range of non-quantifiable benefits have been realised – greater collaboration (COVID-19 response etc) and sharing of knowledge. Future investment opportunities of over £1bn have also been identified – feedback from councils suggest this level of leveraged funding would not have been achievable if not for enhanced scope of powers of new councils.

It is the view of the research team that it is too early in the process to conclude if local government reform has been cost effective or not due to the lack of supporting data and limited scope for councils to fully realise benefits. The review period reflects only the initial seven-year period since the formation of the 11 new councils in NI. This timeframe is far from ideal due to:

- The limited timeframe for councils to fully leverage any benefits of increased powers; and
- Political instability within NI during the limited timeframe of the review (no functioning NI Assembly for more than 3 of the 7 years).

Minister Lyons has agreed that this report should now be shared with council chief executives.



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I hope you find this report helpful.

Yours sincerely,

ANTHONY CARLETON

Impact of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness

DfC Analytics Division

1 October 2024

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background

This report examines the impact of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness in Northern Ireland. The reform, which took place from 1 April 2015, reduced the number of councils from 26 to 11 and transferred additional functions and responsibilities to local government.

The content of the report is taken primarily from the experiences of local councils who identified the benefits, opportunities, challenges etc. encountered during the initial years following local government reform.

1.2 Summary of Key Findings

The analysis of the returns from councils shows several benefits and opportunities that have resulted from the reform:

- **Improved Service Delivery** - The reform has led to the development of new models of service delivery, resulting in more efficient and effective ways of delivering services to communities. The transfer of planning responsibilities to the councils has significantly improved the service provided to planning applicants and increased the sustainability of development within the districts.
- **Collaboration and Synergy** - The reform has facilitated collaboration and synergy between councils, enabling the implementation of shared services, collaborative procurement initiatives, and partnerships with external organisations. This collaboration has resulted in cost savings, improved service quality, and enhanced economic development opportunities.
- **Economic Development** - The reform has empowered local government to drive economic development and job creation through initiatives such as business support programs, investment incentives, and partnerships with local businesses and educational institutions. This has resulted in increased investment, growth in key sectors, and the attraction of new businesses to the region.
- **Community Engagement and Social Inclusion** - The reform has encouraged greater community engagement and social inclusion through the establishment of community planning partnerships, advisory groups, and community-led initiatives. These collaborations have allowed residents to have a voice in decision-making processes and have led to the development of programs and services that address the needs and aspirations of local communities.
- **Environmental Sustainability** - The reform has prioritised environmental sustainability through the implementation of initiatives promoting recycling, waste reduction and energy efficiency. Councils have invested in sustainable practices and technologies, reducing their environmental footprint, and promoting a circular economy.
- **Improved Governance and Decision-Making** - The reform has strengthened governance structures and decision-making processes, ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective representation of community interests. Councils have implemented streamlined decision-making processes, improved financial management practices, and established performance management systems to enhance governance and promote efficient use of resources.

While the reform has brought significant benefits and opportunities, it has also presented some challenges. These challenges include issues such as duplication of roles within departments, disparities in terms and conditions for employees, difficulties in integrating different working practices, and inadequate budgets for transferred functions.

Feedback would suggest that the challenges encountered during the reform process have been addressed through strategic planning, change management, and the implementation of standardised

procedures.

Whilst the financial metrics¹ in Section 7 would indicate that total combined expenditure for councils have increased, this does not reflect the detail of increased capital investment incurred by individual councils and feedback from councils would indicate that they believe they received inadequate budgets for certain transferred functions, particularly planning. A range of new powers transferred to local government within the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014; however, a number of these responsibilities were not allocated specific budget. These powers included community planning, democratic accountability / openness and transparency (increase in members and an increase in member allowances with no central government transfer of budget) and performance improvement etc.

Overall, the feedback from councils would suggest that the reform has transformed local government and created a more efficient, effective, and citizen-centric system that is well-positioned to meet the needs of communities and drive the region's future growth and development.

¹ Financial data has been collated from Northern Ireland Audit Office Local Government Auditor's Reports and has been adjusted for inflation.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

From 1 April 2015, under the Reform of Local Government, the number of councils in Northern Ireland reduced from 26 existing councils to 11 new councils, established under the Local Government Act (NI) 1972 as amended by the Local Government Boundaries Act 2008.

The Local Government Finance Act 2011 and the Local Government Act 2014 set out the framework for the transfer of powers and functions previously delivered by Northern Ireland executive departments across to the new councils. The 2014 Act established the General Power of Competence in Northern Ireland, denoting the power to do *"anything that individuals generally may do"*, meaning councils do not have to look to enabling legislation. Instead, they have to check there is no legislation restricting an action.

From 1 April 2015 the NI Executive transferred some functions previously carried out by NI Government Departments and gave some new responsibilities to the 11 new councils. In addition to the move from the 26 legacy councils to the 11 new councils, the NI Executive decided that the following functions should transfer to local government on 1st April 2015:

- Planning (to transfer from Department of the Environment (DOE)
 - Local development plan functions
 - Development control (e.g., consideration and adjudication of planning applications)
 - Enforcement responsibilities
- Roads (to transfer from Department for Regional Development (DRD)
 - Off street parking (except Park and Ride)
- Urban regeneration and community development (to transfer from Department for Social Development (DSD)
 - Functions associated with physical development (e.g., environmental improvement schemes)
 - Area based regeneration (such as Neighbourhood Renewal)
 - Some community development programmes for the voluntary and community sectors
- Housing (to transfer from DSD/Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
 - Registration of houses in multiple occupation
 - Housing unfitness responsibilities, including repair and demolition notices
- Local Economic Development (transfer from Invest NI)
 - Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows
 - Youth Entrepreneurship (such as Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire)
 - Social Entrepreneurship
 - Investing for Women
 - Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprises initiatives
- Local Tourism (transfer from Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)
 - Small scale tourism accommodation development
 - Providing business support including business start-up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes
 - Providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues
- Other
 - Delivery of the EU Rural Development Programme
 - Authority to Spot List to enable councils to add a building to the statutory list on a temporary basis, subject to ratification by the DOE
 - Authority to draw up local lists of buildings that are of architectural and/or historic interest

- Armagh County Museum
- Local water recreational facilities
- Local sports (greater involvement of local government in local sports decisions)
- Donaghadee Harbour
- Community Planning²
- Performance Improvement³

As part of the Reform of Local Government certain urban regeneration and community development responsibilities and the associated resources were to transfer from central government to local government. The most recent proposal to transfer powers and resources was brought forward in 2015 when the then Minister, Mervyn Storey, decided not to progress the Bill due to a lack of support within the Assembly Committee.

2.2 Impact of local government reform on Service Delivery and Cost Effectiveness

This research was commissioned by the DfC Local Government Finance Team to address a recommendation in the 2017 Local Government Auditors Report that, *"the Department monitors and reports on efficiency savings gained"*. Whilst local government reform intended to deliver efficiencies across the NI Public Service, this study is focused solely on the impacts of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness. This project will not explore the impact of local government reform on central government.

The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 has resulted in new and additional responsibilities for local councils including community planning and a focus on performance improvement.

2.3 Objectives/Scope

This research project will provide an assessment of the impact of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness on councils during the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2022.

This research project will explore the impact of local government reform on councils with reference to the range, quality and cost effectiveness of services delivered by councils taking account of variation in the implementation of reform against original plans, the wider operating environment and demand for services. In particular, the study will:

- Analyse the annual cost of service delivery and key cost drivers over the period from April 2015 to March 2022 with reference to relevant factors, such as, the range and scale of services provided, together with a commentary in relation to the funding transferred from central government;
- Identify and analyse, where practical, key effectiveness indicators to gauge how the service delivery has changed over the period;
- Identify the challenges and opportunities that local government reform has presented to councils; and
- Examine how the range and quality of services delivered by councils has changed over the period with reference where practical to relevant indicators, metrics and limiting/influencing factors.

² Transferred via Local Government Act 2014

³ Ibid

2.4 Report Limitations

This report aims to highlight the impact of local government reform on service provision and cost effectiveness over a 7-year period. However, it should be noted that there are limitations in what can be reported upon given the timescales and information available. For example, whilst it is possible to use the financial data extracted from the Local Government Auditors Annual reports showing the total income and expenditure figures over the timeframe, it is not possible to give a robust analysis on cost effectiveness as the supporting information (such as standardised reporting metrics with established baselines) is not available.

This report has attempted to collate the feedback from local councils on efficiencies realised, challenges encountered and future opportunities that can be leveraged as a result of local government reform. However, it should be noted that the supporting data is over a limited timeframe (7 years) that includes the formative years of the new 11 local councils where the legislative basis and level of responsibility of the 26 councils was less than the new 11 councils. During this timeframe there was considerable political uncertainty within NI⁴ and the reporting period also includes the initial wave of Covid-19 enforced lockdowns⁵ and the associated impact on service delivery, income etc.

Whilst this initial research provides an insight into impacts of local government reform, it is the view of the researchers that a longer-term study with a more comprehensive data set is required. The key metrics to measure performance and cost efficiency should be established with councils in advance and an agreed annual monitoring data set agreed upon. This report largely is a collation of the experiences of local councils in the formative years following local government reform and is not a detailed financial analysis of the period.

⁴ NI Assembly dissolved on 16th January 2017 and only formed again on 11th January 2020.

⁵ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/timeline-lockdown-web.pdf>

3 EFFICIENCIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

3.1 Introduction

To inform this research, each of the individual councils were issued with a template that attempted to capture the following information:

- Current Benefits and/or Efficiency Savings – Realised since 1st April 2015;
- Future Benefits and/or Efficiency Savings – Anticipated future benefits/savings;
- Identification of additional direct revenue generating opportunities that have been realised as a direct result of local government reform;
- Future investment/funding opportunities that are currently under consideration that you believe are linked to or have been aided by local government reform;
- Other benefits/opportunities created as a result of local government reform;
- Challenges encountered during the initial years of operation of new councils;
- Known and/or unforeseen costs incurred as a result of local government reform;
- Examples of shared services, synergies, and collaborations between councils since April 2015; and
- Existing or future potential enhanced collaboration between local government and central government that has been enabled by local government reform.

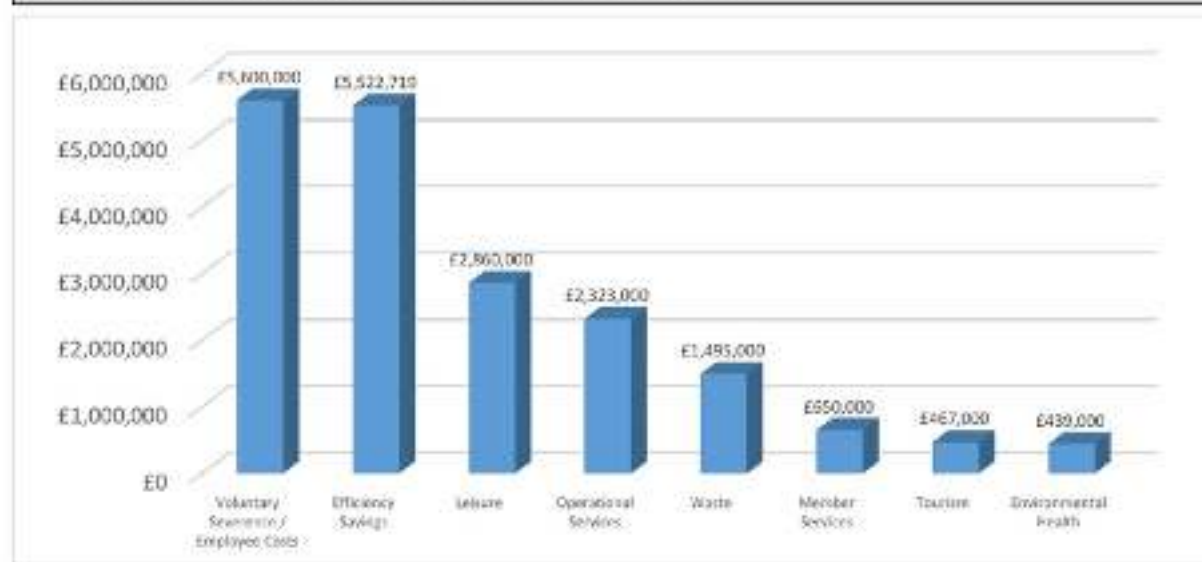
When possible, councils were asked to quantify benefits, costs, savings etc. however this was not always possible due to difficulties in attribution of benefits and costs, the comparatively short timeframe for realisation of these benefits and the challenging macro-economic and political circumstances during the initial period of reform⁶.

⁶ The data contained within this section is based on feedback from the 11 councils.

3.2 Efficiencies – Current

Councils were asked in their responses to identify any direct or indirect benefits and/or efficiencies that have been realised by their council following on from or enabled by government reform. In total, across the 11 councils, **£21,485,452** of efficiency savings were identified. The breakdown of these savings is shown in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1: Current efficiencies realised by local councils



A summary of some of the examples of efficiency savings that have been realised by the 11 councils in NI is outlined below.

3.2.1 Planning

It was noted that working collaboratively with Building Control to identify and address early and on-site breaches of planning control is helping to deter unauthorised development from occurring. Furthermore, close engagement with each council's department for Economic Development is enabling Planning to liaise with some of the council's key businesses and bring forward large scale investment proposals more speedily. Feedback indicated that:

- Planning was now a much more responsive service, which has much greater cognisance of local priorities and rural nature of the councils and their residents.
- The consensus was that the transfer of planning responsibilities to the councils has significantly improved both the service provided to planning applicants and other stakeholders and increased the sustainability of development within the district.
- It was noted that Local Development Plans, when finalised, will also be much more appropriate to the needs of the district than previous development plans which, as a result of being prepared by central government, were prepared with less cognisance of local issues and priorities.

3.2.2 IT

Collaboration with other councils has enabled implementation of much more effective and resilient IT infrastructure. It also facilitated compliant licensing arrangements enabling the councils to reap the benefits of increased collaboration and efficiencies to be derived from IT hardware and software developments. It was noted that councils are now much more able to remain compliant going forward

and to respond to IT threats and opportunities from a higher baseline of investment. Examples of efficiencies include:

- **IT Consolidation** - Noted reduction of duplication with existing systems being amalgamated, which enhances public services and rationalises network infrastructure.
- **Software and Licensing** - Maintenance support contracts for the council and compliant licensing arrangements have enabled increased collaboration and efficiencies in IT hardware and software developments. This makes the council more resilient and compliant in handling IT threats and opportunities.
- **Specialised ICT Team** - Increased emphasis and funding for ICT have led to significant investment in both staff and infrastructure, resulting in a more specialised, skilled, and secure ICT system.
- **HR Payroll System** - A new fully integrated HR Payroll system was implemented following the exit of a service provider, marking a critical enhancement in administrative technology.

3.2.3 Waste Management

There have been cost savings in waste contracts due to larger contracts for the wider districts. However, overall waste costs have increased over the period due to other factors, notably market pressures and additional statutory requirements and targets around waste disposal. Specific examples of efficiencies include:

- One council initiated a review of waste processes, leading to a social media campaign that increased recycling rates and reduced costs. Recycling rates rose from 47% in 2015 to 57.3% in 2019, saving £4.2 million in landfill costs.
- Cost savings were also achieved through more efficient vehicle contracts and route optimizations for new services like glass collection, all managed within existing budgets. Strategic collaborations have been formed between councils to align waste management practices more effectively.
- Significant service improvements and investments have been realised due to the amalgamation with other councils. These improvements span waste services, property and fleet maintenance, and community services like playgrounds and street lighting.

Despite these advancements, it was noted that overall waste management costs have risen due to market pressures and new statutory requirements. However, service enhancements, such as the introduction of additional brown bin services for garden and food waste, have been implemented without needing additional resources.

3.2.4 Collaboration and Economies of Scale

The larger council areas and powers have allowed closer working relationships to be established with regional organisations for the delivery of integrated services e.g., closer links with health trusts and the PHA have allowed projects and programmes to be developed which would not have been possible prior to 2015. This is particularly the case in relation to the Covid-19 response. Councils, because of their larger size and influence had the ability to shape the direction of the Covid-19 response for the benefit of residents. Specific examples of collaboration below:

- **Human Resources** - Savings were realised from 2015 to 2021 onwards through strategies like overtime reduction, agency cost reduction, and superannuation savings.
- **Procurement and Support Services** - Ongoing reviews of contracts and joined-up procurements have streamlined service delivery and budgeting.
- **Employee Costs** - There was a reduction in staffing levels, especially at senior management levels, leading to cost savings.

- **Insurance and Legal Services** - The introduction of specialist staff improved insurance procurement and reduced premiums, despite some cost increases. Economies of scale also facilitated the introduction of in-house legal teams.
- **Energy and Utilities** - Increased buying power and joint procurement among 11 councils led to more competitive pricing in electricity, gas, and fuel. Energy-saving initiatives like solar power and LED technology also contributed to savings.
- **Building Control and Regulatory Services** - A larger council area allowed for a more consistent approach to regulation, improving the relationship between planning, building control, and environmental health.
- **Community and Wellbeing** - Shared services have been delivered in areas like home safety, infectious disease control, and air quality monitoring, leveraging funding from external stakeholders.
- **Covid Response and Treasury Management** - Collaborative efforts in response to COVID-19 and unified procurement exercises for all councils streamlined processes and enhanced service delivery.
- **Multi-Agency Support** - Collaboration with statutory partners has supported vulnerable populations, reducing reliance on emergency services.

3.2.5 Governance and Decision-Making

Councils have been able to implement streamlined decision-making processes, such as reducing the number of approval layers and implementing clear guidelines for decision-making. This has resulted in faster and more efficient decision-making. Councils have been able to establish clear roles and responsibilities for council members and staff, ensuring effective governance and avoiding duplication of efforts.

The use of technology and digital platforms, such as online portals and collaboration tools, has improved communication and collaboration among decision-makers, allowing for more efficient and timely decision-making.

3.2.6 Financial Management and Budgeting

Councils have been able to implement robust financial management practices, including regular budget reviews and cost control measures. This has helped ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. Financial transparency and accountability have improved by providing clear and accessible financial reports to stakeholders, promoting trust and confidence in the council's financial management.

The use of data analytics and performance metrics by some councils have helped identify areas for cost savings and resource optimisation. By analysing spending patterns and performance data, the councils can make informed decisions to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Cost Management and Procurement Efficiency** - Implementation of managed print services resulted in noticeable savings. Savings were also derived from collaborative tenders and multi-year contracts which streamlined procurement processes.
- **Statutory Compliance without Increased Budget** – Councils were able to manage the full cost impact of new statutory obligations, such as GDPR, without needing additional budget allocation.
- **Integrated Service Delivery** - Larger council areas and extended powers facilitated closer relationships with regional organizations, enhancing the delivery of integrated services, especially evident in the Covid-19 response efforts.
- **Financial System Improvements** - Streamlining financial regulations and the adoption of a new finance system (Software as a Service - SaaS) improved financial management. These changes provided better liquidity, yield, and resilience, particularly noted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Resource Optimisation** - Efficiencies of scale were achieved through reduced staffing needs, even while managing increased workloads within existing budgets.
- **Strategic Financial Planning** - Councils were able to develop a medium-term financial plan, ensuring better financial predictability and management, contributing to a structured approach to budgeting and rate setting.

3.2.7 Service Delivery and Performance

Councils have implemented performance management systems to monitor and evaluate service delivery. This includes setting clear performance targets and benchmarks, as well as regularly reviewing and reporting on performance. They have been able to establish customer feedback mechanisms and actively seek input from service users to identify areas for improvement and ensure that services meet the needs of the community.

The use of technology and automation has streamlined service delivery processes, reducing waiting times and improving customer satisfaction. For example, online appointment booking systems and self-service kiosks have made it easier for residents to access services and reduced administrative burdens.

3.2.8 Infrastructure and Facilities

Councils have invested in upgrading and maintaining infrastructure and facilities to ensure they are safe, functional, and meet the needs of the community. They have implemented asset management systems to ensure efficient use of resources and timely maintenance. This includes regular inspections, proactive maintenance, and asset lifecycle planning. The use of sustainable and energy-efficient technologies has reduced operational costs and environmental impact. For example, councils have installed energy-efficient lighting, implemented smart building systems, and utilised renewable energy sources where possible.

3.2.9 Environmental Sustainability

Councils have implemented sustainable practices and initiatives to reduce their environmental footprint. This includes promoting recycling and waste reduction programs, implementing water conservation measures, and encouraging sustainable transportation options.

They have invested in renewable energy sources and energy-efficient technologies, reducing energy consumption and costs. This includes installing solar panels, utilising geothermal heating and cooling systems, and implementing energy management systems.

The use of recycling and waste management programs has minimised waste and promoted a circular economy. Councils have implemented recycling initiatives, composting programs, and educational campaigns to encourage residents and businesses to reduce, reuse, and recycle.

3.2.10 Education and Skills Development

Councils have implemented efficient processes for education and skills development programs, such as streamlined enrollment procedures and online learning platforms.

They have improved coordination with educational institutions and training providers to ensure effective delivery of programs. This includes partnerships, joint initiatives, and sharing of resources and expertise.

The use of technology and e-learning platforms has expanded access to education and skills development opportunities. Councils have implemented online courses, virtual classrooms, and digital

resources to reach a wider audience and provide flexible learning options.

3.2.11 Economic Development and Employment

Councils have implemented initiatives to support economic development and job creation, such as business incubators, entrepreneurship programs, and investment incentives. They have improved coordination with local businesses and industry stakeholders to identify growth opportunities and address barriers to economic development. The use of data analysis and market research have helped identify emerging industries and target resources and support accordingly.

3.2.12 Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Councils have implemented initiatives to preserve and promote cultural heritage, such as heritage conservation programs, cultural events, and historical site preservation. They have improved tourism infrastructure and services, such as visitor information centers, signage, and tourist accommodations, to enhance the visitor experience. The use of digital platforms and virtual tours has expanded access to cultural heritage and tourism experiences, allowing residents and visitors to explore and learn about the community's history and attractions.

3.2.13 Public Safety and Emergency Management

Councils have implemented efficient emergency management systems, such as emergency response plans, communication protocols, and training programs. They have invested in public safety infrastructure, such as surveillance cameras, emergency alert systems, and fire and police stations, to ensure the safety and security of residents. The use of technology, such as GIS mapping and predictive analytics, has improved emergency response times and resource allocation.

3.2.14 Community Planning

Establishment of Community Planning Partnership and identification of an overarching strategic vision and plan for the district; better working relationships across partners; delivery of partnership actions and evidenced contributions towards achieving outcomes.

These additional themes cover a wide range of areas in which councils have made achievements and improvements. Each theme highlights the councils' efforts to improve processes, optimise resources, and deliver high-quality services to the community. Examples include:

- **Relationship Building and Shared Leadership** - Community planning has fostered stronger relationships among public bodies and local communities, aiding in quicker, smoother joint operations. This was particularly beneficial during the Covid-19 response. Shared leadership supported by Carnegie Trust training has also been advantageous, enhancing collaboration across various levels.
- **Innovation and Strategic Focus** - Initiatives like the innovative Place Shaping pilot for Armagh and participatory budgeting projects have spurred further community-focused innovations. Community planning has introduced a more evidence-based, strategic planning process that is adaptable to changes and challenges like pandemics or economic shifts.
- **Increased Collaboration and Community Involvement** - There is a noted increase in collaboration and co-production in delivering public services, with a significant involvement of community and voluntary sectors in planning for the future. This approach has created added value by combining resources to achieve more substantial outcomes.

-
- **Efficiencies in Service Delivery** - A review of Community Services functions, including management arrangements for Community Centres, has potential cost savings for the council, illustrating an efficient resource allocation.

These points illustrate how community planning has not only improved strategic focus and collaborative efforts but has also brought about new approaches and potential efficiencies in public service delivery.

3.3 Efficiencies – Future

Councils were asked in their responses to detail any benefits and or efficiencies that are projected to be achieved in the future but have not yet been realised given the relative early stage of this review. Many respondents felt that it was not possible to accurately project future efficiency savings. A summary of anticipated future efficiencies are noted below.

- **Human Resources:** Implementation of strategies for overtime reduction, agency cost reduction, and superannuation savings, contributing to a more efficient and cost-effective human resource management approach.
- **Procurement and Support Services:** On-going reviews and streamlining of contracts, procurements, and service delivery to achieve better budgetary control and service provision efficiency.
- **Digital Strategies and Service Provision:** A significant focus on digitalisation to streamline council processes, enhancing external customer service through digital offerings, and promoting more efficient online services for planning applications.
- **Growth Deals:** Initiatives like the Mid-South West Growth Deal aim at securing funding for strategic infrastructural projects, indicating a move towards larger-scale, multi-partner projects for economic growth.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Efforts to address climate change impacts through dedicated teams, sustainability working groups, and the potential transfer of landlord health registration to support environmental health are highlighted as critical future directions.
- **Community Planning and Services:** Feedback emphasised the importance of community engagement and planning, with a strategic growth plan predicting significant economic and social benefits, including capital investment, job creation, and improvements in social, economic, and environmental well-being.
- **Legal, IT, and Finance:** Enhanced legal knowledge, especially in planning, increased IT capacity for more efficient and family-friendly working arrangements, and a new finance system aimed at automating processes and improving decision-making highlight the focus on leveraging technology and legal expertise for operational efficiency.
- **Estates and Asset Management:** A proactive approach towards estates management, including the identification of surplus properties for disposal or community asset transfer, underlines the council's strategy to optimise its asset portfolio for economic and community benefits.

4 BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Introduction

In the Terms of Reference (TOR) for this report we said that this would examine:

- The challenges that councils have encountered during the first six years of reform – to include where practicable, quantitative and qualitative feedback from individual councils on challenges, opportunities and impact of reform on service delivery and other aspects of local government, including, for example, greater transparency and responsiveness in terms of decision making, delivery, accountability and advocacy.
- Highlight the shared services, synergies and collaborations between councils since April 2015 and where possible, highlight any benefits that have resulted.
- Reference synergies resulting from amalgamating and reducing the number of councils and transfer of functions and/or powers from central government to councils.
- Potential for enhanced collaboration between local government and central government.
- Reflect evidence to determine if there are economies of scale from creation of larger councils; and
- Examine available metrics on quality-of-service delivery.

4.2 Benefits and Opportunities Realised

Councils were asked to outline any other benefits/opportunities created as a result of local government reform that they wished to note. A summary of responses highlighted the following:

4.2.1 Service Delivery

- The development of new models of service delivery has allowed local government to find more efficient and effective ways of delivering services to their communities. This includes implementing risk management strategies and a digital framework for health and safety, which have improved safety standards and reduced costs.
- The introduction of performance management systems has helped local government organisations to monitor and evaluate their performance, identify areas for improvement, and support innovation and efficient practice. Economies of scale have been achieved in various aspects of council activity, such as waste management, procurement, and contract management. By consolidating these functions, local government has been able to negotiate better deals with suppliers, reduce costs, and improve service quality.
- Collaborative procurement initiatives have been implemented in areas such as insurance, finance software, and energy. By pooling resources and expertise, local government organisations have been able to secure better deals and achieve cost savings.

4.2.2 Economic Development

- The planning process has provided greater market intelligence, allowing local government to identify opportunities for business investment and expansion. This has attracted new businesses to the area, created jobs, and stimulated economic growth.
- Local government has coordinated regional support programs and developed sub-regional projects to promote economic development. By working together with other stakeholders and partner organisations, local government has been able to leverage resources and expertise to drive economic growth.

- Partnership working has been a key driver of economic development. Local government has formed partnerships with businesses, educational institutions, and community organisations to support economic development initiatives. This collaboration has led to the creation of new business opportunities, skills development programs, and community-led regeneration projects.

4.2.3 Covid-19 Response

- The reform of local government organisations has enabled a more efficient response to the Covid-19 pandemic. By pooling resources and expertise, local government has been able to coordinate the distribution of food parcels and grants to those in need through regional responses.
- The reform has also led to more consistent planning responses to the pandemic, ensuring that measures are implemented in a timely and effective manner. Local government has been able to enforce planning regulations to ensure public safety and compliance with health guidelines.
- The reform of local government has strengthened local government's ability to respond to future crises by improving coordination, communication, and decision-making processes.

4.2.4 Democracy

- Decision making: The reform of local government has improved decision-making processes, allowing for more informed and evidence-based decisions that are aligned with community needs and aspirations.
- Representation of community and democratic issues: The reform of local government has strengthened the representation of community and democratic issues, ensuring that the voices of residents are heard and that decisions are made in the best interests of the community.

4.2.5 Employee Initiatives

- Local government has implemented various initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of its employees. This includes providing increased offerings in health and wellbeing programs, such as mental health support, fitness programs, and flexible working arrangements.
- The reform of local government has resulted in larger teams with greater synergy and expertise. This has created opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development among employees.
- The reform of local government has also provided opportunities for greater engagement with key stakeholders, such as community groups, businesses, and partner organisations. This has allowed employees to have a more meaningful impact on the community and contribute to the strategic direction of local government.
- Staff welfare and training: The reform of local government has allowed for greater investment in staff welfare and training, ensuring that employees have the skills and support they need to deliver high-quality services.

4.2.6 Local Government's Role

- The reform of local government has given local government a stronger voice and increased powers in local politics. This has allowed local government to advocate for the needs and interests of their communities and influence decision-making processes at a regional and national level.
- The reform of local government has also resulted in greater consistency in service delivery across the region. By aligning policies, procedures, and standards, local government has been able to provide a more seamless and efficient service to residents and businesses.

- Local government now has a greater ability to shape the future of their respective areas. Through strategic planning, policy development, and community engagement, local government can drive positive change, promote sustainable development, and address the needs and aspirations of their communities.

4.2.7 Specific Areas of Focus

- Cemeteries administration:** The reform of local government has allowed for more efficient and coordinated management of cemeteries, ensuring that burial services are provided in a respectful and timely manner.
- Registration services:** The reform of local government has streamlined registration services, making it easier for residents to access birth, death, and marriage certificates, and ensuring accurate and up-to-date records.
- Democratic services:** The reform of local government has strengthened democratic processes, ensuring that residents have a voice in decision-making and that local government is accountable to the community.
- Land and property policies:** The reform of local government has allowed for the development of consistent land and property policies, promoting sustainable development, and ensuring fair and transparent processes for land use and development.
- Planning:** The reform of local government has resulted in more consistent and coordinated planning processes, ensuring that development is aligned with community needs, environmental considerations, and regional priorities.

4.2.8 Regeneration Powers

Councils have gained additional regeneration powers, allowing them to deliver prosperity to local communities more effectively. This includes greater synergy between the 11 councils, easier collaboration, and expertise in legal services, marketing, planning, and regeneration.

4.2.9 Customer Service Improvements

Councils have implemented several initiatives to improve customer service. This includes food waste and glass recycling campaigns, increased social media presence for better information sharing and engagement, the introduction of Citizen Space as a consultation and survey platform, and the initiation of the "Big Plan" and partnership arrangements for its delivery. They have also developed new websites, managed events, and achieved awards for parks and tourism.

4.2.10 Operating Improvements

Some Councils have achieved Investors in People platinum status, developed an organisational development strategy and Our People Plan, and invested in staff training and development. They have also implemented health and safety frameworks, developed a health and wellbeing program, streamlined policy development, and launched sustainability programs. Additionally, they have improved communication through intranet and extranet platforms, rolled out Microsoft 365 for better collaboration, and implemented shared service models for recruitment and HR functions.

4.2.11 Economic Development

Councils have focused on economic development initiatives to stimulate growth and create job opportunities in the region. They have established partnerships with local businesses, industry leaders, and educational institutions to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. Councils have supported the

development of key sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and digital technology through targeted investment and infrastructure improvements. Initiatives like the City Deal and the establishment of enterprise zones have attracted new businesses and investment to the area.

4.2.12 Environmental Sustainability

Councils have prioritised environmental sustainability and taken steps to reduce carbon emissions and promote renewable energy sources. They have implemented energy efficiency measures in council buildings, including the installation of solar panels and LED lighting. Councils have also encouraged sustainable transportation options, such as cycling infrastructure and electric vehicle charging points. Initiatives like the Zero Waste Strategy and the promotion of recycling and composting have helped reduce waste and promote a circular economy.

4.2.13 Infrastructure Development

Councils have invested in infrastructure development projects to improve the quality of life for residents and attract visitors to the area. This includes the construction and renovation of public spaces, parks, and leisure facilities. Councils have also focused on improving transportation infrastructure, including road upgrades and public transport enhancements. Initiatives like the City Centre Regeneration Plan and the development of cultural and arts venues have revitalised urban areas and boosted tourism.

4.2.14 Education and Skills Development

Councils have worked closely with educational institutions to enhance educational opportunities and skills development in the region. They have supported initiatives to improve school facilities, provide access to digital technology, and promote lifelong learning. Councils have also collaborated with local businesses to offer apprenticeships, internships, and training programs to equip residents with the skills needed for employment. These additional thematic headings provide a more detailed overview of the council's achievements and initiatives in various areas, showcasing their commitment to economic development, environmental sustainability, community engagement, infrastructure development, and education and skills development.

4.2.15 Other

- **Improved governance:** The reform of local government has led to improved governance structures and processes, ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective decision-making.
- **Service resilience:** The reform of local government has increased the resilience of local government services, allowing for more efficient and effective responses to emergencies and crises.
- **Investment in IT systems and security:** The reform of local government has provided opportunities for investment in IT systems and security, improving data management, communication, and cybersecurity.

These opportunities highlight specific examples and tangible outcomes resulting from the local government reform, showcasing the positive impact on governance, economic development, efficiency, collaboration, and staff well-being.

5 SYNERGY/COLLABORATION

Councils were asked to highlight any examples of shared services, synergies, and collaborations since April 2015 and where possible highlight any benefits that have resulted. Where possible councils were asked to quantify the benefits that could be obtained from these synergies/collaborations. The ability to undertake larger scale strategic capital and regeneration projects, which require a multi partner approach from a financial and logistical/delivery approach was highlighted often. Examples included:

5.1.1 Procurement Collaboration

The Local Government Procurement Group was established to achieve increased savings and efficiency through collaboration. The group aims to facilitate consistency in procurement practices and provide opportunities for local businesses, including Small, Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and micro enterprises. By collaborating, the group can leverage their collective purchasing power and negotiate better deals with suppliers. This collaboration also promotes knowledge sharing and best practices in procurement across the 11 councils.

5.1.2 Community Planning Partnerships

The Community Planning Officers Network meets regularly to identify synergies across the 11 councils and promote community planning partnerships. These partnerships involve collaboration between local government, community organisations, and other stakeholders to develop and implement plans that address the needs and aspirations of local communities. The community response to the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the value of local government in delivering better outcomes for residents through effective community planning and partnership working.

5.1.3 Shared Services

The Community and Wellbeing Directorate has established shared services in various areas, including home safety, tobacco, infectious disease, and air quality monitoring. These shared services help leverage funding from external stakeholders and promote quality and productivity. By pooling resources and expertise, the councils can provide more efficient and effective services to their communities. This collaboration also allows for the sharing of data and information, leading to better decision-making and improved outcomes.

5.1.4 Tourism Collaboration

Tourism Northern Ireland holds regular meetings with all councils to collaborate on shared activities and funding opportunities. This collaboration aims to achieve economies of scale in tourism and marketing efforts, ensuring that Northern Ireland's tourism industry is promoted effectively and efficiently. By working together, the councils and Tourism Northern Ireland can pool their resources and expertise to attract more visitors, generate economic growth, and enhance the tourism experience in the region.

5.1.5 Performance Improvement

The Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group was established to share knowledge and information on performance improvement. The group examines audit and assessment arrangements, develops guidance, and establishes relationships with relevant bodies. By sharing good practices and lessons learned, the councils can continuously improve their performance and deliver better services to their communities. This collaboration also helps ensure consistency in performance measurement and reporting across the 11 councils.

5.1.6 Economic Development

The councils collaborate to support business starts, entrepreneurship, and broadband and digital infrastructure. They leverage funding streams from various sources, including the Department for Communities and Invest NI, to optimise economic development programs. By working together, the councils can attract investment, promote innovation, and create employment opportunities in their respective areas. This collaboration also allows for the sharing of resources and expertise, leading to more effective economic development initiatives.

5.1.7 Finance Collaboration

The Association of Local Government Finance Officers and the Finance Working Group provide mechanisms for finance leaders to collaborate and share strategies. Through these collaborations, finance leaders can exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and develop innovative solutions to financial issues. The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives offers regional leadership and opportunities for collaboration with central government and other stakeholders. This collaboration ensures that financial management practices are consistent and aligned across the 11 councils, promoting transparency and accountability.

5.1.8 Collaborative Procurements

The councils engage in collaborative procurements in various areas, including insurances, treasury management services, animal welfare, and waste management and utilities. By pooling their procurement needs, the councils can achieve cost savings, negotiate better contracts, and streamline their procurement processes. They also collaborate on planning initiatives, property certificates, and recruitment advertising, ensuring consistency and efficiency in these areas.

5.1.9 Covid-19 Response Collaboration

The councils collaborate with the Department for Communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Additional funding has been channeled through the Community Support Programme to support community-led initiatives and assist the most vulnerable. This collaboration allows for a coordinated and effective response to the pandemic, ensuring that resources are allocated where they are most needed, and that support reaches those who need it the most.

5.1.10 Other Collaborations and Shared Services

The councils collaborate on various initiatives and programs, such as the Go for It Programme, Belfast Region City Deal, Digital Voucher Scheme, Levelling up Fund, and the development of the Support Hub. They also collaborate on strategic capital and regeneration projects, public realm improvement works, and town center investment plans.

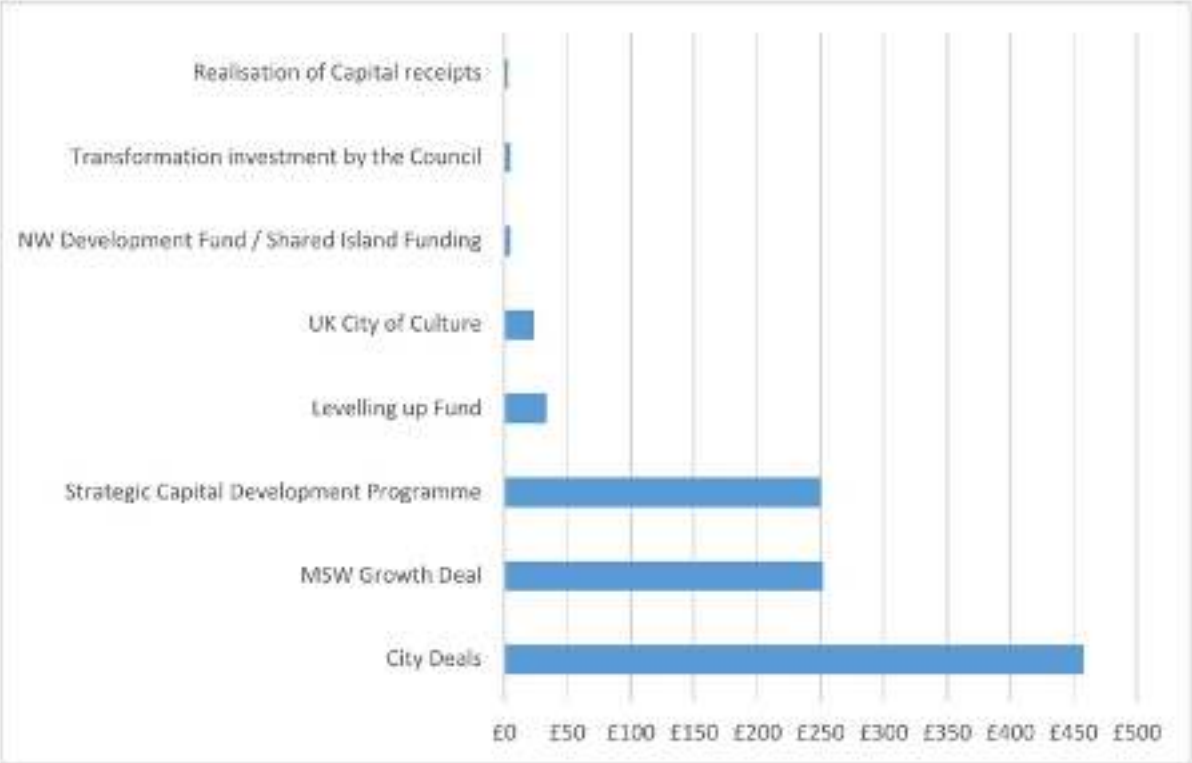
These collaborations aim to maximise the impact of resources, attract external funding, and deliver positive outcomes for the communities they serve. The feedback emphasised the importance of collaboration and synergy among local government entities in Northern Ireland to achieve savings, efficiency, and better outcomes for residents.

Through these collaborations, it was felt the councils can leverage their collective resources, expertise, and influence to address common challenges, deliver high-quality services, and promote the well-being and prosperity of their communities.

Councils attempted to quantify the future funding this new collaboration would yield, and results are

summarised below. In total over £1 billion of additional funding is expected to be leveraged through increased collaboration and powers of the new councils.

Figure 5.1: Future collaborative funding opportunities (£m)



These collaborations and shared services aim to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and service delivery across the councils, leading to better outcomes for residents and the region as a whole.

6 CHALLENGES & ISSUES

The challenges encountered by individual councils can be grouped into several general headings as below with some examples included:

6.1 Budgetary Shortfalls

Councils face challenges such as statutory pressures associated with pay increases and increased waste prices. The amalgamation of legacy councils with wide geographical spread and low population has led to some duplication of provision and additional costs.

Councils also faced funding challenges, particularly in areas where central government investment was lacking. This impacted some council's ability to deliver services and meet the expectations of the community. As a result of this councils had to explore alternative funding options and prioritise spending to address these challenges.

6.2 Lack of central government investment in certain services

Some councils faced challenges due to the lack of central government investment in certain services. This limited council's ability to deliver against expectations and meet the needs of the community. The challenges due to lack of investment or funding included significant statutory pressures from mandated pay increases, escalating waste prices, and inadequate budgets for planning and other transferred functions including Community Planning.

Additionally, it was felt that there is a notable gap in central government resources needed to advance strategic projects and difficulties engaging with central government, especially during times of executive collapse, adding to the challenge of delivering community planning without a dedicated budget. It was evident that councils felt that transferred powers and functions often come with unresolved legacy issues like funding and IT system disparities.

6.3 Assets transferred without resources

In some scenarios, councils received assets, such as off-street car parks, from central government as part of the reform process. However, the councils felt that they did not receive the necessary resources to maintain and manage these assets effectively. This created a financial burden for those councils, as they had to find alternative funding sources or reallocate existing resources.

6.4 Issues with duplication

- **Duplication of Roles** - When departments merged, there was an overlap of roles which initially affected operational efficiency and staff morale. This problem was systematically addressed through structural reviews, a severance scheme, and the reassignment of staff to eliminate redundancy and optimise resource allocation.
- **HR and Process Integration** - The integration phase saw initial inconsistencies in employee terms and conditions and operational processes across merging entities. These issues were gradually resolved by aligning processes and terms through extensive reviews, leading to improvements in efficiency and employee satisfaction over time.

6.5 Conflicting processes in initial stages of RPA

During the initial stages of reform, there were conflicting processes and procedures between the

merging councils. This caused confusion and hindered the smooth integration of services. Councils have had to conduct comprehensive reviews of processes and implemented standardised procedures to address these challenges.

6.6 Capacity issues

Councils faced challenges in managing the additional duties resulting from the transfer of functions. The capacity issues are primarily related to the operational strains experienced by councils following the restructuring and transfer of functions. Examples include:

- **Training and Technical Support** - The removal of centralised group systems like the Building Control and Environmental Health group systems has created significant gaps. Previously, these groups provided capacity for training, technical support, and other operational assistance. Their removal has shifted these responsibilities directly to individual councils, increasing their workload and exacerbating capacity issues.
- **Handling Additional Duties** - Councils are struggling with additional duties, such as off-street car parking, which have been transferred without the corresponding resources. This has led to increased operational demands on councils that already face resource limitations.
- **Maintaining Transferred Assets** - The transfer of assets like off-street car parks from central government without any accompanying resources for maintenance has burdened the councils with additional responsibilities that they are not equipped to handle financially or operationally.

Councils have had to prioritise and allocate resources effectively to ensure the smooth delivery of services.

6.7 Communication and engagement challenges

Some councils faced significant challenges in meeting public expectations regarding citizen engagement, information sharing, and consultation. Some councils felt they were not adequately resourced to deliver on these expectations, resulting in dissatisfaction among the community. The councils implemented new communication strategies and invested in engagement initiatives to improve transparency and public participation.

6.8 Disparity in employee terms and conditions, and working practices

The merger with other councils brought together different terms and conditions, and working practices. This created challenges in ensuring fairness and equity across the newly formed councils. The councils had to review and align rates, terms and conditions, and working practices to create a unified approach.

6.9 Impact of central government grant cuts

It was noted that some councils were significantly impacted by central government grant cuts, particularly the erosion of the Rates Support Grant. This placed a strain on councils' finances, especially in areas that relied heavily on government funding. Councils had to find ways to mitigate the impact of these cuts, such as exploring alternative revenue streams or implementing cost-saving measures. These additional details provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by councils during the reform process and the specific actions taken to address them.

6.10 Statutory pressures

Some councils faced statutory pressures primarily involving national negotiations for pay increases and

other rising costs, notably in waste management. Councils face challenges due to the inability to raise planning charges despite increasing costs, creating significant rate challenges.

Additionally, councils are under pressure to deliver new investments and services to foster district growth, such as capital projects and city deals. These demands are compounded by inadequate budgets for transferred functions and the need for community planning without a dedicated budget.

6.11 Demand for new investment and services

There was a significant demand for councils to deliver new investment and services to support district growth. This included capital projects, investment in areas of growth, and participation in City Deals. Meeting these demands required additional resources and strategic planning.

6.12 Service alignment and cultural integration challenges

Some councils faced challenges in aligning services, cultures, and harmonising practices between the merging councils and transferred functions. This required effective communication, collaboration, and change management strategies.

6.13 Difficulties engaging with central government during the collapse of the Executive

A number of councils faced difficulties in engaging with central government during the collapse of the Executive. This created challenges in delivering community planning without a detailed program for government and clear guidance.

6.14 Challenges of building a unified council identity

Some councils initially faced challenges in building a unified council identity with local citizens and stakeholders. This required effective branding, communication, and engagement strategies to foster a sense of unity and shared purpose.

6.15 City versus rural tensions

In some cases, councils faced tensions between the city and rural areas, which created challenges in managing a more diverse area. The reformation process led to difficulties in creating a unified council perception, especially in the context of diverse areas where city and rural tensions are pronounced. These geographical and demographic differences added complexity to the integration efforts, impacting the ability to form a solid and universally accepted council identity.

6.16 Increased member travel distances and costs

The increase in the number of elected members resulted in increased travel distances and mileage costs for some councils. This required adjustments in budgeting and logistical arrangements to accommodate the expanded council.

7 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

7.1 Introduction

As noted in Section 2.1, the NI Executive decided that a range of additional functions should transfer to local government on 1st April 2015. This section provides a high-level overview of the financial performance of councils during the time period immediately following local government reform during the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2022, there is also inclusion of data from the three years which preceded local government reform to provide some context. The review of financial data also includes knowledge of additional responsibilities and costs associated with LG Act NI 2014.

This financial data is for ALL councils in aggregate and does not specifically analyse individual council areas. It should also be noted that this is not a like for like comparison between the baseline position (26 councils) and the new delivery structures (11 councils). All financial data has been sourced from Northern Ireland Audit Office – Local Government Auditors Annual Reports.

This analysis does not include an in-depth review of individual council's annual accounts nor seek to identify specific efficiencies or make assumptions about how the review of local government reform has impacted on financial performance as there are a wide range of external factors at play and the research team did not have the resources to investigate detailed financial records for each council.

7.2 Financial Analysis Caveat

It is noted that analysing councils' audited accounts or treasury returns data could potentially be misleading as they include costs such as depreciation and pension fund movements that are funded from non-usable reserves. Councils have stated that they have driven annual recurrent savings through voluntary severance and other initiatives. There has also been a significant investment in new capital projects and services, despite being impacted by central government grant cuts.

7.2.1 Income

Figure 7.1 shows total income for all councils from 2012-13 to 2021-22. All previous years' figures have been restated using HMT deflators as at December 2022.

Figure 7.1: Total Income (£m) For All Councils 2015-16 to 2021-22



The average income for all councils combined in the three years that preceded local government reform in NI was £952m. In the seven years since local government reform, the average income for all councils was £997m. This represents a percentage increase of 4.7%.

In the period 2015-16 to 2021-22 there has been a 6.9% increase in income with a general upward trend over the period.

7.2.2 Expenditure

Figure 7.2 shows the total expenditure for all councils over the time period 2012-13 – 2021-22.

Figure 7.2: Total Expenditure (£m) For All Councils 2012-13 to 2021-22

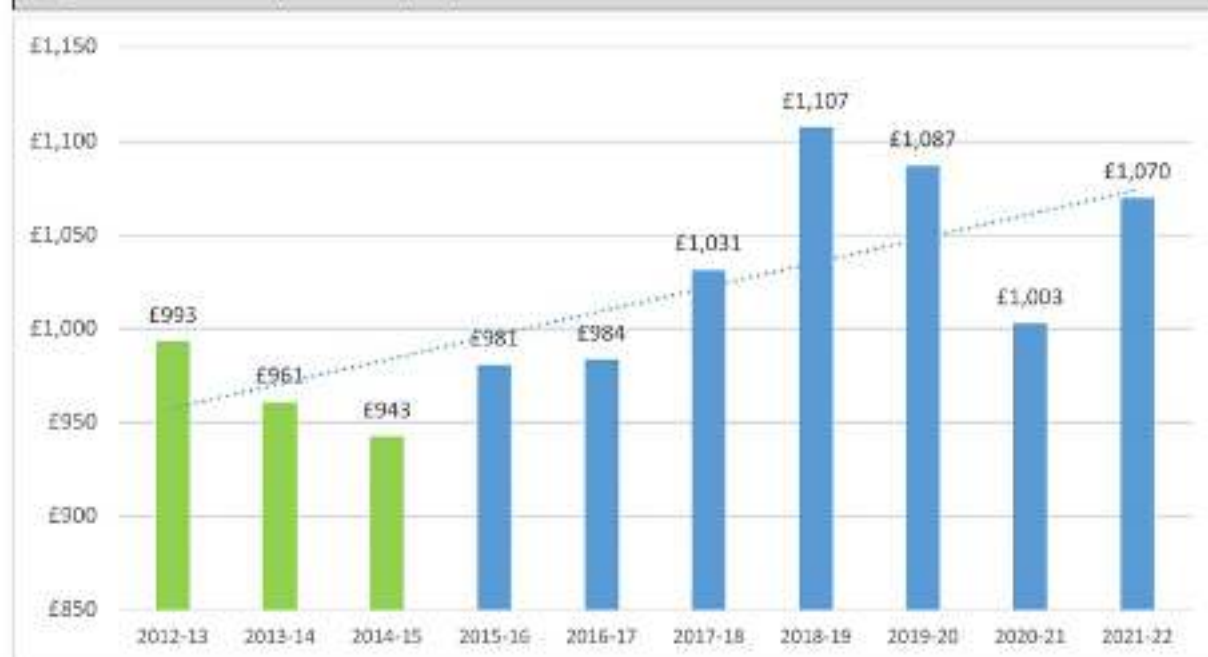


Figure 7.2 shows that there has been a gradual year on year increase in total expenditure for combined total council expenditure over the period, however it has not been linear with expenditure decreasing in 2019-20 and again in 2020-21.

The total percentage change over the 10-year period is an increase of 7.8%. The average expenditure in the three years prior to local government reform was £966m. In the 7 years post reform, the average total expenditure was £1,037m. This represents an increase of 7.5%.

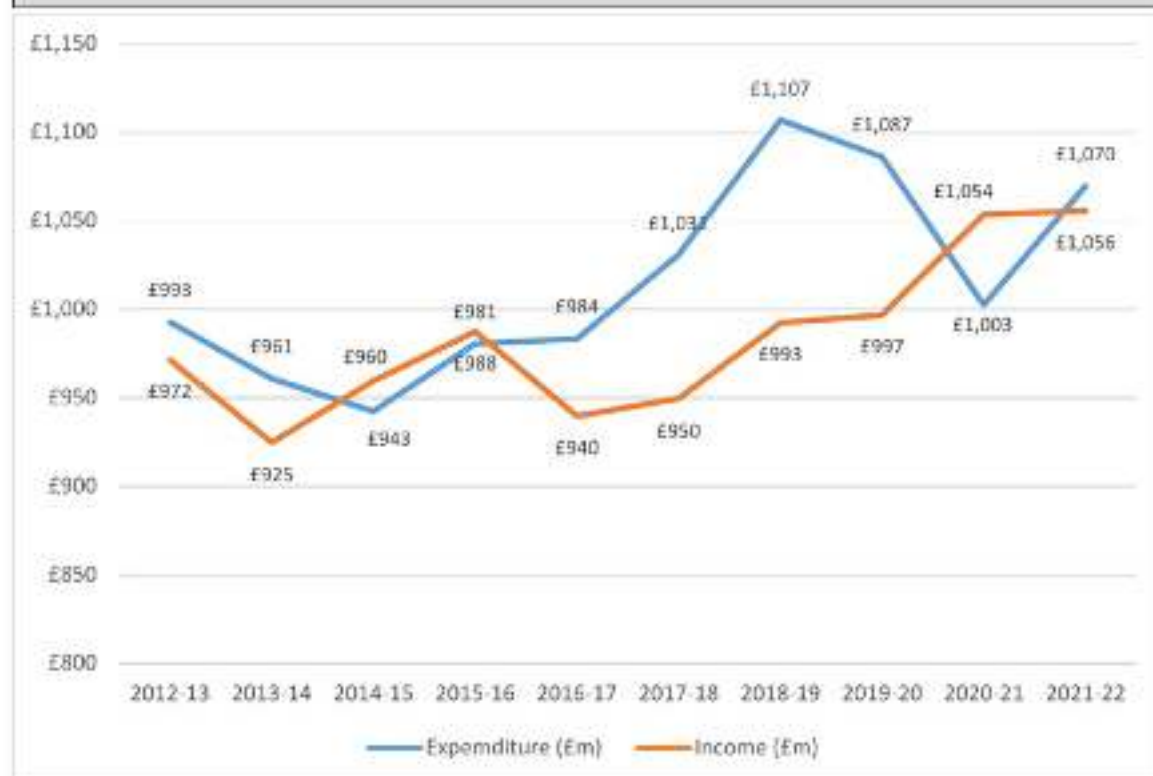
7.2.3 Income/Expenditure

Figure 7.3 below shows that in 7 of the 10 years surveyed, total expenditure by all councils exceeded total income. On average this equated to an average additional expenditure of £32.57m per annum over the period.

In the period since reform (2015/16 – 2021/22), expenditure has exceeded income in five of these seven years. The total spending deficit over this seven-year period equals £286m across all councils or an average of £40.8m per annum.

Additional expenditure over this period has been funded by use of borrowing/reserves.

Figure 7.3: Total Income / Expenditure (£m) For All Councils 2012-13 to 2021-22



It should also be noted that many councils have invested significant amounts in capital investment projects in recent years. Capital investment relates to assets which are purchased, constructed or improved by the councils to support delivery of their services. These relate from one-off purchases in-year to larger projects that can take several years to complete.

Figure 7.4 overleaf shows the financial commitment to capital investment over a 10-year period (pre and post local government reform).

7.2.4 Capital Investment

The chart in Figure 7.4 below shows that capital investment has been trending slightly upwards over the past 12 years. In the five years pre local government reform total capital investment averaged £99 million. In the 7 years post local government reform total capital investment has averaged £119 million.

In the immediate five years post reform the capital investment average was slightly higher (£128m), but Councils have had to cut capital investment due to the impacts of Covid-19 on budgets.

Figure 7.4: Total Capital Investment (£ million)



7.2.5 Loan Position

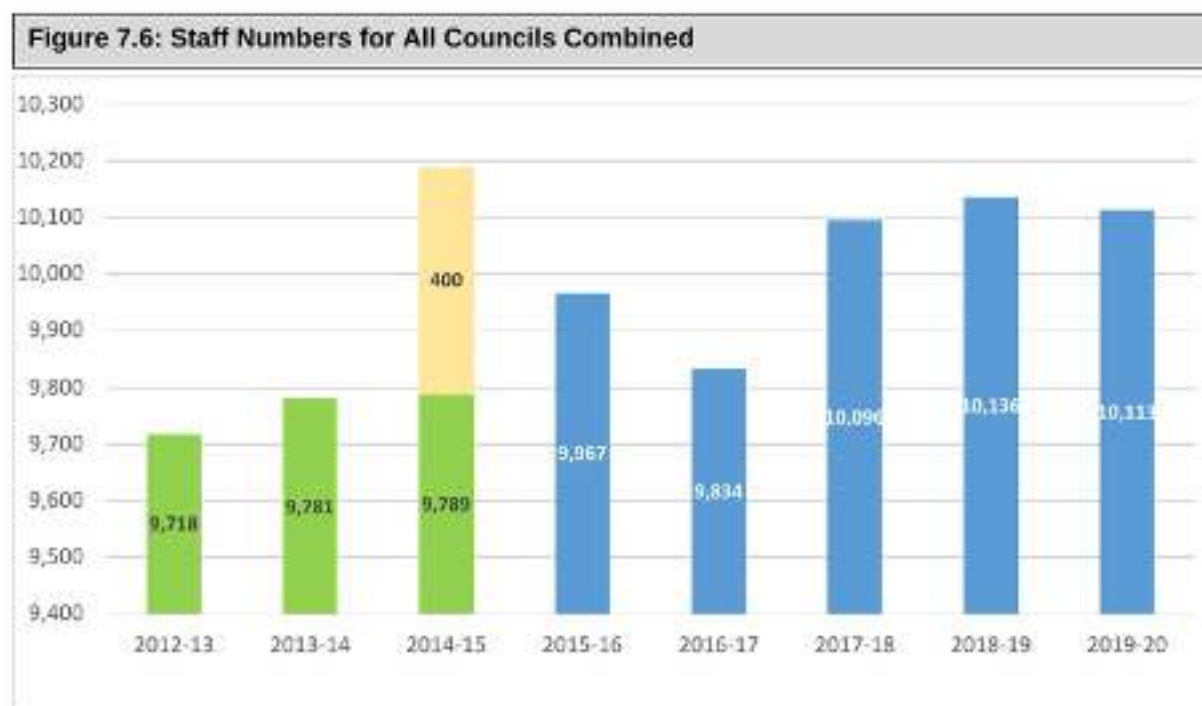
Figure 7.5: Change in Loan Position (2015/16 – 2021/22)

Date	Total Borrowing
31 st March 2016 2017 LGA Report	£493.7 million
31 st March 2022 2023 LGA Report	£481.2 million

The total borrowing total has decreased by £12.5 million (2.6%) over the 7-year period since reform. The majority of debt relates to external borrowing (mostly from central government) to enable the financing of capital investment.

7.2.6 Staff Numbers

Figure 7.6 below shows the change in total staff numbers within all councils over the period 2012/13 – 2019/20⁷.



On 1 April 2015, all staff from the 26 legacy councils plus over 400 staff from the Planning Service transferred to the new councils (9,967 FTE from Councils + 400 from Planning Services = Total of 10,367 FTE Staff).

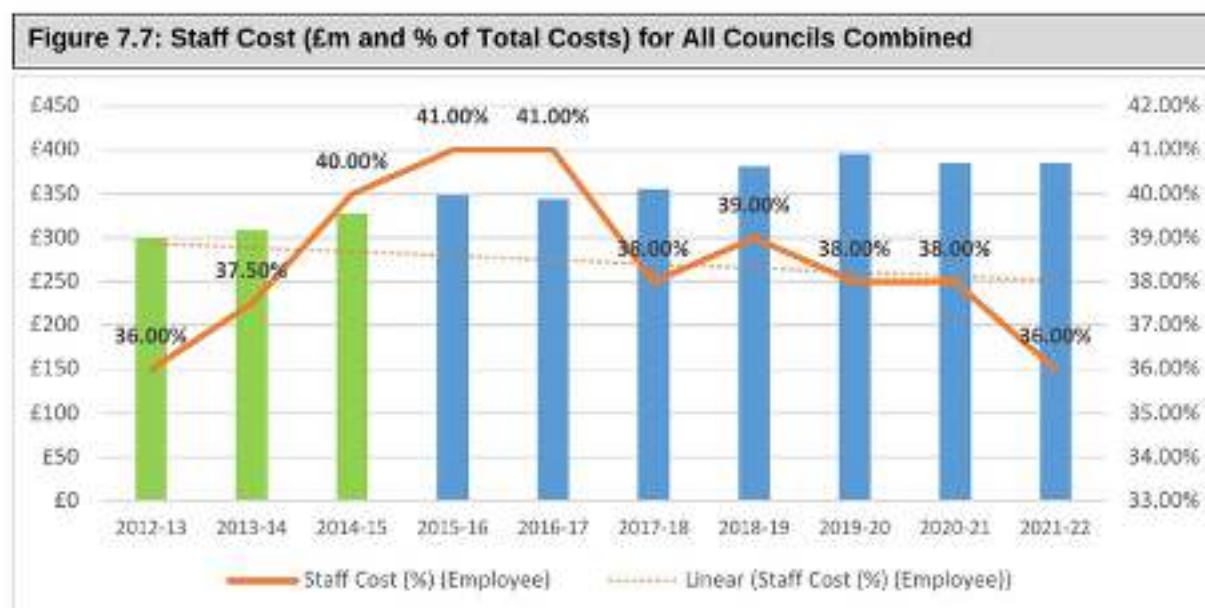
Despite the impact of the Planning staff transfers (400) from the Northern Ireland Civil Service, for 2015-16 the overall net increase in Full Time Equivalents (FTE) from 2014-15, was only 178, largely due to the impact of staff leaving under exit packages. The total staffing compliment for all councils actually appeared to be lower considering the additional functions that had been carried across.

Given that in 2014-15 the local government FTE count (across 26 councils) equaled 9,789 and the staffing complement for planning etc. totaled 400, this equaled a total FTE number of 10,189. The FTE count across all 11 councils in 2019-20 was 10,113. This equates to a decrease of 0.75% in FTE staff in spite of the fact additional functions have been transferred across to local government and the requirement of additional staff to operate new functions under LG Act NI 2014 (such as community planning etc.).

⁷ Specific staff numbers for 2020/21 and 2021/22 were not included within the Local Government Auditors Report 2023.

7.2.7 Staff Costs

Figure 7.7 below shows the Total Staff Cost (and Staff Cost as a percentage of Total Costs) over a 10-year period.



The total Staff Cost has increased by £85m (28.3%) over the 10-year period; however, it should be noted that the Staff Cost as percentage of total costs has actually remained the same. If looking specifically at the 7-year period post reform, the Staff Cost as a percentage of Total Costs has decreased from 41% in 2015/16 to 36% in 2021/22.

8 SUMMARY

8.1 Report Limitations

This report aims to highlight the impact of local government reform on service provision and cost effectiveness over a 7-year period. However, it should be noted that there are limitations in what can be reported upon given the timescales and information available. For example, whilst it is possible to use the financial data extracted from the Local Government Auditors Office reports showing the total income and expenditure figures over the timeframe, it is not possible to give a robust analysis on cost effectiveness as the supporting information (such as standardised reporting metrics with established baselines) is not available.

This report collates the feedback from local councils on efficiencies realised, challenges encountered and future opportunities that can be leveraged as a result of local government reform. However, it should be noted that the supporting data is over a limited timeframe (7 years) that includes the formative years of the new 11 local councils. During this timeframe there was considerable political uncertainty within NI⁹ and the reporting period also includes the initial wave of Covid-19 enforced lockdowns⁹ and the associated impact on service delivery, income etc.

Whilst this initial research provides an insight into impacts of local government reform, it is the view of the researchers that a longer-term study with a more comprehensive data set is required. The key metrics to measure performance and cost efficiency should be established with councils in advance and an agreed annual monitoring data set agreed upon. This report largely is a collation of the experiences of local councils in the formative years following local government reform.

8.2 Efficiencies

The councils have identified £21,485,452 of current efficiency savings. In terms of planning, collaborative working with Building Control has helped deter unauthorised development and enabled faster processing of investment proposals. The transfer of planning responsibilities to the councils has improved the service provided to planning applicants and increased the sustainability of development. Local Development Plans are now more appropriate to the needs of the district.

The implementation of effective and resilient IT infrastructure through collaboration with other councils has resulted in compliant licensing arrangements and increased collaboration and efficiencies in IT hardware and software developments. Councils are now more able to remain compliant and respond to IT threats and opportunities. While there have been cost savings in waste contracts due to larger contracts for the wider districts, overall waste costs have increased due to market pressures and additional statutory requirements.

The larger council areas and powers have allowed closer working relationships with regional organisations for the delivery of integrated services, particularly in relation to the Covid-19 response. Councils have been able to shape the direction of the Covid-19 response for the benefit of residents.

Streamlined decision-making processes, clear guidelines, and the use of technology and digital platforms have resulted in faster and more efficient decision-making. Councils have established clear

⁹ NI Assembly dissolved on 16th January 2017 and only formed again on 11th January 2020. There was also no sitting NI Assembly in the period 3 February – 31st March 2022.

⁹ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/timeline-lockdown-web.pdf>

roles and responsibilities, ensured effective governance and avoided duplication of efforts.

Robust financial management practices, regular budget reviews, and cost control measures have helped allocate resources efficiently. Financial transparency and accountability have improved through clear and accessible financial reports. The use of data analytics and performance metrics has identified areas for cost savings and resource optimisation.

Performance management systems have been implemented to monitor and evaluate service delivery. Customer feedback mechanisms have been established to identify areas for improvement. The use of technology and automation has streamlined service delivery processes.

Councils have implemented sustainable practices and initiatives to reduce their environmental footprint, including recycling and waste reduction programs, water conservation measures, and sustainable transportation options. Efficient processes for education and skills development programs, coordination with educational institutions and training providers, and the use of technology and e-learning platforms have expanded access to education and skills development opportunities.

Initiatives to support economic development and job creation, coordination with local businesses and industry stakeholders, and the use of data analysis and market research have targeted resources and support accordingly. Initiatives to preserve and promote cultural heritage, improve tourism infrastructure and services, and the use of digital platforms and virtual tours have enhanced the visitor experience.

Efficient emergency management systems, public safety infrastructure, and the use of technology have improved emergency response times and resource allocation. The establishment of Community Planning Partnership and the identification of an overarching strategic vision and plan for the district have improved working relationships and contributed towards achieving outcomes.

Overall, the achievements and improvements made by the councils in various areas, emphasising their efforts to improve processes, optimise resources, and deliver high-quality services to the community.

8.3 Benefits and Opportunities

The section on the non-monetary assessment of local government reform highlights several positive aspects of the reform process. Through quantitative and qualitative feedback from individual councils, the section sheds light on the challenges, opportunities, and impact of reform on service delivery and other aspects of local governance.

One of the key positives identified is the increased efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Many councils reported improvements in their ability to deliver services to their communities, with streamlined processes and better resource allocation. This has resulted in enhanced customer satisfaction and a more responsive local government.

Furthermore, the reform has provided councils with the opportunity to innovate and explore new ways of delivering services. Many councils have embraced technology and digital solutions to improve service delivery and engage with their communities. This has resulted in greater accessibility, transparency, and citizen participation in local government decision-making processes.

The reform process has also brought about positive changes in governance structures and practices. Many councils have implemented stronger accountability mechanisms, improved strategic planning, and enhanced community engagement. This has fostered a culture of transparency, trust, and inclusivity within local government.

Overall, the non-monetary assessment of local government reform highlights several positive outcomes. The increased efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, enhanced collaboration and

partnership, innovation in service delivery, and improved governance practices are all positive impacts of the reform process. These findings provide valuable insights for councils and policymakers as they continue to navigate and refine local government reform efforts.

8.4 Synergy and Collaboration

Collaborations have proven to be effective in addressing common challenges and promoting the well-being and prosperity of communities. One area of collaboration is procurement. The Local Government Procurement Group was established to leverage the collective purchasing power of local government entities. By negotiating better deals with suppliers and sharing best practices in procurement, the group has achieved increased savings and efficiency.

Community planning partnerships have also been instrumental in promoting collaboration between local government, community organisations, and other stakeholders. These partnerships aim to develop and implement plans that address the needs and aspirations of local communities. The value of effective community planning and partnership working was particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Shared services have been established in various areas, such as home safety, tobacco, infectious disease, and air quality monitoring. These shared services help leverage funding from external stakeholders and promote quality and productivity. Tourism collaboration is another important aspect of local government collaboration. Tourism Northern Ireland collaborates with all councils to achieve economies of scale in tourism and marketing efforts. By pooling resources and expertise, they can attract more visitors, generate economic growth, and enhance the tourism experience in the region.

The Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group plays a crucial role in sharing knowledge and information on performance improvement. By sharing good practices and lessons learned, the councils can continuously improve their performance and deliver better services to their communities. Economic development is also a key focus of collaboration among local government entities. The councils collaborate to support business starts, entrepreneurship, and the development of broadband and digital infrastructure. By working together, they can attract investment, promote innovation, and create employment opportunities in their respective areas.

Finance collaboration is essential to ensure consistency and transparency in financial management practices across the councils. The Association of Local Government Finance Officers and the Finance Working Group provide mechanisms for finance leaders to collaborate and share strategies. Collaborative procurements have been successful in achieving cost savings, better contracts, and streamlined processes. The councils engage in collaborative procurements in various areas, leveraging their collective buying power. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the councils collaborated with the Department for Communities to respond to the crisis.

Additional funding was allocated through the Community Support Programme to support community-led initiatives and assist the most vulnerable. In addition to these collaborations, the councils collaborate on various initiatives and programs, such as the Go for It Programme, Belfast Region City Deal, Digital Voucher Scheme, Levelling up Fund, and the development of the Support Hub. They also collaborate on strategic capital and regeneration projects, public realm improvement works, and town centre investment plans. These collaborations have not only resulted in immediate benefits but also hold promising future funding opportunities. It is estimated that over £1 billion of additional funding will be leveraged through increased collaboration and the enhanced powers of the new councils. This funding will further enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and service delivery across the councils, leading to better outcomes for residents and the region as a whole.

The collaborations and shared services among local government entities in Northern Ireland have

proven to be highly beneficial. They have resulted in increased savings, efficiency, and better outcomes for residents. These collaborations have addressed common challenges, promoted community well-being, and attracted investment. The future looks promising with the potential for significant additional funding and further improvements in service delivery. Collaboration and synergy continue to be key drivers in achieving the well-being and prosperity of communities in Northern Ireland.

8.5 Challenges and Issues

During the reform process, the councils faced numerous challenges. One major challenge was the duplication of roles within departments. When different teams merged, there were instances where roles overlapped or duplicated, leading to inefficiencies and confusion.

Another challenge was the differing terms and conditions of employees from the merging councils. This created difficulties in ensuring fairness and consistency across the workforce. The councils had to negotiate and harmonise terms and conditions to create a unified approach. Conflicting processes and procedures between the merging councils also caused challenges during the reform process. This led to confusion and hindered the smooth integration of services.

The councils also faced capacity issues in managing the additional duties resulting from the transfer of functions. This included responsibilities such as off-street car parking, which required additional resources and expertise. The councils had to prioritise and allocate resources effectively to ensure the smooth delivery of services. Financial challenges were also a significant issue for the councils. The transfer of functions did not occur on a cost-neutral basis, resulting in resource shortfalls that had to be addressed through rate increases.

Additionally, the councils received assets from central government without the necessary resources to maintain and manage them effectively, creating a financial burden. The councils had to find alternative funding sources or reallocate existing resources to address these challenges. The councils also faced challenges in meeting public expectations regarding citizen engagement, information sharing, and consultation.

Furthermore, the councils were significantly impacted by central government grant cuts, particularly the erosion of the Rates Support Grant. This placed a strain on the councils' finances, especially in areas that relied heavily on government funding. The councils had to find ways to mitigate the impact of these cuts, such as exploring alternative revenue streams or implementing cost-saving measures. Other challenges included difficulties in engaging with central government during the collapse of the Executive, building a unified council identity with local citizens and stakeholders, managing tensions between the city and rural areas, increased travel costs due to the increase in elected members, and the lack of central government investment in certain services.

Overall, the councils faced a range of challenges during the reform process, requiring careful planning, effective communication, and strategic decision-making to overcome them and successfully implement the necessary changes.

8.6 Conclusion

The aim of this research paper is to provide an assessment of the impact of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness on councils during the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2022.

Whilst annual costs have increased this should be viewed in light of significant additional functions taken on by local councils as well as the investment in capital infrastructure over the timeframe. Inflationary uplifts should also be factored into the cost increases.

For the most part local councils have stated that it is not possible to quantify current and future efficiency savings due to lack of available information/limited timeframe. Those efficiencies that could be quantified highlighted **savings of £21.5m as well as identifying a range of potential future savings moving forward**. Feedback has suggested a range of non-quantifiable benefits have been realised – greater collaboration (Covid-19 response etc.) and sharing of knowledge. **Future investment opportunities of over £1bn have also been identified** – feedback from councils suggest this level of leveraged funding would not have been achievable if not for enhanced scope of powers of new councils.

It is the view of the research team that it is too early in the process to conclude if local government reform has been cost effective or not due to the lack of supporting data and limited scope for councils to fully realise benefits. The review period reflects only the initial seven-year period since the formation of the 11 new councils in NI. This timeframe is far from ideal due to:

- The limited timeframe for councils to fully leverage any benefits of increased powers; and
- Political instability within NI during the limited timeframe of the review (no functioning NI Assembly for over 3 of the 7 years).

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Mournes Gateway Project - Programme Board Meeting

**Thursday 28th August 2024 3.30pm
Downshire Civic Centre/MS Teams**

In Attendance:

Programme Board Members

**Councillor Willie Clarke
Councillor Glyn Hanna - Chair
Councillor Laura Devlin (Teams)
Councillor Jill Truesdale**

NMDDC Officials

**Conor Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism
Caolain Boyd Assistant Director: Capital Projects & Procurement
Conor Woods, Strategic Capital Projects Manager
Amanda Smyth AD Economy Growth Tourism**

External Members

Michael Mitchel ARUP

MMGP/028: Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were noted from:

Councillor Pete Byrne
Councillor Michael Rice
Michelle Boyle, Head of Tourism, Product Development & Visitor Experience.

Cllr Hanna welcomed M Mitchell from ARUP to the meeting and looked forward with working closely with the ICT on the delivery of the project.

MMGP/029 Minutes of Previous Meetings:

i) 8 February 2024

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor L Devlin, seconded by Councillor G Hanna it was agreed to approve Minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board Meeting held on 8 February 2024.

MMGP/030 Governance Update

Mr C Mallon referred to the updated governance document that reflected the establishment of the Programme board to include Cllrs and Officials and the Project Board with Officials ICT and external partners.

Mr Mallon confirm the role of the Programme board was to act as a sounding board for council and to over see the delivery of the project.

Cllr Truesdale queried if the budget of £44m had been agreed by DfE and sought clarity on the role of the Programme board and decision making on the project.

Mr Mallon confirmed that the budget of £44m remained the current estimate for the project and that DfE accepted that given the project's early stage of development, however, there cannot be absolute certainty over the final cost at this time.

Mr Mallon also agreed to review the Governance document and provide more clarity on the role and responsibility of the Programme Board in respect of reporting to SPR.

Cllr Truesdale queried the 2 day timeframe for issuing meeting papers and suggested it was changed to 5 days. Mr Mallon responded that the 2 days was included in the governance of the project from the start and had been agreed by Council, the 2 day timeframe also aligns with NCCR governance.

Cllr Truesdale asked if technical report were requested by councillors would they be provided, Mr Mallon advised that any requests for information would be considered.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Devlin it was agreed note the updated Governance Document with clarity on role and responsibilities to be provided.

MMG/031 Introduction to the Integrated Consultancy Team

Mr Mallon welcomed and introduced Mr Mitchell to the meeting.

Mr Mitchell went through the organogram and discussed the ICT structure with the Board Members

Cllr Truesdale queried the appointment of the gondola consultant and if resulted in an additional cost and how was VFM determined.

Mr Mallon advised that the requirement for a Gondola consultant was set out in the procurement strategy, and it would incur a cost against the project.

Mr Woods confirmed that the appointment of the gondola consultant would be following a competitive procurement exercise.

board makes an appeal to me, although I do keep up with NCCR where it was also brought in, so from my understanding the Project Board is now called the Programme Board with a parallel support programme board alongside. And the Project Board, there's a list of members, is now a filter between the ICT and the Programme Board (us)? One of project boards role is to make appropriate recommendations to the Programme Board regarding investment decisions, is that all correct?

I said 'Because anyone who says they can absorb the amount of information given, at times 24 hours before a meeting, is not absorbing or scrutinising the information given b/c none of us are engineers or gondola experts'. CM said no one had objected before.

MMG/032 Project Manager Update Report

Mr C Woods provided an update on the current progress with the project as set out in the report presented:

Cllr Hanna commented on the amount of information presented and asked that going forward a dashboard with key project information could be provided as a summary of the report. C Woods confirmed that the dashboard would be provided.

Cllr Devlin asked if the Gondola Consultant was an addition to the Integrated Consultancy Team scope, asked for an update on the engagement with the National Trust and were the traffic counters that are in Newcastle for the surveys taking place as part of the project?

C Woods advised that the Gondola Consultant is an addition to the Integrated Consultancy scope, gave an update that the first Partnership working group meeting between National Trust and NMDDC took place on 24th July 2024 and the traffic counters are collecting survey data which is part of MMGP.

Cllr Truesdale asked for an update on the National Trust working group and if minutes from stakeholder group meeting would be presented at the Programme Board.

C Mallon confirmed that records of individual stakeholder meetings would not be tabled at the Programme board, however and stakeholder engagement report would be the presented to the board at regular intervals as part of the PM report.

Cllr Clarke commented on the need for better communication with stakeholders and welcomed the planned engagement and communication through the new stakeholder forum that is currently being established, Cllr Clarke stressed the importance of communicating accurate and factual information to the public and media to provide a balanced message.

Cllr Clarke also commented on the need to continue to consider secondary projects that would be stimulated by the main MMGP eg Donard wood to Bloody Bridge and Tollymore.

Cllr Clarke also raised the query on the reported gondola downtime due to the weather and asked if this was part of the considerations for the project, Mr Mitchell confirmed that the gondola downtime for both maintenance and weather has and will continue to be a consideration, and the gondola consultant will provide expert input into these considerations when appointed

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Devlin it was agreed to note the Project Manager's Update.

MMG/033 Date for Next Meeting.

I asked 'how long the traffic counters would be in place?' and was told that they would be gone in the next couple of days by Arup

I asked for clarification of the word 'partnership' was this a separate group? or just the MOU. CM confirmed it was the MOU

Mr Mitchell stated he was very aware project is marmite- need to start putting good news stories out about it, need added value to the project -

I said the gov doc states- In the consensus of agreement not being reached relevant issues should be recorded in the meeting record pro forma- quite a few times these minutes and relevant document have, quite a few times not even reached SPR.- will this improve? I was told by CM Nobody has complained

The next meeting will be Thursday 17th October 2024 @ 3.00pm

**For approval by the Mourne Mountains Gateway Programme Board.
For Noting at Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting**

DRAFT

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Minutes of Mournes Gateway Project - Programme Board Meeting
Thursday 17th October 2024 3.00pm
Downshire Civic Centre/MS Teams**

In Attendance:

Programme Board Members

Councillor Willie Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Pete Byrne (Teams)
Councillor Laura Devlin (Teams)
Councillor Jill Truesdale

NMDDC Officials

Conor Mallon, Director - Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Josephine Kelly, Director – Corporate Services
Caolain Boyd Assistant Director - Capital Projects & Procurement
Amanda Smyth, Assistant Director - Economy, Growth & Tourism
Conor Woods - Strategic Capital Projects Manager
Michelle Boyle – Head of Tourism, Product Development & Visitor Experience
Tracie McLoughlin – PA, ERT Dept.

MMGP/034: Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were noted from:
 Councillor G Hanna
 Councillor M Rice

MMGP/035 Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 28 Aug 2024
a) Draft Minutes
b) Draft Minutes with proposed amendments.

Mr Mallon advised that the draft minutes were circulated to Members for approval. Officers received and shared proposed amendments to the minutes received from Cllr Truesdale, the amendments were not agreed by correspondence.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor J Truesdale, seconded by Councillor P Byrne it was agreed that the draft minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board Meeting held on 28 August 2024 are noted as not agreed with amendments presented by Cllr J Truesdale noted for the record.**

MMGP/036 Governance Update

Mr C Mallon referred to the updated governance document that reflected the roles and responsibilities of the Programme Board.

Cllr Truesdale sked when will the costs be determined. Mr Mallon advised the costs included in the governance document are for guidance only.

Cllr Truesdale referred to the flowchart on page 6 which indicated it is the Project Board that engages with stakeholders but on page 8 under the title Programme Board Responsibilities it refers to input from senior stakeholders. Cllr Truesdale asked how are we to progress without engagement with stakeholders?

Mr Mallon said the Programme Board receives feedback on stakeholder engagement from the Project Board and the ICT, and advised if the Programme Board wish to take a role in engagement that can be considered

Cllr Truesdale proposed the Programme Board are involved in stakeholder engagement.

Cllr Clarke said stakeholder events are open to the public and any member wishing to engage can attend those events if they wish and Cllr Truesdale said she would like to attend the events if that was ok to do so.

Mr Mallon confirmed there were no restrictions on members attending public engagement events.

Cllr Truesdale asked if there would be legal representation on the Programme Board? Mr Mallon said the representative would be called in as required.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor P Byrne, seconded by Councillor W Clarke it was agreed to approve the updated Governance Document.

MMG/037 Project Manager Update Report

Mr C Woods provided an update on the current progress with the project as set out in the report presented.

Cllr Truesdale asked:

- a. In relation to the budget, Cllr Truesdale asked if the contractor wasn't appointed until July, why was there spend in May, June, July?

Mr Woods confirmed that the contractor was appointed from May.

- b. In relation to the public engagement event, Cllr Truesdale asked what arrangements were in place as the previous event was chaotic and thought 10 days notice may not be sufficient?

Mr Woods confirmed the event was being organised by Arup and the public notice would be issued next week and officers confirmed that 10 days was sufficient notice.

- c. Cllr Truesdale asked if the National Trust had agreed to the title 'National Trust Partnership Working Group'?

Officers confirmed the establishment of a joint working group was agreed in the MOU and no issue with the title had been raised.

Cllr Clarke asked:

- a. What is the gondola specialist remit?

Mr Woods said they would provide design input to ARUP and will look at space requirements, layout, profile (pylon locations) and other key elements.

Mr Mallon said they would be pivotal in the design, procurement for gondola supplier oversight during construction and sign off prior to operation.

Cllr Devlin asked:

- a. In relation to the public engagement event, will there be the ability to feedback visually?

Mr Woods confirmed ARUP will design boards to gain feedback.

- b. In relation to engagement events, is this the first round and what time is the event proposed to take place?

Mr Woods said yes, this is the first round and there will be series of events from now up to planning submission and it is proposed to take place from 1pm – 8pm.

Cllr Devlin said it was important that feedback was given as previously people who engaged felt they had not been listened to. She said the PB members will share details of the events.

Mr Mallon said he encouraged members to attend the public engagement events and feedback to the Programme Board.

Cllr Clarke said he thought there had been a good response to the previous engagement and asked what happened to the feedback?

Mr Mallon said this was collated and given to the design team and formed the development of the risk register.

Cllr Truesdale agreed with Cllr Devlin's comments that those who previously engaged felt forgotten about.

Cllr Truesdale asked if the costs for the gondola specialist included take down and security at end of life?

Mr Mallon confirmed maintenance contracts will be in place over the gondola's life cycle, whole life costs and dismantling considered in the business case.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor L Devlin, seconded by Councillor W Clarke it was agreed to note the Project Manager's Update.

MMG/038 Stakeholder Forum Update

Mrs M Boyle referred members to Item 5.0 report circulated and advised that following a public Expression of Interest process, there were 3 successful groups identified but there are some unfulfilled representations. It is therefore recommended that these gaps are filled through direct invitation utilizing stakeholder mapping undertaken by ARUP. These areas are:

- Heritage/Environmental Interest;
- Business Interest/Private Sector;
- Tourism Interest;
- Community, Voluntary and Social Economy;
- Active Travel;
- Existing / Future User
- Section 75;
- Other Interest Group

Cllr Clarke said youth groups should be included.

Cllr Truesdale agreed and suggested YMCA Newcastle

Cllr Devlin also agreed.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor L Devlin, seconded by Councillor W Clarke it was agreed to approve the recommendation the direct invitation be issued to groups to complete the stakeholder requirements.

MMG/039 Date for Next Meeting.

The next meeting will be Tuesday 17th December 2024 @ 3.00pm

**For approval by the Mourne Mountains Gateway Programme Board.
For Noting at Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting**

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