

December 8th, 2025

**Notice Of Meeting**

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Thursday, 11th December 2025** at **6:00 pm** in **Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre.**

**Committee Membership 2025-26**

Councillor O Hanlon **Chairperson**

Councillor D McAteer **Deputy Chairperson**

Councillor P Byrne

Councillor C Enright

Councillor M Hearty

Councillor R Howell

Councillor T Howie

Councillor A King

Councillor C King

Councillor A Lewis

Councillor A Mathers

Councillor S O'Hare

Councillor H Reilly

Councillor M Rice

Councillor D Taylor

# Agenda

## 1.0 Apologies and Chairperson's Remarks

## 2.0 Declarations of Interest

## 3.0 Action sheet arising from Strategy, Policy & resources Committee Meeting held 13 November 2025

📎 *SPR-Action Sheet arising from 2025 11 13.pdf*

*Page 1*

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### *For Discussion/Decision*

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## 4.0 Officer Report on Notice of Motion - Autism Friendly Towns (C/124/2025)

*For Decision*

📎 *Officer report on Notice of Motion - Autism Friendly Towns.pdf*

*Page 3*

## 5.0 Performance S95

📎 *SPR Cover Report Improvement Audit and Assessment 2025-26.pdf*

*Page 6*

📎 *Appendix 1 - Cover Letter - Final NMD S95 report to Council - 011225.pdf*

*Page 9*

📎 *Appendix 2 - NMD Final S95 report 2025-26 - 011225.pdf*

*Page 10*

📎 *Appendix 3 - NMD Signed Audit Certificate 2025-26 - 011225.pdf*

*Page 31*

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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*

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## 6.0 Proposed Lease Monaghan Row, Newry

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

📎 *SPR Report Dec 25 Proposed Lease of Part at Monaghan Row Newry.pdf*

*Not included*

📎 *Draft Lease Trust to Council for Part of Monaghan Row Newry.pdf*

*Not included*

📎 *SAA30 OHagan House - Proposed Council Parking Plan rev01.pdf*

*Not included*

📎 *SAA30 OHagan House - Proposed Council Lease Plan.pdf*

*Not included*

## 7.0 Car Parking Charges – St Patrick's Day

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

 ***SPR Committee Report - St Patricks Day.pdf***

***Not included***

## 8.0 Capital Project Extension of Struell Cemetery

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

 ***SPR Committee Report - Capital Project Extension to Struell Cemetery, Downpatrick.pdf***

***Not included***

 ***Appendix 1 - Business Case Extension to Struell Cemetery.pdf***

***Not included***

 ***Appendix 2 - Drawing of new proposed graves Struell.pdf***

***Not included***

## 9.0 Fleet Technology Business Case

 ***SPR Report - Business Case - Fleet Technology.pdf***

***Not included***

 ***Business Case - Fleet Technology.pdf***

***Not included***

## 10.0 Lands at Shrigley

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

 ***SPR Report - Lands at Shrigley.pdf***

***Not included***

 ***Appendix 1 - Shrigley Map 1 (2).pdf***

***Not included***

 ***Appendix 2 - Shrigley Map 2 (2).pdf***

***Not included***

## 11.0 Tyrella Beach Amenity Building

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

 ***SPR Report - Tyrella Beach Amenity Building - 11.12.2025.pdf***

***Not included***

## 12.0 Ballynahinch Square

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


Paper to follow

## 13.0 Revised Terms of Reference for Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group

*For Decision*

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

 **Appendix I - Draft revised Terms of Reference for Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group 2025.pdf** **Not included**

 **Revised Terms of Reference - Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group.pdf** **Not included**

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***FOR NOTING Items deemed to be exempt under Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014***

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## 14.0 PI & Treasury Management Update

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

 **TM and PI Q2 202526.pdf** **Not included**

 **Appendix 1 - PI and Treasury Management Report Q2.pdf** **Not included**

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***For Noting***

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## 15.0 Planning Update

*For Decision*

 **SPR - Planning Department Update Dec 25.pdf** **Page 34**

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## 16.0 Correspondence to Council Chief Executives

 **SUB-0872-2025 - Letter to Council Chief Executives - COUNCILS STANDING ORDERS.pdf** **Page 40**



# Invitees

Cllr Terry Andrews

Cllr Callum Bowsie

Mr Caolain Boyd

Fionnuala Branagh

Cllr Jim Brennan

Mr Gerard Byrne

Cllr Pete Byrne

Cllr Philip Campbell

Cllr William Clarke

Cllr Laura Devlin

Cllr Cadogan Enright

Cllr Killian Feehan

Cllr Doire Finn

Ms Joanne Fleming

Cllr Conor Galbraith

Cllr Mark Gibbons

Cllr Oonagh Hanlon

Cllr Glyn Hanna

Cllr Valerie Harte

Mr Conor Haughey

Cllr Martin Hearty

Cllr Roisin Howell

Cllr Tierna Howie

Ms Catherine Hughes

Ms Marina Hughes

Cllr Jonathan Jackson

Joanne/Noelle Johnston

Cllr Geraldine Kearns

Miss Veronica Keegan

Mrs Josephine Kelly

Cllr Aurla King

Cllr Cathal King

Cllr Mickey Larkin

Cllr David Lee-Surginor

Cllr Alan Lewis

Cllr Oonagh Magennis

Mr Conor Mallon

Cllr Aidan Mathers

Cllr Declan McAteer

Ms Carol McClean

Cllr Leeanne McEvoy

Jonathan McGilly

Mr Colin Moffett  
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Cllr Kate Murphy  
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Cllr Selina Murphy  
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Sinead Murphy  
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Cllr Declan 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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Ms Alison Robb  
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Mr Peter Rooney  
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Cllr Michael Ruane  
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Mr Conor Sage  
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Conor Smyth  
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Donna Starkey  
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Sarah Taggart  
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Cllr David Taylor  
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Mr David Telford  
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Cllr Jarlath Tinnelly  
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Ms Sinead Trainor  
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Cllr Jill Truesdale  
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Mrs Marie Ward  
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Cllr Helena Young  
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<u>Minute Ref</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Decision</u>	<u>Lead Officer</u>	<u>Actions taken / progress to date</u>	<u>Remove from Action Sheet? Y/N</u>
<b><u>ACTION SHEET – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING (SPR) –</u></b>					
<b><u>Thursday 14 August 2025</u></b>					
SPR/135/2025	Business Case – Residual Waste Contract	It was agreed that the requested rates per tonnage be brought back before Members as discussed.	S Murphy	<b>New rates not available until Procurement Process completed</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><u>ACTION SHEET – STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING (SPR) –</u></b>					
<b><u>Thursday 16 October 2025</u></b>					
SPR/185/2025	Action Sheet of meeting held 16/10/25	It was agreed to note the action sheet.	J Kelly	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/186/2025	Mid Year Assessment of Chief Executive & Corporate Services Directorate Business Plans	The mid-year assessment was agreed	M Ward	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/187/2025	Mid-Year assessment – Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26	The mid-year Assessment – Performance Improvement Plan was agreed	G Byrne	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/188/2025	Renewal of Microsoft Enterprise Agreement	It was agreed to approve the renewal of Council's Microsoft Enterprise agreement through a compliant procurement route. This represents a continuation of existing arrangements, with all associated costs already included within the budget.	J Kelly	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/189/2025	Health Cash Plan	It was agreed to support the continuation of the Employee Health Cash Plan as outlined within the report	M Hughes	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/190/2025	Lease Arrangements – Delamont Country Park Caravan Park	It was agreed to defer the item to allow officers to bring further information on the proposed lease	C McClean	<b>Report to be brought back to SPR in due course.</b>	<b>N</b>
SPR/191/2025	Accessibility Proposal	The following was agreed: •AccessAble be commissioned to develop guides for Council venues and locations.	C McClean	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>

		•The relevant Year 1, 2 and 3 costs be included in the rate setting process for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.			
SPR/192/2025	Mini-Digi Hub Project Bessbrook	It was agreed commence procurement and appointment of a contractor to undertake the works as outlined within section 2 of the Officer's Report	C Boyd	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/193/2025	Recruitment Director: Corporate Services	The following was agreed: -To approve the recruitment for Director: Corporate Services -Confirm the recommendations as contained within 2.1 of the Officer's Report -Nominations to the selection panel to be appointed in due course, in consultation with Party Leaders.	M Ward	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/194/2025	Exempt NCCR Programme Board Minutes 5 Sept 2025	It was agreed to note the minutes	C Mallon	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/195/2025	Management Accounts – Q2	It was agreed to note the Q2 2025/26 Management Accounts	G Byrne	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/196/2025	Minutes of SFWG Meeting held 4 November 2025	It was agreed to note the minutes	J Kelly	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/197/2025	Letter from the Dept of Communities Sub-0772-2025	It was agreed to note the correspondence	J Kelly	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/198/2025	Officer Report on Correspondence from Consulate General of the USA dated 2 June 2025 re 250 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence	It was agreed to note correspondence had been discussed at the Councillor's Equality & Good Relations Reference Group on 8 October 2025, and that the consensus of Members present was to support the Museum and Heritage Services section organising a talk or small exhibition to acknowledge this anniversary.	C McClean	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>
SPR/199/2025	Attendance at NI Amenity Council AGM	It was agreed to note the recommendation	J Kelly	<b>Agreed</b>	<b>Y</b>

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	11 December 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Officer report on Notice of Motion: Autism Friendly Towns
<b>Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):</b>	Carol McClean, Assistant Director Legal & People
<b>Contact Officer (Including Job Title):</b>	Colin Moffett, Head of Corporate Policy Suzanne Rice, Corporate Policy and Equality Officer

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

<b>For decision</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>For noting only</b>	
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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose and Background</b>
1.1	<p>The following Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor J Truesdale, tabled for consideration at Council Meeting on 4 August 2025, was referred to the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6:</p> <p><u>Reference C/124/2025 – Autism Friendly Towns</u></p> <p><b><i>"Acknowledging the Council's good work in the promotion of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Masterclasses for Employers. That this Council reinstates the action to continue the Promotion of Newcastle as an Autism Friendly town in the next Disability Action Plan as this was not included to sit within the finalised Disability Action Plan 2023-2027 and that the learning from this initiative now extends to all towns across the district in the next Action Plan. In the interim period Council sets up the disability forum and returns with regular progress updates on the inclusion of neurodiversity within the Disability Action Plan. This would include using best practice from Autism charities and Neurodiversity partnerships and the setting up of learning and awareness events."</i></b></p> <p>The Notice of Motion was discussed at the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group meeting on 8 October 2025.</p>
	<b>Key issues</b>
2.1	<p>Detailed discussions took place on the Motion and other Councils were highlighted as examples of good practice. Members were informed on implementation of the original Autism Friendly Town initiative, including how this was developed for Newcastle, being led by Autism Initiatives NI and supported by the Council's ERT Directorate.</p> <p>With regard to the establishment of a Disability Forum it was the consensus of those present that, if this was to be taken forward, it may be best led by Community Planning under the Active and Healthy Communities Directorate.</p>

	Members were also updated on the AccessAble proposal which was tabled for consideration at the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 13 November 2025 seeking agreement of the relevant funding to initiate the project in the 2026/27 financial year.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
3.1	<p>To note that following discussion at the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group on 8 October 2025 members of the Reference Group were supportive of the notice of motion. Should Council be minded to agree and progress the actions set out in the notice of motion, the consensus of the members of the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group was to recommend consideration be given to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Autism Initiatives NI be contacted by the ERT Directorate to determine if there is updated training, guidance or funding for the Autism friendly towns initiative.</li> <li>2. The proposal to establish a Disability Forum be referred to the Community Planning Partnership for consideration.</li> </ol>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Resource implications</b>
4.1	Resource implications associated with reinstating the promotion of Newcastle as an Autism Friendly town, extending this to all towns across the district, and establishing and implementing a Disability Forum.
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)</b>
5.1	<p><b><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></b></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><b><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></b></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><b><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></b></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	<p><b>Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)</b></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 type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	<p><b>Appendices</b></p>
	<p>N/A</p>
8.0	<p><b>Background Documents</b></p>



<b>Report to:</b>	SPR Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	11 December 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	S95 Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26
<b>Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):</b>	Gerard Byrne – Assistant Director of Finance and Performance
<b>Contact Officer (Including Job Title):</b>	Catherine Hughes – Acting Head of Performance and Improvement

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

<b>For decision</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>For noting only</b>	
<b>1.0</b>			<b>Purpose and Background</b>
1.1			The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the key findings from the Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment 2025-26 which was carried out by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on behalf of the Local Government Auditor (LGA). This audit and assessment underpins the general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of functions, which has been placed on Councils through Part 12 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act (2014). A copy of the report is attached at <b>Appendix 2</b> .
<b>2.0</b>			<b>Key issues</b>
2.1			<b>Audit Opinion</b>  The LGA has certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. It certifies an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, they believe that Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2024-25 and its 2025-26 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance. A certificate of compliance has been issued and is attached at <b>Appendix 3</b> .
2.2			<b>Proposals for Improvement</b>  During the audit and assessment the LGA identified no issues requiring a formal recommendation under the Act. One proposal for improvement was proposed and is detailed below.  The Council should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider the format of future Self-Assessment Reports to ensure Performance Improvement results are prominent and readily identifiable.</li> <li>2. Ensure targets and comparatives are in place for all measures of success, where this would be appropriate; and,</li> <li>3. Review how visuals are presented in the Self-Assessment Report.</li> </ol> <b>Response to Proposal</b>



	In light of the above proposal a detailed report is being developed to bring to senior management and members to consider revising Council's current approach to the annual Self-Assessment.
2.3	<b>Detailed Observations</b>  The LGA has included a number of observations in relation to the following thematic areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General duty to improve;</li> <li>• Governance arrangements;</li> <li>• Improvement objectives;</li> <li>• Consultation;</li> <li>• Improvement plan;</li> <li>• Arrangements to improve</li> <li>• Collection, use and publication of performance information; and</li> <li>• Demonstrating a track record of improvement.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
3.1	To consider and agree the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26 (Appendix 2)</li> </ul>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Resource implications</b>
4.1	There are no direct financial resource implications within this report.
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)</b>
5.1	<b><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></b>  It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.2	<b><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></b>  Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  If yes, please complete the following:  The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/>  The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/>

5.3	<p><b><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></b></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><b>Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)</b></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 type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	<p><b>Appendices</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appendix 1</b> – Cover Letter from NIAO</li> <li>• <b>Appendix 2</b> – s95 Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26 for Newry, Mourne and Down District Council</li> <li>• <b>Appendix 3</b> – Audit Certificate</li> </ul>
8.0	<p><b>Background Documents</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2024-25</li> </ul>

**By Email**

Marie Ward  
Chief Executive  
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council  
Downpatrick Office  
Downshire Civic Centre  
Ardglass Road  
BT30 6GQ

1 December 2025

Dear Marie,

**Newry Mourne and Down District Council: IMPROVEMENT AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT – FINAL AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2025-26**

I have now certified the improvement audit for the Council with an unqualified opinion on 29 November 2025. In terms of the assessment, I have concluded that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) during 2025-26. No statutory recommendations will be made to the Department this year in respect of the Council nor is there a requirement for a special inspection.

The report sets out the findings and conclusions from our work, it includes the audit and assessment certificate as an Annex. I also attach a copy of the original certificate I have signed. Our audit and assessment procedures may not have brought to light all areas in which improvements could be made and our findings should not be seen as comprehensive in this respect. Responsibility for determining whether they should be implemented, and the effects of such implementation, necessarily rests with management.

This letter and attachments have been copied to the Department for Communities as the legislation requires. I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance and cooperation we received throughout the audit.

*Yours sincerely,*



**Colette Kane**  
**Local Government Auditor**



## **Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26**

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

**Newry, Mourne and Down District Council**  
29 November 2025

# Contents

- 1. KEY MESSAGES.....1
- 2. AUDIT SCOPE.....4
- 3. AUDIT FINDINGS.....6
- 4. ANNEXES.....8

*We have prepared this report for Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s sole use. You must not disclose it to any third party, quote or refer to it, without our written consent and we assume no responsibility to any other person.*

# 1. Key Messages

## Summary of the audit

Audit outcome	Status
Audit opinion	Unqualified opinion
Audit assessment	The LGA has concluded that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) during 2025-26.
Statutory recommendations	The LGA made no statutory recommendations
Proposals for improvement	The LGA made one new proposal for improvement

This report summarises the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA) on the 2025-26 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. We would like to thank the Chief Executive and her staff, particularly the Head of Performance Improvement, for their assistance during this work.

We consider that we comply with the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) ethical standards and that, in our professional judgment, we are independent and our objectivity is not compromised.

## Audit Opinion

The LGA has certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. She certifies an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2024-25 and its 2025-26 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.



## **Audit Assessment**

The LGA has assessed whether the Council is likely to comply with its performance improvement responsibilities under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act). This is called the 'improvement assessment'.

In her opinion, the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26 and has demonstrated a track record of improvement. The LGA did not exercise her discretion to assess and report whether the Council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

## **Audit Findings**

During the audit and assessment we identified no issues requiring a formal statutory recommendation under the Act. We made one proposal for improvement (see Section 3). These represent good practice which should assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement. Detailed observations on thematic areas are provided in Annex B.

## **Status of the Audit**

The LGA's audit and assessment work on the Council's performance improvement arrangements is now concluded. By 31 March 2026 she will publish an Annual Improvement Report on the Council on the NIAO website, making it publicly available. This will summarise the key outcomes in this report.

The LGA did not undertake any Special Inspections under the Act in the current year.

## **Management of information and personal data**

During the course of our audit we have access to personal data to support our audit testing. We have established processes to hold this data securely within encrypted files and to destroy it where relevant at the conclusion of our audit. We can confirm that we have discharged those

responsibilities communicated to you in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **Other matters**

### **Sustainability and Climate Change**

Under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, Councils are required to prepare prospective reports on how they are adapting to climate change in the exercise of their functions. The reports are designed to help aid well-informed action to tackle climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce the impact of climate change.

The first report covers the four-year period beginning January 2026. At present individual councils are at varying stages in their journey toward the NI Executive's target of a 48 per cent reduction in their baseline emissions by 2030.

If Councils are to link climate change and sustainable action to their performance objectives or even as part of their wider continuous improvement arrangements in future years, it will be necessary to consider arrangements to improve, including ensuring adequate resourcing and gathering of accurate data.

### **Benchmarking**

As I have reported in previous years, whilst councils have undertaken work to improve benchmarking, for example by participating in the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Performance Networks, more progress needs to be made by the sector to allow a broader range of functions to be compared to support councils with their General Duty to Improve, in accordance with section 84 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.



## 2. Audit Scope

Part 12 of the Act provides all councils with a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. It sets out:

- a number of council responsibilities under a performance framework; and
- key responsibilities for the LGA.

The Department for Communities (the Department) has published 'Guidance for Local Government Performance Improvement 2016' (the Guidance) which the Act requires councils and the LGA to follow. Further guidance to clarify the requirements of the general duty to improve was issued by the Department during 2019.

The improvement audit and assessment work is planned and conducted in accordance with the Audit Strategy issued to the Council, the LGA's Code of Audit Practice for Local Government Bodies in Northern Ireland and the Statement of Responsibilities.

### *The improvement audit*

Each year the LGA has to report whether each council has discharged its duties in relation to improvement planning, the publication of improvement information and the extent to which each council has acted in accordance with the Department's Guidance. The procedures conducted in undertaking this work are referred to as an "improvement audit". During the course of this work the LGA may make statutory recommendations under section 95 of the Act.

### *The improvement assessment*

The LGA also has to assess annually whether a council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act, including consideration of the arrangements to secure continuous improvement in that year. This is called the 'improvement assessment'. She also has the discretion to assess and report whether a council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

### *The annual improvement report on the Council*

The Act requires the LGA to summarise all of her work (in relation to her responsibilities under the Act) at the Council, in an 'annual improvement report'. This will be published on the NIAO website by 31 March 2026, making it publicly available.

### *Special inspections*

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

### 3. Audit Findings

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

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

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

Our procedures were limited to those considered necessary for the effective performance of the audit and assessment. Therefore, the LGA's observations should not be regarded as a comprehensive statement of all weaknesses which exist, or all improvements which could be made.

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

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
Improvement Objectives	<p>The purpose of the Self-Assessment Report is to report performance against the targets set out in the Performance Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Whilst this information has been reported, the inclusion of additional measures of success from the Corporate Plan (that have no targets)</p>	<p>The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider the format of the future Self-Assessment Reports to ensure the Performance Improvement results are prominent and readily identifiable.</li> </ul>

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
	<p>makes it more difficult for the reader to assess performance.</p> <p>Additionally, some of the visuals in the Self-Assessment Report showing status on meeting targets and performance compared to prior year are unclear and incomplete.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ensure targets and comparatives are in place for all measures of success, where this would be appropriate; and,</li><li>• review how visuals are presented in the Self-Assessment Report.</li></ul>

## 4. Annexes

### **Annex A – Audit and Assessment Certificate**

#### **Audit and assessment of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's performance improvement arrangements**

##### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2024-25 and its improvement plan for 2025-26 in accordance with section 93 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) and the Code of Audit Practice for local government bodies.

I also certify that I have performed an improvement assessment for 2025-26 at the Council in accordance with Section 94 of the Act and the Code of Audit Practice.

This is a report to comply with the requirement of section 95(2) of the Act.

##### **Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Local Government Auditor**

Under the Act, the Council has a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions and to set improvement objectives for each financial year. The Council is required to gather information to assess improvements in its services and to issue a report annually on its performance against indicators and standards which it has set itself or which have been set for it by Government departments.

The Act requires the Council to publish a self-assessment before 30 September in the financial year following that to which the information relates, or by any other such date as the Department for Communities (the Department) may specify by order. The Act also requires that the Council has regard to any guidance issued by the Department in publishing its assessment.

As the Council's auditor, I am required by the Act to determine and report each year on whether:

- The Council has discharged its duties in relation to improvement planning, published the required improvement information and the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the Department's guidance in relation to those duties; and



- The Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act.

### **Scope of the audit and assessment**

For the audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information or whether the improvement plan published by the Council can be achieved. My audits of the Council's improvement plan and assessment of performance, therefore, comprised a review of the Council's publications to ascertain whether they included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the documents complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing them.

For the improvement assessment I am required to form a view on whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act, informed by:

- a forward looking assessment of the Council's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and
- a retrospective assessment of whether the Council has achieved its planned improvements to inform a view as to its track record of improvement.

My assessment of the Council's improvement responsibilities and arrangements, therefore, comprised a review of certain improvement arrangements within the Council, along with information gathered from my improvement audit.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 93 to 95 of the Act cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

### **Audit opinion**

#### **Improvement planning and publication of improvement information**

As a result of my audit, I believe the Council has discharged its duties in connection with (1) improvement planning and (2) publication of improvement information in accordance with section 92 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

## **Improvement assessment**

As a result of my assessment, I believe the Council has discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

In my opinion, the Council has demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement and I believe that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26.

I have not conducted an assessment to determine whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act in subsequent years. I will keep the need for this under review.

## **Other matters**

I have no recommendations to make under section 95(2) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.

I am not minded to carry out a special inspection under section 95(2) of the Act.



Colette Kane  
 Local Government Auditor  
 Northern Ireland Audit Office  
 106 University Street  
 BELFAST  
 BT7 1EU  
 29 November 2025

## Annex B – Detailed observations

Thematic area	Observations
General duty to improve	<p>The Council continues to develop arrangements to secure continuous improvement and has outlined within its Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26, its plans to achieve objectives and to attain continuous improvement.</p> <p>The Council published its Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26 on 19 June 2025 after gaining approval by the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee. Approval was subsequently given by full Council on 7 July 2025 and by the Audit Committee on 31 July 2025. It should be noted that the plan had been published prior to it being considered and approved by full Council. To be in line with best practice the Council should not publish the performance improvement plan until it has been fully approved. The Performance Officer has developed a new performance schedule which has been relayed to the senior leadership team and which will enable future Performance Improvement Plans to be ratified by full Council before being published by the prescribed deadline.</p> <p>The Performance Improvement Plan outlines the Council’s improvement framework and provides a description of the Council’s arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions evidenced by examples of self-imposed indicators and standards. Arrangements are constructed within the seven relevant criteria set out in legislation and the current functions prioritised and selected for improvement are aligned to its Corporate Plan and Community Plan. The objectives and associated projects are set across all the Council’s functions.</p> <p>Throughout the year the Council has introduced several new arrangements, demonstrating commitment to secure continuous improvement. The Council has continued to embed the Business Planning and Performance Management Framework. The Business Planning and Performance Management Cycle demonstrates the integrated</p>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p>timeline of activity required to strengthen the alignment across the Framework and facilitate the development, implementation and review of the Community Plan, Corporate Plan, Performance Improvement Plan, Directorate Business Plans, Service Plans and People Perform Grow. The monitoring, reporting and review arrangements at each level of the Framework continue to be mainstreamed and a standard, consistent approach has been developed for performance reporting, using the red/amber/green (RAG) status.</p> <p>In April 2024 the Council commenced implementation of a new electronic management system through a company called One Advanced. Objectives and measures from the Community Plan and Corporate Plan have been input and a full year of assessment has now been carried out for the Corporate Plan, Performance Improvement Plan, Directorate Business and Service Plans. New objectives, actions and measures have also been input for the 2025-26 Performance Improvement Plan and Directorate Business and Service Plans with the mid-year assessment due to be carried out in October/November 2025.</p>
Governance arrangements	<p>The Council has adequate governance and scrutiny arrangements for performance improvement and these arrangements are operating effectively. The Council has established a range of governance arrangements to assist in the delivery of the Performance Improvement Plan.</p> <p>The Performance Improvement Policy was adopted in November 2018 and was reviewed in October 2022 which concluded that the policy was fit for purpose. The policy provides the context for mainstreaming and embedding of the Business Planning and Performance Management Framework across the organisation.</p> <p>The Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee meets monthly and has overall responsibility for Performance Management including monitoring and scrutiny. There is regular monitoring and discussion of Performance Improvement at this committee. As</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>noted in our 2024-25 report, the Council may want to consider whether it would be beneficial for this to be a permanent agenda item. The Audit Committee meets quarterly and is responsible for providing assurance that the performance arrangements are robust and effective. Regular monitoring will detect any barriers or challenges in achieving these desired outcomes at an early stage, creating more time to rectify any difficulties.</p> <p>The governance arrangements for the development, implementation and review of Directorate Business Plans have been strengthened over the past few years and included within the respective plans. All Business Plans are considered, scrutinised and approved by the respective Standing Committee.</p> <p>An internal audit on the implementation of the new Electronic System for performance was carried out in Q4 of 2024-25. It looked at a number of measures within the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25, specifically the validation processes for certain measures including statutory indicators as well as internally collected data and measures. IA provided a satisfactory level of assurance but identified a number of improvements that could be incorporated within the Council's systems which are currently being considered and implemented where possible.</p>
Improvement objectives	<p>The 2025-26 Performance Improvement Plan contains five objectives. All five performance improvement objectives have been carried forward from 2024-25, as they remain relevant and meaningful. The improvement objectives cover a wide range of Council services and they relate to both improving Council functions and improving services for communities and citizens.</p> <p>The Council continues to review and refine improvement objectives and the associated actions, outcomes and measures every year as part of the development of the Performance Improvement Plan. It is evident that improvement objectives have been</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>developed in accordance with the strategic priorities of the Council as detailed in the Corporate Plan flowing from the Community Plan outcomes and in accordance with consultation with stakeholders. It is also clear that the objectives align with the strategic aspects of improvement. There are issues with targets, comparatives and visuals that cause difficulties to the clear demonstration of improvement and assessment of performance. This has been included in Section 3 as a proposal for improvement.</p>
Consultation	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to consult key stakeholders on the proposed performance improvement objectives. The Council held an eight-week consultation process between 14 March - 9 May 2025 on the draft performance improvement objectives 2025-26. This was advertised by public notice in the local paper, Council's website and social media platforms.</p> <p>This process was further supplemented by the consultation and engagement which was carried out to support the development of the Draft Corporate Plan 2024-27:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents Survey (September 2022)</li> <li>• Consultation and engagement on the Draft Corporate Plan 2024-27 (March –May 2024)</li> <li>• Consultation and engagement on the draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-25</li> </ul> <p>Overall, the Council had a majority agreement from consultees on proceeding with the draft improvement objectives.</p>
Improvement plan	<p>The Council's 2025-26 Improvement Plan was published in June 2025 and complies with the Act and with DfC guidance. The document is available on the Council's website along with a summary document "<i>Our Performance, Looking Back, Going Forward</i>", which sets</p>



Thematic area	Observations
	<p>out the key points from its Performance Improvement Plan (and its assessment of performance).</p> <p>The Performance Improvement Plan contains a high-level description of the Council's plan for discharging its statutory performance improvement duties. It includes a description of its annual performance improvement objectives, how these were selected, the key actions to be undertaken to achieve each of the objectives, how the progress of the key actions will be measured and what the outcomes for local communities and stakeholders will be. For each objective, detail is also provided on how it is linked to the corporate plan priorities, community plan outcomes and Programme for Government outcomes, as well as detailing the alignment of each objective to the seven aspects of improvement.</p> <p>The plan also provides a summary of the Council's consultation process and the outcome of that process, together with information on how citizens and stakeholders may propose new objectives during the year and how performance against the plan will be reported.</p>
Arrangements to improve	<p>The Council's arrangements to secure the achievement of its improvement objectives, statutory indicators and its compliance with the general duty to improve, are adequate.</p> <p>The Council is required to establish arrangements to deliver on its improvement objectives each year. The Department for Communities' guidance states that the Council should be able to understand and demonstrate the impact of its arrangements for continuous improvement on the outcomes for citizens.</p> <p>The Council continues to further embed performance improvement into the Council's Business Planning and Performance Management Framework. This framework forms the basis on which the arrangements to secure achievement of the objectives, statutory indicators and general duty are based. It is evident that arrangements are becoming</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>increasingly embedded within the overall business planning and performance management cycle particularly with the introduction of Service Plans, the Corporate Performance Dashboard and continued development and roll-out of <i>'People Perform Grow.'</i></p> <p>The Council has produced objective delivery plans for the 2025-26 performance improvement success measures as a means to secure their achievement. These plans provide an overview of the rationale for selecting each Objective, and alignment with the Corporate and Community Plans. They also include 'supporting actions', 'measures of success', links to existing plans, strategies and programmes of work, resource allocation, governance arrangements, risk management implications and arrangements to mitigate risks and responsible officers. These plans have been developed in close liaison with the Senior Management Team and Corporate Management Team and are supplemented by a range of supporting plans and strategies which provide further information regarding the arrangements the Council has put in place to achieve each PI Objective in place for 2025-26.</p>
Collection, use and publication of performance information	<p>The Council's publication of its 2024-25 Performance Improvement Self-Assessment Report by 30 September 2025 fulfils the Council's statutory requirement under Part 12, Section 92 of the Act.</p> <p>The report includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• details of its performance in discharging the general duty to secure continuous improvement</li> <li>• details of progression, achievement and outcomes from previous PI objectives</li> <li>• results of its statutory performance indicators compared with prior years</li> <li>• results of its self-imposed standards and indicators and comparisons with prior years</li> </ul>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>Councils are also required to assess performance of any selected self-imposed indicators and standards, in relation to the general duty to improve. Legislation requires the Council to compare its performance for the 2024-25 year to that of previous years and as far as is practicable, report performance against other councils in the exercise of the same or similar functions. The 2024-25 Self-Assessment Report provides results for a variety of self-imposed indicators. The Council has contributed to and used the APSE led National Performance Benchmarking Network. This assisted the Council in improving its ability to compare performance across a wide range of services and activities.</p> <p>There were some issues identified in relation to data reporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some data in the Self-Assessment Report has been reported as unavailable at the time of publication.</li> <li>• It has not been made clear in the Self-Assessment Report that the figures provided for the economic statutory indicator 'the number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity' have been found to be unreliable (see further information below).</li> <li>• The target for the economic statutory indicator 'the number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity' was updated via the Go Succeed programme to 173, however, page 42 of the Self-Assessment Report incorrectly notes the target as 170.</li> <li>• The target for the waste statutory indicator 'the percentage of household waste collected by District Councils that is sent for recycling' is noted throughout both the Performance Improvement Plan and the Self-Assessment Report as 55 per cent by 2025, however, page 53 of the Self-Assessment Report has not been updated to reflect this and still shows the 50 per cent by 2020 target.</li> </ul>



Thematic area	Observations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A target for the waste statutory indicator 'the amount of Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste arisings' is noted in the Performance Improvement Plan as 85,500 tonnes, however no target is noted in the Self-Assessment Report.</li> </ul> <p>During the year an Internal Audit review of the 'Go Succeed' programme was carried out by Belfast City Council (BCC). BCC is responsible for collating the economic development figures for all Councils across NI. The figures are then used as the basis for the Department for the Economy's statutory indicator figures for Economic Development. The Internal Audit review identified that the figures relating to 189 business plan approvals (approximately 7.5 per cent of the total approvals for the year) are not reliable. Newry Mourne and Down District Council's report did not reference the fact that the economic development statistics were not reliable.</p> <p>BCC is undertaking further work on these figures to assess whether some or all of the information can be included in the statistics for economic development.</p> <p>The importance of accuracy, reliability and consistency in the presentation of data to support performance assessment has been included as a Proposal for Improvement this year.</p>
Demonstrating a track record of improvement	<p>The Council has disclosed its performance in relation to its statutory indicators including a comparison across four years, providing an explanation and context to performance and has provided performance comparisons against national averages or other councils'.</p> <p>The Council met four out of seven statutory targets, with planning performance indicators being the area that is falling short, alongside attempts to reach recycling targets. However, significant improvement on processing time for major planning applications should be noted.</p>

Thematic area	Observations
	<p>There were five improvement objectives identified for 2025-26. Of the five objectives, four showed a trend of improvement with one showing no clear trend of improvement during the year (PIO 5). All five objectives were carried forward from the prior year.</p> <p>Against self-imposed indicators, the Council has been able to show improvement with many targets/objectives achieved or on track to be achieved.</p> <p>The Council continues to demonstrate improvement, meeting outcomes and indicators and where not, offering explanation and amending working practices with the aim of future achievement.</p>



## **Audit and assessment of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's performance improvement arrangements**

### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2024-25 and its improvement plan for 2025-26 in accordance with Section 93 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) and the Code of Audit Practice for local government bodies.

I also certify that I have performed an improvement assessment for 2025-26 at the Council in accordance with Section 94 of the Act and the Code of Audit Practice.

This is a report to comply with the requirement of Section 95(2) of the Act.

### **Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Local Government Auditor**

Under the Act, the Council has a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions and to set improvement objectives for each financial year. The Council is required to gather information to assess improvements in its services and to issue a report annually on its performance against indicators and standards which it has set itself or which have been set for it by Government departments.

The Act requires the Council to publish a self-assessment before 30 September in the financial year following that to which the information relates, or by any other such date as the Department for Communities (the Department) may specify by order. The Act also requires that the Council has regard to any guidance issued by the Department in publishing its assessment.

As the Council's auditor, I am required by the Act to determine and report each year on whether:

- The Council has discharged its duties in relation to improvement planning, published the required improvement information and the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the Department's guidance in relation to those duties; and
- The Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act.

## **Scope of the audit and assessment**

For the audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information or whether the improvement plan published by the Council can be achieved. My audits of the Council's improvement plan and assessment of performance, therefore, comprised a review of the Council's publications to ascertain whether they included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the documents complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing them.

For the improvement assessment I am required to form a view on whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act, informed by:

- a forward-looking assessment of the Council's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and
- a retrospective assessment of whether the Council has achieved its planned improvements to inform a view as to its track record of improvement.

My assessment of the Council's improvement responsibilities and arrangements, therefore, comprised a review of certain improvement arrangements within the Council, along with information gathered from my improvement audit.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with Sections 93 to 95 of the Act cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

## **Audit opinion**

### **Improvement planning and publication of improvement information**

As a result of my audit, I believe the Council has discharged its duties in connection with (1) improvement planning and (2) publication of improvement information in accordance with Section 92 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

## **Improvement assessment**

As a result of my assessment, I believe the Council has discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

In my opinion, the Council has demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement and I believe that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26.

I have not conducted an assessment to determine whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 12 of the Act in subsequent years. I will keep the need for this under review.

## **Other matters**

I have no recommendations to make under Section 95(2) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.

I am not minded to carry out a special inspection under section 95(2) of the Act.



Colette Kane  
 Local Government Auditor  
 Northern Ireland Audit Office  
 106 University Street  
 BELFAST  
 BT7 1EU  
 29 November 2025

Report to:	SPR Committee
Date of Meeting:	11 December 2025
Subject:	Planning Department Update
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Jonathan McGilly Assistant Director Regeneration
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Jonathan McGilly Assistant Director Regeneration

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

For decision	For noting only	x
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1.0	<b>Purpose and Background</b>																																							
1.1	Following consideration of Planning performance paper at previous SPR committee an update report has been prepared to update members on activity since last report and reflecting data from report for Q3 2024/2025 published in April 2025																																							
2.0	<b>Key issues</b>																																							
2.1	<b>NISRA Statistics</b> (Excludes those not validated and PADs, PAN, Certificates of lawfulness, discharge of Conditions)  <b>Live Planning application 30 June 2024</b> <b>1505</b> <b>Live Planning application 30 September 2024</b> <b>1466</b> <b>Live Planning application 31 December 2024</b> <b>1529</b> <b>Live Planning applications 31 March 2025</b> <b>1526</b> <b>Live planning applications 30 June 2025</b> <b>1527</b>  <b>Major applications</b> <table><tr><th>Period</th><th>Av processing time</th><th>Nr Applications received</th><th>Nr Applications withdrawn</th><th>Nr Applications decided</th></tr><tr><td>QE Sept 2023</td><td>421 wks</td><td>3</td><td>0</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>QE March 2024</td><td>115 wks</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>QE Sept 2024</td><td>34 wks</td><td>4</td><td>0</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>QE Dec 2024</td><td>21.7 wks</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td>QE March 2025</td><td>19.6 wks</td><td>3</td><td>1</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>QE June 2025</td><td>54.4 wks</td><td>4</td><td>0</td><td>2</td></tr></table>					Period	Av processing time	Nr Applications received	Nr Applications withdrawn	Nr Applications decided	QE Sept 2023	421 wks	3	0	1	QE March 2024	115 wks	0	0	4	QE Sept 2024	34 wks	4	0	2	QE Dec 2024	21.7 wks	0	0	2	QE March 2025	19.6 wks	3	1	4	QE June 2025	54.4 wks	4	0	2
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QE June 2025	54.4 wks	4	0	2																																				

## LOCAL APPLICATIONS

Period	Av processing time	Nr Applications received	Nr Applications Withdrawn	Nr Applications decided
QE June 2024	43 wks	278	10	271
QE Sept 2024	46.4 wks	283	15	247
QE Dec 2024	50.1 wks	295	34	202
QE March 2025	45 wks	271	19	236
QE June 2025	46 wks	271	8	252

Average for year to date 46 weeks

Processing times for local applications remains above target and NI Average.

During this period NMD received the second highest number of applications in NI equating to approximately 11.4% of NI total and determined the third highest number of applications

## CURRENT ANALYSIS OF ALL APPLICATIONS

Based on latest **available data as of 1/12/25:**

**1811 live applications** – (This includes ALL applications that are not captured and reflected in NISRA stats)

### Made up as follows:

1282 applications are allocated & processing, approx. 25% are awaiting consultee responses.

529 awaiting allocation,

0 new applications to be validated.

For period April 2025 – December 2025 (9 mths) 951 applications have been determined, this remains at a similar level to 24/25 year.

For period April 2024 – March 2025, 1408 applications were determined. (23.5% increase)

For same period April 2023 – March 2024, 1140 applications were determined.

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Revised Development Plan timetable was agreed by Council in June 2023 and by the Department in September 2023.

Draft Plan strategy was presented and agreed by Council on 31 March 2025 and was formally launched on 27 June and was followed by 12 week consultation period with a series of consultation sessions were facilitated across the district during this period.

94 representations were received, and these are currently being reviewed and responses drafted.

There will be a formal consultation period on representations and counter representation period from the 30 January to the 30 March 2016 during which time any interested party will be afforded the opportunity to make a submission on any 'site specific' representation (counter representation).

Following the counter representation period a public consultation report containing a summary of the representations and counter representations received will be drafted.

Following that the plan would then move to Independent Examination stage as per the timetable

### **ENFORCEMENT**

The NI target for the Enforcement is that 70% of enforcement cases are concluded within 39 weeks of receipt.

For Quarter April – June 2025, 74% cases were closed within target this has improved from 57.6%% in previous quarter.

For period April to June 2025, 50 cases were concluded.

For period April to June 2025, 83 new cases have been opened which broadly equates to the same number as were closed.

### **Challenges**

Challenges remain with respect to performance against statutory targets and the number of applications live in the system is also well above manageable levels.

A number of ongoing challenges continue to impact on service delivery, in summary these are;

#### Statutory consultation

This remains a challenge across ALL consultees and has been discussed with DfI at a strategic level.

For period April June2025 there were a total of 906 Consultations issued, 61% were replied to within target of 21 days.

#### Application quality

The poor quality of some submissions continues to be an issue and given that several consultations are required with poor applications any changes required results in a delay in response times this adds to the challenges.

### **Validation checklists**

All approvals are now in place and validation backlog has been cleared.  
Training is ongoing with a view to pilot being introduced in February 2026.

### **Recruitment Actions:**

Staff retention and recruitment continues to be an industry wide challenge in both Local Councils and the private sector.

Since last update 2no Senior planners have been appointed and commenced in post in October.

Recruitment for 1 Planning Officer has just been completed and post accepted, commencement date to be finalised

Planning assistant trawl was completed and reserve list in place.

Reserve lists are in place now for Senior Officers, Planning Officers and Planning Assistants.

HLA recruitment is underway and a strong interest can be reported.

Internal trawls / Acting up EOIs are currently underway to cover 3 absences

Absence has been a particular challenge since the last update and this is being managed as per procedures but does have an impact on outputs.

### **Performance Management –**

#### **Current performance improvement actions**

- Majors and Legacy applications are being reviewed monthly with an agreed actions to determine / close applications.
- Ongoing performance meetings with Senior Planning staff to review performance and agree actions to address challenges.
- Ongoing engagement with statutory consultees around response times.
- Senior Planners have developed workplans with all team members to be reviewed weekly/fortnightly to plan for weekly determination figures

#### **Additional performance improvement actions**

- Dedicated training/mentoring programme to build capacity of new Planning Assistants, this is being delivered by part time Principal Planning Officer.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing review of applications district wide. Allocation of case loads on the basis of application complexity to ensure caseloads are reflective of experience of each individual, eg                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allocation of applications out of sequence ie not based on the date received</li> <li>○ Allocation of projects with Economic development impact, grant funding, medical considerations etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stringent application of how many times applicants are given opportunities to resubmit information to address application shortcomings and missing information. If outstanding or revised information is not provided within specified timeframe, then will move the application to a decision. – This has been introduced and is resulting in formation being provided but needs to be monitored and implemented more extensively</li> <li>• Introduction of individual team performance management with individual performance targets to ensure output is managed at an individual level as well at a department level – Ongoing</li> <li>• Reviewing consultations to ensure we only consult with statutory partners where necessary. – This is ongoing, lead by Seniors.</li> <li>• Following engagement with NIW a pilot has been introduced to help reduce the number of NIW consultations relating to rural applications.</li> <li>• Continue to review staff complement and react to emerging resource challenges.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
3.1	Note the content of the report
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Resource implications</b>
4.1	NA
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)</b>
5.1	<p><b><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></b></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	<b><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></b>



	<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><b><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></b></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	<b>Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)</b>
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> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	<b>Appendices</b>
	NA
8.0	<b>Background Documents</b>
	NA



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Our ref: SUB-0872-2025  
Date: 21 November 2025

**From: The Minister**

District Council Chief Executives

Via E-mail

Dear Chief Executive,

**COUNCILS' STANDING ORDERS – CONTINUING EFFECT OF SCHEDULE 3 TO THE  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT (TRANSITIONAL, SUPPLEMENTARY, INCIDENTAL  
PROVISIONS AND MODIFICATIONS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2014**

It has been drawn to my attention that some councils have provisions within their Standing Orders which are not in keeping with the legislative provisions in relation to the reconsideration of council decisions under section 41(1) of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

I feel that it is appropriate at this time to remind councils of the advice the Department issued in January 2017 on this matter: a copy of the letter is attached for your information. That advice stated that the provisions of Regulation 7 of, and Schedule 3 to, the Local Government (Transitional, Supplementary, Incidental Provisions and Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2014 (the "Transitional Regulations") remain in effect.

The continuing effect of these provisions means that all decisions called in under section 41(1)(b) must be reconsidered by way of a qualified majority, as prescribed by paragraph 2(a) in Part 1 of Schedule 3.

I would be grateful if you could ensure that your Council is made aware of the effect of the existing legislative provisions and that it should operate its call in procedure in keeping with the requirements of the Transitional Regulations. The council should arrange for its Standing Orders to be amended, if necessary, to reflect this position as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



**Gordon Lyons MLA**  
**Minister for Communities**