

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

Update Report

April 2024 to March 2025

Contents

- Welcome
- Key Achievements
- In the Spotlight: Championing Biodiversity Across Mid and East Antrim
- Our Plan
- Performance Summary
- People
- Place
- Planet
- Performance
- Get Involved
- Closing Remarks

Welcome

As we mark the close of the first year of our Corporate Plan 2024–2028, I'm pleased to share this update on our journey so far. It has been a year of meaningful change for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, and I'm proud of the strides we've made together, both as an organisation and as a community.

Across the year, we've worked with energy and purpose to turn our vision into reality. While there is still much to do, we're already seeing the positive impact of our efforts, from new initiatives to enhanced essential services, improving the lives of people across our borough.

This update highlights key milestones from the past year, celebrates the changes taking place across our communities, and reaffirms our commitment to improving the quality of life for everyone who lives, works, and visits our borough.

I hope you find this update both informative and inspiring. Thank you for your continued support, it plays a vital role in our success. I look forward to what we can achieve in the year ahead.

Valerie Watts

Interim Chief Executive

Our Vision is:

“Mid and East Antrim will be a strong, vibrant, safe and inclusive community, where people work together to improve the quality of life for all.”

Some of our key achievements over the last year have included:

1. Pop-up Shop opportunities utilised by 57 community groups, entrepreneurs and events.
2. 50 town centre events and activities held across Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne.
3. 271 dynamic and engaging museum & heritage events delivered.
4. Almost 370k trees planted or distributed across the borough via our Tree and Woodland Management Strategy.
5. Almost 6,600 people participated in 144 outdoor recreation activities.
6. Over 4,700 people engaged in enterprise and employability outreach activities.
7. Over 97k visitors welcomed at strategic visitor attractions.
8. Winner of the 'Local Government Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Award' at the 2025 NILGA Awards for our Autism-Friendly Borough Initiative.
9. 82 community arts events delivered across the borough.
10. 1,500 pairs of glasses collected for reuse through our Spectacle Reuse Scheme.
11. Completed the second-year delivery of our Equality and Disability Action Plans.
12. Fields Good, Northern Ireland's first regenerative agriculture festival, held in September.

13. Over 11 tonnes of food (32,655 meals) collected through Community Fridges.
14. 5% increase in the number of MEA schools awarded a Green Flag through the Eco-Schools programme.
15. Over £7m invested across 19 key capital projects, including playparks, MUGAs and community centres.

In the Spotlight: Championing Biodiversity Across Mid and East Antrim

We are proud to be championing biodiversity across Mid and East Antrim, restoring habitats, empowering communities, and inspiring future generations. From town woodlands to family events, our efforts are helping ecosystems recover and flourish through practical conservation and local collaboration.

Our communities are at the heart of our work. In Ballymena, the Friends of ECOS have long led the way in habitat management and citizen science. From creating a new hazel walk to restoring wildflower meadows, their work supports pollinators and other species. Furthermore, this year alone, the group have planted almost 6,000 trees to help address ecological imbalances, and their butterfly monitoring partnership with Butterfly Conservation NI is a model of local environmental action.

In Carrickfergus, the Friends of Bashfordland Wood are restoring balance in woodland and meadow areas. Traditional techniques like tree thinning and glade creation are bringing light and life back into the woodlands, while the removal of invasive species, such as bamboo and salmonberry, is encouraging the return of native flora and fauna.

To inspire and educate the next generation, our Biodiversity University continues to grow. Delivered each year in August across Larne, Carrickfergus, and Ballymena, the programme reaches over 250 families in each area. Through fun, hands-on activities and wildlife experiences, children and parents are building lasting connections with nature and developing the skills to care for it.

Building on these successes, our most recent initiative in Larne Town Park is beginning to take shape as the pilot site for our new Nature Recovery Plan. Here,

we're combining habitat restoration with community action. Volunteers and local schools have created a thriving community orchard and introduced new wildflower planting, while grassland areas are being left uncut in summer to benefit pollinators and small wildlife.

Woodland edges are being carefully restored by gradually removing invasive species and planting native trees to support long-term ecological health. Plans are also underway to develop a looped nature trail, making the park even more accessible for people to experience nature up close.

Once the pilot is complete, the Nature Recovery Plan will go to public consultation ensuring that our long-term vision for biodiversity is shaped by those who use and care for these spaces most.

Our Plan

In striving to achieve our vision, we are delivering our Corporate Plan under the 4 key pillars of People, Place, Planet and Performance.

Performance Summary

We use a series of key performance indicators to help us track our success in the delivery of our strategic objectives. We refer to these as measures.

Our performance against our 61 measures across the year is summarised below:

- 75% were achieved or on track. (46/61)
- 15% are delayed but progressing. (9/61)
- 10% were not achieved. (6/61)

Detailed performance updates, by pillar, are provided throughout the remainder of this report.

People

Our ambition:

By 2028, Mid and East Antrim will be a safe, inclusive, and welcoming borough, where diversity and cultural differences are celebrated, and communities live in peace. Our people will have equity of opportunity and support to achieve their full potential, in both a professional and personal capacity. Individuals and communities will be empowered to be independent and self-sustaining, enabling us to concentrate our efforts on those who need it most.

To achieve this, we will:

- Work in partnership with employers and stakeholders to support those seeking employment, provide upskilling support, improve access to the labour market for those with disabilities, and promote skills pathways.
- Promote the benefits of offering apprenticeships and work experience opportunities to enhance skills development and bridge the gap between education and employment.
- Support and deliver opportunities for our citizens to improve their physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Explore ways to help vulnerable and marginalised individuals feel welcomed and supported in their local communities, removing feelings of isolation or exclusion.
- Lead by example to improve equality, accessibility, and inclusion across the borough by embedding it into everything we do.

- Work alongside partners to encourage good relations, enhance community pride, and reinforce a strong sense of belonging in our communities.
- Strengthen community safety, and boost public confidence, by forging collaborative partnerships that focus on proactive and comprehensive crime prevention.

Under this theme:

- 93% were achieved or on track. (13/14)
- 7% were not achieved. (1/14)

What you'll see

Measure	Deliver activities and programmes through the Mid and East Antrim Labour Market Partnership.
Status: Achieved	<p>A total of 365 participants took part in a wide range of employment and skills academies, including programmes in cleantech, hydrogen, welding, childcare, phlebotomy, classroom assistance, administration, and enterprise. A total of 377 qualifications were achieved across these programmes.</p> <p>Despite a late start due to delayed funding, 83 participants have already gained employment, with further outcomes expected later in 2025/26 as academies conclude.</p>

Measure	Deliver the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Intervention Programme by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>The STEM Intervention Programme ran between April and September. The initiative included a range of activities aimed at raising awareness of STEM subjects and career opportunities. The programme was offered free of charge to schools and included 17 in-school workshops, 2 full-day events, a Teacher Insight Day and a final celebration event.</p> <p>A total of 8 schools participated, with 454 students attending the in-school workshops and 326 participating in the 2 full-day events.</p>

Measure	Deliver activities to promote and secure apprenticeship and work placement opportunities across the borough by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>A total of 1,035 individuals engaged through Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week activities in February and through the Apprenticeship E-Hub.</p> <p>Apprenticeship Week included 400 employer visits to schools, 40 school visits to employers, and 80 creative industries school takeovers. It also featured 2 key events, the Northern Regional College's Higher Level Apprenticeship event with 228 attendees and a construction sector takeover event with 66 participants.</p> <p>The Apprenticeship E-Hub has continued to grow, with 199 applications submitted, 16 companies registered, and 6 apprenticeships commenced. In total, 215 individuals and businesses have actively engaged through the platform.</p> <p>Across all programmes, 41 apprenticeship and placement opportunities were secured, 19 through the Work Connections Programme and 6 via the E-Hub.</p>

	The newly launched Placement Insights Programme supported 16 participants in its first cohort, offering hands-on industry experience to boost employability and career readiness.
--	---

Measure	Deliver 15 internal work placement opportunities by 31 March 2025.
Status: Not Achieved	<p>We set a target of delivering at least 15 work experience and work placements across the year. While this target was not fully met, we successfully provided 9 placements across various departments, including Climate Change & Sustainability, Tourism, Arts & Culture, and Parks & Open Spaces.</p> <p>We are currently working on the development of a Work Placement policy and moving forward we will focus on actively promoting placement opportunities and strengthening collaborations with educational institutions.</p>

Measure	Deliver the MEActive programme.
Status: Achieved	Across the year, over 10,300 people participated across 1,400 sessions of the MEActive programme. Over half of participants were female and almost 3,400 had a disability or lifelong illness. The programme offered a variety of activities including AquaFit, Pilates, Danderball, Dodgeball, Men's Over 50's Circuits, Pickleball, and Racket Club, catering to all ages and abilities.

Measure	Deliver the GP Referrals scheme.
Status: Achieved	Across the year, the Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS) received 282 GP referrals, with 110 individuals enrolling in the programme. Of those enrolled, 53 participants have successfully completed the full 12-week programme and are now paying a reduced gym membership fee of £15 per month.

Measure	Deliver the Veterans programme by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>The Veterans Programme delivered a successful year of activity, with 5 key events focused on honouring and connecting local veterans. Highlights included popular visits to Stormont and the RUC GC Memorial Garden, a historical talk with live music in Ballymena, and group visits to the Royal Ulster Rifles Museum, the Museum of Orange Heritage, and Drumalis House in Larne.</p> <p>Events were well attended, with strong engagement, positive feedback, and growing interest, prompting additional activities to meet demand and encouraging new participants to join the programme.</p>

Measure	Deliver actions through the Poverty Action Group.
Status: Achieved	The Poverty Action Group continued to support low-income families and individuals across the borough through financial advice, food distribution, essential resources, and wellbeing programmes.

	<p>With group support, we successfully delivered the borough-wide School Uniform Scheme, providing vital assistance ahead of the new school year.</p> <p>Although the group hasn't met formally this year, members remained active in addressing local needs. To improve coordination, we will take on facilitation and assign a dedicated staff resource to resume regular meetings, ensuring more effective partnership working and ongoing support for vulnerable citizens.</p>
--	--

Measure	Deliver programmes through the Loneliness Network.
Status: Achieved	<p>The Mid and East Antrim Loneliness Network is dedicated to combating loneliness and fostering community connections across the borough.</p> <p>Initiatives to date include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 Chatty Benches • 12 Chatty Cafés • 17 Loneliness Champions • 6 Kindness Post-boxes • A Connected Walk • A Christmas Event

Measure	Deliver Age-Friendly actions across the borough.
Status: Achieved	<p>The launch of the Age-Friendly Strategy and Action Plan 2024–27 in September marked a key milestone in our commitment to supporting older people. A series of events and workshops highlighted available services, resulting in several onward referrals. Our new Age-Friendly information booklet prompted a number of direct support requests, and Agewell’s reflective tool ‘See Things from My Age’ was presented at the November meeting of the Age-Friendly Alliance, alongside health and wellbeing initiatives on energy efficiency and home accident prevention.</p> <p>Complementing this, in partnership with Agewell and funded by the Arts Council NI, our Arts team delivered the Rural Engagement Arts Programme and the Arts and Older People Programme, engaging over 500 older people through drama, storytelling, and creative workshops.</p>

Measure	Progress internal Autism-Friendly actions.
Status: Achieved	<p>Over the past year, we’ve made strong progress in making our services and spaces more accessible and welcoming for autistic people.</p> <p>We implemented Autism-Friendly Action Plans across 4 key cultural venues, The Braid Museum and Arts Centre, Larne Arts Centre, Carrickfergus Museum, and Andrew Jackson Cottage. These venues are introducing</p>

	<p>sensory spaces, accessible signage, and pre-visit guides, with the aim of achieving Autism NI Impact Award accreditation by June 2025.</p> <p>To strengthen our support network, we trained and accredited 4 additional Autism Champions, bringing the total to 17 champions across our parks, leisure, arts, and museum services.</p> <p>We also developed and launched an Autism-Awareness Communications Plan, which includes the promotion of Quiet Hours in our parks and new resources for Autism Acceptance Month, such as an Employability Guide and Training Model, developed in partnership with the Northern Area Autism Forum.</p> <p>Our efforts were recognised with the Local Government Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Award at the 2025 NILGA Awards.</p>
--	--

Measure	Deliver actions under the Equality and Disability Action Plans.
Status: On track	<p>Significant progress has been made in delivering the actions set out in our Equality and Disability Action Plans. Key achievements to date include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of disability swimming lessons in each of our leisure centres. • Delivery of inclusive activities during Love Parks Week.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement of pupils with special educational needs in tree planting activities within our parks and open spaces. • Delivery of PAN Disability clubs in each of our leisure centres. • Launch of the Graduate Build programme in partnership with Disability Action. • Continued rollout of our Autism-Friendly Borough initiative. <p>Our internal Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Network plays a key role in this work, meeting quarterly to monitor progress, provide feedback, and share best practices across departments.</p> <p>As part of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate restructure, dedicated roles, including an Inclusion & Equality Manager and a Consultation & Engagement Officer, have been established to further strengthen our capacity to deliver on these commitments.</p>
--	---

Measure	Deliver programmes within the Good Relations Action Plan.
Status: Achieved	<p>As a result of reduced funding, the Good Relations Action Plan was streamlined to the following 3 programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating Culture Safely – Fully delivered, with 9 cultural beacons distributed across the borough, supporting safe and respectful celebration of local traditions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate – Following a procurement process, the Inter-Ethnic Forum (Mid and East Antrim) was appointed to deliver this programme, promoting inclusion and engagement with diverse communities. • Good Relations Audit and Strategy – A contract has been awarded to carry out a borough-wide consultation to inform a new strategy. <p>In September, we were pleased to participate in Good Relations Week 2024, joining local groups and organisations to celebrate under the theme ‘OpportUNiTY’. The week featured workshops, theatre, talks, exhibitions, and performances that showcased the rich diversity and shared values within our community.</p>
--	--

Measure	Deliver actions under the Policing & Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) Action Plan.
Status: Achieved	<p>The PCSP was reconstituted with new members, supported by induction and training, and 3 working groups were established to focus on key priorities, including anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol, and domestic and sexual violence.</p> <p>Formal meetings were held quarterly, and Community Safety Wardens played an active role in engaging with local communities. We continued to support the Inter-Ethnic Forum, funded bilingual services, and delivered</p>

	successful initiatives such as the Four Tier Home Security scheme and Small Grant Funding for local safety projects.
--	--

Place

Our ambition:

By 2028, Mid and East Antrim will be widely recognised as an ideal place to live, visit, work and do business. We will have vibrant, clean, and harmonious shared spaces, designed to showcase our natural, and built, heritage and assets. Our tourism offering will be filled with diversity and richness of culture, history, and heritage, attracting visitors on a global scale. Businesses, new and existing, will have the required support to grow and prosper, leading to an economically innovative and sustainable borough, offering stable employment, inclusive growth and an ideal place to invest.

To achieve this, we will:

- Support the development of a sustainable, dynamic, and prosperous local economy that helps businesses to grow, and promote the borough as an ideal place to do business for both new and existing companies.
- Help drive sustainable economic growth by promoting the borough as a leading visitor and cultural destination, utilising our natural, and built, heritage and assets.
- Support our towns and villages to help regenerate and stimulate economic activity, while protecting and conserving our natural and historic landscape.
- Enhance and expand our amenities, parks, open spaces, and built heritage, making sure they meet the needs of all, while encouraging their respectful and mindful use.

- Conduct Council business in a way that encourages economic prosperity within the borough.

Under this theme:

- 72% were achieved or on track. (13/18)
- 17% are delayed but progressing. (3/18)
- 11% were not achieved. (2/18)

What you'll see

Measure	Progress the i4C Innovation & Cleantech Centre and the HyTech Centre by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>We have made strong progress in both the i4C and HyTech NI projects.</p> <p>In relation to the i4C Innovation and Cleantech Centre, a design team has been appointed, and value engineering is underway to ensure cost-effective delivery. Elected Member approval was given in April 2025 for the Contract for Funding to be signed and Member approval will be sought in the coming months for the appointment of an operator.</p> <p>For the HyTech Centre, the final Outline Business Case was submitted to Invest NI in February and is under appraisal, with a funding decision expected in October. We continue to lead 3 local hydrogen testbed trials as part of this project in partnership with industry, Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.</p>

Measure	Deliver the Go Succeed programme.
Status: Achieved	<p>Across the year, 325 participants were supported through the programme. In the same time period, the programme also led to the promotion of 144 jobs. (These figures are subject to quality assurance and may change).</p>

Measure	Deliver 16 civic events by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>A total of 34 events were delivered, including annual commemorations such as the Knockagh Somme, Merchant Navy Day, Princess Victoria Memorial, and Emergency Services Day, alongside special events marking the Normandy anniversary and the unveiling of 3 UDR Greenfinch memorials.</p> <p>Initiatives such as Democracy Week engaged over 1,800 participants, particularly from schools, while both Irish Language Week and Ulster Scots Language Week saw increased attendance compared to previous years, with total participation estimated at over 6,000 people.</p>

Measure	Welcome at least 35,000 people to Council and partner events in person by 31 March 2025.
Status: Not Achieved	<p>Following a comprehensive review of the events programme, the original schedule was streamlined to focus on delivering the most impactful and high-quality experiences. As a result, some planned events did not proceed, which affected overall attendance figures.</p> <p>A total of 27,250 attendees were recorded for the year, falling short of the original target of 35,000. Despite this, the events delivered remained engaging, accessible, and aligned with the needs of our community and our strategic priorities.</p>

Measure	Launch the Neighbourhood Tourism Scheme by 31 October 2024.
Status: Achieved	The Neighbourhood Tourism Scheme was successfully launched, enhancing visitor experiences in Gracehill, Cullybackey, Broughshane, Carnlough, and Whitehead through the installation of branded visitor information stands, digital marketing materials, and interactive iPads.

Measure	Welcome at least 90,000 visitors to our strategic tourist attractions (Carrickfergus Castle, The Gobbins, US Rangers Museum, Andrew Jackson Cottage and Arthur Cottage) by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	Across the year, we welcomed 97,310 visitors to our strategic tourist attractions.

Measure	Develop a regeneration strategy, in conjunction with the Larne Business Forum and the Larne Community Wealth Building Hub by 31 March 2025.
Status: On track	<p>Due to its increasing vacancy levels and pressing regeneration needs, Larne was selected as a pilot area under our 2024 borough-wide Dereliction Strategy. Since then, we have made strong progress in shaping a focused regeneration approach in collaboration with the Larne Business Forum and Larne Community Wealth Building Hub.</p> <p>The completion of a strategic regeneration report has helped identify several key challenges, including economic underperformance, high levels of</p>

	<p>dereliction, low business confidence, and wider community wellbeing concerns.</p> <p>In response, we are in the final stages of designing a package of regeneration interventions that align with local priorities and support a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable renewal for Larne. While further feasibility work, funding identification, and community consultation are still required, we are actively engaging with property owners to assess interest in a proposed grant scheme aimed at tackling dereliction and unlocking redevelopment opportunities.</p>
--	---

Measure	Deliver the Town Centre Revitalisation Scheme by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>A range of projects have been implemented to enhance public spaces, support local businesses, and encourage increased footfall. Highlights include the delivery of vibrant street art in Ballymena and Larne, the installation of new feature lighting and festive decorations, and the awarding of over £700,000 in external funding to support revitalisation initiatives, including shop front grants, seasonal lighting, and the development of a pop-up park in Larne.</p> <p>The Pop-Up Shop initiative exceeded expectations, with 31 community groups and entrepreneurs making use of available spaces. In addition, 50 events and activities were delivered throughout the year. Sound systems are</p>

	also due to be installed in Ballymena and Carrickfergus pending final agreements with property owners.
--	--

Measure	Maintain or exceed a score of 66% on the Street Cleansing Index as part of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB) by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>The Street Cleansing Index assesses the effectiveness of street cleaning efforts by measuring various aspects of urban and rural environments, such as the presence of litter, graffiti, and general maintenance conditions. By using the Street Cleansing Index, KNIB aims to ensure that public spaces are kept clean and welcoming.</p> <p>We have achieved a cleaning index score of 70%.</p>

Measure	Completion of phase 1 of the Cullybackey to Galgorm Greenway by 30 September 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	<p>Design consultants were appointed in June, and following necessary revisions to the proposed route, outline designs were approved by the project board in November 2024.</p> <p>A phased delivery approach has now been agreed, with funding departments (DfC, DAERA, and DfI) supportive of our revised plan. The project remains under review to assess the impact of design changes on</p>

	the overall timeline. Submission of the planning application is expected by summer 2025, after which a revised completion date for Phase 1 will be confirmed.
--	---

Measure	Development of Carnfunnock Country Park for completion by 31 March 2026.
Status: Delayed but progressing	<p>Public consultation has been completed and planning approval secured.</p> <p>The tender process is underway, however, returned tenders identified a budget shortfall. In response, the project has undergone a detailed review to identify potential cost savings and explore opportunities for additional Council funding. A re-profiling exercise is underway to support this, with outcomes to be presented to Elected Members and approval sought to progress to tender award stage.</p> <p>It is anticipated the project will progress and a contractor will be on site during summer 2025 with a delivery period of 18 months. The funders have extended the project window until 31 March 2027 to reflect the updated delivery timeline.</p>

Measure	Begin the process of developing a Green Spaces Strategy for formal launch in 2026/27.
---------	---

Status: Delayed but progressing	Development of a Green Spaces Strategy was underway, with initial planning and consultation activities having taken place. However, following internal discussions, it has been agreed that the Green Spaces Strategy will be incorporated into a broader Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. Work on this strategy is ongoing and is scheduled for completion by March 2026.
---	---

Measure	Ensure at least 50% of suppliers or performers, for each Council ran event, are from the borough.
Status: Achieved	A total of 71% of performers at our events were from the local area.

Measure	Ensure that a minimum of 60% of payments to suppliers are made within 10 working days.
Status: Achieved	77% of payments to suppliers were made within 10 working days.

Measure	Ensure that a minimum of 80% of payments to suppliers are made within 30 calendar days.
Status: Achieved	90% of payments to suppliers were made within 30 calendar days.

Measure	Major planning applications processed within an average of 30 weeks by 31 March 2025.
Status: Not Achieved	<p>Between April and December 2024, our average (median) processing time of major planning applications was 53.6 weeks, a significant improvement on the 67.4 weeks for the same period last year. Notwithstanding this improvement, the figure remains above both the statutory target of 30 weeks and the Northern Ireland average of 39.7 weeks and places us in a position where further improvement is required.</p> <p>Within the reporting period we processed 8 major planning applications to a conclusion, of these only 1 was decided within the statutory timeframe.</p> <p>The difficulty in meeting the target is an issue that affects Northern Ireland as a whole and is not exclusive to us. Our processing time reflects a combination of stakeholder delays and particularly complex applications, set within the context of a relatively new two-tier planning system.</p> <p>We are actively exploring a range of measures to improve performance and address challenges impacting our ability to meet this target. One option currently being progressed is the implementation of a Planning Application Validation Checklist, in line with legislative changes introduced by the Department for Infrastructure. The purpose of the checklist will be to clearly set out the specific information and supporting documentation required for different types of planning applications, helping to reduce delays caused by poor quality or incomplete submissions. By ensuring applications are valid</p>

	<p>and complete at the point of submission, the checklist will support more efficient processing, quicker consultee responses, and improved decision-making times. We are now in the final stages of developing our draft checklist which we hope to finalise and publish in the coming months.</p> <p>Verified data up to the end of March 2025 is not yet available and will be provided in our next update.</p>
--	--

Measure	Local planning applications processed within an average of 15 weeks by 31 March 2025.
Status: On track	<p>Between April and December 2024, we decided 476 local applications with an average (median) processing time of 6.2 weeks, with 82% of cases processed within the target 15 weeks, placing us as the top performing council for this measure.</p> <p>The average processing time across all NI councils was 19.2 weeks, with 42% of cases processed within the target 15 weeks.</p> <p>Verified data up to the end of March 2025 is not yet available and will be provided in our next update.</p>

Measure	Ensure at least 70% of enforcement cases are concluded within 39 weeks by 31 March 2025.
---------	--

Status:	Between April and December 2024, we concluded 120 enforcement cases,
On track	82.5% of which were concluded within the target 39 weeks.
	The average across all NI councils for this period was 70.3%.
	Verified data up to the end of March 2025 is not yet available and will be provided in our next update.

Planet

Our ambition:

By 2028, Mid and East Antrim will be at the forefront of balancing progression with sustainability. We will be an emerging NI hub for innovation, environmental and cleantech skills training, and green economic growth. Our commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 will have set a standard for excellence across the region. Our dedication to safeguarding our natural and built heritage and preserving the environment through climate change mitigation and adaptation, will ensure a thriving and resilient future for generations to come.

To achieve this, we will:

- Empower, educate, and work in partnership with our citizens, communities, and businesses, to progress the borough towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- Support local communities to create an environmentally resilient and sustainable borough that is equipped to deal with emergency situations, including climate adaptation.
- Protect our natural environment, enhance biodiversity, and retain or increase Council's current levels of carbon capture.
- Lead by example and reduce the impact of our own operations to progress our organisation towards net-zero emissions by 2040, by embedding sustainability and climate adaptation into all decision-making.

- Deliver an effective and efficient waste service that supports citizens, communities, and businesses to reduce waste and promote a more circular economy.

Under this theme:

- 91% were achieved or on track. (10/11)
- 9% are delayed but progressing. (1/11)

What you'll see

Measure	Deliver the Mid and East Antrim Net Zero (MEANZ) Business Programme.
Status: On track	<p>The Net Zero Insights webinar series is 60% complete, with over 130 participants across 5 webinars gaining expert guidance on emissions reduction and sustainable practices. A companion video series featuring 5 local companies will launch in summer 2025, alongside a new Emissions Reporting Toolkit.</p> <p>A best practice visit to the Midlands provided valuable insights into clean technology and collaboration. Support from 6 Innovate UK Technical Assistance Partners is enhancing local expertise in net zero delivery.</p> <p>Ongoing practical projects include CleanTech Collaborative Growth Network training, HyTech NI communications planning, and a borough-wide carbon baselining exercise.</p>

Measure	Engage with local schools and communities to provide environmental education programmes.
Status: Achieved	We continue to make strong progress in delivering environmental education to local schools and communities. The number of Eco-Schools with Green Flag status has increased by 5%, and an awards ceremony will take place in June to recognise participating schools.

	<p>Targets relating to community engagement covering topics such as recycling, circular economy, energy conservation, waste reduction, and sustainable living have been exceeded. Sessions have been delivered to a wide range of groups including U3A, Inner Wheel, Cairncastle Women's Institute, Ballymena Probus Club, and the Carson Project.</p>
--	--

Measure	Continue to actively engage with the Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG).
Status: Achieved	<p>We have continued to actively engage with the Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG) while supporting local community groups to build resilience through the Five Sources of Resilience.</p> <p>Regionally, we contributed to workshops that brought together government departments, academia, and the community sector, helping shape the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) report presented to the Northern Ireland Executive. The report recommended stronger departmental leadership, resources, and greater community sector involvement.</p> <p>We continue to promote the Community Resilience Toolkit and explore funding to support its wider use. Plans are also underway to establish a Community Resilience Network, with 4 co-produced workshops to be delivered across the borough in the year ahead.</p>

Measure	Plant 100,000 trees across the borough through the Climate Canopy Project by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	Almost 370,000 trees have been planted across the year, the majority at Woodburn Forest, and the remainder via local schools and community groups. We continue to engage local communities and schools through tree planting, educational workshops and publications.

Measure	Continue to be an active member of the Energy Managers Forum.
Status: Achieved	We remain actively involved in the Energy Managers Forum, with our Energy Manager serving as Chair for the next 2 years. In this role, they are leading a joint energy procurement effort for 10 local authorities and chairing regular forum meetings. A sub-committee has been established to oversee annual energy procurement, ensuring continued collaboration and progress.

Measure	Deliver energy saving and clean energy projects within Council buildings by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	We successfully delivered 8 energy saving projects this year, exceeding the target of 6. These included LED lighting upgrades at facilities such as the Showgrounds, Larne Leisure Centre, People's Park, Oakfield Community Centre, Carrickfergus Civic Centre, Carrickfergus Town Hall, and Sir Thomas Dixon building.

	<p>In addition, 4 clean energy projects were completed. Solar PV installations were delivered at the Sullatober Depot and Portglenone Marina, while battery storage systems were installed at Springwell Street car park and Sullatober Waste Transfer Station.</p> <p>Data logging technology and analytics platforms were also added to the Showgrounds, Carrickfergus Civic Centre, Larne and Carrickfergus Leisure centres, Portglenone marina, Springwell Street car park, and Sullatober sites to inform future investment opportunities in renewable generation and storage.</p>
--	---

Measure	Finalise internal Council strategies and procedures to further progress sustainability by 31 March 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	Sustainability strategies have been drafted and are currently under review to allow for alignment with the updated and revised Asset Management Strategy and Fleet Decarbonisation Strategy. The completion of this work will be carried into 2025/26.

Measure	Ensure at least 50% of household waste collected is sent for recycling by 31 March 2025.
Status: On track	From April to December 2024, 52.67% of household waste collected was sent for recycling. Verified data up to the end of March 2025 is not yet available and will be provided in our next update.

Measure	Ensure a maximum of 16,387 tonnes of biodegradable collected municipal waste is sent to landfill by 31 March 2025.
Status: On track	From April to December 2024, 11,566 tonnes of biodegradable collected municipal waste was sent to landfill. Verified data up to the end of March 2025 is not yet available and will be provided in our next update.

Measure	Ensure less than 75,797 tonnes of collected municipal waste arisings by 31 March 2025.
Status: On track	From April to December 2024, there were 58,405 tonnes of collected municipal waste arisings. Verified data up to the end of March 2025 is not yet available and will be provided in our next update.

Measure	Delivery of 5 circular economy initiatives by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>We successfully delivered 5 key circular economy initiatives, promoting sustainability, waste reduction, and community support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School Uniform Scheme - Ran across July and August, gifting nearly 2,000 items to families. 2. Christmas Toy Container Scheme - Ran from 28 October to 13 December, diverting 3.1 tonnes of toys from landfill, generating charity revenue, and providing affordable gifts. 3. Community Fridges - Collected over 11 tonnes of food (32,655 meals) across the year. 4. Community RePaint Scheme - Collected 1,690 litres of paint, redistributing 1,321 litres to local groups and individuals. 5. Spectacle Reuse Scheme - Collected 1,500 pairs of glasses for reuse. <p>These schemes will continue into 2025/26.</p>

Performance

Our ambition:

By 2028, we will operate as a single entity, fully embracing the vision of the Reorganisation of Public Administration (RPA 2015). We will be a sustainable, customer focused organisation and employer of choice, attracting and retaining the right people, with the right skills, to deliver our vision for the borough. We will provide value for money services by building solid foundations, learning from our mistakes, and instilling sound governance arrangements.

To achieve this, we will:

- Redesign the organisation to work more effectively and efficiently, ensuring financial competence and resilience, delivering social value, and offering good value for money services in a sustainable manner.
- Develop our key support services to help us achieve our goals, underpinning and enabling us to operate effectively and meet our core, statutory and regulatory obligations.
- Continue to work alongside our partners to progress the delivery of the Community Plan and other Council strategies, sharing knowledge, skills, and best practice, to create synergy and influence decision-making to achieve the best outcomes for the borough at an affordable cost.
- Empower and equip our staff, through comprehensive skill development initiatives, fostering a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and growth, ultimately enhancing individual and organisational capabilities.

- Prioritise employee health and wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health, creating an environment where everyone feels valued, motivated and confident, enabling them to thrive personally and professionally.
- Invest in our Elected Members, providing them with the required skills and knowledge to effectively govern.
- Include stakeholders in our decision-making processes through consultation, communication, and engagement, in order to increase satisfaction levels.

Under this theme:

- 55% were achieved or on track. (10/18)
- 28% are delayed but progressing. (5/18)
- 17% were not achieved. (3/18)

What you'll see

Measure	Utilisation of technologies to improve service delivery.
Status: On track	<p>Our Finance team has made strong progress in harnessing digital tools to drive efficiency, accuracy, and compliance. Automation of key processes such as prepayments and recurring journals has reduced manual effort and improved consistency, while enhanced journal approval controls have strengthened segregation of duties.</p> <p>The automation of invoice processing is well underway, with user testing and full rollout planned in the coming months. Staff training has supported in-house development of system-based reports, including an automated balance sheet and improved income and expenditure reporting. Self-service reporting for managers is also in progress, with tailored training materials being developed.</p> <p>Financial management has been strengthened through a new month-end checklist, Finance workday calendar, and enhanced reforecasting, improving visibility of actuals vs budget and supporting more accurate year-end projections. Control accounts and workflows have also been refined to improve recurring journals and balance sheet reconciliations.</p> <p>A successful system upgrade in March laid the foundation for further enhancements. Work is now advancing on new sourcing and inventory modules, with project teams and testing environments in place.</p>

Measure	Implementation of the Good Governance Review.
Status: On track	The majority of the actions from the Good Governance Review have been completed. The remaining actions are underway, with relevant updates being brought to Elected Members on the specific areas.

Measure	Robust budget arrangements and sound financial management.
Status: On track	<p>We have continued to strengthen our financial management and budgeting processes. Based on current projections, efforts are underway to increase the General Fund, bringing it closer to the mid-range of the approved target. In light of the current economic climate and rising unexpected costs, this increase is necessary to ensure greater financial stability and give us the ability to mitigate unforeseen expenses and financial risks.</p> <p>External borrowing remains well within policy limits, and we have made strong progress in delivering timely and accurate monthly management accounts. This has improved financial oversight and informed decision-making across the organisation. Additionally, we have introduced a forecasting process to provide a more accurate and timelier picture of our financial position, supporting better planning and decision-making moving forward.</p> <p>Debt management processes have been significantly improved, with the proportion of outstanding debt over 90 days reduced steadily over the</p>

	<p>course of the year. This reflects the implementation of a revised Debt Management Policy and ongoing collaboration across service areas.</p> <p>Investment activities have been managed in line with Treasury Management parameters. Policy updates were introduced during the year to ensure continued compliance, while also supporting effective cashflow and risk management.</p>
--	--

Measure	Review and update our Asset Management Strategy by 31 March 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	<p>Work to review and update the Asset Management Strategy is underway, however progress has been slower than expected due to the need for the team to respond to emerging organisational priorities. Engagement with key stakeholders has taken place to ensure alignment and inform the development of the strategy.</p> <p>It has been agreed that the review will continue into 2025/26 to allow for a more comprehensive and informed update.</p>

Measure	Ensure all information requests under Freedom of Information (FOI) and/or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) are processed within the statutory timeframe of 20 working days.
Status: Not Achieved	<p>Across the year, 92% of requests for information under FOI and/or EIR were processed within the statutory timeframe.</p> <p>Delays were mainly due to the time required to gather comprehensive information, which often involved coordination across multiple service areas. In some instances, additional time was also needed to obtain legal advice, secure appropriate approvals, and ensure careful consideration of exemptions in relation to more complex requests.</p>

Measure	Ensure all subject access requests are processed within the statutory timeframe of one calendar month.
Status: Not Achieved	<p>Across the year, 81% of subject access requests were processed within the statutory timeframe.</p> <p>While the target of full compliance was not met, all requests were carefully managed to ensure lawful and accurate disclosure. Where delays occurred, these were primarily due to the need for thorough review and appropriate approvals to safeguard the rights of individuals and uphold data protection standards.</p>

Measure	Ensure the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) does not issue any decision notices overturning our FOI/EIR decisions.
Status: Achieved	The ICO did not overturn any of our decisions this year.

Measure	Implement changes to ensure effective utilisation of resources within the Corporate and Support Services Directorate.
Status: On track	<p>A restructuring of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate is underway, with significant progress made to date. Many staff have transitioned into new roles, and a number of vacancies have been publicly advertised. The restructuring will continue into 2025/26.</p> <p>The primary objective of the restructure is to ensure that the Corporate and Support Services Directorate is appropriately resourced to deliver high quality services in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. By realigning functions and roles, the restructure will enhance the capacity of the directorate to support other service areas, drive greater value for money, and deliver improved outcomes for our citizens.</p>

Measure	Deliver 10 programmes against the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) by 31 March 2025.
Status: On track	<p>We continue to make significant progress in delivering actions aligned with all 17 Goals UNSDGs, and the target of 10 programmes has been exceeded.</p> <p>A placement student from Queen's University Belfast is currently compiling a comprehensive progress report on our achievements to date.</p>

Measure	Continue to work in partnership with various community, business and tourism stakeholders to progress various initiatives and support programmes.
Status: On track	<p>This year, we have continued to collaborate with a wide range of community, business, and tourism stakeholders, including Government departments, the Public Health Agency, the PSNI, the Northern Health & Social Care Trust, and local groups.</p> <p>Whilst it is impossible to list all partners, these collaborations have been essential in progressing initiatives that support public health, community cohesion and local business development.</p>

Measure	Ensure at least 1.5 days are spent, per full time equivalent (FTE), on employee learning and development by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	Across the year, 1.5 days were spent, per FTE, on employee learning and development.

Measure	Deliver a minimum of 100 training courses to staff by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	Almost 260 individual courses were completed and recorded, surpassing our target for the year.

Measure	Develop action plans based on the results of the 'Listening to Staff' survey by 31 March 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	A comprehensive strategy will be developed following the completion of the restructure of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate. These action plans will outline the necessary steps to effectively respond to the survey results.

Measure	Develop a Learning & Development Strategy for staff by 31 March 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	The development of a Learning & Development Strategy for staff will progress following the completion of the restructure of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate. A key component of this new structure includes the creation of an Organisational Development & Talent Manager

	role. This post will lead on the development and implementation of the strategy.
--	--

Measure	Deliver a minimum of 2 health and wellbeing initiatives for staff by 31 March 2025.
Status: Achieved	<p>We launched several initiatives this year to support staff health and wellbeing, including World Mental Health Day, Shoctober Week, Hearing Aid Support Services and StayWell focus on Financial Health.</p> <p>The restructuring of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate includes the creation of an Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Officer role. This officer will be responsible for delivering actions to advance our health and wellbeing initiatives for staff.</p>

Measure	Ensure annual staff absence levels do not exceed 15 days per FTE by 31 March 2025.
Status: Not Achieved	<p>Across the year, 17.18 days per FTE were recorded, exceeding the target of 15 days per FTE.</p> <p>During the latter half of 2024, a scrutiny panel comprising of Elected Members was established to review sickness absence across the</p>

	<p>organisation. The panel completed a review and identified several key issues contributing to the high levels of absenteeism.</p> <p>We are now developing and implementing a series of targeted initiatives, informed by best practice and recommendations from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), that are aimed at improving attendance and supporting staff wellbeing.</p>
--	---

Measure	Develop and implement a Learning & Development programme for Elected Members by 31 March 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	<p>Significant progress has been made in developing and implementing the Learning & Development programme for Elected Members. Membership of the Councillor Development Charter Sub-Committee has been agreed and the committee held its inaugural meeting in September, with subsequent meetings held throughout the year.</p> <p>A training needs assessment for Elected Members is currently underway, and officers are preparing a report for review. The development of the programme will continue into 2025/26.</p>

Measure	Develop a Consultation & Engagement Strategy to ensure stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes by 31 March 2025.
Status: Delayed but progressing	As part of the ongoing restructure of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate, a new Consultation & Engagement Officer role has been established. This officer will lead on the development of a comprehensive strategy aimed at ensuring our consultation processes are inclusive, transparent, and effective, ultimately strengthening stakeholder involvement in decision-making.

Get Involved

We would like your input, views, and feedback.

If you would like to tell us about something that you think needs to be improved, you can do so at any time throughout the year.

Please contact us by any of the following methods:

- Email: performance@midandeantrim.gov.uk
- Telephone: 0300 1245 000
- Post: Corporate Performance and Improvement Team, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena, BT43 5EJ.

If you live, work or study in Mid and East Antrim you can also submit questions directly to our Elected Members and Officers by completing a short form.

More details can be found at: www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/publicquestions

Closing Remarks

As I reflect on the past year, I am incredibly proud of the collective efforts made by Council officers and our partners in delivering our Corporate Plan.

While we may not have achieved everything we set out to, I am confident that, after reading this update, you can clearly see the positive impact we have had across the borough.

Our dedication to realising our vision remains steadfast, and we will continue building on the progress achieved to date. Looking ahead, we have identified a number of promising and innovative projects for the year ahead, and I look forward to sharing updates on these with you as the year progresses.

I want to take this opportunity to encourage you to stay connected with us through our website and social media channels, where we will be sharing real-time updates and celebrating the work that continues to make Mid and East Antrim a strong, vibrant, safe, and inclusive community for all who live, work, and visit here.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement.

Valerie Watts

Interim Chief Executive