

Our Plan to Work Better

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Performance Improvement Plan 2026/27

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Other formats: If you would like this plan in a different way, like large print or another language, please email: communications@midandeantrim.gov.uk

About the Plan

Welcome

Welcome to our Performance Improvement Plan for 2026/27. This plan outlines how we will enhance our services to continue improving the area, and the quality of life for everyone who lives, works and visits Mid and East Antrim.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to its development. I also encourage citizens to stay engaged and play an active role in shaping their local communities. Together, we can build a positive and sustainable future for Mid and East Antrim.

Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive

Duty to Improve

Councils are required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. This is set out within the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Improvement means delivering meaningful benefits for local people and the local environment. To meet this duty, councils must set Improvement Objectives each year and ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to achieve them.

Arrangements to Secure Continuous Improvement

Our Performance Management Framework sets out how we drive continuous improvement by aligning the Council's strategic priorities with employee objectives. These arrangements are reviewed each year by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Table: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Performance Management Framework

Mid and East Antrim Community Plan- "Putting People First" (2017-2032)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This 15-year plan sets a long-term vision for the area: a strong, vibrant, safe and inclusive community where people work together to improve the quality of life for all. The plan was developed with partners from public services, businesses and voluntary organisations and is led by the Council. To view the plan, visit: Mid and East Antrim Community Plan
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Corporate Plan (2024-2028)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This 4-year plan follows the Community Plan vision and sets our priorities through four main themes: People, Place, Planet and Performance. To view the plan, visit: Mid and East Antrim Corporate Plan
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Performance Improvement Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This plan sets out our Improvement Objectives for the coming year and supports the goals in the Community Plan and Corporate Plan.
Business Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Business plans set out what each service area will work on over the year, including their main priorities and targets. They support the Corporate Plan and the Performance Improvement Plan.
Personal Development Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">These annual reviews support discussions on performance and development, align individual objectives with the Corporate and Business Plans, and identify training or development needs.

Developing our Plan

We developed our Performance Improvement Plan by balancing the needs of local communities with what the Council can realistically deliver.

Three draft improvement objectives were identified, informed by a broad evidence base. This included findings from the 2022 Citizen Survey, regional and national data, the Northern Ireland Programme for Government, the Community Plan, and our Corporate Plan. We also took account of previous consultation feedback, legislative requirements, performance and audit reviews, benchmarking with other councils, and input from Council management and officers.

Draft Improvement Objectives

Our draft objectives for 2026/27 were:

1. People: We will work with others to improve the lives of citizens.
2. Place: We will maintain and improve our local areas.
3. Planet: We will reduce our environmental impact and improve sustainability.

Public Consultation

We carried out a 12-week public consultation from January to April 2026. Participants were invited to indicate their support for the draft objectives, consider examples of how these could be delivered, and share their own ideas for improvement.

The consultation was delivered both online and in person across Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne town centres, as well as the Council's three leisure centres.

It was widely promoted through emails to key stakeholders, including Council staff, Elected Members, Section 75 consultees, local businesses and community groups, as well as through social media and local newspapers.

Hard copies were available at main Council reception areas, and an Easy Read version was provided to support accessibility.

Key Consultation Findings:

- A total of 160 people took part, with strong support (93%) for each objective.
- Most respondents (86%) were borough citizens: 38% lived or worked in the Ballymena area, 34% in the Carrickfergus area, and 20% in the Larne area.
- The age profile included 26% aged 15–39, 49% aged 40–64, and 25% aged 65 and over.

Key priorities identified through consultation grouped under the Corporate Plan themes:

People

- Supporting children and young people
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Promoting accessibility and inclusion
- Strengthening collaboration and communication

Place

- Maintaining and enhancing parks and open spaces
- Supporting vibrant town centres
- Encouraging local businesses and employment

Planet

- Improving recycling
- Keeping the borough clean
- Protecting and enhancing green spaces

Performance

- Delivering value-for-money services
- Ensuring meaningful engagement with citizens and stakeholders

Outcome:

In summary, the consultation, supported by wider research, confirmed strong support for the three draft objectives. These were refined through community feedback and input from senior management and officers to form the final Improvement Objectives for 2026/27.

While the objectives may not address every need or issue identified, the findings of the consultation and research will be shared across the Council to inform service-level improvements.

Improvement Objectives

Our objectives for 2026/27 are:

1. **People:** Increase access to activities that support health, wellbeing and inclusion.
2. **Place:** Create safe, accessible and attractive places that enhance wellbeing and support town centres, local businesses and employment.
3. **Planet:** Create a cleaner, greener borough by improving recycling services and enhancing public spaces.

In line with legislation and statutory guidance, our Improvement Objectives are:

- **Legitimate:** Contribute to one or more of the recognised Aspects of Improvement set out in the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, including strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.
- **Clear:** Set out the improvements people can expect to see.
- **Robust:** Supported by clearly defined measures to assess success.
- **Deliverable:** Aligned with service plans and budgets, recognising that delivery will depend on available resources and external factors.
- **Demonstrable:** Supported by clear and objective evidence.

The objectives also incorporate the **statutory indicators and standards** set out in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (NI) 2015.

Screening

All policies, including strategies and plans, are screened to assess potential impacts on Equality, Rural Needs, Data Protection and Sustainability. This process helps identify impacts at an early stage and ensures compliance with statutory obligations.

- **Equality:** The Council must have due regard to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The screening process did not identify any adverse impacts, therefore a full equality impact assessment was not required.

- **Rural Needs:** Under the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, the Council must consider rural needs. The screening process did not identify any adverse impacts, and the Plan is expected to have a positive borough-wide impact.
- **Data Protection:** Screening concluded that a full Data Protection Impact Assessment was not required.
- **Sustainability:** The Council has a statutory duty to promote sustainable development. Screening demonstrated that the Plan supports short and long-term positive outcomes for greenhouse gas emissions, climate adaptation and resilience, biodiversity, land use, waste management, health and wellbeing, education and engagement, local economy and careers, and equity.

Improvement Objective 1

People: Increase access to activities that support health, wellbeing and inclusion.

What we know - Community, Health and Wellbeing:

- The population profile of Mid and East Antrim shows the largest age group is 40–64 (34%), followed by 15–39 (29%), 65+ (20%), and 0–14 (17%) (Census 2021).
- A significant proportion of citizens live with long-term health conditions or disabilities, affecting 25% of individuals and 45% of households (Census 2021).
- There is strong demand for affordable, safe and inclusive activities, particularly for children and young people. These enhance wellbeing and can help reduce anti-social behaviour.
- Citizens would like increased funding for sports organisations and more targeted health and wellbeing programmes, however, barriers to participation remain, including access and the availability of suitable facilities.
- Survey findings show relatively low satisfaction with physical and emotional health, with one in four citizens not taking part in weekly exercise (Citizens Survey 2022).

To address these needs, we will:

- Enhance health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly for children and young people, through targeted programmes and support for sports organisations.
- Reduce barriers to participation and improve accessibility across Council services and facilities.

How we will measure success:

- Progress the Amateur & Grassroots Sporting Organisations Improvement Fund by 31 March 2027.
- Deliver the Inclusive Summer Opportunities Grants Scheme by 30 September 2026.
- Establish a Mid and East Antrim Disability Lived Experience Group by 31 December 2026.
- Install 3 new Changing Places facilities across the borough by 31 March 2027.

Who is responsible:

- Director of People
- Director of Growth and Major Projects
- Director of Corporate and Support Services

Links to other strategies and plans:

- **Programme for Government:** Better support for children and young people with special educational needs
- **Community Plan:** Good Health and Wellbeing; Community Safety and Cohesion
- **Corporate Plan:** People
- **Aspect of Improvement:** Strategic Effectiveness; Service Availability; Fairness

Improvement Objective 2

Place: Create safe, accessible and attractive places that enhance wellbeing and support town centres, local businesses and employment.

What we know – Outdoor Spaces, Town Centres and Employment:

- Parks and open spaces are highly valued, particularly for children and young people, however, concerns remain around maintenance, accessibility and anti-social behaviour.
- Town centres are widely perceived to be in decline, with issues including vacant and derelict buildings, accessibility challenges, cleanliness and reduced vibrancy. Key priorities include improving shopfronts, reusing vacant properties, and enhancing facilities and access.
- There is strong support for local businesses and job creation, including measures such as reduced business rates, start-up support and improved access to funding.
- Skills development and apprenticeships are viewed as important for creating local employment opportunities.
- While employment and economic activity levels remain strong compared to the Northern Ireland average, disposable income across Northern Ireland is the lowest in the UK, and average earnings in Mid and East Antrim are below the Northern Ireland average.

To address these needs, we will:

- Enhance and expand accessible, inclusive and high-quality play parks and outdoor recreational spaces.
- Help revitalise town centres by improving the built environment and increasing vibrancy.
- Support local business start-ups through targeted assistance.
- Strengthen skills development and employment opportunities.
- Promote sustainable growth through an effective and efficient Planning department.

How we will measure success:

- Refurbish one play park within the borough by 30 June 2027.
- Open a new play park and bike park at Carnfunnock Country Park by 30 June 2027.
- Deliver a pop-up park in Larne town centre by 31 July 2026.
- Progress the design development for 2 civic spaces within Ballymena town centre by 31 March 2027.
- Deliver the Shopfront Improvement Scheme by 31 March 2027.
- Achieve the statutory target for jobs promoted through business start-up interventions by 31 March 2027 (target to be confirmed by the Department for Economy).
- Deliver skills and employment programmes, with 200 participants, 100 participants into employment, and 150 qualifications gained by 31 March 2027 (subject to funding).
- Achieve an average (median) processing time of 30 weeks for major planning applications by 31 March 2027.
- Achieve an average (median) processing time of 15 weeks for local planning applications by 31 March 2027.
- Conclude at least 70% of planning enforcement cases within 39 weeks by 31 March 2027.

Who is responsible:

- Director of Place
- Director of Growth and Major Projects

Links to other strategies and plans:

- Programme for Government: Growing a globally competitive and sustainable economy
- Community Plan: Good Health and Wellbeing; Progress in Education and Employment; Tourism and the Economy
- Corporate Plan: People; Place
- Aspect of Improvement: Strategic Effectiveness; Service Quality; Service Availability; Efficiency

Improvement Objective 3

Planet: Create a cleaner, greener borough by improving recycling services and enhancing public spaces.

What we know - Environment, Cleanliness and Sustainability:

- Creating a clean and safe borough is a shared responsibility between Council, citizens, businesses and visitors.
- There is strong support for protecting and enhancing green spaces, including increased planting, restoration and the use of native species, all with long-term maintenance.
- Street cleanliness is 66% (in line with the Northern Ireland average), with dog-fouling, litter and fly-tipping identified as key concerns.
- Citizens want stronger enforcement, more bins, increased cleaning, improved education and greater focus on rural areas.
- Legislative changes under the EU Circular Economy Package amended the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and introduced, amongst a range of measures, a municipal recycling rate target of 65% and less than 10% landfill by 2035.
- Recycling systems vary across the borough and overall performance has declined with household recycling rates at 50.8% (2024/25).
- Cost, convenience and time are key barriers to environmental action (Citizens Survey 2022).
- Citizens have called for simpler recycling systems, including single-bin collections.

To address these needs, we will:

- Enhance and protect green spaces through planting, biodiversity initiatives and sustainable land management.
- Promote responsible environmental behaviour through targeted awareness and participation opportunities.
- Simplify recycling for citizens.
- Achieve statutory recycling and environmental targets.

How we will measure success:

- Launch the MEA Tree and Woodland Strategy by 31 March 2027.
- Deliver a civic pride campaign by 31 March 2027.
- Roll out a new dry recycling collection service by 31 July 2027.
- At least 50% of household waste collected is sent for recycling by 31 March 2027.
- Limit biodegradable collected municipal waste to landfill to no more than 16,387 tonnes by 31 March 2027.
- Less than 79,500 tonnes collected municipal waste arisings by 31 March 2027.

Who is responsible:

- Director of Place
- Director of Corporate and Support Services

Links to other strategies and plans:

- Programme for Government: Protecting Lough Neagh and the environment
- Community Plan: Good Health and Wellbeing; Community Safety and Cohesion
- Corporate Plan: Place; Planet
- Aspect of Improvement: Strategic Effectiveness; Service Quality; Service Availability; Efficiency; Sustainability; Innovation

Monitoring Progress

Monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure clear oversight, accountability and transparency in the delivery of plans and performance across the Council. These arrangements are summarised below.

- **Community Plan** progress is reported to:
 - Strategic Alliance (every six months)
 - Community Panel (quarterly)
 - Neighbourhoods and Communities Committee (as appropriate)

- **Corporate Plan** progress is reported to:
 - Senior Management Team (every six months)
 - Full Council (every six months)

- **Performance Improvement Plan** progress is reported to:
 - Senior Management Team (quarterly)
 - Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee (quarterly)

- **Business Plan** progress is reported to:
 - Assigned Director (quarterly)

- **Performance Self-Assessment Report** is reported to:
 - Full Council (annually)

Progress updates on our Corporate Plan and Performance Improvement Plan are also published on our website.

Get Involved

We all have a part to play in making Mid and East Antrim a great place to live, work and visit.

Here are some of the ways you can help:

- Shop locally.
- Be a responsible pet owner.
- Bin your waste.
- Reduce, reuse and recycle.
- Donate unwanted items to charity.
- Report problems, such as, fly-tipping, dog foul and anti-social behaviour.
- Get involved in community and voluntary work.
- Support our older people.
- Support people who are vulnerable.
- As business owners, offer apprenticeships or work placement opportunities.
- Be safe on our roads.
- Use public transport when you can.

You can also tell us about something that you think needs to be improved at any time throughout the year through any of the following methods:

- Email: performance@midandeastantrim.gov.uk
- Telephone: 0300 1245 000
- Post: Policy and Performance 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 submit questions directly to our Elected Members and Officers by completing a short form. To find out more, visit: www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/publicquestions