

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26

Other formats

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Welcome

Welcome to our Performance Improvement Plan for 2025/26.

As a council, we aim to deliver high-quality services for our citizens, and we are committed to working in better ways to achieve this.

Our Performance Improvement Plan is part of our arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It focuses on some of the issues affecting our borough, whilst working alongside the Mid and East Antrim Community Plan and our own Corporate Plan, to deliver the best outcomes for our citizens, communities, businesses, and visitors, including our City Deal projects which will develop our tourism assets and grow our economic potential.

This year, we will concentrate on developing our Local Economic Partnership action plan, to support the Sub-Regional Economic Plan and rebalance economic growth across Northern Ireland.

We will endeavour to drive footfall into our town centres and support our local businesses, recognising the many challenges they face.

We will improve how we communicate with our citizens and visitors, by going back to basics and installing new information notice boards within our town centres, so people know what's going on in our borough.

We will help to prevent violence against women and girls, addressing a key issue within our communities, by tackling the underlying causes of violence, abuse and harm towards women and girls and stopping it before it starts.

We will help to make Mid and East Antrim a great place to live in and visit, by encouraging everyone to play their part in looking after it.

And finally, we will improve our environmental impact by rolling out a new, simpler way of recycling across the borough.

I am really looking forward to working alongside our partners to deliver this plan, and I want to thank everyone who contributed to its development.

Valerie Watts

Interim Chief Executive

Duty to Improve

Under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, councils have a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions.

Improvement means an activity that enhances the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities. It means more than gains in service outputs, efficiencies, or internal effectiveness.

For each financial year, councils must set Improvement Objectives, and have in place the arrangements to achieve them.

Arrangements to Secure Continuous Improvement

Our arrangements to secure continuous improvement are outlined in our Performance Management Framework. This framework drives performance at all levels within the organisation by linking our corporate strategies, aims and objectives to each employee's individual work plan.

These arrangements are audited by the Northern Ireland Audit Office each year.

Table: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Performance Management Framework

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Community Plan - “Putting People First” (2017-2032)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15-year plan.• Sets the vision for Mid and East Antrim as “a strong, vibrant, safe, and inclusive community,
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	<p>where people work together to improve the quality of life for all”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed by partners from the public, private, and voluntary sectors, and led by Council. Available to view at: www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/resident/community-planning/putting-people-first
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Corporate Plan (2024-2028) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council’s 4-year strategic plan. Adopts the same vision as the Community Plan. Delivers our ambitions through 4 key pillars: People, Place, Planet, and Performance. Available to view at: www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/corporateplan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Performance Improvement Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council’s annual improvement plan. Sets Improvement Objectives. Aligns with the aims of the Community Plan and Corporate Plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual plan developed by each service area. Sets priorities and targets for the year ahead. Links to the Corporate Plan and Performance Improvement Plan.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Personal Development Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual plan. • Links Council's strategic objectives to each employee's individual work plan. • Identifies learning and development needs.

Developing our Performance Improvement Plan

We held a public consultation on 3 proposed Improvement Objectives from 17 January to 4 April 2025. These objectives were based on our understanding of local needs and an assessment of our ability to meet those needs.

- **Draft Objective 1**

People: We will work with partners to improve the lives of citizens.

- **Draft Objective 2**

Place: We will maintain and improve our local areas.

- **Draft Objective 3**

Planet: We will reduce our environmental impact and improve sustainability.

A survey was conducted in the Council's leisure centres, and within Ballymena, Carrickfergus, and Larne town centres. The survey was also published online and displayed at our main reception areas.

We asked people "do you agree with us pursuing this objective?", and gave examples of the types of actions we could take to achieve them.

The survey also asked, "if the Council could make any improvement to positively impact on your life or environment, what would it be?".

The consultation was promoted to citizens, staff, Elected Members, community groups, voluntary groups, Section 75 groups and local businesses.

An Easy Read version of the consultation document was also published.

145 people responded, and all 3 objectives received over 90% support.

We also reviewed and considered a wide range of information sources when developing our Improvement Objectives, including:

- The results from the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Citizen Survey (2022).
- Regional statistics, such as data from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
- The Programme for Government NI – “Doing What Matters Most” (2024-2027).
- The Mid and East Antrim Community Plan – “Putting People First” (2017-2032, and 2022 review).
- The Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Corporate Plan (2024-2028).
- Findings from previous public consultations on the Council's prior Performance Improvement Plan and Corporate Plan.
- A review of legislation and statutory guidance.
- Self-analysis from our annual Performance Self-Assessment Reports, audit results (Northern Ireland Audit Office), and business plan performance.
- Benchmarking with other councils.
- Engagement and feedback from the Council's management and officers.

A summary of our research findings, along with feedback from the public consultation, is provided on the following pages.

1. People: We will work with partners to improve the lives of citizens.

- Health and wellbeing

- In our Citizens Survey (2022), citizens indicated relatively low levels of satisfaction with both their physical and emotional health (average ratings of 5.8 and 6.4 out of 10 respectively).
- 1 in 4 of our citizens' activities are limited by a long-term health problem or disability.
- 1 in 4 of our citizens do not do any weekly exercise.
- 'Health' is cited as the main reason for economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.
- The population is ageing, with loneliness and isolation identified as key issues amongst older age groups, but this can affect anyone.
- Support for and engagement with older people is welcomed.
- There is a lack of awareness among older age groups of our existing offering of health, wellbeing and social opportunities.
- We must consider the needs of people with disabilities to ensure equal access to all buildings, venues and events, including the provision of quiet spaces.

- Financial health

- In our Citizens Survey (2022), citizens indicated low levels of satisfaction with their financial health (average rating of 5.2 out of 10).
- More concessions are welcomed for leisure and arts and cultural programmes for people on lower incomes.

- Positive feedback was received on our leisure centre membership rates for older people and families.

- Skills and employment

- Rates of employment and economic activity in the borough currently fare well against the Northern Ireland average.
- Our citizens would like the opportunity to develop their skills and improve their employment prospects. They felt any opportunities to do so should be open to all age groups.
- Reasonable adjustments should be made for people with disabilities to apply for jobs within the Council and the local area.
- We should hold job fairs and ensure they are accessible to all.

- Safety

- Insufficient leisure and recreational provision for young people can lead to loitering, littering, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, which can result in people feeling unsafe within the borough's parks, playparks, town centres and sporting facilities.
- Evidence shows most women and girls in Northern Ireland have experienced some form of gender-based violence. The prevention of violence against women and girls is an immediate priority of the Programme for Government. There is citizen support to take action to address this.

- Partnership
 - Our citizens recognise the benefits of us working in closer partnership with the statutory, community, voluntary, and sporting sectors. This can help to maximise resources (and avoid increasing rates), address local issues (such as drugs and anti-social behaviour), ensure access for all (by engaging with people with lived experience), and achieve better outcomes for citizens.

- Communication
 - Feedback indicates a lack of awareness of our offerings, such as programmes for leisure, socialising, nature and outdoor recreation, arts and cultural activities, town centre events, skills development, employment academies, volunteering opportunities and poverty support.
 - People of all ages do not use social media and would like us to use some more traditional forms of communication.
 - All information should be provided in alternative formats to ensure equal access for everyone.

2. Place: We will maintain and improve our local areas.

- Leisure and recreation

- The need for safe and accessible outdoor space was noted, within both urban and rural areas.
- There is a demand for more sports, recreation and play provision for children and young people, particularly ages 12+, including indoor facilities that can be supervised or locked (to deter anti-social behaviour), and investment in our leisure centres, sporting facilities and playparks.
- Parks should be wheelchair friendly and have ample disabled parking.
- Our leisure centres are well used by a variety of different age groups. Users would like an extension of opening hours, the opening of facilities on bank holidays and more cleaning. Feedback indicates an excess in demand for our MEAqua Programme and Summer Schemes.
- We should ensure adequate and accessible toilet provision across the borough, including indoor and outdoor venues, during events and within our town centres. We should also consider the provision of Changing Places toilets.
- A few respondents requested dog parks.

- Local economy and town centres

- As a whole, Northern Ireland has the lowest discretionary income of all UK regions and the median pay in Mid and East Antrim is lower than the Northern Ireland average.

- Our citizens would like to see more inward investment, higher value jobs, and support for businesses to start up and grow in the area.
- To create an economy that works for everyone, the Northern Ireland Executive plans to address four key challenges, including productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation and regional balance. The Sub-Regional Economic Plan will rebalance economic growth across Northern Ireland and will see the creation of Local Economic Partnerships within each council area.
- Citizens would like to see improvements within our town centres, with high operating costs, businesses closing, dereliction, vacant units and cleanliness stated as some of the key issues.
- There was a general feeling that the Ballymena area was prioritised over Carrickfergus and Larne, with some specific locations of concern raised.
- Support to help sustain town centre businesses was welcomed, such as a reduction in business rates and the removal of car parking charges.
- There was support for actions to help drive footfall and improve the attractiveness of our town centres. These included shop front improvements, well-publicised events, town centre markets, incentives to shop locally, the development of an evening/night-time economy, and lighting, seating and planting schemes.
- Some ideas to improve town centre accessibility included more pedestrian areas for safer and more enjoyable events, and for more seating and toilet provision, particularly for use in the evening and during events.
- Closer partnership working with other government departments is needed to ensure a holistic approach, for example street lighting, gritting and potholes, and speed awareness and enforcement.

- Tourism
 - Around half of our citizens think the area is good for attractions and tourism.
 - There is a demand for more focus on developing and promoting the borough's history and heritage, and for the development of linkages between our tourism assets.
 - People living in Carrickfergus would like to see greater use and promotion of the castle, such as opening on bank holidays, aligning with cruise ship schedules and creating better linkages with the town centre.
 - Some citizens of Larne would like to see the promotion of the town as a gateway to the Causeway Coastal Route. Some noted the need for a Tourist Information Centre.

3. Planet: We will reduce our environmental impact and improve sustainability.

- A cleaner borough
 - The Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful Street Cleanliness score for Mid and East Antrim is 70%, which is an ‘acceptable’ level.
 - Feedback indicates that dog foul and litter are key issues throughout the borough.
 - People would like to see more bin provision, including general waste, recycling and dog foul bins.
 - Citizens would also like more cleaning of the borough’s town centres, parks and playparks, pitches and housing developments. They would also like to see a greater Dog Warden presence.
 - The value of volunteering groups within our local areas was noted.
 - Everyone has a part to play. We should work closely with local community and voluntary groups, and schools on green initiatives. The importance of working with young people was also stressed, as was the Council leading by example.
- Waste management and recycling
 - There are currently two dry recycling household collection models operating within Mid and East Antrim borough, a twin-stream blue bin and kerbside boxes.
 - Our citizens have indicated that they would like recycling to be simpler.
 - ‘Cost’, ‘convenience’ and ‘time’ were citizens’ top reasons for not making environmental improvements (Citizens Survey 2022).

- Amendments to the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997, introduced in 2020, impacts the statutory recycling targets for local councils. Municipal recycling rates must reach 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030, and 65% by 2035. There will be a 10% cap on landfill waste by 2035, and by 2028, there will be a ban or restriction on biodegradable waste sent to landfill.
- Our household recycling performance is currently 50.67% and falling, for dry recycling and organic waste.
- Our kerbside recycling rate is 17.7%, one of the lowest of all the Northern Ireland councils.

Consultation Outcome

All of our research and findings have been carefully considered.

Our Senior Management Team have recommended the Performance Improvement Plan for 2025/26 addresses the following needs and issues:

- Preventing violence against women and girls.
- Boosting economic productivity.
- Supporting our town centres.
- Improving communication with our citizens.
- Making the borough cleaner.
- Simplifying recycling.

Although the Plan does not address every need and issue identified, the results of the consultation and research will be shared within the Council to inform service-level improvements.

Our Improvement Objectives

Our Improvement Objectives for 2025/26 are:

1. **People:** We will help to prevent violence against women and girls.
2. **Place:** We will help boost our local economy and town centres.
3. **Planet:** We will all play our part in making Mid and East Antrim a great place to live in and visit.

These objectives are:

- Legitimate: They make a demonstrable contribution to one or more Aspect of Improvement, as defined in the Local Government Act (NI) 2014:
 - Strategic effectiveness
 - Service quality
 - Service availability
 - Fairness
 - Sustainability
 - Efficiency
 - Innovation
- Clear: They set out the visible improvements citizens can expect.
- Robust: They have defined terms of success.
- Deliverable: They have established links to individual service programmes and budgets. (Please note, due to high levels of internal transformation and external uncertainty, the actions described within this plan are subject to the availability of funding and finance throughout the year).

- Demonstrable: They are capable of being supported by objective evidence.

Statutory Indicators and Standards

The statutory indicators and standards specified by the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (NI) 2015, also form part of our Improvement Objectives.

Improvement Objective 1:

People - We will help to prevent violence against women and girls.

Why:

- Evidence shows most women and girls in Northern Ireland have experienced some form of gender-based violence from everyday misogyny and sexual harassment to extreme physical and sexual violence. There have been over 20 domestic homicides with a female victim since January 2020, and these numbers continue to rise. A whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach is needed to end this, there is something everyone can do.
- The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework was launched by the Northern Ireland Executive in September 2024. The focus of this strategy is on prevention. Tackling the underlying causes of violence, abuse and harm towards women and girls and stopping it before it starts is vital.
- The Strategy includes a first Delivery Plan (2024-26), which includes the launch of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Change Fund, which has been made available to local councils and is aimed at the community and voluntary sector. The key outcome of the Change Fund is changed attitudes, behaviours, and cultures – Everyone in society understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, and plays an active role in preventing it. (Source: Northern Ireland Executive).

- Our citizens have indicated their support for programmes and activities to address this issue.

What you will see:

- Roll out of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Change Fund within the Community and Voluntary sector.
- An awareness and training programme to ensure everyone understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, and plays an active role in preventing it.
- Our organisation will know how to recognise and respond to domestic violence or abuse.

How we will measure improvement:

- The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Change Fund delivered by 31/3/26.
- An Ending Violence Against Women and Girls awareness and training programme delivered by 31/3/26.
- Platinum level Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence by 31/3/26.

Who is responsible:

- The Director of Community
- The Interim Director of Corporate and Support Services

Wider strategic links:

- Programme for Government:
 - Ending violence against women and girls
 - Safer communities

- Community Plan:
 - Prioritising the most vulnerable
 - Community safety and cohesion
 - Progress in education and employment

- Corporate Plan:
 - People

- Aspect of Improvement:
 - Fairness

Improvement Objective 2:

Place - We will help boost our local economy and town centres.

Why:

- Our citizens would like to see more inward investment, higher value jobs, and support for businesses to start up and grow.
- Productivity in Northern Ireland has been below the UK average for decades. To create an economy that works for everyone, the Northern Ireland Executive plans to address four key challenges of productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation and regional balance. Prioritising these areas will help to transform the economy, help businesses to thrive, ensure rewarding work for everyone regardless of background, help boost wages and spread economic prosperity across all areas.
- Through the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, we will play a central role in enabling this change, through the creation of the Mid and East Antrim Local Economic Partnership, with a dedicated funding pot to deliver on our agreed priorities.
- Our citizens have indicated their support for actions that will help to drive footfall and support our local businesses. Our town centres continue to face many challenges, with high operating costs, businesses closing, dereliction, vacant units and cleanliness identified as some of the key issues.
- There appears to be a lack of awareness of our offering, such as programmes for leisure, socialising, outdoor recreation, arts and cultural activities, town centre events, skills development, employment academies, volunteering

opportunities and poverty support. People would like to know more about what is going on in the area and would like us to use some more traditional forms of communication, such as town centre notice boards. All information should be provided in alternative formats to ensure equal access for everyone.

What you will see:

- The submission of the Mid and East Antrim Local Economic Partnership Action Plan.
- A range of events within our town centres to boost footfall and support our local businesses.
- Installation of town centre information notice boards to improve communication and awareness of opportunities.
- Business start-ups and growing businesses through the flagship Go Succeed service and other tailored supports.
- An effective and efficient Planning Service.

How we will measure improvement:

- The submission of an agreed action plan for the Mid and East Antrim Local Economic Partnership, in line with the Regional Balance Fund Project Guidelines by 31/3/26.
- 15 events or activities held within Ballymena, Carrickfergus, and Larne town centres by 31/3/26.

- The installation of 3 information notice boards in Ballymena and Carrickfergus town centres by 30/6/25. (A notice board is already in place in Larne town centre).
- 50 jobs promoted through business start-up interventions by 31/3/26.
- A processing time for major planning applications within an average of 30 weeks by 31/3/26.
- A processing time for local planning applications within an average of 15 weeks by 31/3/26.
- At least 70% of planning enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks by 31/3/26.

Who is responsible:

- The Acting Director of Development
- The Interim Director of Operations

Wider strategic links:

- Programme for Government:
 - Grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy
- Community Plan:
 - Progress in education and employment
 - Tourism and the economy
 - Community safety and cohesion
 - Good health and wellbeing

- Corporate Plan:
 - People
 - Place

- Aspect of Improvement:
 - Service availability
 - Strategic effectiveness
 - Innovation

Improvement Objective 3:

Planet – We will all play our part in making Mid and East Antrim a great place to live in and visit.

Why:

- Everyone has a part to play in creating a borough that is clean and safe for everyone who lives in, works in or visits Mid and East Antrim.
- Our Street Cleanliness score is 70%, an 'acceptable' level. Our citizens identified litter and dog foul as key issues throughout the borough and would like to see more cleaning of our town centres, parks and playparks, pitches, leisure centres and housing developments.
- There are currently two dry recycling household collection models operating within the borough, a twin-stream blue bin and kerbside boxes. Our household recycling performance for dry recycling and organic waste is currently 50.67% and falling. Our kerbside recycling rate is 17.7%, one of the lowest of all Northern Ireland councils. Our citizens told us through our survey that they would like recycling to be simpler.
- Amendments to the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997, introduced in 2020, impacts the statutory recycling targets for local councils. Municipal recycling rates must reach 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030, and 65% by 2035. There will be a 10% cap on landfill waste by 2035, and by 2028, a ban or restriction on biodegradable waste sent to landfill.

What you will see:

- A communications campaign to encourage everyone to play a part in making Mid and East Antrim cleaner, safer and more attractive.
- Simpler recycling.

How we will measure improvement:

- The development of a communications campaign to help people to play their part in looking after Mid and East Antrim by 31/3/26.
- The launch of a fully co-mingled dry recycling collection service by 1/11/26.
- At least 50% of household waste collected sent for recycling by 31/3/26.
- A maximum of 16,387 tonnes of biodegradable collected municipal waste sent to landfill by 31/3/26.
- Less than 79,500 tonnes collected municipal waste arisings by 31/3/26.

Who is responsible:

- The Interim Director of Corporate and Support Services
- The Interim Director of Operations

Wider strategic links:

- Programme for Government:
 - Protecting Lough Neagh and the environment

- Community Plan:
 - Good health and wellbeing
 - Community safety and cohesion
 - Tourism and the economy
 - Valuing our environment

- Corporate Plan:
 - People
 - Place
 - Planet
 - Performance

Aspect of Improvement:

- Service quality
- Efficiency
- Innovation
- Sustainability

Screening

- Equality:
 - The Council must carry out its functions having due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and the desirability to promote good relations (Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998). The screening did not identify any major adverse effects on any Section 75 category or requirements for mitigation, and therefore determined that it was not necessary to conduct a full equality impact assessment.

- Rural:
 - The Council must give due regard to rural needs (Rural Needs Act Northern Ireland 2016). The screening did not identify any adverse impacts. This Plan will have a positive impact on the borough as a whole.

- Sustainability:
 - The Council has a statutory duty to promote sustainable development. The screening, which considered the likely impacts of this Plan, under the 5 pillars of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda, identified no adverse impacts.

- Data Protection:

- A Data Protection Impact Assessment screening was undertaken, and as a result, a full Data Protection Impact Assessment was not deemed necessary.

Monitoring Progress

Our reporting arrangements are designed to ensure proper oversight, accountability, and transparency.

- The Community Plan is reported to:
 - The Strategic Alliance every six months.
 - The Community Panel every quarter.
 - The Neighbourhoods and Communities Committee as appropriate.

- The Corporate Plan is reported to:
 - The Senior Management Team every six months.
 - Full Council every six months.

- The Performance Improvement Plan is reported to:
 - The Senior Management Team every quarter.
 - The Corporate Resources, Policy, and Governance Committee every quarter.

- Annual Business Plans are reported to:
 - The assigned Director every quarter.

- Performance Self-Assessment Report is reported to:
 - Full Council every year.

Play Your Part

We want you to help us make Mid and East Antrim the best that it can be.

Here are some of the key things you can do to 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.

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 through any of the following methods:

- Email: performance@midandeastantrim.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.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/publicquestions

Closing Remarks

Addressing the needs of Mid and East Antrim remains our highest priority, and we will continue to make improvements, where we can, to improve the quality of life and environment for our ratepayers and communities.

Working in partnership with our citizens and other stakeholders will help to shape a future that reflects our shared values and ambitions, ensuring a prosperous and sustainable borough for the generations to come.

I look forward to the year ahead, and warmly encourage you to follow our journey through our website and social media channels.

Valerie Watts

Interim Chief Executive