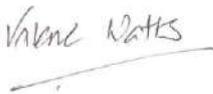February 20th, 2026

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend a meeting of the

Mid and East Antrim Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee

to be held on **Monday, 23rd February 2026** at **6:30 pm** in **Council Chamber, The Braid, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena and via remote access.**

Yours sincerely

Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Agenda

1   NOTICE OF MEETING

2   APOLOGIES

3   DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members and Officers are invited to declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, including gifts and hospitality, they may have in respect of items on this Agenda.

4   ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION

4.1   Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26 Q3 Update - Circulated

4.2   Public Consultation Briefing - Circulated

https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-ni-executive-disability-strategy-2025-2035

4.3   Quarterly Complaints Report - Q3: October - December 2025 - Circulated

4.4   Reception Scrutiny Review – Proposed Improvements - Circulated

4.5   Update on the development of a Consultation & Engagement

5   ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

6   TABLED QUESTIONS

Closed Committee - In accordance with Council policy, representatives of the Press will not be in attendance for this section of the Meeting.

7   ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION – CLOSED COMMITTEE

7.1   Procurement Update - Circulated

7.2   Quarter 3 (April - December 25) Management Accounts - Circulated

7.3   Treasury Management – Annual Outturn Report 2024/25 and 2025/26 in year Review - Circulated

7.4   Tullygarley Playing Fields – Return of Expression of Interest - Circulated

8   ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – CLOSED COMMITTEE

Open Committee

9   FORWARD PLAN FOR CORPORATE RESOURCES, POLICY & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Council/Committee:	Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26 Q3 Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Siobhan Fisher, Assistant Director Citizen Focus
Approver:	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate & Support Services

1. Purpose

1.1. To provide Elected Members with the Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26 Q3 Update Report for scrutiny and to seek approval to publish the report on the Council's website.

2. Background

2.1. 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. Councils must set Improvement Objectives and publish them within a Performance Improvement Plan by 30 June each year.

2.2. Oversight of the Council's performance improvement responsibilities is provided by the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee. The role of the Committee is to:

- Review performance and make recommendations for course correction when performance is not meeting targets.
- Consider opportunities for innovation and best practice to ensure continuous improvement and quality service delivery.
- Approve and oversee the delivery of any relevant service strategies within the 'Performance' function.

2.3. The Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26, included at Hyperlink 1, was approved by Council on 21 July 2025.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1.   The Improvement Objectives for 2025/26 are:

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

3.2.   The plan also includes the statutory indicators and standards specified by the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (NI) 2015.

3.3.   The update report is included at Appendix 1. Of 15 measures (key performance indicators) used to track progress, 100% are currently on track or achieved.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1.   The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement are audited and assessed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office every year. Non-compliance with legislation and guidance may lead to poor service delivery, poor audit results and reputational damage.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1.   The report will be published on the Council's website following approval by Elected Members, and ratification of the minutes of this meeting by Full Council.

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1.   Elected Members are asked to scrutinise the Performance Improvement Plan Q3 Update Report, and to approve it for publication on the Council's website.

7. Appendices / Link

Hyperlink 1:   Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26

Appendix 1:   Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26 Q3 Update

Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26

Quarter 3 Update Report (April to December)

Other formats

If you would like this publication in a different format, such as large print or another language, please email communications@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

Contents

- Duty to Improve
- Improvement Objectives and Progress Update
- Play Your Part
- Get Involved

Duty to Improve

Legislation:

- 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.
- Councils must set Improvement Objectives and have appropriate arrangements in place to achieve them. The objectives should be framed to bring about improvement in at least one of the following areas - strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.
- A Performance Improvement Plan, setting out these objectives, must be published each year. To view our plan for this year, please visit: www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/performance

Arrangements to Secure Continuous Improvement:

- Our arrangements to secure continuous improvement are set out in our Performance Management Framework. This framework drives performance by linking our corporate strategies, aims and objectives to each employee's work plan. Our arrangements are audited by the Northern Ireland Audit Office every year.

Improvement Objectives and Progress Update

- Our objectives for 2025/26 are:
    - People: We will help prevent violence against women and girls.
    - Place: We will help boost our local economy and town centres.
    - Planet: We will all play our part in making Mid and East Antrim a great place to live in and visit.

- We use outcomes (what you will see) and measures (key performance indicators) to monitor the delivery of our objectives.

- Of 15 measures, 100% are currently achieved or on track.

Objective 1 - People: We will help to prevent violence against women and girls

Why this objective was chosen:

- 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. There is something everyone can do to end this.

- The Northern Ireland Executive launched The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework in September 2024, focusing on tackling the underlying causes of violence, abuse and harm towards women and girls and stopping it before it starts. The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Change Fund has been made available to local councils for rollout within the community and voluntary sector.

- Our citizens support programmes and activities to address this issue.

A progress update is provided overleaf.

5

Outcome	Roll out of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Change Fund.
Measure	Change Fund delivered by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Domestic violence continues to be one of the most significant public protection concerns in Northern Ireland, with police statistics showing persistently high levels of incidents across the region. £100,000 in funding has been awarded across 5 organisations for projects aimed at preventing violence against women and girls. These projects will be delivered within local primary and secondary schools, and through community, sporting and youth organisations. Activities will range from education (focusing on healthy and respectful relationships, exploring root causes, challenging harmful norms, consent, digital safety, addiction and more), to front-line services and therapeutic support. More details will be shared as these projects progress.

Outcome	Everyone understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, and plays an active role in preventing it.
Measure	Training programme delivered by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	'Power to Change' and 'Be the Change' training programmes have been delivered across our 3 leisure centres. The aim is to ensure our facilities and gyms are somewhere women and girls feel safe and will be safe. Staff have been trained to challenge abuse or harassment and to deliver effective responses to anyone who may have experienced it. Another programme 'Why we need to talk about violence against women and girls' is being delivered to community groups and women's groups to raise awareness on the roots of violence. This programme challenges attitudes and misconceptions, and has been complimented by The Executive Office's campaign on coercive control. A third programme seeks to enhance support within mental health care settings by training staff to recognise high-risk domestic abuse. The Northern Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership (NDSVP) website has also been upgraded to provide a 'one-stop' site for anyone seeking information or support for domestic or sexual abuse or on ending violence against women and girls across the NDSVP

	area. The new website, along with signposting posters and cards, will be launched in March 2026.

Outcome	Our organisation will know how to recognise and respond to domestic violence or abuse.
Measure	Platinum level Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence by 31/3/26.
Status: Achieved	The Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence plays a vital role in ensuring we can provide a safe, confidential and informed response to employees affected by domestic abuse, and in promoting access to 'Safe Place' resources for the wider community. Retaining Platinum level status in November 2025, we remain committed to supporting victims, challenging perpetrator behaviour and strengthening our ability to respond safely and effectively. Many of our buildings, including our leisure centres, depots and community spaces offer a 'Safe Place' for those affected by domestic violence or abuse. More than 100 staff members have also completed Domestic Violence Charter Training, becoming informed advocates for their families, neighbourhoods and community groups. This training will be rolled out to our Elected Members in 2026.

Objective 2 - Place: We will help boost our local economy and town centres

Why this objective was chosen:

- Our citizens would like to see more inward investment, support for businesses to start up and grow, and higher value jobs in the area.

- The Northern Ireland Executive plans to transform our economy by addressing challenges relating to productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation and regional balance. We will establish a Mid and East Antrim Local Economic Partnership to support this, with funding to deliver on our agreed priorities.

- Our town centres face many challenges with high operating costs, businesses closing, vacant units, dereliction and cleanliness identified as key issues. Our citizens support actions that will help to drive footfall and support our local businesses.

- We need to work in new ways to help citizens and visitors stay connected to what's happening across our borough.

Progress update:

Outcome	Submission of Mid and East Antrim's Local Economic Partnership Action Plan.
Measure	Submit an agreed action plan in line with Regional Balance Fund Project Guidelines by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Work continues to progress the submission of an agreed action plan.

Outcome	Town centre events to boost footfall and support our local businesses.
Measure	15 events or activities held within Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne town centres by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	A full programme of activities has been delivered across Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne, including Artisan Markets, Summer Carnivals, Halloween and Christmas themed events, with more activities lined up for delivery before the end of March 2026.

Outcome	Information notice boards to help citizens and visitors stay connected.
Measure	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).
Status: Achieved	New traditional-style notice boards have been installed in Ballymena and Carrickfergus town centres and have been used to promote a wide range of events and activities. We also send a bespoke newsletter to businesses within our 3 main towns every month, with information about business support programmes and training opportunities, events, road closures and more.

Outcome	Support for businesses to start-up and grow through Go Succeed and other tailored supports.
Measure	50 jobs promoted through business start-up interventions by 31/3/26.
Status: Achieved	115 jobs have been promoted on the 'Engage' pillar so far this year. ('Engage' clients are those not expected to register for VAT).

Outcome	An effective and efficient Planning Service.
Measure	A processing time for major planning applications within a median average of 30 weeks by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Latest verified data is for April to September 2025, when an average (median) processing time of 26.6 weeks was recorded. The Northern Ireland council average was 34.0 weeks. During this period, 2 applications were decided and 1 was withdrawn. 66.7% of cases were processed within 30 weeks, against a Northern Ireland council average of 47.5%. Data up to December 2025 will be published in our next update, when verified.
Measure	A processing time for local planning applications within a median average of 15 weeks by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Latest available data is for the period April to September 2025, when an average (median) processing time of 7.4 weeks was recorded. During this time, 292 applications were decided and 21 were withdrawn. 81.5% of cases were processed within 15 weeks, against a Northern Ireland council average of 41.8%. Data up to December 2025 will be published in our next update, when verified.
Measure	At least 70% of planning enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Latest available data is for the period April to September 2025, when 83 cases concluded. During this time, 74.7% concluded within 39 weeks, against a Northern Ireland Council average of 75.1%. Data up to December 2025 will be published in our next update, when verified.

Objective 3 - Planet: We will all play our part in making Mid and East Antrim a great place to live in and visit

Why this objective was chosen:

- Everyone has a part to play in making Mid and East Antrim clean and safe. While the borough is mostly clean, dog foul and litter are key issues in some areas.

- Our citizens want simpler recycling. With a decline in levels of household recycling, something needs to be done to protect the environment and meet legal requirements.

Progress update:

Outcome	A communications campaign to encourage everyone to play a part in making Mid and East Antrim cleaner, safer and more attractive.
Measure	Campaign developed by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Several communications have been delivered to help make our borough cleaner and greener. Campaigns focused on road safety, recycling and re-use, and responsible dog ownership. We also promoted the 'Safer Steps' campaign, a female personal safety walk, in partnership with the PSNI. Our longer-term communications campaign, which aims to inspire community pride, is due to launch in April 2026.

Outcome	Simpler recycling through the launch of a fully co-mingled dry recycling collection service.
Measure	Launch of a new dry recycling collection service by 1/11/26.
Status: On track	A reaffirmation report for the approval of the new service was taken to Full Council on Monday 12 January 2026. Members were provided with the legal basis on what they were approving to satisfy the claim made in the judicial review that members were not provided with all the facts when they made their original approval in April 2025.

	Officers are anticipating a conclusion to the judicial review at the next court hearing at the end of February 2026. The project is continuing and subject to funding will commence as planned in October 2026 when the contract with the current provider comes to an end.

Outcome	Achievement of statutory waste key performance indicators.
Measure	At least 50% of household waste collected sent for recycling by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Latest available data is for the period April to September 2025, when 57.3% was recorded. Data up to December 2025 will be published in our next update.
Measure	A maximum of 16,387 tonnes of biodegradable collected municipal waste sent to landfill by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Latest available data is for the period April to September 2025, when 527 tonnes were recorded. A new contract for processing waste means that waste is no longer sent directly to landfill. During the same period last year, a total of 7,741 tonnes were recorded. Data up to December 2025 will be published in our next update.
Measure	Less than 79,500 tonnes collected municipal waste arisings by 31/3/26.
Status: On track	Latest available data is for the period April to September 2025, when 40,558 tonnes were recorded. Data up to December 2025 will be published in our next update.

Play Your Part

Things you can do to help make Mid and East Antrim the best that it can be:

- 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 during 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 also submit questions directly to our Elected Members and Officers by completing a short form. For more details, please visit: www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/publicquestions

| Council/ Committee: | Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee |
| Date: | 23 February 2026 |

| Report Title: | Public Consultation Briefing |
| Publication Status: | Open |

| Author: | Siobhan Fisher, Assistant Director – Citizen Focus |
| Approver: | Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate and Support Services |

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with an update on the public consultations in which Council is involved, namely:

(a) those where the Council is a stakeholder and submitting a response; and
(b) those where the Council is responsible for conducting the consultation.

2. Background

2.1. Within the Corporate and Support Services directorate, the Policy, Performance & Partnership team is responsible for managing Council's responsibilities in relation to public consultations.

2.2 The primary aim of public consultations in Northern Ireland is to gather public opinions, feedback, and ideas on proposed policies, initiatives, or legislation to ensure decision-making is informed, transparent, and accountable to the needs of citizens and stakeholders.

2.3 Public consultations published by the Northern Ireland Executive are centrally recorded by the Policy, Performance & Partnership team and reviewed by the relevant service areas. Draft responses are prepared for consultations relevant to the Council and/or the Borough and are subsequently submitted to the appropriate Committee for consideration and approval by Elected Members.

2.4 The role of local government in responding to public consultations encompasses representing community interests, influencing policy development, contributing local knowledge, and ensuring that community needs inform the planning and delivery of local services and development.

2.5 The role of local government in conducting public consultations is to promote transparent, inclusive and accountable decision-making processes that are responsive to community needs. Moreover, public consultations must comply with statutory obligations, including those set out under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1 A consultation summary report is attached at Appendix 1. It provides an overview of the consultations to which the Council is responding, including the relevant committees and associated dates, as well as a summary of consultations currently being conducted by the Council for information.

3.2 Draft consultation responses prepared by the Corporate and Support Services directorate will be submitted to the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee at each meeting for review by Elected Members. A summary of the consultation(s) is provided below, with the draft response(s) attached for your consideration.

Consultation on the Northern Ireland Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035

The Department for Communities launched a public consultation on the Northern Ireland Disability Strategy for 2025-2035 on behalf of the Executive.

The Strategy was developed in partnership with Deaf and disabled people and their representative organisations and focuses on tackling the most significant barriers to inclusion and participation in society. The draft and its eight outcomes set out an ambitious programme of work designed to create real change by focusing on tackling the most significant barriers to inclusion and participation in society faced by Deaf and disabled people.

Several service areas have fed into the response, which will be, once approved, submitted as a consolidated Council response.

Please find Council's response attached at Appendix 2, the consultation paper is available at Hyperlink 1.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1 Responding to relevant public consultations is essential for the Council to publicly affirm its policy positions and to actively pursue the best possible outcomes on behalf of the residents of the Borough.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1. The Policy, Performance & Partnership team will present a Public Consultation report to each meeting of the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee (CRPG).

5.2. On approval of Elected Members, Officers will proceed to make submissions on behalf of the Council to the relevant consultations.

6.   Recommendation or Decision

It is recommended that Elected Members:

(i)   Note the consultation summary report.

(ii)   Approve the draft response to the Consultation on the Northern Ireland Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035.

7.   Appendices / Links

Appendix 1   Consultation Summary Report

Appendix 2   Draft response to the Northern Ireland Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035.

Hyperlink 1   Consultation on the Northern Ireland Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035

Appendix 1

15

Mid & East Antrim
Borough Council

Consultation Register Summary Report
Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee

23 February 2026

a) Consultations where Council is the stakeholder

Title and Closing Date	Consulting Department/Organisation	Proposed Dept and Committee
Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) Options Deadline: 29/01/2026	Department of Finance Response submitted on 29/01/2026	Economic Development Environment & Economy Committee 26/01/2026
Significant Water Management Issues Deadline: 16/06/2026	DAERA	Planning Planning Committee 02/04/2026
Rethinking our Resources: NI Resources and Waste Management Strategy Deadline: 08/04/2026	DAERA	Operations Environment & Economy 02/03/2026
Forest Management carried out by the Forest Service Deadline: 02/02/2026	Soil Association Certification Response submitted on 02/02/2026	Outdoor Recreation Environment & Economy 26/01/2026
Draft Nature Recovery Strategy Deadline: 18/03/2026	DAERA	Outdoor Recreation and Climate & Sustainability Neighbourhood & Communities 24/02/2026

Appendix 1

b) <u>Consultations being conducted by Council</u>

Title	Consulting Department	Comments/Link to Consultation Documents
Consultation on Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Draft Performance Improvement Plan for 2026/27	Policy, Performance & Partnership	Invites stakeholders to contribute to the three draft Improvement Objectives. The consultation ends on 8 April 2026.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

1. Vision

The overall vision of the draft Disability Strategy is "An inclusive society that respects, protects promotes and fulfils the rights of all Deaf and disabled people to participate fully, free from discrimination".

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the vision included in the draft Disability Strategy?

X	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Neither agree nor disagree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree

Please tell us why.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council fully supports the Strategy's ambitious, rights-based vision of an inclusive society in which all Deaf and disabled people can participate equally and without discrimination. This vision closely aligns with councils' statutory equality duties, community planning responsibilities and broader place-shaping role, reinforcing the need for inclusion to be embedded across all mainstream services. The Strategy's adoption of the social model of disability is particularly welcome, recognising that barriers arise from societal structures and attitudes rather than individual impairments. The vision also resonates strongly with the Council's Corporate Plan, which acknowledges the diverse and intersecting needs of disabled people, those with long-term conditions and neurodivergent individuals throughout the employment lifecycle. Achieving this vision, however, will depend on robust implementation, adequate resourcing, meaningful engagement with Deaf and disabled people and clear accountability to ensure measurable progress.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

2. Strategy Scope

The Strategy aims to improve the lives of people who are Deaf and disabled people, their families and carers so that they can play a full and active role in all aspects of our society.

It aims to support people who are:

- Deaf or disabled, and/or
- Have health conditions, and/or
- Are neurodivergent

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the scope of the Strategy?

X	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Neither agree nor disagree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree

Please provide us with any comments you have on the scope of the Strategy.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes the Strategy's broad and inclusive scope, which recognises deaf and disabled people, those with health conditions, neurodivergent individuals, and the families and carers who support them. This approach reflects the complex and overlapping needs encountered at community level, where challenges cannot be neatly categorised and often intersect with factors such as poverty, age, rurality and gender. The Council values the Strategy's recognition of hidden and multiple conditions and seeks further clarity on how intersectionality will be embedded in implementation. The Strategy's aim to ensure that deaf and disabled people can play a full and active role in all aspects of society is strongly aligned with the Council's own objectives, including those of the Mid and East Antrim Labour Market Partnership. The LMP Action Plan's focus on reducing the disability pay gap, tackling underemployment and improving access to self-employment opportunities complements the Strategy's scope, recognising that flexible and supported employment pathways, including self-employment, can provide meaningful and sustainable routes into work for disabled people.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

3. Guiding Principles

The Strategy uses the following principles around language and terminology. These have been developed in partnership with Deaf and disabled people. The Strategy recognises and respects:

- Those who choose to identify as people with disabilities, focusing on the person first and their condition or impairment second. "People with disabilities" is terminology most associated with the UNCRPD and the human rights model of disability.

- Individuals who choose to identify as disabled people, recognising that people with impairments or conditions are disabled by barriers created by society. "Disabled people" is the terminology most associated with the social model of disability.

- Those who choose not to identify as either "people with disabilities" or "disabled people" and who may choose an identity relating to their condition or impairment.

- People who have a hidden / invisible condition or impairment.

- Self-defined models such as Deaf culture.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the guiding principles of the Strategy?

	Strongly agree
	Strongly agree
X	Agree
	Neither agree nor disagree
	Disagree
	Strongly disagree

Please provide us with any comments you have on the guiding principles of the Strategy

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes that the Strategy's guiding principles were co-designed with deaf and disabled people, ensuring they are grounded in lived experience and foster respectful, flexible and inclusive language. These principles provide a strong foundation for consistent, rights-based policy development across sectors. The eight outcomes reflect these principles in practice, offering a comprehensive framework that closely aligns with local government responsibilities—particularly around accessible services, inclusive environments, cultural participation, employment pathways and community involvement. The Council strongly supports the outcomes and the Strategy's emphasis on co-production, accessibility and independent living as core expressions of its guiding principles.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

4. Outcomes

The Strategy is structured around eight outcomes. The outcomes will seek to ensure Deaf and disabled people can live and play a full role in society.

Outcome 1	Effectively exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms and participate in society on an equal basis, free from discrimination.
Outcome 2	Access our built environment, facilities and transport on an equal basis.
Outcome 3	Access our public services, government information and communications on an equal basis.
Outcome 4	Access and participate in culture, leisure activities and sport on an equal basis.
Outcome 5	Live independently in the community with choice and control, with a sufficient and sustainable standard of living.
Outcome 6	Have access to quality health and social care on an equal basis and without discrimination.
Outcome 7	Access, sustain and progress within quality employment in an inclusive labour market.
Outcome 8	Deaf and disabled children and young people can exercise their rights and reach their full educational, social and developmental potential.

To what extent to you agree or disagree with the importance of the eight outcomes included in the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Outcome 1	X				
Outcome 2	X				
Outcome 3	X				
Outcome 4		X			
Outcome 5	X				
Outcome 6	X				
Outcome 7	X				
Outcome 8	X				

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

Do you have any further comments to make on any of the outcomes listed? (Please reference the outcome)

Outcome 1: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly supports all commitments under Outcome 1. In particular, the establishment of a Regional Disability Forum is welcomed as a critical mechanism to ensure lived experience informs delivery and monitoring. Additional support Councils would need:

- Clear guidance on how councils are expected to engage with, contribute to and respond to the Regional Disability Forum.
- Consistent regional standards for disability data collection and reporting to avoid duplication and ensure comparability across councils and departments.
- Support to build staff capability in co-production and participatory engagement with Deaf and disabled people.

Outcome 2: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council recognises this outcome as critical to enabling full participation in daily life. We welcome the commitment to inclusive design standards and improved transport accessibility. Given the significant rural nature of Northern Ireland, including parts of our Borough, greater clarity on how transport improvements will reach rural areas would strengthen this outcome further. The Council also strongly supports the focus on inclusive design, accessibility and improvements to the public realm. Councils are central to delivery through planning, regeneration, leisure facilities, parks and town centre management. Additional support councils would need:

- Capital funding streams to support retrofitting of existing council facilities where inclusive design standards are not currently met.
- Clear guidance on applying inclusive design standards consistently across council-led developments and procurement.
- Early engagement with councils on the proposed accessibility rating system for businesses, including resourcing for administration, enforcement and public communication.
- Reinstatement of the Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Fund, which has historically supported councils and community organisations to improve physical accessibility in arts, culture, heritage and leisure settings. The reintroduction of this funding stream would significantly strengthen delivery of Outcome 2 by enabling practical improvements to the public realm and built environment, ensuring equitable access for Deaf and disabled people.

Outcome 3: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes the strong focus on digital inclusion within this outcome. Ensuring equal access to essential public services, many of which are increasingly delivered online, is crucial. It is therefore important that people who are unable to access or use digital platforms are not placed at a disadvantage. Councils deliver a wide range of customer-facing services and recognise the importance of ensuring accessibility across both digital and non-digital channels. Additional support councils would need:

- Practical guidance and shared templates for accessible communications, Easy Read materials and alternative formats.
- Funding or regional procurement support for assistive technologies and interpretation services.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

- Support for workforce development to ensure staff are confident and competent in inclusive communication and assisted digital support.

Outcome 4: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council agrees with the commitments under Outcome 4 and notes strong alignment with councils' statutory and operational role in leisure, culture, arts and community facilities. Additional support councils would need:
- Explicit recognition of councils as delivery partners within this outcome.
- Revenue funding to support inclusive programming, concessionary access and targeted outreach to Deaf and disabled residents.
- Support to simplify eligibility processes and reduce administrative barriers to participation in leisure and cultural activities.

Outcome 5: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly supports the emphasis on independent living, housing and life transitions. Local government plays a key enabling role through planning, community development and partnership working. Additional support councils would need:
- Clear alignment between housing, planning and disability policy guidance to support inclusive and adaptable housing design.
- Opportunities to contribute to and shape Inclusive Design guidance to ensure it is practical and deliverable at local level.
- Stronger integration with community planning to ensure local solutions reflect lived experience.

Outcome 6: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly supports Outcome 6 and recognises the importance of cross-sector collaboration. While councils are not health providers, they play a critical preventative and community wellbeing role. Additional support councils would need:
- Clear pathways for collaboration between councils, HSC Trusts and the voluntary sector, particularly around community-based supports.
- Joint training opportunities to ensure consistent disability awareness across public-facing services.

Outcome 7: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly supports the commitments under Outcome 7, particularly the use of social value in procurement and the focus on lifelong learning. Councils are significant local employers and commissioners. Additional support councils would need:
- Practical guidance on using social value clauses to create employment, training and placement opportunities for Deaf and disabled people.
- Support to develop inclusive work experience, apprenticeship and supported employment pathways at local level.
- Access to regional best practice and evaluation evidence to support continuous improvement.

Outcome 8: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly supports Outcome 8 and its focus on early intervention, transitions and inclusive education. Councils play a key role through leisure provision, community development and family support. Additional support councils would need:

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- Strong alignment between education-led reforms and community-based services.
- Funding to support inclusive extracurricular and youth activities.
- Engagement mechanisms that meaningfully include Deaf and disabled children and young people in local decision-making.

Are there any other outcomes you feel should be included?

No.

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Outcome One

Commitments under this outcome will focus on ensuring that Deaf and disabled people do not feel overlooked or ignored when it comes to their rights and legal protections. To fully take part in society as equals, Deaf and disabled people need to know and understand their rights and be able to use the laws that are in place to protect them.

Outcome One Commitments

1. We will establish a Regional Disability Forum to advise on the monitoring and implementation of the Disability Strategy.

2. We will ensure that all new policies are designed with the involvement of Deaf and disabled people.

3. We will work to improve the collection and increase availability of high-quality, reliable and inclusive disability data. Every two years we will publish a Disability Data Compendium setting out disability data held by Executive departments.

4. We will gather information on the level of disability-related public expenditure across all Executive departments.

5. A review and update of existing Disability Legislation in Northern Ireland to include how the UNCRPD can best be incorporated into local legislation here.

6. We will ensure the rights of sign language users are protected.

7. We will promote disability awareness.

8. We will promote the participation of Deaf and disabled people in public life.

9. We will ensure Deaf and disabled people do not lose any rights as a result of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

10. We will build the capacity of voluntary and community organisations working on behalf of Deaf and disabled people through our refreshed sectoral infrastructure support programmes.

11. We will run community led reviews of the needs of women and girls facing additional risk of violence and the barriers to accessing services and make recommendations with the first phase to include deaf and disabled women.

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NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

To what extend to you agree or disagree with the eleven commitments supporting Outcome One of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 1		X			
Commitment 2	X				
Commitment 3	X				
Commitment 4		X			
Commitment 5		X			
Commitment 6		X			
Commitment 7		X			
Commitment 8		X			
Commitment 9		X			
Commitment 10		X			
Commitment 11		X			

Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

Commitment 2: Involving Deaf and disabled people in policy design is critical to ensuring policies are effective and inclusive. Embedding this principle will guarantee that lived experience informs decision-making from the outset, leading to better outcomes and reducing the risk of policies that unintentionally create barriers.

Commitment 3: Publishing a Disability Data Compendium every two years is a positive step. To make this truly effective, the data should be searchable by council area. This would help both central and local government design more targeted policies and services, and ensure decisions reflect the specific needs of local communities.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

No.

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Outcome Two

Commitments under this outcome will focus on removing barriers that Deaf and disabled people can face in relation to physical accessibility. Many public services are now digital; however, a significant number of people still need to communicate by telephone or face to face through attending public buildings. Deaf and disabled people can face barriers to accessing some services which non-disabled people take for granted. These barriers are not a result of a person's disability, but of society's failure to consider and provide for a diverse range of needs. With forward planning and the input of Deaf and disabled users, our built environment, facilities and transport can be made accessible to all.

Outcome Two Commitments

12. We will ensure that inclusive design standards are adopted in all new publicly funded spaces and facilities.

13. We will continue to work with the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Committee and others to continually improve Deaf and disabled people's access to transport in both urban and rural settings.

14. We will continue to operate the Blue Badge scheme to provide access for Deaf and disable people to parking and city and town centres.

15. Future projects on the NICS Estates will comply with the new building regulations provisions for Changing Places Toilets.

16. We will continue to explore options to make the public realm a more welcoming and accessible place for everyone.

17. We will scope the introduction of an accessibility rating system for businesses, similar to the Food Hygiene Rating "Scores on the Doors" system.

18. We will involve Deaf and disabled people in the modernisation of the Courts and Tribunals estate under Vision 2030, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) Modernisation Portfolio.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the seven commitments supporting Outcome Two of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 12		X			
Commitment 13		X			
Commitment 14		X			
Commitment 15		X			
Commitment 16		X			
Commitment 17		X			
Commitment 18		X			

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NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

Commitment 12: Alongside adopting inclusive design standards for new publicly funded spaces, the Council recommends that the Strategy also commits to upgrading existing buildings and public spaces. Dedicated funding will be essential, as many organisations may face financial challenges in retrofitting older infrastructure to meet accessibility standards.

Reinstating the Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Fund would directly support this commitment by enabling councils, community organisations and cultural venues to enhance accessibility in both new and existing facilities.

The Fund previously provided essential capital support to improve physical access, communication access and inclusive design features across arts, culture, heritage and leisure environments. Restoring this funding stream would:
- Help ensure consistent adoption of inclusive design principles across Northern Ireland.
- Enable retrofitting of older public buildings, which is often outside core budgets.
- Reduce accessibility barriers in rural and smaller community settings.
- Strengthen alignment between local delivery partners and regional strategic commitments.
- Its reinstatement would therefore make a tangible contribution to the delivery and impact of Outcome 2.

Commitment 13: This is vital for independence and participation. The collaborative approach demonstrates a strong commitment to tackling accessibility barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for Deaf and disabled people regardless of location.

Commitment 15: Compliance with new building regulations for Changing Places Toilets is essential to ensure that public spaces are truly inclusive. To support successful implementation, this commitment could include ringfenced funding and a clear delivery plan. Dedicated resources would help ensure these facilities are prioritised and consistently provided across the NICS estate, giving confidence to Deaf and disabled people that accessibility remains a core focus.

Commitment 17: The proposed accessibility rating system for businesses is a positive mechanism to encourage engagement and promote change. However, it will be important that businesses are consulted extensively during the development of the scheme, to ensure the rating model is practical, fair and supported by clear guidance. It is also important to consider the potential cost of implementation for businesses, will there be funding and support available. Clarifying this point would ensure the rating system is both fair and achievable.

Commitment 18: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council recommends that all relevant stakeholders are engaged at the earliest possible stage, early engagement will help ensure that accessibility considerations are embedded from the outset and

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

> that the modernisation work fully reflects the needs and lived experiences of deaf and disabled people.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

> **Review of existing infrastructure:** Many older facilities still present barriers for deaf and disabled people, a review would help identify gaps and prioritise improvements such as Changing Places toilets. This proactive approach would ensure accessibility is not limited to new developments but embedded across all public infrastructure.

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Outcome Three

We all use public services, and these are increasingly provided in a digital format. In an inclusive society, everyone, including Deaf and disabled people, can access services in a way that meets their needs. Deaf and disabled people require access to information and communication, facilities and services, on an equal basis to non-disabled people. This includes electronic information and services. Commitments under this outcome will address the needs of Deaf and disabled people relating to electronic information and services.

Outcome Three Commitments

19. We will promote digital inclusion and access to communication and information technologies for Deaf and disabled people of all ages.

20. We will ensure that departmental information and communications are available in easy-to-read formats and alternative accessible formats for Deaf and disabled people who require it.

21. Digital communications will be compliant with Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations to ensure those using assistive technologies are not disadvantaged in any way.

22. We will make it easier for Deaf and disabled people to report crime and access the justice system.

23. We will ensure that Youth Justice Agency buildings and services are accessible for Deaf and disabled children including those who are neurodivergent.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the five commitments supporting Outcome Three of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 19	X				
Commitment 20	X				
Commitment 21		X			
Commitment 22		X			
Commitment 23		X			

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

Commitment 19: While the commitment rightly emphasises promoting digital inclusion and access to communication technologies, there is no specific mention of digital skills training, is this included? Training tailored for deaf and disabled users should be part of this commitment, covering assistive technology tools, confidence building, and ongoing support, to ensure individuals can effectively use digital platforms and services.

Commitment 20: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes this commitment as it is vital for inclusion. Providing information in easy-read and alternative accessible formats offers significant benefits such as improved understanding, equal access and increased engagement and participation from deaf and disabled people.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

No.

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Outcome Four

Commitments under this outcome will address the needs of Deaf and disabled people relating to accessing and participating in culture, leisure activities and sport on an equal basis.

Outcome Four Commitments

24. We will support and promote the careers of Deaf and disabled artists.

25. We will support and promote the access of Deaf and disabled people to arts, culture and heritage sites and activities.

26. We will improve Deaf and disabled people's access to and participation in sport through Active Living – the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland.

27. We will support and promote accessibility through the Heritage, Culture and Creative Programme and its four individual policies - Historic Environment, Museums, Public Libraries and Arts.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the four commitments supporting Outcome Four of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 24	X				
Commitment 25	X				
Commitment 26	X				
Commitment 27	X				

Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

All commitments: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council fully supports the commitments outlined in Outcome 4. These actions will help foster inclusive opportunities for Deaf and disabled artists, enhance accessibility across arts, heritage sites, and libraries, and encourage greater participation in sport through the Active Living Strategy. By embedding accessibility within cultural policies and programmes, these commitments aim to remove barriers and ensure equal opportunities for engagement and enjoyment.

The reinstatement of the Department for Communities' Access and Inclusion Fund would provide vital support in delivering these commitments. Its restoration would:
- Strengthen the delivery of inclusive cultural programmes and events.
- Support capital improvements that make venues genuinely accessible.
- Enable smaller community and voluntary organisations to participate in accessibility initiatives.

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NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

- Enhance partnership delivery across councils, arts bodies and heritage institutions.
- Allow councils to meet regional accessibility expectations more consistently and sustainably.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

The Access & Inclusion programme has been a much-valued support source for arts & leisure organisations in recent years to enhance and promote accessibility – it is so disappointing that funding for this programme has been withdrawn for the past two years. Reinstatement and commitment to this funding stream is greatly welcomed.

Funding support for all arts organisations is crucial in delivering participation on an equal basis. If this funding is only available for 'key' arts organisation and/or organisations who specialise in disability services, then this is not promoting equal access across all of the arts.

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Outcome Five

Commitments under this outcome focus on enabling Deaf and disabled people to live independently with choice and control. The Deaf and disabled people who contributed to the development of this Strategy highlighted the need for independent living to be prioritised.

Outcome Five Commitments

28. We will improve the availability of suitable housing for Deaf and disabled people and their families.

29. We will ensure that Deaf and disabled people have sufficient income and are treated with dignity and respect in applying for benefits.

30. We will align with and complement the implementation of the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy.

31. We will take steps to place Deaf and disabled people who are currently institutionalised at the heart of all planning and decision making about their future.

32. We will take steps to protect Deaf and disabled people from violence, exploitation and abuse.

33. We will support Deaf and disabled people to negotiate life transitions with dignity and choice.

34. We will produce guidance on 'Inclusive Design' to encourage an improvement in housing standards for people with cognitive and sensory impairments.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the seven commitments supporting Outcome Five of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 28		X			
Commitment 29		X			
Commitment 30		X			
Commitment 31	X				
Commitment 32		X			
Commitment 33		X			
Commitment 34		X			

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Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

Commitment 31: This commitment is important because it supports disabled people's right to be treated as equal citizens and as individuals with their own rights and identities. Decisions about someone's future should respect their autonomy, their ability to make choices, and their right to give informed consent. Independent advocacy is essential to ensure people are genuinely listened to, and support fair and inclusive decision-making.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

No.

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Outcome Six

Deaf and disabled people have the same right to access health and social care services as everyone else. This outcome will focus on the provision of health and social care to promote the independence of Deaf and disabled service users.

Outcome Six Commitments

35. We will take action to ensure that short breaks are provided to a level that is reflective of assessed needs, while also expanding a range of supports for people with disabilities and their families/carers.

36. We will involve Deaf and disabled people in health and social care policy and service design provision via the Department of Health's Regional Health and Social Care Disability Forum. x

37. We will introduce a digital care record for every patient in Northern Ireland.

38. We will ensure ongoing training in Disability and Equality issues for public-facing Health and Social Care staff and review the training on a continual basis.

39. We will clarify pathways to clinical support for Deaf and disabled people.

40. We will review the direct payments process to ensure people are able to access appropriate day care services.

41. We will explore greater use of social prescribing to improve the physical and mental health of Deaf and disabled people.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the seven commitments supporting Outcome Six of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 35		X			
Commitment 36		X			
Commitment 37		X			
Commitment 38	X				
Commitment 39		X			
Commitment 40		X			
Commitment 41		X			

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Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

Commitment 38: A key challenge is that disability and equality training is often inconsistent across organisations; to be effective, training must be embedded into staff induction and ongoing professional development, be regularly refreshed, and be supported by clear leadership commitment. Without this, there is a risk that training becomes a one-off or tick-box exercise rather than leading to a genuine cultural change.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

No

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Outcome Seven

Commitments under this outcome will focus on ensuring that Deaf and disabled people have equal rights to employment as non-disabled people. They should experience fair and equal treatment in the workplace, and employers should be aware of the benefits of having a fully inclusive workplace which is reflective of the diversity of society.

Outcome Seven Commitments

42. We will implement a new Disability and Work Strategy in meaningful partnership with Deaf and disabled people and stakeholders.

43. We will ensure opportunities for lifelong learning are maximised.

44. We will support Deaf and disabled children and young people in their skills, education and careers journey.

45. The Civil Service as an employer, will deliver through implementation of its People Strategy 2025-2030 initiatives to support and increase the employment and inclusion of disabled people in its workforce.

46. We will fully implement the Executive's Social Value in Procurement Policy. This approach means that the delivery of social benefits will be considered throughout the procurement cycle, including as part of the scoring process, and we will consider how this may be used to create training and employment opportunities for Deaf and disabled people.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the five commitments supporting Outcome Seven of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 42	X				
Commitment 43	X				
Commitment 44	X				
Commitment 45	X				
Commitment 46	X				

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Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

> **All Commitments**: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council supports the Strategy's goals to ensure every workplace is an inclusive one. The MEA Labour Market Partnership recognises the importance of early intervention and effective pathways from education into employment. Improving access to skills development, careers advice and work experience opportunities will help support long-term participation in the labour market. MEA LMP are delivering personalised support programmes including bespoke delivery via the Work Connections, Start Out 19-24 and the Placement Insights Programmes. The LMP works with employers and young people in special education to develop their skills and provide support for transition pathways after Post 16 education.

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

> No

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Outcome Eight

Commitments under this outcome will provide a focus on the importance of ensuring that Deaf and disabled children and young people have the best start in life. It acknowledges that early interventions can set the scene for the rest of their lives.

Outcome Eight Commitments

47. We will ensure that the rights of Deaf and disabled children and young people will be respected, protected and promoted by all Departments.

48. All departments will engage with Deaf and disabled children and young people in developing policy and legislation which impacts on their lives.

49. We will develop and implement an Executive Childcare Strategy which takes account of the needs of Deaf and disabled children and their families.

50. Monitor the implementation of the Executive's Autism Strategy 2023 – 2028.

51. We will support Deaf and disabled children, young people and their families throughout childhood, in particular at key life transitions, through the Special Educational Needs Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan and its Transitional Support Programme.

52. We will ensure that Deaf and disabled children are visible, included and can participate fully in education through delivery of a new Special Educational Needs Framework.

53. We will provide legal remedy for disability discrimination in education.

54. We will promote and support a pathway to Sign Language Qualifications which may lead to qualification and registration as interpreters, translators and teachers to contribute to the delivery of the intent of the Sign Language Legislation and Sign Language Framework objectives.

55. We will increase the range of residential and community-based short breaks for Deaf and disabled children and young people.

56. We will provide a range of extracurricular activities for Deaf and disabled children and young people.

57. Initial teaching training and continuous professional development for the education workforce will provide them with the skills and knowledge to build supportive learning environments for children and young people with special educational needs and/ or a disability.

58. We will improve access to skills, training, apprenticeships and further and higher education opportunities for disabled people and people with health conditions.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the twelve commitments supporting Outcome Eight of the draft Disability Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commitment 47		X			
Commitment 48	X				
Commitment 49		X			
Commitment 50		X			
Commitment 51	X				
Commitment 52		X			
Commitment 53		X			
Commitment 54		X			
Commitment 55		X			
Commitment 56		X			
Commitment 57	X				
Commitment 58		X			

Do you have any further comments to make on any of the commitments listed? (Please reference the commitment)

Commitment 48: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council strongly welcomes the commitment to involve children and young people directly in policy and legislative development. The Council encourages departments to ensure this engagement is meaningful, accessible and inclusive of children with a wide range of communication needs, including non-verbal young people.

Commitment 51: Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes the commitments under this outcome to provide a focus on the importance of ensuring that deaf and disabled children and young people have the best start in life. It acknowledges that early interventions can set the scene for the rest of their lives.

Commitment 57: MEA LMP is committed to supporting young people with disabilities to reach their full potential delivering initiatives in partnership with local schools including Placement Insights, Start Out (19–24-year-old SEN School Leavers), Activate Your Curiosity STEM project, World of Work Programme and Enterprise Activities. For young people with SEN or disabilities in rural areas, transitions from school to further education/training may be complicated by lack of local provision and transport. The Council would welcome greater commitment to ensuring equality of delivery across rural and urban areas.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

Are there any other commitments you feel should be included under this outcome?

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council would also welcome a stronger focus on lifelong learning and upskilling for deaf and disabled people, recognising that disabilities, health conditions, or life circumstances may cause people to need to re-train or refresh skills later in life.

NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

Equality Impact Assessment

The Department has also included an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) alongside the draft Disability Strategy. The full EQIA is available on the consultation website.

The Equality Impact Assessment is carried out to ensure that the two statutory duties on public authorities carrying out functions relating to Northern Ireland, as contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are met.

The first duty requires public bodies, in carrying out their functions in relation to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between –

- people with different religious beliefs
- people from different racial groups
- people of different ages
- people with different marital status
- people with different sexual orientations
- men and women generally
- people with or without a disability
- people with or without dependants
- people with different political opinions

The second statutory duty requires that in addition and without prejudice to the above duty, the Department should also have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people with different religious beliefs, different political opinions or from different racial groups.

The EQIA on the Executive's draft Disability Strategy has been completed to identify if adverse differential impacts may occur as a result of its implementation.

Are there any data, needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in the EQIA consultation document?

If so, what are they and can you provide details?

No

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Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in the EQIA Consultation document?

If so, what are they?

No.

Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts emerging from implementation of the draft Disability Strategy.

Not applicable.

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Final Comments

Is there anything further you'd like to add or comment on in relation to the draft Disability Strategy?

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council welcomes the Strategy's comprehensive, rights-based approach and is committed to playing a proactive role in its delivery.

To further strengthen accountability and effective implementation, the Council suggests enhancing the clarity of responsibility within the Strategy. In addition to the annual progress reports and planned mid-term review, clearer departmental lead responsibilities for each strategic commitment, supported by measurable and time-bound performance indicators linked directly to actions, would help ensure consistent delivery. Embedding these firmer accountability mechanisms would reduce the risk of implementation gaps and improve transparency over progress.

With appropriate resourcing, clear accountability and meaningful partnership working, councils can be powerful enablers of the Strategy's vision at community level, helping to ensure that Deaf and disabled people experience real, tangible improvements in their daily lives.

To effectively support and deliver the Strategy, the Council believes the following cross-cutting enablers are essential:

Sustainable Funding
Long-term revenue and capital funding aligned to the ten-year lifespan of the Strategy, recognising the cumulative cost of accessibility improvements, workforce development and inclusive service delivery.

Clear Governance and Accountability
Defined roles for councils within governance, monitoring and reporting arrangements, including links to the Regional Disability Forum and Action Plans.

Workforce Development
Regionally supported disability awareness, inclusive leadership and trauma-informed training for council staff and Elected Members.

Co-Production Infrastructure
Practical support to build capacity for co-production at local level, including engagement with Deaf and disabled people who are traditionally underrepresented.

Data and Evaluation Support
Consistent data standards, shared indicators and access to regional analysis to support evidence-based decision-making and reporting.

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NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 Questionnaire

Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the consultation process more generally?

No.

|	
Council/Committee:	Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee
Date:	23rd February 2026
Report Title:	Quarterly Complaints Report - Q3: October - December 2025
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Siobhan Fisher, Assistant Director – Citizen Focus
Approver:	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate and Support Services

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the complaints processed by Council during Q3 of 2025/2026, i.e. between 1 October and 31 December 2025.

2. Background

2.1 The Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy is in place to provide guidance to those making a complaint, comment or compliment.

2.2 In compliance with the policy, Council is required to produce quarterly complaint performance statistics, analysis of the trends and outcomes and lessons learned.

2.3 Council's complaints performance data and reporting compliance have been included as mandatory KPIs within each service area's business plan.

3 Key Issues for Consideration – Q3 2025/2026

3.1 Council received a total of 81 complaints during Q3 2025/2026.

3.2 Chart (a) shows a 72% increase in complaints in Q3 compared with Q2, largely due to bin collection issues caused by adverse weather and ongoing problems with Bryson Recycling.
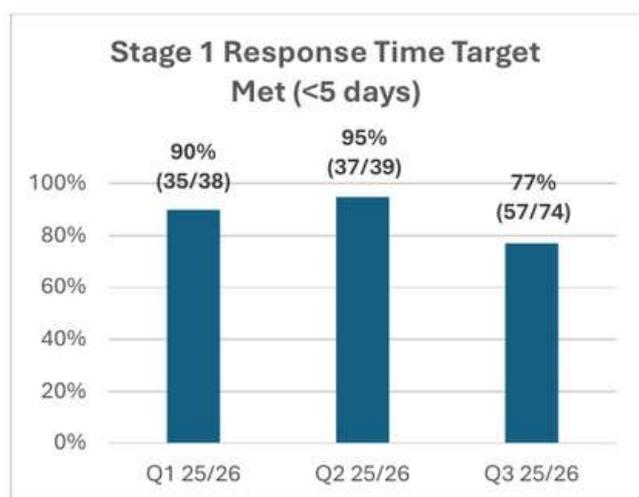
Total Complaints per quarter

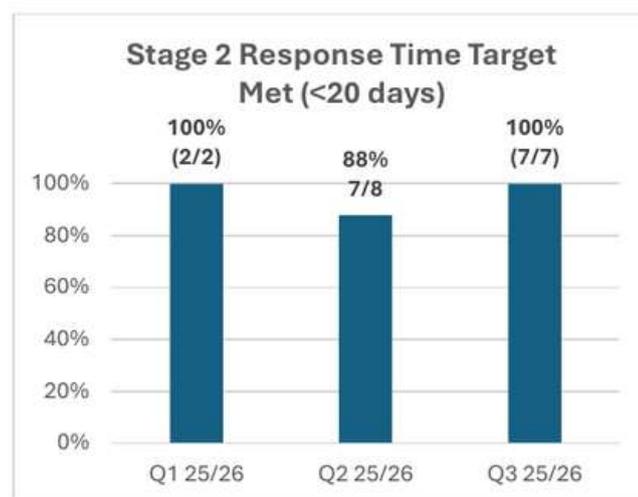| Quarter	Complaints
Q1 25/26	40
Q2 25/26	47
Q3 25/26	81
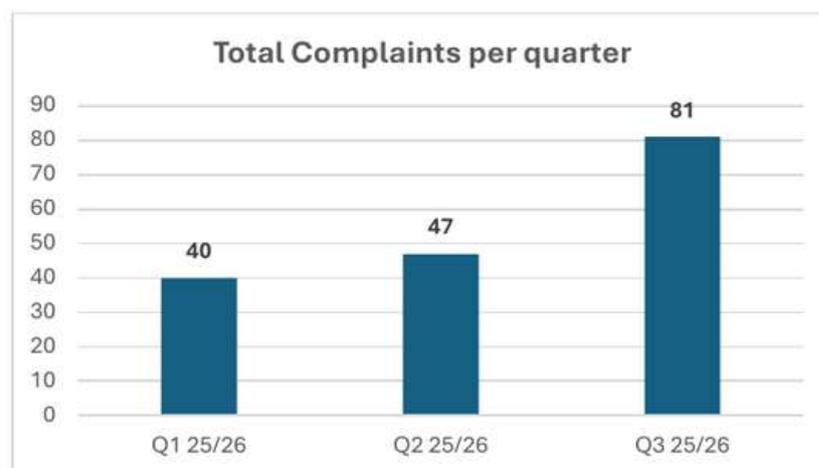
(a)

3.3 Under the reviewed Complaints, Comments & Compliments Policy, officers are encouraged to address complaints directly and resolve them at Stage 1 - Frontline Resolution where possible and appropriate.

3.4 Charts (b) and (c) provide a breakdown of how well Council met the timeframes for Stage 1 (5 working days) and Stage 2 (20 working days).

During Q3 Council met timeframes for Stage 1 complaints at a lower rate when compared to Q2 25/26 (↓18%). Of 74 complaints closed at Stage 1, 57 were responded to 'on time' – a success rate of 77%.

During Q3 Council met timeframes for Stage 2 complaints at a higher rate when compared to Q2 25/26 (↑12%). Of 7 complaints closed at Stage 2, 7 were responded to 'on time' – a success rate of 100%.

Stage 1 Response Time Target Met (<5 days)

Quarter	Rate
Q1 25/26	90% (35/38)
Q2 25/26	95% (37/39)
Q3 25/26	77% (57/74)

(b)

Stage 2 Response Time Target Met (<20 days)

| Quarter	Rate
Q1 25/26	100% (2/2)
Q2 25/26	88% 7/8
Q3 25/26	100% (7/7)

(c)

3.5 Chart (d) shows that during Q3, 9% of complaints were escalated to Stage 2 which is an 8% decrease when compared to Q2 25/26.

3.6 Complaints can be escalated to Stage 2 via 3 channels:

- **By the complainant**: when dissatisfied with Council's Stage 1 response/action.
- **Seriousness of the issue**: when the issue is serious requiring a full investigation.
- **No Stage 1 response**: if a complainant did not receive a response to a Stage 1 complaint.

3.7   Chart (e) highlights the reasons complaints were escalated to Stage 2. During Q3, all stage 2 complaints were escalated by the complainant who remained dissatisfied with Council's Stage 1 response.
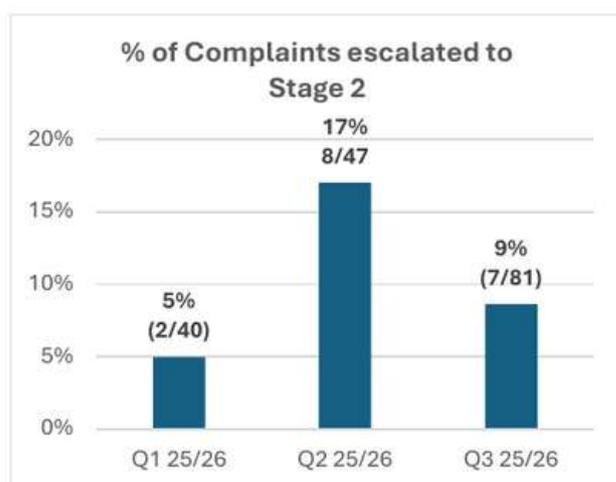
(d)
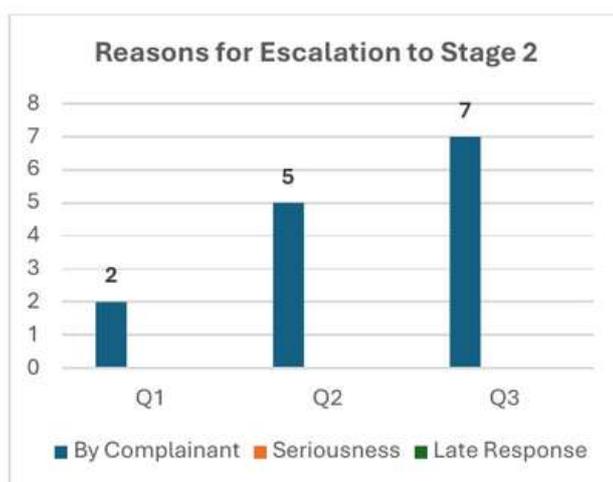
(e)

3.8   Chart (f) provides a breakdown of how well, in total, Council complied with the timeframes for Stage 1 (5 working days) and Stage 2 (20 working days).

3.9   During Q3, Council's response time dropped to 78%, a significant decrease from Q2, reflecting the rise in complaint volumes. Of the 81 complaints received, 17 responses were issued late, primarily due to delays in receiving updates from Bryson Recycling.

3.10   Chart (g) outlines the outcome of the complaints per quarter.
- **Upheld** - investigation determined Council was at fault
- **Partially upheld** – investigation determined Council was partially at fault
- **Not upheld** - an investigation determined Council were not at fault
- **Resolved** - when both the organisation and the customer agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution of the complaint

3.11   During Q3, there was a marked increase in complaints where Council was found at fault compared with Q2 25/26, largely due to ongoing issues with the third-party contract with Bryson Recycling.
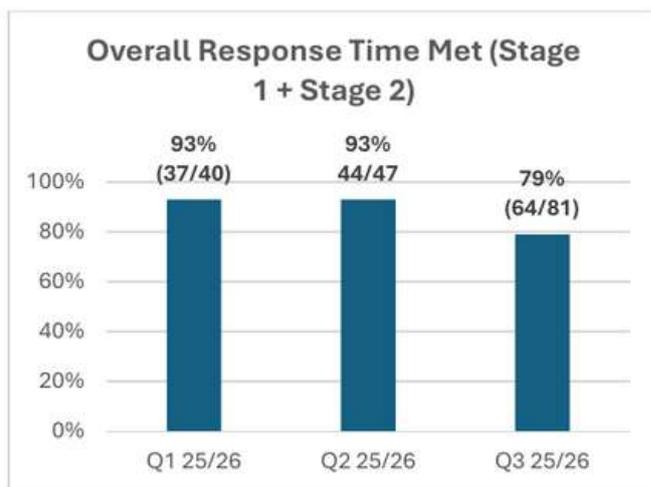
(f)
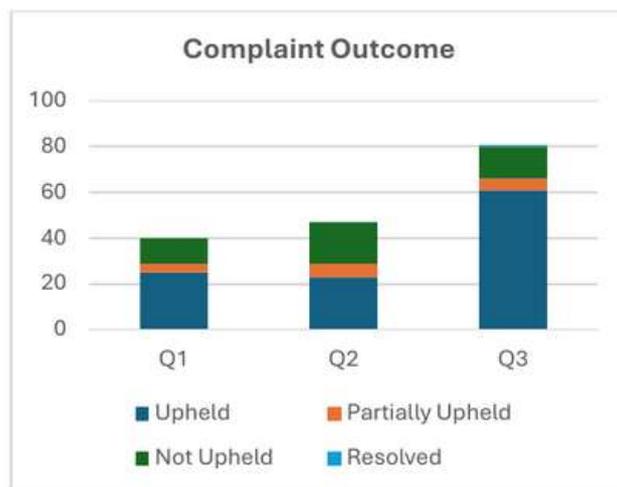
(g)

3.12 One complaint was under investigation by NIPSO during Q3 25/26. This complaint is ongoing.

3.13 Chart (h) provides the number of complaints received by the various service areas during Quarter Q3 25/26. Of a total of 53 service areas, 9 received complaints.

3.14 The service areas that received the highest number of complaints during Q3 25/26 are Waste, Environmental Health, Amphitheatre and Seven Towers Leisure Centre. Waste related complaints account for 68 of the total number of complaints received (81).

3.15 It is typical that frontline services receive the most complaints due to their much higher rate of interactive service delivery.
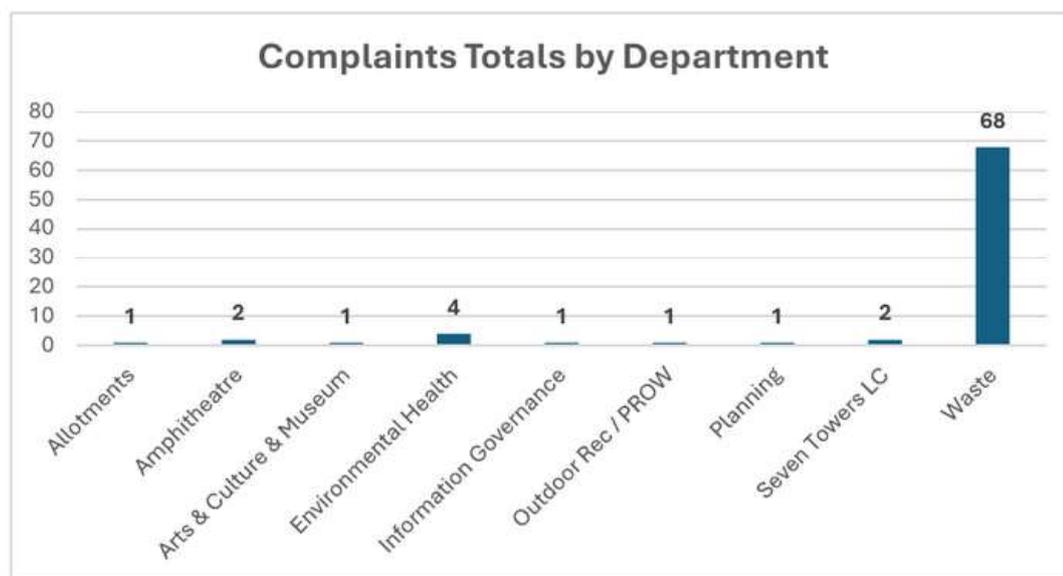
(h)

3.16 Chart (i) illustrates the breakdown of complaint outcomes for each of the service areas with the highest volume of recorded complaints for Q3 25/26.

Complaint outcomes top 4 Service Areas
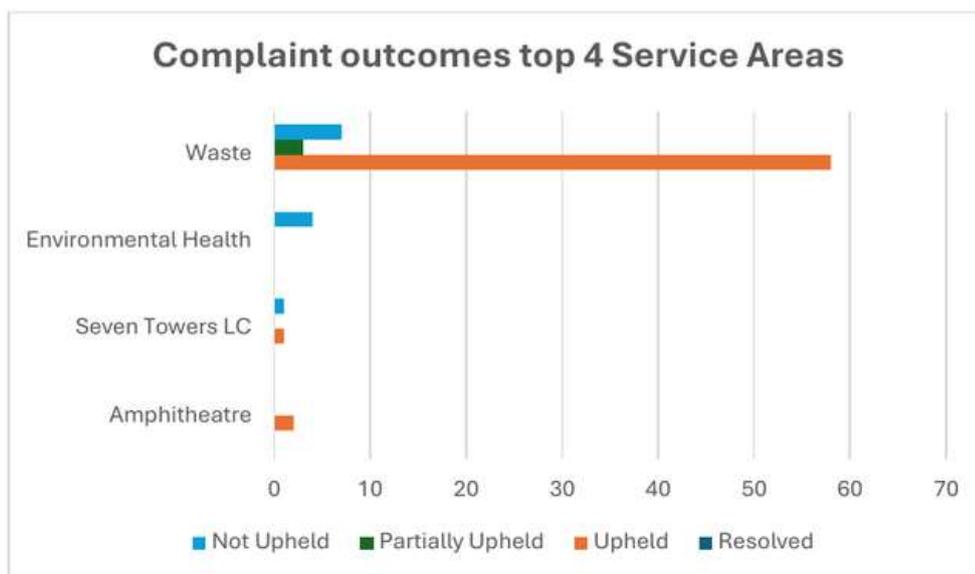
(i)

3.17 Table 1 provides a breakdown of the types of issues reported for Q3 and any lessons learned.

Table 1

	Service Area	Complaints	Issues
1.	Waste Services	68 (84%)	Ongoing issues with Bryson Recycling accounted for 55 (approx. 81%) of all complaints this quarter. Fifteen of the sixteen late responses were also due to delayed updates from the contractor. This continues to be addressed through the contract management process.
2	Environmental Health	4 (5%)	Complaints were general in nature. No trends identified.
3.	Amphitheatre	2 (2%)	1 complaint regarding customers not pre showering prior to using spa and 1 complaint regarding a parent eating nuts in Ludo soft play **Lessons learned/improvement measures** Spa etiquette has been created for customers to sign up to prior to using new spa area.
4.	Seven Towers Leisure Centre	2 (2%)	1 complaint from an elected member about general cleanliness of Changing Village area. This was addressed as part of normal cleaning program. 1 complaint with regards to closing the centre due to severe storm warning.

3.19 During Q3, several service areas received compliments. Table 2 provides a summary of those compliments received.

Table 2

Service Area	Compliment
Seven Towers Leisure Centre	7 compliments were recorded. • Staff helpfulness • Temperature of pools • Facilities • Cleanliness
Waste	There were 19 compliments across a range of waste services, including praise for speedy request resolution and delivery of services well within KPI targets. Several residents also commended specific HRC and Waste Helpdesk staff for what they described as exceptional service when using Council services.
Tourism	1 Compliment for the staff who hosted the children's Christmas event at Andrew Jackson Cottage.
Audit & Risk	"Jill has been a great help in assisting with updating the Service Risk Register." (Assistant Director)
Registration	Many verbal compliments on the care and empathy that registration staff display when dealing with customers during death registrations. 2 compliments on the helpfulness of staff and information provided.
Reception - Larne	2 compliments for the helpfulness of staff.

4 General Considerations/Implications

4.1 Responding effectively to complaints is necessary for Council to demonstrate its commitment to continuous improvement in the delivery of its services and facilities.

5 Proposed Way Forward

5.1 The revised policy requires that Council's complaints performance data is reported on a quarterly basis.

5.2 At CRPG meeting on 20th October 25, Annual Complaints Data was approved to be uploaded to Council's corporate website. The data contained within this report will be used to formulate the annual report.

6   Recommendation or Decision

Members are asked to note the quarterly complaint report for Q3 2025/2026.

7   Appendices / Links
N/A

| Council/Committee: | Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee |
| Date: | 23rd February 2026 |

| Report Title: | Reception Scrutiny Review – Proposed Improvements |
| Publication Status: | Open |

Author:	Siobhan Fisher, Assistant Director – Citizen Focus
	Philip McKinney, Customer Service and Digital Strategy Manager
Approver:	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate and Support Services

1. Purpose

1.1. To update the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee following Audit & Scrutiny Committee approval to implement recommendations contained within the Reception Scrutiny Review and outlined in Appendix 1.

2. Background

2.1. In April 2025, Council commissioned a Scrutiny Review of its Reception function.

2.2. A panel comprising of Elected Members and Council Officer's was established to oversee the process. The panel met on various occasions over a period of several months.

2.3. The Customer Service and Digital Strategy Manager conducted field research on current reception operations, benchmarking against other NI councils and analysing call volumes, walk-ins, and cash-handling data.

2.4. From the field research, a series of recommendations to enhance and improve the reception function were developed. These recommendations were subsequently approved by SMT on 10 December 2025 and approved by the Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 27 January 2026.

2.5. It is the role of the Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee to oversee progress and monitor implementation of the recommendations. A report outlining progress against the recommendations in each of the completed scrutiny reviews will be brought forward to this Committee bi-annually.

3. **Progress to date on recommendations within the Reception Scrutiny Review**

3.1 Options on the 0300-call menu have been changed. A new option has been included for dog licence purchases and renewals. This has significantly reduced call volume to the Animal Welfare hunt group.

3.2 To place greater emphasis on improving call handling performance, call handling data is now being provided to departmental managers. Performance management in this area has quickly resulted in significantly improved call-answer rates across many service areas. This data will continue to be provided to services with high call volumes and support and challenge will be exercised to ensure improvement where necessary.

3.3 Jabber telephone software has been installed and configured on all user laptops for colleagues who are members of hunt groups. This enables them to answer incoming calls directly from their laptop while working from home, improving flexibility and ensuring service continuity.

3.4 A simple list outlining all hunt group names, extension numbers, and their general responsibilities has been circulated to all staff. A separate list provides contact details for external agencies that customers frequently contact the Council about. Together, these resources support the Council's aim of ensuring calls are directed to the correct place on the first attempt.

3.5 A consistent approach to financial administration has been applied at all three reception areas. This ensures security and consistency of financial management.

3.6 Customer Service training has been scheduled for reception staff in early 2026. This training will ensure a consistent quality service across all areas.

3.7 Posters have been installed at all reception locations to provide both customers and staff with clear information on the standards of behaviour expected. This will be further supported by a new Customer Charter in the coming months.

4. **General Considerations / Implications**

4.1. Financial implications

There will be financial implications associated with progressing the proposed recommendations.

Staff IDs must be purchased.

An additional contract must be set up to allow for collection and lodgment of cash at Braid Museum & Arts Centre.

There will be costs associated with the training requirements identified through the fieldwork.

A new digital platform incorporating a corporate website and case management system will be purchased to provide 24/7 access.

There will be additional costs for providing electronic devices, initially at 1 of the reception locations.

4.2. **Human Resources**
Customer Advisor's will require training / coaching to assist with adoption of new approaches to work and digital platforms.

4.3. **Equality Screening**
Any equality implications will be identified and addressed within the Customer Strategy.

4.4. **Assets**
There is no impact or requirement in respect of Council's assets.

4.5. **Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan**
Supports MEABC's ambition to be customer-focused, accountable, and committed to providing excellent customer service.

This action supports the 'Performance' pillar specifically with the following objective:

"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."

4.6. **Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact**
There is no variance in impact based on rurality nor any tangible environmental impact.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1. That Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee notes the progress to date on implementation of the recommendations contained within the Reception Scrutiny Review.

5.2. That progress updates will be provided to Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee on a bi-annual basis.

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. It is recommended that the Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee note the Reception Scrutiny Review recommendations. A bi-annual report will be brought to Committee to ensure ongoing monitoring and implementation.

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 - Reception Scrutiny Review - Proposed Improvements.docx

Appendix 1 – Proposed improvements for Council reception – Phase 1

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Issue		Recommendation	Improvement	Actions
Call handling	0300 number	Change options on the 0300-call menu. Include Animal Welfare option within Environmental Health. Create new option for dog licence purchase and renewals.	Clarity for customers Reduce calls about dog licencing reaching Animal Welfare.	Create a new option for Dog Licensing and place it before Animal Welfare on the call menu. Remove Animal Welfare from the call menu and advertise AW contact details on website.
	Performance data	Continue to provide data to service managers	Maintain current high levels of call handling performance	Set up monthly reports for each department and distribute to relevant managers. Flag poor performance with managers and address any mitigating factors / issues.
	Hunt groups	Install Jabber on all staff laptops	Ensure calls can be answered when remote working	Set up Jabber software on all hunt group members laptops to allow them to answer calls at home.
		Hunt group lists and service overviews to be provided to reception	Ensure calls are directed to the correct place first time	Compile a simple list displaying all hunt group names, extension numbers and general responsibilities. Include, contact details for other outside agencies that

Appendix 1 – Proposed improvements for Council reception – Phase 1

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				customers contact Council about. Distribute to all staff.
	Warm transfer of calls from reception	Reception to provide handover information to the department receiving the call	Improved service to the customer ensuring they do not have to repeat their query	Implement a procedural change at Council receptions.
	Call script	Provide call answer script for reception	To ensure consistency across the Borough	Agree upon a standard answer script and ensure that all Customer Advisors adhere to it.
	Online channels	Promote online options to reduce call volumes	Additional options for customer services and cost reduction	Linked to below action.
	Website and CRM	Improve access to digital services through a new website and CRM	Improved access to information and online services for customers. A CRM will allow a full overview of each customer to be held by call handling staff.	Implement a new Council website that is accessible, secure, transactional and customer focused. Implement a digital platform / case management system to digitise current manual processes and provide an end-to-end system.
Walk in customers	Security measures	Provide a personal safety lone working device to all members of reception staff	Provides security and reassurance for staff should they require help or assistance.	Order lone worker devices for each customer advisor.

Appendix 1 – Proposed improvements for Council reception – Phase 1

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	On site access to online services	Pilot the placement of an electronic device at one location with a staff member present to support walk in customers to access services online.	Provides additional options for customers to access services.	Place a device in reception area at Braid Arts Centre and encourage customers to use for online processes.
Cash handling	Waste services transactions	Enable Waste Services staff to complete full payment process and customer transaction without the need to transfer calls to reception	Improves customer service and reduces call transfers between departments	Research feasibility of this proposal. Determine whether payment should move to waste or if reception should handle entire process. Implement selected solution to enable single point of contact for this service.
	Online system for dog licencing	Review current system to identify system issues preventing customer use of online portals	Improves customer service if transaction can be completed online	Determine issues relating to Te-Dogs system. Improve operability of system if possible.
	Financial administration duties completed by reception staff	Scope why this approach is in place and consider alternative options	Reducing these duties would enable more focus to be put on the customer at front of house	Analyse financial transactions reception is undertaking for other departments. Seek opportunities to reassign responsibility for this back to departments.
	Cash floats	Identify minimum float required and ensure consistency across all 3 areas	Ensures security and consistency	Implement consistent float value across all 3 areas.

Appendix 1 – Proposed improvements for Council reception – Phase 1

	Cash lodgements	Review processes and identify improvements	Ensures security and consistency	Evaluate existing arrangements with G4S, Securicor, internal lodgement by caretaker and realign with one solution.
	Financial processes	Adopt consistent approach across all 3 areas	Ensures security and consistency	Migrate Larne Market Yard to same finance process as the other two sites.
Front of house improvements	Uniforms	Provide staff uniforms	Presents a professional image	Select suitable staff uniform. Involve customer advisors in this process to gain buy-in.
	Training	Provide a training plan for receptionists	Staff development and improved customer service	Undertake training needs analysis for reception staff.
	Customer Charter	Develop the existing charter to include service standards. Roll out advice and training to all customer facing departments across Council. Publish on Council website and display in prominent public areas.	Provides consistent standards and ensures all parties are aware of expectations	Design a customer service charter to include basic KPI's. Distribute to all Council staff and publish on corporate website.
	Zero tolerance to abuse	Publish information in reception areas to make staff and customers aware of expectations	Provides customers and staff with information on standards expected	Provide and Display posters highlighting Council's policy on abusive behaviour prominently at each location.

Appendix 1 – Proposed improvements for Council reception – Phase 1

	Staff cover	Train staff in the CSS hub to provide cover for reception when required	Always ensures reception cover as required	Provide training on basic reception duties to staff in CSS hub.

Council/Committee:	Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	Update on the development of a Consultation & Engagement Strategy
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Siobhan Fisher, Assistant Director Citizen Focus
Approver:	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate & Support Services

1. Purpose

1.1.   To provide Elected Members with an update on the development of a Consultation & Engagement Strategy for Council.

2. Background

2.1.   Understanding the needs of our communities and residents is essential to sound decision-making and the provision of efficient and effective public services. Consultation and engagement is a tool that can increase our understanding of community needs.

2.2.   Having a clear purpose, through the development of a strategy and toolkit, will establish clear principles to guide Council officers and help ensure a more structured, proportionate and appropriate approach to our consultation.

2.3.   Statutory guidance also requires public authorities to consult widely with local people when reviewing service provision.

2.4.   The restructuring of the Corporate and Support Services Directorate aims to support the establishment of effective consultation and engagement across the organisation. Responsibility sits with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion team, with resources now in place to progress the development and implementation of a Consultation & Engagement Strategy.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1.   The purpose of the strategy will be to promote best practice, encourage cooperation, and to provide advice and guidance on listening to and involving service users, citizens, businesses, visitors and stakeholders to ensure that we carry out consultation and engagement across the organisation in a consistent manner.

Agenda 4.5 / Update on Development of a Consultation Engagement Strategy...

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3.2. This will help ensure that our consultations are timely, meaningful and impactful. This in turn will help to build trust in local democracy, whilst also ensuring Council meets its statutory obligations.

3.3. Officers have started to work on the development of a Consultation & Engagement Strategy. Broadly speaking it will include:

- Purpose and core principles
- Legislative and policy context
- Identifying stakeholders and consultees
- Looking at consultation and engagement methods, including:
  - Online surveys
  - Social media campaigns
  - Digital consultation platform
  - Meetings (both in-person and virtual)
  - Forums
  - Workshops
  - Focus groups
  - Community outreach
  - Strategic reference groups
- Roles and responsibilities of Officers, SMT and Elected Members
- Training and support
- Monitoring, evaluation and review

3.4. In order to address the current disjointed and inconsistent approach to consultation and engagement across Council, consideration should be given to the development of an online digital consultation platform. Officers will investigate as part of this piece of work.

3.5. Officers will also work to develop a toolkit and guidance for when Council is conducting consultations and for the instances where Council is responding as a consultee.

3.6. Officers are working towards the development of a draft strategy by the end of this financial year.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1. This programme of work aligns with the Performance pillar of the Corporate Plan, helping to meet the objectives of:

- "Include stakeholders in our decision-making processes through consultation, communication and engagement, in order to increase satisfaction levels."
- "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."

4.2. There may be financial and resource implications from the outworkings of the strategy that will have to be considered.

4.3. The strategy will be subject to all four screenings, namely Equality, Rural Needs, Data Protection Impact Assessment and Sustainability.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1. Officers will continue to work on the development of a draft strategy and present to Elected Members in due course.

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. Elected Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

7. Appendices / Link

N/A

Mid & East Antrim
Borough Council

Council/ Committee:	Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	Quarterly Information Governance Performance Report Q3 October – December 2025
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Sarah Williams, Assistant Director – Business Support
Approver:	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate and Support Services

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with a quarterly update in respect of Council's information governance.

2. Background

2.1 As a public authority, Council has several statutory duties in respect of information governance.

2.2 Council's strategic approach to information governance is outlined in its Information Governance Framework policy document. The Framework connects all of the information-related disciplines and is structured around the following 8 key pillars of information governance:

- Data Protection
- Information Security
- Risk Management
- Records Management
- Information Sharing
- Access to Information
- Training and Communication
- Governance

2.3 The Council's Information Governance Team, which includes Council's Data Protection Officer, sits within the Corporate and Support Services directorate and drives forward each of the 8 pillars to achieve compliance and best practice.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1 <u>Pillar 1: Data Protection</u>

3.1.1 There is currently a significant piece of work ongoing to complete data protection documentation for all relevant processing activities.

3.1.2 Data Breaches

In Q3 25/26, 1 data breach was reported to the Data Protection Officer. Upon investigation and DPO risk assessment, the matter was not found to meet the ICO threshold to report.

3.2 **Pillar 2: Information Security**

3.2.1 Work is ongoing in this area with collaboration between the Information Governance Team, the IT Team and the Assets & Facilities Management Teams.

3.3 **Pillar 3: Risk Management**

3.3.1 The Information Governance team identifies and mitigates risk on an ongoing basis, as represented on the Corporate Risk Register.

3.3.2 Work is ongoing to address internal audit actions in respect of information governance, which is reported to Elected Members under separate reporting arrangements.

3.4 **Pillar 4: Records Management**

3.4.1 The Information Governance Team are conducting a Council-wide records review in line with the Records Management Policy which will assist with reducing both hard copy and electronic storage requirements and reduce the demand on resources that this creates.

3.4.2 A regional, model approach to retention and disposal is in development. PRONI has now written to SOLACE to commend the regional approach and SOLACE, in turn, has communicated its endorsement to the regional group of information governance officers.

In the meantime, MEABC continues to apply its existing, ratified Retention & Disposal schedule.

As soon as the regional R&D Schedule is in place, the Information Governance Team will action its application within MEABC, including the update of Council's Records Management Policy.

3.4.3 Information Assets Register (IAR) and Record of Processing Activities (RoPA)

A significant piece of work to review the IAR and RoPA is nearing completion with an estimated completion date of the end of February.

3.5 Pillar 5: Information Sharing

3.5.1 As per Section 3.1.1, above, there is currently a significant piece of work ongoing to complete data protection documentation for all relevant processing activities which includes data sharing agreements and data processing agreements.

3.6 Pillar 6: Access to Information

3.6.1 In Q3 between 1st October 2025 and 31st December 2025, there were a total of 162 information requests received and processed.

3.6.2 There were 3 requests for internal reviews (IRs) which are appeals related to previously answered requests for information.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Information by Request Type Quarter 3 2025/2026
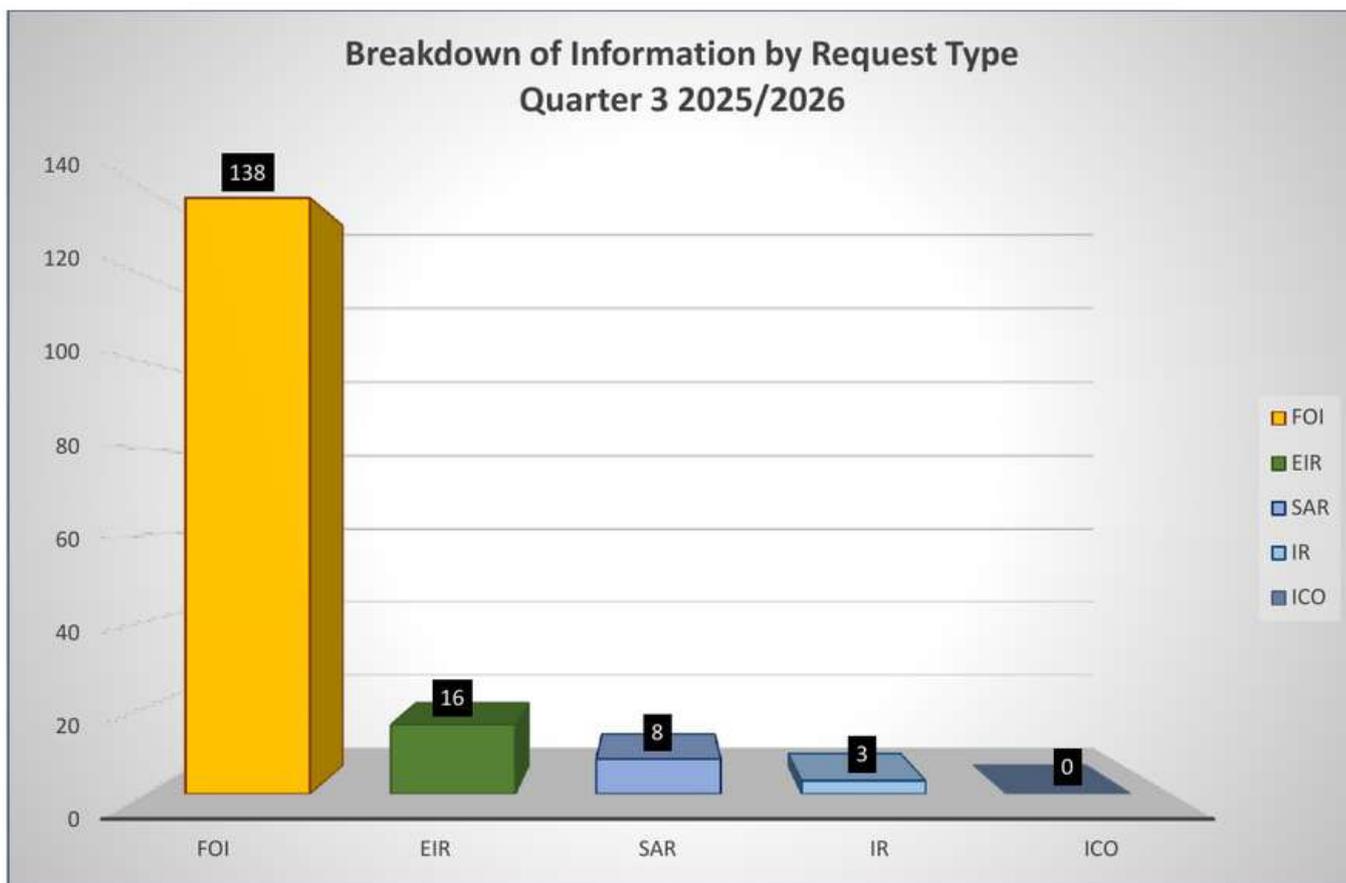
New requests

FOI	EIR	SAR	IR	ICO
138	16	8	3	0

Closed requests

FOI	EIR	SAR	IR	ICO
150	18	6	2	1

Requests in progress

FOI	EIR	SAR	IR	ICO
21	3	4	1	0

Overdue requests

FOI	EIR	SAR	IR	ICO
4	2	1	0	0

Reason for overdue requests

	FOI	EIR	SAR	IR	ICO
Awaiting information from Dept.	4	2	-	-	-
Information being processed	-	-	-	-	-
Awaiting approval from Management to release	-	-	1	-	-
Awaiting clarification from requestor	-	-	-	-	-
Request initially misdirected by requestor	-	-	-	-	-

3.6.3   Of the 516 overall information requests received year to date (25/26), 182 (33%) were completed by the IG Team upon receipt. These were predominantly requests for information not relevant to Council. In these instances, information and guidance was provided to requestors in line with the requirements of Section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3.6.4   The total number of requests received has increased by 23% compared with Quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2024-2025.

3.6.5   The following graph shows the trend in requests received since MEABC's formation in 2015.

Total Annual Requests 1st April 2015 31st December 2025

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
FOI	234	354	490	567	473	401	483	608	645	514	472
EIR	12	46	35	21	26	10	20	32	70	90	50
SAR	5	0	17	27	22	9	34	54	29	26	32
IR	0	0	4	1	1	8	8	27	17	10	7

FOI   EIR   SAR   IR
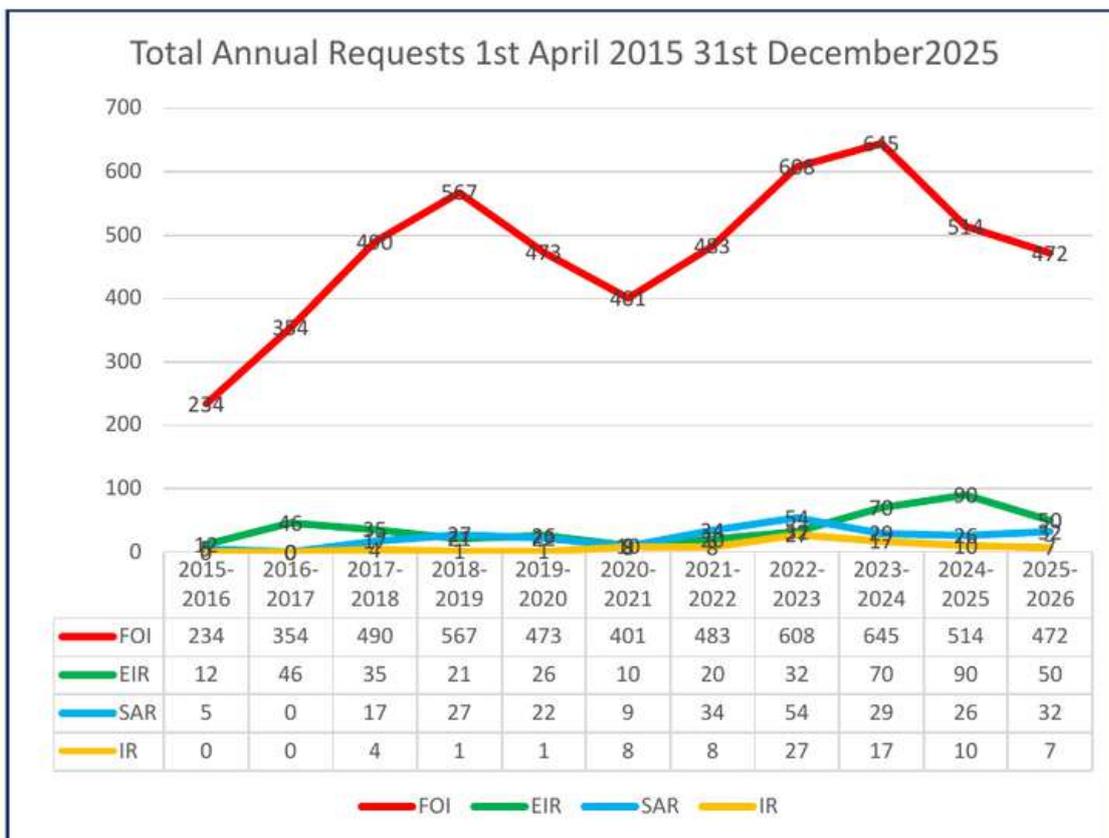
3.7   Pillar 7: Information Governance Training

3.7.1   Internal information governance training sessions continued in Q3. The training schedule is designed to permit maximum attendance with minimal negative impact on officers' day to day work.

3.7.2   Breakdown of courses delivered in Q3:

Access to Information – 38 attendees, 4 sessions
Data Breaches – 53 attendees, 3 sessions
Data Processing and Sharing – 35 attendees, 2 sessions
Introduction to Information Governance – 26 attendees, 4 sessions

3.7.3   Year to date (25/26) figures:

Access to Information – 222 attendees, 16 sessions
Data Breaches – 223 attendees, 13 sessions
Data Processing and Sharing – 149 attendees – 6 sessions
Introduction to Information Governance – 234 attendees. 10 sessions

3.7.4   The IG training pilot scheme was trialled for a one-year period from January-December 2025. A review of the pilot year is underway, including a skills needs assessment to inform the development of new modules. Currently, it is intended to introduce additional modules to cover DPIAs, Records Management and the role

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and responsibilities of an Information Asset Owner, together with an onboarding module that would be delivered during the induction process.

3.7.5 As part of Council's overall approach to improving its information governance function, a focus has been placed on formalising the skill set within the Information Governance Team by pursuing accredited training qualifications.

Each Information Governance Officer has undergone or is scheduled to complete training in their relevant area of expertise. Having sat and passed exams, an Officer has recently qualified as a Records Management Practitioner with another Officer qualifying as a Data Protection Practitioner.

3.8 Pillar 8: Governance

3.8.1 Council's information governance accountability is supported by several governance measures including an Information Governance Steering Group (IGSG) and reporting to the Senior Management Team, this Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee and the Audit & Scrutiny Committee.

3.8.2 The IGSG continues to meet quarterly, chaired by the DPO, and reports to the Senior Management Team through the Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO). The SIRO for MEABC is the Director of Corporate and Support Services.

3.8.3 The Information Governance team, on behalf of the IGSG, has recently initiated a review of the information governance risks associated with Council's use of CCTV and other video/monitoring equipment such as Body Worn Video devises, temporary CCTV and lone worker devices. The findings of this review will inform a draft revised CCTV policy document which will be presented to SMT and the CRPG Committee for their consideration in due course.

3.8.4 Council's suite of information governance policies are currently being reviewed and will soon be presented for approval by SMT and/or CRPG for their consideration and approval.

4 General Considerations/Implications

4.1 Effective information governance is necessary for Council to fulfil its statutory duties and to demonstrate commitment to openness and accountability.

5 Proposed Way Forward

5.1 An extensive programme of work has been commenced to advance Council's information governance practices. The Information Governance Team will continue to implement the actions therein.

6 Recommendation or Decision

6.1 Members are asked to note the Quarterly Information Governance report for Q3 2025/6

7   Appendices / Links

N/A

Mid & East Antrim
Borough Council

Council/ Committee:	Corporate Resources Policy & Governance Committee
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	Inclusion & Wellbeing draft Strategy and Action Plan
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Fiona Surgenor, Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Officer
Approver:	Sarah Williams, Assistant Director, Business Support

1. Purpose

1.1.   The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Elected Members to progress the implementation of an Inclusive Workforce Monitoring exercise and to agree the content of the Strategy and Action Plan to be implemented, budget depending.

2. Background

2.1.   The wellbeing of employees is intrinsically linked to the environment in which they work. A positive and supportive workplace fosters a sense of value, motivation, and overall health.

2.2.   A healthy and inclusive organisational culture benefits not only the workforce but also the wider community. Employees who feel supported are more likely to engage in civic activities, contributing to a more connected and resilient society.

2.3.   For many individuals, the workplace provides a sense of purpose. High-quality work experiences are associated with increased life satisfaction, while poor experiences can negatively impact overall wellbeing. A clear understanding of how each of our roles contribute to broader organisational success enhances engagement and performance.

2.4.   The approach to employee wellbeing and inclusion is multifaceted. The Strategy and Action Plan are constructed around a framework comprising of three key areas – Supportive Workplaces, Connected Staff and Better You. Five areas of wellbeing are then connected to each area. This is illustrated below:

Inclusion & Wellbeing Framework

Financial Wellbeing

Workplace Wellbeing

Physical Wellbeing

Professional Wellbeing

Better you

Supportive workplaces

Connected staff

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

Work Related Wellbeing

- Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy
- Flexible Working options
- Age Friendly Employer
- Working Environment
- Supportive Behaviours (leadership and colleagues)
- Pulse surveys
- Staff recognition scheme
- EDI initiatives
- Peer Support Groups

Professional Wellbeing

- Learning Hub – Targeted e-learning courses
- Career development through Annual Personal and Development Reviews
- Wellbeing workshops
- Management Development Programme

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

- Dignity & Respect at Work
- Up to date diversity data
- Acknowledging wellbeing through multiple lenses .
- EAP– Lena by Inspire
- Mental Health training and toolkit for managements and Mental Health First Aiders
- StayWell Health Hub
- Mental Health Awareness Sessions

Physical Wellbeing

- Cycle2Work
- Discounted Leisure Membership
- EAP - Lena by Inspire
- UK Healthcare Scheme
- Occupational Health
- Workstation assessment
- Health Promotion Events / Health Checks
- MSK Risk Workshops / Physio Workshops
- Fatigue Management Awareness

Financial Wellbeing

- My Money Matters
- NILGOSC Pension Scheme
- Finance awareness workshops
- Free Will Writing – Kennedy Burchill
- Working Well as You Age Guide
- StayWell Hub – advice on financial matters
- Home & Tech Scheme

2.5.   There are many benefits as a result of taking a proactive inclusion and
wellbeing approach, some of which are listed below:

- Enhanced Employee Engagement and Morale
  - Employees who feel supported in their wellbeing are more likely
    to be engaged, motivated, and loyal.
  - Proactive initiatives (e.g. mental health workshops, fitness
    challenges) foster a sense of belonging and purpose

- Improved Productivity and Performance
  - Healthy employees are more focused, creative, and efficient.
  - Reduced presenteeism leads to better quality output

- Reduced Absenteeism and Sick Leave
  - Preventative care and early intervention help reduce time off
    due to illness.
  - Mental health support can lower stress-related absences

- Positive Organisational Culture
  - A wellbeing-focused culture promotes trust, openness, and
    collaboration.
  - It signals that the organisation values its people beyond their
    output

- Talent Attraction and Retention
  - Wellbeing programs are increasingly seen as a key factor in
    choosing employers.
  - Employees are more likely to stay with organisations that invest
    in their holistic wellbeing

- Better Team Dynamics and Communication
  - When people feel well, they communicate more effectively and
    work better in teams.
  - Emotional resilience supports conflict resolution and empathy

- Compliance and Risk Reduction
  - Proactive Wellbeing strategies help meet legal and ethical
    responsibilities.
  - They reduce risks related to burnout, workplace stress, and
    mental health crises.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. **Employee demographics**: More than half of our staff (52%) are aged over 50, and that's something to be celebrated. This group brings valuable knowledge, experience, and insight to everything we do. But we also recognise that with age, health needs can increase—and that can affect things like attendance, energy levels, and stress.

3.2. **Absence**: Like many organisations, we have seen sickness absence rise significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022/23, absences peaked at 17.9 days lost per full-time employee, figures for 2024/25 still sit at 17.8 days per FTE — well above our target of 15 days. This highlights an important challenge: we need to better understand the causes behind these absences and strengthen our support systems to help staff stay healthy, supported, and present at work.

3.3. **Reasons for Absence**: When absence does occur, 82% of cases are long-term, while 18% relate to short-term illnesses. This tells us that many of the issues affecting staff are more serious or ongoing in nature—and require a compassionate, sustained approach. The top three reasons for sickness absence are: Stress/depression/fatigue, Musculoskeletal (back & neck), and Stomach/Liver/Kidney issues.

3.4. **Financial Implications**: Investing in employee wellbeing is a strategic lever for driving organisational performance, reducing risk, and enhancing our reputation as an employer of choice. It directly supports our business objectives by improving service delivery, reducing absence costs, and strengthening workforce resilience.

3.5. Despite our commitment to creating the best possible workplace, certain **organisational challenges** stand in the way. These include:

- Underrepresentation: A lack of comprehensive workforce data on protected characteristics—such as ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation—limits our ability to plan inclusively and identify gaps. Therefore, the use of an Inclusive Workforce Monitoring Form will enable us to define the demographic of our workforce, identify the areas of need and to refine our actions accordingly. The form will be anonymous and will not be stored with any identifying information. The anonymized statistics and data will be used to inform discussions about improving the diversity of our workforce and increasing wellbeing and inclusivity.

- Stigma around mental health: Fear of judgment may discourage employees from disclosing mental health concerns or seeking the support they need. Skills development will help to create an

understanding environment where staff feel psychologically safe to speak with their line manager, or trusted colleague, about their mental health concerns.

- Low disability awareness: Insufficient understanding or training around both visible and hidden disabilities can lead to unmet needs and workplace exclusion. Skills development in this area will help to create an understanding environment where staff feel psychologically safe to speak with their line manager about their visible and hidden disabilities.

- Training gaps: Not all line managers feel confident or well-equipped to address inclusion and well-being issues, such as mental health or disabilities, which can negatively impact on the employee experiencing these issues.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1. Investing in employee inclusion and wellbeing is not only ethically sound but also critical to the delivery of high-quality public services.

4.2. Through the **Achieve Health & Wellbeing Group**, the Council has implemented a diverse range of initiatives aimed at enhancing employee health and wellbeing.

4.3. We acknowledge that a healthy, engaged, and supported workforce underpins organisational success and service excellence.

4.4. While individual health and lifestyle choices remain personal, the Council is committed to fostering a workplace environment that facilitates and encourages healthier decisions.

4.5. The **Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan** builds upon existing resources, including:

- Lena by Inspire – our Employee Assistance Programme
- Access to the UK Healthcare Plan
- Occupational Health Services
- Comprehensive Health and Safety Support
- Flexible Work/Life Balance Policies

4.6. This Strategy represents a forward-looking approach, aiming to establish a lasting culture of wellbeing that extends to employees' families, communities, and the wider Borough.

Mid & East
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4.7.   Given that many Council employees reside locally, the benefits of a robust wellbeing culture align with and support the objectives of the **Putting People First Community Plan**.

4.8.   The Strategy is designed to ensure that wellbeing support is:
- Relevant
- Effective
- Accessible when needed

4.9.   Our aspiration is that this Strategy empowers staff to feel healthy, motivated, and fulfilled in both their professional and personal lives.

5. Recommendation or Decision

5.1.   It is recommended that Elected Members agree to the use of the framework outlined in the Strategy as a means of delivery.

5.2.   It is recommended that Elected Members support further development and workforce consultation on the draft Inclusion and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan.

6. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1: Draft Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy
Appendix 2: Draft Inclusion & Wellbeing Action Plan

Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy

2025-2028

Mid & East Antrim
Borough Council

CONTENTS

Introduction

At Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, we believe that investing in the inclusion and wellbeing of our people isn't just the right thing to do—it's essential to delivering excellent public services. When our employees feel mentally, emotionally, physically and professionally well, they're better equipped to thrive at work and beyond.

Through our Achieve Health & Wellbeing Group, we've championed a wide range of wellbeing initiatives that support our employee's health over the past few years. We recognise that a healthy, engaged and supported workforce is the foundation of everything we do.

While health and lifestyle choices are ultimately personal, the Council is committed to creating a workplace that makes healthy choices easier—whether that's by promoting wellbeing, offering guidance, or providing support when challenges arise.

Our Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy builds on the resources already in place, including Lena by Inspire (our Employee Assistance Programme), access to the UK Healthcare Plan, Occupational Health services, comprehensive health and safety support, and flexible work/life balance policies. But this Plan goes further - aiming to build a legacy of knowledge, support and healthy habits that ripple out from our staff to their families, communities and the wider Borough.

With many of our employees living locally, the impact of a strong wellbeing culture extends far beyond the office. It supports the ambitions of our Putting People First Community Plan and helps us make Good Health & Wellbeing a reality across Mid and East Antrim.

This new Strategy is our next step forward. It's about making sure the support we offer is meaningful, effective and there when you need it—whether it's helping you feel your best at work or supporting your wellbeing in everyday life.

Because at the end of the day, we're all more than our jobs. We're parents, carers, volunteers, creatives, adventurers—and we all deserve to feel healthy, happy and motivated. Our hope is that this Strategy helps you do just that.

Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive

What do we mean by inclusion and wellbeing?

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion in a workplace environment refers to creating a culture where **everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute**, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. It goes beyond simply having diverse people in the room—it's about making sure **everyone has a voice and feels they belong**.

What is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing is closely linked with good health.

Good health is more than just the absence of illness. It's a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing that enables individuals to live full, active lives. It means having the energy and resilience to carry out everyday tasks, enjoy meaningful relationships, and take part in work, family and community life. Good health empowers people to reach their full potential and live with purpose.

Wellbeing is all about how we feel in ourselves—physically, mentally and emotionally. It's the personal sense of being healthy, happy, comfortable and content with life. When we talk about *mental wellbeing*, we're referring to our emotional health, how we think and feel, and how we cope with life's ups and downs.

Good mental wellbeing means feeling confident, being able to connect with others, bounce back from challenges, and make the most of our potential. It's also about working creatively and productively, forming positive relationships, and contributing to our community.

Why Inclusion & Wellbeing in the Workplace Matters

When employees feel well, valued and supported, everyone benefits. A culture of inclusion and wellbeing can lead to:

- Happier, healthier staff
- Increased motivation and higher morale
- Strong staff retention and lower turnover
- Fewer absences due to sickness
- Positive working relationships between employees and managers

How do we create a culture of inclusion and wellbeing?

An inclusive and happy workplace doesn't just happen—it's shaped by how we work, support one another, and care for our environment. It can be defined as:

- A workplace that actively recognises and manages health risks
- A working environment designed with people's physical and mental needs in mind
- A culture that encourages and supports healthy lifestyle choices and fosters respect and empowerment amongst staff
- A place where both employees and employers take shared responsibility for individual and team wellbeing and inclusion

Bringing the Plan to Life: Everyone Has a Role to Play

By implementing this Employee Health & Wellbeing Plan, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council aims to build a healthier, more resilient, and engaged workforce—one that is well-equipped to deliver on the Council's key priorities outlined in:

- Putting People First Community Plan
- MEA Corporate Plan 2024–2028
- Departmental Business Plans

Continuing delivery of high-quality, value-for-money services.

Achieving this ambition requires a shared commitment from every level of the organisation. We all have a part to play in creating a culture where wellbeing is supported, encouraged and embedded in daily working life.

In the first instance, all Council employees have a part to play in terms of their individual health and wellbeing and everyone should take positive steps towards looking after themselves.

Employees
Employees are responsible for:

- Engaging with their managers to work together to enhance wellbeing across their team and department.
- Taking actions to support their own wellbeing, including accessing support through MEABC's Employee Assistance Programme, and other wellbeing resources as appropriate.
- Reporting wellbeing issues to their manager as early as possible.
- Taking part in training and development opportunities.

- Contacting support services when required.
- Being aware of the MEABC's policies and procedures on wellbeing.
- Identifying early when they, or a colleague, are beginning to experience excessive pressure that may lead to work related stress and raise this with their line manager or HR so they can help in resolving this.
- Working with their manager or HR department in tackling the issue, for example, identifying solutions they think may help.
- Supporting and getting involved in organisational initiatives.
- Being supportive of colleagues experiencing wellbeing issues.
- Working with their line manager or HR department in identifying solutions to help them return to work effectively after taking any extended sick leave.
- Updating Outlook diaries to show annual leave and working hours or when they are having protected time, where applicable.
- Setting ground rules for themselves to ensure they are only working their set hours.

Line Managers

Managers play a vital frontline role. They will:

- Supporting their own wellbeing and providing an example to others, seeking support as required.
- Engaging with employees to promote and enhance their team's health and wellbeing (including the areas of respect and empowerment) and including these in training plans where appropriate.
- Effective recruitment, induction, onboarding, development and training.
- Supporting employees through a changing and challenging climate – enhancing coping capacity and developing a more flexible/agile work environment in line with the new ways of working.
- Empowering employees and giving them appropriate autonomy.
- Monitoring and recognising work stress or exclusion amongst employees and offering necessary support/control measures.
- Creating a culture in which issues that arise are quickly identified and solutions considered against an individual's needs
- Monitoring workload in relation to inclusion, health and wellbeing
- Organising regular team meetings to discuss upcoming challenges/opportunities, workplans and workload.
- Implementing effective return to work programmes following employees' illness/absence from work.
- Regularly discussing wellbeing in 121's with employees.
- Using the resources available through the EAP service, Lena by Inspire, and through StayWell to support their own wellbeing.

Directors/Assistant Directors

Each Director is responsible for:

- Providing leadership and promoting collaboration on issues that have an impact on the health, wellbeing and inclusion of their employees.
- Creating a safe and healthy environment for all employees at work.
- Engaging and communicating with employees and raising awareness about inclusion and wellbeing.
- Understanding any inclusion and wellbeing issues, what causes them and how they can be prevented and managed.
- Being aware of the organisation's policies and procedures and including wellbeing in training plans where appropriate.
- Supporting and getting involved in organisational inclusion and wellbeing initiatives.
- Understanding their role in preventing and managing inclusion and wellbeing issues, and that work pressures can sometimes cause or exacerbate these.
- Identifying inclusion and wellbeing issues in team members early and working with the individual and human resources to resolve the problem.
- Being aware and supportive of factors affecting staff.
- Being visible and available across the organisation.
- Being a role model in supporting their own and others' wellbeing, seeking support where required.
- Being committed to good communication to create a culture that promotes inclusion and wellbeing and establishes a positive work/life balance.
- Recognising employee skills and contributions.
- Ensuring effective workforce planning.
- Supporting managers to manage, prioritise workloads and ensuring appropriate distribution of work across teams.

Human Resources

Human Resources are responsible for:

- Understanding what inclusion and wellbeing issues are, what causes them and how they can be prevented and managed.
- Developing suitable policies and procedures to support inclusion and wellbeing.
- Engaging and communicating with staff and raising awareness of wellbeing support.
- Working collaboratively with employee representative groups to implement solutions to issues identified by staff.
- Monitoring and reviewing solutions.

- Supporting line managers in preventing and managing individuals experiencing inclusion and wellbeing issues, including helping them return to work.
- Working with others providing services to support individuals, for example, occupational health services, to identify sources of problems that need action and to manage successful return to work.
- Identifying additional policies and initiatives that may promote and enhance the inclusion and wellbeing of staff.
- Providing development opportunities for employees.

Employee Representative Groups

Employee representative groups are responsible for:

- Understanding what inclusion and wellbeing issues are, what causes them and how they can be prevented and managed.
- Supporting MEABC to tackle the issues and gain commitment for improving inclusion and wellbeing.
- Engaging and communicating with staff on inclusion, health and wellbeing and raising awareness.
- Working with others, including HR and managers, to implement solutions identified by staff.
- Encouraging staff to identify and address sources of wellbeing and inclusion issues and to work with their line manager, representatives or other relevant individuals in doing this.
- Providing support to individuals experiencing inclusion and/or wellbeing issues, helping them talk to their line manager about the problem, and signposting them to suitable services to help them.
- Working with the organisation in identifying additional policies or initiatives that may promote and enhance the inclusion and wellbeing of staff.

What Influences Employee Wellbeing?

Employees' wellbeing is directly shaped by the environment they work in. A positive and supportive workplace plays a vital role in helping individuals feel valued, motivated, and healthy.

When a workplace has a healthy and inclusive culture, it doesn't just help the organization—it has a ripple effect on the wider community too. People who feel happy and supported at work are more likely to get involved in their communities, whether that's through increased recycling, more people voting, or other civic activities. In the end, it helps build a stronger, more connected society.

Key factors that influence the work environment include how work is structured, and if it is fairly distributed across job roles.

A lot of people get their life purpose from the workplace by doing a job they love. Good quality work is also therapeutic – it is possible to track life satisfaction with a good employee experience. The opposite is also true when a bad employee experience increases life dissatisfaction. Therefore, having a sense of purpose and an understanding of how your role contributes to wider success can also positively influence the work outcomes and employee engagement.

A positive work environment can be created through:

- Job security and stability
- Supportive, approachable, and effective leadership
- A healthy work/life balance
- A workplace culture rooted in fairness, respect and equity

This requires strong job and organisational design, inclusive people policies, and leadership that fosters trust, inclusion and wellbeing.

Barriers to a Positive Working Environment

Despite our commitment to creating the best possible workplace, certain organisational challenges may stand in the way. These include:

- **Underrepresentation**: A lack of comprehensive workforce data on protected characteristics—such as ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation—limits our ability to plan inclusively and identify gaps.
- **Recruitment barriers**: Application processes that aren't fully accessible, inconsistent use of reasonable adjustments, and limited outreach to underrepresented groups can prevent diverse talent from joining the organisation.
- **Stigma around mental health**: Fear of judgment may discourage employees from disclosing mental health concerns or seeking the support they need.
- **Low disability awareness**: Insufficient understanding or training around both visible and hidden disabilities can lead to unmet needs and workplace exclusion.
- **Training gaps**: Not all line managers feel confident or well-equipped to address inclusion and wellbeing issues, which can affect how support is delivered.
- **Inconsistent flexible working**: Uneven application of flexible work policies can disadvantage employees with caring responsibilities, older staff, and those with disabilities.

Building on Strong Foundations

At Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, we've already made real progress when it comes to supporting the inclusion and wellbeing of our staff. We have several policies, procedures, and strategies—some focused directly on wellbeing, others supporting it more broadly—that help create a positive working environment.

We're proud of the strong culture of support we're building. Across the organisation, we have:

- **Trusted Colleagues** offering support for anyone experiencing domestic abuse
- **Confidential contacts (Dignity & Respect Advisors)**
- **Autism Champions**
- **Mental Health First Aiders**

These roles are filled by volunteers who give their time and energy to help others, which speaks volumes about the values we share as a team.

You can find a full list of our current wellbeing-related policies and health initiatives in Appendix 1 (as of June 2025).

Our Ageing Workforce

More than **half of our staff (52%) are aged over 50**, and that's something to be celebrated. This group brings valuable knowledge, experience, and insight to everything we do.

But we also recognise that with age, health needs can increase—and that can affect things like attendance, energy levels, and stress. That's why it's more important than ever to invest in activities and support that promote both mental and physical wellbeing as part of daily working life.

MEABC Staff: Age Groupings

Age Group (years)	No of Staff
15-21	
22-29	18
30-34	38
35-39	51
40-44	78
45-49	100
50-54	103
55-59	112
60-64	73
65-100	26
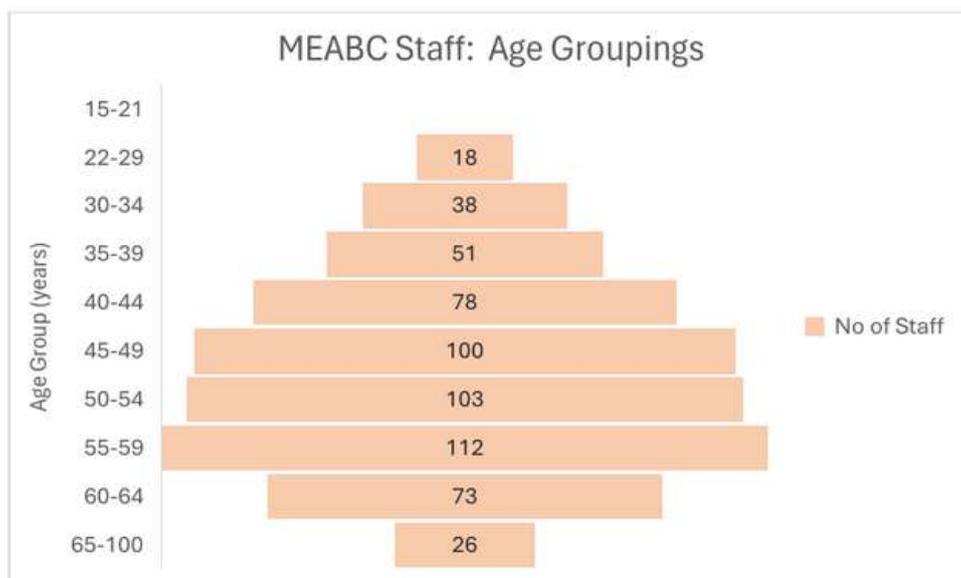
Sickness absence and its impact on business

What We're Seeing Right Now in Northern Ireland

Overall sickness absence rate in Northern Ireland is:
- 2.7% in 2022, the highest since 2015[1].
- Equivalent to 6.0 days lost per worker.
- 5.1 million days lost across NI in 2022, up from 3.8 million in 2019[2].

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS):

According to the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA)'s Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024/25 report:
- Average days lost to sickness per staff year: 13.4 days
- 6.1% of working days lost to sickness absence.
- Direct salary cost of absence: £48.8 million, or 3.8% of the NICS pay bill[1].
- Around 13.7% of staff has at least one long-term absence spell.

Local Government:

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) 2025 Local Government Auditor's Report summarises the latest full year available:
- Average sickness absences in councils (2023/24): 17.1 days per employee.
- This figure is substantially higher than in central government (ie NICS)
- The Auditor noted that local government has consistently higher sickness absence levels than central government.

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[1] Northern Ireland Sickness Absence Rate Reaches Eight Year High
[2] Sickness Absence: Lessons for Northern Ireland businesses and managers

Main Reasons for Sickness Absence in local government

Mental Health Conditions
- This is consistently the leading cause of long-term absence across councils.
- Includes stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout.
- Often linked to workload pressures, lack of support, and organisational change.

Musculoskeletal Disorders
- Common among staff in physically demanding roles (e.g. waste collection, maintenance).
- Includes back pain, joint issues, and repetitive strain injuries.

Minor Illnesses
- Short-term absences due to colds, flu, stomach bugs, etc.
- These are frequent but typically low-impact individually.

Respiratory Conditions
- Includes seasonal illnesses and lingering effects of COVID-19.
- Often cited as a top reason for short-term absence.

Workplace Stress
- Not always classified under mental health, but a major contributor.
- Can stem from poor management practices, lack of autonomy, or interpersonal conflict.

Ageing Workforce
- Councils report higher absence rates among older employees, who tend to have longer recovery periods when ill.
- This demographic trend is especially pronounced in local government.

Implications for Council: Rising absence levels

Like many organisations, we've seen sickness absence rise significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022/23, absence peaked at **17.9 days lost per full-time employee**. While there's been a slight improvement, figures for 2023/24 still sit at **17.0 days per FTE**—well above our target of **15 days**.

This highlights an important challenge: we need to better understand the causes behind these absences and strengthen our support systems to help staff stay healthy, supported, and present at work.

Understanding Our Absence Trends

While sickness absence continues to be a challenge, it's worth recognising that in **2023–24, over 64% of Council employees had no recorded absence at all**—a positive reflection of the commitment and resilience shown by our staff.

However, when absence does occur, **82% of cases are long-term**, while **18% relate to short-term illnesses**. This tells us that many of the issues affecting staff are more serious or ongoing in nature—and require a compassionate, sustained approach.

Top Reasons for Sickness Absence (2023–24)

Reason	Days Lost	% of Total	Number of Employees
Stress, depression, fatigue	3,218½ days	31.4%	65 employees
Musculoskeletal (back & neck)	1,780 days	17.4%	40 employees
Stomach, liver, kidney issues	987 days	9.6%	60 employees

These figures show that **mental health and musculoskeletal issues** make up the majority of days lost—and both are areas where early intervention, workplace support and prevention efforts can make a real difference.

Our Approach to Supporting Attendance

We understand that periods of ill health are sometimes unavoidable. When employees are unwell, our focus is on **support, understanding, and early intervention**. The Council is committed to treating every absence case with fairness and care, ensuring that no one feels left behind.

Our **Attendance Policy** aims to:

- Support a positive, healthy workplace culture
- Encourage high attendance while being sensitive to individual circumstances
- Balance service delivery needs with employee wellbeing

As part of this, we will target **communication and wellbeing initiatives**— including those within the Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Action Plan— towards teams or service areas where absence levels are high, or where we can see clear opportunities to address root causes.

We're all working together to build a culture where **everyone feels supported to stay well and thrive at work.**

Employee Assistance Programmes

Employee Wellbeing Support at Council – Current Usage

Lena by Inspire (April 2024 – March 2025)

- **11 staff** accessed the Lena Hub.
- **24 referrals** were made to the counselling service.
- **128 counselling sessions** were delivered.

StayWell Hub (August 2024 – July 2025)

- **393 visits** recorded.
- **1,593 individual pages** viewed.
- Data is only available from **August 2024 onwards**.

Counselling demand is steady, showing staff are seeking professional support.

Usage of Lena Hub remains very low, indicating a need to boost awareness and position it as a preventative tool.

StayWell Hub is being accessed more frequently, but continued promotion is needed to increase engagement and ensure staff know about its resources.

The Council's investment in **Lena by Inspire and StayWell Hub** provides a strong foundation, but to maximise impact:

a) Awareness must be improved.
b) Resources should be positioned as **day-to-day wellbeing tools**, not just crisis intervention.
c) Line managers must play a stronger role in signposting.

We already know there are some **societal challenges** affecting our workforce. These include:

- **Rising living costs** – Financial pressure is making it harder for many people to stay mentally well.

- **Addiction and housing concerns** – These are becoming more noticeable and need thoughtful support.

- **Struggles accessing healthcare** – Long NHS waiting lists and difficulty getting GP appointments are causing added stress.

- **Relationship pressures** – Issues at home or at work can take a serious toll on emotional wellbeing.

These are all real-life pressures our colleagues are dealing with—and they reinforce why ongoing support and flexibility are so essential.

Knowing When to Reach Out

There will always be times when internal support alone isn't enough—whether it's due to the complexity of an issue or the need for long-term, specialist help. That's where effective **signposting and external partnerships** come in.

By pointing people in the right direction and working closely with trusted organisations, we can make sure every staff member has access to the right support at the right time.

Recognising the Value of Each Other

Peer-led Staff Recognition Award #MEAmazing

A peer-led MEA Staff Recognition Award will be developed to celebrate and learn from positive contributions made by staff across all services.

The aims of this programme are to:

- Encourage a culture of positivity, appreciation, and continuous improvement.
- Highlight examples of excellent service and collaborative working.
- Support staff wellbeing and morale through peer recognition.
- Share good practice and promote learning across teams.

Any employee or team within Mid and East Antrim Borough Council can be recognised—regardless of role, grade or department. Individuals can be recognised for:

- Going above and beyond their role
- Demonstrating Council values in action
- Supporting a colleague or the community
- Introducing an innovative or helpful idea
- Delivering excellent internal or external service

The nominee will receive a MEA Recognition Certificate, a pin badge and a message of thanks. The nominator will receive a confirmation email and each quarter, a selection of stories will be shared in the Staff Bulletin or Intranet Spotlights, showcasing great practice.

Consideration of a Staff Recognition Scheme for Reliability & Contribution Award

Recognizing staff for full attendance can positively reinforce reliability, morale, and wellbeing when handled thoughtfully. However, it's important to balance recognition with inclusivity—avoiding the perception of penalizing those who miss work for valid reasons (e.g., disability, medical leave, family responsibilities).

Considerations for Inclusion & Fairness

- Pro-rata recognition for part-time staff or returners from long-term leave
- Alternative categories, e.g.:
    o "Most Improved Attendance"
    o "Resilience Award"
    o "Commitment to Role"
- Wellbeing-sensitive framing:
    o Emphasize *reliability* and *contribution* rather than mere physical presence.

Where We're Headed: Our Vision for Inclusion & Wellbeing

We're aiming to be a workplace where people feel **energised, supported, and proud to belong**—a Council that not only delivers excellent services but also genuinely cares for the wellbeing of its people.

Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing's Vision

To create a healthy, supportive, and inclusive workplace that enables every employee to thrive.

Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing's Ambition

We want to create a culture where:

- Every employee feels **trusted, valued and recognised** for their contribution

- **Motivation and engagement** are high across all teams

- People have opportunities to **learn, grow and develop** their careers

- **Absence is low** because wellbeing is supported at every level

- Staff choose to **stay and thrive** at MEABC because they feel respected and included

- Everyone is **clear about their role** and how it connects to the Council's bigger picture

- Line managers are seen as **sources of support, guidance and encouragement**

- People are empowered to **look after their physical and mental health**

How We're Getting There: Our Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy

This Strategy builds on the great work we've already done—strengthening existing policies and initiatives while introducing new, practical actions that create a more **joined-up and consistent approach** to wellbeing across the Council.

It's built around three key pillars of Wellbeing:

The five key elements of wellbeing, illustrated in the graphic above, form the substance of the Inclusion and Wellbeing Strategy for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. These areas have been identified through benchmarking against best practice across a range of organisations and provide a robust framework for the Council's action plan. Each element plays a vital role in supporting a healthy, engaged, and resilient workforce:

- **Workplace Wellbeing**: Focuses on creating a positive and supportive work environment where employees feel valued, safe, and empowered. This includes fostering good relationships, promoting work-life balance, and ensuring fair treatment—all of which contribute to job satisfaction and productivity.

- **Professional Wellbeing**: Encourages continuous learning, career development, and recognition of achievements. By investing in staff growth and progression, the Council supports individual aspirations while strengthening organisational capability.

- **Mental & Emotional Wellbeing**: Addresses the psychological and emotional health of employees. Promoting mental wellbeing through awareness, support services, and open conversations helps reduce stigma and ensures staff feel supported during challenging times.

- **Physical Wellbeing**: Supports healthy lifestyle choices and physical health through initiatives such as fitness programmes, health screenings, and ergonomic workspaces. A physically healthy workforce is more energetic, focused, and less prone to illness.

- **Financial Wellbeing**: Recognises the impact of financial stress on overall wellbeing. Providing access to financial education, resources, and support helps employees manage their finances more effectively, reducing anxiety and improving overall quality of life.

Together, these five elements reflect the Council's commitment to fostering a workplace culture that prioritises inclusion, wellbeing, and the holistic needs of its people - build a workplace where everyone feels they **belong, can contribute, and can thrive.**

Work Related Wellbeing

- Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy
- Flexible Working options
- Age Friendly Employer
- Working Environment
- Supportive Behaviours (leadership and colleagues)
- Pulse surveys
- Staff recognition scheme
- EDI initiatives
- Peer Support Groups

Professional Wellbeing

- Learning Hub – Targeted e-learning courses
- Career development through Annual Personal and Development Reviews
- Wellbeing workshops
- Management Development Programme

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

- Dignity & Respect at Work
- Up to date diversity data
- Acknowledging wellbeing through multiple lenses .
- EAP– Lena by Inspire
- Mental Health training and toolkit for managements and Mental Health First Aiders
- StayWell Health Hub
- Mental Health Awareness Sessions

Physical Wellbeing

- Cycle2Work
- Discounted Leisure Membership
- EAP - Lena by Inspire
- UK Healthcare Scheme
- Occupational Health
- Workstation assessment
- Health Promotion Events / Health Checks
- MSK Risk Workshops / Physio Workshops
- Fatigue Management Awareness

Financial Wellbeing

- My Money Matters
- NILGOSC Pension Scheme
- Finance awareness workshops
- Free Will Writing – Kennedy Burchill
- Working Well as You Age Guide
- StayWell Hub – advice on financial matters
- Home & Tech Scheme

A copy of the Action Plan based on the framework above is attached in Appendix 5.

How We'll Measure Success: Inclusion & Wellbeing in Action

At Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, success in employee health and wellbeing isn't just about ticking boxes—it's about creating real, lasting impact. It means making work feel meaningful, supportive, and empowering for everyone.

Our Key Enablers

We'll make progress by building on the following strengths:

- Clear and consistent messaging and branding

- Open dialogue and continuous feedback

- A collaborative, person-centred approach

- An open, just and learning environment

- Shared values and trauma informed practice

- Clear ways of measuring and monitoring progress

- Access to appropriate infrastructure/resources – people e.g. OH, TU, HR & OD, and champion networks, governance, digital and data focused and physical environment.

Our Values That Underpin It All

At the heart of this Plan are values that shape how we work:

Excellence
To be an exemplar – striving to be the best we can be by efficiently and effectively managing and deploying resources in order to maximise outcomes.

Leadership & Commitment
Through strong leadership we will give direction, provide support and empower everyone to play their role in delivering the vision and strategic priorities for all our people

Service Innovation
We will empower people to express their ideas and harness their creative skills through supporting them to be transformative.

Respect
Establishing a culture of openness, trust & value

A Teamwork Approach
Working together and supporting each other in true partnership to make the vision of Mid and East Antrim a reality

Integrity
To support a spirit which enables honesty, accountability and trust throughout.

Equality & Fairness
To recognise and value diversity and promote opportunity and equal access to services.

Respect – Valuing everyone's differences, experiences, and perspectives. Establishing a culture of openness, trust and value.

Excellence – to be an exemplar – striving to be the best we can be by efficiently and effectively managing and deploying resources in order to maximise outcomes.

A Teamwork Approach – Working together and supporting each other in true partnership. Standing by and supporting one another through challenges, fostering meaningful relationships; and giving time, energy, or resources to support others.

Leadership & Commitment – Through strong leadership we will give direction, provide support and empower everyone to play their role in delivering the vision and strategic priorities for all our people.

Integrity – To support a spirit which enables honesty, accountability and trust throughout the organisation, acting with equity and justice in all decisions. In other words, doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.

Service Innovation – We will empower people to express their ideas and harness their creative skills through supporting them to be transformative.

Equality & Fairness – To recognise and value diversity, promote opportunity and equal access to services, and ensuring everyone feels they belong.

At Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, we encourage all staff to embrace and demonstrate the values that create a positive, inclusive, and supportive workplace.

We will build stronger connections between each other by understanding and sharing in the feelings of others, and, by being kinder to each other, we will help foster a culture of compassion, generosity, and care.

As a Council, we will remain focused on the possibilities of the future, inspiring optimism and resilience amongst staff, and celebrate our achievements support each other, and give space for learning and understanding.

Together, these values shape the kind of workplace we can all be proud of.

Staying Flexible and Responsive

This Plan is designed to grow and evolve. If new concerns, ideas, or opportunities arise—whether through feedback from staff, elected members, or partners such as the Public Health Agency, Lena by Inspire, Staywell, or Business in the Community—we'll update the plan to reflect what matters most to our people and helps to support and improve our wellbeing.

Bringing the Strategy to Life: Implementation, Review & Accountability

Turning our Inclusion and Wellbeing Strategy into action means more than just planning—it's about making it real, visible, and impactful across every part of the organisation.

Who's Responsible?

The Strategy clearly outlines who is responsible for each task. Every department will play a key role in making sure the Strategy is shared widely, and that staff are encouraged—and wherever possible, supported—to take part in wellbeing activities, training and events.

We know it can be more difficult for colleagues in frontline roles to attend sessions. That's why Corporate HR will work hand-in-hand with frontline teams to remove barriers and ensure that wellbeing support is accessible to all—regardless of role, shift, or location.

Tracking Our Progress

We're committed to making sure this Strategy delivers real change. That's why we'll report on progress every six months to the Senior Management Team, checking how we're doing against the targets and timelines set out in the Plan.

To truly understand the difference we're making, we'll measure both the experience of our people and the outcomes of our efforts. These will include a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

How We'll Measure Success – general metrics

Here's how we'll know we're on the right track:

- **Staff Turnover** – Are people staying because they feel supported and valued?

- **Employee Voice** – Do staff feel they have opportunities to discuss personal development and career growth?

- **Recognition & Feedback** – Are employees receiving meaningful feedback and feeling recognised for their contributions?

- **Engagement in Wellbeing** – Who's attending events and training (across both office-based and frontline teams)?

- **Health Check Participation** – How many staff are accessing preventive health support?

- **Absence Trends** – What are the key reasons for absence, and how are we responding?

- **Counselling Demand** – What's the uptake of support services like Lena by Inspire?

A more detailed breakdown of how we will measure our outcomes is contained in the Action Plan attached to this document.

Review Timeline

We'll carry out a formal review of these measures at the end of Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3, to help us track impact over time, celebrate successes, and adjust where needed.

This isn't a 'set and forget' Strategy—it's a living, evolving strategy built around the people who make our organisation what it is.

Appendix 1: List of policies & schemes supporting Health & Wellbeing

List of Policies

- Agile Working Policy and Procedure
- Attendance Policy
- Career Break Policy
- Dignity & Respect at Work Policy and Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Equality of Opportunity in Employment Policy
- Family Leave Policy
- Further & Higher Education Support Scheme Policy
- Flexi Leave Policy
- Grievance Procedure
- Learning & Development Policy
- Menopause Policy
- Pay Protection Policy
- Social Media Policy for Officers
- Special Leave Policy
- Time off in Lieu (TOIL) Policy and Procedures

Health & Wellbeing Support Schemes in Place as at 31 December 2025

Lena by Inspire

Helpline Number: 0800 389 5362

Support Email: support@lenabyinspire.com

UK Healthcare Cash Plan

Sharepoint Link:

https://meacouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/MEALive/SitePages/UK-Healthcare.aspx

Appendix 2: Employee Assistance Programmes

☀Lena
By Inspire

The right support, at the right time.

Lena's digital Support Hub gives you access to a range of online tools and resources tailored to support your individual wellbeing.

Guided self-assessment via 'iHelpr chatbot'

- This is the first step to ensuring you get the right support, the chatbot will guide you through the process and you'll receive recommendations tailored specifically to you.

Self-help courses and digital intervention tools

- Each course topic has been designed to help you identify and review possible factors that are contributing to your areas of challenge, simple steps will then be suggested to resolve these difficulties.

'Five ways to wellbeing' database

- Five actions that can be built into your day that can help maintain and improve your wellbeing. The database will identify a range of activities linked to the five ways of wellbeing.

Mood & sleep tracker

- The tracker allows you to view and reflect upon how you are feeling across the month. Getting a good night's sleep can improve your mood.

Gratitude diary

- As research supports an association between expressing gratitude and an individual's wellbeing, the online gratitude diary allows you to record 3 things you are thankful for on a regular basis.

Self-referral

- Our services have never been easier to access, we now have a self-referral form on the hub. Just fill in your contact information, and a member of our team will be in touch to complete the process.

Your wellbeing, understood.

If you lose or forget your PIN or sign in details, or need technical support please contact:
hubsupport@lenabyinspire.com

Lena (by Inspire) is an operating name of Carecall (NI) Limited, a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (N1038960) and of EAP Consultants Limited, a company registered in Ireland. Reg No 372660.

Getting started on the hub.

Step One:

Visit lenasupporthub.com and select 'Sign Up' from the menu.

Sign Up

Step Two:

When prompted, enter the unique registration PIN for your organisation.

Your unique registration PIN for the Hub is:
MEABCHUB

Step Three:

Register using your email address and create your own password for future logins.

Step Four:

Start browsing and building your knowledge on mental health and how to improve your own wellbeing.

UK Healthcare™
Looking after every body

Mid & East
Antrim
Borough Council

HAVE YOU JOINED THE COUNCIL FUNDED HEALTHCARE CASH PLAN SCHEME?

The healthcare cash plan scheme as shown below is fully funded for all eligible employees at the standard level 1 cover. You can add up to 4 dependent children (up to the age of 24) onto the policy completely free of charge and you also have the option to include a partner for a small additional premium.

	Level 1
Employee Premium	FREE
Partner Premium	£5.50 per month

Benefit	Level 1	Benefit	Level 1
Dental: Includes check-ups, fillings, hygienist fees, X-Rays and dentures	£60	**Optical:** Includes eye tests, glasses, contact lenses, repairs and laser eye surgery	£60
Dental Accident: For Dental injury as a direct result of accidental impact	£200	**Health Screening:** Includes well man/woman screening and all screening that helps prevent an illness	£100
Wellbeing: (Physiotherapy, Osteopathy, Reflexology, Acupuncture) Covers treatment by a registered practitioner	£100	**Specialist Consultation:** Covers diagnostic consultations and tests recommended by your GP	£200
Complementary Therapies: (Homeopathy, Reflexology, Aromatherapy, Remedial Massage) Covers treatment by a registered practitioner following GP referral	£100	**Chiropody / Podiatry:** Covers treatment by a chiropodist or podiatrist	£20
MRI, CT and PET SCANS: Covers MRI, CT and PET Scanning	£200	**Confidential Telephone Helplines:** Anytime support for legal issues, medical problems, counselling and ID Theft	---

Discounted Gym / Spa Membership:
Access to special membership rates. (Provided by Incorpore Ltd)

Savings on Holidays, Theme Parks, Retail Discounts and Attractions:
Access to special discounted rates. (Provided by Incorpore Ltd)

The above scheme is covered "Worldwide" with all pre-existing conditions fully included and immediate cover provided.
All benefit amounts are annual sums

SIMPLY GIVE YOUR CONSENT AND "OPT IN" TO JOIN THE SCHEME!!

www.ukhealthcare.org.uk/midandeastantrim

Your Corporate Benefits

UK Healthcare™ — Looking after every body

Mid & East Antrim — Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council – Your Benefits Table	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Employee Monthly Premium	Council Funded	£7.67	£16.67	£25.67	£40.67
Partner Monthly Premium	£5.50	£12.00	£21.00	£30.00	£45.00

Benefit	Payback	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Dental — Includes check-ups, fillings, hygienist fees, X-Rays and dentures	100%	£60	£110	£150	£200	£275
Dental Accidents — For dental injury as a direct result of accidental impact	100%	£200	£400	£600	£800	£1,000
Optical — Includes eye tests, glasses, contact lenses, repairs and laser eye surgery	100%	£60	£110	£150	£200	£275
Health Screening — Includes well man/woman screening and all screening that helps prevent an illness	100%	£100	£130	£150	£200	£300
Specialist Consultation — Covers diagnostic consultations and tests recommended by your GP	100%	£200	£250	£300	£350	£400
MRI, CT and PET Scans — Covers MRI, CT and Pet Scanning	100%	£200	£250	£300	£350	£400
Wellbeing (Physiotherapy/Osteopathy/Chiropractic/Acupuncture) — Covers treatment by a registered practitioner	100%	£100	£150	£200	£250	£300
Complementary Therapies (Homeopathy/Reflexology/Aromatherapy/Remedial Massage) — Covers treatment by a registered practitioner following GP referral	100%	£100	£150	£200	£250	£300
Chiropody — Covers treatment by a chiropodist or podiatrist	100%	£20	£50	£100	£150	£200
Hospital In-Patient — A nightly allowance for any NHS or private hospital admission	Up to 28 nts	£10	£15	£20	£30	£50
Day Case — A daily allowance for day case admissions	Up to 10 vsts	£10	£15	£20	£30	£50
Hospital Parental Stay — A nightly allowance for one parent accompanying a child covered by the policy	Up to 28 nts	£10	£15	£20	£30	£50
Prescriptions — The number of standard prescription items that can be claimed		1	2	3	4	5
Discounted Gym / Spa Membership — Services provided by Incorpore Ltd		Access to special membership rates				
Savings on holidays, theme parks, retail discounts and attractions — Services provided by Incorpore Ltd		Access to special discounted rates				
Confidential Counselling Helplines — Helpline services provided by Health Assured Limited		Anytime support for legal issues, medical problems, counselling and ID theft				
Worldwide Cover	Up to 28 days	Cash plan benefits extend to trips abroad				

Immediate cover provided. Pre-existing conditions included. Benefit levels are annual sums.
Dependent children up to age 24 are covered free.

Stay ♥ Well

https://staywell.meabc.well360.info
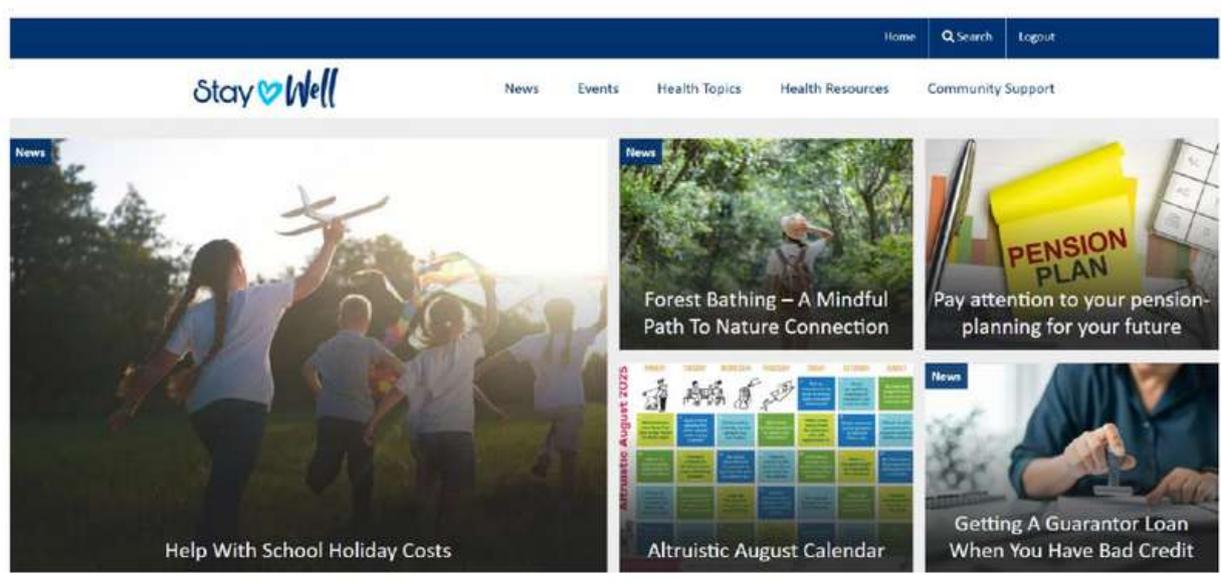
Council's StayWell hub provides a large number of health and wellbeing related resources such as news articles, top tips, apps and tools, signposting to local support organisations.

The areas of support offered include the following;

Appendix 3: Staff Recognition Scheme (1)
DRAFT

Reliability and Contribution Awards

Purpose

To recognise and celebrate staff who demonstrate commitment, reliability, and positive contribution to the Council through excellent attendance—while ensuring fairness, inclusivity, and wellbeing.

Award Categories

Category	Description	Eligibility Criteria
1. 100% Attendance Award	Recognises staff who have achieved full attendance over the past 12 months (excluding annual leave, training, special leave)	Full-time and part-time staff who have not recorded sickness absence or unauthorised leave
2. Reliable Contributor Award	Acknowledges consistent attendance and positive contribution even if time off was taken for valid reasons (e.g. hospital appointment, bereavement, disability-related leave)	Line manager nomination + team endorsement
3. Most Improved Attendance	Recognises staff who have demonstrated significant improvement in attendance over the year	Evidence of positive attendance trend; HR review
4. Team Attendance Champions	Celebrates teams with the strongest overall attendance and peer support culture	Based on HR data and team nomination

Recognition Methods

Type	Examples
Tangible Rewards	£25 gift voucher / local experience / wellbeing hamper
Experiential Rewards	Early finish Friday / additional half-day leave / lunch with senior leaders

Public Recognition	Name featured in staff newsletter / intranet / displayed on office digital screen
Formal Presentation	Quarterly or annual recognition at a staff forum or team meeting
Certificate	Printed or digital "Council Commitment & Reliability" certificate AND digital badge to use on email or staff profile

Inclusion and Fairness Safeguards

- No one penalised for disability-related or maternity/paternity leave

- Equity for part-time staff through adjusted criteria

- Wellbeing framing: celebrating positive contribution over "presenteeism"

- Optional opt-in: staff can choose to be considered for recognition

Timing

Frequency	Recognition Period
Quarterly	Informal team recognition
Annually	Formal Council-wide celebration (e.g. at year-end staff event)

Review and Feedback

- Annual review by HR & Inclusion Team

- Feedback invited from awardees, line managers, and union reps

- Adjusted to reflect changing workforce needs and wellbeing goals

Appendix 4: Staff Recognition Scheme (2)

DRAFT

MEA Staff Recognition Scheme Procedure:

Recognising Excellence Across Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

1. Purpose

The MEA Recognition Award has been developed to celebrate and learn from positive contributions made by staff across all services. Whether it's exceptional teamwork, outstanding service delivery, or a colleague going the extra mile, this scheme allows employees to recognise and thank one another in a simple and meaningful way.

2. Aims

- Encourage a culture of positivity, appreciation, and continuous improvement.

- Highlight examples of excellent service and collaborative working.

- Support staff wellbeing and morale through peer recognition.

- Share good practice and promote learning across teams.

3. Who Can Be Recognised?

Any employee or team within Mid and East Antrim Borough Council can be recognised—regardless of role, grade or department. Individuals can be recognised for:

- Going above and beyond their role

- Demonstrating Council values in action

- Supporting a colleague or the community

- Introducing an innovative or helpful idea

- Delivering excellent internal or external service

4. Who Can Submit a Nomination?

All Council staff are encouraged to submit nominations. Nominations can be made by:

- Peers and colleagues
- Line managers and supervisors
- Service users (where appropriate)

5. How to Nominate

Nominations should be submitted through the online **MEA Recognition Nomination Form**, available on the Council's intranet. The form asks for:

- Name(s) of the individual or team being recognised
- Service/department
- Description of the action or behaviour being recognised
- Why it made a difference or demonstrated excellence
- (Optional) Your name and contact details

Paper copies of the form are also available for teams without easy access to digital systems.

6. What Happens Next?

- The nominee will receive a **MEA Recognition Certificate** and a message of thanks.
- The nominator will receive a confirmation email.
- Each quarter, a selection of stories will be shared in the **Staff Bulletin** or **Intranet Spotlights**, showcasing great practice.
- Recognised staff may be invited to local recognition events

7. Confidentiality and Consent

Nominees will be notified and given the option to opt-out of public recognition (e.g. intranet articles or bulletins). Nominations can be submitted anonymously if preferred.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

Corporate HR will oversee the award scheme and analyse trends and feedback to ensure continuous improvement. Themes such as teamwork, innovation, or customer service excellence may inform future training, engagement, or wellbeing campaigns.

9. Contact

For more information or support with submitting a nomination, please contact:

Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Officer
E: fiona.surgenor@midandeastantrim.gov.uk
Tel: 07880 432 458

10. MEA Recognition Nomination Form

Appendix 5: Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Action Plan 2025 - 2028

Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing 3-year Action Plan

2025-2028

Mid & East Antrim
Borough Council

Introduction

It's easy to fall into the trap of doing wellbeing on an ad hoc basis—running the occasional wellness event or offering perks like leisure centre memberships or sharing free seminars. While these things can be helpful, the reality is that employers have limited control over whether people actually use them. As the saying goes, *you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.*

What Council *can* influence, though, is the work environment itself. By shaping a culture that's supportive, inclusive, and engaging, we can create the kind of conditions where wellbeing naturally flourishes. When people feel valued, connected, and empowered in their day-to-day work, the impact on wellbeing is far more meaningful and long-lasting.

Council has developed an Inclusion and Wellbeing Strategy to do just that. The Strategy sets out the context and reasons for focusing on this area and its importance to the success of Council. The Action Plan below provides more detail on how we will achieve this.

Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Vision:

To create a healthy, supportive, and inclusive workplace that enables every employee to thrive.

Supportive Workplaces

Work-Related Wellbeing - Creating Good Work That Boosts Wellbeing

When people feel well, they do well. Our goal is to design work and working conditions that actively support wellbeing and improve productivity. Here's how we'll get there:

Action	What are we going to do?	When we're going to do it	How much will it cost?	How will we measure success?	Who will lead on it?
Launch **internal wellbeing campaign** (MEA & YOU)	Develop and launch a MEABC Inclusion & Wellbeing Strategy Staff engagement in wellbeing conversations / employee bulletin	Q1 2026 Q3-4 2026	£500	# views on Staff Intranet # attending launch events # of focus groups held	HR – development and delivery SMT – approval and oversight Communications Team
Development of **Inclusion & Wellbeing Working Group**	To help guide and develop the Inclusion and Wellbeing package for staff	Commencing 2026	Nil	# attending meetings # of successful projects delivered	HR – Inclusion & Wellbeing

Flexible Working options	Offer flexible working through our Flexible Working Policy and various leave policies to help create a **better work life balance.**	Ongoing	Nil	# flexible working applications accommodated	HR
Age Friendly Employer	Sign up to the **Age Friendly Employer Pledge** to create an age friendly working environment, including career planning.	Q3-4 2025/2026	£500	# policies reviewed # attending workshops # emails circulated to staff re positive aging	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Working Environment	Deliver meaningful training to managers on **how work affects wellbeing**—and how to lead with care	Q1 2026/2027 Q1 2028/2029	£3,000	# line managers trained % satisfied with training	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Supportive Behaviours (leadership and colleagues)	Train managers in **tailored workplace adjustments** and how to support diverse needs.	Q3 2026/2027 Q4 2027/2028	£3,000	# line managers trained % satisfied with training	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Pulse surveys	Monitor and regularly report on working conditions, using **real employee feedback.**	6-monthly pulse survey commencing Q1 2026	£0	# of responses	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Staff recognition scheme	Recognise and reward **empathy,**	Q4 2025	£750	# of staff nominated	HR Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing

	compassion, and inclusive leadership				
EDI initiatives A Diverse Speaker Series is a transformative initiative that brings individuals from diverse backgrounds into the spotlight, allowing them to share their unique experiences, insights, and expertise.	Create work environments that are **respectful, understanding and inclusive**	Q4 2026/2027 Q4Y 2028/2029	£2,000	# of staff attending events % satisfied with increased understanding and awareness	HR Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Peer Support Groups: PSGs are employee-led groups that provide a safe space for underrepresented communities or specialist groups, such as women's wellbeing, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic minorities or men's wellbeing, to connect and share experiences. **Positive Impact:** • Boosts employee engagement and retention.	Take an **employee-led approach** to support, giving people a voice in what works best for them. Establish Wellbeing Champions & Peer Support Groups.	Q1-2 2026	£300 (room hire & hospitality)	# of peer groups established # of wellbeing champions recruited # of meetings per year # of recommended actions produced	HR – establishment and management Assistant Directors – facilitating volunteers/employees to take part.

• Offers leadership opportunities for underrepresented employees. • Encourages collaboration and mentorship across departments.				

Professional Wellbeing - Making Inclusion & Wellbeing Everyone's Business

Wellbeing shouldn't be seen as 'extra'—it should be part of how we lead, manage, and work together every day. We're embedding wellbeing into the DNA of our management culture.

Action	What are we going to do?	When we're going to do it	How much will it cost?	How will we measure success?	Who will lead on it?
Learning Hub (iHASCO / Skillgate)	Targeted **e-learning courses**: Equip all employees with the skills to look after their own wellbeing.	Ongoing	No additional cost	# enrolling on courses # completing training	HR – learning & development

Career development through **Annual Personal and Development Reviews**	Consistent application of Personal Development Reviews with all staff. Collate development requirements and prepare action plans Integrate wellbeing into annual appraisals and team planning	Ongoing	Nil	# reviews undertaken over 12-month period	HR - Learning & Development
Wellbeing workshops	Take a **whole-person approach** to wellbeing – supporting physical, mental, financial and social health. Host workshops quarterly eg Take 5, stress awareness, movement at work, heart health.	Q1-4 2026	£3,000	# attending sessions Qualitative event survey # Uptake of EAP/Health Services	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing HR – Learning & Development Health & Safety
Management Development Programme	Make inclusion and wellbeing a **core skill** for all people managers Coaching & Mentoring Listening Skills Stress Awareness Team Wellbeing				HR – Learning & Development

Connected Staff

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing - Shaping a Workplace Culture That Reflects Everyone

We're committed to building a culture where people can be their **authentic selves at work**—no matter their background, identity or circumstances. Creating a culture of psychological safety, inclusion, care and support.

Action	What are we going to do?	When we're going to do it	How much will it cost?	How will we measure success?	Who will lead on it?
Promote **zero-tolerance policies** for bullying, harassment or discrimination	Review and promote Council's **Dignity and Respect at Work** Policy. Cascade training to all staff. Refresh the **Confidential Contacts** (previously Harassment and Bullying Advisers) within Council	Q1-2 2026	Nil	# of training sessions delivered # of confidential contacts recruited # of staff supported	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing & Learning & Development
Use up-to-date **diversity data** to shape our Plan	Administer an **Inclusive Workforce Monitoring Form** to all staff to provide us with up to	TBA	Nil	# of respondents	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing

with insight and purpose	date data, and to identify key areas of need.				
Understand and address wellbeing through **multiple lenses**	Recognising that our staff live multi-faceted lives with different needs - **Trained Mental Health First Aiders / Trusted Colleagues Scheme / Autism~Neurodiversity Champions**	Ongoing	£4,500	# of training sessions attended # of staff volunteering for roles	HR Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing HR - Learning & Development Community Dept – Autism Friendly Borough
Mental Health training and toolkit for management and Mental Health First Aider employees	We will empower leaders and line managers to make mental health and wellbeing part of everyday business—not just something we talk about when things go wrong – through the provision of a toolkit and training.	Q3 2026/2027	£3,000	# of training sessions completed # of staff attending training sessions	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing, and Learning & Development Wellbeing Champions
Equip all employees with the skills to look after their own wellbeing	**Employee Assistance Programme** – Lena by Inspire / StayWell Health Hub promotion via 121 meeting with line managers.	Ongoing	£16,000 / year	# of visits to website #of staff referred to counselling	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Lena by Inspire Partners StayWell Partners

	Review of services to improve uptake by employees.			# of counselling sessions delivered	
Mental Health Awareness Sessions	Roll out sessions to all staff using Skillgate **e-learning** and issue **signposting information** to staff on a regular basis.	Ongoing	Nil	# of courses completed # of staff attending training / sessions # of emails issued	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing, and Learning & Development Wellbeing Champions NHSCT – Mental Health Team Lena by Inspire
	Deliver in person **Take 5** Training.	Q2-4 2026	£600 room hire & resources		
	Mental Health Awareness Sessions and Drop In Wellbeing Clinics	Q2-4 2027	TBC		
	Specialist therapy for staff dealing with trauma	Q2-4 2027	TBC		
Promote **Lena by Inspire** for advice and support	To enable staff to be better informed and proactive about their own wellbeing	Ongoing	Nil	# of emails issued # of new staff induction sessions delivered	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing

Better You

Physical Wellbeing - Improving how we feel, function and perform.

Physical wellbeing is important in the workplace—and in life—because it directly affects how people feel, function, and perform. We know that regular movement and good sleep habits improve cognitive function, which supports better decision-making and creativity. For this and many more reasons, we will encourage all staff to focus on their physical wellbeing by:

Action	What are we going to do?	When we're going to do it	How much will it cost?	How will we measure success?	Who will lead on it?
Offering a **Cycle2Work** Scheme to all staff	A salary sacrifice scheme enabling staff to hire purchase a bicycle to use for work and at home.	Q3-4 2025	Cost neutral - Clearing account set up – cost incurred cleared by salary sacrifice over 12 month period.	# of staff registering for the scheme	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Payroll
Council Leisure Membership	Provide discounted Leisure Centre Membership to all staff.	Ongoing	n/a	# of staff registering with LC	Community Dept (Leisure Services)

Provide a **Healthcare Scheme**	All staff are able to access to **UK Healthcare Scheme** from joining Council. Staff have the option to pay additional premiums to enhance the provision, as well as including their family in the cover.	Ongoing	Nil	# of staff registered on scheme # of claims processed by UK Healthcare	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Occupational Health Service	Have an Occupational Health Service in place to support those staff members on sickness absence.	Ongoing	n/a	# of referrals	HR
Workstation Assessments	Audit physical health risks in the workplace and create action plans to address them.	Ongoing	Nil	# of assessments completed	Health & Safety
Health Promotion Events / **Health Checks**	Offering staff the opportunity to visit a mobile health check service annually to check blood pressure, cholesterol, and BMI.	Q3 & 4 2026/2027 Q3 & 4 2027/2028 Q3 & 4 2028/2029	£4500 pa (£500 per day / x3 areas / annually)	# of staff registered for a health check # referrals to further treatment	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Wellbeing Champions
MSK Risk Workshops / Physio Workshops	Partner with appropriate delivery organisation to deliver **MSK risk workshops** and movement breaks with	1 workshop per year over three years	£4,500	# of staff absent due to MSK conditions	HR Health & Safety

	the aim of reducing MSK-related absence				
Fatigue Management Awareness	Deliver **fatigue management** awareness for employees. Causes of fatigue and prevention techniques. **Nutrition and Health Eating** workshop to be included.	1 workshop per year over three years	£4,500	# of staff adopting healthier routines and breaks (pulse survey)	HR Health & Safety Environmental Health – Health & Wellbeing Team

Financial Wellbeing - Improving our quality of life.

Financial wellbeing is important in the workplace because it directly affects employees' mental health, productivity, engagement, and overall quality of life. When people feel financially secure, they're better able to focus, contribute, and thrive at work. We will encourage all staff to improve their financial wellbeing by:

Action	What are we going to do?	When we're going to do it	How much will it cost?	How will we measure success?	Who will lead on it?
My Money Matters	Offers staff financial information, webinars and finance seminars on a range of topics which improves awareness	Ongoing	Nil	# of staff engaging with service	Finance HR

				# of staff aware of service	Wellbeing Champions
Finance awareness workshops	Deliver one workshop quarterly. Deliver Money First Aider Training.	Finance Awareness commencing Q2 2026/2027 delivered bi-annually. Money First Aider training delivered Q1 2026 & Q1 2028	£5,250 £2,000	# of staff attending training # of staff with improved understanding and awareness of issues (pulse survey)	HR in partnership with: NILGOSC My Money Matters Advice NI The Wellbeing Project Money First Aid
NILGOSC Pension Scheme	A generous pension scheme for all employees	Ongoing	Nil	n/a	Payroll / HR
Will Writing	Free Will Writing offered by our partners Kennedy Burchill	Ongoing	£200	# of staff availing of the service # attending drop in service	HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing
Working Well as You Age Guide	Create a "Working Well as You Age" guide for MEABC staff detailing Retirement Planning, Flexible Working, Health & Nutrition, Learning New Skills.	Q3 2027	£2500	# of staff feeling better supported and valued (pulse survey)	HR Learning & Development Environmental Health Wellbeing Team BITC Agewell / MEAAP

| StayWell Hub | Articles and information on financial matters | Ongoing currently to 2027/28 | n/a (Included under Mental and Emotional Wellbeing) | # of staff engaging with service

# of staff aware of service | HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing |
| Offering a **Home & Tech Scheme** to all staff | Salary sacrifice scheme to help employees purchase larger household items via Currys and IKEA. | Q3-4 2025 | Cost neutral - Clearing account set up – cost incurred cleared by salary sacrifice over 12 month period. | # of staff registering for the scheme | HR – Employee Inclusion & Wellbeing Payroll |

INCLUSION & WELLBEING PROJECTED SPEND
2026 - 2027

ACTION	YEAR	2026/2027			
	QTR	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Supportive Workplaces					
Launch internal wellbeing campaign		£500.00	-	-	-
Development of Inclusion & Wellbeing Working Group - 6-monthly online meetings		-	-	-	-
Flexible Working Options		-	-	-	-
Age Friendly Employer		-	-	-	-
Working Environment		£1,500.00	-	-	-
Supportive Behaviours - workplace adjustments		-	-	£1,500.00	-
Pulse Surveys		-	-	-	-
Staff Recognition Scheme		-	-	-	-
EDI Initiatives		-	-	-	£1,000.00
Peer Support Groups		-	£300.00	-	-

Learning Hub (iHASCO / Skillgate)	Existing	-	-	-	-
Career development through Annual Personal Development Reviews		-	-	-	-
Wellbeing Workshops		-	£250.00	-	£250.00
Management Development Programme	Existing	-	-	-	-
Connected Staff					
Promote zero-tolerance policies for bullying, harassment or discrimination		-	-	-	-
Inclusive Workforce Monitoring		-	-	-	-
Understand and address wellbeing through multiple lenses		-	£600.00	-	£600.00
Mental Health Training & Toolkit		-	-	£3,000.00	-
Employee Assistance Programmes (contracted)	Existing	£3,000.00	-	-	-
Mental Health Awareness Sessions		£600.00	-	£600.00	-
Promote EAP services		-	-	-	-
Better You					
Cycle2Work Scheme	Cost Neutral	-	-	-	-
Council Leisure Membership	Existing	-	-	-	-

UK Healthcare Scheme		-	-	-	-
Occupational Health Service	Existing	-	-	-	-
Workstation Assessments	Existing	-	-	-	-
Health Promotion Events / Health Checks		£1,500.00	-	£1,500.00	-
MSK Risk Workshops / Physio Workshops		-	£1,500.00	-	-
Fatigue Management Awareness		-	-	-	£1,500.00
My Money Matters	Existing	-	-	-	-
Finance Awareness Workshops (25 per workshop) & Money First Aider (10 places)		£1,000.00	£750.00	-	£750.00
NILGOSC Pension Scheme	Existing	-	-	-	-
Will Writing		-	-	-	-
Working Well as You Age Guide		-	-	-	-
Staywell Hub		-	-	-	-
Home & Tech Scheme	Cost Neutral	-	-	-	-
QUARTERLY TOTALS		£21,100.00	£3,400.00	£6,600.00	£4,100.00
ANNUAL BUDGETS					£22,200.00

Mid & East
Antrim
Borough Council

Council/Committee:	Corporate Resources Policy & Governance
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	NIE Sub-station – Moat Road, Ballymena
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Cathy Grant – Acting Corporate Solicitor
Approver:	Laureen Donnan, Interim Director of Corporate Services

1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to a renewal Lease and right of way for a new Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited (NIE) Sub-station at Moat Road, Ballymena, measuring 33sqm in accordance with the map attached at Appendix 1.

2. Background

2.1. NIE held a lease with Council for a sub-station at Moat Road, Ballymena, for 42 years from 1974. Accordingly, that lease expired in 2016. NIE approached Officers regarding the renewal of that Lease quite some time ago but have only recently furnished a valuation from Land and Property Services (LPS). Relevant officers have no objection to the proposal and the lands have been valued by LPS at £1500.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. Council has a number of lease agreements with NIE across the Borough. Council typically enters a 99 year lease with standard provisions for sub-stations and NIE pays a premium usually determined by LPS valuers. These sub-stations provide a vital service in the delivery of electricity to residential and commercial premises in the Borough.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1. Financial implications: the lands have been valued independently by LPS on behalf of NIE and meets with Council Officers' approval.

4.2. Human Resources: the matter will be progressed by the Legal Department.

4.3. Equality Screening: N/A

4.4.   Assets: An agreement regularizes the position.

4.5.   Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan: N/A

4.6.   Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact: N/A

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1.   If approved authorization is required for the Mayor and Chief Executive to execute the necessary legal documentation.

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1.   That Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee:
(a) agrees to enter into a new Lease and right of way with NIE for a new sub-station at Moat Road, Ballymena as outlined in Appendix 1; and
(b) authorise the Chief Executive and the Mayor to execute and seal the new Lease and right of way.

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 – Map proposed lease and right of way

NIE NETWORKS EASEMENT AREA

NIE NETWORKS LEASE AREA

Moat Road 'A' S/Stn.
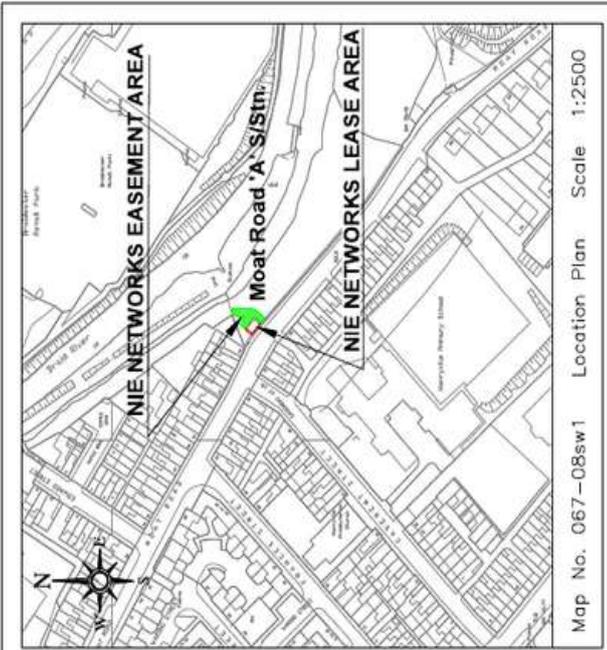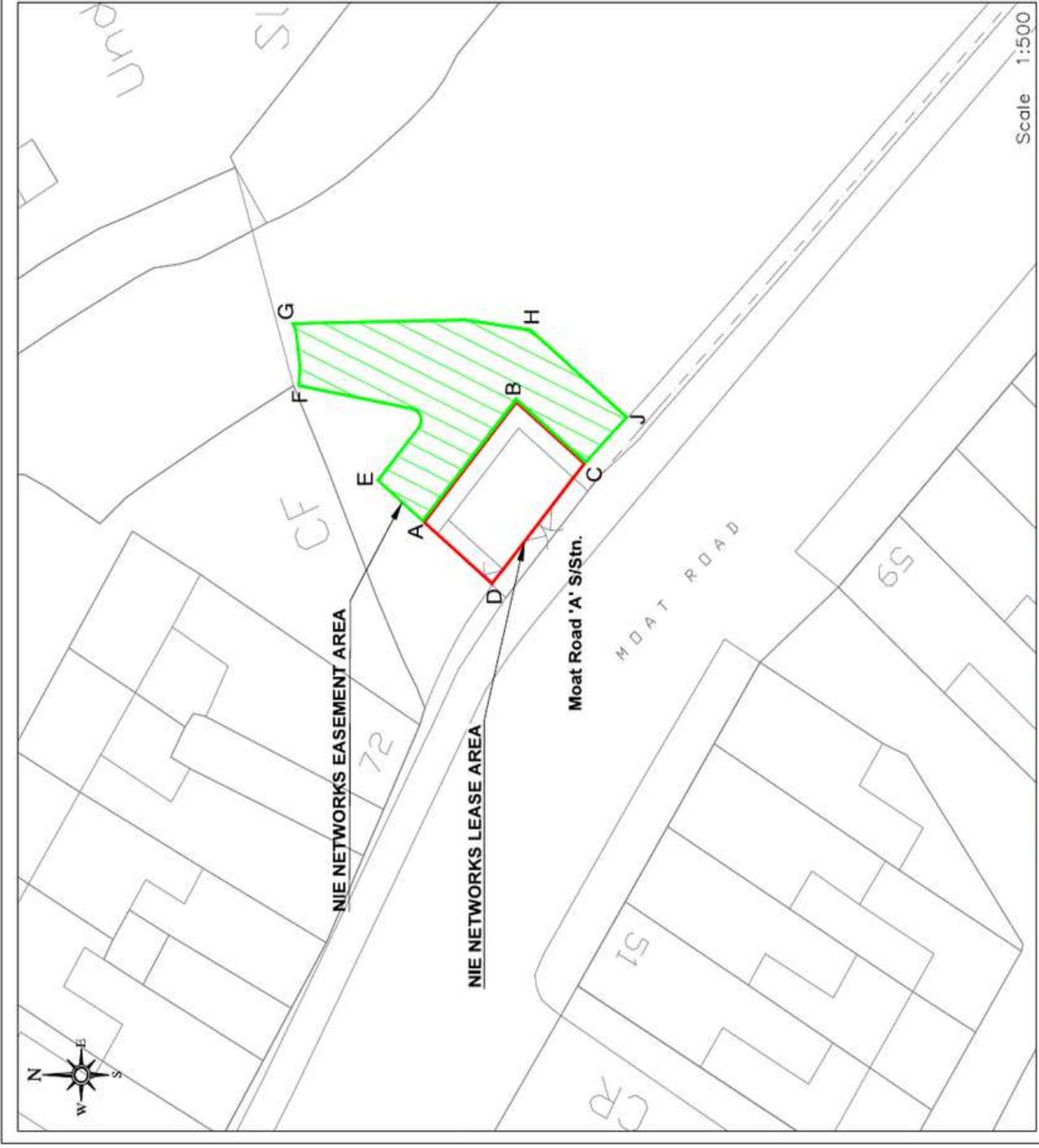
Location Plan   Scale 1:2500

Map No. 067-08sw1

1A. SUB-STATION LEASE AREA A-B-C-D-A
SITE MEASUREMENTS:
A - B = 7.50m.
B - C = 4.50m.
C - D = 7.50m.
A - D = 4.50m.

Lease Area = 33.00m²

EASEMENT NOTES

2A. NIE NETWORKS TO HAVE A CABLE EASEMENT FROM E-F-G-H-J-C-B-A-E.
EASEMENT AREA = 75.84m²

2B. AREA DEFINED BY CABLE EASEMENT PLANTING IS RESTRICTED
TO GRASS OR SHALLOW ROOTED GROUND COVER.

LEGEND
☐ NIE NETWORKS LEASE AREA
▨ NIE NETWORKS CABLE EASEMENT AREA

NIE NETWORKS JOB No.

Title
NIE NETWORKS S/STN. LEASE & EASEMENT
MOAT ROAD 'A' S/STN
MOAT ROAD
BALLYMENA
BT42 2DA

DRAWING OFFICE DARGAN
Surveyed by S.McDowell
Drawn by S.McDowell
Checked by J.Clarke
Approved by —

Map No. I.G. 067-08SW
Scale AS SHOWN
Sheet Size A3
Drawing No. EIL 3328 A

SMD 27.10.2023
INT DATE

A REVISION TO LEASE AND EASEMENT AREA
REV AMENDMENT

Moat Road 'A' S/Stn.

NIE NETWORKS EASEMENT AREA

NIE NETWORKS LEASE AREA

MOAT ROAD

Scale 1:500

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

REPRODUCED FROM THE ORDNANCE SURVEY
MAP WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE DIRECTOR
AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE © CROWN COPYRIGHT

G H F B E A C J D

Council/Committee:	Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	White Ribbon NI – Staff Awareness Programme and Organisational Pledge
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Sonia Treacy, OD & Talent Manager
Approver:	Sarah Williams, Assistant Director – Business Support

1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval on the development of a corporate awareness programme via White Ribbon NI and to sign-up to the White Ribbon NI pledge.

2. Background

2.1. White Ribbon NI was launched in Northern Ireland in November 2021 with a core aim to end violence against women and girls.

2.2. By signing the White Ribbon NI pledge, organisations publicly commit to never committing, condoning, or remaining silent about violence against women and girls. It requires organisations to embed awareness, learning and leadership through staff engagement, internal policies, and day-to-day behaviours, as well as through their influence within local communities.

2.3. Several public sector organisations and councils have already signed the pledge, including Belfast City Council, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Prison Service and Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. Proposed Delivery Model

3.1.1. It is proposed that the Council delivers six sessions in total across the Borough:
- Ballymena: AM and PM sessions
- Carrickfergus: AM and PM sessions
- Larne: AM and PM sessions

3.1.2. This approach would enable participation from approximately 150 staff.

3.1.3. Due to funding support from The Executive Office, three sessions will be provided free of charge. The remaining three sessions would be charged at £500 per session, with a maximum of 25 participants per session.

3.2. Strategic Fit

3.2.1. The programme aligns directly with:
- The Programme for Government commitment to ending violence against women and girls
- The Council's participation in the Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence through Onus, whose focus is on awareness raising and supporting organisations to become Safe Places for those affected by Domestic violence or abuse
- The Performance Improvement Plan commitment on tackling violence against women and girls.
- The Council's role as a significant employer and civic leader within the Borough

3.2.2. It also supports wider organisational objectives relating to wellbeing, dignity and respect at work, and trauma-informed practice

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1. Financial implications - The total cost of delivery would be £1,500, covering three chargeable sessions. No additional costs are anticipated. This represents a modest, one-off investment with significant reputational and preventative value. Funding can be met from existing OD and Learning budgets.

4.2. Human Resources - Delivery will be coordinated through the OD & Learning function. No additional staffing resources are required.

4.3. Equality Screening - The programme supports equality of opportunity and contributes positively to safeguarding and inclusion. Any equality issues will be identified through the Council's usual screening process.

4.4. Assets - There are no asset implications.

4.5. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan - The proposal aligns with the Council's commitment to safe, inclusive and supportive workplaces and its broader leadership role within communities.

4.6.   Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact - No adverse rural or environmental impacts have been identified. Any issues will be identified through the Council's usual screening processes.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1.   Subject to Elected Members approval:

- Provisional delivery dates in February 2026 to be confirmed
- Council venues will be booked in Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne
- A staff communication and invitation to attend will be issued

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1.   Members are asked to:
   (i) Note the update on engagement with White Ribbon NI,
   (ii) Approve the delivery of six staff awareness sessions at a total cost of £1,500, and
   (iii) Approve the Council proceeding to sign the White Ribbon NI organisational pledge

7. Appendices / Links

www.whiteribbon.org.uk/about-us

Mid & East
Antrim
Borough Council

Council/Committee:	Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance Committee
Date:	23 February 2026
Report Title:	Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy 2025–2028 and Year 1 Action Plan
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Sonia Treacy, OD & Talent Manager
Approver:	Sarah Williams, Assistant Director, Business Support

1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this report is to present a final draft of the Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy 2025–2028 and associated Year 1 Action Plan.

2. Background

2.1. Further to the work of the Councillor Development Sub-Committee (CDSC) and the completion and analysis of the Elected Member Training Needs Analysis, a draft Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy was presented to CRPG in January 2026 for feedback and to allow officers to complete the accompanying screening documents.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. **"Recommended" Training Approach** - The CDSC emphasised the importance of ensuring Members are appropriately supported to discharge their roles to a high standard, particularly in areas where organisational and personal risk is greatest.

3.2. While generic training continues to be available through regional and national provision, the Sub-Committee recognised the need for targeted, role-specific development, including for:
- Chairs and Vice-Chairs
- Planning Committee Members
- Audit and Scrutiny Members
- Members undertaking significant representational or regulatory roles

3.3. The CDSC revisited the earlier discussion at CRPG where mandatory training was not supported.

3.4. In response, the Sub-Committee endorsed the introduction of a "recommended training" framework for defined high-risk areas. The

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following areas were identified as appropriate for recommended status, reflecting statutory duties, governance exposure and reputational risk:

- Chairing meetings
- Code of Conduct
- Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation
- Cyber Awareness
- Equality and Good Relations / Section 75
- GDPR and Data Protection
- Planning Committee training
- Health and Safety
- Treasury Management and rate-setting
- Audit and Scrutiny Committee capability
- Fraud Awareness and Anti-Money Laundering

3.5.   This approach was considered to strike the right balance between Member autonomy and organisational assurance.

Annual Training Plan – Year 1

3.6.   The Sub-Committee noted and supported the proposed Year 1 Action Plan, which prioritises:

- Known regional and national provision
- Short, focused development sessions
- Practical support aligned to committee responsibilities

The emphasis was on quality, relevance and accessibility, rather than volume of training.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1.   Financial implications - A dedicated Elected Member's development budget already exists. Delivery will be managed within existing approved budgets and regional provision. No additional funding is sought.

4.2.   Human Resources – Delivery will be coordinated through the OD & Talent function with support from Democratic Services. Existing capacity is sufficient.

4.3.   Equality Screening - An Equality Screening has been completed. The Strategy promotes inclusive access, flexible scheduling, hybrid delivery and alternative formats.

4.4.   Assets - There are no asset implications arising from this Strategy.

4.5.   Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan - The Strategy supports leadership effectiveness, governance assurance and organisational performance, reinforcing delivery of the Corporate Plan.

4.6.   Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact - Hybrid delivery and E-learning, where possible, reduces travel, supports rural accessibility and minimises environmental impact.

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5. Proposed Way Forward

- Elected Members asked for any feedback on the final draft strategy
- The Year 1 Action Plan will be implemented, monitored and evaluated through existing governance arrangements
- Delivery, uptake and impact will be monitored and reviewed annually

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. Elected Members are asked to:

- Note the Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy 2025–2028 and Year 1 Action Plan
- Endorse the strategic approach and recommended training framework

7. Appendices / Links

- Appendix 1 – Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy 2025–2028
- Appendix 2 – Year 1 Action Plan
- Appendix 3 – Screening documents:
  - a) DPIA
  - b) Equality Screening
  - c) Rural Needs
  - d) Sustainability Screening

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ELECTED MEMBERS LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN 2025–2028
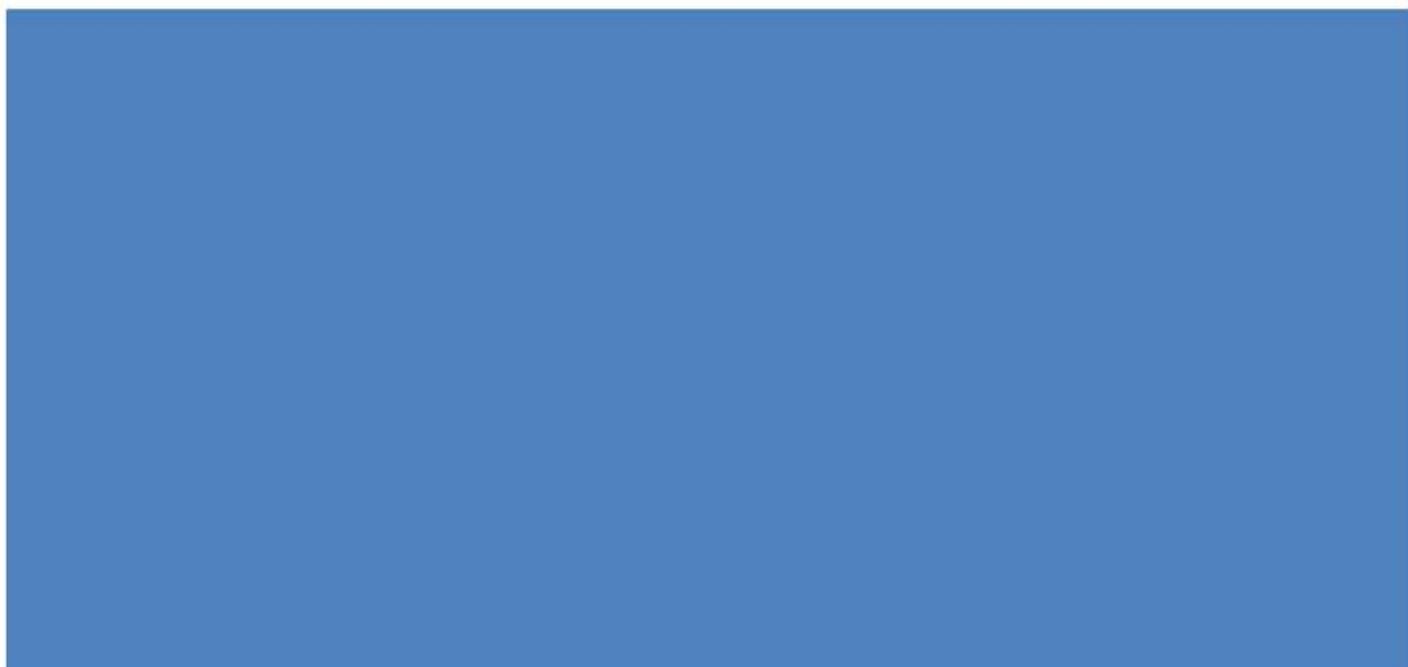
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Introduction

As set out the NILGA Councillor Guide 2023, an Elected Member's primary role is to represent the District Electoral Area (DEA) to which they were elected. However elected Members provide a bridge between the community and the Council by acting as an advocate for residents, signposting them to the right services within Council and keeping them informed about the issues that affect them.

Elected members are expected to play a part in planning, organising, monitoring and developing council business. Additionally, you will be directing and balancing the needs of your local area, your residents, voters, community groups, local businesses, your political party (if you belong to one) and the council. Collectively within each council, the councillors decide what is in the public interest amidst a range of conflicting issues and views.

Elected Members also have a crucial role in providing Community Leadership, working in partnership with local partners and other organisations, including the public, voluntary, community and private sectors, to develop a vision for their local area and to find ways to work collaboratively to improve local services and quality of life for their residents.

In recent years, the role of an Elected Member has shifted in response to the financial, political, environmental, and social context within which Local Government now operates. The demands and fiscal constraints placed on Local Government mean that Councils increasingly need to deliver key services in partnership with other organisations or outsource them entirely. Technology and the widespread use of social media are also having profound effects on how Elected Members are enabled to undertake their roles.

In summary there are several aspects of a Councillor's role:

- Representation
- Community Leadership
- Developing council policy / corporate management
- Finding solutions
- Other duties
- Planning and Regulation

For Elected Members to be flexible and responsive to these changes, it has never been more important that Councils support Elected Members to develop the necessary skills to meet their diverse, complex, and challenging roles.

Aim

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council aims:

1. To "provide Elected Members with flexible and responsive learning and development that is based on individual and organisational needs and is future focused, ambitious and innovative."
2. To equip Elected Members with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead effectively, represent constituents, and deliver on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities across the four pillars: People, Place, Planet, and Performance.
3. To contribute to achieving the Councillor Development Charter status.

Strategic Alignment

This strategy is fully aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan 2024–2028 and its four pillars of People, Place, Planet and Performance. It also reflects the Councillor Development Charter standards, NILGA frameworks, and the Community Plan 2017–2032.

Elected Members are accountable for the delivery of the Council's vision and strategic objectives as set out in our Corporate Plan. This relies on them having the key skills and knowledge to help provide the best possible services to residents and to support Communities across the Borough.

The Council's Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy and Framework have been developed to support Elected Members with the diverse range of knowledge and skills needed, enabling delivery of Council's objectives.

Drivers of Elected Member Learning & Development

Embedded within the Council's Elected Member Learning and Development Framework are drivers that inform the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for Elected Members to fulfil individual and organisational needs and ambitions.

- **Corporate Plan** - The Corporate Strategy for the period 2024- 28 will realise the ambitions of our Council and highlight our commitment
- The **Political Skills Framework (**PSF) outlines key skills which are desirable for councillors to possess and is designed to support local councillors and those working with them in their efforts to review and support organisation and individual development needs. Link to the toolkit LGA - The Political Skills Framework a councillor's toolkit
- **The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)'s Councillor Guide i**s the council-led representative body for local authorities in

Northern Ireland. The Association is supported by political parties and independent members in councils and works in partnership with other key regional bodies and stakeholders.

- Research undertaken by the University of Birmingham in 2016 considered the changing role of the councillor in response to the context within which they operate. The report has encouraged a new approach to the 21st-century understanding of the Councillor. Link to the report The 21st Century Councillor

MEA Elected Member Development Priorities

In order to develop an Elected Member Learning & Development Strategy, the Council carried out a Training Needs Analysis in August 2025 with Members and achieved a return rate of 72.5% with additional returns requested.

A dedicated budget has been set aside for Member Development.

The key areas where members require additional training are :

Communication & Engagement

- Public speaking

Media handling

- Social media proficiency

Governance & Political Skills

- Chairing meetings
- Standing Orders
- Code of Conduct
- Role of Mayor/Deputy Mayor

Digital Competence

- Minute Pad
- Microsoft Office
- Cyber awareness
- Tablet/laptop usage

Legal & Regulatory

- Equality & Good Relations (Section 75)
- GDPR

- Planning Committee training
- Waste regulations

Finance & Scrutiny

- Treasury Management
- Audit & Scrutiny Committee training
- Anti-money laundering awareness

Strategic Planning

- Community and Local Development Planning
- Emergency Planning
- Understanding Council policies

Wellbeing & Inclusion

- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Domestic Violence Charter
- White Ribbon NI
- Personal resilience

Recommended Training

It is agreed that "recommended" training for the development areas of highest organisational risk will include:

- Code of Conduct,
- Cyber Awareness,
- Equality and Good Relations,
- GDPR,
- Planning Committee training,
- Audit and Scrutiny capability
- Treasury Management.

Regional & Sector Partnerships

There are some regional and sectoral partnerships which offer member training. These are:

NILGA Regional Programme

MEA Council will actively participate in the NILGA Regional Programme, supporting a coordinated, Northern Ireland-wide approach to Member

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development. This includes access to shared learning resources, regional workshops, leadership modules, and best practice networks.

NILGA Leadership Development Programme for Councillors 2026

MEA Councillors will be encouraged and supported to participate in NILGA's enhanced Leadership Development Programme (2026 cohort). This programme strengthens Member capability in political leadership, partnership working, strategic decision-making and community engagement.

LGIU – Local Government Information Unit

Council will integrate LGIU briefings, intelligence reports, professional development sessions, and national/local government policy updates into the annual Member development offer. LGIU insights will be used for continuous professional development and strategic awareness.

Delivery Model

Based on the feedback from elected members in the training needs analysis, flexibility will be provided in the delivery of training. A range of suppliers will be used to deliver development to Members, including Internal and External providers as well as statutory bodies such as NILGA.

- Blended learning and flexible formats (in-person + online)
- Access to e-learning modules and recordings
- Workshops led by internal and external facilitators
- Short, practical, senior-level sessions
- Accessibility support, including subtitles and alternative formats

Scheduling & Accessibility

- Sessions offered during weekday mornings and evenings
- Duration capped at 2 hours
- Hybrid formats to accommodate diverse needs
- Alternative formats for accessibility

Governance & Oversight

This strategy has been developed and led by the Elected Member Development Sub Committee.

- Supported by the Member Development Network

- Annual review and reporting to Corporate Resources, Policy & Governance (CRPG) Committee
- Collaboration with NILGA Regional Development Network

Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

The OD and Talent Manager will co-ordinate the following:

- Annual PDPs / Training Needs Analysis (TNA)
- Feedback via surveys, interviews, and KPIs
- Mid-year and annual evaluations
- Impact assessments linked to community outcomes derived from training events evaluations and Member testimonies.

Implementation Plan

A detailed Annual Action Plan will be developed to:
- Prioritise training based on TNA
- Schedule sessions and allocate resources
- Monitor attendance and impact
- Achieve Charter accreditation

The first year's action is set out at **Appendix 1**.

Elected Member Learning & Development Action Plan 2025–2026

Based on Training Needs Analysis (TNA) Findings, NILGA Regional Programme & NILGA Leadership Development Programme 2026 and LGIU (Local Government Information Unit)

1. Purpose of the Action Plan

This Action Plan translates the TNA findings, member feedback, statutory requirements, and regional development opportunities into a clear schedule of learning activities for the 2025–2026 period.

It ensures:

- Full alignment with Council's Corporate Plan (People, Place, Planet, Performance)
- Integration of NILGA's regional offer
- Progressive development from foundation skills through to advanced leadership capability
- A balanced programme across governance, digital, wellbeing, community leadership, and strategic skills

2. Summary of TNA-Informed Priority Areas

High Priority (Critical)

- Governance & Political Skills (Chairing, Standing Orders, Code of Conduct)
- Digital Skills (MinutePad, Microsoft Office, cyber awareness)
- Legal & Regulatory (Equality & Good Relations, GDPR, Planning)
- Communication & Engagement (public speaking, media handling, social media literacy)
- Finance & Scrutiny (Treasury Management, Audit, risk understanding)

Medium Priority

- Strategic Planning & Performance
- Community Leadership & Partnership Working
- Emergency Preparedness
- Understanding key Council policies

Emerging Needs

- Trauma-Informed Practice & Inclusive Leadership
- Sustainability and climate literacy (Planet pillar of the Corporate plan)
- Domestic Violence Charter commitments

Elected Member Learning & Development Action Plan 2025–2026

3. External Programmes to Embed

NILGA Regional Programme

The Regional Programme provides councillors with tailored capacity and confidence building, skills development opportunities, fully aligned to the political skills framework (local leadership, partnership working, effective communication for influence, political understanding, scrutiny and challenge, resilience and wellbeing, effective use of digital technologies and social media, regulating and monitoring).

The Regional Programme is Free of Charge to attend for Elected Members.

Link to the NILGA Regional Programme 2025 -2026 NILGA Regional Programme 2025-2026

NILGA Regional Programme October 2025 – May 2026

Date	Time	Political Skill	L&D	Approach	Facilitation	Learning Outcomes
9th October 2025	12.30 – 1.30pm	Scrutiny and Challenge	Critically analysing information	Webinar	NILGA / Fact Check NI	• Improved understanding and awareness of critically analysing information. • Developed skills and capabilities to check the validity of information, how to drill down information, understand what biases you need to consider etc. • Increased confidence in the scrutiny process.
November 2025	Briefing	Regulating and Monitoring	Audit Committee Training	Briefing	Colette Kane, NIAO	• Improved understanding and awareness of Roles and Responsibilities of the Audit Committee and the LGA. • Developed skills and capabilities in governance, risk and control arrangements. • Increased confidence in their ability to influence robust and defensible decision making.
21st January 2026	12.30 – 2pm	Effective use of Digital Technologies and Social-Media	The Digital Councillor	Lunchtime Webinar	Nigel Cunningham Microsoft	• Improved understanding and awareness of the role of digital technology in improving your local area. • Developed skills and capabilities in using digital technologies to enhance engagement levels via multiple digital channels. • Increased confidence in using social media as a tool to engage with my electorate alongside traditional ways of working.
Wednesday 18th February 2026	10am – 2pm	Partnership Working	Civil Contingencies Emergency Planning	In-person session	Civil Contingencies Resilience	• Improved understanding of what emergency planning is, how to do it and what support is available. • Developed skills and capabilities in targeting resource and making robust and defensible decision when an emergency event occurs. • Increased confidence and competence of councillors in their community leadership role.

The Regional Development Programme that addresses the training needs highlighted in the Training Needs Analysis:

Highlighted Need	Regional Programme	Date
Finance & Scrutiny (Treasury Management,	Audit Committee for Councillors in partnership with NIAO– Webinar	26 November 2025, 12.30 – 2.00pm

Elected Member Learning & Development Action Plan 2025–2026

Audit, risk understanding)		
Digital Skills	The Digital Councillor	21 January 2026, 12.30 - 2.00pm
Emergency Planning	Civil Contingencies Emergency Planning In person)	18 February 2026 10.00am – 2.00pm
Communication & engagement (Public Speaking)	Effective Communication for Influence	18 March 2026, Time tbc

NILGA Leadership Development Programme (Cohort 2026)

This flagship initiative aims to equip councillors with the strategic skills, practical tools, and personal resilience needed to lead effectively in today's challenging political and community environment.

This CPD-accredited programme provides a unique opportunity for councillors across NI to enhance their leadership capacity through a series of eight interactive workshops starting in January 2026.

Grounded in established leadership development models, the programme will cover essential themes such as local leadership, partnership working, community engagement, effective communication, and digital innovation.

Councillors will have the chance to explore their roles in leading place-based outcomes, improving services, and collaborating across various systems and sectors. With insights from real-life case studies and expert speakers, the programme offers a platform for participants to reflect, grow, and take practical steps to enhance their leadership impact.

Upon completion, participants will receive CPD credits, with an additional accreditation option available for those seeking formal recognition of their learning.

A progression pathway for Members showing leadership potential. (Link to the NILGA Leadership Development Programme 2026) NILGA Leadership Programme 2026

Components include:

- Political leadership & influencing skills.
- Strategic decision-making
- Community leadership

Elected Member Learning & Development Action Plan 2025–2026

- Partnership and collaborative governance
- Effective scrutiny
- Negotiation and conflict resolution

**Council will nominate Members for the 2026 cohort in November 2025 through Group Party Leaders.
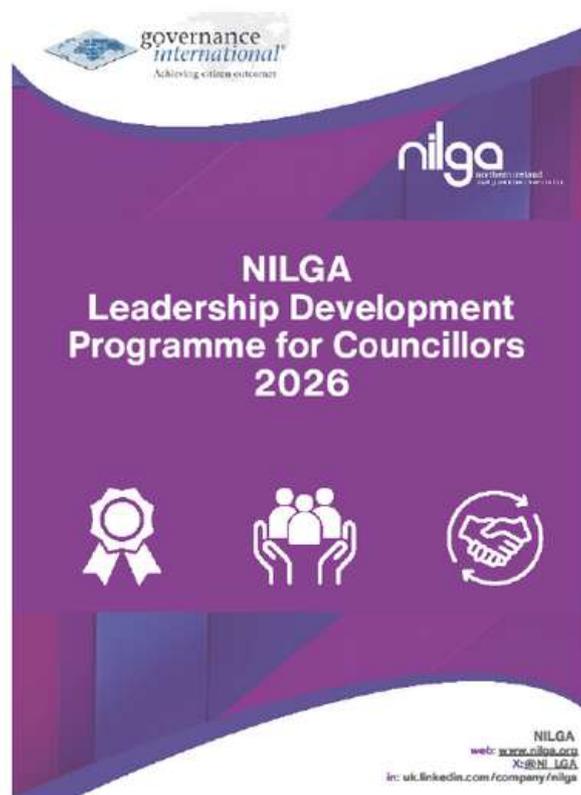
Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

The LGIU is an independent, not-for-profit membership organisation working to make local democracy around the world collectively stronger, through shared ideas, resources, and connections for local government.

LGIU Training will give Councillors a skills and knowledge boost across a variety of areas essential to the Councillor role.

Link to LGIU Training Opportunities - LGIU Training

Topics Include:

Topic	Date	Format
Leadership of Place – Community Engagement	4 December 2025, 09:30 am – 12:30pm	Online via Zoom

Elected Member Learning & Development Action Plan 2025–2026

(Cost £120 plus vat)		
Tackling disinformation, misinformation, and the role of AI (Cost £120 plus vat)	3 February 2026, 09:30 am – 12:30 pm	Online via Zoom
Understanding strategic thinking (Cost £161 plus vat)	26 March 2026, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm	Online via Zoom

MEA in-house recommended development

Highlighted Need	Deliver Option
Code of Conduct for Elected Members	Recommended Annually
Chairing & Facilitating Meetings	As required
Standing Orders	Recommended at Induction
Scheme of Delegation	Recommended at Induction
Finance & Scrutiny - Treasury Management for Rate Setting	Workshop delivered by the Finance Team Recommended annually
Equality & Good Relations / Section 75	Workshop delivered by external facilitator – recommended every four years
Planning Committee	Workshop delivered by the Planning Department - mandatory annually
Audit & Scrutiny Committee Training	External course - recommended for committee members annually
Cyber Security	E-learning iHASCO module - Recommended annually
Fraud Awareness	E-learning iHASCO module - recommended annually

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Data Protection / GDPR	E-learning iHASCO module - recommended annually
Anti-Bribery / Anti Money Laundering	E-learning iHASCO module -recommended annually
Health & Safety	E-learning iHASCO module - recommended every two years

Additional Development Available

Highlighted Need	Deliver Option
Waste Regulations	Workshop delivered by the Waste Management Team
Community Planning	Workshop delivered by the Community Development & Planning Management Team
Corporate Planning & Performance / Local Development Planning	Workshop Delivered by the Policy & Performance Management
Trauma Informed Practice	Link to Level 1 and 2 E-learning modules via SBNI (Safeguarding Board NI)
Charter on Domestic Violence	External Workshop delivered by Onus
First Aid / Defibrillator Training	External Course delivered over 1 /2 days
Handling Media & Press	Workshop delivered by the Communications and Marketing Team
Digital Skills	Range of Digital Skills available
Understanding Risk	Workshop delivered by the Risk & Compliance Manager

IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) – SCREENING QUESTIONS

A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is a process to help you systematically and comprehensively analyse your personal data processing and help you identify and minimise any data protection risks of a project.

You must do a DPIA before you begin any type of personal data processing that is **"likely to result in a high risk."**

This set of screening questions will help you decide whether a DPIA is necessary. Please note, if there is a change to the nature, scope, context or purposes of your processing you will be required to complete this screening template again.

You will be accountable for the screening decisions you make. Therefore, it is critical that you document via "Explanatory Notes" the screening decisions you have made, providing logical reasons regarding whether to do a DPIA or not.

Section A - Project Details

Title of Project/Plan/Policy	**Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy and Action Plan**
Is this an existing, revised or new project?	New Strategy and Action plan
What is the purpose of the project, plan or policy? *e.g. intended aims/outcomes* **Include any relevant background information here**	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council aims: 1. To "provide Elected Members with flexible and responsive learning and development that is based on individual and organisational needs and is future focused, ambitious and innovative." 2. To equip Elected Members with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead effectively, represent constituents, and deliver on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities across the four pillars: People, Place, Planet, and Performance. 3. To contribute to achieving the Councillor Development Charter status.

Which MEABC Department owns or holds responsibility for this project, plan or policy?	OD & Talent / Democratic Services

Section B – Personal Data

Does this project, plan or policy involve the processing of personal data?	☒ Yes	☐ No

If the answer to this question is '**No**', you do not need to conduct a DPIA.

Please proceed straight to **Section E.**

If the answer to this question is '**Yes**', please proceed to **Section C.**

Section C: Questions 1 – 13
Examples are for guidance only and should not be considered exhaustive or definitive.

For questions 1 to 13, a DPIA **MUST** be carried out if the answer is **YES**. Your documentation should explain very clearly whether there are any indicators that a type of processing will likely result in 'high risk'.

High risk means a risk that could result in a significant impact on individuals' rights and freedoms.

For some of these questions, the answer will only be "yes" if the processing occurs in combination with criteria (see questions 14 to 22) in the Article 29 Data Protection Working Party's European Guidelines.

Screening Questions - <u>Will the project:</u>	Yes/No	Explanatory Notes
1 Use systematic and extensive profiling or automated decision-making to make significant decisions about people? *e.g. using technology to analyse personal data or make decisions without human involvement.*	No	
2 Process special category data or criminal offence data on a large scale? *e.g. health, medical, racial/ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, trade union or political views.*	No	No special category data is recorded, only EM Name, Location of course, Course title, date.
3 Systematically monitor a publicly accessible place on a large scale? *e.g. CCTV.*	No	
4 Use innovative technologies or the novel application of existing technologies?	No	

	e.g. AI-driven systems, or repurposing data for new functions. *(**Note**: A DPIA is required where this processing is combined with any of the criteria from the European guidelines.)*		
5	Use profiling, automated decision-making or special category data to help make decisions on someone's access to a product, service, opportunity or benefit? *e.g. use of computer systems to automatically decide, or by using sensitive data to decide whether someone can get access to a service provided by Council.*	No	EM development is recorded to provide details of completion and support the achievement of the Charter status.
6	Carry out profiling on a large scale? *Profiling is using personal data to assess or predict things about a person, e.g. job performance, financial situation, interests, reliability, behaviour, location, or movements.* *To decide what constitutes 'large scale' you should consider and include information on factors such as:* *- number of individuals concerned* *- volume of data* *- variety of data* *- duration of processing* *- geographical extent of processing.* *Also see examples in ICO's guidance of processing/ projects they consider to be large scale.*	No	
7	Process biometric data? *e.g. Fingerprints, facial/voice recognition.* *(**Note**: A DPIA is required where this processing is combined with any of the criteria from the European guidelines.)*	No	
8	Process genetic data? *e.g. DNA or data from ancestry/genetic testing* *(**Note**: A DPIA is required where this processing is combined with any of the criteria from the European guidelines.)*	No	
9	Combine, compare or match personal data from multiple sources? *e.g. proof of life enquiries, receiving information from external organisations.*	No	Information will be used to support the achievement of councillor Development Charter
10	Process personal data without providing a privacy notice directly to the individual? *Signposting to a privacy notice on the website is sufficient to satisfy this requirement.* *(**Note**: A DPIA is required where this processing is combined with any of the criteria from the European guidelines.)*	No	

11	Process personal data in a way which involves tracking individuals' online or offline location or behaviour? *e.g. are you collecting information about where people go or what they do? [online activity or GPS].* **(Note: A DPIA is required where this processing is combined with any of the criteria from the** European guidelines**.)**	No	Location / Venue /Provider of the development course will be recorded
12	Process children's personal data for profiling or automated decision-making or for marketing purposes, or offer online services directly to them? *e.g. running an online library service for children and using their reading history to suggest new books.*	No	EM are all over 18yrs
13	Process personal data which could result in a risk of physical harm in the event of a security breach? *e.g. revealing home addresses of people in a protected role.*	No	

Section D:
Article 29 Data Protection Working Party's European Guidelines

When considering if your processing is "likely to result in high risk," you should consider the European guidelines. These define **nine** criteria of processing operations likely to result in high risk. In most cases, a combination of two factors indicates the "need" for a DPIA. Although this is not a strict rule.

Therefore, if the answer to any of questions 14 to 23 is "yes" a DPIA should be "**considered.**"

Your documentation should explain very clearly whether there any indicators that a type of processing will likely result in high risk.

Will the project:		Yes/No	Explanatory Notes
14	Involve evaluation or scoring? *e.g. a recruitment panel scoring candidates against set criteria.*	No	
15	Involve automated decision-making with legal or similar significant effect? *e.g. an automated system decides to assign a fixed penalty notice without human review.*	No	
16	Involve systematic monitoring? *e.g. CCTV, use of software to monitor staff emails*	No	

17	Involve sensitive data or data of a highly personal nature? *e.g. processing health information or information about neighbour disputes*	Yes	Dietary Requirements – which could indicate a health condition.
18	Involve data processing on a large scale? *e.g. electoral roll data for all residents*	No	There are only 40 Elected Members
19	Involve matching or combining datasets? *e.g. matching HR records with payroll data or combining customer data from different platforms, e.g. combining someone's Te Dogs record with their planning portal application.*	No	
20	Involve processing of data concerning vulnerable data subjects? *Note: this does not always mean a traditionally considered vulnerability, e.g. staff may be considered to be vulnerable data subjects due to the imbalance of power between employer and employee.*	No	
21	Use innovative technological or organisational solutions? *e.g. AI.*	No	
22	Prevent data subjects from exercising a right or using a service or contract? *e.g. restricting access to an online application unless identity verification is completed, restricting someone's right of access, etc.*	No	
23	Process personal data which could result in a risk of other forms of harm (e.g. emotional, psychological, financial) in the event of a security breach? *e.g. details of a disciplinary investigation or complaint, bank details, etc.*	No	

Section E: Findings

Does this screening indicate that a DPIA is required?	☐ Yes	☒ No

Note: Data Protection legislation and ICO guidance state that you should seek your DPO's advice when you need to do a DPIA. If this box is ticked 'yes', please complete the full Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) template on the P-drive.

Has a DPIA been recommended?	☐ Yes	☒ No

You may wish to conduct a DPIA even if the screening indicates that one is not required. A DPIA is a useful tool to consider any impacts and/or risks involved in processing personal data.

Final Comments
Please outline anything you feel relevant to the decision whether to conduct a DPIA or not.

On some occasions your project may require the processing of a minimal amount of personal data, e.g. for administrative purposes only. Use this space to outline any such circumstances.

Data recorded is administrative, minimal amounts to include, EM name, course title, location, date, length of course, etc.

Personal data will be stored on Council server, within Departmental specific drives and password-protected folders with role-based access controls.

EM Personal Data will be used as evidence to support their achievement of the NILGA Councillor Development Charter.

DPIA Screening completed by:
Please complete below and forward this document onto relevant department

Position:	OD & Talent Manager		
Department:	HR	Date:	15/01/2026

Information Governance review completed:
This screening can be reviewed by any member of the Information Governance team

Position:	Information Governance Officer	Date:	15/01/2026

DPIA Screening Approval:
This should be the Information Asset Owner, which is usually the HoS/AD

Position:	Assistant Director of Business Support		
Department:	Corporate Services	Date:	19/2/2026

Section 75 Equality Screening

Part 1	Policy Scoping
Part 2	Screening Questions
Part 3	Screening Decision
Part 4	Monitoring
Part 5	Approval and Authorisation

Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Part 1: Information about the policy

Information about the policy	
Name of policy	Elected Member Learning & Development Strategy 2025-2028
Is this and existing, revised or new policy?	New Strategy
What is it trying to achieve? *(intended aims/outcomes)*	1. To provide Elected Members with flexible and responsive learning and development that is based on individual and organisational needs and is future-focused, ambitious, and innovative. 2. To equip Elected Members with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead effectively, represent constituents, and deliver on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities across the four pillars: People, Place, Planet, and Performance. 3. To contribute to achieving the Councillor Development Charter status. The strategy and associated action plan for Elected Members is informed by a training need analysis and will involve training delivery from internal and external sources.

Are there any section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit for the intended policy? *If so, explain how.*	The strategy will facilitate equality of opportunity as development opportunities will be open to all Elected Members, irrespective of the section 75 category.
Policy Lead Officer *(who initiated or wrote the policy)*	OD & Talent Manager
Who owns/implements the policy?	HR & OD / Corporate & Support Services – Business Support

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

If yes, are they *(please tick as appropriate)*

☒ financial
☐ legislative
☐ other, please specify

Financial – Elected Members Development Budget

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? *(please tick as appropriate)*

☐ Staff
☐ Service users
☒ Other public sector organisations
☐ Voluntary/community/trade unions
☒ Other, please specify Elected Member_____

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

• what are they?
• who owns them?

The following polices belong to Mid and East Antrim Borough Council:
Equality Scheme
Dignity at Work
Council Corporate Plan 2024- 2028

Elected Members Code of Conduct – NILGA owned
Councillor Development Charter - NILGA owned
The Political Skills Framework – LGA
NI Local Government Association Councillor Guide -NILGA

The results from the training needs analysis also have a bearing on the strategy and associated action plan.

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to signpost to S75 data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Religious belief	In Northern Ireland, religious belief and political opinion often intersect. Current data indicates that the majority of Elected Members are Unionist (65%) and as such it is reasonable to conclude are from a Protestant background.
Political opinion	There are 40 Councillors working for the Borough, the political breakdown is as follows: **Party / % of Councillors** DUP — 30 UUP — 20 Alliance — 17.5 TUV — 15 Sinn Fein — 10 SDLP — 0 Green — 0 Others — 7.5
Racial group	At present, 100% of Elected Members are White, and there is no minority ethnic representation within the Council.
Age	Council does not collect or retain age-related statistics for Elected Members. Nonetheless, the policy has been developed to ensure that its provisions are inclusive and appropriate for people of all ages.
Marital status	Council does not collect or retain information on the marital status of Elected Members. However, the strategy includes provisions intended to accommodate Members regardless of marital or family circumstances.
Sexual orientation	Council does not collect or retain information on the sexual orientation of Elected Members. However, the strategy includes provisions intended to accommodate Members regardless of sexual orientation.
Men and women generally	Elected Members are made up of 77.5% Male and 22.5% Female

Disability	Council does not collect or retain information on the disability status of Elected Members. However, the strategy includes provisions to support Members with or without disabilities, as detailed in the screening form.
Dependants	Council does not collect or retain information on the dependant status of Elected Members. However, the strategy includes measures designed to accommodate Members with or without caring responsibilities.

If you do not have enough data to tell you about potential or actual impacts you may need to conduct a pre-consultation to generate more data and to distinguish what groups are potentially affected by your policy.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Section 75 category	Details needs, experiences and priorities
Religious belief	While no adverse impacts are identified, it remains essential that all training is delivered in a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment that promotes equal participation and avoids any perception of religious or cultural bias.
Political opinion	As elected members represent a broad range of political opinions, it is essential that training is delivered in a politically neutral way that supports equal participation for all.
Racial group	There are no elected members from minority ethnic backgrounds. This will continue to be monitored to ensure that any future needs are identified and addressed.
Age	Given the diverse age profile of elected members, there is a need to provide learning formats that are appropriate and accessible for members of all ages for example Blended learning, flexible formats, e-learning with accessibility support, including subtitles and alternative formats which supports Elected members to learn at their own pace. Flexible scheduling and hybrid attendance options supports members of various ages.
Marital status	There is no evidence of differing needs, experiences or priorities for individuals based on marital status.
Sexual orientation	In the absence of data relating to sexual orientation, there is a requirement to create a safe, respectful, and non-judgemental learning environment for all elected members.
Men and women generally	Elected Members are made up of 77.5% Male and 22.5% Female. There are more male Elected Members than female, therefore, there is a need for a learning environment free from gender bias, where women's contributions are valued equally.
Disability	There is no evidence of differing needs, experiences or priorities for individuals based on disability. However, should a disability be disclosed or suspected, individual needs are to be accommodated through reasonable adjustment.
Dependants	Flexible delivery models benefit those with caring responsibilities. Hybrid formats accommodate diverse needs and benefit those with caring responsibilities.

Part 2. Screening questions

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

1 What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? minor/major/none		
Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? **Positive major** **Positive minor** **None** **Negative major** **Negative minor**
Religious belief	The Dignity at Work policy and Elected Members Code of Conduct will enforce standards of respectful behaviour and non-discrimination. It is expected that any impact would be positive.	Positive minor
Political opinion	The Dignity at Work policy and Elected Members Code of Conduct will enforce standards of respectful behaviour and non-discrimination. It is expected that any impact would be positive.	Positive minor
Racial group	Currently, there are no Elected Members from an ethnic minority background, therefore there is no impact. This will continue to be monitored to ensure that any future impacts are identified and addressed.	None
Age	Hybrid and alternative formats are available to accommodate diverse needs across all age ranges. It is expected any impact would be positive.	Positive minor
Marital status	The Dignity at Work policy and Elected Members Code of Conduct will enforce standards of respectful behaviour and non-discrimination. It is expected any impact would be positive.	Positive minor
Sexual orientation	The Dignity at Work policy and Elected Members Code of Conduct will enforce standards of respectful behaviour and non-discrimination. It is expected that any impact would be positive.	Positive minor
Men and women generally	There are more male Elected Members than female, therefore, there is a need for a learning environment free from gender bias, where women's contributions are valued equally. The Dignity at Work policy and Elected Members Code of Conduct will enforce standards of respectful behaviour and	Positive Minor

	non-discrimination. It is expected that any impact would be positive.	
Disability	The strategy provides learning formats that are appropriate and accessible for members of all abilities for example blended learning, flexible formats, e-learning with accessibility support, including subtitles and alternative formats and supports elected members to learn at their own pace. Flexible scheduling supports members of various abilities. The Dignity at Work and Councillors Code of Conduct will also support a supportive learning environment.	Positive Minor
Dependants	This Strategy provides a flexible delivery model which benefit Elected Members with caring responsibilities.	Positive Minor

2	Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?	

Section 75 category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Religious Belief		This Strategy is accessible to individuals of all religious beliefs. Participation does not depend on, or differentiate between any faith background.
Political opinion		This Strategy is accessible to individuals of all political opinions. Participation does not depend on or differentiate between any political viewpoint.
Racial group		Currently there are no Elected Members from an ethnic minority background. This will be monitored for future opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for this group.
Age		Mitigations have already been put in place to address the needs identified for this group.
Marital Status		This Strategy is accessible to individuals of all marital status. Participation does not depend on or differentiate between the marital status of participants.
Sexual Orientation		This Strategy is accessible to individuals of all sexual orientations. Participation does not depend on or differentiate

		between the sexual orientation of participants.
Men and women generally		This Strategy is accessible to individuals of all genders. Participation does not depend on or differentiate between men or women.
Disability		This Strategy already accommodates Elected members with disabilities by providing reasonable adjustments when required.
Dependents		This Strategy already accommodates Elected Members with caring responsibilities with a hybrid flexible delivery model.

3   To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none

Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? Positive major Positive minor None Negative major Negative minor
Religious belief	Reinforcement of the Dignity at Work Policy will provide a neutral, respectful environment for individuals of all religious backgrounds, political opinions, and race.	Positive minor
Political opinion		
Racial group		

4   Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Good relations category	If **Yes**, provide details	If **No**, provide reasons
Religious belief		Existing arrangements, including the Council's Dignity at Work Policy already provides a strong framework that promotes respectful behaviour and positive interaction between individuals of different religious beliefs, political opinions, and racial groups.

The Elected Members Code of Conduct also supports good relations. |
| Political Opinion | | |
| Racial Group | | |

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? *(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).*
There are no adverse impacts identified for people who hold multiple identities such as female with caring responsibilities. The Strategy is designed to be inclusive and accessible, with a structured based approach that ensures that no combination of characteristics results in differential treatment.
Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.
Elected Members are made up of 77.5% Male and 22.5% Female. There are more male EMs that female, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that they would have more caring responsibilities.

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.
A full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. The screening process has not identified any adverse impacts on any of the Section 75 equality categories. The Strategy is designed to be inclusive, transparent, and accessible, and provides structured opportunities that are available on an equal basis to all eligible individuals.
If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced – please provide details.
Any potential minor impacts are positive in nature and are effectively mitigated through existing Council policies, including the Dignity at Work Policy, and the Elected Members Code of Conduct
If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.
Not applicable.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?
☐ Yes ☒ No

If so, give the reasons to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.
Not applicable.

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	
Social need	
Effect on people's daily lives	
Relevance to a public authority's functions	

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?   If yes, please provide details.

Part 4. Monitoring

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Equality Screening undertaken by:	
Position/Job Title:	OD & Talent Manager
Department:	HR & OD
Date Completed:	07/01/2026

Equality Screening approved by:	
Position/Job Title:	Assistant Director – Business Support
Department:	Corporate & Support Services
Date Completed:	19/2/2026

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

Section 1: Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A.	Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by MEABC that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

The development, implementation and adoption of an Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy 2025-2028 in support of Council achieving the Councillor Development Charter.

1B.	Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section **1A** above relates to.

Developing a	Policy	☐	Strategy	☒	Plan	☐
Adopting a	Policy	☐	Strategy	☒	Plan	☐
Implementing a	Policy	☐	Strategy	☒	Plan	☐
Revising a	Policy	☐	Strategy	☐	Plan	☐
Devising a Public Service	Policy	☐	Strategy	☐	Plan	☐
Delivering a Public Service	Policy	☐	Strategy	☐	Plan	☐

1C.	Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section **1B** above.

Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2028

1D.	Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The Strategy aims:
1. To "provide Elected Members with flexible and responsive learning and development that is based on individual and organisational needs and is future focused, ambitious and innovative."
2. To equip Elected Members with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead effectively, represent constituents, and deliver on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities across the four pillars: People, Place, Planet, and Performance.

3. To contribute to achieving the Councillor Development Charter status

The strategy and associated action plan for elected members is informed by a training need analysis and will involve training delivery from internal and external sources.

1E.	What definition of 'rural' applies in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.
☒	Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).
☐	Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).
☐	A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

Not Applicable

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Not Applicable

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Not Applicable

Section 2: Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A.	Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?
Yes ☒ No ☐	If the response is NO GO TO Section 2E

2B.	Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.
The strategy will impact Elected Members from all areas, including rural areas.	

2C.	If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact people in rural areas more or less than people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The Strategy will not impact Elected Members in rural areas differently from people in urban areas. The Strategy relates to Elected Members from all areas (rural and urban). Furthermore, the Council has facilities in both urban and rural locations.

A variety of delivery methods has been considered, including blended learning and flexible formats such as in person and online. The variety of delivery methods include access to e-learning modules and recording of training also allows those Elected members living in rural areas to access development. If in-person events are not possible to offer in a hybrid way, locations will be considered and will be advertised well in advance to allow planning for those Elected Members that live in rural areas.

2D.	Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Services is likely to primarily impact on.		
Rural Business	☐	Rural Tourism	☐
Rural Housing	☐	Rural Jobs or Employment	☐
Rural Education or Training	☒	Rural Broadband or Mobile Comms	☐
Rural Transport Services or Infrastructure	☐	Rural Health or Social Care Services	☐
Poverty in Rural areas	☐	Deprivation in rural areas	☐
Agri-Environment	☐	Other (please state)	☐
If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A			

2E	Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.
Not applicable.	

Section 3: Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas.

3A.	Has MEABC taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.
Yes ☐ No ☒	If the response is NO GO TO Section 3E

3B	Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by MEABC to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	☐	Published Statistics	☐
Consultation with Other Organisations	☐	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods of Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☐

3C.	Please provide details of the methods and information sources MEABC used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names or organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.
Not applicable.	

3D.	Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by MEABC?
Not applicable.	
If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A	

3E.	Please explain why no steps were taken by MEABC to identify the social and economic needs of people
Council does not record data relating to the rural or urban location of Elected Members. Despite this, the strategy contains specific provisions to meet the needs of Members regardless of whether they live in rural or urban settings.	

Section 4: Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A.	Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Not Applicable.

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Section 5: Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A.	Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes ☐   No ☒   If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C

5B.	Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Not applicable.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A

5C.	Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Council recognises that Elected Members may experience different levels of accessibility depending on whether they are based in rural or urban locations. While specific data on the rural or urban residence of Elected Members is not routinely collected, the Strategy has been designed to ensure equitable access and participation for all Members, regardless of location.

Section 6: Documenting and Recording

6A.	Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by MEABC and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.
☒	I can confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained, and relevant information compiled

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	
Position/Grade:	OD & Talent Manager
Department	HR & OD
Date:	29/01/2026

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	
Position/Grade:	Assistant Director – Business Support
Department:	Corporate & Support Services
Date:	19/2/2026

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Date created	Lead author	Organisation
21/01/2026	Catherine Hunter	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

📋 Your report

Elected Members Learning & Development Strategy and Action plan 2025-2028

Our Climate, Environment and Social Assessment has been designed to help make sustainable development more readily understood by examining the everyday work taking place within an organisation.

The Strategy and Action plan aims: 1. To "provide Elected Members with flexible and responsive learning and development that is based on individual and organisational needs and is future focused, ambitious and innovative." 2. To equip Elected Members with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to lead effectively, represent constituents, and deliver on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities across the four pillars: People, Place, Planet, and Performance. 3. To contribute to achieving the Councillor Development Charter status.

Completed by	Completion time	General result
Catherine Hunter	0 minutes	

Key

🔴 Long term negative impact

🟠 Short term or limited negative impact

⬜ No known impact

🟦 Short term or limited positive impact

🟩 Long lasting positive impact

Tips & Advice

We've identified several factors in your assessment that could have an impact. Here are some advice and tips.

Has this work considered climate change at a strategic level?   ›

- Climate affects nearly every aspect of our lives, from our food sources to our transport infrastructure, from what clothes we wear, to where we go on holiday. It has a huge effect on our livelihoods, our health, and our future.
- It is vital that all news plans and policies strategically consider and outline the climate-related factors associated with their work at the earliest stage.
- Identifying and planning for climate-related risks and impacts is a necessity for any project and failing to do so can have severe negative implications for the local environment and community.
- The LGA has several resources available that are specifically designed to help councils and other local authorities take strategic action against climate change. These can be found here: Climate change resources | Local Government Association

Land Usage

Has this work considered the local environment (ecosystems, habitat, biodiversity, waterways, waste pollution, etc.) and ecosystem services at a strategic level?   ›

- Nature is essential for human life. Nature provides us with water, clean air and food, and raw materials for medicines, industry and buildings. Our crops rely on insect pollination and the complex biological processes that create soil. Enjoying parks, landscapes and wildlife improves our health and well-being.
- All of these benefits, known as ecosystem services, depend on a healthy environment.
- Strategically planning to protect the local environment so our communities can benefit from ecosystem services should be at the centre of local authority planning.
- More information on the benefits of ecosystem services can be found here: Ecosystem services - nature's benefits | NatureScot

Will the work implement measures to monitor or review its environmental impact?   ›

- Monitoring the environmental impacts of new plans and projects can help to better understand its long-term environmental impacts, which enables organisations to learn and communicate lessons learned and inform future projects and practice.
- Adequate monitoring therefore plays a critical role in enabling conservation and enhancement strategies to evolve and improve over time.
- Environmental impacts can be monitored using key performance indicators (KPIs) to track data such as biodiversity net gain or waste management.
- Regular environmental impact assessments are an effective method of monitoring the environmental impacts of new plans and projects.
- An environmental impact review conducted at the end of the project or plan can provide insight into the effectiveness of the conservation and enhancement measures utilised on the project and the overall impact of the project on the environment.

Equity

Has the work considered how it can encourage and promote ethical business practices at a strategic level? (e.g. ethical sourcing, paying a living wage, combatting modern slavery, anti-corruption, etc.)   ›

- According to the LGA, ethical business practice within public bodies can be achieved by focusing on six key areas:
- Ethical principles: rights and liberty of individuals, community and the public good.
- Ethical cultures: cultural variety and dynamism about values.
- Fairness: equal treatment, equal opportunity, relational equality, equity.
- Services: ethics in service design, delivery, resource allocation and staffing.
- Practices: planning, environment, housing and transport compared with people-focused services.
- Violations: investigation and sanctions for ethical breaches and integrity violations.
- High standards of ethical conduct in local government are necessary to protect the integrity of decision-making, maintain public confidence, and safeguard local democracy and human rights.

How will this work impact children and young people and address the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC)?   ›

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**Corporate Resources, Policy and Governance Committee
Forward Plan**

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 13 April 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Modern Slavery Policy	For approval	Sarah Williams
Policy Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Quarterly Communications Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
EDI Update report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Quarterly Complaints Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
IT Cyber Security – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
TechOne Programme – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Bad debt policy	For approval	Michelle Hegarty
Conflicts of Interest, Gifts & Hospitality Policy (Employees)	For approval	Sarah Williams
Gifts and Hospitality (Members)	For noting	Sarah Williams
Draft Audio Recording Protocol	For approval	Sarah Williams
Policy Changes	For noting	Sarah Williams

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 18 May 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Health & Safety Annual Report	For noting	Steven Bailie
Notices of Motion Status Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Information Governance – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Licences/Agreements enacted under Scheme of Delegation - October 2025 to March 2026	For noting	Sarah Williams
Bad Debt Write-Off Report	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
HR & OD Training: Six-Monthly Update Report	For noting	Sarah Williams
Travel and Subsistence policy	For approval	Michelle Hegarty
Social Value	For noting	Jonathan McGrandle

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 15 June 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Policy Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Annual Equality Commission NI and DEARA Rural Needs Submissions	For approval	Siobhan Fisher
Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26 Year End Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Fraud Policy & Response Plan	For approval	Michelle Hegarty
Pay Award Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
CRPG Terms of Reference	For approval	Sarah Williams
Quarterly Complaints Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Constitution – Annual Update	For approval	Sarah Williams
TechOne Programme – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
IT Cyber Security – Quarterly Update		

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 3 August 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Sickness Absence Update – Six Monthly Update)	For noting	Sarah Williams
EDI Update Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Information Governance – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Scrutiny Review of Reception (6 monthly)	For noting	Siobhan Fisher

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 14 September 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Quarterly Communications Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Quarterly Complaints Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Performance Improvement Plan – Q1 Update	For approval	Siobhan Fisher
Update on National Pay Awards	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Quarterly Management Accounts – Q1	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
TechOne Programme – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
IT Cyber Security – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 19 October 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Quarterly Information Governance Performance Report Q1 & Q2	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Update on OD & Learning and Development Q1 & Q2	For noting	Sarah Williams
Information Governance – Draft Records Management	For noting	Sarah Williams
Annual Complaints Report – for Publication on Corporate Website	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Briefing	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
It Cyber Security – Six Monthly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Reserves Policy	For approval	Michelle Hegarty
Licences Agreements enacted under Scheme of Delegation April 2026 to September 2026	For noting	Sarah Williams
Debt Write-Off Report	For noting	Michelle Hegarty

Planned agenda items for next meeting – 30 November 2026

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Policy Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Quarterly Communications Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Quarterly Management Accounts – Q2	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Performance Improvement Plan Q2 Update	For approval	Siobhan Fisher
Quarterly Complaints Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Raising Concerns Policy	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Elected Member Development Charter Sub-Committee Minutes	For noting	Sarah Williams
Asset Management Plan	For approval	Siobhan Fisher
Updated List of Outside Bodies	For noting	Sarah Williams

Planned Agenda Items Next meeting (18 January 2027)

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Performance Improvement s95 Audit Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
EDI Update Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Technology One Programme – Quarterly Update –	For noting	Sarah Williams
Workplace Charter Domestic Violence – Annual Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Sickness Absence – Six Monthly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Amendment to the PQ protocol	For approval	Sarah Williams
Somme Visit	For approval	Sarah Williams

Planned agenda items for next meeting - 23 February 2027

Items	Purpose	Report by:
Procurement Update	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Performance Improvement Plan Q3 Update	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Treasury Management Annual Outturn Report	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Quarterly Management Accounts Q3	For noting	Michelle Hegarty
Update on development of DRAFT Consultation & Engagement Strategy (TBC)	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Public Consultation Report	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Information Governance – Quarterly Update	For noting	Sarah Williams
Wellbeing Action Plan	For noting	Sarah Williams
Quarterly Complaints Report - Q3: October - December 2025	For noting	Siobhan Fisher
Scrutiny Review of Reception – Actions to Date	For noting	Siobhan Fisher

1. Items to be Programmed

Item
Dual Language Street Naming Policy
HR Policies / Strategic projects / industrial action as required
Health and Safety Policies as required
Staff Survey
Learning and Development Policies as required
IT Strategy
Article 55 report – update on progress (with morph into a Workforce report outstanding establishment, retention, Article 55, training)
Publication Scheme
Digital Strategy