

Ards and North Down Borough Council  
Audit and Assessment Report 2019-20

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



28November 2019

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# 1. Key Messages

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## Summary of the audit

<b>Audit outcome</b>	<b>Status</b>
Audit opinion	Unqualified opinion
Audit assessment	The LGA has concluded that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.
Statutory recommendations	The LGA made no statutory recommendations
Proposals for improvement	The LGA made two new proposals for improvement

This report summaries the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA) on the 2019-20 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Ards and North Down Borough Council. We would like to thank the Chief Executive and his staff, particularly the Performance Improvement Manager, for their assistance during this work.

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

## Audit Opinion

The LGA has certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. She certifies an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that Ards and North Down Borough Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2018-19 and its 2019-20 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.

## Audit Assessment

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

In her opinion the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2019-20 and has demonstrated a track record of improvement. The LGA did not exercise her discretion to assess and report whether the council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

## Audit Findings

During the audit and assessment we identified no issues requiring a formal recommendation under the Act. We made two proposals for improvement (see Section 3). These represent good practice which should assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement. Detailed observations on thematic areas are provided in Annex C and progress on key proposals for improvement raised in prior years, which had not been fully addressed last year, have been noted in Annex B.

## Status of the Audit

The LGA's audit and assessment work on the Council's performance improvement arrangements is now concluded. By March 2020 she will publish an Annual Improvement Report on the Council on the NIAO website, making it publicly available. This will summarise the key outcomes in this report.

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

The total audit fee charged is in line with that set out in our Audit Strategy.

## Management of information and personal data

During the course of our audit we have access to personal data to support our audit testing. We have established processes to hold this data securely within encrypted files and to destroy it where relevant at the conclusion of our audit. We can confirm that we have discharged those responsibilities communicated to you in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

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## 2. Audit Scope

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

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

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

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

### *The improvement audit*

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

### *The improvement assessment*

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

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

The Act requires the LGA to summarise all of her work (in relation to her responsibilities under the Act) at the Council, in an 'annual improvement report'. This will be published on the NIAO website by March 2020, making it publicly available.

### *Special inspections*

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

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## 3. Audit Findings

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

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

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

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

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

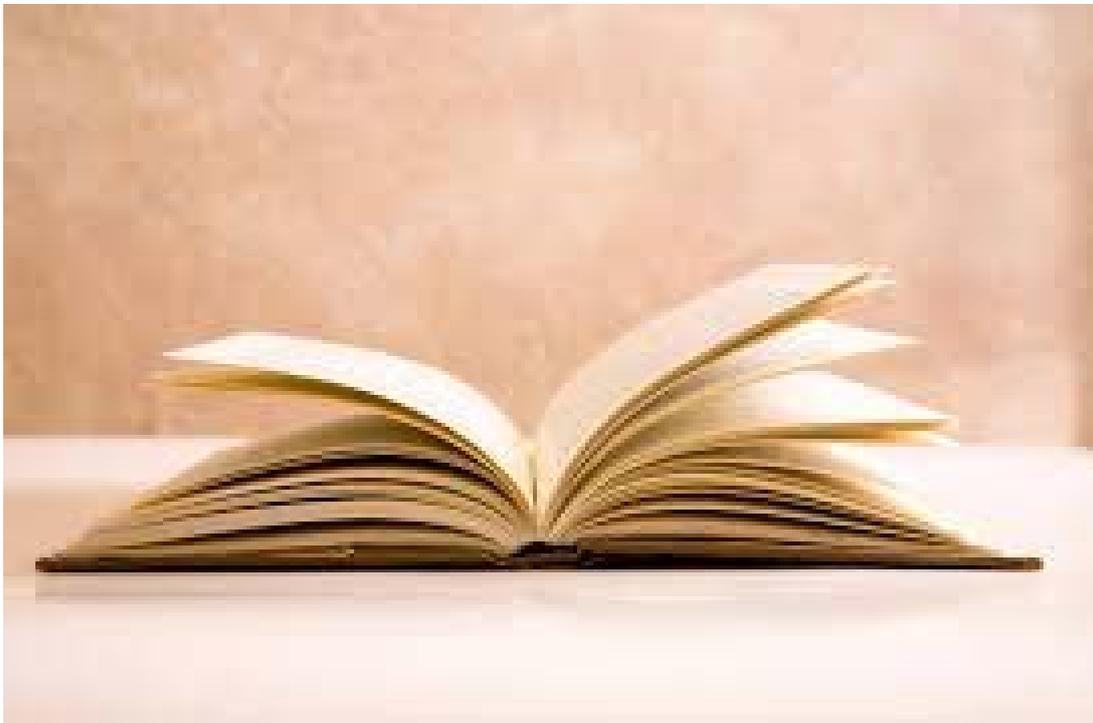
Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
Improvement Plan	NIAO reported in 2017-18 and again in 2018-19 that although the Performance Improvement Plan included the statutory indicators and standards it was not clear how the Council intended to achieve these. This remains the case in the Council’s 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan.	The Council should ensure that its Performance Improvement Plan includes detail on how the Council plan on meeting both the statutory performance indicators and its non-statutory self-imposed performance indicators.
Arrangements to improve/Demonstrating a track record of improvement	The Council can demonstrate improvement against prior year performance for 38 percent of its performance indicators. This was due to either the introduction of 13 new indicators within 2018-19 or as a result of two specific projects not getting final approval to progress.	The Council should complete its work on identifying the performance indicators and data it needs to properly monitor performance as soon as possible to allow performance to be considered over time.

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
	<p>A further 11 new indicators have been introduced for 2019-20 for which there will be no baseline performance indicator.</p> <p>The annual introduction of new performance indicators makes it difficult to assess performance over an extended period of time and for residents to ascertain whether the Council is demonstrating continuous improvement.</p>	

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## *4. Annexes*

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## Annex A – Audit and Assessment Certificate

### **Audit and assessment of Ards and North Down Borough Council’s performance improvement arrangements**

#### **Certificate of Compliance**

I certify that I have audited Ards and North Down Borough Council’s (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2018-19 and its improvement plan for 2019-20 in accordance with section 93 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) and the Code of Audit Practice for local government bodies.

I also certify that I have performed an improvement assessment for 2019-20 at the Council in accordance with Section 94 of the Act and the Code of Audit Practice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- A forward looking assessment of the Council’s likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and

- A retrospective assessment of whether the Council has achieved its planned improvements to inform a view as to its track record of improvement.

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

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

### **Audit opinion**

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

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

#### **Improvement assessment**

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

The 2019-20 year was the fourth in which councils were required to implement the performance improvement framework. The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement, should by now be well embedded. Whilst the Council continues to strengthen these arrangements, it nonetheless delivered some measurable improvements to its services in 2018-19 and has demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement. In my opinion I believe that the Council is likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2019-20.

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

#### **Other matters**

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

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

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28 November 2019

Annex B – Follow up of implementation of key prior year proposals for improvement

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
<b>General Duty to Improve</b>				
2017-18	GD1/2018	The Council should continue the development of its performance management system to achieve the best measurement of all its functions and services, to ensure identification of those areas which would benefit most from improvement.		<b>Implemented</b>
2017-18	GD2/2018	The Council should ensure that the process through which functions are prioritised and selected for improvement forms the basis for objective-setting in a 'bottom up' approach. This should provide a better link between objective and actions, help to improve transparency, and help with the measurement of the objective outcomes.		<b>Implemented</b>
2017-18	GD3/2018	The Council should ensure that performance framework documentation is updated in line with documented procedures and that evidence of review is recorded (even where no changes have occurred).		<b>Implemented</b>
<b>Governance Arrangements</b>				
2016-17	GA5/2017	The Audit Committee should consider the benefit of using internal audit, where required, to provide it with future assurance on the integrity and operation of the Council's performance framework and identify areas for improvement.		<b>Implemented</b>

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
<b>Arrangements to Improve</b>				
2018-19	AI1/2019	Where possible the Council should report performance over several years. The Council monitors over 300 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which provide a rich source of information, with data extending over a number of years.	<p>The Council's Annual Self-Assessment report now provides baseline data from previous years where available, although new indicators continue to be introduced. In these cases comparisons cannot be made as prior year baseline data is not yet available.</p> <p>The Council continues to monitor in excess of 300 KPIs. Only some of this data is published by Council but all is reviewed as part of the Service Planning process. More performance information was recently published online<sup>1</sup> however this is separate from the self assessment report.</p>	<b>In progress</b>
2018-19	AI2/2019	Where objectives are wide ranging or dependant on other targets being met it would be appropriate to break the objective down into smaller units and to set interim targets and milestones to measure progress.		<b>Implemented</b>
<b>Improvement Objectives</b>				
2016-17	IO1/2017	Going forward, ensure that each improvement objective is focused on outcomes for citizens in relation to improved	The Council set four improvement objectives within its 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan.	<b>In Progress</b>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/resident/performance/how-we-are-performing>

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
		<p>functions and/or services rather than focusing primarily on achieving corporate efficiencies.</p>	<p>If delivered effectively, three of the four current year objectives can demonstrate direct benefit to citizens. The fourth objective - "<i>Improve efficiency and transparency</i>", is set at a very high level, and, with the exception of the final action regarding Resident Panel pilots, is unclear how citizens will benefit.</p> <p>The associated actions and outcomes included within the Performance Improvement Plan focus more on providing corporate efficiencies such as the implementation of new Council IT systems and more timely publication of Council performance data on the Council's website.</p>	
2016-17	IO3/2017	<p>Ensure that improvement can be demonstrated and, where possible, measured through the use of meaningful performance indicators and data collection and/or other qualitative methods. These indicators should not just concentrate around, nor be limited to, the statutory indicators and standards imposed by central government. Where possible and relevant, the Council should use baseline performance data.</p>	<p>The Council's four improvement objectives for 2019-20 include a wide range of meaningful indicators and are not limited to statutory indicators. The Council has now included baseline data from previous years, for eight of its 19 indicators. This will allow demonstration of future improvement.</p> <p>A number of new indicators have been adopted for the current year and therefore previous baseline data is not available.</p>	<b>In progress</b>
2017-18	IO1/2018	<p>The Council should link the improvement objectives more closely to the identified</p>	<p>The Council's service planning process was revised during 2018-19. It was designed to</p>	<b>In progress</b>

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
		<p>actions, keeping in mind the intended outcomes. A bottom-up approach to objective setting may help the Council to avoid improvement objectives that are too broad and open-ended. It should also narrow the gap in the Council's ability to clearly demonstrate the impact on the outcomes for citizens.</p>	<p>assist officers in identifying performance improvement initiatives at an early stage, to clearly link them through the Corporate and Community Plans and to identify the outcome of the initiative and what difference it will make to stakeholders.</p> <p>The service planning process was also combined with the budget planning process to ensure that appropriate financial resources were being allocated to both business as usual and performance initiatives.</p> <p>The Council's Performance Improvement Plan outlines the Strategic Planning timetable and outlines when, and how performance improvement initiatives were discussed with various stakeholders such as; residents, Elected Members and Heads of Service.</p> <p>The Council established four improvement objectives within its 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan. If delivered effectively, three of the four current year objectives can demonstrate direct benefit to citizens. The fourth -"Improve efficiency and transparency", it is set at a very high level, and it is unclear how citizens will benefit directly.</p>	

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
			The associated actions and indicators included within the Performance Improvement Plan focus more on providing corporate efficiencies such as the implementation of new Council IT systems and more timely publication of Council performance data on the Council's website.	
2017-18	IO2/2018	The Council should ensure that underlying projects are more focused on outcomes or that the collective outputs contribute to an evidence-based outcome at the objective level. The outcome(s) should always be clearly stated so that citizens can understand how they will benefit.	See comments above at IO1/2018 and IO1/2017	<b>Not implemented</b>
2017-18	IO3/2018	Where possible and relevant, the Council should use baseline performance data/information (and set standards which it hopes to achieve) against which future improvement can be demonstrated.		<b>Implemented</b>
<b>Collection, use and publication of performance information</b>				
2017-18	CUP1/2018	In addition to the local indicators and standards relating specifically to improvement objectives, the Council should select a range of local indicators and standards to enable it to measure and monitor improvement across its full range of functions, as part of its general duty arrangements to	The Council's Annual Self-Assessment report provides performance results against the indicators linked directly to the Council's: improvement objectives; statutory indicators; and self-imposed indicators.	<b>In progress</b>

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
		<p>continuously improve. This information should be included in the published Performance Improvement Plan and Annual Self-Assessment Report and provide year on year comparisons. The Council should continue working with other councils and the Department to agree a suite of self-imposed indicators and standards. This will enable meaningful comparisons to be made and be published in line with its statutory responsibility.</p>	<p>A sub-group of SOLACE's performance improvement working group has produced a paper on the way forward to establish a regional performance framework (benchmark framework). The approach will be agreed with the Department of Communities. A meeting of the sub-group discussed the issue in November 2019.</p> <p>Some progress has been made in the current year following advice from the Department of Communities that councils should benchmark at least two self-imposed indicators relating to the general duty to improve in addition to benchmarking the statutory indicators. The Council has benchmarked these indicators against the other councils within the annual assessment report 2018-19. We expect that further progress by all councils will be necessary in the coming year to allow a broader range of functions to be compared.</p>	
2017-18	CUP2/2018	<p>Self-assessment reports must clearly set out a section on performance in relation to its general duty to improve as required under the legislation.</p>		<b>Implemented</b>

Year of report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by Council	Status
2017-18	CUP3/2018	Self-assessments should not focus solely on the underlying projects but also include an assessment of the Council's progress in delivering its improvement objectives.		<b>Implemented</b>

## Annex C – Detailed observations

Thematic area	Observations
General duty to improve	<p>The Council has in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions.</p> <p>The Council's Service Planning process was revised during 2018-19 in order to assist officers in identifying performance improvement initiatives at an earlier stage, to clearly link those initiatives to the Corporate and Community Plans and to identify expected outcomes and what difference it might make. The revised Service Planning process was combined with the Council's budget planning process to ensure that appropriate financial resources were allocated to both business as usual and performance initiatives.</p> <p>There is clear evidence that the Council has aligned the Performance Improvement Objectives to The Big Plan 2017-32 (the Council's Community Plan) and also to the Council Corporate Plan 2015-20. Both of these documents set the longer term corporate and performance expectations for the Council and these documents are clearly referred to in the Performance Improvement Plan and easily accessible from the Council's website.</p> <p>The Council's Annual Self-Assessment report now includes a section titled "<i>Discharging the general duty to secure continuous improvement in 2018-19</i>" and provides the information required in this regard. It also provides detailed analysis on how it performed against each of its 2018-19 objectives. An aggregated RAG status is used to show the results of each individual improvement objective at a high level.</p> <p>Issues identified and any planned improvements are included throughout the report. Within the "<i>overall assessment of progress at year end</i>" section, the Council has included details on where things went well and where things could be improved going forward.</p>
Governance arrangements	<p>The Council has adequate governance and scrutiny arrangements for performance improvement and those arrangements are operating effectively. Incorporating a data validation exercise into the internal audit of performance improvement would further strengthen the arrangements.</p>

	<p>The Council has established a range of governance arrangements to assist it in the delivery of its Performance Improvement Plan. It has a dedicated Performance Improvement Unit (PIU) with a Performance Improvement Manager and three full time Performance Improvement Officers. The PIU is overseen by the Council's Head of Strategic Transformation and Performance who reports to the Council's Director of Finance and Performance.</p> <p>The Council amended the Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee during 2018 so that the Performance Improvement Plan would be brought to each meeting and that going forward, the Committee would have responsibility for monitoring progress in respect of the Council's progress. These review and reporting practices are now embedded within the Council's arrangements.</p> <p>Performance reports from each of the Council's Service Areas (i.e. planning, leisure, waste) are brought before the Council's Standing Committees on a quarterly basis. These reports include detail on how the Council is performing against individual Service Area Key Performance Indicators ("KPIs") of which there are over 300.</p> <p>The Council has now incorporated a Performance Improvement audit into the Internal Audit Plan for 2019-20 but this review will focus on comparing the Council's Performance Improvement framework against good practice, as opposed to any data validation.</p>
Improvement objectives	<p>The 2019-20 improvement objectives are legitimate, clear, robust, deliverable and demonstrable. The Council's focus is mainly on objectives and associated projects, outcomes and targets that are aimed at directly benefiting citizens.</p> <p>There is clear evidence that the Performance Improvement Objectives are linked to the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and also to the associated Big Plan, the Council's Community Plan. Each Corporate Improvement Objective has associated actions and outcomes, as well as a number of performance measures. A Senior Responsible Officer, who is the Director of the Service Area to which the objective relates, has been assigned to manage the implementation of each objective...</p> <p>The 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan contains four objectives, reduced from the seven objectives included in the 2018-19 Plan. Four of the 2018-19 objectives were combined to provide a better focus for improvement. The Annual Self-Assessment Report provides a narrative for each of the 2018-19 objectives stating whether it has rolled forward to 2019-20 or whether the objective will be monitored as a "<i>business as usual</i>" activity. While the rationale for the changes to the 2019-20 objectives from 2018-19 have been included as part of the "<i>overall assessment of progress at year end</i>", it is not always clear to the reader.</p>

	<p>If delivered effectively, three of the four current year objectives and associated projects, outcomes and targets can demonstrate direct benefit to citizens. These three objectives are outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve how we engage with, and support, all local communities to deliver real social benefits;</li> <li>• Improve street cleansing and recycling rates from HRC's and commercial customers; and</li> <li>• Deliver projects that will create attractive areas that people will want to live, work, visit and invest in.</li> </ul> <p>The Council's fourth improvement objective - "<i>Improve efficiency and transparency</i>", is set at too high a level and in these instances it is difficult to conclude how this can directly benefit citizens.</p> <p>The associated projects, outcomes and targets included within the Performance Improvement Plan focus more on providing corporate efficiencies such as the implementation of new Council IT systems and more timely publication of Council performance data on the Council's website.</p>
<p>Consultation</p>	<p>The Council has met its statutory duty to consult on the proposed 2019-20 performance improvement objectives. The process was transparent and open; evidence of the consultation process was documented adequately; the results of the process were used to inform the 2019-20 performance improvement objectives; and there is evidence of ongoing dialogue between the Council and the community.</p> <p>The Department for Communities (DfC) guidance recommends that councils consult when deciding how to discharge the general duty to improve and on its proposed improvement objectives.</p> <p>The Council's consultation period began in September 2018 with the Corporate Leadership Team and Heads of Service being asked to identify improvement initiatives during the service planning and budget process. The public consultation on the 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan lasted for three weeks. The consultation comprised advertising an online survey and also the facilitation of two separate focus groups. A total of 29 responses were received from the online survey and the focus groups were attended by 17 residents.</p> <p>The Council encourages stakeholders and residents to engage in the performance improvement process through "Your Opinion Matters", an ongoing campaign being run continuously throughout the year. The Performance Improvement Plan presents a summary of responses received from the consultation process and highlights the support of stakeholders and residents to each individual improvement objective. The Plan also highlights where amendments were made to the Corporate Improvement Objectives from any of the prior year associated actions to reflect the feedback received from the consultation process.</p>

	<p>The Council is intending to establish a Resident Engagement Strategy to assist with the consultation process in future.</p>
<p>Improvement plan</p>	<p>The Council's 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan complies with the Act and with DfC guidance.</p> <p>The Council published its 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan on its website on 28 June 2019. The Plan was made available in other formats on request. It contains the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• background information setting the strategic and corporate context within which the Council's improvement responsibilities lie;</li> <li>• a description of its annual performance improvement objectives, how these were selected, together with related performance improvement projects and key actions to be undertaken to deliver the objectives;</li> <li>• statutory imposed performance indicators and standards in relation to waste and recycling, and economic development;</li> <li>• self-imposed indicators and standards;</li> <li>• the reasons why objectives were chosen and what improvements are expected;</li> <li>• a summary of the Council's consultation process in relation to the Plan;</li> <li>• the Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and</li> <li>• an overview of the Council's performance management governance arrangements.</li> </ul> <p>The Plan includes an explanation that the Council has a suite of corporate indicators which include statutory indicators as well as self-imposed non-statutory indicators. The Performance Improvement Plan also includes a table showing each of the statutory and non-statutory indicators and how the Council performed in each of these areas dating back to 2015-16. There is no explanation, however, of how the Council intends to improve its performance on either the statutory indicators, or the self-imposed indicators. Under the legislation the Council is required to provide clear information on how it is working to meet and monitor progress against statutory indicators and its own self-imposed non-statutory performance indicators. The Council should ensure that adequate narrative is provided detailing how it intends to improve its performance against the statutory indicators and the self-imposed indicators.</p>
<p>Arrangements to improve</p>	<p>The Council has adequate arrangements in place to secure the achievement of its improvement objectives, statutory indicators and the general duty to improve. Performance information could be improved if indicators are embedded over several years to allow improvement over time to be measured.</p>

	<p>The Council’s indicators, aligned with the delivery of the agreed improvement objectives, are supported by Head of Service delivery plans and budgets. The achievement of those indicators is supported by projects which are being managed by assigned Project Managers with lines of accountability to the Senior Management Team and Elected Members.</p> <p>Progress against all improvement objectives, statutory indicators and self-imposed objectives, are reviewed monthly at a Departmental level and reported quarterly to the Corporate Service Committee, Audit Committee and Council using a ‘traffic light system’ to indicate progress against the objective.</p> <p>Ongoing risks associated with the delivery of projects are identified and managed as part of project management arrangements and, if required, escalated to the Council’s risk registers as part of normal risk management reporting arrangements.</p> <p>Across the Council’s four improvement objectives, there are a total of 19 indicators. The template format used within the 2019-20 Performance Improvement Plan allows for the disclosure of performance data dating back to 2015-16 for each of the measures, although historic data is only available for a limited number of measures due to a range of new measures being created for 2018-19 and 2019-20 for which there is no baseline data. Of the Council’s 19 agreed performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two measures have baseline and comparative data dating back to 2015-16;</li> <li>• Three measures have supporting data dating back to 2016-17;</li> <li>• Three measures have supporting data dating back to 2018-19; and</li> <li>• Eleven measures are new for 2019-20 and therefore do not have historic supporting data.</li> </ul> <p>Historical data is available primarily for the measures relating to waste collection, recycling, staff absenteeism and prompt payment. For the other objectives, the form fields requesting historic data to be populated are either marked as “non-applicable” or “new measure”. There is no indication that alternative measures were explored, either from within the Council or from other comparable bodies. This makes it difficult to assess whether any progress can realistically be made, or how appropriate the targets set will be. A brief explanation would clarify this for the reader.</p>
Collection, use and publication of performance information	The Council’s arrangements to assess its performance and to publish the results are adequate. The Council could improve further by introducing arrangements for data validation.

The Council has developed a Performance Management Handbook and a supporting Performance Management Policy which outlines how performance data is being collected in the Council and who has responsibility for managing the collection and reporting of this data.

The Council uses a dedicated performance management system, called Pentana, to record and report on this performance data. Pentana is accessible through the Council's Intranet page and each service area has its own access to the relevant aspect of the Pentana portal. Heads of Service, or their designated officer, will input data details of actual performance against the agreed indicators onto the system on a quarterly basis. This system is the source for all reports to Standing Committees, the Audit Committee and the Council. The Internal Audit Plan provides for two Service Reviews which includes compliance with performance methodology and data validation where required.

The Council reports on prior year performance within the Annual Self-Assessment report. The Report provides detail on how the Council performed in relation to its Performance Improvement Objectives, its statutory indicators and its self-imposed indicators. An overall RAG status is assigned to each indicator as well as direction of travel showing either progress or a decline against the prior year's performance.

The Annual Self-Assessment report has been updated in the 2019-20 year to include a section on performance in relation to the overall general duty to improve. The Report now provides increased detail in relation to the overall achievement of improvement objectives rather than focussing on improvement at an operational level. For each improvement objective, as well as providing performance there is narrative detailing an overall assessment of progress against the overarching objective giving readers a sense of if the objective is being achieved.

In terms of comparisons with other Councils, the Council has disclosed this information for the statutory indicators as well as for prompt payment and average number of working days lost per employee. The Council discloses performance against an NI average figure as opposed to benchmarking against individual Councils. More detailed comparisons would provide readers with more transparent performance information.

The Council is a member of the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE), including the APSE Performance Network, a public sector benchmarking organisation which assists the Council in improving its ability to compare performance across a wide range of services and activities.

	<p>A sub-group of SOLACE’s performance improvement working group has produced a paper on the way forward to establish a regional performance framework (benchmark framework). The approach will be agreed with the Department of Communities. A meeting of the sub-group discussed the issue in November 2019.</p> <p>Some progress has been made in the current year following advice from the Department of Communities that councils should benchmark at least two self-imposed indicators relating to the general duty to improve in addition to benchmarking the statutory indicators. The Council has benchmarked these indicators against the other councils within the annual assessment report 2018-19. Significant progress by all councils is essential in the coming year to allow a broader range of functions to be compared.</p>
<p>Demonstrating a track record of improvement</p>	<p>The Council can demonstrate improvement in its performance.</p> <p>The Council’s Annual Self-Assessment report provides information on the Council’s performance in relation to its improvement objectives, statutory indicators and self-imposed indicators. The Council has reported within its 2018-19 Annual Self-Assessment Report, performance against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• twenty two performance indicators associated with its seven performance improvement objectives (2018-19);</li> <li>• seven statutory performance indicators (three of which are included within the 22 indicators associated with the improvement objectives); and</li> <li>• five self-imposed non-statutory indicators (two of which are included within the 22 indicators associated with the improvement objectives).</li> </ul> <p>Overall, the Council reported a total of 29 performance indicators. The Council was on target or close to target for 83 per cent of its performance indicators (i.e. in 24 out of 29 indicators). It demonstrated year on year improvement for 38 per cent of the performance indicators (i.e. in 11 out of 29 indicators). Thirteen new indicators were introduced in 2018-19 for which no prior year baseline data was available. A further 11 new indicators were introduced for 2019-20.</p> <p>Introducing new performance indicators each year makes it difficult to assess performance over an extended period and for residents to ascertain whether the Council is demonstrating continuous improvement.</p>