



Looking Back

Self-Assessment Report
2025/2026

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1. Introduction and context

Introduction

Ards and North Down Borough Council is committed to being a high performing organisation, innovating and partnering to make a positive difference for our Borough. At the heart of everything is our drive to continuously improve and deliver excellent quality services, whilst ensuring value for money.

This Self-Assessment Report provides a vehicle for the Council to determine its capacity and ability to deliver 'continuous improvement' by identifying areas where it is performing well and areas that will require particular attention in future years. By assessing where progress has been slower than expected or has not resulted in the levels of desired performance, it can review and adjust the way it uses its resources to ensure maximum benefit for the people living in, working in and visiting Ards and North Down. This report sets out how the Council performed against its Corporate and Statutory Indicators in the 2025/26 year.

The Council would like to recognise the commitment and professionalism of all its employees during this period.

Context

The Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2028 aligns with the long-term aspirations of the Borough's Community Plan 2017-2032. The Corporate Plan serves as the Council's current strategic framework, setting out our vision to be **A Sustainable Borough**.

The plan is driven by three corporate priorities:

1. **Economic** - Increasing economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses.
2. **Environmental** - Reducing carbon emissions as we transition to net zero.
3. **Social** – Improving wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequalities.

The Plan outlines seven outcomes that support the three priorities. Each outcome is supported by strategic actions detailing the commitments the Council is making between 2024-28.

Measures of success, to monitor progress and demonstrate if we have achieved what we set out to, have also been identified within our new Corporate Plan.

The Council is committed to improving our services and resident feedback is critical to this. We welcome your comments or suggestions at any time of the year and have a continuous 'Your Opinion Matters' campaign. Suggestions for improvement initiatives can be sent to us by emailing yom@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk or contacting us at:

Transformation Team
Ards and North Down Borough Council
City Hall, The Castle
BANGOR, BT20 4BT
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2. Discharging the general duty to secure continuous improvement in 2025/26

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 places a duty upon Councils to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement and to account for it. At the beginning of each financial year, the Council is required to publish a Performance Improvement Plan, which sets out how it will discharge its duties in the financial year ahead, and by 30 September to publish a Self-Assessment Report to account for its improvement activity and review performance against the Improvement Objectives set in the preceding year.

We seek to discharge our duty to improve through Council's Performance Governance Framework, **PERFORM**, which ensures that the Council's strategic objectives are cascaded throughout the organisation.

At the highest level, **The Big Plan (Community Plan)**, published in April 2017, sets out strategic priorities for the Borough and includes details of the joint activity that will be undertaken by the strategic partners (including Council) to support the delivery of those priorities. The **Corporate Plan** outlines the Council's vision, priorities, outcomes and strategic actions and describes its ambition for how local services will be delivered more efficiently and effectively for everyone. The Corporate Plan is underpinned by a number of secondary strategic plans and thematic strategies and supported by detailed operational service plans and individual development plans.

What is Improvement?

Improvement means more than just gains in service output or efficiency, or the internal effectiveness of the Council. It is about activity that enhances the sustainable quality of life and environment for the residents and businesses in Ards and North Down.

To demonstrate our commitment to improving the areas that matter most to our residents, our annual improvement plan and objectives are aligned to the outcomes set out in [The Big Plan](#) 2017-2032 and supports the priorities set out in the [Council's Corporate Plan](#).

The Council is committed to ensuring that our improvement objectives are relevant, that the best arrangement for delivering them is in place and that the Council can understand and demonstrate the impact on the outcomes for its citizens. In its 2025/26 Performance Improvement Plan the Council set 4 Improvement Objectives:

Improvement Objective 1	We will increase economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses
Improvement Objective 2	We will reduce carbon emissions as we transition to net zero
Improvement Objective 3	We will improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality
Improvement Objective 4	We will be a high-performing organisation

and identified a number of local improvement indicators along with the six statutory performance indicators for Waste, Planning and Economic Development.

Arrangements to secure continuous improvement

Section 90 of the Act requires a Council, during each financial year, to collect information which will allow it to assess its performance in achieving its improvement objectives and to measure its performance against performance indicators or standards set by the Department or any other indicators or standards which the Council chooses to use.

The Council has governance arrangements in place to assure accountability for improvement and to ensure the delivery of its plans takes place in an open, effective, honest and accountable manner.

These arrangements include:

- Alignment of the service planning and budget process to ensure all costs are included in the estimates
- An electronic performance management system, Ideagen, which can:
 - analyse data on a range of frequencies for trends and comparison
 - track the progress of indicators and actions
 - provide and communicate regular and robust performance information to Managers, Elected Members and the public
- Half yearly reporting on Service Plans to relevant standing committees; in December and June
- Half yearly reporting on progress against the Performance Improvement Plan to Corporate Committee
- Regular reporting on Capital Projects to Corporate Projects Portfolio Board (CPPB)
- Regular reporting on Transformation Projects to the Strategic Transformation and Efficiency Programme (STEP) Board
- Regular reporting on Estates Projects to the Estates Development Programme Board (EDPB)
- Reporting to Strategic Policy and Finance Group (SPFG) as and when required
- Appropriate risk management in relation to main programmes of work

These arrangements follow a Strategic Planning Timetable (see Figure 1) and are underpinned by the Council's Performance Governance Framework, **PERFORM**:

Plan

Stating what we will do and why - the Performance Planning and Management process will be used at the following levels:



Community Planning and Reporting, where a plan will be developed every 10-15 years, setting out shared objectives for the local area and its people, to be fulfilled by a range of organisations working in partnership. A review of the plan will be carried out every four years in advance of its fourth-year anniversary.

Corporate Planning and Reporting, where a plan will be developed every 4 years to set out objectives for the Council.

Performance Improvement Plans which set out the Council's plan for a single year.

Service Planning and Reporting, where a plan will be developed every year by each council service.

Individual (and/ or collective Team level) Planning and Reporting, where a plan will be delivered every year.

This approach is designed to facilitate alignment between Community, Corporate, Service and Individual plans, activities and the needs of our stakeholders. It will also focus on assessment of key risks, alignment of the Council's resources, processes and systems to consistently achieve strategic objectives.

Engage

Working together to achieve it - to inspire and motivate staff and stakeholders to be engaged with what the organisation seeks to deliver. It is likely to include focus on developing leadership, culture and values and will typically involve effective inductions, team building, cross-council team working and staff forums.

Resource

Putting our people and budgets where they are needed - to improve organisation and structural design, budget setting and management. It will involve recruitment, learning and development and system investment. It should also ensure a coordinated approach to the development of resources including staff.

Focus

Doing the right thing right – to ensure system and process alignment with organisational objectives. It is likely to involve carrying out service reviews, ongoing coaching, identifying

process improvements, reviewing potential suitable systems and ensuring optimum use of systems, technology and equipment.

Operate

Getting on with the job - to ensure continuous improvement. It is designed to promote performance improvement, encourage innovation and share good practice. This will typically include ongoing benchmarking exercises to ensure we continually improve our practices and any other identified activities that would encourage continuous improvement.

Relate

Communicating with our stakeholders - to have successful communications. The aim is to encourage engagement and transparency; this stage will include decisions on communication and delivery, including internal/external communication methods, carrying out stakeholder surveys and receiving feedback including complaints. Stakeholder analysis and Partnership working are also likely to be included.

Manage

Reviewing how we are doing and managing improvements - to monitor, reward good performance and address under performance. This will involve reviewing feedback etc. for each of the parties involved and determining actual measurement achieved against original objectives/targets.

Timeline	Activity
October – March	• Budget Setting and Service Planning process • Identification of areas for improvement • CLT/ HoST consultation on Service Plans and key areas for improvement • Resident Satisfaction Survey (every 2 years) • Service Plans approved by Standing Committees • Strike the Rate • Report on Performance to December Standing Committees (Half Year 1) • Report on Performance Improvement Plan to December Corporate Committee (Half Year 1)
April – May	• Consultation with community, stakeholders, employees and Elected Members with regard to performance improvement measures • Employee Appraisals • Draft Performance Improvement Plan to HoST and CLT
June	• Performance Improvement Plan to Corporate Committee and ratification by Council • Publish on Council website by 30 June • Begin Self-Assessment review of prior year's performance • Submit Benchmarking statistics • Report on Performance to June Standing Committees (Half Year 2)
August	• NIAO Fieldwork • Draft Self-Assessment Report to HoST and CLT
September	• Self-Assessment Report to Corporate Committee and ratification by Council (includes report on Performance Improvement Plan for Half Year 2) • Publish Self-Assessment Report by 30 September • Budget Setting and Service Plan preparation

Figure 1 - Strategic Planning Timetable 2025/26

We continually assess how we are performing against targets to ensure we are making a difference to our stakeholders. This process, along with delivery planning, is aligned to our corporate priorities, moves through monitoring and reporting performance and considers resident and service user feedback to ensure we identify improvement activity that will deliver positive outcomes.

Additionally, we continuously review the effectiveness of our performance arrangements in support of our General Duty to improve ensuring there are clear linkages between outcomes, priorities, and actions.

Further information on our performance can be found at [Performance Improvement - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#).

3. The cost of our services

Gross Expenditure		
	25/26 Outturn	24/25 Outturn
Service	Total	TOTAL
Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	4,497,000	4,274,000
Community	4,746,000	4,104,000
Leisure	4,460,000	4,550,000
Waste & Cleansing Services	19,507,000	18,642,000
Estates	11,108,000	11,135,000
Parks & Cemeteries	6,827,000	5,963,000
Economic Growth	3,525,000	3,334,000
Planning Services & Building Control	3,879,000	3,690,000
Tourism, Arts & Heritage	3,392,000	2,919,000
Strategic Capital Development	377,000	382,000
Community Planning & Climate Change	478,000	369,000
Communication & Marketing	1,306,000	1,200,000
Finance	1,429,000	1,418,000
Strategic Change	2,677,000	2,775,000
Human Resources	1,150,000	1,090,000
Corporate Governance	5,510,000	5,339,000
Corporately Managed	12,933,000	13,811,000
Total	87,801,000	84,995,000

Our financial statements will be available on the Council's [website](#) from October 2026.

4. How we measure and analyse our performance

Throughout the year, we use key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor how we are delivering services. The KPIs shown in this report are only some of the indicators we use and for the purposes of the report have been aggregated to give an overall assessment of our performance. The indicators we monitor are comprised of:

- **Statutory Indicators**

- Waste Management - the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) sets the Waste Management indicators and standards and publishes performance by council area on a quarterly basis through the NI Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics report - information may be accessed using the following link [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics)
- Planning - the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) sets the Planning indicators and standards, which are published by council area on a quarterly basis. Information may be accessed using the following link: [Planning activity statistics | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](https://infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/planning-activity-statistics)
- Economic Development - set by the Department for the Economy (DfE)

- **Self-Imposed Indicators:**

- Those set by services against the objectives and actions in their Service Plans
- A suite of suggested indicators from the Department for Communities (DfC) to allow performance comparison across the sector.

5. How did we do? Our Performance Results for 2025/26

A SUMMARY

...OF THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

As a Council we employ circa 900 people to help our services. In 2025/26 we worked hard to ensure we operated effectively and that those who live in, work in and visit the Borough received high-quality services that provided value for money. This section illustrates just some of our achievements over the past year.

In 2025/26:



Delivered **188 Business interventions**

to assist local businesses through business advice sessions and business research service.

178 jobs created through the Go Succeed Programme.



132,000m²

of Council Maintained ground rewilded.



Household Recycling

58.5%



£144,842 invested in **sport**, through the Sports Capital and Forum Grant funding programmes



Carried out **9681** Building Control (BC) inspections



Planted **15,747** trees in the Borough



Issued **49 littering fines** and **38 Fixed Penalty Notices** for dog fouling



Delivered **£12M capital investment**

across the Borough



Reached over **768 Children** through participation in Summer Schemes across **8** locations

Delivered **207** diversionary/patrols/sessions to **4,956** participants

Some of our good news stories from 2025/26

Council conferred the Freedom of the Borough, its highest honour, on Rhys McClenaghan MBE, at a formal ceremony on Friday 23 January 2026.

The award was presented in recognition of the exceptional impact Rhys has made on gymnastics in Northern Ireland and in placing Ards and North Down firmly on the global sporting stage.

A three-time World Champion, as well as a Commonwealth and European Champion, Rhys is one of the leading pommel horse gymnasts in the world. His remarkable achievements have reshaped the sporting landscape - not only for Irish gymnastics but across these islands. His success is the result of extraordinary talent, relentless commitment and unwavering self-belief.

A special live celebration, *Meet the Champion: Rhys McClenaghan Live*, also took place on Sunday 25 January at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. The event included a Q&A session hosted by Cool FM's Pete Snodden, a display from Origin Gymnastics, and a meet and greet with Rhys himself.

Many thanks to all staff involved in organising both the conferment ceremony and the live event – both of which were a massive success.



Council achieves progress in the Business in the Community NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey 2025!

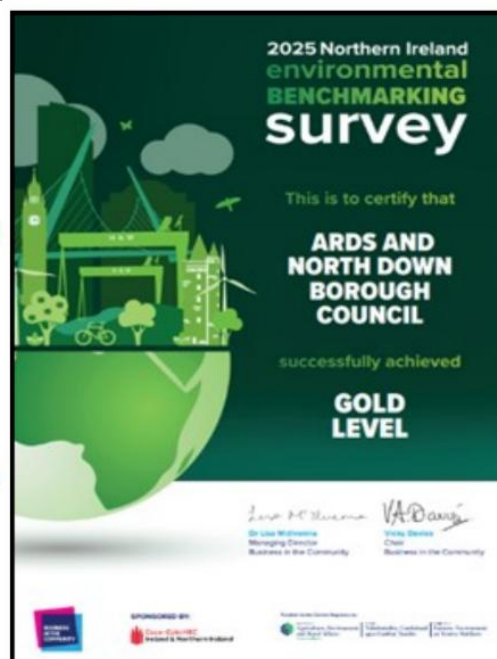
Council participated in the annual **Business in the Community Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey** again this year. We are proud to announce that we have achieved **Gold Level** this year, upgrading from the Silver Level achieved in 2024.

The Northern Ireland Environmental Benchmarking Survey benchmarks organisations against sector peers and leading Northern Ireland organisations based on environmental management and performance in key areas, as well as the extent to which environmental business practices have been embedded within corporate strategies. The survey is recognised as a positive influence as it helps organisations publicly demonstrate their commitment to better environmental practices.

It is great to see our progress within Council as we continue to become more sustainable, it is a huge achievement.

A big thank you for all your efforts as we aim to achieve more for our staff and residents.

#netzero #sustainability #climate



Groomspoint has been named the winner of the 'Best Kept Large Village' category and Donaghadee has been taken the 'Best Kept Small Town' title in the 2025 Northern Ireland Best Kept City, Town, Village and Housing Area Awards.

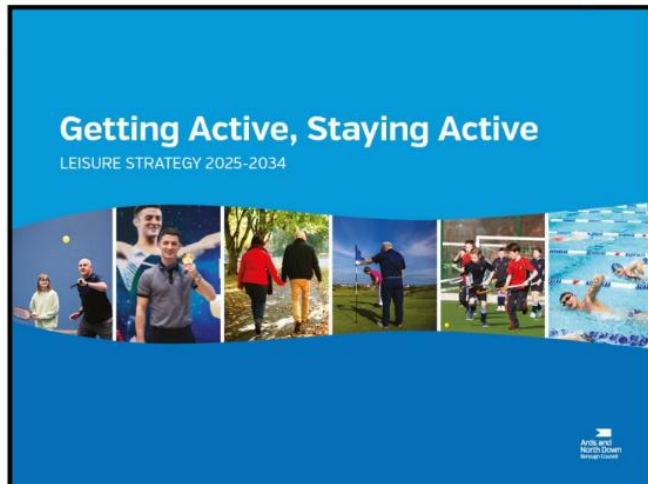
This is the first time Groomspoint has won the Large Village category thanks to its impressive floral enhancement throughout the village, it is also the second time that Donaghadee has won the Small-Town category.

Launch of Leisure Strategy 2025-2034 – Getting Active, Staying Active

Council is delighted to share the new **Leisure Strategy 2025-2034 – Getting Active, Staying Active**, which sets out our shared vision for a Borough “*where everyone can enjoy an active life.*”

This is the first leisure strategy for Ards and North Down, developed by the Council and delivered in partnership with local agencies, organisations and community groups. Together we aim to create more opportunities for **active leisure** - anything that involves exercise so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of an active lifestyle.

The Strategy sets out a clear direction for developing leisure across Ards and North Down, promoting an inclusive and sustainable approach that supports the health and wellbeing of all residents.



First Purpose-Built Softball Diamond Opens

Council's purpose-built softball diamond facility in Bangor's Ward Park – the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, has officially opened.

This sports facility will be home to several softball teams including North Down Softball Club's Bangor Buccaneers, Bangor Barracudas and Scrabo Sluggers. The facility will also be used by many other teams during competitive matches within the Ulster Softball league and for tournaments.

Council launches its €5,681,833 PEACEPLUS Co-designed Local Action Plan

Council has officially launched its €5,681,833 PEACEPLUS Co-designed Local Action Plan, which will be focused on fostering positive relations between people from all backgrounds and building a shared, inclusive future.

The Local Action Plan is a project supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

New 5.4km Whitespots Line Connects Bangor and Newtownards as Major Greenway Milestone Completed



Council is celebrating the completion of works on the new Whitespots Line of the Comber Greenway. A transformative 5.4-kilometre active travel route linking Newtownards and Bangor.

The milestone was marked at an event attended by project partners, funders, contractors and community representatives last week. Minister for Infrastructure, Liz Kimmins MLA was also in attendance.

The new shared-use path strengthens opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling for residents and visitors of all ages, while showcasing the area's natural environment through a safe, accessible and scenic route.

- Major funding support for the project was provided by:
- Department for Infrastructure (DfI)
- Department for Transport
- UK Government

Performance against our Corporate Plan 2024-2028

The Corporate Plan 2024-2028 aligns with the long-term aspirations of the Borough's Community Plan (The Big Plan 2017-2032).

The Corporate Plan serves as the Council's strategic framework for 2024-2028, setting out our vision to be **A Sustainable Borough**.

The plan is driven by three corporate priorities:

- **Economic** - Increasing economic growth attracting more jobs and businesses.
- **Environmental** - Reducing carbon emissions as we transition to net zero.
- **Social** – Improving wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequalities.



The Plan outlines seven outcomes that support the three priorities. Each outcome is supported by strategic actions detailing the commitments the Council is making for the remaining four-year period. The strategic actions form the basis of the Performance Improvement Plan objectives for 2026/27, to ensure our focus continues achieving our commitments.

Measures of success to monitor progress and demonstrate if we have achieved what we set out to have also been identified within the Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Plan is underpinned by a range of strategic and service unit plans, which set out in more detail how we will deliver and resource the activities needed to work towards our vision.

The Council monitors performance of its key performance indicators included within each of its Service delivery plans with a RAG performance. A summary for 2025/26 broken down by Corporate Priority is below:

Corporate Priority	Green 	Yellow 	Red 
Economic	102 KPIs	11 KPIs	36 KPIs
Environment	22 KPIs	0 KPIs	6 KPIs
Social	52 KPIs	2 KPIs	13 KPIs

A separate, more detailed report on how Council is performing against the Corporate Plan 2024-2028 has been developed.

The following Improvement Objectives are based on an analysis of performance measures reported as part of the normal Service Planning process that underpin the Corporate Plan 2024-2028 and the Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017-2032. Further information on our performance can be found at

<https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/performance-improvement>.

Big Plan Outcome All people in Ards and North Down...	Corporate Plan 2024-2028 Priorities...
benefit from a prosperous and inclusive economy	Economic: Increased economic growth attracting more businesses and jobs
benefit from an environment that is valued, well-managed and accessible	Environmental: Reduced carbon emissions as we transition to net zero
benefit from opportunities to fulfil their lifelong potential	Social: Improved wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality
benefit from communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure	
benefit from being equipped to enjoy good health and wellbeing	

Performance Key

The key outlined below provides definitions for the three Red/Amber/Green (RAG) status levels that have been chosen to measure progress, and the Red/Amber/ Green (RAG) status levels which have been chosen to determine our overall assessment of progress.

RAG Status	Definition	RAG Overall assessment of progress	Definition
	Target/ standard, actions and measures are on track		The majority of measures are on target
	Target/ standard, actions and measures are ongoing, but some are falling short of plan		At least 25% of the measures in this outcome are slightly below target
	Target/ standard, actions and measures are of concern and are mostly falling short of plan		At least 50% of the measures in this outcome are significantly below target

PERFORMANCE AGAINST PIP 2025/26

The undernoted table gives an aggregated assessment of the Council's performance against the Performance Improvement Plan 2025/26. The tables following give details of the outcomes of each of the activities against each objective.

Improvement Objective	Aggregated RAG
We will increase economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses	Green
We will reduce carbon emissions as we transition to net zero	Yellow
We will improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality	Green
We will be a high-performing organisation	Yellow

Each of the areas is described in detail in the following section of this report.

Improvement Objective 1: We will increase economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses

What we hoped to achieve

- Grow the Council's non-domestic rate base.
- Develop programmes, and participate in initiatives, that help support business growth within Ards and North Down.
- Develop programmes, and work in partnership, to increase people's employability.
- Help businesses access training, knowledge, skills and innovations that will assist with the transition to low carbon.
- Maximise opportunities for people to take part in volunteering.
- Maximise the use of Council-owned assets to generate economic return for the Borough.
- Reprioritise our capital plan towards supporting a thriving, low carbon, sustainable economy.
- Develop partnerships and deliver activities that improve digital connectivity to benefit local businesses.
- Deliver a focussed Borough-wide programme of events and activities.
- Start to see delivery of the ambitions within the Belfast Regional City Deal projects.
- Invest in high-quality, low carbon, built infrastructure.
- Deliver the Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy.
- Effectively apply the policies within the Local Development Plan to make well considered and timely planning decisions.
- Achieve sustainable visitor numbers, meaning there is a balance between the number of visitors to the Borough, the capacity of local infrastructure and benefits to local people and communities.

How did we do

2025/26 Measure	2025/26 Target	2025/26 Actual	RAG Status	Reason why KPI not met / Actions being taken	2024/25 Actual	Trend from previous year
Develop a capital grant scheme for vacant or derelict properties, aimed at transforming vacant properties into vibrant spaces, fostering redevelopment, boosting the local economy and increasing the non-domestic rate base.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Deliver the Strategic Capital Projects Portfolio for 2025/26 (ensuring our Capital Plan supports a thriving, low carbon, sustainable economy)	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Develop a master plan and OBC by 31st March 2026 for the delivery of a business park at the former NIE site on Balloo Road, Bangor.	100%	20%	●	Unsuccessful procurement exercise to secure an Integrated Consultancy Team to produce a masterplan for the Former NIE site. Action to be taken: Proceed with a Brief to secure a partner to support the development	-	-

				of the site into a potential Business Park. This will be delivered in 2026-2027.		
Develop the Belfast Regeneration City Deal Waterfront development projects to Integrated Design Team stage.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Oversee the development works of Phase One to Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock Arena in keeping with the agreed Quality Specification as part of the Queen's Parade redevelopment scheme.	100%	50%	●	Phase 1 of the development works have commenced and continue to progress. Expected completion October 2026.	-	-
Implement Social Value in Council Procurement Policy by 31st March 2026 to consider how the services we commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.	100%	0%	●	Carried forward to 2026/27.	-	-
Develop a strategy to secure new private sector commercial development in the Bangor Waterfront Area.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Create a trial Social Value initiative by 31st March 2026	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Implement the Mini Digi Hubs project at Comber Community Centre.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Develop the Innovation Hub project to support the growth of the Creative and Digital Tech sectors in Film and TV production (site identification).	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Create 123 new jobs through the "Go Succeed" Programme (Statutory Indicator).	123	179	✓	-	129	↑
Deliver 12 projects in 2025/26 through Labour Market Partnership Action Plan (subject to funding)	12	16	✓	-	12	↑
Develop a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) action plan.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Support 18 businesses in 2025/2026 through the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund Programme	18	17	▲	-	9	↑
Develop/ work up a minimum of 5 projects aligned to the City/ Town Masterplans and 5 aligned to the Village Plans	10	10	✓	-	5	↑

Assist up to 4 groups to deliver Neighbourhood Tourism community initiatives via a pilot grant scheme	4	8		-	-	-
Raise the profile of the Borough as a visitor destination by increasing the number of followers to Visit AND social media by 25%	25%	26%		-	-	-
Implement a new Food standards delivery model.	100%	100%		-	-	-

Improvement Objective 2: We will reduce carbon emissions as we transition to net zero

What we hoped to achieve

- Baseline and reduce our carbon footprint.
- Agree a plan to transition to net zero carbon, including fleet and building emissions, and integrate it within our Roadmap to Sustainability.
- Reduce our energy consumption with a continued focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- Increase the percentage of waste that is sent for recycling and reduce landfill.
- Maximise opportunities to attract external funding and build reserves to support the transition to net zero carbon that reduces the financial impact on the ratepayer.
- Increase tree planting across the Borough to meet our target of 160,000 trees planted by 2032.
- Maintain high standards of cleanliness in our city, towns and villages.
- Participate in partnerships that help tourism operators and visitors make more sustainable choices.
- Participate in partnerships that help protect our valuable natural and coastal assets to enable us to sustainably use them for recreation and climate adaption.

How did we do

2025/26 Measure	2025/26 Target	2025/26 Actual	RAG Status	Reason why KPI not met / Actions being taken	2024/25 Actual	Trend from previous year
Increase % of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use) to 60% (Statutory Indicator: 55.5%).	60%	58.5%		Markets for items such as textiles remain severely depressed reducing opportunities to expand collections for this waste stream compared to what was envisioned.	56.4%	
Reduce the amount (tonnage) of Local Authority collected municipal waste arisings to less than 83,895 (Statutory Indicator). (Previous year's target: 85,976 tonnes).	83,895	85,062		-	83,605	
Reduce annual household waste collected per capita to less than 475kgs	<475kg	487kg		Ards and North Down is an affluent borough, so we produce more waste per capita. The only sure way to reduce overall household waste per capita is to reduce consumption and proposed measures to target consumption are often rejected as they conflict with economic growth which is often regarded as a cornerstone of a successful Borough. However, further measures to ban single use	-	-

				plastics and continued promotion of the principles of repair and re-use should help to work towards meeting the target.		
Carry out refurbishments to Council estate according to agreed schedule.	100%	100%	✓	-	100%	=
Increase the m2 of rewilded Council maintained ground from 120,000 to 130,000.	130,000	132,000	✓	-	132,302	↓
Plant 15,000 trees across the Borough in 2025/26.	15,000	15,747	✓	-	15,532	↑
Set milestones for energy reduction in order to meet our 2030 target.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Implement recommendations within NIPSO Report – Strengthening Our Roots: Prepare and publish a guidance document on Trees and Development in the Borough	100%	95%	⚠	-	-	-
Implement the Action Plan arising from the Sustainable Energy Management Strategy.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Develop and implement a Climate Action Plan for Council.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Develop a Motorhomes Strategy.	100%	25%	●	Carried forward to 2026/27 due to resourcing.	-	-
Put in place 36 Project ELLA delivery targets.	36	41	✓	-	-	-
Continue with a total number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued to a minimum of 425; targeting areas of concern to reduce issues (2025/26 Target: 425).	425	248	●	Target not attainable with vacancies that impacted team during the year.	324	↓
Reduce the average CO2 generated by each dwelling (tonnes based on standardised dwelling figures) (3.79 tonnes - lower figure is better).	<3.79	3.776	✓	-	3.787	↓

Achieve 21.5% of Borough housing stock meeting general disability standards (taking 2001 standard as baseline).	21.5%	22.3%		-	22%	
Develop 'Sustainable Transport at Events' Delivery Plans to maximise opportunities for visitors to attend tourism events in a sustainable manner.	100%	100%		-	-	-

Improvement Objective 3: We will improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality

What we hoped to achieve

- Develop and implement a Leisure Strategy.
- Deliver our Greenways and Urban Trail Development.
- Improve the quality of our playparks and implement a Play Strategy that encourages physical activity in children and young people.
- Complete Phase 1 of the Whitespots Country Park development.
- Deliver our services to maximise environmental protection and the wellbeing of people.
- Support health and wellbeing initiatives that focus on physical activity, mental health and early intervention.
- Reduce absenteeism and increase the wellbeing of employees.
- Develop and implement interventions and programmes that help reduce anti-social behaviour, create harmonious communities and increase community resilience that focus on respecting culture and diversity.
- Provide opportunities for people to add value to their communities through the development, and local management, of community spaces.
- Use our policies to enhance relationships with community and third-party sector organisations to deliver projects with a focus on safe, connected communities and social wellbeing.
- Increase the area for growing spaces available.
- Invest in our green spaces to improve biodiversity, increase community growing opportunities and encourage responsible use.

How did we do

2025/26 Measure	2025/26 Target	2025/26 Actual	RAG Status	Reason why KPI not met / Actions being taken	2024/25 Actual	Trend from previous period
Support the implementation of the Programme for Governments Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework in the Ards and North Down Borough by implementing a Change Fund grants programme.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Provide 4,700 no. participants the opportunity to have a positive learning experience using community development direct provision services.	4,700	4912	✓	-	-	-
Provide 40 no. participants the opportunity to take part in a programme of Living History visits to places that can be perceived as contentious, followed by meaningful discussion.	40	28	●	As the group tested this year was a class of school age children, we could only test the maximum in their class which was 28. The outcomes remained the same with the lower number of participants.	-	-

Launch 20 no. PEACEPLUS Projects.	20	20	✓	-	-	-
Support a minimum of 140 households by the social supermarket's, with a target of 50% of those households to be enabled to break the cycle of poverty and to have a positive social value outcome.	140	308	✓	-	-	-
Deliver 4 no. community arts-based projects that help address areas of social need.	4	4	✓	-	-	-
Deliver 3 no. group engagements with North Down Museum Adult SEND Programme.	3	4	✓	-	-	-
Retain 7 no. Green Flag awards for the Borough.	7	7	✓	-	7	=
Establish 5 no. Friends Groups.	5	5	✓	-	2	↑
Invest £26,000 in 'In Bloom' Projects	£26,000	£36,052	✓	-	£22,473	↑
Provide annual report of progressing corporate action of 1,250sqm (0.125ha) of community growing space per 10,000 households by 2028.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Retain 4 no. of in Bloom/ Best Kept awards.	4	8	✓	-	5	↑
Increase the number of Community Projects in Parks organised from 40 to 70 (now incorporates Play Events).	70	104	✓	-	40	↑
Complete 100% of monthly car park inspections to identify key issues requiring cross directorate remediation.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Achieve 100% success in Loo of the Year Awards (Gold or Platinum Award) across 5 public toilets.	5	5	✓	-	5	=
Increase the number of businesses registering for Health and Wellbeing initiatives to 24.	24	41	✓	-	27	↑
Complete a Leisure Strategy for the Borough and implement Year 1 recommendations.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-

Maintain 4 no. QUEST Awards across leisure sites.	4	4	✓	-	4	=
Increase number of fitness classes delivered per week by Leisure Ards and Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT/Serco) from 220 (2024/25 target) to 250.	250	252	✓	-	249	↑
Embed 5 Steps to Wellbeing into all aspects of our Service with 20 (5 internal and 15 external) focussed information sessions, activities and programmes delivered.	20	21	✓	-	-	-
Develop 5.4km Greenway - Floodgates to Green Road Project.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Seek planning permission for the development of Greenway - Comber to Newtownards Project.	100%	-	●	Dfl provided their permission to proceed with lodging the A21 application on 11 May 2026, i.e. outside this reporting period. Officers are now seeking an updated quotation from their consultants to lodge an application.	-	-

Improvement Objective 4: We will be a high-performing organisation

What we hoped to achieve

- Implement Council's digital strategy to facilitate digital connectivity and deliver across all Council services.
- Implement a Workforce Planning Strategy that enables us to understand the capacity and capabilities required for a high performing Council.
- Implement Council's Customer Service Strategy to ensure our customers' needs are met.
- Review our organisational design to ensure our services are delivered in an effective and efficient way.
- Right size the Council's estate to have the right number of employees and buildings to work effectively.
- Invest in leadership programmes and training that creates and nurtures high performing teams/ leaders throughout the Council.
- Embed our Behaviour Charter* and PRIDE** values as part of the everyday work of our employees.
- Increase our financial resilience to safeguard the Council's long-term sustainability.
- Develop partnerships that result in shared activities and involve democratic evidence-based decision-making.
- Examples across all our service areas of mechanisms used to consult and engage with residents, businesses, visitors and other stakeholders as appropriate.

*The Behaviour Charter is a document for Council employees that demonstrates the Council's preferred approach and attitudes to work.

**The PRIDE values (Progression, Respect, Integrity, Delivery and Excellence) are the core values of the Council and are embedded in everything that we do.

How did we do

2025/26 Measure	2025/26 Target	2025/26 Actual	RAG Status	Reason why KPI not met / Actions being taken	2024/25 Actual	Trend from previous period
Develop and implement an Electronic Document and Records Management System for Council.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Develop and implement a new Financial Management System across Council by 31st March 2026.	100%	100%	✓	-	-	-
Increase % of complaints dealt with within timescale to 100%.	100%	93%	⚠	-	100%	↓
Carryout an independent review of Community Centres and Halls provision and operating model in Ards and North Down Borough that provides recommendations of future provision for 2026 –2035.	100%	65%	●	Currently ongoing – to be completed in 2026/27.	-	-
All Council policies screened for Equality, Good Relations, Sustainability, Rural Needs and Data Protection.	100%	100%	✓	-	100%	=

Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan reviewed and agreed by September 2025.	100%	100%	✓	-	100%	=
Reduce days lost due to sickness per employee across the Council.	11 days	14 days	⚠		14 days	=
Achieve 100% uptake to Council's Apprenticeship Scheme in-year.	3 students	3 students	✓	-	-	-
Community planning partnerships – Facilitate/ participate in at least 20 Community Planning Workstreams.	20	47	✓	-	1	↑
9 Community Centre and Halls Customer Engagement Sessions carried out.	9	14	✓	-	7	↑
Complete a survey to identify needs and values of the Economic Development and business support services.	1	1	✓	-	-	-

Statutory Performance Indicators and Standards

The Council is required to report on how it has performed against the Statutory Indicators¹ set out in The Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. Section 91 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 requires the Council to use this information to assess its performance against the previous year's performance; and so far as is practicable, the performance of other councils in the exercise of the same or similar functions.

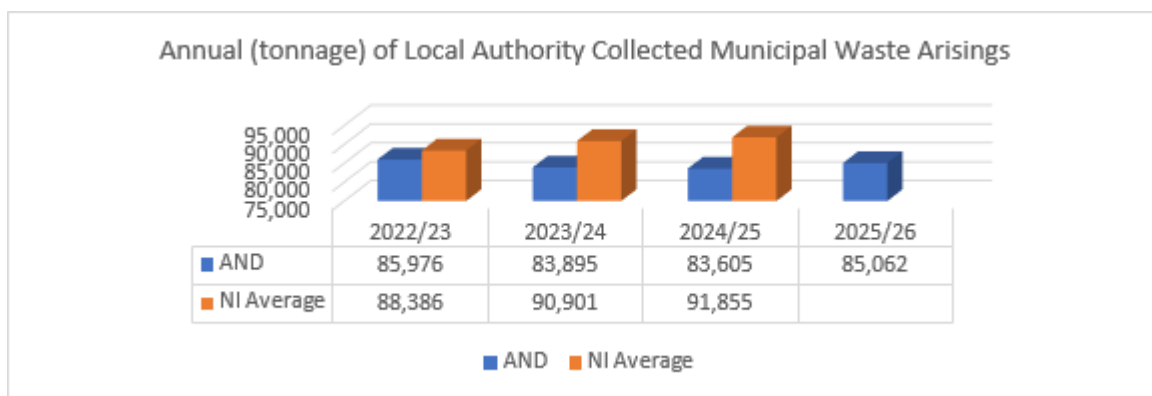
Waste Management

The 2025/26 year saw an increase in the Council's municipal waste arisings (Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste – LACMW) up to 85,062 tonnes from 83,605 tonnes but also a significant increase in the LACMW recycling rate to 59.2% and household recycling to 58.5%. The online Household Recycling Centre (HRC) booking system introduced mid-year 2023, continues to improve recycling at the HRCs while deterring the use of the HRCs by the commercial sector and non-residents of the Borough.

A Task and Finish Working Group was established to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's kerbside collection service with WRAP appointed to provide an overview and modelling of different collection models using the Kerbside Assessment Tool (KAT). The review has been completed, but the Council is still awaiting DAERA to publish the outcomes of the Rethinking our Resources consultation to ensure that any changes to the kerbside collection system meet with new legislative requirements.

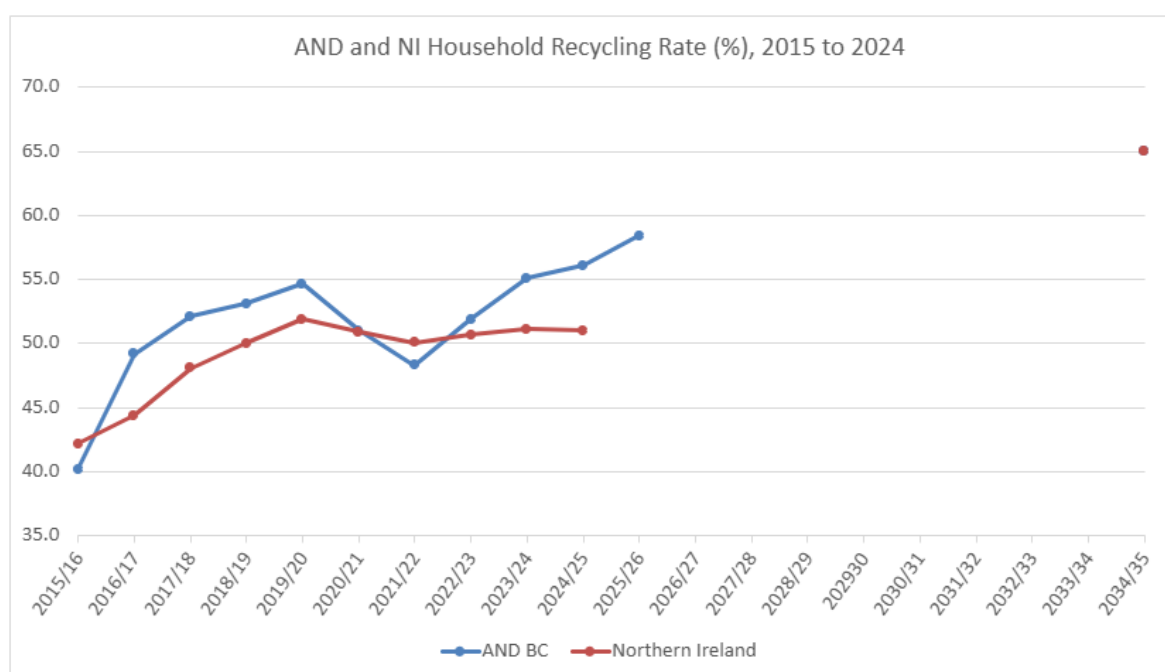
The Council's long-term strategy for reducing reliance on landfill has been based on increasing recycling and the delivery of the arc21 Residual Waste Treatment Project. The tender for the treatment of residual waste arisings commenced in January 2025 and the 2025/26 year we have seen a reduction of landfill to less than 1%, down from 29% in the 2024/25 financial year. We also receive a percentage of recycling from the treatment of residual which averages around 8-10%. Landfill allowances are fixed and remain unchanged.

¹ End of year statutory indicators and standards for waste and planning can be found in Appendix 1



2025/26 NI Average figure not yet available

RAG Status	▲
Trend against prior year (lower is better)	↑



2025/26 ANDBC Figure 58.5%

2025/26 NI Average figure not yet available

RAG Status	▲
Trend against prior year	↑

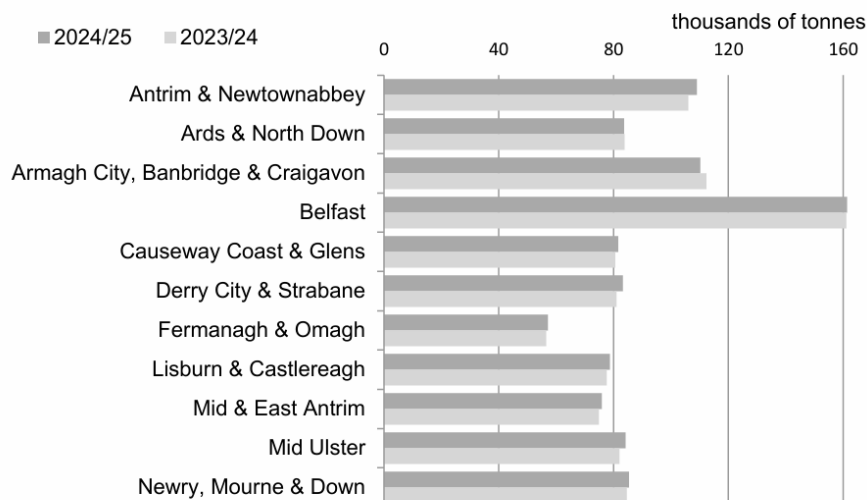
How do we compare?

2025/26 Northern Ireland Waste Management Annual Report not yet published.

Source: Northern Ireland Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics Annual Report 2024/25

Waste Arisings

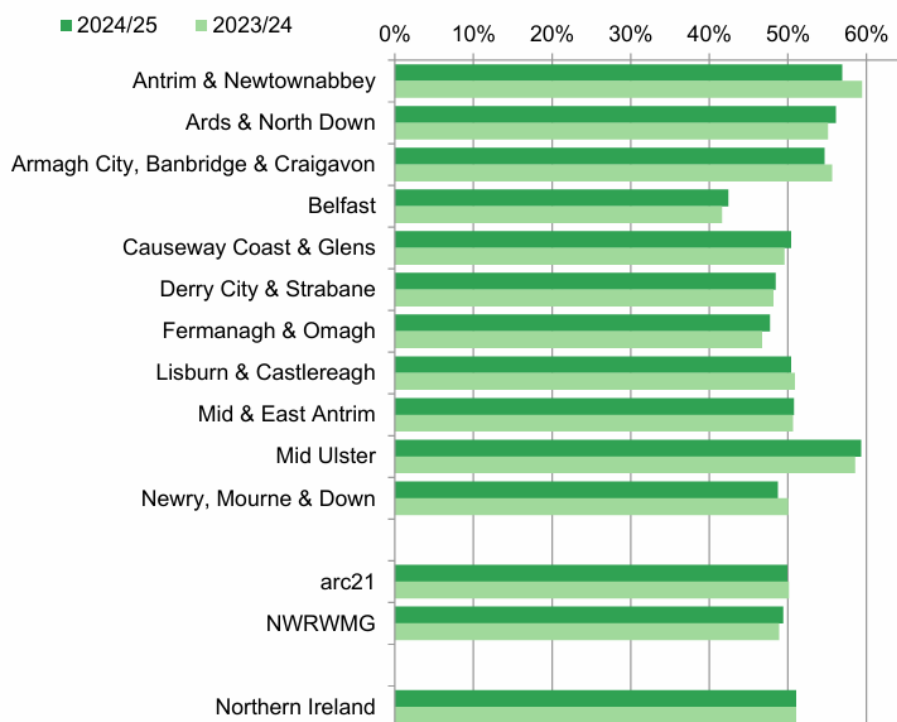
Figure 4: Waste arisings by council
Northern Ireland, 2023/24 and 2024/25, KPI (j)



Eight councils reported increases in their waste arisings in 2024/25 compared with 2023/24.

Recycling

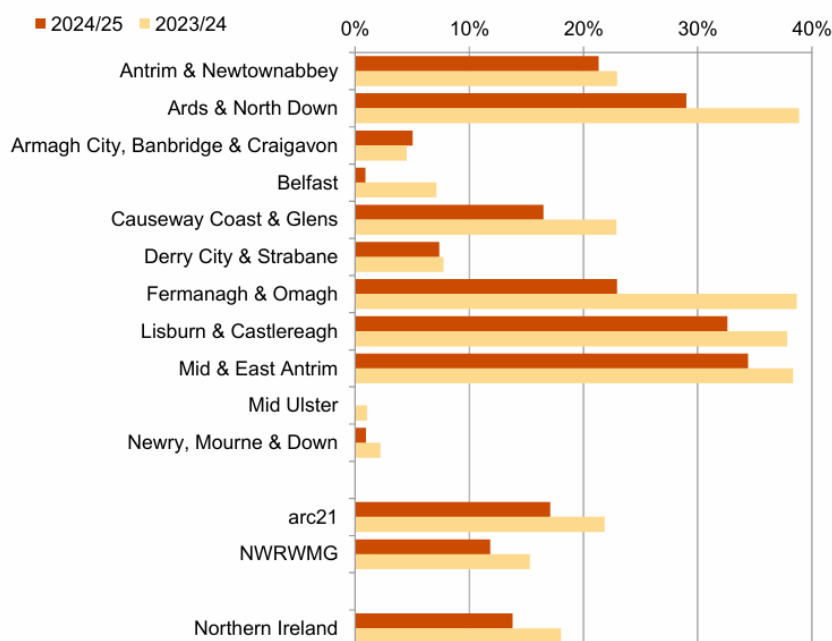
Figure 7a: Household waste preparing for reuse, dry recycling and composting rate by council and waste management group
Northern Ireland, 2023/24 and 2024/25, KPI (a2)



Five councils reported increased household recycling rates compared to 2023/24. Four councils reported decreased household recycling rates compared to 2023/24, with Antrim & Newtownabbey reporting the largest decrease at 2.5 percentage points. The remaining councils reported similar rates to 2023/24.

Landfill

Figure 13: Household waste landfilled by council and waste management group
Northern Ireland, 2023/24 and 2024/25, KPI (b)



Nine councils recorded a decrease in their household landfill rate in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24 with Fermanagh & Omagh recording the largest decrease of 15.7 percentage points.

The NWRWMG had a household landfill rate of 11.8 per cent, 1.9 percentage points lower than the Northern Ireland rate. Arc21's household landfill rate was higher than the Northern Ireland rate at 17.1 per cent. However, the landfill rate for Arc21 decreased 4.8 percentage points compared to 2023/24.

Planning

Further to an organisational redesign in 2025, the Planning Service (formerly under the Prosperity Directorate) was amalgamated with the Building Control Service (formerly part of Regulatory Services under the Environment Directorate). The joint service now sits within the Place and Prosperity Directorate, alongside Capital Projects, Tourism, Arts and Heritage, and Economic Growth.

Planning and Building Control are two distinct, but interconnected, processes in the construction industry. Planning permission is essential for most developments, ensuring that projects align with regional and local planning policies and do not adversely affect the surrounding area. Building Control focuses on the technical aspects of construction, ensuring that the work undertaken complies with safety, health and environmental standards.

The Council is responsible for, in the main:

- Local development planning – creating a plan that will set out a clear vision of how the Borough should look in the future by deciding what type and scale of development should be encouraged and where it should be located;
- Development management – determining the vast majority of planning applications; and
- Planning enforcement – investigating alleged breaches of planning control and determining what action should be taken.

The objective of the planning system is to secure the orderly and consistent development of land whilst furthering sustainable development and improving well-being. This means the planning system should positively and proactively facilitate development that contributes to a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable Northern Ireland.

The Council, as a planning authority, is required to simultaneously pursue social and economic priorities alongside the careful management of our historic and natural environment for the overall benefit of our society. The Service provides statutory duties as set out under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the mission is aligned with the Corporate Vision as set out in the Corporate Plan 2024-2028.

2025/2026 saw the establishment of a dedicated team dealing solely with applications in the 'major' category of development, which will, in the longer term, enable senior planning officers to dedicate appropriate attention to processing of these such applications, which normally relate to economic outcomes. Establishment of this team has been made to align with the Corporate Plan objectives relating to growing the non-domestic rate base and contributing to the growth of the economy.

January 2026 saw the introduction of the new Statutory Validation Checklist, further to introduction of subordinate legislation by the Department for Infrastructure to enable the Council to set its own list of requirements for information to be submitted at the outset of submission of a planning application. This means that the majority of applications are appropriately 'front-loaded' to anticipate what is required under prevailing planning policy

and to satisfy statutory consultees, thus attempting to ensure applications pass through the process more quickly.

The Planning Service has been working closely with NIEA in relation to its own Performance Improvement Plan, which has seen a reduction in the number of consultations being issued to NIEA without the relevant detail/instruction, direct contact between officers in each organisation reestablished, and contribution made to development of Standing Advice to assist both applicants and planning officers.

Factors affecting performance

- Quality of applications being submitted (now being addressed through Validation Checklist)
- Resource and expertise within statutory consultees (understood to be being addressed by central government)
- Outdate wastewater infrastructure resulting in many towns being classed as being in 'closed catchments' by which further connections by NI Water are curtailed
- Current lack of legislative controls governing submission of volume of amendments / representations at late stage in process (being addressed through collegiate working on a Joint Protocol with DFI to address the submission of late information and late representations)
- Volume and detail of objections received to proposals, including relatively minor applications
- Number of international and nation environmental designations and increased environmental governance (whilst Borough is set in beautiful landscape context, the volume of designations necessitates particular care to be taken in addressing proposals which may have the potential to create significant impacts/effects)
- Servicing of Planning Committee in respect of call-ins and proposals referred by number of objections received
- Duplication of efforts in responding to queries from MLAs/MPs despite planning agents being appointed
- Planning Appeals Commission decisions and Court judgments
- Staff attraction/retention

Major planning applications

Over the course of 2025/2026 the Council received seven applications in the major category of development. Four major applications were approved as follows.

Whilst the average processing time exceeded the 30-week average target, the delays can be explained by amendments to various schemes, in order to address policy compliance or consultee requests.

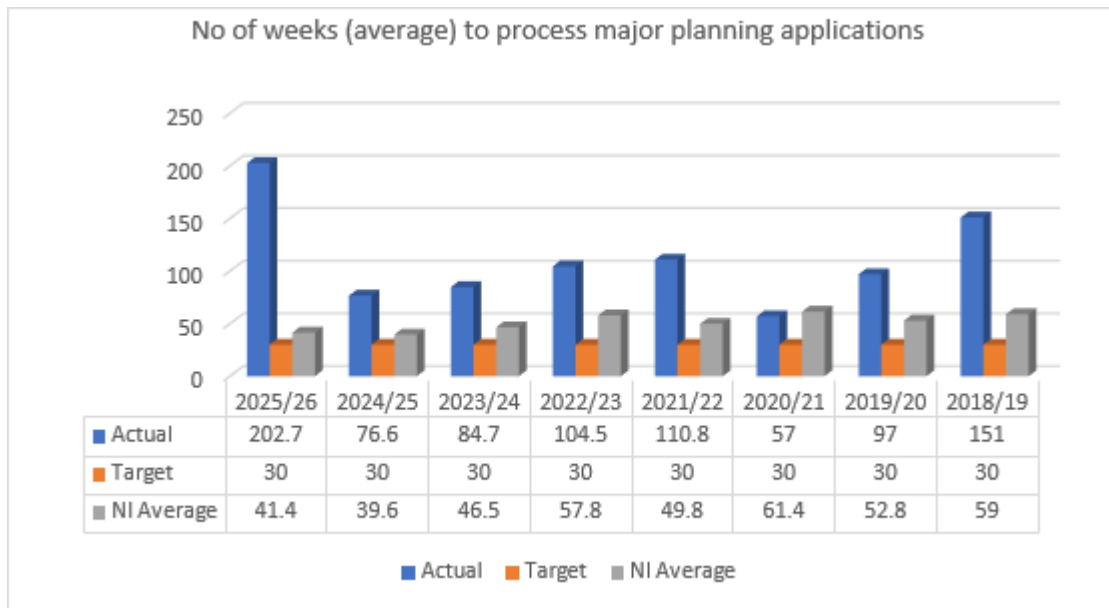
The Planning Service continues to strive to improve processing times and interact with DFI to contribute to the Planning Improvement Programme, which has stemmed from the regional review of planning by both the NI Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee.

LA06/2023/2314/F was for a Park and Ride Facility including tarmacked parking area (452 spaces), landscaping, boundary fencing, cycle shelter building, relocation of existing playpark within the site and associated development, located on the site of the former Ards Leisure Centre, William Street/Corry Street, Newtownards. The Department for Infrastructure vested the land from the Council in order to meet the growth in demand from passengers travelling on the important transport corridor from Newtownards to Belfast (also benefitting North Down and the Ards Peninsula). It will provide additional facilities to link to the existing Glider route on the Newtownards Road. Determination was held up whilst discussion regards the relocation of the playpark at Corry Street took place.

LA06/2021/1477/F – Royal Hotel & Windsor Bar, Bangor - Demolition of Royal Hotel and Windsor Bar to accommodate a mixed use development comprising of 35No. apartments, 2No. restaurant units, and 1No. retail unit, car parking and associated site and access works. Due to the intention to demolish the structure entirely, as compared to a previous scheme that would part retain the façade, the Council had to engage a specialist to consider options that would not require demolition of this iconic building within a proposed Area of Townscape Character. Processing was also held up as the developer required to undertake detailed liaison with NI Water to agree an acceptable drainage solution, and a Planning legal agreement was required to be negotiated to be executed in parallel with the approval to ensure the replica façade rebuild takes place as currently proposed.

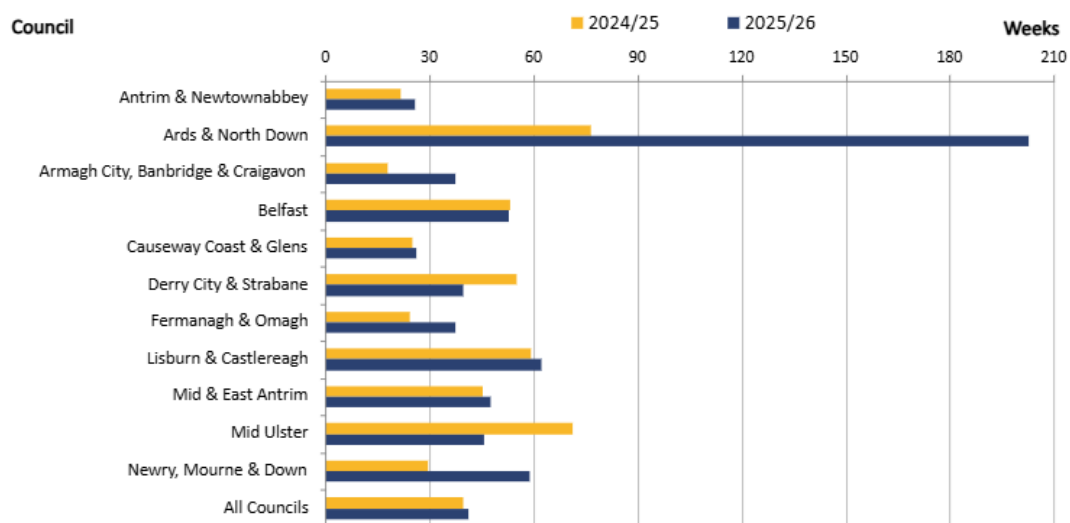
LA06/2024/0623/F – Relocation of Lidl store from Bloomfield Road to Skipperstone Road with extinguishment of existing use. This application required independent consultancy input in respect of retailing and also required negotiation of and execution of a Planning legal agreement for extinguishment of the retailing use of the Bloomfield Road store. It also had to be removed from the Planning Committee schedule when originally programmed to deal with submission of late objections.

LA06/2019/0104/F – Tullynagardy Avenue, Newtownards – erection of 62no. dwellings – this application went through various amendments to design and layout since its first submission before it was found policy compliant.



How do we compare?

Fig 3.2 Major Development average processing times by council, 2024 & 2025

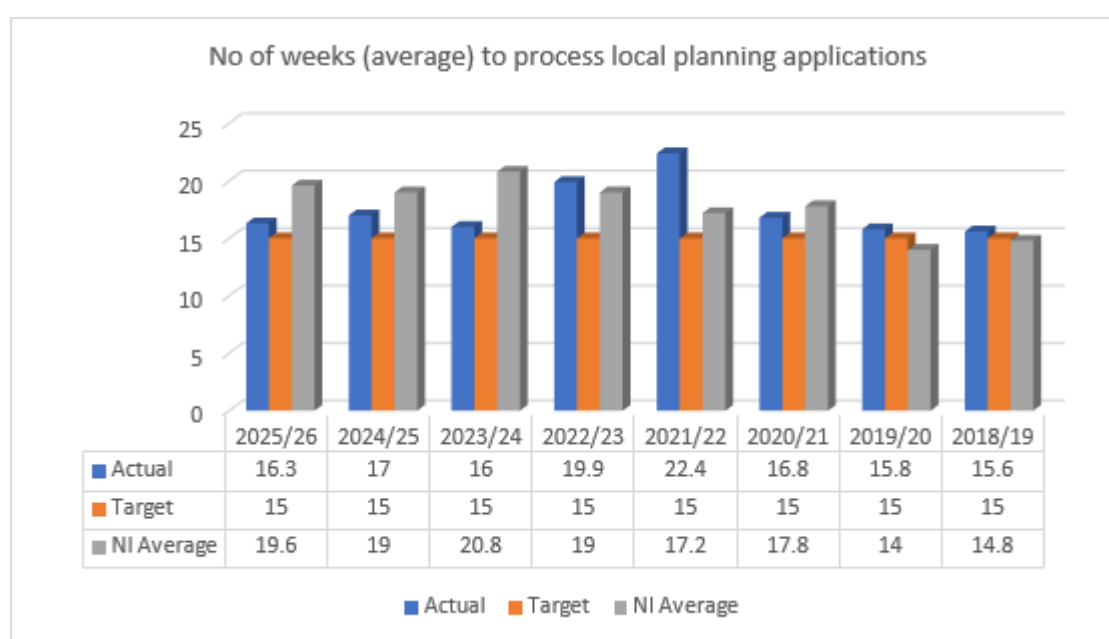


Local planning applications

Planning Service received 745 applications in the 'local' category of development of the course of the year. 'Local' includes anything from an application for a fence up to a housing development of 49no. dwellings. Some 728 applications were determined, 47 of which were either called into Planning Committee or referred to Planning Committee by virtue of the number of objections received contrary to the Planning Service's recommendation.

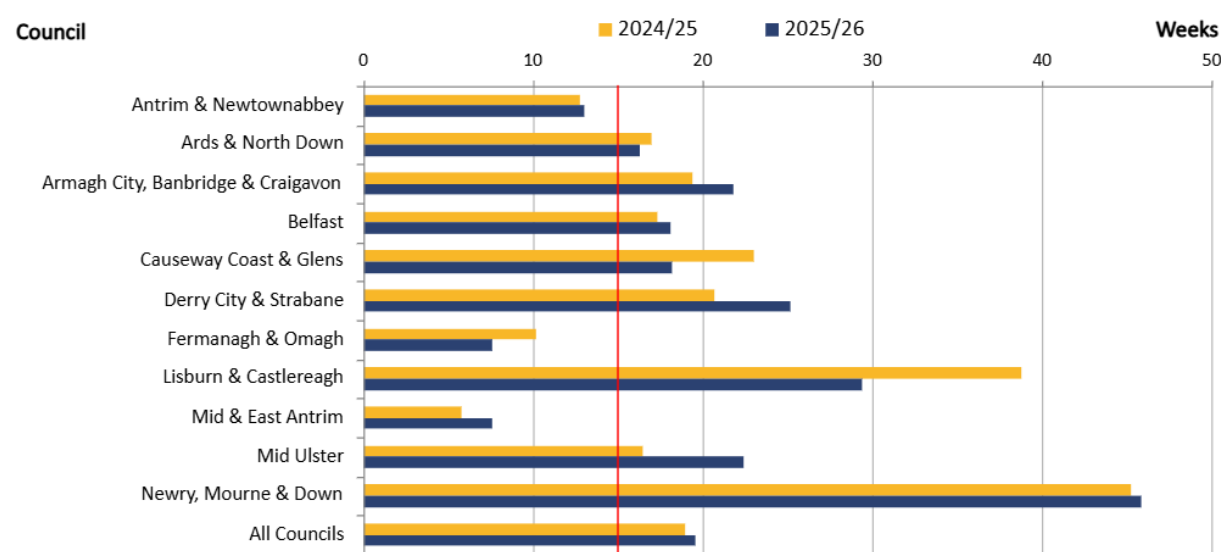
Average processing time across the year for these applications was 1.3 weeks above the target processing time of 15 weeks.

The Service is continuing to address pre-2025 applications alongside receipt of new proposals, in tandem with liaison with applicants to request amendments to ensure a quality design and positive contribution to the environment.



How do we compare?

Fig 4.2 Local Development average processing times by council, 2024/25 & 2025/26



Additional Activity

In addition to the above planning applications, it is important to draw attention to additional work carried out within the Development Management section, which is not reported upon, but which is required to be completed in parallel to work on planning applications.

Additional activity details the "non-application" workload of the Planning Service, and includes Discharge of conditions, Certificates of Lawfulness (Proposed & Existing), Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)/ Consents to Fell Trees in Conservation Area, Pre-Application Discussions (PADs), Proposals of Application Notice (PANs) and Non-Material Changes. Preparation of Statements of Case for appeals and attendance at hearings is not detailed.

Type	Received 01/04/25 – 31/03/26	Determined - by 31/03/2026
Discharge of Condition	52	70
Certificate of Lawfulness	62	62
Non-Material Change	40	40
Pre-Application Discussion	27	27
Proposal of Application Notice	9	9
TPO/consent for works	53	39

‘Discharge of Condition’ refers to applications made to the Planning Service to confirm discharge of conditions attached to a previous approval, and where normally submission of finalised information or proof of consents are required, prior to development being able to commence on site. Such applications normally require further consultation with either statutory or non-statutory consultations.

Following the grant of planning permission amendments are often required to address unexpected changes in circumstances or site conditions. As such, an application for a ‘Non-material change’ removes the need for an entirely new planning application to be submitted where only a very small change is sought. This requires planning officers to review the proposed change against the original planning permission to ascertain if the change can truly be considered non-material.

Neither Discharge of Conditions or Non-Material Change applications attract a planning fee, yet their processing can be resource intensive and is required in a timely fashion in parallel to the processing of planning applications, preparing Statements of Cases and representation at planning appeals, alongside provision of advice in respect of duty planner calls and reception enquiries.

The Council responded positively to a consultation issued by the Department of Infrastructure during 2025/2026 regards potential for charging fees for this activity and we await the outcome.

Enforcement

During COVID-19 Planning Enforcement staff were reallocated to deal with planning applications, and only those enforcement cases deemed Priority 1 or being progressed through the Courts were actioned. This resulted in a backlog which the Planning Enforcement team continues to work through, some of which are dependent upon outcome of appeals or retrospective applications and are proactively drawing older cases successfully to conclusion which has impacted on the ability to hit the laid down target.

During 2025/26 the Planning Service opened 261 enforcement cases. The following table details the reason for the 212 cases concluded during the year.

Remedied /Resolved	49
Planning Permission Granted	13
Not Expedient	48
No Breach Identified	86
Immune from Enforcement Action	16
Total	212

An enforcement case is 'concluded' when one of the following occurs:

- An Enforcement Notice is issued;
- Legal Proceedings commence;
- A planning application is received; or
- The case is closed.

It should be noted that normally enforcement action is held in abeyance in respect of any identified breach of planning control, whilst any retrospective planning application is being assessed, which can impact on closure timeframes.

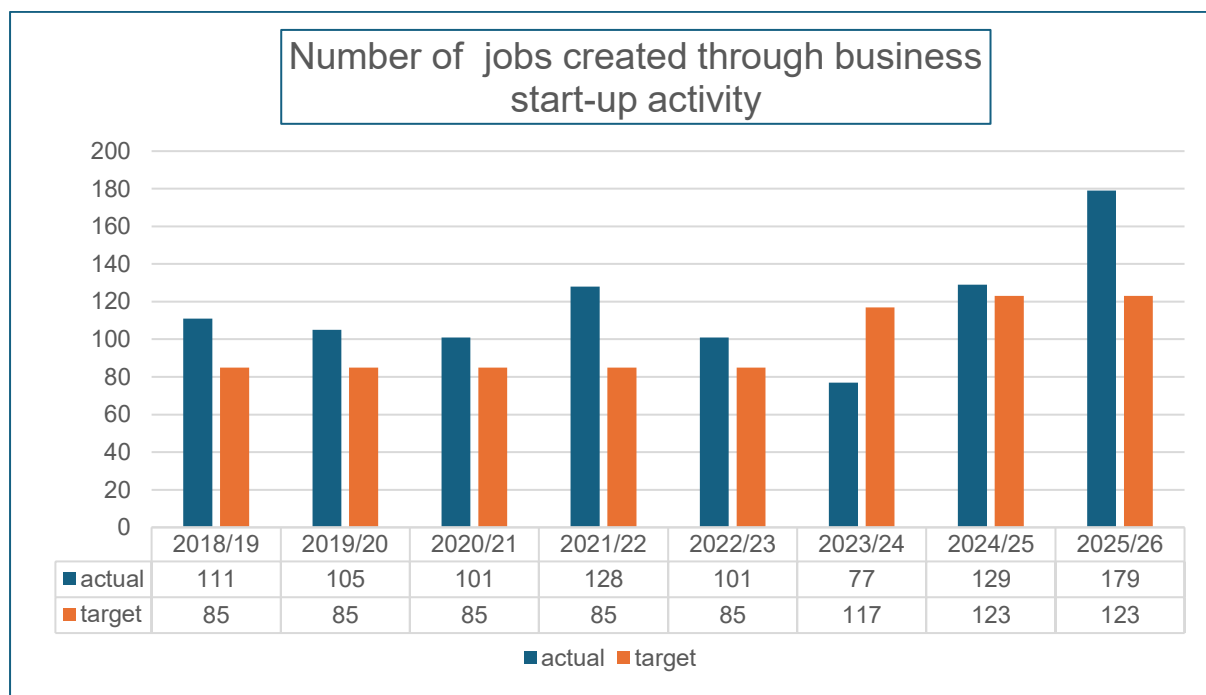
% progress of enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt			
Year	Actual (%)	Target (%)	NI Average (%)
2024/25	51.4	70	70.7
2023/24	55.7	70	76.4
2022/23	62.9	70	74.2
2021/22	41	70	70.4
2020/21	62	70	69.9
2019/20	81.1	70	81.4
2018/19	76.9	70	81
2017/18	73.4	70	77

Economic Development

The Go For It Programme concluded in September 2023, after which Northern Ireland's 11 local councils introduced the new Enterprise Support Service (ESS), known as Go Succeed, funded by the UK Government through the Levelling Up Fund until 31st March 2026.

Go Succeed launched in November 2023. While job creation remained strong and exceeded half-yearly statutory targets until September 2023, the initial months following the launch saw a slowdown due to extended implementation timelines and technical and operational challenges. These issues led to underperformance during the first six months, from November 2023 to March 2024.

Since then, the Go Succeed delivery agents have improved their delivery and performance. By March 2026, job creation levels reached 179 against statutory targets of 123 with the programme continuing to have a positive impact on local enterprise support. The council remains actively engaged with Go Succeed delivery partners to monitor progress, manage performance, and raise awareness of the support available to businesses.



RAG Status	✓
Trend against prior year	↑

Number of Business Plans (BPs) and Enterprise Action Plans (EAPs) that have been carried out under the Engage and Foundation pillars of the Go Succeed Service:

Go Succeed Job Creation Data Per Month 2025/26						
Month	BP'S		EAP'S		PMO	
	Engage	Foundation	Engage	Foundation		
April	6	1	8		15	9
May	8	1	9		18	10.8
June	16	5	13	2	36	21.6
July	7		6	2	15	9
August	7	5	4		16	9.6
September	15	3	13		31	18.6
October	6	5	15	1	27	16.2
November	17	3	13		33	19.8
December	8	1	7	1	17	10.2
January	2	1	3		6	3.6
February	7		10	1	18	10.8
March	26	5	25	10	66	39.6
E&F	125	30	126	17	298	178.8 Jobs
Engage					251	150.6 Jobs
Foundation					47	28 Jobs

2025/26 Go Succeed figures not yet validated.

Other Indicators

	2021/22 Actual	2021/22 Target	2022/23 Actual	2022/23 Target	2023/24 Actual	2023/24 Target	2024/25 Actual	2024/25 Target	2025/26 Actual	2025/26 Target	RAG
Staff Absence	6.57%	5%	7.24%	5%	7.62%	7%	6.73%	6%	6.59%	5%	
Resident Satisfaction	82%	82%	Not measured this year	Not measured this year	83%	83%	Not measured this year	Not measured this year	72%	83%	
Net Cost of Services per head of population	£341	£336	£356	£350	£373	£398	£371	£404	£405	£417	

Staff Absence

Overview of Absence Performance

At the end of Quarter 4, on 31 March 2026, the Council's overall absence rate was 6.59%. This represents a reduction of 0.14 percentage points compared with the corresponding period last year, when the overall absence rate was 6.73%.

For Quarter 4, covering January to March 2026, the absence rate was 7.46%. This represents a decrease of 0.16 percentage points compared with Quarter 3, when the rate was 7.62%. The absence rate at the end of quarter 4 the year before, however, was 6.65% so this shows a slight increase of 1.21 when compared to quarter 4 last year.

Long-Term and Short-Term Absence

Long-term absence continues to account for the highest proportion of absence, with 75.95% of all absence in Quarter 4 attributable to long-term cases.

Short-term absence in Quarter 4 remained exceptionally low at 1.58%. This reflects the continued management of short-term absence under the Absence Policy, including absence management meetings and attendance-related targets where appropriate. Refresher training on absence management continues to be provided regularly to managers.

Key Causes of Absence and Wellbeing Support

The most significant cause of long-term absence in Quarter 4 was stress, depression and fatigue-related illness, followed closely by musculoskeletal conditions. The Council continues to explore ways to address mental health issues and adopted a Mental Health Charter in 2019, which includes actions within the Mental Health Action Plan to support mental health in the workplace.

Year-End Position and Target Achievement

By the end of the 2025/2026 financial year, the average number of working days lost per employee due to sickness absence was 14.41, which is marginally lower than at the same point last year.

The Council's Absence Management Action Plan included a target to reduce absenteeism to 5%.

Short-term absence is being managed effectively and does not present a significant concern. However, due to continued levels of long-term absence, the Council did not achieve the target of reducing absence to 5% or below by 31 March 2026. The Council's absence rate was 1.59 percentage points above target. The sustained level of long-term absence is influenced in part by the favourable sick pay terms and conditions available to Council employees under the APT&C (Green Book) provisions adopted by all Northern Ireland councils.

Employee Wellbeing Initiatives

A wellbeing initiative introduced with local firm Insula Wellbeing remains in place. The initiative provides one-to-one sessions for staff and is intended to support employees before sickness absence becomes necessary. All staff will be offered an annual mental health check-up.

Future Reporting Arrangements

A detailed options report on absence was previously presented to the Corporate Services Committee. Following consideration of that report, and having taken legal advice, it was agreed that it would not be in the Council's best interests to amend the current sick pay provisions. Alternative options were explored, and it has now been agreed that each directorate will report quarterly on its own absence figures to the appropriate committee, in addition to the corporate quarterly absence report submitted to the Corporate Services Committee. It is anticipated that this reporting will commence in September 2026 using Quarter 1 information.

How do we compare?

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS LOST TO SICKNESS

(Note: Figures beyond 2023/24 were not available at the time of writing)

Source: Local Government Auditor Report 2025

Figure 11: Number of days lost to sickness absence per year

COUNCIL	Days lost to sickness			Change vs previous year	
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2022-23	2023-24
Antrim and Newtownabbey	19.7	17.7	13.6	-2.0	-4.1
Ards and North Down	14.2	15.7	16.3	1.5	0.6
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	20.5	19.9	18.8	-0.6	-1.1
Belfast	16.3	17.1	17.0	0.8	-0.1
Causeway Coast and Glens	19.2	17.0	18.1	-2.2	1.1
Derry City and Strabane	16.8	16.5	18.7	-0.3	2.2
Fermanagh and Omagh	13.1	11.9	12.8	-1.2	0.9
Lisburn City and Castlereagh	13.6	15.8	18.4	2.2	2.6
Mid and East Antrim	15.2	17.9	17.0	2.7	-0.9
Mid Ulster	12.1	13.1	13.2	1.0	0.1
Newry, Mourne and Down	20.7	23.3	23.9	2.6	0.6
Average	16.5	16.9	17.1	0.4	0.2

Resident Satisfaction

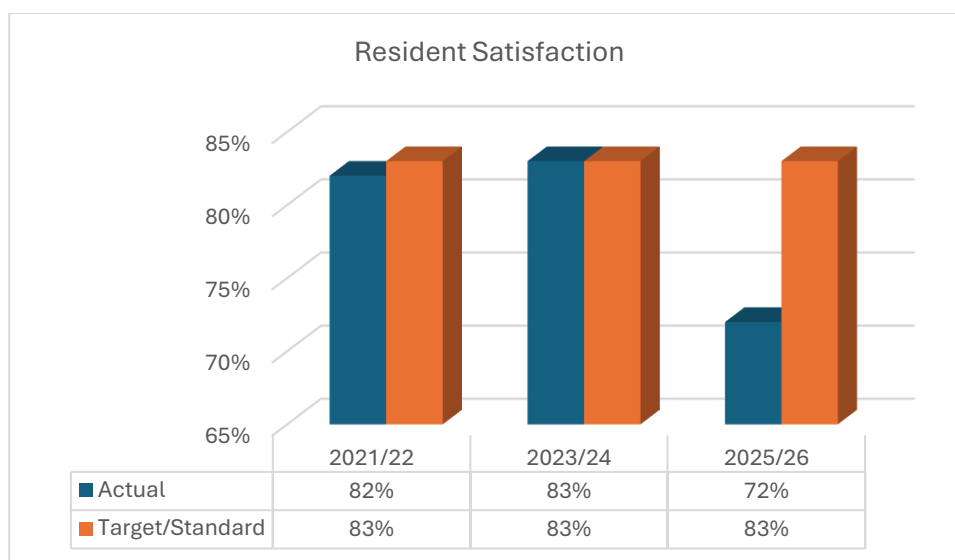
The Council undertakes a formal survey of residents every two years to gain insight into satisfaction levels across the organisation and the services we deliver. The information gathered is shared across all service areas and is used to inform several performance improvement measures included in our annual service plans, Performance Improvement Plan and financial statements.

The overall findings from the Residents' Survey completed in 2026 suggest a high level of satisfaction, with the Council scoring well on specific measures such as providing value for money, consultation and engagement opportunities and excellent digital communication.

72% of residents are satisfied with the Council overall – a decrease from 2023 when the overall satisfaction level was 83%. This should be considered in context given that the comparative figure for all GB Councils in October 2025 was 51%, the lowest on record. The Council is widely perceived as reliable, professional and competent, indicating a solid foundation of trust in core service delivery.

The most common suggestions for Council improvement included: tackling dog fouling and more enforcement; improvements in street cleaning, litter and waste management; improving parking, traffic and congestion; and improving footpaths, pavements and accessibility.

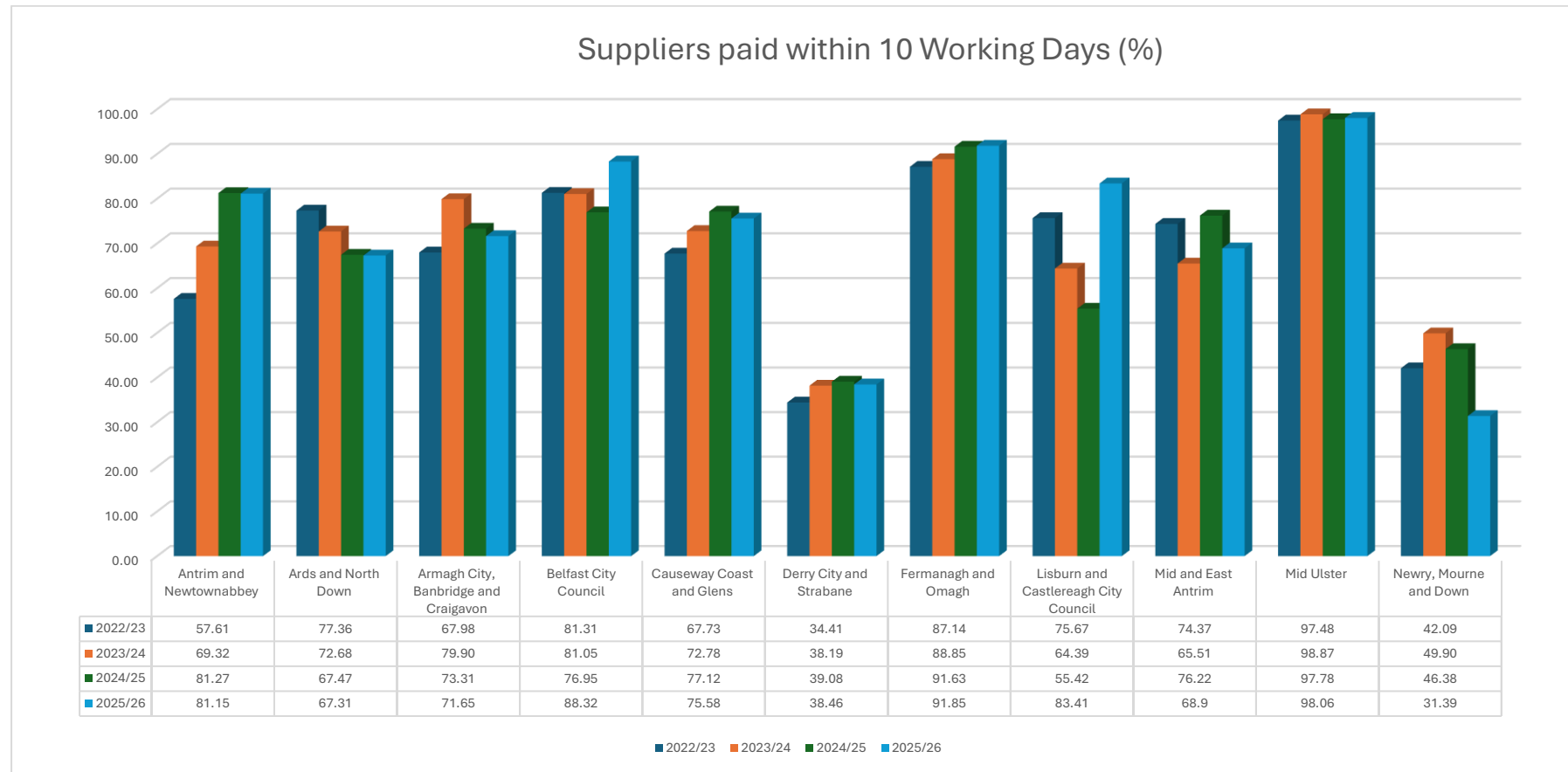
In terms of priorities for the Council, residents believe the focus should be on attracting jobs and investment, improving wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality and reducing carbon emissions as we transition to net zero.



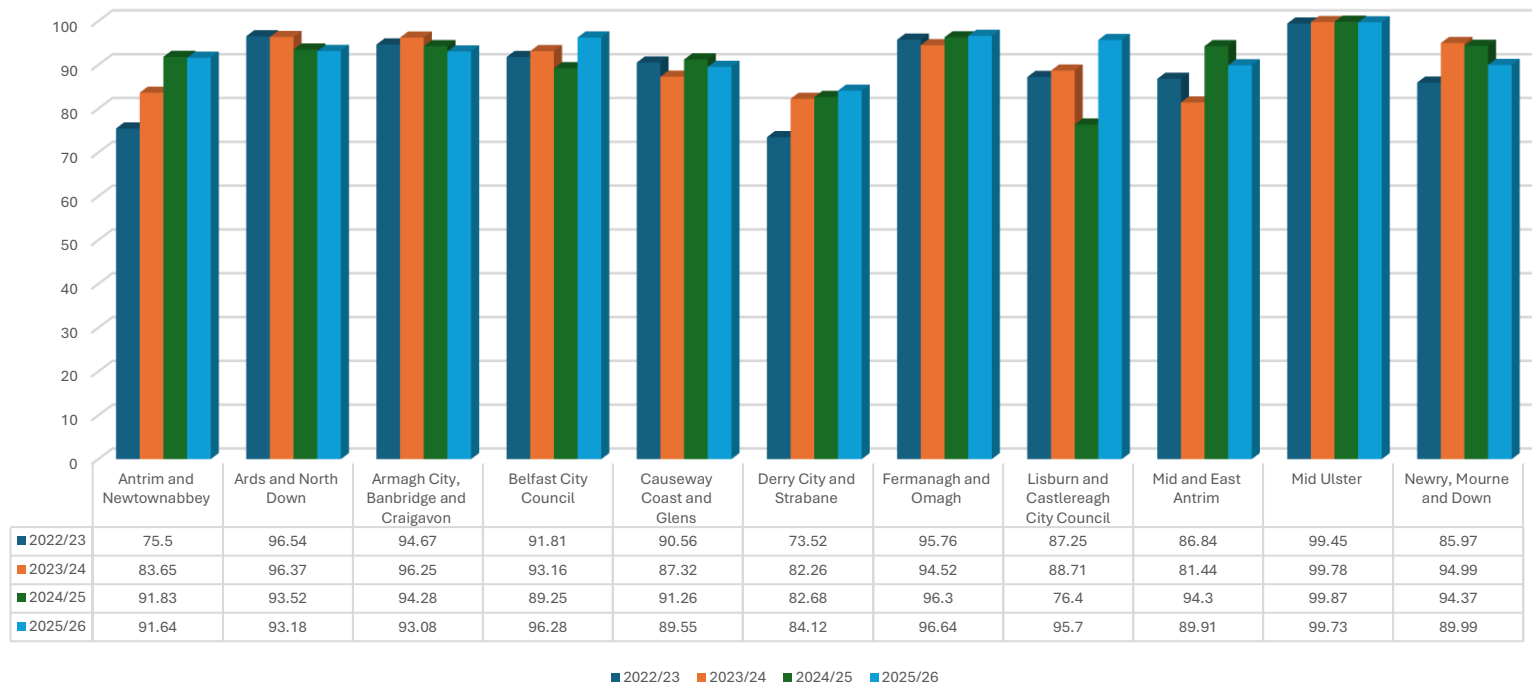
RAG Status	●
Trend against prior period	↓

Prompt Payment

Council will continue to implement process improvements to assist suppliers with prompt payment of invoices.



Suppliers paid within 30 Days (%)



Source: [PROMPT PAYMENTS 2025-26](#)

Indicator	2025/26 Target	2025/26 Actual
Annual Prompt Payment of invoices		
Within 10 days	≥80%	67.31%
Within 30 days	≥95%	93.18%

Within 10 Days	
RAG Status	
Trend against prior year	

Within 30 Days	
RAG Status	
Trend against prior year	

6. Northern Ireland Audit Office proposals for improvement – arising from S.95 Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26

NIAO Proposal	ANDBC Progress to date
General Duty to Improve	
<u>Governance</u> In both 2023-24 and 2024-25, NIAO highlighted the need for an internal audit review of Performance Improvement. NIAO review of the 2025-26 audit plan indicates that this area remains unscheduled. Given that the last internal audit of Performance Improvement was conducted in 2017–18, NIAO consider the gap between reviews to be excessive. While NIAO recognise that Internal Audit completes individual service reviews, the Audit Committee should formally consider scheduling an internal audit of Performance Improvement, as a whole, as part of the 2026/27 audit plan. This would help ensure appropriate oversight and assurance in a key area of the Council’s statutory responsibilities.	Scheduled in the Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27 – commenced July 2026.

7. Your Opinion Matters

Ards and North Down Borough Council is committed to improving our services and resident feedback is critical to this. We welcome your comments or suggestions at any time of the year and have a continuous 'Your Opinion Matters' campaign. Suggestions for improvement initiatives can be sent to us by emailing yom@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk or contacting us at:

Transformation Team
Ards and North Down Borough Council
City Hall
The Castle
BANGOR
BT20 4BT

Email: pim@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
Telephone: 0300 013 3333

8. Alternative formats

This document can be provided in alternative formats if required in relation to language or disability by contacting the Transformation Team at the above address.

9. Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Municipal Waste and Planning Statistics

MUNICIPAL WASTE

THE NORTHERN IRELAND MUNICIPAL WASTE STATISTICS can be found at [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

PLANNING

THE NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS APRIL 2025–MARCH 2026 can be found at [Northern Ireland planning statistics April 2025 - March 2026 | Department for Infrastructure](#)