

Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Audit and Assessment Report 2018-19

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



Draft: 30 November 2018

Contents

Page

1. Key Messages	3
2. Audit Scope	5
3. Audit Findings	6
4. Annexes	7

We have prepared this report for sole use of the Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and the Department for Communities. You must not disclose it to any third party, quote or refer to it, without our written consent and we assume no responsibility to any other person.

1. Key Messages

Summary of the audit

Audit outcome	Status
Audit opinion	Unqualified opinion
Audit assessment	The Local Government Auditor (LGA) has not drawn a conclusion [this year only]
Statutory recommendations	The LGA made no statutory recommendations
Proposals for improvement	The LGA made no new proposals for improvement

This report summaries the work of the LGA on the 2018-19 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon 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 that an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2017-18 and its 2018-19 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'.

The Council has discharged its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act as far as possible, in that its arrangements continue to mature. It remains too early for the Council to demonstrate a track record of improvement: consequently, it is not possible for the LGA to conclude as to the extent of improvement that may be made. The LGA did not exercise her discretion to assess and report whether the council is likely to comply with these arrangements in future years.

This is the second year in which councils have been required to fulfil their full statutory responsibilities under Part 12 of the Act. In the LGA's opinion councils should be able to demonstrate a track record of improvement in 2019 to allow a full assessment to be made.

Audit Findings

During the audit and assessment we identified no issues requiring a formal recommendation under the Act. We made no new proposals for improvement (see Section 3). Detailed observations on thematic areas are provided in Annex C and progress on proposals for improvement raised in prior years has 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 2019 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.

2. Audit Scope

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. A multi-stakeholder group comprising of representatives of the Department and councils has been established and a subgroup of this has drafted guidance to clarify the requirements of the general duty to improve. A working draft has been agreed and further improvements to reporting on the general duty are expected in 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 2019, 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.

3. Audit Findings

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; and
- Collection, use and publication of performance information.

We have not raised any new proposals for improvement. We have included in Annex B previous proposals for improvement. Proposals for improvement include matters which, if accepted, will assist the Council in meeting its performance improvement responsibilities. The LGA will follow up how these proposals have been addressed in subsequent years. We recommend that the Council's Performance and Audit Committee also track progress on their implementation.

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.

4. Annexes



Annex A – Audit and Assessment Certificate

Audit and assessment of Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council’s performance improvement arrangements

Certificate of Compliance

I certify that I have audited Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council’s (the Council) assessment of its performance for 2017-18 and its 2018-19 improvement plan 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 2018-19 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 as far as possible discharged its duties under Part 12 of the Act and has acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance sufficiently.

The 2018-19 year was the third in which councils were required to implement the new performance improvement framework. The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement, as is to be expected, are still developing and embedding. The Council continues to strengthen its arrangements to secure continuous improvement, and has delivered some measurable improvements to its services in 2017-18. However, until the Council's arrangements mature and it can demonstrate a track record of ongoing improvement in relation to the framework, I am unable to determine the extent to which improvements will be made.

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.

PAMELA McCREEDY
Local Government Auditor
Northern Ireland Audit Office
106 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1EU

30 November 2018

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

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
General Duty to Improve				
2016-17	GD 1	Linking the forthcoming community plan, and the ongoing processes that underpin it, with the Council's future corporate objectives and improvement plan; and within this, ensuring that the process by which functions are prioritised and selected for improvement and improvement objectives developed are transparent and well documented.	The Improvement Plan is linked to the Community and Corporate Plans via the themes and priorities, however the process for selection of functions and setting of objectives needs to be improved further and this should be taken forward in due course in light of proposals from the Multi-Stakeholder Working Group.	In Progress
2016-17	GD 2	Given the statutory nature of the framework, expand upon the current corporate performance management framework to develop a performance improvement policy.	The performance policy is still in draft format.	In Progress
2016-17	GD 3	Greater linkage and co-ordination between the departmental business plans, through which performance improvements are delivered, and improvement planning arrangements.	More information should be provided on the activities/projects through which the Council has identified its improvements are to be achieved.	In Progress
2017-18	GD 4	The Council should continue to prioritise the development of its performance management system to enable the performance of all of its functions and services to be measured, to support the identification of those areas that would benefit most from improvement.	The new performance management system is being rolled out during 2018-19. This should assist with the identification of those areas that would benefit most from improvement. Through the process for selection of functions and setting of objectives the Council needs to	In Progress

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
			clearly identify functions for improvement and ensure that a measurable objective is set with clear, well documented evidence supporting that measurement.	
Governance Arrangements				
2016-17	GA 1	Consideration of the need to revise terms of reference for the Governance, Policy and Resources Committee to fully reflect its role in respect of the Council's performance improvement arrangements.		Implemented
2016-17	GA 2	As part of the wider corporate planning and performance management system, further explore and determine the role of, and timing of reporting on performance matters to, Council committees (service committees, Governance, Policy and Resources Committee and Performance and Audit Committee).	The Council should take steps to improve reporting arrangements to ensure that the Performance and Audit Committee are updated on 'Proposals for Improvement' progress.	In Progress
2016-17	GA 3	Facilitate Members of both Committees with training and support to discharge the performance improvement responsibilities.	Performance and Audit Committee members have received training. The Council have advised that, in association with NILGA, all 11 councils are developing and planning further training for elected members.	In Progress
2016-17	GA 4	The Performance and Audit Committee should monitor the activity of the other Council committees charged with the scrutiny of performance improvement.	Committees monitor the business plans and other workloads of all departments with the Performance and Audit Committee obtaining a mid-year report on the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and annual self-	Not implemented

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
			assessment report in September. The full Council receives all Committee papers and reports including any progress report, the mid-year PIP report and annual self-assessment. Council officers have indicated there is an ongoing review of governance within the Council which will consider this proposal for improvement and decide if current arrangements need to be changed.	
2016-17	GA 5	Ensure that both Governance, Policy and Resources Committee and Performance and Audit Committees are provided appropriate performance improvement documentation to perform their scrutiny and monitoring functions.		Implemented
2016-17	GA 6	Consideration of the role of the Council's internal audit in providing assurance on the integrity and operation of the Council's performance improvement processes and progress against performance improvement targets.	<p>Ongoing. During internal audit of service areas or facilities, where relevant within the scope of audits, consideration is given to any particular performance matters especially if statutory in nature. Going forward the Council should consider how it might obtain assurance of its data relevant to, specifically, self-imposed indicators. There may be a role for internal audit to assist with this.</p> <p>The NI Councils' Regional Internal Audit Managers Group are considering the role of internal audit in providing assurance to the Audit Committee in relation to performance improvement responsibilities.</p>	In Progress

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
2017-18	GA 7	The Performance and Audit Committee, as part of its responsibility to consider the adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, should receive regular updates on progress against the 'proposals for improvement'.	See GA2 above	In Progress
Improvement Objectives				
2016-17	IO 1	Ensuring that each improvement objective is focused on outcomes for citizens, detailing how citizens will be better off where the Council improves as intended.	The Improvement Plan contains information setting out the benefits that citizens can expect, but the measure of success is unclear.	In Progress
2016-17	IO 2	Providing more specific and transparent detail within the improvement plan on what key actions entail and how they are to be delivered.	More detail has been provided on actions and the measures that will apply but from the information available it is not clear how these actions will contribute towards achieving the objectives.	In Progress
2016-17	IO 3	Expanding improvement targets to provide a wider coverage of improvement objective elements and key actions.	The Council set four improvement objectives again this year. Except for some minor wording changes, the objectives remain the same as those for 2017-18.Improvement targets are mainly focussed on statutory performance indicators and therefore it is still not clear if key actions for all objectives are able to be measured.	In Progress
2017-18	IO 4	The Council should provide an explanation in the Performance Improvement Plan of any changes in improvement objectives compared to those in the previous year, given that the improvement objectives play a critical role for the		Implemented

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
		arrangements being put in place for continuous improvement.		
Consultation				
2016-17	CONS 1	Raise the profile and transparency of the performance improvement framework throughout the year on the Council's website and other communication channels for example social media, citizen magazines etc.		Implemented
2016-17	CONS 2	Consider other methods of obtaining views (as well as service level feedback) from citizens and organisations, for example, a citizen panel, staff and councillor workshops, focus groups and public meetings.		Implemented
2016-17	CONS 3	The questions in the consultation sought agreement on the objectives and provided an opportunity for comment. From our own experience of consultations we believe that providing additional discussion points and explaining any specific matters the Council wish to obtain comment on, or guide consultees to matters they may wish to reflect upon, encourage more meaningful responses.	This is being developed through the Community and Voluntary Sector Panel and the consultation hub.	In Progress
2016-17	CONS 4	Increasing the length of the consultation period.		Implemented
2016-17	CONS 5	Publishing a transparent synopsis of responses together with what impact, if any, these had on	Responses are forwarded to the relevant departments for assessment and adjustments made as deemed necessary. Each respondent is	Partially implemented

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
		improvement objectives would demonstrate to consultees that their views are being considered.	contacted regarding their comments and notified of any changes as a result of same but a synopsis of responses is not published.	
2017-18	CONS 7	The Council should try to identify why it did not receive any formal responses to its performance improvement consultation exercises, with a view to tailoring its efforts to promote its performance improvement responsibilities and engage with citizens and stakeholders.	<p>The Council developed a new Consultation Hub in 2017-18 and used it for consultation on the 2018-19 draft improvement objectives.</p> <p>Consultation was conducted in line with the new draft policy – which is to be developed further following consultation training.</p> <p>The Council has a Community and Voluntary Sector Panel and both website and magazine encourage feedback. Other media is also used to communicate the responsibilities.</p> <p>The Consultation policy, which is in draft, should further consider if any further actions could be taken to encourage responses.</p>	In Progress
Improvement Plan				
2017-18	IP 1	In relation to the information available to underpin the general duty to improve and to develop the Performance Improvement Plan, the plan should detail the progress that the Council is making in establishing the information systems and using data to support the plan and demonstrate improvement in its functions.	Section 3 of the plan acknowledges that data has been captured and collated. It also indicates the Council's intention to develop and utilise new systems. However, there is little detail and no clear indication of the progress being made by the Council in this regard.	In Progress
Performance Reporting and Data Collection				

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
2017-18	PRDC 1	In addition to any 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 continuously improve. This information should be included in the published self-assessment and provide year on year comparisons.	A number of self-imposed (local) indicators and standards have been included in the 2017-18 Assessment Report. Further work is being undertaken to establish a revised/wider set of agreed 'self-imposed' performance indicators and standards; The Council is working with other councils, APSE and DfC to inform future self-imposed indicators and the potential for benchmarking (all of which is being discussed by the Multi-Stakeholder Working Group).	In Progress
2017-18	PRDC 2	The Council should ensure that a new performance management framework is established and embedded across all of its functions without delay.	<p>A workshop on setting performance indicators and standards for business planning purposes was delivered in February 2018 to HOD and departmental representatives.</p> <p>A Multi-Stakeholder Group has been established with representatives from the Department for Communities and the councils. A sub group of this was tasked with drafting guidance to clarify the requirements of the General Duty to Improve. A working draft has now been agreed and we expect that further improvements to reporting on the General Duty will be made in 2019. Further improvements to the performance management framework may be made following this clarification.</p>	In Progress

Year of Report	Reference	Proposal for improvement	Action taken by council	Status
2017-18	PRDC 3	The Council should continue working with other councils and the Department to agree a suite of local indicators and standards. This will enable meaningful comparisons to be made and published in line with its statutory responsibility.	The work plan of the Multi-Stakeholder Group referred to above includes consideration of benchmarking. We expect that progress will be made by September 2019 to allow a broader range of functions to be compared with other councils.	In Progress
2017-18	PRDC 4	Self-assessment reports must include a section on performance in relation to its general duty to improve as required under the legislation.	See PRDC 2 above for information on the work of the Multi-Stakeholder sub group.	In Progress
2017-18	PRDC 5	Self-assessments should not focus solely on the underlying initiatives, but also include an assessment of the Council's progress in delivering its improvement objectives	The self-assessment report does not include an adequate assessment of the Council's progress in delivering its improvement objectives. As well as providing progress against actions planned the Council should include an assessment of how improvement objectives are being delivered.	Not implemented

Annex C – Detailed observations

Thematic area	Observations
<p>General duty to improve</p>	<p>The Council has well established arrangements to secure continuous improvement, which are documented, subject to scrutiny and continue to develop. The Council can demonstrate that it constructs the improvement objectives with the seven criteria in mind and that they cover all the departments. It selects objectives based on priorities in the Corporate and Community Plans and, together with feedback from the community, links these through to business plans. Plans and reports are subject to scrutiny. The Council should document the selection of functions and development of improvement objectives more clearly. It should identify the specific functions to be improved, clearly link these to the objectives and show how improvement will be measured against them.</p> <p>The Council makes use of current and previous performance data for year-on-year baseline and comparative purposes. It is also developing APSE and other internal measures to facilitate benchmarking with other councils. It plans to develop and use its new performance management software to capture relevant information to support the improvement plan and help demonstrate continuous improvement. The full benefits of the new system have yet to be realised. The Council should continue to develop its improvement framework and ensure that its performance management systems and processes fully support this.</p> <p>A sub group of the Multi-Stakeholder group referred to above was tasked with drafting guidance to clarify the requirements of the General Duty to Improve. A working draft has now been agreed and we expect that further improvements to reporting on the General Duty will be made in 2019.</p>

<p>Governance arrangements</p>	<p>The Council has established appropriate governance arrangements to assist it in securing continuous improvement and to meet its performance improvement responsibilities. The Council’s committee structure remains unchanged from last year. The Council’s ‘Governance, Policy and Resources Committee’ (GPRC) is responsible for the approval for performance improvement objectives, plans and reports on statutory indicators. The Committee meets monthly. The Performance and Audit Committee advises the Council and Chief Financial Officer. It meets quarterly and receives the Performance Improvement Plan, the Self-Assessment Report and a six-monthly progress report on the annual improvement plan. The Council’s committees would benefit from clearer information on how the actions are contributing to the overall achievement of improvement objectives.</p> <p>Individual service committees receive reports on progress against business plans, including relevant performance improvement objectives. The Council intends that these reports will be produced by the Council’s performance management system in the near future. Training on the new system is ongoing and the system will be developed to include other action plans where possible.</p> <p>Each department prepares an annual business plan. Heads of department are responsible for overseeing implementation of their plan. In this regard, each of the actions underpinning the objectives has a realistic service plan, timetable and budget.</p> <p>The Council’s Performance Policy was approved by the Executive Management Team but is still in draft, subject to ongoing trade union consultation. It is expected that this will be finalised and formalised as soon as possible.</p> <p>The current internal audit work plan contains no specific performance improvement related audits but staff are aware of the need to reference any particular performance matters, especially if statutory in nature. A 2016-17 ‘proposal for improvement’ suggested consideration of internal audit’s role and the Northern Ireland Councils’ Regional Internal Audit Managers Group is taking this forward.</p> <p>A number of previous Proposals for Improvement on Governance (and other areas) have yet to be fully addressed. The council monitors progress against the proposals and reported progress on the 2017-18 proposals to the Performance and Audit Committee. The Council should track progress against all outstanding Proposals for Improvement and provide the appropriate committees with regular updates on progress.</p>
---------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Improvement objectives</p>	<p>Councils should now be able to demonstrate that arrangements are in place to collect the relevant information and the data to support any claims of improvement. In her 2018 annual report¹, the Local Government Auditor anticipated that this could be challenging for some councils (like Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council) because improvement objectives were strategic in nature and it is necessary that the basis for measuring improvements is clear in improvement plans. Some previous year proposals for improvement in Annex B relate to these issues.</p> <p>Links exist between the improvement objectives and the Community Plan. A statement of the ‘improvements residents, businesses or visitors can expect’ supports objectives in the plan. The objectives relate to improving functions and services for communities and citizens and they were formally agreed. In this regard, the council complies with the legislation and guidance.</p>
<p>Consultation</p>	<p>The Council carried out extensive consultation during its community planning process to identify and understand community needs. This informed the drafting of the Performance Improvement Plan, which was submitted for approval prior to being put out to public consultation. The consultation arrangements comply with the legislation and the council’s internal draft policy. The need for a policy was raised as a Proposal for Improvement in 2016-17 and Council should ensure that the draft policy is finalised and formalised as soon as possible.</p> <p>There was an eight-week consultation process on the draft Performance Improvement Plan using the intranet for staff and Members, the staff magazine, social media, emails to businesses, statutory partners and letters and emails to Section 75 groups, the Council website and the local press. In addition, the Council provides its citizens and stakeholders with an opportunity to propose new improvement objectives during the year via the website. In this respect, the Council has met its statutory duty to consult on its improvement objectives.</p>

¹ Local Government Auditor's Report - 2018, 04 September 2018

	<p>It is the Council's responsibility to promote and encourage its citizens and stakeholders to engage with it. The Council has made a number of changes to help promote feedback through the consultation process and raise the public profile of performance improvement. This includes a new Consultation Hub and a Community and Voluntary Sector Panel.</p>
<p>Improvement plan</p>	<p>The Council published its Performance Improvement Plan in June 2018. It is available in electronic format on the Council's website, in hard copy at Council offices, and in other formats on request. The document contains a high-level description of the Council's plan for discharging its statutory performance improvement duties. It includes a description of its annual performance improvement objectives, how these were selected, the key actions to be undertaken in order to achieve each of the objectives, and how the progress of the key actions will be measured.</p> <p>The plan also provides a summary of the Council's consultation process and the outcome of that process, together with information on how citizens and stakeholders may propose new objectives during the year and how performance against the plan will be reported.</p> <p>In line with good practice, the Council has provided a rationale for any changes to prior year improvement objectives. Appropriate information systems to support the improvement planning process are still in development. The Council is planning to develop and utilise the new performance management software system to provide relevant information that supports the plan and assists in demonstrating continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Arrangements to improve</p>	<p>The Council's Corporate Planning Framework provides the arrangements that establish the links between the function improvements to be delivered through the departmental business plans and action plans (at service, programme and project level) and the strategic priorities set out in the Community Plan and Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The 2018-19 departmental business plans for all 15 departments are in place and were approved by service committees and the full Council in May and June 2018. They contain the actions identified within the Improvement Plan together with others that will contribute to securing improvement in both service delivery and the longer-term outcomes for our citizens and other stakeholders. They support the operational delivery of the Corporate Plan and the annual Performance Improvement Plan. Each department's plan identifies the available resources and is effectively project managed. There are clear lines of accountability to senior management and elected members through the existing governance arrangements.</p>

	<p>The Council purchased its Performance Reporting Software in 2017-18. The 2018-19 business plans are now on the system. Staff have, and will continue to, receive training on the new system, which will be developed to include other action plans. The Council’s performance management system facilitates regular management reporting, consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a quarterly departmental business plan report to the Strategic Director; and • six-monthly departmental business plan performance reports to the relevant service committees.
<p>Collection, use and publication of performance information</p>	<p>The collection, use and publication of performance information should enable the Council to measure and evaluate improvement, assist in the identification of priority areas, facilitate comparison and benchmarking and support the communication of outcomes and progress to its citizens and other stakeholders.</p> <p>A Multi-Stakeholder Group was established with representatives from the Department for Communities and the councils. The work plan of the group includes consideration of benchmarking. We expect that progress will be made by September 2019 to allow a broader range of functions to be compared with other councils.</p> <p>Performance information</p> <p>The Council is developing its performance management system but, until it is fully embedded, it has limited performance data to monitor and assess its general duty to improve and to support the performance improvement planning process.</p> <p>In addition to the indicators supporting the improvement objectives, a sample of self-imposed indicators are included in a separate section of the plan. The full range of self-imposed indicators are included in business plans and used to measure performance. The plans are subject to scrutiny by their related functional committee and progress against targets/deliverables is reported to Council.</p> <p>Publication of performance information</p> <p>The Council published its 2017-18 ‘Performance Self-Assessment Report’ in September 2018. It includes assessment of the initiatives supporting the 2017-18 improvement objectives and includes separate sections on performance relating to the statutory indicators and some self-imposed indicators. Where available, year-on-year comparisons are included in all three areas. Comparison against other councils in Northern Ireland is limited to the statutory indicators.</p>

	<p>Commentary has been provided on the performance against each of the indicators, including explanations where targets have not been met and the proposed remedial action. While statutory indicators are already validated, going forward, the Council should consider how it might obtain assurance of its data relevant to, specifically, self-imposed indicators e.g. by internal audit.</p>
--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------