



## **The Corporate Improvement Process 2021-23 Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q – What is the Performance Improvement Duty of the Local Government Act 2014?**

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council are committed to continuous improvement. Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 puts in place a framework to support continuous improvement in the delivery of Council services and under Section 84 of the Act, Councils have a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

Councils are required to gather information to assess improvements in their services and to issue a report annually on their performance against indicators which they have set for themselves within an annual Corporate Improvement Plan or statutory indicators that have been set by various Departments.

The statutory indicators include:

- Economic Development – The Department for the Economy, DFE.
- Planning Performance – The Department for Communities, DFC.
- Waste Management – The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DAERA.

Further information on the Act can be viewed at:

[Local Government Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2014](#)

### **Q – What is Improvement?**

As defined in the Act:

“An activity that enhances the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities”.

Section 85 states that for each financial year, the Council must set itself improvement objectives and have arrangements in place to achieve those objectives.

### **Q - What Areas Must Improvements Cover?**

Section 86 of the Act stipulates that each improvement objective identified must bring about an improvement in at least one of the following areas:

- Strategic effectiveness.
- Service quality.
- Service accessibility.
- Fairness.
- Sustainability.
- Efficiency.
- Innovation.

**Q – How Do Council's Determine Improvement / Recovery Objectives?**

Improvement objectives correspond directly with the Council's priorities for improvement/recovery. Councils determine their own priorities for improvement based on a thorough evidence-based understanding of the communities they serve and a critical analysis of evidence within the following sources:

- Recovery Plan
- The Draft Community Plan.
- The Council's corporate priorities.
- Financial Plan and other relevant Council strategies/plans.
- Outcomes of any performance assessment exercises.
- Audit, regulatory and inspection reports.
- Performance Data / Benchmarking.
- Priorities identified through analysis of performance data.
- Evidence gained from consulting on improvement objectives in the previous year.
- The Programme for Government (PfG).

**Q – How Many Improvement (Recovery) Objectives Can a Council Set?**

As many as they wish. However, all improvement objectives must be:

1. Legitimate.
2. Clear.
3. Robust.
4. Deliverable – linked to Council's business plans and budgets.
5. Demonstrable – Success through objective evidence.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council must agree improvement objectives formally.

**Q – How has the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacted Council Duties?**

The Pandemic has had a significant impact on Council services and resources, but the Council remains committed to ensuring the Borough recovers whilst continuing to develop, improve and grow.

The Council prepared, consulted upon and published a Corporate Recovery Plan for 2021-23 which sets out plans for the recovery of services to pre-COVID levels, whilst reflecting a number of key areas for performance improvement during 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Further details concerning the Councils Recovery Plan and Governance Arrangements can be viewed at:

[Corporate Recovery Plan 2021-23](#)

[Corporate Recovery Plan 2021-23 Executive Summary](#)

[Performance Governance Arrangements 2021-23](#)

**Q – Do the Council Consult On / Publish Its Improvement (Recovery) Process?**

Yes, Section 87 of the Act requires the Council to consult with the following groups before setting its improvement objectives:

1. Citizens / ratepayers and stakeholders.
2. Local businesses / potential businesses.
3. Statutory / community planning partners.

#### 4. Other

The Council consulted on the Corporate Recovery Plan 2021-23 between 24 May and 19 July 2021, receiving 42 responses.

#### **Q – Do the Council Committees Have a Role to Play?**

Yes, the Council and local communities play a key role in determining and monitoring the overall performance of the organisation. The Audit Committee, Policy and Governance Committee and the Council are required to regularly report on:

- The process of selecting improvement objectives.
- Monitoring progress of improvement objectives.
- The promotion of innovation delivery.
- Delivery of the Council's discharge of the general duty to improve.

#### **Q – Do the Council Record and Report on Progress?**

Section 90 of the Act requires the Council to collect information which will allow it to assess performance improvement i.e.

1. Performance indicators (including statutory indicators: Economic Development, Planning and Waste Management).
2. Qualitative Information.
3. Other sources of evidence.

Section 91 of the Act requires the Council to use this information to:

1. Assess performance against the previous year's performance.
2. Compare performance with the performance of other Councils and public bodies (from 2017 onwards).
3. Publish an Annual Report before 30<sup>th</sup> September of each financial year on the Council's corporate website.

Further information on the Council's performance in 2020-21 can be viewed at: [Annual Report on Performance 2020-21 Self-Assessment](#)

#### **Q- Does the Council Compare their Performance Against other Organisations?**

Yes, the Council provides comparisons within the Annual Report on Performance 2020-21 Self-Assessment, detailing performance against other Northern Ireland Councils in terms of statutory indicators, absence and prompt payments.

The Council uses a range of methods of benchmarking performance, including seeking out regional, national and international organisations with whom we can compare performance.

In addition, the Council is a member of the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE), including its Performance Network, which is a public sector benchmarking organisation.

#### **Q – What Is the Role of the Local Government Auditor?**

The Local Government Auditor undertakes an annual improvement assessment to determine if the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of the Act.

The various assessments include:

A Forward Looking Assessment – July/August

A comprehensive review of the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan.

Retrospective Assessment – September / October

A review to determine if the Council has discharged its duties in accordance with Departmental guidance.

Audit and Assessment Report – 30<sup>th</sup> November

A report which determines if a Council has complied with the statutory duty to improve.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office publishes annual Improvement Reports, which can be viewed at:

[Northern Ireland Audit Office Publications](#)

The most recent published report covers 2019-20 and can be viewed at:

[Antrim and Newtownabbey Performance Improvement Report 2019-20](#)

The Council has received notification from the NIAO, pending official publication of the report, that the Council's performance arrangements have been certified with an unqualified audit for 2020-21. In addition there are no statutory recommendations and no proposals for improvement which represents good practice.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, assessment and fieldwork for the 2021-22 performance arrangements will take place in December 2021 and January 2021, with the NIAO intending to complete and publish their findings before 28 February 2022.

### **Q – What Happens if a Council Fails to Comply with the Requirements of the Act?**

If a Council fails to comply with any of the requirements in relation to Part 12, the Auditor can direct a Council to take the following action:

1. Prepare or amend an improvement plan;
2. Enter into specific arrangements with another Council;

And / or:

1. Carry out a review of its exercise of specified functions;
2. Set specific improvement objectives.

Any Northern Ireland Department may direct the Council to take any action which they deem necessary to secure compliance with their requirements under Part 12 of the Act.

### **Q – Ongoing Consultation**

The Council will continue to consult with communities and relevant stakeholders throughout the year providing an opportunity to identify new areas for improvement.

The Council is committed to improving our services and it is important that we listen to what our colleagues, residents, visitors and local businesses have to say. We welcome your comments or suggestions at any time of the year. If you have any comments, would like any further information, or to request a copy of the Recovery Plan please contact:

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