



28 April 2022

Committee Chair: Alderman P Michael

Committee Vice-Chair: Councillor T McGrann

Committee Members: Councillors – M Cooper, H Cushinan, R Foster, S Flanagan, N Kelly, A McAuley, M Magill, B Mallon, N Ramsay, V Robinson, M Stewart, B Webb and R Wilson

Dear Member

MEETING OF THE POLICY & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Policy & Governance Committee will be held in the **Council Chamber, Mossley Mill on Wednesday 4 May 2022 at 6.30pm.**

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui Dixon".

Jacqui Dixon, BSc MBA
Chief Executive, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council

For any queries please contact Member Services:

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A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3 PRESENTATION

3.1 Finance – Supporting Corporate Recovery

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Challenge 2022

5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5.1 Managing Attendance

5.2 Agency

5.3 Quarterly Screening Report and Rural Screening

5.4 Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 Annual Monitoring Report

5.5 Communications & Customer Channels Report

5.6 Year End Report On FOI/EIR/DPA Requests

5.7 Budget Report – March 2022 Period 12

5.8 Prompt Payment Performance

6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

6.1 Capital Projects Progress Report to 31 March 2022

6.2 Procurement Tender Report & Award of Contracts

7 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

**REPORT ON BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE
POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING ON
WEDNESDAY 4 MAY 2022**

3. PRESENTATION

3.1 PRESENTATION – FINANCE SUPPORTING CORPORATE RECOVERY

Members are advised that the Deputy Director of Finance will make a presentation at the meeting.

4 ITEM FOR DECISION

4.1 HR/HR/10 NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL (NJC) PAY CHALLENGE 2022

Members are asked to note the enclosed correspondence from the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) which provides an update on the 2021 pay round and associated challenges.

NILGA wish to engage early with Councils given the expected difficulties for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 pay negotiations.

NILGA have asked that consideration be given to the information enclosed and for the Council's position for both the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 pay award to be shared with NILGA to help inform the collective position for Northern Ireland.

Members are reminded that: -

- The 2021 pay deal included a 1.75% pay increase for all staff (2.75% on SCP1), recommencing the national review of Term-Time only working arrangements and national joint discussions on homeworking policies, mental health support and maternity leave.
- The bottom NJC rate is SCP1 and from 1 April 2021 this was paid at £9.50 per hour.
- The bottom SCP point for current employees in Council is SCP3, £9.79. Following recent Council approval, a supplement of 21p will be paid from 1 April 2022 to ensure the Real Living Wage Foundation rate of £9.90 is paid to those on pay point SCP3.

NILGA have advised of the need to be aware of the potential for the National Living Wage (NLW) to increase to at least £10.50 or higher if there is to be headroom in 2022 and £11.50 (17p headroom above the top end forecast of £11.33) in 2023.

Options to absorb the NLW increases present significant implications that may be different in each Council.

The estimates for pay increases have been based on a 2.5% pay increase for 2022/2023 and 2023/2024.

It is anticipated that the Trade Union's pay claim for the year 2022/2023 will be issued in early May 2022 and NILGA will coordinate the usual pay briefing in conjunction with Local Government Association to seek Council's view on the contents of the claim.

The National Employers are due to meet on 9 May 2022 to consider the feedback from regional briefings. Northern Ireland will be represented at the meeting by the NILGA representative, Alderman Audrey Wales.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report is noted and that Council's position on the increased pay award as reflected in the estimates at 2.5% for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 should be reported to NILGA.

Prepared by: Jennifer Close, Head of Human Resources

Agreed by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

Approved by: Jacqui Dixon, Chief Executive

5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5.1 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the management of attendance from April 2021 – March 2022 (summary enclosed).

ABSENCE – APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 2022

Members are advised that the final position on sickness absence for 2021/22 was 14.7 average days per employee against the annual corporate target of 12 days.

Given the exceptional nature of 2020/21; 2019/20 absence figures have been used for comparison. The table below outlines an increase in long term absence and a respective decrease in short term absence.

Reporting Year	Average days Lost	Long Term	Short Term
2019/2020	12.41 days	77%	23%
2021/2022	14.7 days	87%	13%

There has been a steady increase in 100% attendance with 63% of staff achieving this compared to 59% in 2019/20.

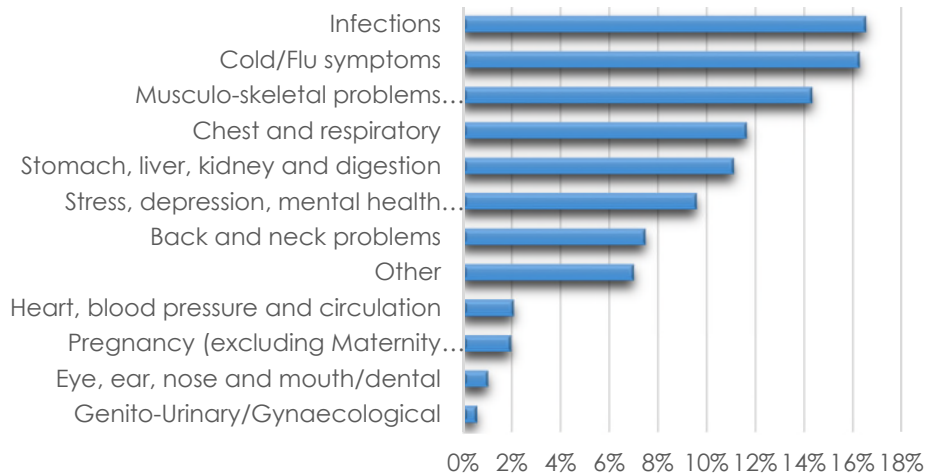
The top reasons for absence broadly remain the same, however there has been a reduction in personal stress since 2019/20 from 38% to 35% of absence cases.

Top Reasons for Absence			
2019/2020		2021/2022	
Personal Stress, Depression, Mental Health, Fatigue	38%	Personal Stress, Depression, Mental Health, Fatigue	35%
Other (flu, cold symptoms etc, operations, cancer)	23%	Other (flu, cold symptoms etc, operations, cancer)	23%
Musculoskeletal	15%	Work Related Stress	15%
Work Related Stress	11%	Musculoskeletal	11%
Back and Neck Problems	9%	Stomach, Liver, kidneys and digestion	10%

Short term absence

Short term absence cases accounted for 13% (177 cases) of overall absence, with the main reasons being infections, colds, and flu, as detailed in the below chart.

Reasons for Short term absence



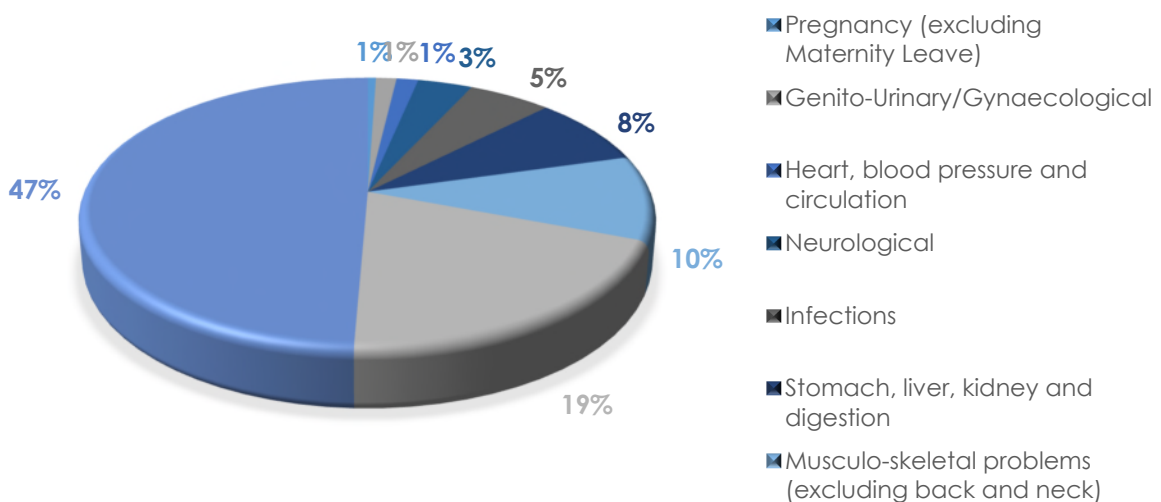
Long term absence

Long term absence cases (in excess of 20 days) accounted for 87% (78 cases) of overall absence. In reviewing these cases for the year, it should be noted that:

- 69% returned to work
- 2 formal case reviews were completed with employees returning to work
- 1 case resulted in dismissal following a formal case review
- 5 employees voluntarily left the organisation

The reasons for long term absence largely remain the same and are noted are detailed in the chart below:

REASONS FOR LONG TERM ABSENCE



Although the long term absence figure has increased since 2019/20, several mitigating factors should be noted and are explained below.

Key considerations for days lost to long term cases:

1. Disability - Approximately 27% of long term absence is recorded as disability related and in these instances management has a legal obligation to consider making reasonable adjustments. These cases can be complex and regularly require legal advice and guidance to progress to any potential dismissal.
2. 'No pay' periods - A number of long term absence cases resulted in employees exhausting their sick pay entitlement and although no additional cost is incurred by the Council during the 'no pay' periods – these days lost are still included in the absence figures.

If days lost to employees who were not in receipt of sick pay were not included in the absence figures, the average days lost per employee at the end of March 2022 would have been 13.52 days

3. Furlough - Three long term absence cases were unavoidably extended due to furlough in 2020/21. Within the reported absence figures these cases amount to approximately 1.4 average days of the 14.7 average days lost and had they not been furloughed this absence would have been attributed to the 2020/21 year.

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT 2022/23

Current situation

Currently, there are 24 long term absence cases and of these 6 cases are now planned for Formal Case Review.

Throughout the recovery period, the prevalence and impact of long Covid has emerged as a significant concern and will likely continue to impact absence levels in the year ahead.

Wellbeing focus

The Council remains focused on encouraging health and wellbeing in the workplace, and will continue to offer and implement the following initiatives:

- Promotion of an Employee Assistance Programme through Inspire offering 24/7 confidential support
- Health checks
- Breast Screening through Action Cancer
- Occupational Health Referrals and Physio Treatments
- Cycle to work scheme
- Flu vaccination programme
- Mental Health briefings and online courses for employees and managers

- Facilitating access to Council Leisure Facilities through the staff membership scheme
- Covid 19 advice, guidance, the HR Team providing a 24/7 HR Support line to help employees with Covid queries

Targeted actions

1. The Head of HR and HR Manager hold bi-monthly meetings with relevant Deputy Chief Executives, Deputy Directors/Heads of Service to schedule formal case reviews where appropriate and to agree next steps for any further complex cases
2. Information to be provided to Heads of Service on an in-depth analysis of sickness absence patterns and trends
3. HR Officers to work directly with their service area managers on absence cases, agreeing action plans to address the cases effectively
4. Training for managers to be delivered on how to effectively manage their absence caseloads, how to have difficult conversations and absence management toolkits developed to help managers
5. Wellness meetings held in person or virtually if required with absent employees for regular contact
6. Identifying suitable return to work options e.g. alternative duties across the organisation
7. Timely referrals to Occupational Health and use of Physio provision where appropriate, including reviewing the effectiveness of these services
8. For employees who have triggered the absence threshold, Managers and HR will ensure absence review meetings are carried out in a timely manner
9. Ongoing promotion of the wellbeing resource tool, 'STAYWELL across the organisation in addition to the ongoing support services from Inspire and the courses available through Northern Trust Recovery College

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Victoria Stewart, HR Systems and Data Analyst

Reviewed by: Jennifer Close, Head of Human Resources

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

5.2 HR/HR/019 - AGENCY STAFF UPDATE

Members are reminded that agency staff are used across the Council to provide temporary cover for absence such as:

- Maternity leave
- Secondments
- Sickness absence
- Vacant posts

The use of agency staff is subject to a rigorous approval process, which requires the approval of the Corporate Leadership Team and there is budgetary provision for the majority of posts filled via departmental salary budgets, salary contingency and grant funding.

Current Agency staff

The table appended provides an update for Members on the use of agency staff as at March 2022 compared to March 2020 (pre covid-19). It excludes limited ad-hoc agency cover, which is necessary to provide operational cover, at short notice (enclosed Appendix 1). Given the exceptional nature of 2020/21; 2019/20 agency figures have been used for comparison.

In reviewing the number of agency workers it should be noted that:

- the figures are broadly comparable with 54 in March 2020 and 53 in March 2022
- there are less agency workers covering vacancies on structures
- agency workers are used more to provide ad-hoc cover

Cost of Agency

Enclosed at Appendix 2 sets out expenditure on agency workers in March 2022.

The cost of agency staff has increased for the period of 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 at 7% of all staffing costs compared to 6% for the same period in 2019 – 2020 (pre covid).

The increased costs are impacted by:

- the NJC pay increase backdated to 1 April 2021 that is applicable to agency workers

Costs will further increase from 6 April 2022 as a result of the increase in National Insurance.

In 2022/2023

While there are currently 18 Seasonal Grounds Maintenance workers in place the agency is working to provide further agency cover.

As the Summer Schemes are resuming in July and August 2022 a tender has commenced through the agency to engage 50 Summer Scheme Leader roles to support these schemes.

It has been challenging to fill roles through the agencies due to the current labour market and it is anticipated that we will directly recruit and fill a number of operational vacancies that are currently covered by agency workers.

We would anticipate that going forward we will use agency workers for more ad hoc, seasonal, temporary cover.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Victoria Stewart, HR Systems and Data Analyst

Agreed by: Pauline Greer, Human Resources Manager

Approved by: Jennifer Close, Head of Human Resources

5.3 CCS/EDP/7 QUARTERLY SCREENING REPORT AND RURAL SCREENING

Members are advised that in line with the Council's Equality Scheme it was agreed to provide quarterly updates on the screening of policies under Section 75. Within the Scheme, the Council gave a commitment to apply screening methodology to all new and revised policies. Where necessary and appropriate, these new policies would be subject to further equality impact assessment.

SECTION 75 AND RURAL SCREENINGS

The policies noted below have been screened between January and March 2022.

POLICY	SCREENING DECISION
Oil Stamp Policy	1
Graffiti Removal Policy	1
Play Park City of Belfast Playing Fields	1

- (1) Screened with no mitigation
- (2) Screened with mitigation
- (3) Screened and EQIA required

CONSULTATIONS AND SURVEYS

The consultations and surveys noted below cover January to date and status by way of update.

CONSULTATION / SURVEY TITLE	STATUS CLOSED
Draft Dual Language Street Sign Policy Consultation	Closed 31 Mar 22
Ballyclare Jobs Fair - March 2022	Closed 29 Mar 22
Rathcoole Jobs Fair - March 2022	Closed 29 Mar 22
HAVE YOUR SAY- Cleanliness of the Borough 2022	Closed 28 Feb 22
Enchanted Winter Garden 2021 Staff and Elected Member Survey	Closed 31 Jan 22
Christmas Switch-On Events 2021	Closed 20 Jan 22
Enchanted Winter Garden 2021	Closed 14 Jan 22
Antrim & Newtownabbey Policing & Community Safety Partnership	Closed 10 Jan 22
	STATUS OPEN
Borough Life - Our Beautiful Borough	Open 4 Apr 2022 Closes 2 May 2022
Corporate Recovery and Improvement Plan 2022-23	Open 7 Mar 2022 Close 30 May 2022
Age Friendly Programme	Open 22 Mar 2022 Close 31 May 2022

Separate consultation and survey updates will be provided in due course to inform of feedback received, from surveys already undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Ellen Boyd, Accessibility and Customer Services Officer

Agreed by: James Porter, Customer Services Manager, Nicola McCullough,
Head of Communications and Customers

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

5.4 CCS/EDP/14 RURAL NEEDS ACT (NI) 2016 ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

Members are reminded that on 1 June 2017, the Rural Needs Act became operational for district councils and government departments.

The Rural Needs Act places a duty on public authorities and local councils, to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies, plans and when designing and delivering public services. It also requires public authorities to provide information to Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on how they have fulfilled this duty on an annual basis and to collate this information in their annual report.

The Rural Needs Annual Monitoring report for 2021 to 2022 is **enclosed** for Members information.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Ellen Boyd, Accessibility and Customer Services Officer

Agreed by: James Porter, Customer Services Manager

Reviewed by: Nicola McCullough, Head of Communications and Customers

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

5.5 CCS/CS/006 COMMUNICATIONS & CUSTOMERS CHANNEL REPORT

Members are reminded that within the draft Corporate Recovery and Improvement Plan 2022-23, which is currently being consulted upon with stakeholders, the Council has included “*We will achieve high levels of customer satisfaction*” amongst four performance improvement targets.

The Council continues to put its customers at the heart of service delivery and has responded to the challenges of the pandemic by introducing new customer channels to complement the existing, traditional forms of communication.

Moving forward, further data will be gathered on digital channels, gaining insight into current and future needs of customers, as the Council strives to deliver a modern, inclusive, effective, and responsive service experience. This will all form part of the Customer Strategy review, which will be reported back to Committee during 2022-23.

Previously residents were presented with twenty-eight different telephone numbers and a host of email addresses to request service or assistance. This has been addressed by the introduction of dedicated 0300 service numbers and streamlined email addresses, such as *more@* and *culture@*, alongside the creation of service Hubs, offering direct access to specialist support from sixty-five customer service agents, whom received nearly 174,000 calls and 17,000 Live Chats were received in 2021-22.

A Live Chat service was introduced at the onset of the Pandemic, providing a safe and effective channel to interact with customers through our website and dedicated residents app. This has also allowed the use of dedicated support for events such as the Enchanted Winter Garden, as well as the provision of more inclusive services to the deaf community.

The Council has also improved the Customer Complaints Procedure, reducing the stages and times for issues to be responded to, and introducing a self-service digital platform to allow customers to manage their interactions. This is ahead of the planned transformation of how public bodies handle complaints being delivered by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

The proposed Corporate Recovery & Improvement Plan for 2022-23 sets out the following actions to achieve “*We will achieve high levels of customer satisfaction*”:

- Continue to communicate with our citizens through Borough Life, Website, Residents' App, and Live Chat.
- We will regularly seek and act on feedback from residents, visitors and local businesses through a programme of consultations and engagement.
- We will implement our Customer Charter and Service Standards, accompanied by innovative and effective training.
- We will reduce the number of abandoned calls.
- We will promote and improve our live chat functionality.

- We will embed the new complaints process across the organisation.

The success of these actions will be measured in 2022-23 by meeting the following:

- We achieve at least 80% satisfaction with overall Council services.
- The percentage of abandoned calls will be 6.5% (or less).
- We have achieved at least 600,000 online transactions.
- There are at least 3,743 downloads of the Residents App.

The performance of the Corporate Recovery & Improvement Policy 2022-23 will be reported on a quarterly basis to the Policy & Governance and Audit Risk Committees, and within the Annual Report on Performance 2022-23 (Self-Assessment), which will be reviewed by Council and published on the Council's website by 30 September 2023.

Monthly reports will be presented to the Policy & Governance Committee providing further Members with further detail, accompanied by an analysis of data and trends within all aspects of these actions and measures.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report is noted.

Prepared by: James Porter, Customer Services Manager

Agreed by: Nicola McCullough, Head of Communications and Customers

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

5.6 G/DPFI/2 YEAR END REPORT ON FOI/EIR/DPA REQUESTS

A report has been prepared on requests received from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and the Data Protection Act (DPA) and this is enclosed.

A summary of the statistics for the year is:

- The number of requests has increased by 20% on the previous year. Provision of responses has remained resource intensive due to their complex nature and the levels of approval required.
- The percentage of requests answered within the 20 day deadline has decreased from the Council KPI of 100% to 95%. However, the ICO guidance considers a response rate of 95% or more to be good.
- Of the 297 requests received, 223 were under FOI, 59 under EIR and 15 under DPA.
- The sections that received most requests were Finance (63), Environmental Health (60), Planning (50) and Governance (50).
- Ten appeals (requests for internal review) were received within the financial year compared to one in the previous year. The Council's original response was upheld for all ten appeals.
- Three complaints to the ICO were notified within the year compared to one in the previous year. One of the three complaints has not yet been progressed by the ICO. For the other two complaints the ICO asked that the Council correspond directly with the complainants and this has been done.
- Seven data breaches were reported during the year. One was considered of sufficiently high risk to require reporting to the ICO. Twelve data breaches were reported in the previous year but none required notification to the ICO.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Helen McBride, Information Governance Manager

Agreed by: Liz Johnston, Head of Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

5.7 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – MARCH 2022 – Period 12

A budget report for March 2022 – Period 12 is enclosed for Members' information.

The Council's financial position at the end of March 2022 shows a favourable variance of £700k.

The budget report for Period 12 does not include final adjustments required to arrive at the final financial position of the Council for the 2021/22 financial year. These adjustments include final accruals of expenditure incurred, grants receivable, debts invoiced after 31 March 2022, contributions to reserves, and prepayments of expenditure and income

Any adjustments made as a result of the above shall be reflected in the Statement of Accounts presented to the Audit Committee.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance and Capital

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance & Governance

5.8 FI/FIN/9 PROMPT PAYMENT PERFORMANCE

Members are reminded that the Department for Communities (DfC) issued revised guidance (Local Government Circular 19/2016) on prompt payments and the recording of invoice payments in November 2016. This guidance requested councils to record specific performance targets of 10 working days and 30 calendar days and continue a cycle of quarterly reporting on prompt payment performance by councils to the DfC and its publication on their website.

The Council's prompt payment performance for the period **1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022** is set out below:

The default target for paying invoices, where no other terms are agreed, is 30 days.

(N.B. 30 days target is 30 calendar days and 10 days is 10 working days).

During the above period, the Council paid invoices totalling £14,685,510.

The Council paid 4,816 invoices within the 30-day target. (87%)

The Council paid 4,193 invoices within the 10-day target. (76%)

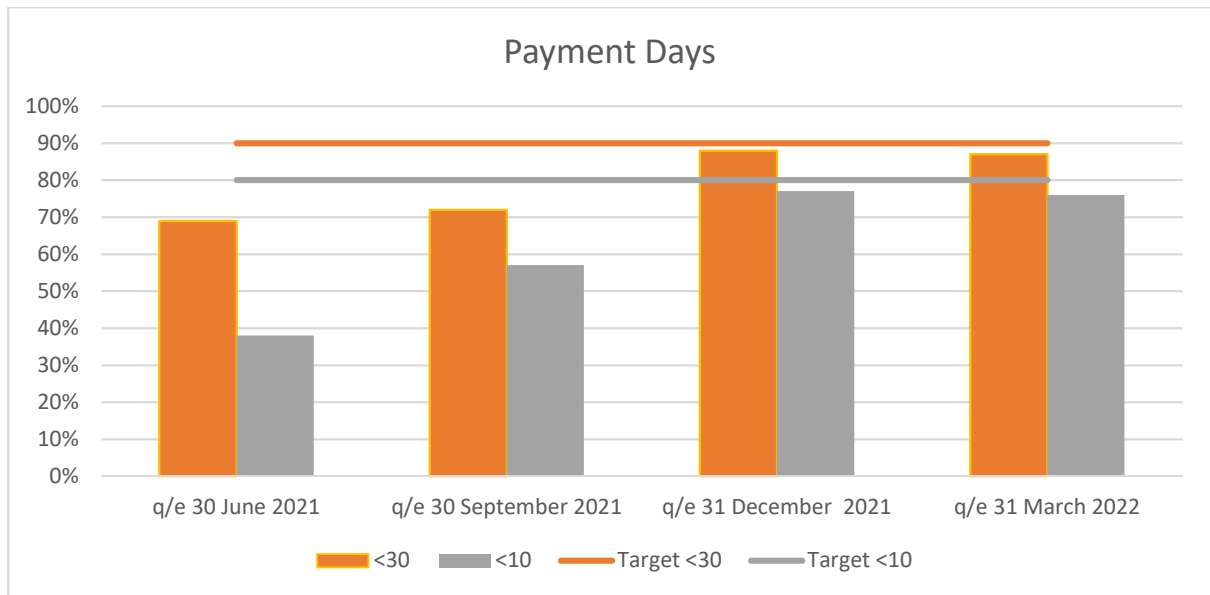
The Council paid 723 invoices outside of the 30-day target. (13%)

The Council has set a target of paying 90% of invoices within 30 days and 80% within 10 days.

The quarterly results for 2021/22 are as follows:

Period	Total Number of Invoices Paid	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Target		90%	80%
q/e 30 June 2021	3,352	69%	38%
q/e 30 September 2021	5,867	72%	57%
q/e 31 December 2021	6,575	88%	77%
q/e 31 March 2022	5,539	87%	76%

The performance presented graphically highlights the performance metrics for the above.



Members will recall that a new finance system went 'live' on 12 April 2021. This impacted on performance whilst the new system and procedures were embedded.

The table and graph above show the performance improvement over the last year, with performance levels stabilising in the second half of the year.

It is worth noting that the number of invoices paid for quarter 4; 5,539, have almost returned to pre-Covid levels; q/e 31 March 2020, 6,308 invoices paid.

Period	Total Number of Invoices Paid	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Quarter 1			
Apr	470	83%	49%
May	1,068	66%	28%
June	1,814	64%	33%
Quarter 2			
July	1,895	58%	42%
Aug	1,911	60%	58%
Sept	2,061	85%	69%
Quarter 3			
Oct	2,300	85%	73%
Nov	2,429	90%	79%
Dec	1,846	87%	76%
Quarter 4			
Jan	1,500	88%	76%
Feb	1,960	85%	74%
Mar	2,079	88%	77%

The prompt payment performance for Councils in Northern Ireland is published quarterly by the Department for Communities (DfC). The prompt payment performance for the quarter ended 31 December 2021 is shown in **Appendix 1 (Enclosed)**; the Council's performance for Quarter 3 against the average performance for the other Councils for the same Quarter of 2021/22 is set out in the table below:

Council	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Antrim & Newtownabbey BC (3rd Quarter 2021/22)	88%	77%
All Councils (3rd Quarter 2021/22)	92%	74%

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Ann Hamilton, Financial Controller

Agreed by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Approved by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance and Governance