

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

Audit and Assessment Report 2018-19

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



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 Fermanagh and Omagh District 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 two new proposals for improvement

This report summaries the work of the LGA on the 2018-19 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Fermanagh and Omagh District 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 Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (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 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 two proposals for improvement (see Section 3). These represent good practice which should assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities for performance improvement. Detailed observations on thematic areas are provided in Annex C and progress on 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.

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

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for improvement
Governance	Members of the Council's Improvement scrutiny and oversight committees have a key role to fulfil in ensuring that, not only are the findings from the LGA's annual audit and assessment work being monitored and progress actively tracked, but that measurable progress is being achieved.	The Council's Policy and Resources Committee as well as the Audit Panel should follow up on progress made against the Proposals for improvement included within s95 reports on a regular basis. Arrangements to track these might be similar to that used for tracking financial audit or internal audit recommendations.
Collection and use of performance information	Whilst performance data is challenged where there appears to be an anomaly, the Council could consider whether there is a potential role for internal audit to independently validate published performance data.	The Council should consider what assurance it has on the validity of performance data and consider whether internal audit could assist with this.

4. Annexes



Annex A – Audit and Assessment Certificate

Audit and assessment of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council’s performance improvement arrangements

Certificate of Compliance

I certify that I have audited Fermanagh and Omagh District 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				
2016-17 Report	GD 1	More use of service data (or other qualitative data) to enable performance measurement and benchmarking. This will help identify those functions/services which would benefit most from improvement.	<p>Audit work in 2017 and 2018 noted that the council made use of service data (and other qualitative data), where available, to measure the performance of its functions which helped to inform decision making in respect of its identification of improvement priorities.</p> <p>The Council has a wide range of data available at service level which is reported through Service Delivery and Improvement Plans (SDIPs). This information is used to inform the identification of areas for improvement and select improvement objectives and work streams alongside statutory indicators and wider population indicators available through the Community Plan evidence base.</p> <p>The Council is a member of the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Performance Networks and services and is looking to develop its use of benchmarking data. It has identified a key suite of performance measures upon which data is submitted annually to APSE for benchmarking purposes, both in terms of Northern Ireland and GB Councils. Further progress needs to be made, however, on developing a suite of common indicators to aid comparison.</p>	<p>In progress</p> <p>Further work is needed in co-operation with other councils to progress benchmarking.</p>

2016-17 Report	GD 2	Continue to link the forthcoming community plan, and the ongoing processes that underpin it, with the Council's improvement processes.		Implemented
2017-18 Report	GD 3	The Council should continue to prioritise the development of its performance management system to enable the performance of all its functions and services to be measured, to support the identification of those areas which would benefit most from improvement.		Implemented
Governance				
2016-17 Report	GOV 1	Senior management should facilitate Members of both the Policy and Resources Committee and the Audit Panel with training and support to discharge the performance improvement responsibilities.		Implemented
2016-17 Report	GOV 2	Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Audit Panel should be updated to reflect their respective performance improvement responsibilities.		Implemented

2016-17 Report	GOV 3	Performance improvement should feature as a regular item on the Policy and Resources Committee agenda and as a standing item on the Audit Panel agenda.		Implemented
2016-17 Report	GOV 4	The Audit Panel should monitor the activity of the Policy and Resources Committee specifically in respect of the scrutiny of performance improvement.		Implemented
2017-18 Report	GOV 5	Quarterly progress reports to the Policy and Resources Committee would benefit from more detailed information relating to the specific performance measures and indicators linked to each improvement projects and activities, as this information becomes available. This should also show how each project and activity is contributing to the overall improvement objectives.		Implemented
Objectives				
2017-18 report	OBJ 1	The Council should ensure that any improvement achieved can be demonstrated at the objective level and not just at the project level. This could be achieved by establishing baselines, setting indicators, and standards at the objective level.	Our observations also noted that in the past objectives were strategic, broad and open-ended, with some distance between what the overall objectives were trying to achieve and the activities set to contribute towards delivering them. A revised approach has been adopted in the 2018-19 Improvement Plan. A set of measures has been identified for each objective, which the actions directly contribute to. The self-assessment report next	In progress To improve transparency for the citizen, and to be able to demonstrate clearly improvement later, the Council needs to establish baselines of current performance at

			<p>year will document the improvement or otherwise in each of these measures.</p> <p>However, at the overall improvement objective level and some work strands, no baseline for current performance, standards, or targets (where applicable) was included in the Improvement Plan.</p> <p>The Council is progressing the availability of appropriate baseline data to support measurement of improvements, through Community Planning indicators and service performance indicators and measures (both internal and APSE).</p>	<p>an overall objective level as well as associated projects/work strands. These should be included in the published Improvement Plan as well as any targets or timescales for improvement.</p>
Consultation				
2016-17 report	CON 1	Continue to 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 report	CON 1	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 and focus groups.		Implemented
2016-17 report	CON 1	The questions in the consultation sought agreement on the objectives and provided an opportunity for comment. From our own experience of		Implemented

		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, and encourage more meaningful responses.		
Performance Reporting and Collection and use of Information				
2017-18	INFO 1	The Council should continue working with other councils and the Department to agree a suite of self-imposed indicators and standards. This will enable meaningful comparisons to be made and published in line with its statutory responsibility.	<p>The Council is continuing to work through APSE to ensure that comparisons can be provided. This is still developing and significant work is ongoing to update performance measures and provide clarity on data submission to aid consistency.</p> <p>A Multi-Stakeholder Group has been established with representatives from the Department for Communities and the councils, and is also attended by NIAO. 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>	In progress
2017-18	REP 1	To enhance the transparency and clarity of future self-assessments self-assessment reports must include a clear and transparent self-assessment of performance in relation to the general duty to improve as required under the legislation.	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 following revised guidance to be issued in 2019.	In progress

2017-18	REP 2	To enhance the transparency and clarity of future self-assessments self-assessments should not focus solely on the underlying projects, but also include a clear and transparent assessment of the Council's progress in delivering its improvement objectives.	Last year we highlighted the risk arising from the distance between what the overall objective seeks to achieve and the projects established to deliver the objective, and how that could impact on reporting. In the 2017-18 self-assessment the Council focused more on demonstrating the improvement achieved in year in terms of outcomes, and included where possible previous year figures or a baseline. However, as we noted last year baselines at the overall objective were not always available when the 2017-18 Plan was developed.	<p>In progress</p> <p>The inclusion of baselines and prior year figures in future Improvement Plans will further improve transparency and enable the Council to clearly demonstrate improvement not just at project or work strand level but also at the overall objective level. The Council continues to work on refining these elements.</p>

Annex C – Detailed observations

Thematic area	
General duty to improve	<p>The Council is required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of all of its functions. These arrangements should enable the Council to understand local needs and priorities, collect performance data and as a result, use this information to identify and prioritise those functions which will benefit most from improvement. This will enable it to select its improvement objectives and in turn, make best use of its resources and capacity to deliver outcomes.</p> <p>The Council's arrangements to secure continuous improvement are becoming more established and continue to be developed. The process by which functions are prioritised and selected is transparent and subject to appropriate levels of scrutiny, but also continues to develop.</p> <p>The Council has a wide range of data available at service level which is reported through Service Delivery and Improvement Plans (SDIPs). This information is used to inform the identification of improvement objectives alongside statutory indicators and wider population indicators available through the Community Plan evidence base.</p> <p>The Council continues to make use of previous performance reports, service data (or other qualitative data) and in particular the baseline data, performance indicators and measures, being developed both internally and as part of APSE in order to benchmark to help identify those functions/services which would benefit most from improvement.</p> <p>A sub group of the Multi-Stakeholder group 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>
Governance arrangements	<p>The Council's governance arrangements support effective decision making and oversight in relation to its statutory responsibility to have arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement in its functions. The Council has established appropriate governance arrangements to assist it in securing continuous improvement and continues to develop these, where necessary, to assist it in meeting its performance improvement responsibilities.</p> <p>Responsibility for managing the Performance Improvement responsibilities sits with the Community Planning and Performance Service within the Chief Executive's Directorate. It is managed by a Head of Service, and a full-time Performance Improvement Officer has been appointed, alongside a part-time Project Assistant. The team looks after the corporate planning and service delivery and improvement planning processes, alongside performance management and improvement.</p>

Thematic area	
	<p>The Council assigned responsibility for scrutiny of its performance improvement framework to the Policy and Resources Committee. The Audit Panel oversight role has developed to include quarterly monitoring of the activity of the Policy and Resources Committee, specifically in respect of the scrutiny of Council's Performance Improvement Plans and reports, and this is a standing item on agenda for reporting.</p> <p>These show how each project and activity is contributing to the overall improvement objectives, as this information becomes available. Progress against Proposals for Improvement included in the s95 report are not formally tracked by the relevant committees. We have raised this as a Proposal for Improvement this year.</p>
Improvement objectives	<p>The Council is required to establish improvement objectives each year and we undertake an assessment of these in line with legislation and supporting statutory guidance. Councils are expected to determine their own priorities for improvement based on a thorough understanding of the communities they serve. Improvement, in the context of the legislation, means more than just quantifiable gains in service output or efficiency, or the internal effectiveness of an organisation. Improvement for councils should mean activity that enhances the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities. It also requires improvement objectives to be legitimate, clear, robust and deliverable.</p> <p>The Council approved its improvement objectives formally through the Policy and Resources Committee and these were then ratified by full Council on 5 June 2018.</p> <p>Five improvement objectives were set, all of which met at least one of the seven criteria required in legislation. They relate to the functions and services the Council identified to improve for its community and citizens, as set out in the Community Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan. They were selected on the basis of a range of factors including: an analysis of available statutory, corporate and service performance measures; information from performance reports; as well as engagement with Elected Members, Senior Management Team, Heads of Service, and consultation with citizens.</p> <p>Each improvement objective sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why it was selected; • Visible improvements which citizens can expect; • Action to be taken during 2018-19 (there are 20 associated projects/work strands actions set out in the Improvement Plan); and

Thematic area	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How it will measure success. <p>Some baseline data is available for improvement objectives which had been carried forward but this is not published within the Plan. A baseline for the two new objectives will be established in 2018-19 to inform future improvement.</p> <p>Previously we had commented on the risks and difficulties associated with the selection of strategic, broad and open-ended objectives and the distance between what the overall objectives sought to achieve and the projects and activities set to contribute towards delivering them, in terms of clearly demonstrating and reporting on delivery and improvement. To help address this issue the Council adopted a revised approach in its 2018-19 Improvement Plan. Objectives are now clearer and a set of measures has been identified for each objective which the actions directly contribute to. The self-assessment report next year will document the improvement or otherwise in each of these measures.</p> <p>Transparency could be further achieved by establishing baselines of where Council performance is currently at, setting indicators and standards at the overall objective level and at project level where possible, any milestones and including them in the published Improvement Plan. We recognise that all baseline and measurement data may not have yet been available as systems and arrangements bed in. The Council continues to work on improvements in this area by establishing baselines and specific performance data and KPIs where available.</p> <p>The legislation requires councils to establish arrangements to deliver their improvement objectives. The Council identified and selected a number of projects/work strands which will contribute towards delivering each objective. High level underlying information setting out what improvements citizens can expect to see, what actions are to be taken during the year and how success will be measured are set out. The projects/work strands cover a range of areas, recognising the need to improve internal arrangements as well as to ensure positive outcomes for citizens. In this respect, they are legitimate and clear. The Council has started to progress action against previous Proposals for Improvement made in this area and has improved transparency by adopting a revised approach in the 2018-19 Improvement Plan.</p>
Consultation	<p>We looked at how well the Council involved local people and those that work with and for it, in deciding its priorities for improvement. The Council conducted extensive consultation during its community planning process to identify and understand community needs. This helped to inform its improvement priorities and consideration was then given as to how these would align to the priorities and themes within the Community Plan.</p>

Thematic area	
	<p>An internal process, involving Heads of Service and Senior Management, was undertaken to identify objectives and improvement projects for 2018-19. The Council carried out consultation on its improvement objectives, covering staff, elected representatives, community/voluntary groups, local businesses and representative business organisations.</p> <p>The consultation was in line with the Council's Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy. An eight week consultation exercise on the draft Corporate Improvement Objectives closed on 16 April 2018. A variety of opportunities and methods were used to generate interest and comment on the improvement objectives and projects.</p> <p>In order to help raise the profile and transparency of the performance improvement framework a number of communication channels were used including: advertising in local papers, on Council website with an Online Survey, inviting comments through existing mailing lists, and Social media.</p> <p>The Council also facilitated a number of targeted discussions by meeting face to face with a range of panels/citizen groups including the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) Forum and Access and Inclusion Group in order to obtain views (as well as service level feedback).</p> <p>The draft Plan was also reviewed initially by elected members who, through their local representative role, were able to consider the relevance of the objectives to their understanding of local needs.</p> <p>The final version of the Improvement Plan took account of all of the feedback from the various engagements and was formally agreed by elected members.</p> <p>The Council published a transparent synopsis of consultation. This included explaining the process of consultation, summarising the responses received, stating the number of responses received, and explaining how these informed policy, i.e. what impact, if any, these had on improvement objectives.</p>
Improvement Plan	<p>The Council published its Improvement Plan 2018-19 on 6 June 2018. It updates the improvement objectives set out in 'Corporate Plan Update 2017-19', and it is available in electronic format on the Council's website and other formats upon request.</p>

Thematic area	
	<p>The Improvement Objectives outlined in the Plan are based around the themes set out in the Community Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan, and align to the quality of life outcomes identified. It notes a number of areas which the Council will focus on in the year ahead, with the aim of delivering improvements to benefit residents and service users.</p> <p>The Plan contains a high level description of the Council's arrangements for discharging its performance improvement duties and includes its improvement objectives, as well as the related community planning outcome. A summary of the Council's consultation process, together with information on how citizens and stakeholders may propose new objectives during the year, are included, as are the governance arrangements in place for the Improvement Plan.</p> <p>The Plan clearly sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the basis on which Improvement Objectives were selected; • related projects and key actions to contribute to the achievement of the overall objectives; • the visible improvements citizens can expect; and • how they will measure success. <p>As suggested last year, in line with openness and transparency Good Practice, an explanation for any changes in improvement objectives or specific projects that have not been brought forward is included, along with a statement that these will still be monitored and reported elsewhere.</p> <p>The Plan includes a separate section on the statutory imposed performance indicators and standards which provides a description of the Council's arrangements to exercise its functions so that statutory performance standards are met (as required by section 92(4) of the 2014 Act). This addresses an issue raised in our report last year and ensures that in this regard the Council is compliant with the legislation.</p> <p>A wide range of performance indicators and measures, relating to both the Corporate Plan and the annual Service Delivery and Improvement Plans, are in place across all 17 Council services to allow monitoring and reporting of performance. A number of these relate to improvement objectives and are included in the Plan. The Council's commitment to publishing annual performance information in relation to a range of corporate and service areas, and in doing so demonstrating its general duty to improve, is demonstrated by their inclusion of a number of other self-imposed measures in the Improvement Plan.</p>

Thematic area	
Arrangements to improve	<p>The Council is required to establish arrangements to deliver on its improvement objectives each year. The Department for Communities' guidance states that the Council should be able to understand and demonstrate the impact of its arrangements for continuous improvement on the outcomes for citizens.</p> <p>The underlying projects in relation to the improvement objectives are supported by delivery plans and budgets for use by operational teams. These are being project managed and have lines of accountability, including risk management, to senior management and members.</p> <p>In addition, Members and Officers at full Council and Committee meetings with a strategy/policy and oversight focus receive regular updates from Senior Management on how these established arrangements to improve are progressing.</p> <p>This is the second year councils have been required to carry out and publish a self-assessment of their annual performance improvement.</p>
Collection, use and publication of performance information	<p>The collection and use of timely and relevant performance information on a Council's service areas is essential to the operation of an effective performance improvement framework. It enables the Council to measure and evaluate any improvement, assists in the identification of priority areas for improvement, facilitates comparison and benchmarking and supports the communication of outcomes and progress with its citizens and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The type of information required to be collected, used and reported falls under three key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the general duty to improve – where the assessment of the effectiveness of continuous improvement arrangements can be supported by examples of "self-imposed" performance indicators and standards; • the improvement objectives – with specific associated performance measures and indicators; and • statutory indicators. <p>The Council continues to develop its performance management framework. It has procured a Performance Management software solution and is currently in the process of rolling it out. This will support community planning and corporate performance management and make it easier to access, manage and to identify trends. The Council collects a large suite of corporate data and information across its functions and services to monitor performance in relation to corporate performance. These inform the development of Service Delivery and Improvement Plans (SDIP) for each service as well as help to:</p>

Thematic area	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify priority areas for improvement; • develop of the annual Improvement Plan; • monitoring of progress; and • publication of the annual self-assessment. <p>In relation to its general improvement responsibilities the Council has a range of ‘self-imposed’ indicators and standards in its Plan and these are monitored and reported on in its Annual Performance Report in September 2018.</p> <p>The Council also collects data and information to monitor progress in relation to its improvement objectives and the work strands and projects which support delivery of these. These focus on both quantitative and qualitative information. The Council continues to develop this area including establishing baselines, standards and targets. It also continues to develop the collection and use of comparative and benchmark data and information in relation to performance. The Council’s performance management framework is becoming embedded corporately and this information is used to monitor the progress of projects at the service delivery plan level and collectively, to monitor the projects underlying its improvement objectives. This facilitates scrutiny and informed decision making in relation to the Council’s performance improvement responsibilities.</p> <p>Our work identified the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service areas across the Council identified a number of performance measures which are included in the annual SDIPs. Services are tasked with collecting data in relation to these measures and they are reported to SMT on a six monthly basis. • For each of the improvement objectives a corresponding project(s) has been identified to support achievement of that objective. Each improvement project has an identified Project Lead (normally a Head of Service) who is responsible for putting in place a project plan with milestones and agreed ‘measures of success’ and to put in place arrangements to collect data against those measures/prospective improvements. Progress against milestones is reported on via quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team (SMT), Council and the Audit Panel. At the end of the financial year, a post project evaluation template is issued to all Project Leads to submit data which will provide either quantitative or qualitative evidence of improvement. • Where possible progress reports to Management and Committees now provide quantitative or qualitative evidence of improvement against project measures, rather than just reporting on progress against milestones;

Thematic area	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has introduced trend analysis within its Performance Measures analysis, comparing data with previous years where it is available; • The comparison of self-imposed indicators and standards across councils has been limited due to the absence of an agreed performance management framework across local government; • The Council is a member of the APSE Performance Networks and are working with the Department to establish an agreed framework for recording and reporting on KPIs which will help comparison and benchmarking across some councils; • The Council is looking to further develop its use of benchmarking data from APSE. It has identified a suite of performance measures on which it will submit data annually to APSE for inclusion in a benchmarking report(s). Pilot reports are available for three years. The Council uses the information from the APSE Performance Reports internally to ascertain a better understanding of how it is performing. For example, the 2016-17 report was used within a Performance Workshop for Heads of Service and Directors in September 2017. APSE data is also considered by the Senior Management Team. <p>In September 2018 the Council published its 'Annual Performance Report 2017-18'. This gives an overview and a self-assessment of the performance of the Council during the previous financial year in accordance with its legislative requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in discharging its general duty to improve; • in meeting its improvement objectives for that year; • by reference to its local and statutory performance indicators; and • meeting its local and statutory performance standards. <p>The key purpose of the report is to show citizens, and other stakeholders how the Council is discharging its duty under legislation to secure continuous improvement as set out in its 2017-18 Improvement Plan. It enables the Council to communicate progress against its improvement objectives and to highlight what visible improvements it has made to its functions and services.</p> <p>In reporting its performance in 2017-18 the Council sought to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address the risk to clear and transparent monitoring and reporting of performance against objectives arising from the distance between what the overall objective seeks to achieve and the projects established to deliver the objective; and

Thematic area	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensuring that the focus is not solely on the underlying projects, by including an assessment of the Councils progress in delivering its improvement objectives. <p>Improved data collection and management processes has helped to begin identifying and measuring improvement in some areas. This has enabled the Council to support its self-assessment and report on a number of improvements to its services, for example improved Major Planning application processing times.</p> <p>The self-assessment focuses on performance in relation to the projects which supported the Council's 2017-18 improvement objectives. Good progress was reported against each of the three improvement objectives. Baseline figures were included, where possible, and performance in year measured against this, with commentary provided. The Council also set out for each objective what was achieved in terms of improvements against what it said it would do, and what would happen next – for example: if it was achieved, adopted or revised. This provided a useful link between the previous Improvement Plan, performance against it, and the current Improvement Plan, which helps to demonstrate the continuous nature of Improvement.</p> <p>In addition, the Council's assessment of its performance and its published report should include a comparison of its performance with previous years, and where reasonably practicable, with other councils. In this, the second year of publishing performance self-assessment, comparison was made with the prior year. In future years we would expect that trend analysis and reporting of performance may be further developed.</p> <p>The report includes a section on the performance against statutory indicators, as well as some comparisons against other councils in Northern Ireland. This is an area which should be developed in future, subject to planned discussions between the Department and councils on benchmarking.</p> <p>Section 7 of the Council's Annual Performance Report reports the Council's performance against its self-imposed performance measures, based on corporate plan priorities and commitments during the year. This work demonstrates the progress made in relation to the General Duty to Improve during the year across all functions and services. This is likely to develop further next year.</p>