



Improvement Plan

2022–2023



Belfast
City Council

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Introduction

Under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, we have a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives and produce an annual improvement plan. We must also ensure that we have arrangements in place to deliver those improvements. This is referred to as our “Duty to Improve”.

Our improvement plan sets out our improvement objectives for the year ahead and explains what we will do to achieve them. This document is one of a number of strategic planning documents that drives council activity. However, it does not include every initiative or improvement activity that the council intends to do. Unlike, our corporate plan, which sets out everything we want to achieve, the improvement plan focuses on a small number of improvement areas for the year ahead. This allows us to focus more specifically on key areas for improvement, agreed in consultation with local people.

When the pandemic first hit, councils were allowed to defer the publication of their improvement plans so that we could all refocus our efforts and reconfigure services to support the pandemic response. Instead, in September 2020 we published the “Belfast: Our Recovery” document that set out the areas we needed to focus on in the short term during the pandemic, and looking forward, what we needed to build on and do to lay the foundations for sustained recovery. We then used this plan to inform our 2021-22 improvement plan.

The past two years have been quite difficult for everyone around the world. Covid-19 has brought new challenges for our health, for society and for the economy. However, Belfast's response to the pandemic reflects who we are as a city - caring and resilient with a strong community spirit and a warmth and sense of humour that shines through. We want to build on this and use this year's Improvement Plan to look ahead and help our city recover and bounce back even stronger.



For us, 'Improvement' is about more than just efficiency savings or enhancements to services. Whilst these are very important, we believe our improvement plan has to make a difference to people's lives. It must improve local quality of life and it must help build a sustainable future for our ratepayers and communities. Therefore, our planned improvements comprise both service improvements and activity aimed at improving broader quality of life. Using the Belfast Recovery document as a guide, we have sought to ensure that our Improvement objectives provide a balanced approach for our residents and city by focusing on a mix of economic, social and environmental related improvements.

Statutory Guidance

Statutory guidance also requires us to consider how our improvement objectives will drive improvement in terms of: **Strategic effectiveness, Sustainability, Fairness, Service quality and availability, Efficiency and Innovation**. We must also assess improvement objectives against criteria requiring that they should be:

- **Legitimate** - making a demonstrable contribution to at least one of the aspects of improvement listed in the Act, this directed us toward developing objectives where the potential impact would have greatest value.
- **Clear** - setting out the visible improvement that citizens can expect. This involved considering the 'measurable' aspect of our commitments and choosing objectives that were more likely to lead to tangible improvements.
- **Robust** - with defined terms of success (quantitative or qualitative). As far as possible objectives have been aligned to performance indicators with agreed targets to help demonstrate what contribution we expect our efforts to make to each improvement activity.
- **Deliverable** - with established links to individual service programmes and budgets. Every improvement objective contains deliverables that will be managed through our programme delivery arrangements.
- **Demonstrable** - capable of being supported by objective evidence. Progress for each objective will be demonstrated through a combination of quantitative (PIs) and qualitative (project reporting) evidence.

Our Strategic Planning Framework

The Belfast Agenda

The Belfast Agenda is the city's first community plan. Published in 2017 following extensive engagement with local people, it set out a vision for Belfast and shared outcomes for the city. In collaboration with our community planning partners we are currently in the process of reviewing the Belfast Agenda and developing a refreshed plan for the period 2022-26. During September to December 2021, we carried out public engagement to help identify a set of revised priorities for the Belfast Agenda. This was followed by more focused engagement to develop action plans and performance measures for each priority. This work is ongoing.

The Belfast Agenda is an ambitious and dynamic plan that has shaped and will continue to shape the plans and priorities of the council and its partners. Our Corporate Plan reflects the outcomes and priorities agreed in the Belfast Agenda, which in turn helps shape and inform activity within our Improvement Plan. The revised Belfast Agenda priorities for 2022 – 26 are:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ✓ Sustainable and inclusive economic growth | ✓ Community and neighbourhood regeneration | ✓ Climate, resilience and sustainability |
| ✓ Employment and skills | ✓ Health inequalities | ✓ Active and sustainable travel |
| ✓ Educational attainment | ✓ Housing-led regeneration | ✓ City Development |
| ✓ Older people | ✓ Children and young people | ✓ Good relations |

Council Planning Framework

The Belfast Agenda is an ambitious and dynamic plan that has shaped and will continue to shape the plans and priorities of the council and its partners. We have aligned our Corporate Plan to the Belfast Agenda, and together, these represent the primary and overarching strategic plans for the city and council. In November 2020, we also produced a covid recovery plan which still informs strategic planning. Beneath this, council also has a number of supporting strategic plans to help manage and direct particular activity, for example our Local Development Plan which is the spatial planning framework for the city and our medium-term financial plan which sets out the financial strategy for the council. These strategic plans, including the Improvement Plan, are supported by annual Departmental and Committee Plans to ensure activity for the year ahead is managed. This forms part of a wider strategic planning and performance framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: STRATEGIC PLANNING & PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK



Identifying our Improvement Objectives

We use a range of information and feedback to identify and agree our improvement objectives. The improvement plan does not include all the work we plan to do, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement actions. Therefore, it is important that we get the focus right. We look at data, existing plans and priorities to decide what we think we should focus on and then we ask our residents - are we focusing on the right things, is anything missing and what are your ideas about what we need to do to achieve these improvements?

In previous years, the foundation for our improvement objectives was the Belfast Agenda. The Belfast Agenda was developed following a wide-reaching engagement process with the public and other stakeholders. Published in November 2017, it created a vision for Belfast and, based on what was important to local people, set out what the city would do together to help achieve the future Belfast everyone wanted. The Belfast Agenda is the overarching plan for improving quality of life in Belfast and guides what council and other public agencies in the city will do, along with businesses and communities, to make Belfast better. It reflects local people's ambitions and priorities for the city. By building our improvement objectives around the Belfast Agenda, we are confident that we have provided a meaningful and balanced set of improvement objectives in response to what people told us mattered most.

However, in March 2020 the world was rocked by the emergence of Covid-19. As a result of the pandemic, we adjusted last year's improvement plan and used the "Belfast: Our Recovery" document as the starting point for identifying our improvement objectives. The Our Recovery plan set out 6 broad areas of focus: Our city, our communities, our economy, our environment, our services and our digital innovation. Moving forward, we felt these headings provided the best way of grouping our improvements as it not only was simple to understand but also ensured a balanced focus across the wide range of issues that mattered to people. For 2022-23 we amalgamated the digital innovation into the 'our city' heading.

We continue to use the Belfast Agenda process to help inform our improvement plan. The Belfast Agenda is the over-arching plan for the city, so it important that what we do contributes to that work. Equally, as the public helped shaped the Belfast Agenda, we know that it is a good starting point for determining what we should focus on. In September 2021, the Belfast Community Planning Partnership began reviewing the Belfast Agenda. They started by asking people if the outcomes and priorities in the current Belfast Agenda were still valid and correct. When we began reviewing our improvement plan a number of priority areas were beginning to emerge, which we were able to incorporate into our improvement plan. The engagement and evidence base for the refreshed Belfast Agenda will continue to inform our improvement actions moving forward.

Annual review of our Improvement Objectives

Every year we review and update our improvement objectives to ensure we continue to deliver the improvements people want. We do an initial assessment, which forms part of our annual corporate planning process, and then share our draft objectives and proposed actions with the public. Only when our residents have had an opportunity to have their say, do we finalise the improvement plan.

Our annual review process for 2022-23 is set out below:

Sept 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Phase 1 Engagement: Review of the Belfast Agenda commences
Oct 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Preliminary budget setting and corporate planning commences
Nov 2021- Jan 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Policy and strategy review of improvement objectives
Feb 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Corporate Management Team (CMT) - review and assessment of 2022-23 improvement objectives
Feb 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">SP&R Committee - scrutiny of proposed improvement objectives
Feb - May 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Public consultation on improvement objectives
May 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">CMT - review of consultation responses and update of improvement objectives
Jun 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">SP&R Committee approves Improvement Objectives and Improvement Plan
Jun 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Improvement Plan published

Consultation

Each year, before we finalise our improvement objectives, we issue them for public consultation to enable residents and other interested stakeholders to influence and to have a say in agreeing them. In February, SP&R Committee approved 5 improvement objectives for consultation:

The public consultation ran for a period of approximately 10 weeks between 21 February and 4 May. Managed through our online Your Say Belfast (YSB) consultation platform, it provided residents with an opportunity to learn more about the proposed improvement objectives and included a link to an online survey. Through this survey, residents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposed improvement objectives, to provide comments and to suggest other areas that they felt should be included as improvement objectives.

We used a range of communication channels, including Facebook and Twitter, to promote and direct people to the consultation. We also shared details with our Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises network and YSB mailing list to encourage wider dissemination and input.

32 individuals and 3 organisations responded to the survey. The consultation results indicated high levels of support; therefore, we did not feel it necessary to make changes to the proposed improvement objectives. However, we have updated our actions and milestones so that they reflect the feedback provided by our residents. For example, we have incorporated actions relating to pest control and included more environmental improvements linked to parks and open spaces. As some of the comments and suggestions are not the council's responsibility or require a joined-up approach with partners, we also share the consultation feedback with the appropriate Belfast Agenda Boards and the ongoing work of the Belfast Agenda.

Developing our improvement actions

During the consultation period, we begin to develop more detailed improvement actions, indicators and targets for measuring progress. We review and update these to reflect the comments and suggestions received from residents and then create our formal improvement plan. Elected Members approve the improvement plan, which is then monitored on quarterly basis.

The remainder of this plan sets out our detailed improvement objectives and improvement actions.

Our Improvement Objectives 2022 - 2023

Our services

We will continue to adapt and improve our services

Our communities

We will work to support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and more resilient

Our economy

We will work collaboratively to support businesses, jobs and inclusive growth

Our environment

We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast

Our city

We will continue to support our city to recover and innovate in a safe, inclusive and sustainable way

Improvement Objective 1: Our Services

We will continue to adapt and improve our services

Why this is an improvement objective

When the Belfast Agenda was published in 2017, we decided to align our improvement objectives to the priorities in the Belfast Agenda. As a result, many of our improvements were at a strategic city level that often required the collaboration of other agencies. Although our residents were supportive of these priorities, they told us that they wanted our improvement objectives to focus more on the services we deliver. In 2019-20, we added a new objective that focused specifically on improving council services and increasing satisfaction with council. When we consulted residents about this new objective, it was very clear and that the provision of high quality, customer-focused and efficient services was particularly important to them. For this reason, 'Improving our services' will always be a key aspect of our improvement plan moving forward.

To help ensure that our services continually meet customer expectations and can adapt to changing circumstances, we've put in place two main internal change programmes – one focusing on customer care and one focusing on improving our processes, systems and service design. We update and monitor these programmes each year and, where appropriate, reflect this ongoing work in our improvement plan. Our council-wide continuous improvement programme will continue to support services, helping them to recover to pre-covid levels or introduce new or improved internal operations. However, for this year's improvement plan our service improvement efforts will focus on our environmental health and city protection services. During the covid-19 pandemic we became increasingly aware of the importance of safeguarding the most vulnerable in society. Over the coming year we will build on that awareness and ensure that safeguarding principles are embedded across all our services. We will also continue to implement our customer focus programme, building on the learning and experiences gained throughout lockdown.

Although we don't operate the Port of Belfast, our port health service is responsible for making sure the port meets environmental health standards, including any new Brexit arrangements. Last year, we included port health in our improvement plan due to the specific challenges it faced and its importance for the city and the wider region. As our port health service continues to be impacted by ongoing uncertainties regarding the outworking of the Northern Ireland Protocol, we have retained this as an improvement for 2022- 23.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To improve our customer care practices and to increase resident satisfaction with council and our customer care

- ✓ To systematically improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services
- ✓ To continue to adapt and improve our port health service as it responds to Brexit and the changing needs of the city

What we will do

- ❖ Ensure our environmental health and city protection services are fit for purpose post covid-19
- ❖ Continue to implement our customer focus programme
- ❖ Continue to develop new procedures and transition arrangements for port health

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
% residents satisfied with Belfast City Council	65%	76%	78%
% residents who agree that Council provides good customer service	62%	73%	75%
% residents who agree Council provides good value for money	57%	64%	66%

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Ensure our environmental health and city protection services are fit for purpose				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Facilitate an External Review process of the HMO service by Department for Communities				
Develop an operational improvement plan for delivery of pest control services				
Develop a corporate Safeguarding Policy and related procedures				
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee			

Continue to implement our customer focus programme				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Finalise Customer Hub KPIs – for example calls and emails answered within agreed standards, call abandonment, repeat calls, customer satisfaction, corporate complaints				
Roll out digital Improvements: online forms automation; soft phones roll out; generic email account inventory and standards; telephony recording				
Develop approach to transitioning services into the Customer Hub				
Pilot service design approach with Building Control system replacement				
Responsible Chief Officer	Programme Director Customer Focus			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Continue to develop new procedures and transition arrangements for port health				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Review and update the resourcing/staffing model to reflect any new arrangements for the NI Protocol following UK/EU discussions				
Work with DAERA and FSA to develop a sustainable funding model to secure necessary funding for the Port Health service and obtain assurance for the 2023/24 financial year as a priority				
Review BCC Port Health IT systems requirements in context of emerging EU/UK system solutions and IT automations (under development regionally and nationally) to support NI Protocol implementation				
<i>All actions subject to ongoing Brexit guidance</i>				
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee			

Improvement Objective 2: Our Communities

We will work to support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and resilient

Why this is an improvement objective

Year on year, as we developed our improvement objectives it became clear that our residents wanted us to focus efforts on improving our local neighbourhoods and supporting local people. As a council, we provide a range of local amenities, invest in community development and, through our Elected Members, advocate on behalf of residents. These were seen as important roles for council and areas that should be reflected in our improvement plan. During the pandemic, the importance of ‘community’ and access to these local amenities became critical. Last year, we reviewed our improvement objectives and created a new focus on “our communities”. This was particularly well received by residents and will therefore continue to be priority improvement objective moving forward.

Our focus for 2022-23 will be on supporting community infrastructure, including strengthening community participation, and helping to improve people’s health and wellbeing by providing the best local amenities and support needed so that they can lead more active and healthier lives.

Health and wellbeing is consistently one of the highest ranking priorities for our citizens. In our 2017 resident survey, “improving health and wellbeing” was the second highest ranked priority for residents whilst, not surprisingly in 2021 it was the highest. Good quality parks and open spaces have always been essential for improving people’s health and emotional wellbeing, but during the pandemic, their value became even more widely recognised. That’s why our improvement plan continues to focus effort on ensuring that our parks and playgrounds are good quality, safe and welcoming as they can be. Coupled with that, will be a focus on helping people to lead healthier lives by being more active. Research by both the council and Age NI has shown that many people have become less physically active as a result of the pandemic, so it is important that we do all we can to encourage and make it easier for our residents, young and old, to get out and about and improve their activity levels. We will also continue to work with our Belfast Agenda partners to improve health and wellbeing and to help address health inequalities.

Last year we also created a new improvement objective aimed at improving how we listen to and involve residents. Although we set up a new engagement platform and established a new Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises Panel and Network, the results from our 2021 resident survey tells us that we still need to do better. Given the importance of civic voice and participation to community development and community wealth building, we have retained this as an improvement objective for 2022-23. Our efforts for the year ahead will focus on how we can improve community dialogue and deliberation.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To improve local neighbourhoods and increase resident satisfaction with their local area
- ✓ To empower our residents and local communities and give them a say on the things that affect or are important to them
- ✓ To improve our parks and playgrounds and to encourage and enable our residents to lead more active and healthier lifestyles

What we will do

- ❖ Implementation of the £8m neighbourhood regeneration fund for capital projects
- ❖ Develop enhanced approaches to civic engagement and the involvement of the VCSE sector
- ❖ Encourage participation in sport and physical activity

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
% residents who are satisfied with their local area a place to live	84%	85%	86%
% residents who agree that their local area has good quality parks and green space	78%	78%	80%
% residents using council parks at least monthly (resident survey data)	56%	62%	65%
% of residents who undertake less than 2.5 hours physical activity per week	34%	29%	25%
% residents who agree council consults and listens to the views of local residents	63%	63%	65%
Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	Target
Number of Parks and Green Spaces with Green Flag accreditation	20	20	20
Number of registered participants on Your Say Belfast	248	2453	3000
Number of registered VCSE participants on Your Say Belfast	113	217	300

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Implementation of the £8m neighbourhood regeneration fund for capital projects				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Stage 1: Application (emerging projects) - Assess, moderate and approve applications to proceed to Stage 2				
Stage 2: Development (uncommitted projects) - Work with successful Stage 1 applicants to develop their projects				
Preparation for launch of Stage 3 in 2023-24				
Development of Outcomes Based Accountability approach to measuring success of the programme				
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Develop enhanced approaches to civic engagement and the involvement of the VCSE sector				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Support council and the Belfast Community Planning Partnership to enhance civic participation, including the introduction of participatory budgeting pilots				
Work with the CPP and other partners to improve how we engage with young people and seldom heard communities				
Hold the annual VCSE conference in person (subject to covid-19)				
Work with the VCSE Panel to develop and deliver a wider programme of engagement with the sector				
Issue a quarterly newsletter to update stakeholders on the work being undertaken by the panel and raise				
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of City and Organisational Strategy			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Improve our parks and playgrounds and encourage participation in sport and physical activity				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Maintain our Green Flag and Green Flag Heritage Award status across our parks and open spaces (20)				
Develop a 5-year action plan for the delivery of the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy				
Deliver the Playground Improvement Programme				
Initiate major capital project to improve Marrowbone Millennium Park				
Initiate major capital project to improve Pitt Park				
Initiate major capital project to improve Paisley Park				
Initiate major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields in collaboration with partners				
Complete works and launch new city park and playground at Páirc Nua Chollan				
Produce the Belfast Physical Activity and Sport Development Strategy				
Deliver Boxing Strategy Action Plan				
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee, Strategic Policy & Resources Committee			

Improvement Objective 3: Our Economy

We will work collaboratively to support businesses, jobs and inclusive growth

Why this is an improvement objective

During the Belfast Conversation, the engagement process we used to develop the Belfast Agenda, “jobs and employment” was the top priority for citizens. Since then, it has remained a recurring theme and key priority in all our engagements with residents. Building a strong local economy that supports jobs and encourages entrepreneurs was also seen a key priority during the Belfast Conversation. This was also reinforced in the 2019-20 engagement on our Inclusive Growth Strategy where feedback from residents, businesses and community groups highlighted the importance of proper investment, business growth and shared prosperity. In our recent resident survey, half of those surveyed selected either a stronger economy (25%) or employment and skills (25%) as the most important priority for Belfast; with only health and wellbeing attracting a higher importance rating.

Although other Government departments, particularly the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for the Economy (DfE), have statutory responsibility for the economy, employability and skills development, we do have an important role to play. We run a number of initiatives to support small businesses and develop entrepreneurs and provide a range of employability and skills programmes to help people to access skills and jobs. From 2017 onwards, our improvement objectives have always included actions designed to improve the support we provide and ensure that it is delivering the impact intended. This included working with partners in an integrated and strategic way to ensure that, as a city, local people are able to access decent, secure jobs that pay well and provide opportunity for progression and development.

The impact of the covid-19 pandemic and series of lockdowns has only reinforced the need for us to do all we can to support businesses and people’s jobs. We have therefore retained this improvement objective for 2022-23.

A number of our planned training and employability programmes were restricted because of social distancing requirements and our priority this year will be to refresh these programmes and help match people to new job requirements and vacancies. A strong and healthy business sector is vital to for the success and wellbeing of our city and for those who live here. This is turn supports local wealth creation and employment, which allows us to deliver our vision of inclusive growth, where all people share in the success of the city. However, to help ensure everyone benefits from economic growth, we will also look at how we can better support social enterprises and cooperatives as well as our existing local businesses and new start-ups.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To refocus our employability and skills programmes in response to the new covid era challenges we now face
- ✓ To support residents into employment (through participation on our employment academies)
- ✓ To support local businesses to start up and grow
- ✓ To encourage and support the development of the social enterprise and cooperative sector

What we will do

- ❖ Deliver Employment Academies
- ❖ Deliver local business start-up programmes
- ❖ Support social enterprises and co-operatives

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	Target
Number of participants on Employment Academies	458	816 ¹	540
The 'into work' percentage of participants on Employment Academies at the end of the year	New KPI	New KPI	70%
Number of jobs promoted through the Go For It programme [Statutory PI]	258	311	325
Business start-up and growth activity:	419	518	560
- Number of business plans developed	698	731	750
- Number of participants/businesses supported			
Number of social enterprises and cooperatives accessing support to start up	11	52	45

¹ This figure was artificially boosted for 2021-22 by one-off additional funding via the Labour market Partnership. Hence the 2022-23 target is lower.

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Deliver employment academies, local business start-up programmes and support for social enterprises and co-operatives				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Employment Academies				
Deliver employment academies in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, care sectors, & customer service.				
Continue to work with partners to identify, design and deliver further Employment Academies.				
Local business start-up programmes				
Continue to develop a revised approach to business start-up support to be introduced 2023-2024				
Continue to deliver the 'Go for it' programme for start up support for 2022-23.				
Social Enterprise and Cooperatives				
Increase the levels of community outreach to encourage cooperatives and social enterprises.				
Continue to support new start-up cooperatives and social enterprises.				
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Economic Development			
Reporting Committee	City Growth & Regeneration Committee			

Improvement Objective 4: Our Environment

We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast

Why this is an improvement objective

Climate change is a global concern. However, each and every one of us can take steps to help prevent this. Our Elected Members embraced this message and in 2019 declared a climate emergency in Belfast. In recognition of this and given the growing momentum within Belfast and amongst our residents around this issue, we added a new climate and sustainability improvement objective for 2020-21. Whilst a small minority of our residents disagreed with this step, explaining that they did not believe in climate change, the majority were extremely supportive. Given the significant challenges facing our environment and the behavioural changes that will be needed to truly make Belfast an environmentally friendly and sustainable city, we feel it will be necessary to keep the environment as an improvement focus for the foreseeable future. Whilst we need to transition quickly, we also need to do this fairly, so that we leave no one behind.

Our focus for the year ahead will be on 3 core areas of activity: using our civic leadership role to develop joined-up and longer-term approaches to tackling climate change; introducing local level initiatives to protect our local environment; and to critically examine how we can reduce waste by re-using or recycling more. Communication and promotion will be key to all three, as will listening and involving local people in these discussions and deliberations. We set up a new citizen engagement platform in 2021 and created a new [climate and resilience](#) engagement hub to help involve more people in these discussions.

Although much of this work will need to be done in collaboration with others, we are determined to lead by example and use our influence to make a positive difference. During 2018, we undertook extensive engagement with residents regarding our current household waste and recycling arrangements and it became very clear that this was an important issue for local people. Residents' growing concern about the impacts of waste and pollution on our environment, coupled with the significant investment required to implement better practices and positive behaviours, compelled us to prioritise this as an improvement objective in 2019-20. We are still assessing the impact of covid-19 on waste and recycling and will continue to look for new and innovative approaches to build on the foundations we have already put in place.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ Embed a strategic approach to tackling climate change and position Belfast as an environmentally friendly city
- ✓ Increase the level of recycling across the city and reduce our reliance on landfill
- ✓ Increase the number of trees in Belfast, protect the biodiversity of the city and improve air quality

What we will do

- ❖ Develop council’s strategic approach to climate change and facilitate partnership working to support delivery of the Belfast Climate Plan
- ❖ Continue the roll out of the Belfast One Million Trees Programme and complete the development of the Belfast Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- ❖ Reassess and improve our approach to waste and recycling, taking into account any implications from the covid-19 pandemic

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
% residents who agree that Belfast is environmentally friendly; it protects and values its natural resources	74%	73%	75%
Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	Target
One Million Trees Programme:			
- Number of visitors to places tool per annum (Your say Belfast)	403	580	700
- Number of pins submitted per annum (Your say Belfast)	222	104	150
- Number of site assessment undertaken	10	20	20
- Number of trees planted	39,000	24,000	30,000
Statutory Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22*	Target
Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable BCC collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	38,545	32,000
% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)	43%	41%	42%
Amount (tonnage) of BCC collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	172,413	172,000

* Provisional data - validated figures not available until November 2022.

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Develop council's strategic approach to climate change and facilitate partnership working to support delivery of the Belfast Climate Adaption Plan				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Partnership Working				
Facilitate effective partnership working by leading and supporting the Belfast Climate Commission, Belfast Resilience and Sustainability Board and BCC Climate Plan Programme Board				
Belfast Climate Plan				
Develop a Belfast Climate Plan by March 2023				
Develop a Belfast Climate Investment Plan by March 2023				
BCC Climate Plan				
Produce a BCC Climate Risk Plan by December 2022				
Produce a BCC Climate Plan by December 2022				
Develop a BCC Climate Investment Plan by December 2022				
Responsible Chief Officer	Belfast Climate Commissioner			
Reporting Committee	Climate & City Resilience Committee			

Reassess and improve our approach to waste and recycling				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Agree the way forward for the expansion of the Kerbside Sortation model for recycling				
Report to the council and identify actions moving forward regarding the 'More Circularity, Less Carbon' project				
Develop proposal for single use plastics policy for the council				
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	People and Communities Committee			

Protecting our environment and local biodiversity				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Local Biodiversity Action Plan				
Complete development of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan	■	■	■	■
Review capacity to ensure compliance with Statutory Biodiversity duty	■	■	■	■
Air Quality				
Agree council approach to funding for a fleet replacement strategy in order to transition to an alternative fuel	■	■	■	□
Deliver HVO plan to convert compatible vehicles from diesel to HVO	■	■	□	□
Belfast Tree Strategy				
Development of a tree strategy for Belfast	■	■	■	■
Belfast One Million Trees				
Carry out site identification and assessment	■	■	■	■
Carry out tree planting	■	■	■	■
Conduct annual tree count	■	□	□	■
Conduct annual land call	□	■	□	□
Carry out site identification and assessment	□	■	□	□
Responsible Chief Officer	Belfast Climate Commissioner and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	Climate & City Resilience Committee and People and Communities			

Improvement Objective 5: Our City

We will continue to support our city to recover and innovate in a safe, inclusive and sustainable way

Why this is an improvement objective

We created this improvement objective so that we can focus on things that benefit the city as a whole. It includes big programmes of work that will also contribute to our other improvement priorities such as helping to grow our economy, enhance our environment or support our communities. As these are major projects, the activity spans more than one year. For example, our Leisure Transformation Programme is a 10-year programme that will see us investing £105 million to improve our leisure centres, programmes and services. This investment means our city as a whole is able to offer leisure and recreation opportunities for all, whilst also helping to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. Similarly, work to develop strategic greenways across the city is a longer-term improvement that will benefit the environment and improve people's health. Another goal of the greenways is to connect people and improve community safety and cohesion.

Our city centre is a unique asset, not just for Belfast, but for the wider regional economy. Residents want our city centre to be vibrant, safe and welcoming. They understand that a prosperous and enticing city centre benefits everyone socially and economically. However, city centres across the globe are changing and Belfast, like other core cities, needs support to remain relevant and competitive. Our vision and commitment to the city centre began following the Bank Buildings fire, but now it's more important than ever to create a vibrant, enjoyable and well-connected city centre environment where people want to live and spend time. The pandemic had a devastating impact on our city centre, but it's time to build back stronger and better.

The city's immediate response to the pandemic highlighted the importance of digital innovation in designing and delivering effective urban services. Last year we added a new improvement objective centred on digital innovation that reflected this growing trend. Building on the council's existing commitment to digital innovation we have retained this improvement objective for 2022-23. Our aim is to drive forward an ambitious city innovation programme that will ensure Belfast can harness digital innovation to better address complex urban challenges and support our citizens and communities.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To revitalise our city centre and support it to rebuild and develop following the impact of covid-19
- ✓ To enhance our city and people's lives by providing unique, multi-use outdoor public spaces and high-quality recreational facilities
- ✓ To encourage the adoption of digital innovation across the city

What we will do

- ❖ Initiate a 2-year pilot City Centre Capital Grant Scheme (Vacant to Vibrant)
- ❖ Improve public spaces, greenways and recreational facilities across the city
- ❖ Deliver the first year of the Smart District programme and develop a £5 million Innovation for Societal Challenge fund

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
Resident satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live	86%	85%	88%
% residents who agree the city centre is vibrant and attractive, with lots going on	81%	80%	83%
% of residents who agree that Belfast: - is easy to get about - has good infrastructure	79%	85% 83%	88% 86%
Number of SMEs/companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme	New	New	30

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Initiate a 2-year pilot City Centre Capital Grant Scheme (Vacant to Vibrant)				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Complete analysis of initial 'expression of interest' returns and finalise approach to the grant scheme for launch				
Launch the City Centre Capital Grant Scheme				
Process application and manage the scheme				
Prepare an interim (year 1) review report for committee.				
Responsible Chief	Strategic Director of Place and Economy			
Reporting Committee	City Growth and Regeneration Committee			

Improve public spaces, greenways and recreational facilities across the city				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cathedral Gardens: Complete public consultation on design and initiate contractor procurement				
Forth Meadow: complete construction of sections 3 and 4 – Springfield Road and Falls Park				
Forth Meadow: commence construction of section 5 – Bog Meadows				
Upgrade of the existing access, footways and cycle path through the existing Bog Meadows Nature Site				
Lagan Gateway: complete Phase 2 - path connection from Lagan Land East into Belvoir Forest Park				
Ballysillan Playing Fields Initiate major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields in collaboration with partners				
Boodles Dam: Complete upgrades and improvements to dam at Ligoniel Park				
Leisure Transformation Programme:				
Templemore Baths: Complete construction works and launch facility				
Girdwood: Continue to develop business case for Girdwood.				
Develop up options for Leisure Transformation Phase 4				
Responsible Chief	Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Deliver the first year of the Smart District programme and develop a £5 million Innovation for Societal Challenge fund				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Deliver the Augment the City challenge competition to enhance the city centre visitor experience through immersive technologies				
Deliver the first year of the Citizen Office for Digital Innovation programme aimed at working directly with citizens on Smart District projects				
Design the £20 million Belfast Regional Digital Innovation Venture Fund for SMEs				
Develop a £5 million Innovation for Societal Challenge fund aimed at innovative SMEs and city partners				
Responsible Chief	Strategic Director of Finance and Resources, Director of City and Organisational Strategy			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Continuous Improvement and Monitoring Arrangements

General Duty to Improve

The improvement objectives outlined in this Plan do not represent everything we will do in the year ahead. As an organisation we are committed to continually improving, both in terms of the services we provide and the leadership we show for the city. Through the delivery of our corporate plan and through our facilitation and leadership of the Belfast Agenda, we will continually strive to ensure that Belfast is a city that supports the needs and ambitions of local people.

To ensure that we continuously improve and meet the needs of our city and residents, we have established the following governance arrangements to manage the delivery of all of our plans, including our improvement objectives. These arrangements include:

- Formal monitoring of plans and activity through our standing committees
- An aligned planning process – where activity is ‘planned’ in at the relevant level (Committee, Departmental, Service, Area)
- Consideration of the full costs (including where necessary ongoing costs) is included in our estimates process
- Delivery of contributing projects through a clear programme management framework
- Appropriate risk management in relation to main programmes of work
- Appropriate monitoring, reporting and performance management arrangements in place
- Monthly monitoring and reporting (strategic planning and performance information) at a corporate management team level

Improvement Objectives - Reporting Framework

Each reporting year we publish an annual self-assessment report, setting out how we have performed against our improvement plan for the previous year, and during the year, we bring quarterly progress reports to the Audit Committee. In addition to these formal reporting mechanisms, our Corporate Management Team monitors progress against our improvement plan as part of the management team’s wider performance management responsibilities.

Arrangements for Achievement of Statutory Performance Indicators

The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 requires councils to collect and publish information to allow them to measure performance against a number of indicators set by the Department for Communities. This relates to activity in respect of economic development, waste management and planning applications. We closely monitor these indicators to ensure they are progressing in line with our targets. The statutory indicators are as follows:

	Statutory Performance Indicators	Baseline		Target
		2020-21	2021-22	2022-2023
Environment (waste)	Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable BCC collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	38,545 (e)	32,000
	% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)	43%	41% (e)	42%
	Amount (tonnage) of BCC collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	172,413(e)	172,000
Economy	Number of jobs promoted through the Go For It programme	258	311	325
Planning	Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications	37	31	30
	Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications	14	17	15
	% of Enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks	93.2	83%	70%

Note: the waste figures for 2021-22 are estimates; validated figures will not be available until November 2022.

We have incorporated the job promotion and waste related indicators into our 2022-23 improvement plan as they relate to specific improvement activity and remain key areas we need to focus on.

The targets for planning are set by the Department for Infrastructure. These are important service standards that we will continue to monitor as part of our ongoing approach to improvement. In 2018 - 19, we introduced improvements to our planning service culminating in 10 “operating principles” of good practice for managing planning applications based around performance, customers, communication and processes. Our Planning Service continues to work to improve the planning application process in response to emerging needs and customer expectations. Unfortunately, the service was impacted quite substantially by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly during the first quarter of

2020-21. However, we successfully introduced new processes and IT hardware to support online applications and remote working. Notwithstanding, the initial impacts of the pandemic has led to a 35% increase in live applications on hand.

It has proven very challenging to bring the number of applications on hand down to a more manageable level. This has been contributed by under-performance by statutory consultees and the intermittent technical difficulties with the Planning Portal (Public Access and back-office software) during the first two months of 2022. These factors adversely impacted on statutory performance, particularly the Local applications which make up the significant majority of all applications we receive. Belfast City Council, therefore, very much welcomes the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee in respect of the need to reform and improve the NI planning system so that it better serves Belfast and the wider region.



Our Improvement Objectives: Statutory Criteria

Statutory criteria for improvement objectives:							
Improvement objectives	Strategic effectiveness	Service quality	Service availability	Fairness	Sustainability	Efficiency	Innovation
Our city	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Our Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Our Communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Our environment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Our economy	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

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