

Performance Improvement Self-Assessment Report 2023-24



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Belfast
City Council

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Foreword

Welcome to our Performance Improvement 2023-24 Self-Assessment

As Chief Executive of Belfast City Council, I am pleased to share our Self-Assessment Report 2023-24 which sets out council's commitment to continuous improvement. Just like our citizens, businesses and stakeholders across the city, the council continued to face significant challenges such as cost-of-living and inflationary pressures, adverse climate, and ecological impacts, alongside new and increasing demands on council services. We are therefore proud to be able to deliver improvement during these circumstances.

We hope that our Self-Assessment Report 2023-24 demonstrates the importance that we place on improvement across our organisation. Whilst we reflect on the achievement of our five performance improvement objectives, we are also keen to highlight other corporate successes and achievements during the year. We worked tirelessly with our community planning partners to update and refresh the city's community plan, The Belfast Agenda. This sets out our renewed focus to help ensure that Belfast can fulfil its potential and improve the quality of life for all our residents. We also launched a new People Strategy to enable us to attract, recruit, and retain a talented workforce that is motivated to achieve our ambitious plans for the city.

The continued delivery of our award-winning Leisure Transformation Programme has helped to enhance our leisure provision across the city and supported a 10.6% increase in the number of people using our leisure centres in 2023-24, enabling more of our residents to become more physically active. We have also strived to ensure that our residents and

communities are more engaged in decision making. This is reflected by a 24% increase in the number of responses to our consultation surveys and embedding participatory budgeting into a growing number of small-scale funding programmes.

We supported 572 local businesses and participants through business start-up and growth support initiatives and promoted 158 jobs through the 'Go For It' programme to help grow and develop our local economy. Our efforts to protect our climate continued and we have helped to reduce our carbon footprint through ensuring that the majority of our fleet are now using an environmentally friendly alternative fuel with Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) accounting for 90.2% of our vehicles' fuel consumption. We also supported some of our most vulnerable residents through the cost-of-living crisis, with 13,792 people accessing our cost-of-living support and advice services and 2,161 people availing of our warm and welcome spaces.

Whilst we are pleased that the Self-Assessment Report has enabled us to reflect on how we continue to develop and grow as a council, we are cognisant that we must continually strive to improve to ensure that Belfast is a great place that we can all be proud of. We welcome the opinions of our citizens, businesses, employees, Elected Members, and service users at any time throughout the year.

If you have an idea for improvement, we would like to hear from you. Please contact us at performance@belfastcity.gov.uk.

1 Performance Improvement Duty

Performance improvement under the Local Government Act 2014

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides the framework to support continuous improvement for all councils. The council is required to gather information to assess improvements in services and to issue an annual assessment of performance against self-imposed and statutory indicators set by Government Departments. The Act also places a responsibility on the council to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. This is known as our 'Duty to Improve' and is set out within our annual Improvement Plan. The Act states that council must publish an annual Self-Assessment Report by 30 September each year and include:

1. An assessment of its performance during a financial year:

- In discharging its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement;
- In meeting its improvement objectives which are applicable to that year; and
- By reference to the statutory performance indicators and self-imposed indicators which are applicable to that year.

2. An assessment of its performance in exercising its functions during a financial year as compared with:

- Its performance in previous financial years; and
- So far as reasonably practicable, the performance during that and previous financial years of other councils.

What is improvement?

In accordance with the Act and accompanying guidance, for us "improvement" is about *continuously improving over time - enhancing the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities* rather than limited to gains in service output or efficiencies.

Belfast City Council is committed to continuously ensuring that our improvement objectives are relevant, putting in place the best arrangements for effectively understanding local needs and priorities, making best use of resources and capacity to deliver, and understanding and demonstrating the impact and improvements for citizens.

The council must align their improvement objectives to bring about improvement in at least one of the specified aspects of improvement as defined in section 86 of the Act:



Arrangements to secure continuous improvement

Council's improvement framework

The council has well-established, robust, and comprehensive arrangements in place to ensure continuous improvement, summarised in figure 1. The council's improvement framework sets out the various components of how the council works, bringing together the specific priorities, ambitions, and outcomes for Belfast. It links the overarching strategic outcomes, ambitions and priorities of key strategies and plans to the annual individual works plans of our employees, making clear the contribution that individuals make towards achieving city and strategic outcomes. It provides a mechanism to establish and implement an integrated way of communicating and delivering objectives throughout council so that all plans, frameworks, and processes are clear and 'joined up', known as the 'golden thread'. Our improvement framework is kept under review to support our 'Duty to improve'.

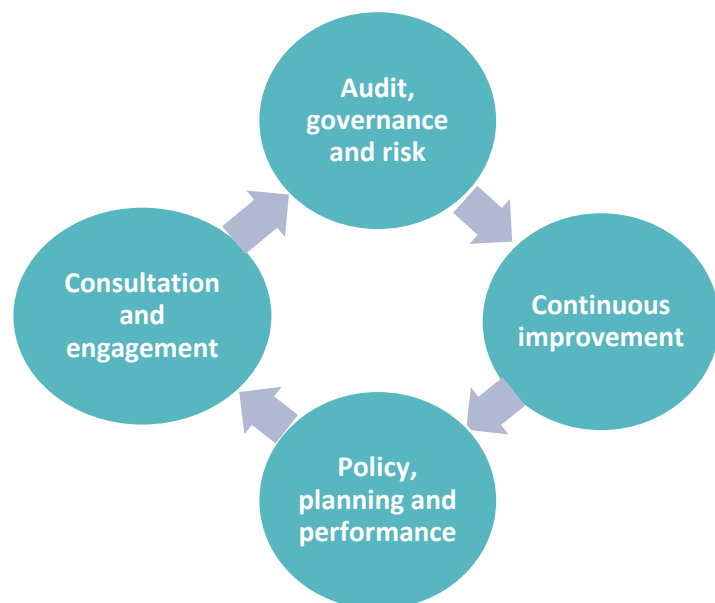
Figure 1: Council's improvement framework.



Measuring performance and improvement

The council continues to enhance, implement, and embed arrangements to secure continuous improvement, in the exercise of our functions, through the following:

Figure 2: Performance and improvement arrangements



Audit governance and risk

Our performance is audited externally by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and proposals for improvement implemented (see Appendix 1). Performance is also monitored by the council's Corporate Management Team (CMT), Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel as well as being considered by our own internal audit service, committee, and the full council.

An annual council audit plan is agreed and actions arising to improve our internal control environment are monitored through the Audit and Risk Panel.

Risks that could impact on the delivery of our objectives are monitored and managed through the Council Risk Management Strategy. Risks are monitored at a strategic, operational and project level and we act as necessary to amend ways of working and ensure continued service delivery.

Continuous improvement

We have a dedicated continuous improvement team who lead and support improvement projects and programmes as well as wider organisational change and service re-design.

Policy, planning and performance

Corporate policies and programmes are developed across the organisation in response to emerging priorities. These are monitored and reported through cross-departmental groups, management teams and boards, and regularly to the relevant committee.

Progress against our key strategies and plans is monitored through regular reports to CMT and to relevant committees. Our performance is assessed and evaluated in the form of published documents such as the Annual Accounts, Annual Audit Letter, Annual Performance Assessment and Annual Statement of Governance.

We are in the process of reviewing and refreshing our Corporate Planning and Performance Management Framework to enhance our continuous improvement journey.

Stakeholder communication, consultation, and engagement

The council is committed to using multiple communication channels and engaging with our stakeholders, to seek views on our key plans and priorities and keep them informed about our services and initiatives.

Monitoring, reporting and governance arrangements

The council's monitoring and reporting structures have been designed to ensure proper oversight and accountability arrangements are in place, and to provide our management teams and Elected Members with assurances that our governance arrangements are robust. This helps to ensure transparency, accountability and drive continuous improvement. The council's governance framework is based on a committee structure with full council and eight standing committees. The full council, which consists of all 60 elected representatives, is the overarching decision-making body, overseeing the work of the council. In addition to the committee structure a range of working groups, forums and boards have also been established to ensure the effective monitoring and reporting of performance and drive continuous improvement. A new planning and performance management framework is currently being developed which will refresh the current arrangements, provide a co-ordinated focus and a robust framework to enhance our continuous improvement journey.

1. Community Plan (The Belfast Agenda)	
Reports to:	Frequency:
Delivery boards	Quarterly
Community Planning Partnership	Bi-annually
Strategy, Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee & full council	As appropriate
Department for Communities (DfC)	Every two years

2. Corporate plan (2020-24) and Annual Corporate Delivery Plan	
Reports to:	Frequency:
Corporate Management Team (CMT)	As appropriate
SP&R committee	Annually
Full council	Annually

3. Committee plans	
Reports to:	Frequency:
CMT	Annually
Relevant committee	Bi-annually and annually
Full council	Bi-annually and annually

4. Performance Improvement Plan	
Reports to:	Frequency:
CMT	Quarterly (except quarter 1)
Audit and Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel	Quarterly
SP&R committee	Quarterly
Full council	Quarterly
DfC	Bi-annually

5. Supporting strategies and plans	
Reports to:	Frequency:
Corporate, departmental and service management teams	As appropriate
Working groups and boards	As appropriate
Relevant committee	As appropriate
Full council	As appropriate

6. Departmental and business plans	
Reports to:	Frequency:
Departmental and service management teams	As appropriate
Working groups and boards	As appropriate

2 Identifying our 2023-24 Improvement Objectives

Three-phase process

All our key strategies and plans are informed and developed by listening to our residents, businesses, partners, staff, and Elected Members. Our 2023-24 performance improvement objectives were developed through a three-phase process. In phase one we reviewed the evidence base, in phase two, we engaged internally and in phase three, we carried out public consultation. The rich and diverse analysis and feedback we received throughout the process was shaped into the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24. The objectives agreed were aligned to the priorities of the draft Community Plan (the Belfast Agenda).

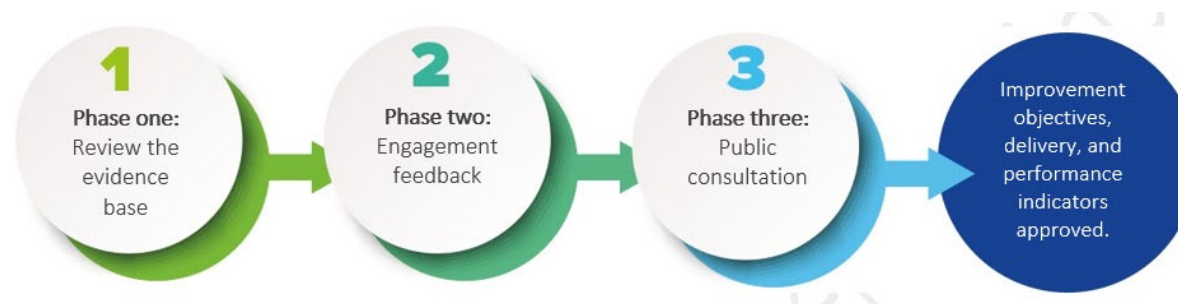


Figure 3: Three-phase process

Our Improvement Objectives 2023-24

The council published its Improvement Plan for 2023-24, which contained five improvement objectives, as set out below:

Our services and facilities	Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.
Our communities	Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.
Our economy	Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.
Our environment	Help tackle climate change by protecting our environment and improving the sustainability of Belfast.
Our city	Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.










3 How we have performed – Review of performance

The Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 does not detail every improvement we intended to make but focused on some of the key areas identified for improvement through our community and corporate planning processes, stakeholder engagement and research analysis.

We use a wide variety of milestones and key performance indicators to measure and monitor the progress and delivery of all our plans, as well as comparing our performance in relation to other councils and relevant organisations where data is available. The following sections will set out how the council has performed in 2023-24 in four key areas, providing a holistic review of council performance:

- i. Overall performance of the Improvement Plan 2023-24;
- ii. Self-assessment of improvement objectives – Improvement Plan 2023-24;
- iii. Corporate performance 2023-24; and
- iv. Financial performance 2023-24.

We have outlined our progress using the following self-assessment key:

Key: Milestone and performance indicator target and trend					
Milestones		Performance indicator target		Performance indicator trend	
	Achieved		On target or exceeded target (within 1% or better)		Positive change
	Partially achieved*		Slightly adrift of target (between 1% and 5%)		No significant change
	Not achieved		Adrift of target (5% or more)		Negative change

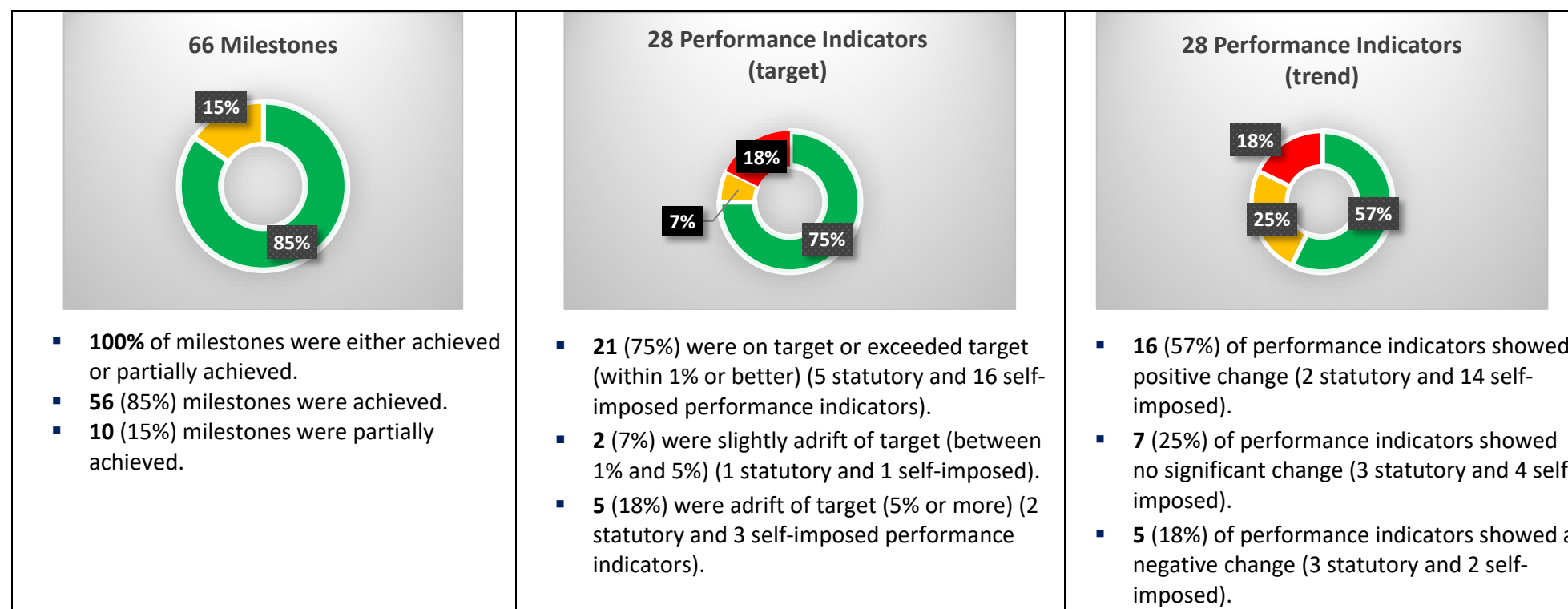
**milestones where work commenced or was progressed but the project or activity spans more than one financial year.*

4 Overall performance of the Improvement Plan 2023-24

For each of our five improvement objectives within the Improvement Plan 2023-24, we identified improvement milestones which set out what we wanted to deliver in conjunction with key performance indicators, which would enable us to measure our success. This section provides an overall performance assessment and a summary of key achievements from our Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.

Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 self-assessment

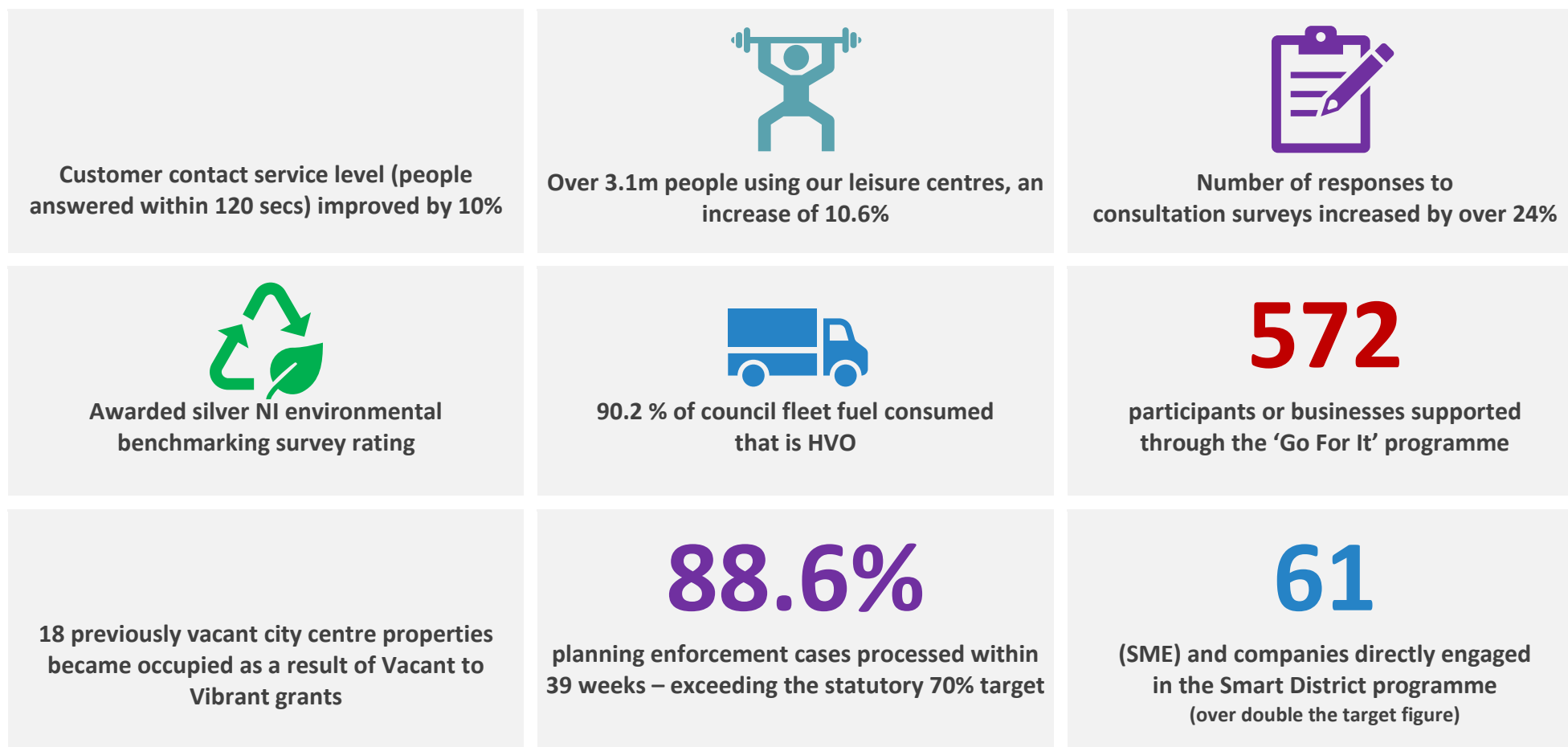
Our overall annual performance against achieving our improvement objectives 2023-24 is summarised below. We have outlined our progress against our 66 milestones and 28 performance indicators (8 statutory and 20 self-imposed).



Milestones were considered to be partially achieved when work commenced or was progressed during 2023-24 but the project or activity spans more than one financial year. A rationale and detailed analysis has been provided in Section 5 where targets (both milestones and performance indicators) have not been achieved and this broadly includes regional issues and delays, council resource constraints as well as dependency on external factors including market forces and regulatory changes.

Summary of key achievements from our Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24

A snapshot of some of the key achievements and performance improvement across all five improvement objectives, is illustrated below.



A

Achieved 'A' grade for Global Carbon Disclosure Project reporting



Invested £580k in our playgrounds



Retained 20 Green flags across our parks and open spaces



Planted 27,941 trees through community, corporate and school planting programme – a total of 110,254 since 2021



Worked with 23 stage 2 and 16 stage 3 neighbourhood regeneration funded projects

£1m

Delivered over £1m in Hardship Programme funding and supported 42k people in need



Supported 722 vulnerable households through the Belfast Warm and Well programme



Reduced the amount of biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled from 28,444 tonnes in 2022-23 to 7218 tonnes in 2023-24



Enabled 13,792 residents to access online cost-of-living support and advice and 2161 residents to visit community centre warm and welcome spaces



Allocated over £150k to deliver the participatory budgeting process – nearly 10k votes received and 78 projects funded



Supported 21 social supermarkets

5 Self-assessment of improvement objectives

When agreeing the five improvement objectives for 2023-24, council identified milestones and associated performance indicators to ensure achievement of the objectives and improvements that benefit residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. This section of the report firstly provides a summary of performance across the five improvement objectives, in figure 4 below.










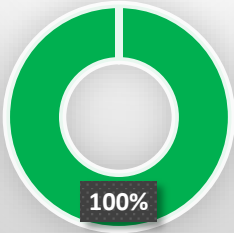
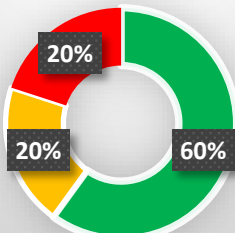
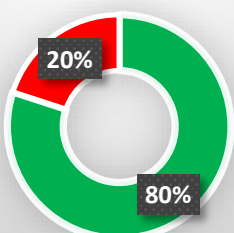
Figure 4: Summary of performance across the five improvement objectives.

This is followed by a self-assessment of each improvement objective providing a progress update on the following areas:

- i. the achievement of the improvement objective;
- ii. the achievement of the improvement milestones;
- iii. how we performed – performance indicators (self-imposed and statutory), target and trends;
- iv. how we compared – performance benchmarking (where relevant and available);
- v. additional evidence of performance improvement; and
- vi. next steps.

Objective 1: Our services

Achievement of improvement objective

Improvement objective 1	Our services and facilities: Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.						
Self-assessment	Achieved – We maintained and improved resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.						
Aspect of improvement							
	General duty/ continuous improvement	Strategic effectiveness	Service quality and availability	Fairness	Sustainability	Efficiency	Innovation
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performance improvement summary	<p>10 Milestones</p> 		<p>5 Performance indicators (target)</p> 		<p>5 Performance indicators (trend)</p> 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 (100%) milestones were achieved. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 (60%) were on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better). 1 (20%) was slightly adrift of target (between 1% and 5%). 1 (20%) was adrift of target (5% or more). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 (80%) performance indicators showed positive change. 1 (20%) performance indicator showed negative change. 		

Achievement of improvement objective 1 milestones

i. Improved our customer care

- ✓ Increased our automated digital channels by introducing a webform for Bulky Waste collections, **achieving 40% shift from phones.**
- ✓ Developed a suite of **customer performance measurement indicators** for the Customer Hub.
- ✓ Introduced **service level agreements** for the Resources and Fleet Service. Introduced customer satisfaction measured at point of contact with the Customer Hub – averaging 80% customer satisfaction over the year.
- ✓ Developed a **new complaints handling procedure** across Local Authorities in Northern Ireland (NI), in conjunction with NI Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Improved **internal awareness of this procedure and provided training to over 300 members of staff** involved in complaints. Complaints information is now available in the Power BI system, which provides a **single view of the customer** across all channels.

ii. Improved key services

- ✓ **Completed the review of city centre governance and management** arrangements.
- ✓ Established city centre governance, including a **new multi-agency tasking group.**
- ✓ **Completed the service design project for pest control services.**

iii. Improved our facilities

- ✓ Completed and opened the new **Templemore Baths leisure facility** and surpassed the target membership.
- ✓ Submitted the business case for **Girdwood indoor sports facility** to the DfC and continued to explore funding options to help deliver the project.
- ✓ Continued work on the draft options report to take forward the **transformation of our leisure facilities** as part of **Phase 4.**

Improvement objective 1 indicators and performance measures

Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Customer contact service level (calls answered within 120 secs)	-	67%	68%	73%	78%	↑	Not applicable
Percentage of customers satisfied with how easy it is to contact the council and get the service they wanted	-	-	77%	79%	81%	↑	Not applicable
Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe	65.5%	71.6	72.3%	75%	65.27%	↓	The complaints handling procedure was changed in line with requirements from NIPSO from a three-stage process to a two-stage process. This has on shortened the escalation process and, therefore, timeframes, with an emphasis on front-line resolution, which is beneficial for customers. The compliance is therefore not comparable to previous timeframes as services are adapting to the new process and are improving on the first quarter compliance results but will become a baseline for expected improvement.

Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school)	-	23,339	27,582	30,500	28,884	↑	Pre-paid membership continues to grow year on year and performance is exceptionally high both in terms of market penetration and market share. However, competition from a new private sector operator in Belfast that opened in January 2024, compounded with the financial crisis and corresponding decline in disposable income impacted on memberships rates in 2023-24. We are working with GLL to agree an action plan to counter the slowdown in growth.
Throughput or footfall – number of people using leisure centres (individual unique customer visits)	-	2,029,310	2,810,202	3,100,000	3,108,894	↑	Not applicable

Additional evidence of performance improvement aligned to objective 1

The council's Corporate Plan sets out medium-term areas for improvement. Progress against our Corporate Plan, our effective use of resources and council value for money is monitored and reported through regular reports to committee. In doing so, we provided evidence of meeting the general duty placed upon us to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of our functions¹.

Evidence to demonstrate that we maintained and improved the council and the services and facilities provided include:²

- ✓ Increased customer satisfaction with the Customer Hub³ by 6% from 75% in 2022-23 to 81% in 2023-24.
- ✓ Implemented numerous customer service improvements as a result of customer complaints.
- ✓ Identified and implemented a number of risk actions to mitigate the impact or likelihood of risks transpiring that may interrupt delivery.
- ✓ Implemented a range of audit recommendations, including the closure of a significant number of outstanding audit recommendations.
- ✓ Delivered a range of service and human resources (HR) improvement projects through our dedicated Continuous Improvement Unit.
- ✓ Undertook a variety of consultations via the council's engagement platform [Your Say Belfast](#) to establish areas for action and improvement.

Next Steps

Improving our services is identified as a key priority in the 2024-28 Corporate Plan (currently in draft). This improvement objective is included in the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 as:

- We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.

¹ The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 Part 12 – General Duty to Improve









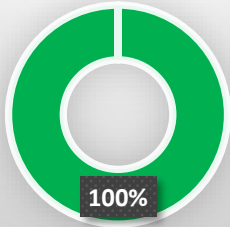
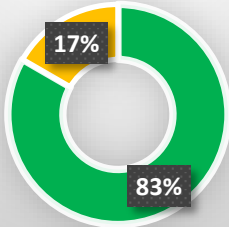
² Evidence as defined in:

- [Circular LG 20/19 - Addendum to Local Government Performance Improvement guidance | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#) (pg. 5) – for example: development/reviews of strategic or community plans, policy reviews, service reviews, action taken through internal audit, risk management, complaints etc.
- Section 37 of the [Circular LG 21/2016 Guidance for performance improvement 2016 onwards. | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#) for example: progress in introducing or completing programmes, facilities, or ways of working, as well as, councils' annual governance, value for money and sustainability statements etc.

³ The Customer Hub handles approximately 70% of all calls to the council and approximately 60% of all customer contacts including email and web forms. It's the main point of contact for the following services: Resources and Fleet Waste Collections, Resources and Fleet Waste Management, Open Spaces and Street Scene, Complaints, General Enquiries, Switchboard.

Objective 2: Our communities

Achievement of improvement objective

Improvement objective 2	Our communities: Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.						
Self-assessment	Achieved – we improved our local areas and enhanced how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.						
Aspect of improvement							
	General duty/continuous improvement	Strategic effectiveness	Service quality and availability	Fairness	Sustainability	Efficiency	Innovation
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performance improvement summary	<p>19 Milestones</p> 		<p>6 Performance Indicators (target)</p> 		<p>6 Performance Indicators (trend)</p> 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19 (100%) milestones were achieved. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 (100%) were on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 (83%) performance indicators showed positive change. 1 (17%) performance indicators showed no significant change or maintained a similar level of performance as per previous years. 		

Achievement of improvement objective 2 milestones

i. Supported our residents, especially those most vulnerable, through the cost-of-living crisis

- ✓ Established an **Elected Members' Cost of Living Working Group** to help co-design an effective hardship programme and associated recommendations for implementation. Council agreed over **£1m funding framework for 2023-24**, which supported the delivery of 12 programmes of work focussed on enhancing the capacity of existing organisations to provide targeted support, **to address food and fuel poverty and their impact on low-income households**. Beneficiaries to date included:
 - 121 schools (68% of those in the city) have taken part and provided support to children and young people;
 - 23-day care providers have provided warm, nutritious, and substantial meals to early years children;
 - Delivered programmes for children and young people, older people, and families in 26 council community centres and 7 Independently managed community centres;
 - **2161** people accessed **warm and welcome spaces** across 17 community centres through a range of projects such as tea dances for older people and lunch and brunch clubs for children and families; and
 - Allocated almost £570,000 to support **21 social supermarkets** which provided food and wraparound support for those in need within our communities. Received 28 applications totalling approximately £946,620 through an open call **Social Supermarket Fund** programme. Outcome of assessments to be reported to committee for funding decisions in April 24.
- ✓ Developed and distributed 14,500 copies of the **cost-of-living support guide** to help people navigate services available across the city, to help with the high cost-of-living. A total of **13,792** people accessed the **online cost-of-living support and advice** (including information about social supermarkets) available at <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/costoflivingsupport>.
- ✓ Convened regular meetings with **Belfast Advice Group** to develop an action plan to implement recommendations from the advice review.
- ✓ Completed a **review of council and DfC funded advice services** including consultation with the Advice Sector and central government departments.
- ✓ Supported **722 referrals to the Belfast warm and well programme** to support vulnerable people in cold homes during winter across all areas in Belfast and delivered training, awareness, and advice to 1,221 participants over 28 sessions. Provided **energy advice** to 315 households with complex energy needs throughout the year. Delivered **capacity building programmes** to raise awareness of the risks of winter and cold weather to vulnerable people such as hard to reach males, older people, parent, and children and Roma/ BME youth.

ii. Improved our neighbourhoods through the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

- ✓ Worked with **24 stage two Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) projects** to help develop their business cases.
- ✓ Worked with 16 stage three projects to identify next steps for each scheme. Presented **recommendations of the Area Working Group to Committee** in December 2023. Issued the first **formal funding offer** under NRF and **successfully commenced** the scheme.

iii. Improved our parks and playgrounds and encouraged people to be physically active

- ✓ **Completed and opened Marrowbone Millennium Park** and the pitch has been signed off by the Irish FA as ‘Intermediate Level’ status. Completed dual language signage.
- ✓ **Initiated capital project to improve Pitt Park.**
- ✓ **Completed the Paisley Park Sportsplex** project, including a 3G pitch and changing facilities.
- ✓ **Initiated major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields** in collaboration with partners which is well underway.
- ✓ **Delivered the Playground Improvement Programme**, including:
 - Refurbished **Loughside Park** Playground
 - Commenced construction in **North Link Playground**.
 - Procured and ordered playground equipment for **New Lodge Playground**.
- ✓ Submitted annual applications to retain **20 Green flags** in relevant parks and open spaces.
- ✓ Commenced public consultation on the draft **Physical Activity and Sports Strategy** and facilitated a follow up stakeholder workshop.

iv. Enhanced and improved how we engage and involve

- ✓ **Supported the Active Belfast participatory budgeting (PB) pilot and improved how we engage with newer communities and other seldom heard groups within Belfast:**
 - Delivered the **‘Move More and Eat Well to Feel Better’ PB pilot** which offered local groups the opportunity to apply for up to £1000 to fund relevant projects. Held **four voting and decision-making events** and a total of **2497 voters cast 11,715 valid votes. Approved 27 projects to be delivered**. A third (33%) of all applicants were from un-constituted groups, and 30% of the successful projects were also un-constituted meaning the **PB reached new people, communities, and groups**.
 - **Secured agreement for a phase 2 – Move More and Eat Well PB process**. Improved uptake by increasing the maximum funding for groups to £2,500. Received **94 applications** and a total of 7,064 recorded votes. Almost twice as many groups were funded (**51 projects** across the four areas of Belfast) with overall PB **funding increasing to £121,258**.
 - For more information, including project evaluation and videos, please see: <https://makinglifebettertogether.com>

- ✓ **Ensured widest participation and good practice and improved how we engage with newer communities and other seldom heard groups within Belfast:**
 - **Widened engagement and participation** through the PB process. Attendance at the PB events was diverse and representation from migrant and ethnic minority communities was very high. The family-friendly and fun nature of the market stall events enabled community bonding and provided a unique opportunity to make new introductions or strengthen networking.
 - **Enabled younger people to have a voice** as part of the PB process, via in-person events. 43% of those submitting a ballot paper were aged 24 and under, with a third (34%) aged 4 – 13 years of age.
 - Invited representative organisations to join the second Move More Eat Well PB design team, given the under-representation of women and girls and people with disabilities within sport, to help with outreach and ensure full inclusivity.
 - Established our third PB initiative – **Bank of Ideas** - focusing on creativity as part of the Belfast 2024 celebrations. A new design team was set-up, including representatives from various arts and creative organisations.

- ✓ **Provided training and developed guidance notes for staff to ensure widest participation and good practice.**
 - Provided **training and advice** as required to services across council and supported the development of a range of public consultations.
 - Shared good practice advice regarding the use of translation options as part of engagements and as a result several key consultations, including our PB initiatives, have included summaries in other key languages or included easy-read versions of strategies.
 - Finalised an extensive ongoing programme of engagement to review and update the community plan.
 - Gathered ideas from children and their parents or guardians and local community groups as part of the public consultation on the naming of a new parks and agreed three suggested names that reflected the site and its historical background, for public vote.

- ✓ **Explored options for enhancing engagement with the Youth Council and**
- ✓ **Supported the Belfast Youth Council to identify key priorities and actions for taking forward in 2023-24.**
 - Conducted a recruitment exercise for the **new Youth Council** between October and December 2023, recruiting **25 young people**.
 - Shared opportunities for youth participation in the PB pilot and community planning co-design process with our youth network.
 - Held Introductory event in City Hall with the Lord Mayor, Chief Executive, all party Youth Champions and new members of Belfast City Youth council and their parents or guardians. The event recognised the voluntary contribution of the youth champions and the commitment of council to **enabling young people to have a voice in determining city priorities**.
 - New cohort has focused on induction, capacity building, team building and **identifying priorities for 2024-25**. The Youth Council has also **developed a partnership** with Queens' University Belfast (QUB) to become involved in the Radical Project which will **enhance youth participation in policy development**.

Improvement objective 2 indicators and performance measures

Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Number of parks and green spaces with Green flag accreditation	20	20	20	20	20	↔	Not applicable
Number of responses to consultation surveys per annum (via Your Say Belfast)	-	6,797	8,846	Not applicable	10,994	↑	Not applicable
Public participation levels in participatory budgeting (PB) decision making events	-	-	-	150	9,559	↑	The initial target was based on the pilot in-person events. As this was our first PB process the response far exceeded our expectations.
Total BCC capital investment in neighbourhoods	£10.2m	£28.1m	£16.3m	£21.5m	£30.1m	↑	Not applicable
Investment in new and upgraded playgrounds	-	-	-	£580k	£580K	↑	Not applicable
Number of residents accessing online cost-of-living support and advice or 'warm and welcome spaces'	-	-	-	Not applicable	Online cost-of-living support and advice – 13,792 Warm and welcome spaces - 2161 Total 15,942	↑	Not applicable

Additional evidence of performance improvement aligned to objective 2

Evidence to demonstrate we improved our local areas and enhanced how we engaged and supported residents so everyone could enjoy a good quality of life.

Our community plan (the Belfast Agenda) sets out long-term outcomes and ambitions for improving the long-term social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of Belfast as well as immediate priorities. Progress against the Belfast Agenda is monitored and reported through regular reports to Community Planning Partnership Boards and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (SP&R). Council publishes a report every two years, assessing progress towards achieving outcomes and demonstrating the impact on the outcomes for citizens. Progress reports can be accessed online: [Belfast Agenda Progress Reports | Your say Belfast \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/your-say-belfast). In doing so, we provided evidence of meeting the general duty to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of our functions and addressing multiple complex community needs. Our role in leading the community planning process in Belfast has been pivotal in demonstrating improvement by contributing working collaboratively with cross-sector partners to understand and improve the sustainability of our areas⁴.

In addition to specific consultation exercises on our dedicated engagement platform Your Say Belfast, we host a number of open engagement spaces on a range of specific issues ([resilience and sustainability](#), for example). We also engaged extensively through our ongoing engagement mechanisms, such as:

- the Equality Consultative Forum.
- staff groups.
- Trade Unions.
- feedback from social media.
- our complaints, comments, and compliments process.
- established forums such as the Migrant Forum and Older Peoples' Forum.

⁴ Section 16 [Circular LG 26/15 - Guidance for local government performance improvement | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
Belfast City Council

Next Steps

As a result of extensive consultation and engagement 'Our people and communities' is a strategic theme included within the refreshed Belfast Agenda and a key priority in the 2024 – 28 Corporate Plan (currently in draft).








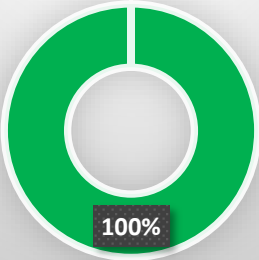
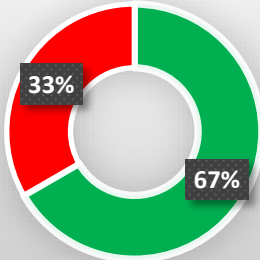
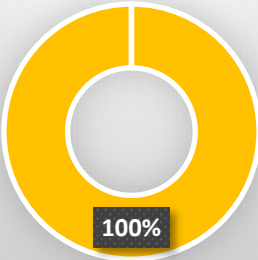
This improvement objective features in the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 as two objectives:

- We will improve our local areas and provide opportunities to support our residents to become healthier and engaged.
- We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.

The council has put cost-of-living support at the heart of its strategic commitments to tackle inequality and poverty. This has emerged as an improvement objective to help mitigate the impact of the current, and sustained, pressures being faced by the families, business, and communities they serve. The role of our community planning partners is also pivotal, we will work closely with cross-sector partners to understand and develop place-based plans to tackle inequalities across the city.

Objective 3: Our economy

Achievement of improvement objective

Improvement objective	Our economy: Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.						
Self-assessment	Achieved – We helped small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, helped create opportunities for local jobs and employment.						
Aspect of improvement	 General duty/ continuous improvement	 Strategic effectiveness	 Service quality and availability	 Fairness	 Sustainability	 Efficiency	 Innovation
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performance improvement summary	<p style="text-align: center;">3 Milestones</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 (100%) milestones were achieved. 		<p style="text-align: center;">3 Performance Indicators (target)</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 (67%) were on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better). ▪ 1 (33%) was adrift of target (5% or more). 		<p style="text-align: center;">3 Performance Indicators (trend)</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 (100%) performance indicators showed no significant change or maintained a similar level of performance as previous years. 		

Achievement of improvement objective 3 milestones

i–iii. Supported local businesses, social enterprises, and co-operatives	
✓	Received the funding agreement/ MoU by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and finalised procurement contracts.
✓	Successfully launched the new enterprise support service ‘Go Succeed’, which was delayed until 13 November 2023.
✓	Received 573 enquiries from individuals wishing to start a business in Belfast , with 278 diagnostics completed leading directly to business plan development, and 1-1 mentoring.

Improvement objective 3 indicators and performance measures

Performance indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target ⁵	2023-24 Actual	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Number of jobs promoted through the ‘Go For It’ programme [statutory performance indicator]	210	308	283	156	158	↔	The ‘Go For It’ programme finished in Q3 of 2023-24. Hence the target and actual figures are lower than in previous years.
Business start-up and growth activity [statutory performance indicator]: - Number of business plans developed	342	514	472	260	263	↔	See ‘Go for it’ above.
Number of participants or businesses supported	698	731	503	658	572	↔	Delay to the start of the new service (planned for September but delayed until November).

⁵ The statutory target for jobs promoted in legislation is 325. During 2023-24 ‘Go For It’ ran for only 6 months as the scheme was coming to an end and Belfast City Council targets were reduced accordingly.

How we compared – performance benchmarking

The 'Go For It' programme has been delivered in collaboration by all 11 councils since September 2017. Together we have supported 15,546 entrepreneurs to produce business plans and in doing so created 9,446 jobs⁶. Six councils met their jobs promotion target for every year of the programme whilst Belfast met their target once in the final year of the programme (2023-24). However, we have delivered the greatest number of business plans and jobs, representing 16% of all programme business plans and promoted the same proportion of programme jobs. Our performance in relation to our fellow councils is as follows:

Business start-up and growth activity [statutory performance indicator]: Number of business plans developed ⁷							
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Total
Antrim and Newtownabbey	171	173	137	162	172	91	906
Ards and North Down	181	171	165	211	166	106	1,000
Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon	360	373	309	386	353	173	1,954
Belfast	430	419	342	514	472	263	2,440
Causeway Coast and Glens	231	195	216	256	213	110	1,221
Derry and Strabane	226	217	184	238	240	118	1,223
Fermanagh and Omagh	276	279	165	309	308	147	1,484
Lisburn and Castlereagh	228	182	173	213	187	103	1,086
Mid and East Antrim	201	199	153	181	206	110	1,050
Mid Ulster	332	301	214	269	278	134	1,528
Newry Mourne and Down	300	298	267	356	305	128	1,654
Total	2936	2807	2325	3095	2900	1,483	15,546

⁶ Job creation figures are calculated by applying a conversion rate to the number of business plans developed. For example, number of business plans developed X 0.6 = number of jobs created. This conversion rate is determined by Invest NI: 2018-19 to 2020-21 jobs promoted = business plans developed x 0.61471 and 2021-22 to 2023-24 jobs promoted = business plans developed x 0.6

⁷ Data supplied by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, who manage the contract to deliver the 'Go For It' Programme. The 'Go For It' programme finished in Q3 of 2023-24. Hence the target and actual figures are lower than in previous years.

Number of jobs promoted through the 'Go For It' programme [statutory performance indicator] ⁸							
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Total
Antrim and Newtownabbey	105	106	84	97	103	55	551
Ards and North Down	111	105	101	127	100	64	608
Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon	221	229	190	232	212	104	1,188
Belfast	264	258	210	308	283	158	1,482
Causeway Coast and Glens	142	120	133	154	128	66	742
Derry and Strabane	139	133	113	143	144	71	743
Fermanagh and Omagh	170	172	101	185	185	88	901
Lisburn and Castlereagh	140	112	106	128	112	62	660
Mid and East Antrim	124	122	94	109	124	66	638
Mid Ulster	204	185	132	161	167	80	929
Newry Mourne and Down	184	183	164	214	183	77	1,005
Total	1805	1725	1429	1857	1740	890	9,446

⁸ Data supplied by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, who manage the contract to deliver the Go For It Programme. The 'Go For It' programme finished in Q3 of 2023-24. Hence the target and actual figures are lower than in previous years.

Additional evidence of performance improvement aligned to objective 3

Evidence that we helped small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, helped create opportunities for local jobs and employment.

In addition to the 'Go For It' programme above, we delivered a range of key initiatives through our dedicated [Economic Development Unit](#) – for example, the [Belfast Labour Market Partnership](#) and the [Belfast Employment Academies](#).

Further evidence to demonstrate that we helped small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, helped create opportunities for local jobs and employment is set out in our [Belfast Agenda Progress Reports](#).

Progress against our City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan is monitored and reported to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.








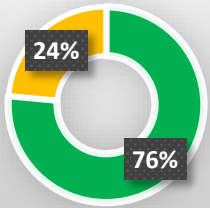
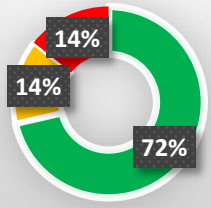
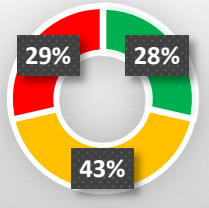
Next Steps

As a result of extensive consultation and engagement, 'our economy' is a strategic theme within the refreshed Belfast Agenda and a key priority in the 2024-28 Corporate Plan (currently in draft). This improvement objective will also feature in the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 as:

- We will stimulate inclusive growth and innovation, help businesses to start-up and grow and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment.

Objective 4: Our environment





Achievement of improvement objective

Improvement objective 4	Our environment: Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.						
Self-assessment	Achieved – we helped tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.						
Aspect of improvement	 General duty/ continuous improvement	 Strategic effectiveness	 Service quality and availability	 Fairness	 Sustainability	 Efficiency	 Innovation
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performance improvement summary	<p style="text-align: center;">17 Milestones</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 13 (76%) milestones were achieved. ▪ 4 (24%) milestones were partially achieved. 		<p style="text-align: center;">7 Performance Indicators (target)</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 5 (72%) were on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better) ▪ 1 (14%) was slightly adrift of target (between 1% and 5%) ▪ 1 (14%) was adrift of target (5% or more). 		<p style="text-align: center;">7 Performance Indicators (trend)</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 (28%) performance indicators showed a positive change ▪ 3 (43%) performance indicators showed no significant change or maintained a similar level of performance as previous years ▪ 2 (29%) performance indicators showed a negative change. 		

Achievement of improvement objective 4 milestones

<p>i. Climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Developed and completed a Climate Risk Assessment for the council estate and operations. ✓ A draft Climate Action Plan is being developed internally with council departments. ✓ The Climate Investment Plan has been postponed pending results of the energy audits as there is currently insufficient information available to properly cost the action plan and develop an investment plan. ✓ Undertaking Energy audits on four key parts of the council estate. ✓ Allocated £697,194.70 to a climate fund to support climate initiatives across the council. Funded 19 projects via the Climate fund with a further 10 applications under review by the Climate Programme Board, examples include: Pilot to improve recycling rates, period waste product and paint re-use. ✓ Maintained an 'A' grade in the Carbon Disclosure Project, achieved the highest score in UK Climate Action Scorecards for the whole of NI and achieved Silver in the 2023 NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey.
<p>ii. Protected our environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Progressed the scoping of a project to deliver the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy action plan. This milestone will be in next year's improvement plan. ✓ Secured additional resources following a capacity review of biodiversity duty. Progressed an action plan in partnership with the Climate Action Team. ✓ Completed the transition of 85% of council fleet to alternative or greener fuels. ✓ Completed and launched the Belfast Tree Strategy. ✓ Commenced delivery of year 1 of the Belfast Tree Strategy action plan, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing a tree canopy mapping/ tree establishment strategy for soft and hard landscapes. ○ Introducing changes to the tree health and condition survey cycles for both council trees and for street trees belonging to the DfI. <p>As part of Belfast One Millions Trees initiative, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conducted a series of woodland management plans and site assessments. Launched Belfast's tree equity score and used the information to carry out a tree planting opportunity mapping. Requested funding from the Climate Fund to deliver site assessments and planting plans during 2024-25. ✓ Planted 27,941 trees through community, corporate and school planting programme. This includes the additional planting from partners (estimated 10,000) in the 2023-24 season. The exact figure will be confirmed following the annual tree count.
<p>iii. Increased recycling and managed our waste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Submitted Kerbside sortation model for recycling report – options and a way forward to be agreed for approval. ✓ Implemented the waste management contract to divert from landfill for 10 months, resulting in a significant reduction in landfill. ✓ Completed the paint reuse scheme phase 1 and phase 2 implementation is due in 2024-25. The reuse IT device scheme is ongoing within council (promoting a circular economy). ✓ Produced a report regarding the proposal for single-use plastics policy of the council, to be considered by the council's corporate management team.

Improvement objective 4 indicators and performance measures

Performance indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend	Commentary if target not met
One Million Trees Programme - number of trees planted per annum	39,000	24,000	63,500	45,000	27,941		Includes an estimated 10,000 trees from partnerships. The exact figure will be confirmed following the annual tree count. Whilst delays in the implementation of the Tree Strategy has impacted tree planting during 2023-24, this strategy provides a more evidence-based approach to achieving long-term outcomes from tree planting.
Carbon disclosure project (CDP) score	-	B	A	A	A		Not applicable
Northern Ireland environmental benchmarking survey rating	-	-	-	Silver	Silver		Not applicable
% of council fleet fuel consumed that is HVO	-	-	-	90%	90.2%		Not applicable

Statutory performance indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual ⁹	Trend	Commentary if target not met
% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use) (increase)	43%	41%	41%	42%	41%	↔	<p>An increase of just over 0.5% was achieved. Again, this uplift is largely a result of the interim residual waste treatment contract with more residual waste being processed by the contractor and as this waste is processed the contractor extracts recyclables from the waste stream.</p> <p>We have a range of ongoing local and regional programmes to change behaviour and increase opportunities to reuse and recycle such as school education visits, pilot street recycling schemes and circular economy projects, as well as enforcement. We continue to engage at a regional level on the development of a waste management policy and strategy for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Provisional data subject to review by the regulator (Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEARA)) - normally November 2024.</p>
Amount of (tonnage) biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled (reduce)	30,071	35,783	28,444	28,000	7218	↑	<p>The amount of biodegradable waste disposed of at landfill fell by 75%, the lowest level recorded to date. This was achieved through the award of the new interim residual waste treatment contract which involves the treatment of all residual waste, and none sent directly to landfill.</p> <p>Provisional data subject to review by the regulator (NIEA and DEARA) - normally November 2024.</p>

⁹ Source DEARA LAC Municipal Waste Timeseries, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics time series data](#) | [Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#) – provisional data (DEARA release final data in November annually).

Statutory performance indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual ¹⁰	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings (reduce)	171,795	168,037	157,892	158,000	160,282	↓	<p>Increased by 1.5%. This is determined by the weather as there has been an influx of garden waste across all councils due to the warm weather and heavy rain. Suggests that waste arisings are starting to rise to the levels witnessed before the abnormally low level of 2022-23.</p> <p>We have a range of ongoing local and regional programmes to change behaviour, prevent waste arising and increase opportunities to reuse and recycle such as school education visits, pilot street recycling schemes and circular economy projects, as well as enforcement. We continue to engage at a regional level on the development of a waste management policy and strategy for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Provisional data subject to review by the regulator (NIEA and DEARA) - normally November 2024.</p>

How we compared – performance benchmarking

Excepting Covid-19, councils have been recycling more, sending less waste to landfill, and reducing the amount of waste collected since Local Government Reform in 2015-16. Collectively, councils have also exponentially increased the amount of waste sent for energy recovery from zero before 2009-10 to approximately 34% in 2023-24¹¹.

¹⁰ Source DEARA LAC Municipal Waste Timeseries, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics time series data | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#) – provisional data (DEARA release final data in November annually).

¹¹ Source DEARA LAC Municipal Waste Timeseries, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics time series data | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#) – provisional data (DEARA release final data in November annually).

Belfast is consistent with these regional trends and our performance in relation to the other councils over the preceding six years is as follows.

% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use) (increase) – statutory indicator ¹²						
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 ¹³
Antrim and Newtownabbey	56.1	57.3	56.9	60.2	60.1	60.9
Ards and North Down	53.1	54.7	51.0	48.3	51.9	55.1
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	51.6	54.8	54.3	53.5	54.2	55.6
Belfast	44.4	45.4	43.0	41.0	40.8	41.1
Causeway Coast and Glens	47.7	53.8	53.9	52.3	52.7	49.6
Derry City and Strabane	44.3	44.2	46.1	45.1	46.0	48.2
Fermanagh and Omagh	49.3	49.1	47.3	47.7	47.5	46.7
Lisburn and Castlereagh	48.1	50.8	50.4	49.7	50.5	50.9
Mid and East Antrim	52.0	51.4	50.8	51.9	51.7	50.7
Mid Ulster	56.0	58.8	58.9	58.2	58.4	58.6
Newry, Mourne and Down	51.4	53.7	51.9	49.8	49.6	50.0
Northern Ireland	50.0	51.9	50.9	50.1	50.7	51.1
<p>Our achievements include: We have maintained a relatively consistent household recycling rate since the reform of Local Government in 2015-16. There has been an overall reduction in recycling in Belfast since 2018-19, plateauing at approximately 41% over the last 3 years. However, Belfast’s recycling rate improved by just over 0.5% between 2022-23 and 2023-24. We have a range of ongoing local and regional programmes to change behaviour and increase opportunities to reuse and recycle such as school education visits, pilot street recycling schemes and circular economy projects.</p> <p>During 2023-24, the highest recycling rate was recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey, with the lowest in Belfast. 8 out of the 11 councils improved their recycling rates compared to the preceding year, including Belfast. 4 councils, including Belfast, were below the Northern Ireland recycling rate, and the target that was set in the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy to achieve 50% recycling by 2020.</p> <p>All councils are still some distance from achieving the target set in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 of recycling at least 70% of waste by 2030.</p>						

¹² Source DEARA Waste Management Statistics, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

¹³ Finalised 2023-24 data available from DEARA November 2024.

Amount of (tonnage) biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled (reduce) – statutory indicator ¹⁴						
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 ¹⁵
Antrim and Newtownabbey	11,622	10,988	12,540	12,369	12,161	11,458
Ards and North Down	19,186	15,762	19,873	20,262	17,124	14,413
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	8,771	6,104	4,339	6,919	3,635	2,580
Belfast	36,658	30,299	30,071	35,783	28,444	7,218
Causeway Coast and Glens	14,356	10,004	5,861	10,278	9,232	10,418
Derry City and Strabane	10,974	7,964	4,802	8,299	5,310	4,076
Fermanagh and Omagh	13,677	13,473	14,410	14,026	13,579	14,773
Lisburn and Castlereagh	16,108	14,373	15,967	14,737	14,240	14,023
Mid and East Antrim	14,444	13,684	14,508	14,495	14,596	15,239
Mid Ulster	5,681	1,505	1,494	1,537	1,285	369
Newry, Mourne and Down	1,846	2,131	2,538	2,685	2,319	937
Northern Ireland	153,323	126,286	126,404	141,390	121,925	95,504
<p>Our achievements include: The majority of councils are reducing the amount of biodegradable waste that is landfilled with a reduction from 218,898 tonnes in 2015-16 to 95,504 tonnes in 2023-24¹⁶. Following the award of the new interim residual waste treatment contract which involves the treatment of all residual waste and none sent directly to landfill, Belfast showed a distinct improvement by reducing biodegradable waste to landfill from 45,231 tonnes in 2015-16 to 7,218 tonnes in 2023-24.</p>						

¹⁴ Source DEARA Waste Management Statistics, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics)

¹⁵ Source DEARA LAC Municipal Waste Timeseries, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics time series data | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics-time-series-data) – provisional data (DEARA release final data in November annually).

¹⁶ Source DEARA Waste Management Statistics, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics)

Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings (reduce) – statutory indicator ¹⁷						
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 ¹⁸
Antrim and Newtownabbey	98,224	102,267	95,468	106,804	100,076	106,040
Ards and North Down	87,338	86,698	93,705	91,434	85,976	83,895
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	105,828	106,742	113,712	115,327	103,379	112,335
Belfast	171,118	168,515	171,795	168,037	157,892	160,282
Causeway Coast and Glens	81,432	81,279	81,611	80,884	81,063	80,596
Derry City and Strabane	78,660	81,304	83,989	83,540	79,114	81,027
Fermanagh and Omagh	55,931	55,224	58,108	58,211	55,362	56,521
Lisburn and Castlereagh	77,861	78,905	80,846	80,299	74,211	77,617
Mid and East Antrim	73,032	73,797	78,986	76,689	73,433	74,842
Mid Ulster	78,672	79,645	86,049	86,085	78,589	82,075
Newry, Mourne and Down	82,136	84,610	86,900	87,328	82,842	84,684
Northern Ireland	990,233	998,985	1,031,169	1,034,637	971,936	999,913
<p>Our achievements include: The amount of waste collected by each council broadly reflects population levels within their boundaries – Belfast is historically inclined to have the highest, with Fermanagh and Omagh the lowest. Whilst there was a slight increase in our municipal waste arisings during 2023-24 for the reasons outlined above, there has been an overall reduction in the amount of municipal waste arisings since 2018-19 (consistent with the majority of other councils) and since the reform of Local Government in 2015-16. This is despite a population increase of 2.3% (7811 people) in Belfast since 2015¹⁹.</p>						

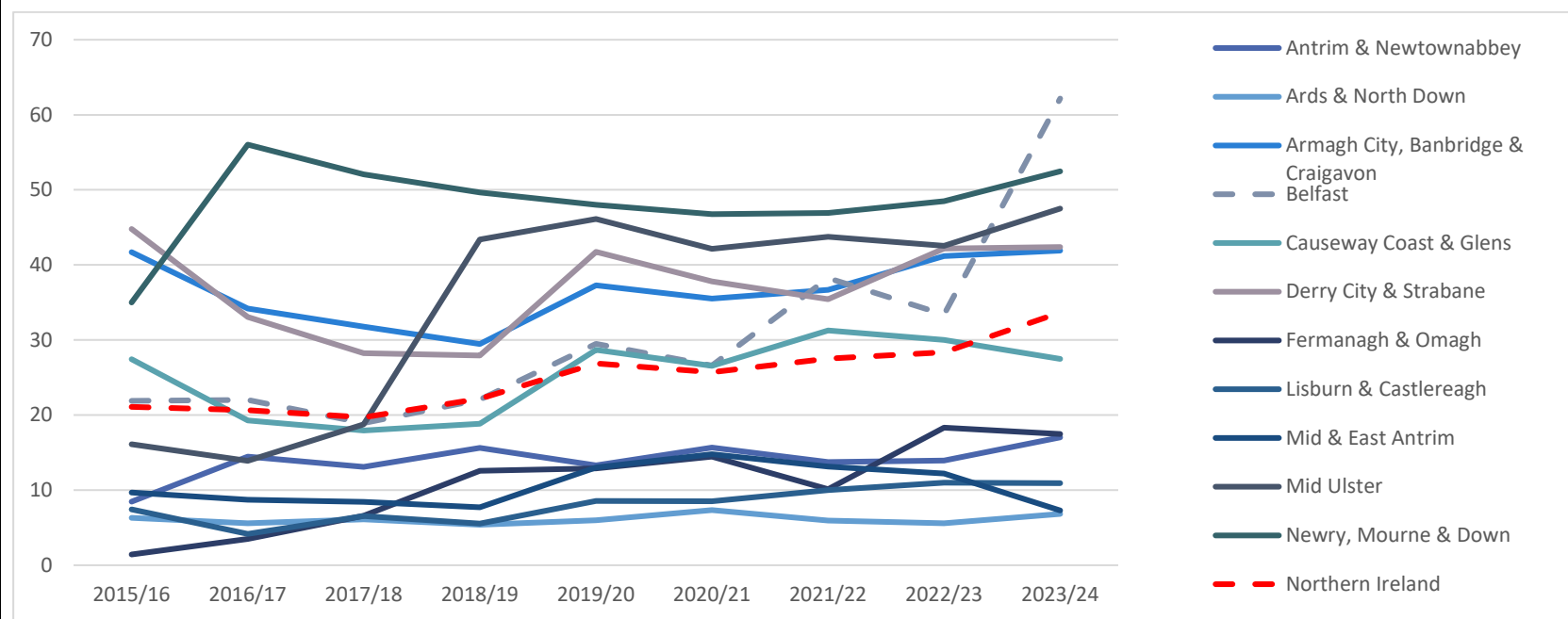
¹⁷ Source DEARA Waste Management Statistics, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics)

¹⁸ Source DEARA LAC Municipal Waste Timeseries, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics time series data | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics-time-series-data) – provisional data (DEARA release final data in November annually).

¹⁹ NISRA Population Estimates 2015-22 [Population Estimates for Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(shinyapps.io\)](https://www.shinyapps.io/population-estimates-for-northern-ireland/)

Local authority collected municipal waste energy recovery rate (%)²⁰

Our achievements include: Whilst it is preferable to prevent, reuse and recycle waste, generating energy from waste by incineration is preferable to landfill. The proportion of waste sent for energy recovery is a useful indicator to demonstrate that we helped to tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast. In line with the Northern Ireland trend, we have increased the amount of waste sent for energy recovery from 0.3% in 2009-10 and 22% in 2015-16 to 62% in 2023-24. Our performance in 2023-24 is an improvement of 29 percentage points on 33% in 2022-23 and is significantly higher than the NI rate of 34%.



²⁰ Source DEARA LAC Municipal Waste Timeseries, [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics time series data](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics-time-series-data) | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs ([daera-ni.gov.uk](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)) – provisional data (DEARA release final data in November annually).

Additional evidence of performance improvement aligned to objective 4

Further evidence to demonstrate that we helped to tackle climate change, protect our environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast is set out in our [Belfast Agenda Progress Reports](#).

Progress against our [Resilience Strategy](#) is reported to the Climate and Resilience Committee and action taken to tackle climate change to date is summarised on our website: [Climate change \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/climate-change).

Some examples of activity that have enhanced our environment and the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities, include:

- ✓ Secured the **Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful Behaviour Change Award** for our ‘impactful and pioneering’ pilot project which tackled single-use plastics.
- ✓ Launched the **Hubbub Recycling on the Go Pilot** that introduced 25 new recycling bins to the City Centre and four parks.
- ✓ Managed the **pre-loved toy appeal** for the second year and were inundated with donations to support local families during Christmas 2023.








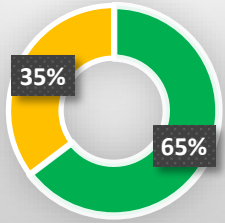
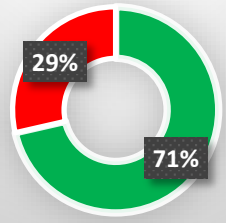
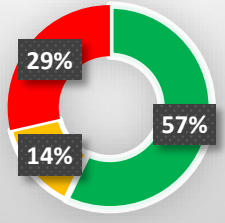
Next Steps

As a result of extensive consultation and engagement ‘our planet’ is a strategic theme of the refreshed Belfast Agenda and is a key priority in the 2024 – 28 Corporate Plan (currently in draft). This improvement objective will feature in the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 as:

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

Objective 5: Our city

Achievement of improvement objective

Improvement objective 5	Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.						
Self-assessment	Achieved – we helped tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.						
Aspect of improvement							
	General duty/ continuous improvement	Strategic effectiveness	Service quality and availability	Fairness	Sustainability	Efficiency	Innovation
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Performance summary	<p>17 Milestones</p> 		<p>7 Performance Indicators (target)</p> 		<p>7 Performance Indicators (trend)</p> 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11 (65%) milestones were achieved. 6 (35%) milestones were partially achieved. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 (71%) were on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better). 2 (29%) were adrift of target (5% or more). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 (57%) performance indicators showed positive change. 1 (14%) performance indicator showed no significant change. 2 (29%) performance indicators showed a negative change. 		

Achievement of improvement objective 5 milestones

i. Encouraged digital innovation

City SME challenge programme

- ✓ Agreed the contract with the Department for Economy worth £900,000 for the **City SME challenge programme**, which was delayed and impacted the roll out of Phase one and two.
- ✓ Held a **public launch of the programme**.
- ✓ **Received initial expressions of interest from over 130 SMEs (to date) as part of phase one**, closing date for applications is Q1 2024-25.
- ✓ **Phase two** of the programme was initiated and will be completed in 2024-25. The programme will be included in the 2024-25 improvement plan.

Building citizen digital innovation capacity (CODI)

- ✓ Developed **partner agreement** on the Weaver's Cross proposal with Translink, MRP and Ormeau Labs.
- ✓ Produced a concept note with partners and submitted to Peace Plus for review, support in finding a lead partner and to develop a **business case for funding**. The review was positive and UU and Digital Health and Care NI as potential leads on two separate applications. UU has since withdrawn, and we are awaiting confirmation from DHCNI that they are progressing with an application.
 - Separate, additional **funding secured** by Ormeau Labs from Peace Plus to deliver training for over 4,500 16 to 25-year-olds.
- ✓ Establishing the core functions for **phase one CODI delivery will be delayed to 2024-25**.

Establish first Smart District innovation hub

- ✓ Agreed the location to establish the first **Smart District Innovation Hub at Weaver's Cross** with partners.
- ✓ Experienced delays in **programme design**, plan to finalise programme design in Q2 2024-25.
- ✓ Delays in programme design had a knock-on impact on **submitting the business case for funding – infrastructure and SME competition**.
- ✓ **First SME challenge call competition** delayed until 2024-25 as a result.

ii. Revitalised and supported our city centre

- ✓ Issued over 400 application packs for the **Vacant to Vibrant scheme** and approved **18 applications** (1 subsequent withdrawal). The remaining 17 applicants represent a **capital grant investment of £ 301,136.25** (with a number of additional applications ongoing) resulting in **approximately 60 employment opportunities**, and an **estimated Rates Value of £ 743,369** (subject to LPS assessment) over the course of the lease periods. A further **14 applications are in development**.
 - **Achieved total output of businesses and organisations through the scheme of £6,627,344.50 (based on sales for Year 1 and Year 2)**. This will be a significant boost for the local independent businesses, and organisations coming through the scheme, that are investing in the city centre. It also had a significant impact on the wider supply chain and city economy (**with an estimated direct and indirect Impact of £9.7m**). All this strengthens the attractiveness of Belfast as a place to invest, live and visit. Of the 17 applications that are approved, 75% are for properties that are historic buildings or considered to be buildings of interest.
- ✓ Submitted **interim (year 1) review report to committee** as planned.

iii. Improved public spaces and greenways

- ✓ **Initiated the Cathedral Gardens** project and the integrated design team have commissioned a number of surveys to progress the design.
- ✓ **Completed construction of Forth Meadow Community Greenway** and signage works will be completed subject to council decision.
- ✓ The **Lagan Gateway project** remains at development stage and outstanding issues have been resolved. The planning application is well developed, and submission is anticipated in 2024-25.
- ✓ Progressed **Belfast City Hall** statues and stained-glass windows. The statues of Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney were unveiled on International Women's Day 8 March 2024. The stained-glass windows project has been moved to Stage 2 delivery on the capital programme and concepts are being developed with completion anticipated in 2024-25.

Improvement objective 5 indicators and performance measures

Performance indicators	2019	2021	2023	2024 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme	New	New	145	30	61	↔	Not applicable
The total number of previously vacant city centre properties that have been awarded the Vacant to Vibrant grant and will become occupied as a result of the intervention.	-	-	5	16	17	↑	Not applicable
The total amount of funding (£) awarded to city centre traders to address vacancy.	-	-	£92,432.70	£290,000*	£301,136	↑	Not applicable
The total number of people engaged (traders, developers, business owners, landlords etc) in assisting with the completion of applications to the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.	-	-	219	360	405	↑	Not applicable

*Rationale for funding target = 10 awards@25k + 2 awards @ 15k + 4 awards @ 2.5k = 16 awards @ 290k

Statutory performance indicators ²¹	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24	Trend	Commentary if target not met
Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications	37	31	57.2	30 weeks (average processing time)	64.4 weeks	↓	Statutory, is included in 2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan. See collective commentary below.
Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications	14	17	19.8	15 weeks (average processing time)	20.6 weeks	↓	Statutory, is included in 2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan. See collective commentary below.
Percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks	93.2	83%	88.8%	70% cases concluded within 39 weeks	88.6%	↑	See collective commentary below.
Commentary if target not met							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is ongoing at a regional level to improve the NI planning system and to develop a new Regional Performance Framework. The council took a lead role in the Regional Planning Service Improvement Programme. The NI Audit Office and NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee are aware of the systemic issues with the operation of the NI planning system and the implementation of the new regional Planning Portal IT system. In addition, at a local level, a council Planning Service Improvement Plan to address planning performance is in place, being implemented and progress monitored through the Council Planning Committee. Completed actions to improve the council planning service include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reorganisation of the team; and A pilot service redesign of the Planning Service. The enforcement service continues to exceed its statutory targets and incrementally recover performance that was impacted by the introduction of the new regional Planning Portal IT system in December 2022. 							

²¹ Source DfI Planning Statistics, [Planning activity statistics | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
Belfast City Council

How we compared – performance benchmarking

The volume of planning applications processed by all councils in 2023-24 was the lowest since Local Government Reform in 2015-16 and from records began in 2002-03. Belfast processed 13.1% (1,311) of all Northern Ireland planning applications in 2023-24 and 13.2% (1,289) of all planning decisions across Northern Ireland. Our performance in relation to other councils is set out below.

Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications (statutory) ²²						
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Antrim and Newtownabbey	24.2	24.6	113.4	25.1	52.1	21.1
Ards and North Down	151.0	97.0	57.0	110.8	104.5	84.7
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	23.6	45.2	54.4	31.6	47.0	27.6
Belfast	41.4	37.0	44.2	31.0	57.2	64.4
Causeway Coast and Glens	49.6	74.5	86.2	54.6	46.4	54.2
Derry City and Strabane	154.2	96.0	65.2	51.6	78.0	68.6
Fermanagh and Omagh	22.0	23.4	58.6	110.2	64.0	22.9
Lisburn and Castlereagh	78.0	55.2	79.7	106.8	87.2	56.4
Mid and East Antrim	43.2	42.4	39.2	34.7	47.6	67.4
Mid Ulster	64.7	73.2	74.1	88.0	68.1	64.0
Newry, Mourne and Down	76.6	94.0	64.6	44.3	89.0	154.8
Northern Ireland	59.0	52.8	61.4	49.8	57.8	46.5
Our achievements include: Major planning applications are of economic, environmental, and social importance. Since 2017-18, Belfast has processed on average 30 major planning applications a year. We processed 30 applications during 2023-24 which was a slight increase on 25 in the preceding year. In 2023-24, the majority (8 out of 11) of councils did not meet 30-week target, including Belfast who ranked 7 th out of 11 councils.						

²² Source DfI Planning Statistics, [Planning activity statistics | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#), Table 3.2.6 - Major development applications processing times by council

Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications (statutory) ²³						
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Antrim and Newtownabbey	24.2	24.6	113.4	25.1	13.4	13.0
Ards and North Down	151.0	97.0	57.0	110.8	19.9	16.0
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	23.6	45.2	54.4	31.6	21.2	24.6
Belfast	41.4	37.0	44.2	31.0	19.8	20.6
Causeway Coast and Glens	49.6	74.5	86.2	54.6	21.2	31.4
Derry City and Strabane	154.2	96.0	65.2	51.6	21.0	23.4
Fermanagh and Omagh	22.0	23.4	58.6	110.2	13.0	13.2
Lisburn and Castlereagh	78.0	55.2	79.7	106.8	32.7	42.4
Mid and East Antrim	43.2	42.4	39.2	34.7	8.6	9.4
Mid Ulster	64.7	73.2	74.1	88.0	21.6	16.1
Newry, Mourne and Down	76.6	94.0	64.6	44.3	21.6	33.7
Northern Ireland	59.0	52.8	61.4	49.8	19.0	20.8
<p>Our achievements include: Local planning applications are normally residential and smaller commercial applications. In 2023-24, the majority (8 out of 11) of councils did not meet the 15-week target, including Belfast who ranked 6th out of 11 councils. Whilst processing times were slightly longer in Belfast during 2023-24 than 2022-23, we have improved in the sense that we have more than halved the average number of weeks it takes to process local planning applications since 2018-19, despite the ongoing issues with the Regional Planning IT systems outlined earlier.</p>						

²³ Source DfI Planning Statistics, [Planning activity statistics | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#), Table 4.2.6 - Local development applications processing times by council

Percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks (statutory) ²⁴						
Council area	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Antrim and Newtownabbey	94.0%	98.7%	90.8%	78.3%	91.2%	96.0%
Ards and North Down	76.9%	81.1%	62.0%	41.0%	62.9%	55.7%
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	80.0%	85.9%	77.7%	86.3%	70.6%	82.7%
Belfast	86.8%	93.2%	66.2%	83.0%	88.8%	88.6%
Causeway Coast and Glens	80.1%	87.6%	66.5%	78.8%	67.7%	58.7%
Derry City and Strabane	53.6%	78.1%	73.3%	77.9%	74.9%	75.0%
Fermanagh and Omagh	84.9%	81.1%	56.6%	60.6%	74.1%	79.6%
Lisburn and Castlereagh	83.8%	84.5%	83.6%	83.9%	80.0%	83.2%
Mid and East Antrim	88.2%	88.8%	82.6%	90.5%	89.5%	87.3%
Mid Ulster	77.4%	90.1%	88.6%	75.2%	46.4%	58.8%
Newry, Mourne and Down	52.9%	36.2%	40.9%	48.5%	58.6%	60.0%
Northern Ireland	81.0%	81.4%	69.9%	70.4%	74.2%	76.4%
Our achievements include: The number of enforcement cases opened and closed during 2023-24 across Northern Ireland was the lowest since 2015-16. The majority of councils met the 70% target in 2023-24, with Belfast ranked 2 nd out of 11 councils.						

²⁴ Source DfI Planning Statistics, [Planning activity statistics | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#), Table 6.2.5 - Enforcement cases conclusion times by planning authority

Additional evidence of performance improvement aligned to objective 5

Evidence that we revitalised our city in 2023-24 and helped it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

- ✓ The vacancy rate for the city centre (retail core) fell to 21% during 2023 which was a decrease from 23% in 2022 (Belfast City Centre Regeneration Tracker).
- ✓ The DfC reports that the trend in % of non-domestic vacant properties in Belfast City is declining as follows:

Percentage of vacant properties Belfast (Source: DfC Town Centre Database – non-domestic vacancy rates).				
October 2023	October 2022	October 2021	October 2019	October 2018
33.7%	33.7%	35.2%	34.1%	34.5%

Whilst council does not claim full attribution for the reduction in vacancy, our work (along with partners) has helped to deliver this positive outcome. Improvement demonstrated through the delivery of key programmes such as:

- ✓ Our [Future City Centre Programme](#)
- ✓ [Belfast Regional City Deal \(BRCD\)](#). Key achievements to date are summarised [online](#).
- ✓ Belfast Stories – a report summarising progress – the Story so Far Report can be accessed via: <https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/9582/widgets/27494/documents/55443>
- ✓ [Equality Action Plan 2020 – 2024](#), [Disability Action Plan 2022 – 2025](#), [Age Friendly Belfast Plan 2022 – 2026](#) and [Good Relations Programme](#)
- ✓ [Publication of our Language Action Plan 2023-26](#)
- ✓ Business as usual processes to ensure our programmes and policies are inclusive by fulfilling our obligations under the S75 NI act through [equality screening](#).

Examples of activity that revitalised our city in 2023-24 and helped the city to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way, including:

- ✓ Supported 15 pre and early-stage entrepreneurs experiencing additional barriers to enterprise through the **Inclusive Enterprise Pathway programme**.
- ✓ Developed the **Belfast Business Promise accreditation scheme** and piloted with 42 organisations in preparation for formal launch in 2024-25.

- ✓ Introduced the requirement, through our [Social Value Procurement Policy](#), for our suppliers²⁵ to pay the Real Living Wage to all of their employees and not use zero hours contracts for any of their employees.
- ✓ Developed a new **toolkit** in conjunction with Tourism NI, Visit Belfast, and the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance to help tourism and hospitality providers in the city become more **inclusive and accessible** to visitors with disabilities.
- ✓ Convened the "**Building an inclusive labour market: opportunities, challenges, and solutions**" conference in partnership with NICVA and the Belfast Labour Market Partnership, with funding from the Department for Communities.
- ✓ Ran the **Grey to Green initiative**, including grant awards to transform urban spaces.
- ✓ Delivered a diverse range of **events** at our warm, indoor public park venue, [2 Royal Avenue](#).
- ✓ Generated **additional economic activity** amounting to £30.8 million and created almost 6,000 paid employment opportunities through the 2023 editions of Belsonic Festival at Belfast's Ormeau Park, and Emerge Music Festival at Boucher Road Playing Fields²⁶
- ✓ Developed 6 Asylum **Support Programmes** through the Home Office Full Dispersal Fund.

Next steps

As a result of extensive consultation and engagement 'our place' is a strategic theme of the refreshed Belfast Agenda and is a key priority in the 2024-28 Corporate Plan (currently in draft). This improvement objective will feature in the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 as:

- Our place – we will create a more vibrant, attractive, and connected city (including city centre).

²⁵ For all tenders over £30,000 - [Social Value Procurement Policy \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁶ [Two of Belfast's biggest outdoor music events have generated over £30m for the NI economy \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](#)

6 Corporate performance 2023-24

The year 2023-24 saw the conclusion of our 2020-24 Corporate Plan. Our Corporate Plan helps shape our services and drives our annual Corporate Delivery Plan and business planning processes. During 2023-24, we undertook significant engagement to refresh and launch our Community Plan (the Belfast Agenda) and develop our draft 2024-28 Corporate Plan. This provided us with the opportunity to take stock of our corporate performance and reassess our priorities as we move into a much different socio-economic operating context than the previous corporate plan.

This section of the report provides a high-level performance summary of the council's annual Corporate Delivery Plan 2023-24:

- i. key deliverables and improvements, as set out within the Corporate Delivery Plan 2023-24;
- ii. service performance achieved across statutory and core services, facilities, and amenities; and
- iii. continuous improvement awards and accreditations achieved.

This is in addition to the statutory and self-imposed performance indicators and delivery already outlined in section five of this report and is thematically structured as per below.

Corporate Delivery Plan 2023-24 – key deliverables and improvements



1. Our services

Planning service

- Agreed an updated **Planning Improvement Plan** at the Planning Committee in December 2023.
- Continued to work with the DfI to implement new modules and improve the **regional planning IT system**.
- Approved **1,600 new homes**.
- Determined **30 major and 1,300 local planning** applications.
- Granted over **700 planning permissions**.

Regulatory and enforcement services

- Continued to carry out a wide range of **inspection and enforcement** activity including:
 - **703** health and safety
 - **3,483** housing
 - **2,336** food safety
 - **1,530** daytime and **3,767** nighttime noise requests
 - Issued **884** fixed penalty notices for littering.
- Commenced implementation of the **Windsor Framework** arrangements at Belfast Port.
- Undertook a review of **Port Health IT system** requirements to determine a 'one system approach' being developed where feasible with partners.

Building control

- Launched the permanent **Pavement café licensing policy** in February 2024.
- Continued to implement the revised **Dual Language Street Sign** policy with 158 applications processed for 86 individual streets by April 2024.
- Processed **434 entertainment licenses**.
- Carried out **829 inspections of entertainment premises**.
- Processed **192 applications relating to street trading, petroleum, cinemas, and road closures**.
- Dealt with **179 dangerous structures**.

The circular economy and urban waste

- Emptied **10.5 million bins** (including Bryson collections).
- Collected **70,000+ bulky waste items**.
- Completed **Phase 1 of the Paint Reuse Scheme**.

Other

- Registered **3,987 births, 3,294 deaths, 1,500 marriages and 20 civil partnerships**.



2. Inclusive economic recovery

Belfast Region City Deal

- Delivered a successful **Business Engagement Event** with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- Supported the **Digital Transformation Flexible Fund** to move into full operation.
- Approved **15 Outline Business Cases** and **2 Full Business Cases**.
- **Signed 9 contracts for funding** – with a value of approximately £500m.

City centre

- Refreshed and delivered the **Future City Centre Programme**.
- Completed work on **The City Centre Living Vision**.
- Progressed several priorities and projects identified within **Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy**.
- Completed Phase 2 of **Belfast Entries Project**.

Education, skills and employment

- Supported and upskilled 867 residents (120 with a disability) through the **Gateway to Choices Services**, 88 progressed into employment and 170 moved into further education or training.
- Held a **Jobs Fair**, which attracted 850 participants and 64 employers.
- Delivered the **GCSE Maths and English Support Programme** with 238 GCSE English and Maths places allocated.

Culture and tourism

- Welcomed 213,000 visitors to **Belfast Zoo**.
- Welcomed 1m+ visitors to **St George's Market**, 1m+ visitors to the **Christmas Market** and attracted over 25,000 visitors to the **Twilight Market**
- Welcomed 310,500 visitors to the **City Hall** for our exhibition and guided tours.
- Successfully launched the **Belfast 2024 programme** which will deliver an ambitious cultural celebration for our city.

City development and investment

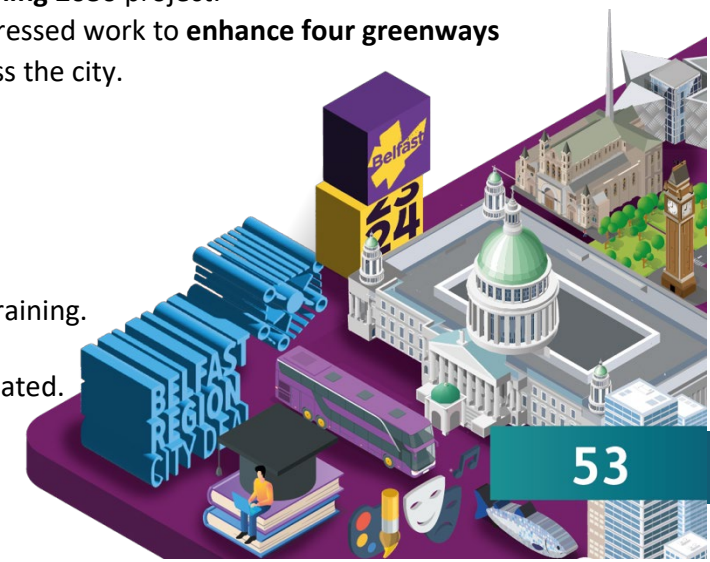
- Launched the process to secure a long-term partner for the delivery of **£630m GDV housing led placemaking regeneration**.
- Continued to engage on **major private sector led regeneration schemes** to ensure alignment with council's strategic corporate priorities.

Inclusive growth

- Commenced a pilot phase for **the Inclusive Growth Toolkit** with 6 diverse projects across council.
- Successfully launched the **Belfast Business Promise**.
- Commenced the development of a proposition to maximise **corporate social responsibility**.
- Implemented our new **Social Value Procurement Policy** to help drive inclusive economic growth.

Access, connectivity, active and sustainable travel

- **Progressed A Bolder Vision** through projects including **Cathedral Gardens Active Travel Hub**.
- Commenced **The Horizon Europe Urban Planning 2030** project.
- Progressed work to **enhance four greenways** across the city.



3. Community recovery

Good relations

- Completed the delivery of the **PEACE IV Local Action Plan**, with 4,500 participants engaging in project activity.
- Completed construction of the 12km **Forth Meadow Community Greenway**.
- Supported 33,436 participants to take part in Good Relations projects across the 9 themes of the **Good Relations Action Plan**.
- Developed and submitted an exciting and ambitious **£15.1 Million PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan** for 2024-27.

Leisure and sports development

- Completed and opened the new **Templemore Baths** leisure facility.
- Continued developmental work to progress plans for **Phase 4 of the Leisure Transformation Programme**.
- Delivered the **Boxing Strategy Action Plan** which engaged over 6,700 participants.
- Progressed the development of the **Belfast Physical Activity and Sport Development Strategy** and commenced the development of a new **Pitches Strategy**.

Neighbourhood regeneration

- Implemented Phase 5 of council's **Alleygate Programme**.
- Continued implementation of the **Local Investment Fund** and **Belfast Investment Fund** projects.
- Completed the **Loughside** playground refurbishment with works ongoing at **North Link playground** and **New Lodge playground**.
- Continued the development of **Urban Villages projects** with the completion of Marrowbone Millennium Park, Healthy Living Centre and ABC Trust Health and Leisure Hub Phase 1 and with Pitt Park nearing completion.

Housing and regeneration

- Worked with city partners to overcome obstacles to **increasing residential development**.
- Commenced feasibility assessments including planning appraisals in respect of the **Citywide Strategic Site Assessments**.
- Re-issued the reframed the **Inner North-West Development Brief**.

Community capacity

- Provided funding to 43 organisations through **Capacity funding** at a value of £1.845m and 87 organisations through **Revenue funding** at a value of £1.342m.
- Provided **£1.4m of funding** to provide a range of **advice services** including generalist advice, Citywide Tribunal services and Welfare Reform Mitigations (face to face advice).
- Delivered Year 1 targets in the **2023-27 Age Friendly Plan** including co-ordination of **Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership**.
- Launch of **Older People's Connection Hub** in which will provide fortnightly access to signposting and information.

Physical programme

- Managed an **investment programme** of 70 projects with investment of £90 million, including £55 million of partnership projects.
- Completed **20 major capital projects** through our physical programme including sport and leisure facilities, active travel infrastructure and community facilities.



4. Environmental recovery

Climate adaption and mitigation

- Developed and completed a **Climate Risk Assessment** for the council estate and operations.
- Commenced development of our new draft **Climate Action Plan**.
- Developed a **draft LEV strategy** with focus on maximising our assets with commercial opportunities to install charging points and the transition of our entire fleet to low emission vehicles.
- Funded 19 projects via the **Climate fund** with a further 10 applications under review by the Climate Programme Board, some examples include: Pilot to improve recycling rates, period waste product and paint re-use.
- Commenced **Climate Data analytics** scoping which will support a proof of concept for future data and analytics projects.

City wide climate adaption and mitigation

- Completed a **Tree Canopy Mapping/Tree Establishment Strategy** for soft and hard landscapes to share with our One Million Tree partners.
- Developed a **Belfast Tree Strategy** with a 10-year lifespan and commenced delivery of the **Year 1 Action Plan**.
- Completed and launched the **Circular Economy** Strategic Assessment/ business case completed with follow up development and feasibility being scoped.
- Delivered **climate city risks and opportunities roundtable discussion in 2024** with funding being sought to deliver full city climate adaptation programme development.
- Implemented **UPSURGE nature-based solutions**.

Improve urban air quality

- Continued delivery of the **Air Quality Action Plan** which remains on track. The **2023 Progress Report** has been accepted and published by DAERA.
- Secured funding from **DAERA via the LAQM grant** and purchased air monitoring equipment and a monitoring regime for the assessment of air quality outside four schools.
- Continued regulation and enforcement of the **Industrial Pollution, Prevention and Control regime** for the Belfast area with currently 120 Permits issued.
- Responded to responded to **70 planning consultations** (via The Air Quality Team) on matters relating to **air quality management**.
- Continued engagement with DAERA on the **Clean Air Strategy**.



5. Strategic planning frameworks

Local Development Plan

- Formally adopted the **LDP strategy** ([Adoption of LDP Plan Strategy | Belfast Local Development Plan \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](#)). The associated suite of **Supplementary Planning Guidance** documents were also adopted at the same time.
- Commenced the production of **The Local Policies Plan** with a timetable and project plan.



Belfast Agenda

- Successfully **refreshed and relaunched the Belfast Agenda** and associated action plans with **new governance arrangements** in place.
- Undertook a review of the **VCSE Panel** with recommendations to be brought forward for the nomination of new panel.
- Developed a **co-design framework** with pilot projects to commence in 2024-25.
- Worked with our Community Planning Partnership and Boards to focus on the **implementation** of new performance dashboard style reporting arrangements.



6. Organisational foundations

People

- Successfully launched our new **People Strategy** and 3-year action plan.
- Approved our **Health and Wellbeing Strategy** and **3-year action plan**.
- Implemented improved **family friendly policies**.
- Delivered training and developmental opportunities such as **LGBT+ awareness raising, JAM Card training, cultural competence and race discrimination awareness training** and **one-to-one coaching** for senior managers.
- Implemented the new **Elected Member Induction and Development Programme** and revised the **Elected Member Personal Development Planning** process.

Asset management

- Continued to develop the **Asset Management Strategy and Plan**.
- Commenced **Asset Management System Phase 2** implementation focusing on Property Maintenance functionality.
- Conducted management of over **275 leases** with investment rental income of £6m+.
- Progressed projects which will progress **housing development** in the city including Gasworks and Upper White Rock.

Customer focus

- Developed a suite of **customer performance and satisfaction** measurements.
- Increased automated **digital channels** by introducing a webform for Bulky Waste collections, achieving 40% shift from phones.
- **Onboarded** Phase 3 services to the **Customer Hub** – Open Spaces and Street Scene, City Protection, Community Safety and Park Wardens.
- Developed a **new complaints handling procedure** across Local Authorities in NI
- Delivered **process improvements** to enhance the customer experience – call resolution time, quality of service.

Planning and performance

- Worked to develop and agree a new **Corporate Plan 2024-28** and **Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-28**.
- Commenced the review of **planning and performance management framework** with work currently ongoing.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

- Published our **Language Action Plan 2023-26**.
- Completed the pre-consultation engagement on a **draft Irish Language Policy**.
- Continued implementation of the current **Equality Scheme**, focusing on high-risk areas, including training and screening development.
- Commenced the review of five-year **Equality Scheme**.
- Implemented Year 2 of **Disability Action Plan**.

Continuous improvement

- Focused on the **AGRS audit actions** with 3 completed in full and 7 partially completed.
- Implemented a **'one front door' approach** for all work requests to CI.
- Commissioned the **external review of Continuous Improvement** which has provided a number of recommendations for implementation.



Continuous improvement - awards and accreditations

During 2023-24 the council achieved or retained a number of awards and accreditations, demonstrating community achievements, our continuous improvement journey and excellence in customer and service quality standards, including:

Marketing and communications

- Our **Marketing and Communications** won Best integrated Campaign and House PR team of the year at the **PRide Awards**.
- The Belfast Zoo marketing team won a **BIAZA award** which recognises success within the zoo and aquarium community.

Environment

- Maintained **ISO45001** (Health and Safety), **ISO14001** (Environment) and **ISO9001** (Quality) standards across Waste Management services.

Economic development

- St George's Market was awarded the **Best Large Indoor Market** in the UK at the **Great British Market Awards**, beating 20 other UK markets.
- Awarded '**Council of the Year**' at the **Social Enterprise Northern Ireland Awards** in October 2023 for the second consecutive year.

Capital development

- The restoration of St. Comgall's was one of the projects shortlisted for the **Royal Society of Ulster Architects'** (RSUA) best works of architecture in Northern Ireland in 2024. (<https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/stcomgalls>)
- Templemore Baths, St Comgalls' and Patrick Street development were shortlisted for **RICS Awards** in heritage and refurbishment and revitalisation categories, with Templemore Baths securing the **Heritage Project Award** and St Comgall's the **Refurbishment Award**.
- St Joseph's Church in Sailortown was also nominated for a **RICS award** in the **best maintenance of a historic building category**.
- Templemore Baths was shortlisted for **Best New Build** or **Design of the Year - at UK Active Awards**.
- The Belfast City Cemetery Heritage Project was shortlisted in the **APSE Service Awards**.

Equality and inclusion

- Awarded **Autism NI Impact Award Champion**.
- Obtained **AAA* status** as a **Disability Positive accredited organisation** which recognises our commitment to the employment of disabled people.
- Awarded **Onus Safe City and Onus Safeplace platinum level**.



7 Financial performance 2023-24

The [Statement of Accounts](#) sets out our annual financial performance. These accounts are audited and scrutinised by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). Despite the challenging financial position faced by the council going into 2023-24 we worked to deliver the financial strategy for 2023-24. We reported a £48K underspend²⁷ in service delivery at the end of 2023-24, in comparison to a £2 million overspend²⁸ in service delivery at the end of 2022-23. Even with the sustained, well-documented financial challenges we continue to deliver services and our objectives within budget and to recover from the economic legacy of Covid-19.

Key achievements and improvements include:

- Maintained proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of our resources for at least the preceding 3 years (NIAO Annual Audit Letter).
- Identified as being financially resilient (NIAO Annual Audit Letter 2022-23).
- Produced financial statements which were certified without qualification for at least the three years (Belfast City Council Financial Reports).
- Maintained an adequate and effective framework of governance, risk management and control for the preceding four years (Annual Governance Statement).
- Implementation of a range of audit recommendations, including the closure of a significant number of outstanding audit recommendations.
- Developed a draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and presented to committee and full council.
- Finalised the implementation of a new finance system that will reduce costs, waste, and improve cash flow to our suppliers (75% of whom are suppliers within Northern Ireland, representing over £80m of expenditure to local businesses²⁹) – system will be rolled-out in 2024-25.

²⁷ 2023-24 Annual Statement of Accounts – will be available on our [website](#) by 30th September 2024.

²⁸ <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/getmedia/0b373e87-8437-4b1b-9182-202a6e2e7929/belfast-city-council-statement-of-accounts-2023.pdf>

²⁹ Belfast City Council Annual Procurement Report 2022-23

How we compared – financial performance

Performance benchmarking – prompt payments

Prompt payment of invoices is an indicator of a healthy organisation with effective internal controls and corporate governance. However, prompt payment of invoices is also important to support the cash-flow of small and medium sized enterprises. Therefore, in 2024-25, we will use this as an indicator of how well we are helping small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow.

Prompt payment performance – percentage of invoices paid within 30 calendar days ³⁰									
Council area or organisation	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend
Antrim and Newtownabbey	86%	82%	86%	89%	80%	80%		84%	
Ards and North Down	81%	90%	93%	96%	98%	97%		96%	
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	60%	82%	67%	91%	95%	95%		96%	
Belfast	88%	91%	93%	93%	94%	92%	90%	93%	↑
Causeway Coast and Glens	82%	86%	79%	87%	92%	82%		87%	
Derry City and Strabane	82%	78%	81%	79%	65%	74%		82%	
Fermanagh and Omagh	87%	94%	94%	94%	94%	96%		94%	
Lisburn and Castlereagh	76%	85%	91%	87%	91%	87%		88%	
Mid and East Antrim	84%	83%	86%	84%	95%	87%		81%	

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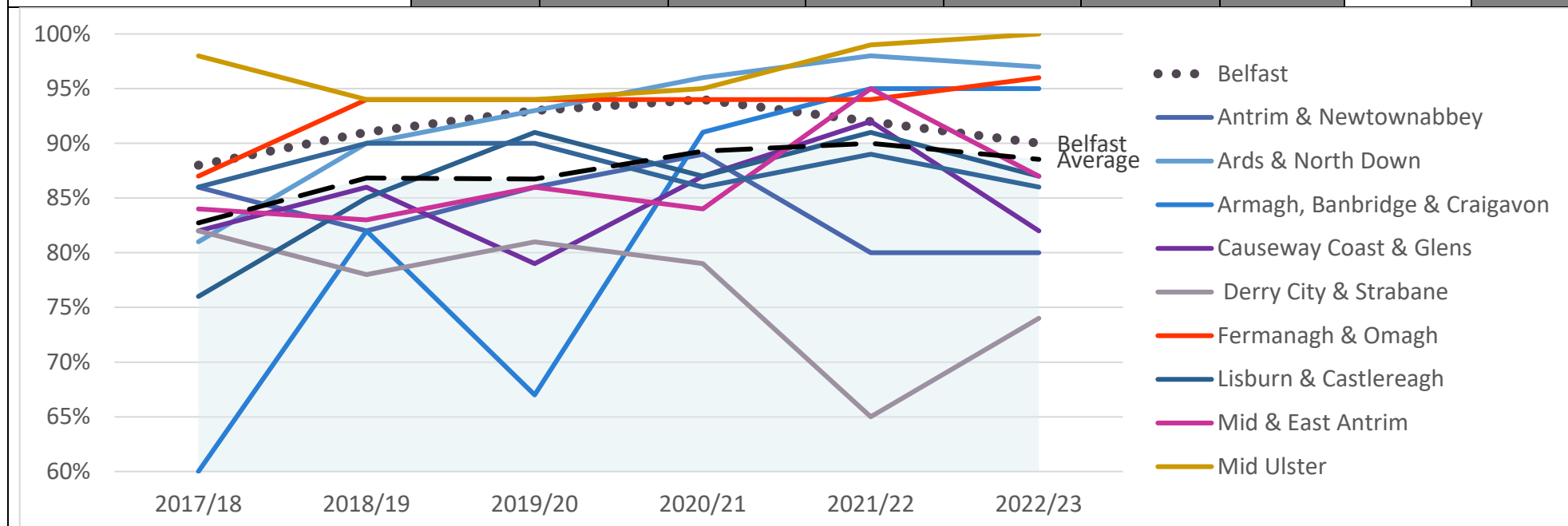
[2017-18 – 2021-22 Appendix 8 Local Government Auditor Report 2023](#)

[2022-23 Northern Ireland Audit Office](#)

[2023-24 Target – Minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel 13/06/23](#)

[2023-24 BCC Actual provided by HR – Actual performance of other councils not available from NIAO until approximately Autumn 2024.](#)

Mid Ulster	98%	94%	94%	95%	99%	100%		99%	
Newry, Mourne and Down	86%	90%	90%	86%	89%	86%		94%	
Northern Ireland	83%	87%	87%	89%	90%	89%		90%	
Northern Ireland Civil Service				97%	98%	97%		97%	
Dublin City Council								94%	



Our key achievements include: Councils are encouraged to pay suppliers as promptly as possible, although, unlike the Northern Ireland Civil Service, we do not have statutory prompt payment targets. Regardless, we endeavour to pay 90 per cent of valid invoices within 30 days. We have continued to steadily improve our prompt payment performance since 2017-18. We process almost 3 times more invoices than any other council in Northern Ireland and are ranked 4th in 2023-24 for prompt payment.

Performance benchmarking – staff attendance and service availability

Our staff are our greatest asset in ensuring service continuity and availability as well as the delivery of our corporate objectives. Our performance in relation to the other councils is set out below. Councils' individual remits and staffing profiles vary which can impact upon absence levels and should be considered when comparing performance.

Sickness Absence (Average number of days lost per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)) ³¹									
Council area or organisation	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 Target	2023-24 Actual	Trend
Antrim and Newtownabbey	11.9	13.7	13.2	11.1	19.7	13.3			
Ards and North Down	16.2	14.2	14.2	10.6	14.2	15.7			
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	16.1	16.7	18.3	15.7	20.5	19.9			
Belfast	13.7	13.7	13.6	10.8	16.3	17.1	14.85	17.00	↑
Causeway Coast and Glens	15.8	17.1	17.7	12.4	19.2	17.0			
Derry City and Strabane	14.0	12.3	14.5	10.4	16.8	16.5			
Fermanagh and Omagh	12.9	10.4	13.8	9.7	13.1	11.9			
Lisburn and Castlereagh	16.7	13.3	13.8	11.5	13.6	15.8			

³¹ Sources:

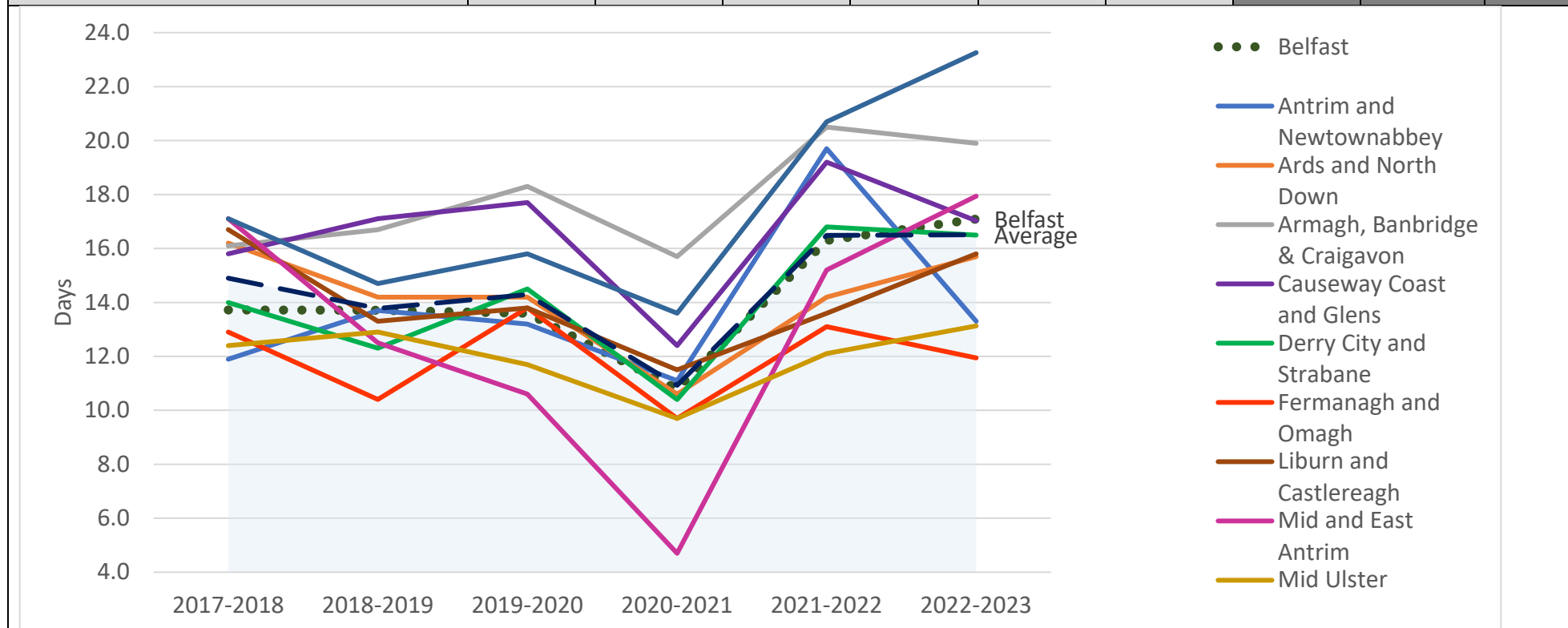
[2017-18 – 2021-22 Appendix 8 Local Government Auditor Report 2023](#)

[2022-23 Northern Ireland Audit Office](#)

[2023-24 Target – Minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel 13/06/23](#)

[2023-24 BCC Actual provided by HR – Actual performance of other councils not available from NIAO until approximately Autumn 2024.](#)

Mid and East Antrim	17.1	12.5	10.6	4.7	15.2	17.9			
Mid Ulster	12.4	12.9	11.7	9.7	12.1	13.1			
Newry, Mourne and Down	17.1	14.7	15.8	13.6	20.7	23.3			
Northern Ireland	14.9	13.8	14.3	10.9	16.5	16.5			



Our key achievements include: Following a decrease in staff absence during Covid-19 in 2020-21 (when staff were furloughed or working from home), absence rates increased for the majority of councils from 2021-22 to 2022-23, and out of all NI councils we were ranked 8th in 2022-23.

In addition to our ongoing training programme, wellbeing initiatives and departmental attendance improvement plans, we continue to take the following action to support the health and wellbeing of all our employees:

- Approved our Workplace Health and Wellbeing Strategy and action plan for launch in 2024-25.
- Promotion of the council's active travel plan, including access to Cycle to Work scheme and discounted leisure centre membership.
- Introduced enhanced leave provisions in February 2023.
- Understanding the Attendance Policy training is now mandatory for new managers.

The general trend towards increased sickness absence in Belfast City Council and the reasons for absence (Covid-19, aging population, poorer overall health, homeworking and workstyles and NHS waiting lists) are commensurate with the wider national trend³².

That said, the table below shows that the percentage of staff with 100% attendance increased during 2023-24 which is higher than pre-Covid-19 levels.

% of staff with 100% attendance ³³	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
	37.08%	61.85%	39.37%	37.43%	41.78%

³² UUEPC, December 2023, Sickness Absence: Lessons for Northern Ireland Businesses and Managers: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/epc/pdf/2023/sickness-absence-lessons-for-northern-ireland-businesses-and-managers/Sickness-Absence-Dec-23-Final.pdf>

³³ Source:

[2019-20 - Minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel 08/06/21](#)

[2020-21 - Minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel 08/06/21](#)

[2021-22 Minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel 07/06/22](#)

[2022-23 - Minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel 13/06/23](#)

[2023-24 - Minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel 04/06/24](#)

Appendix 1: Northern Ireland Audit Office recommendations

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) put forward proposals for improvement which assist the council to continuously improve. Below is a brief summary of NIAO observations and action taken by the council to implement the proposals.

NIAO observations	Council action
2020-21	
Not all of the indicators published by the council are measured annually, but for those that are, it would be useful to present any historical data that is available to illustrate data trends and to more fully comply with the requirement of the Section 92 of the Act.	COMPLETED in 2021-22 Year End Performance Improvement Self-Assessment Report.
As we noted in the previous s95 report milestones are published in the Self- Assessment report under each Improvement Objective however these do not appear in the associated Improvement Plan. Whilst milestones are within the Operational Plan, this is not a published document. It is therefore difficult to understand how these link between the Improvement Plan and the Self-Assessment report.	COMPLETED Milestones included in 2023-24 Improvement Plan and 2023-24 Year End Self-Assessment Report.
2021-22	
The council should consider ways to ensure that Self-Assessment reports provide a comprehensive and useful overview of how the council has performed across its wider corporate activities.	COMPLETED This report provides an overview of our wider corporate performance.
It is desirable that when the council publish their self-assessment of their performance against the plan for 2021-22 that this report provides a comprehensive overview of performance against the full range of activities that are detailed in the Improvement Plan.	COMPLETED A comprehensive overview of performance against the full range of activities that are detailed in the Improvement Plan is provided in this report.
Where council have not met its statutory performance standards during the year, council should explain why that could not be achieved and what steps have been taken to rectify any issues as per the requirement under Section 89(5) [...] it is important for the council to provide adequate meaningful explanations where performance targets have not been met.	COMPLETED Explanations provided within this report where targets have not been met.

2022-23	
<p>In order to provide the reader with a better overview of why objectives have been removed or merged, it would be beneficial if council provided adequate explanations for doing so.</p>	<p>Whilst our improvement objectives were reworded in the 2023-24 Performance Improvement Plan there was no material change.</p> <p>Within the 2023-24 Performance Improvement Plan each improvement objective includes the following section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this an improvement objective? <p>Within this report, the self-assessment of each improvement objective contains the following section that clearly links the 2023-24 Improvement Objective to the 2024-25 Improvement Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next steps.
<p>Although the PIP includes a summary table which clearly shows which improvement objective met each of the seven statutory criteria, it would be beneficial for the council to include more narrative in the PIP on how this statutory criteria has been met to enable to reader to more clearly link each improvement objective to the statutory criteria.</p>	<p>COMPLETED</p> <p>Each improvement objective has been clearly linked to the statutory criteria in this report.</p>
<p>Continue to encourage participation in order to ensure improvement objectives meet the needs of the community as a whole. Alternative methods to encourage engagement should be explored by the council to ensure that it is able to achieve a balanced assessment of the needs of the community as a whole.</p>	<p>COMPLETED for the 2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan. We received more than double the responses from the preceding year. The 2024-25 consultation and engagement process is set out here: Performance Improvement Plan 2024 - 2025 - Identifying our performance improvement objectives for 2024-25 (belfastcity.gov.uk)</p> <p>A summary of the consultation exercise and its findings were reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21/06/24 on pages 7-8 of the SP&R Committee report.</p>

2023-24	
The council should continue to explore alternative methods to encourage engagement on the performance improvement objectives, to allow the objectives to better reflect the views of the city as a whole.	COMPLETED The process for consultation and engagement for the development of the 2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan is detailed on our website .
The council does not comment on its assessment of the performance of each performance objective. The council has not included explanations why performance indicators have not been achieved or milestones have been delayed.	COMPLETED – comments and explanations contained within this report.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Self-Assessment Report should provide an explicit statement of whether each individual the Improvement Objective has been “achieved”, or “not achieved”, and should provide an indication of the next steps for the council in each area. 2. Council should ensure that adequate explanations are consistently provided in the Report where targets have not been met, or where negative trends are identified. 3. Any targets set out in the Improvement Plan should also be included within the Self-Assessment Report. This would enable the Self-Assessment report to be used as a standalone document. 4. Milestones should be accompanied by narrative/additional information explaining the status of the performance activity, i.e. whether it has been completed or not. 5. Progress of implementation of the proposals should be monitored by the Audit and Risk Panel. 	COMPLETED Points 1-5 have been actioned within/by way of this report.
Whilst explanations are provided in respect of those statutory indicators which are not achieved, we consider these should be enhanced to provide more information.	COMPLETED Explanations have been enhanced within this report to provide more information.

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