

## **Belfast City Council Response to the draft Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015**

### **Q1: Do you agree with the proposed performance indicators and standards for Councils from April 2015?**

The Council has reviewed the indicators and standards outlined in the consultation paper and is largely satisfied that these can be collected and reported as required. The Council notes that this Order has been designed to last only for the 2015-16 period and a new Order will therefore be created in 2016.

In general terms, however, it is the Council's view that the proposed indicators remain operational and output focused which does not appear to reflect the intent of Parts 10 and 12 of the Act to encourage more *outcome* based performance indicators. Although this is useful information there will of course be other measures that would provide a better picture of how well we are performing against each of the three areas covered; economic development, waste and planning.

Part 12 paragraph 89(2) requires the Department to consult councils before specifying performance indicators and standards. In future years it would be preferable if such consultation could take place in advance of a draft Order being produced rather than the Order itself being used as the opportunity to consult.

The Council also would like to make the following comments in relation to each suggested indicator.

#### ***ED 1 – The number of jobs promoted through business start-up activity.***

This PI was formerly the responsibility of Invest NI in conjunction with DETI and it represents one of the functions transferring to local government.

The Council understands that this PI is a measure of the number of new business plans completed and is used as a proxy for the number of jobs promoted. This has been proposed, in the first instance, for one year. Further clarification as to how this PI will be monitored, together with a fuller breakdown of a *business plan* definition, would be useful to ensure that it is counted in a consistent way across all eleven Councils. It is not immediately clear how the target of 325 for Belfast was reached but we understand that it relates to the April 2015 to March 2016 period and are confident that it is realistic and achievable.

The Council would like to take this opportunity to request early involvement in preparation of the content of PIs for the new 2016-17 Order in light of the ongoing work across the 11 Councils to create a new indicator around business start ups

***P1 – The number of major planning applications processed (Standard for BCC, 30 weeks)***

The Council believes that the above could be more accurately described as a PI by re-wording it to state:

‘% major applications processed within 30 weeks’

and that a ‘standard’ should be applied representing a target % which would be more capable of demonstrating improvement over time and comparison across Councils.

***P2 – The number of local planning applications processed (Standard for BCC, 15 weeks)***

The Council believes that the above could be more accurately described as a PI by re-wording it to state:

‘% local applications processed within 15 weeks’

and that a ‘standard’ should be applied representing a target % which would be more capable of demonstrating improvement over time and comparison across Councils.

***P3 – The progress of enforcement cases (Standard for BCC 70% in 39 weeks)***

The Council believes that the above could be more accurately described as a PI by re-wording it to state:

‘% enforcement cases completed within 39 weeks’

And that the ‘standard’ or target be set at 70%.

In addition to the above comments the Council would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the need for greater clarity around ownership of the planning data particularly in respect of reporting and publication. It is also assumed that the above indicators are all capable of being collected using the existing resources i.e. the Planning Portal and will not therefore necessitate an additional resource for the Council.

**W1 – The % of household waste collected by district councils that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)**

This PI has been collected by the Council for a number of years. The Council is satisfied that it should continue to be collected and subsequently reported through the WasteDataFlow system.

**W2 – The amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable local authority collected municipal waste that is landfilled**

This PI has been collected by the Council for a number of years. The Council is satisfied that it should continue to be collected and subsequently reported through the WasteDataFlow system.

**W3 – The amount of (tonnage) of local authority collected municipal waste arisings**

This data has been collected by the Council for a number of years and we are content that this information is made publically available. However, we would query the appropriateness of this measure being prescribed as a performance indicator. The waste arisings are influenced primarily by; economic conditions, seasonality, socio-economics and demographics and the level of direct influence the Council has on the level of arisings is somewhat marginal. We will of course work with the Department to deliver on its Waste Prevention Programme, in line with the requirements of the Waste Framework Directive, seeking to reduce overall waste arisings and increase recycling by 2020.

For clarification purposes we note that in Annex B paragraphs 26 & 27 of the consultation document, that reference is made to waste collected by District Councils. We assume this should also include waste collected by third parties working on behalf of the District Council.

**Q2: Do you think the proposed performance indicators and standards will contribute to the improvement of Council service provision for economic development, planning and waste management?**

The Council already collects a number of the waste management indicators and has done for some years. We agree that collection of the remaining indicators associated with the transferring functions (planning and the Regional Start Initiative or its successor programme) would be a useful starting point from which more relevant indicators may subsequently emerge.

However in general terms the Council would be keen to encourage the creation of more outcome focused indicators as these tend to better reflect the real impact on people's lives. Indicators associated with processes and operations are indicative only of how well those processes are

carried out which may not, of themselves, make any real difference to the longer term aspirations of the organisation.

Furthermore BCC believes that Councils should continue to have control over the development of its own PIs and included in the development of any future sector wide performance framework (incorporating data collection and reporting) that may emerge..

The Department must work together with Councils, as the primary statutory service provider and democratically elected body, to agree useful and relevant performance indicators and to ensure that costly or over-burdensome indicators are avoided.