



Improvement Plan

2023–2024



Belfast
City Council

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Introduction

Under the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, we have a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives and produce an annual improvement plan. This is referred to as our “Duty to Improve”.

The improvement plan does not include everything we intend to do over the year, but instead focuses on a small number of key improvement objectives agreed in consultation with local people.

Our residents have told us that they want us to provide excellent, value for money services. They’ve also told us that they want us to provide leadership for the city, so that everyone in Belfast can enjoy a good quality of life. Therefore, our improvement objectives include a mix of social, economic and environmental improvements, coupled with service improvements, to provide a broad but balanced approach to improvement.

We do a lot of our work in partnership with other organisations across the city. However, as the improvement planning process deals solely with council performance, each year we review our improvement objectives to ensure they focus on what we can do better to improve our services or improve quality of life in Belfast.

This year, we undertook a substantial re-assessment of our improvement objectives and streamlined many of our previous improvement actions, redirecting our improvement efforts and resources to where it matters most. We did this so that our improvement objectives continue to make the best impact possible and are meaningful for local people.

Our 2023-24 improvement plan comes at a time of increasing pressures on budgets and resources, both for council and for our residents. The past few years have been very difficult. Covid-19 brought unprecedented challenges for our health, for our society and for our economy. Now, the cost-of-living crisis has brought a new set of challenges. Improving what we do and how we do things is particularly important, especially if we want to maintain service levels and build a sustainable future for our ratepayers and communities.

During the pandemic, Belfast demonstrated that it was a caring and resilient city with a strong community spirit. We want this year’s improvement plan to reflect those same characteristics and values.

Our Strategic Planning Framework

The Belfast Agenda

The Belfast Agenda is the city's community plan. It was first published in 2017, following extensive engagement with residents and partners. It sets out a long-term vision for Belfast and shared outcomes for the city, supported by shorter-term action plans to help achieve those aims.

Managed by the Belfast Community Planning Partnership (BCPP), it guides what council and other public agencies in the city will do, in collaboration with businesses and communities, to make Belfast better.

Last year, the BCPP began to review and update the Belfast Agenda. "Continuing the conversation" with residents, the BCCP has now agreed 14 priorities for the period 2023-27. Action plans aligned to each of these priorities have been developed and will be updated on an annual basis.



Council Planning Framework

Our Corporate Plan is the main strategic plan for our organisation. It sets out how we will support the Belfast Agenda and deliver our own organisational priorities, services and programmes. We also have several supporting strategic plans to help manage and direct specific activity. For example, our Local Development Plan which is the spatial planning framework for the city and our medium-term financial plan

which sets out the financial strategy for the council. In November 2020, we also produced a covid recovery plan which still informs strategic planning today. These strategic plans, including the Improvement Plan, are supported by annual Departmental and Committee Plans to ensure activity for the year ahead is managed. This forms part of a wider strategic planning and performance framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: STRATEGIC PLANNING & PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK



Identifying our Improvement Objectives

Strategic Context

The Belfast Agenda sets the overall improvement priorities for the city. Our corporate plan sets the strategic priorities for council. Therefore, it's important that our improvement plan reflects these strategic planning frameworks. Our first improvement objectives were fully aligned to the Belfast Agenda. However, unlike the council improvement plan, responsibility for the Belfast Agenda is shared across partners. The collaborative nature of this work often made it difficult to isolate and report council performance. Following feedback from the Northern Ireland (NI) Auditor, we have stripped away the collaborative actions to focus solely on council activity and the performance improvement areas that we can control and improve. However, we still use the Belfast Agenda as a guide. The priorities in the Belfast Agenda are agreed in collaboration with our residents, so we know that it is a good starting point for determining what we should focus on.

Statutory Guidance and Outcomes

When developing our improvement objectives, we also follow guidance issued by the Department for Communities and recommendations provided by the NI auditor. Therefore, we must ensure that our improvement objectives deliver improvements in relation to:

Strategic effectiveness	This relates to longer term outcomes – are we making a difference?
Service quality and availability	This is about what we do – are we delivering good services and programmes that meet our resident's needs?
Fairness	This is about equality – are we being inclusive and ensuring that no one is left behind?
Efficiency	This is about good financial management – are we running our services well and providing value for money?
Sustainability	This is about the environment – are we doing things that will protect our environment for the generations that follow?
Innovation	This is about trying new things – are we continually learning and improving what we do?

The guidance also states that our improvement objectives should be:

- Legitimate - making a demonstrable contribution to the aspects of improvement as listed in the Local Government Act
- Clear - setting out the visible improvement that citizens can expect
- Robust - with defined terms of success (quantitative or qualitative)
- Deliverable - with established links to individual service programmes and budgets
- Demonstrable - capable of being supported by objective evidence

Under each of our improvement objectives, we therefore explain the rationale for each improvement objective – why it’s important, what we want to achieve, what we will do and how we will measure what we’ve done and the impact we’ve achieved.

In addition to this statutory guidance, we also apply an outcomes-based approach to our improvement objectives. This means focusing on the impact, or end-results, of our improvement activities rather than the service or process. From a performance perspective, we need to measure what we do and how well we do it. However, we believe it’s more important to measure “is anyone better off”. Improving people’s outcomes can be challenging, but it is the only way we can demonstrate to our residents that what we are doing is making a real difference.

Annual Review

Every year we review and update our improvement objectives to ensure we continue to deliver the improvements people want. We do an initial assessment that looks at the previous year’s improvement objectives in terms of the progress we’ve made, the current strategic context and the statutory guidance. This forms part of our annual corporate planning process. We then share our draft objectives and proposed actions with the public. Only when our residents have had an opportunity to have their say, do we finalise the improvement plan.

Our annual review process for 2023-24 is set out overleaf:

Figure 2: IMPROVEMENT PLAN – REVIEW PROCESS 2023-24



Consultation and Engagement

Between October and November 2022, we facilitated several local area engagements and two online engagement sessions to enable residents, communities and other partners to shape the refreshed Belfast Agenda. This gave us valuable insight into what was important to our residents and what they would like to see happen. Often participants used the opportunity to feedback issues relating directly to council. Across the ten workshops, we heard from over 170 people and 110 different organisations.

In February, we developed draft improvement objectives with indicative actions. We put this out to public consultation so our residents and other interested stakeholders could have a say in agreeing our improvement activity. In the consultation we asked our residents:

- Are we focusing on the right things?
- Is anything missing?
- What are your ideas about what we need to do to achieve these improvements?

The public consultation ran for just over 8 weeks between 20 February and 19 April. Managed through our online YSB consultation platform, it provided residents with an opportunity to learn more about the proposed improvement objectives and included a link to an online survey. We used a range of communication channels, including Facebook and Twitter, to promote and direct people to the consultation and sent out notifications to our Your Say Belfast (YSB) mailing list. The survey asked residents whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposed improvement objectives, to provide comments or to suggest other areas they felt should be included as improvement objectives.

36 individuals and 3 organisations responded to the survey. As the vast majority of respondents agreed with our proposed improvement objectives, we did not feel it necessary to make significant changes. Indeed, many emphasised the importance of the city centre and of focusing on core council services; others emphasised the importance of environment related improvements. Some suggested that we needed to use clearer language, actions and targets. We hope that we have addressed this in our final, more detailed improvement plan.

Developing our improvement actions

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

Our Improvement Objectives 2023 - 2024

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.

Improvement Objective 1: Our Services and Facilities

What we want to achieve

Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide

Why this is an improvement objective

Our residents have consistently told us that they want our improvement plan to focus on improving the services we deliver and the facilities we provide. The provision of high quality, customer-focused and efficient services is extremely important to residents and a key aspect of the improvement duty. For this reason, 'Improving our services and facilities' will always be the starting point for our improvement plan.

Improving and maintaining high levels of customer care is an ongoing improvement aim for us. To help ensure that we continually meet customer expectations and can adapt to changing circumstances, we've put in place an internal change programme designed to improve customer care. We include aspects of this programme with our annual improvement plan. This year we are focusing on improving how residents access council online and making interactions with council easier and more seamless.

In addition to our customer care programme, we also have an ongoing continuous improvement programme and a capital (a building and assets) programme that we update annually. The continuous improvement programme tends to focus on operational issues and internal changes to our processes, systems and service design. These changes help us ensure that our services continually evolve, are efficient and fit for purpose. For our public facing improvement plan, we identify the key actions that will help us improve our services and facilities, such as through our Leisure transformation Programme. In previous years we have focused our efforts on specific issues or services, such as improving our safeguarding policy or helping our environmental services to adapt to the new covid-era operating environment. This year, after listening to our residents, we have focused on cleanliness issues and our ongoing leisure transformation.

What we will do

- ✓ Improve our customer care practices by continuing to implement our customer focus programme
- ✓ Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of key services, focusing this year on our services that help make the city clean and green
- ✓ Upgrade and improve our Leisure facilities by continuing to implement our Leisure Transformation Programme

How we will measure our performance

Performance Indicators	2019	2023	Target
Resident satisfaction with Belfast City Council	65%	71%	76%
Percentage of residents who agree that is easy to contact the council or access council services	New	60%	65%
Percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive	80%	79%	82%
Resident satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities.	New	73%	75%

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Improve our customer care				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Create a strategy for expanding the provision and uptake of automated Digital Channels	■			
Develop of performance metrics to measure the impact of the Customer Programme			■	
Develop Service Level Agreements and transactional customer satisfaction measurement		■		
Develop and implement an approach for seamless customer transactional relationship across all contact channels (Single View of Customer)				■
Responsible Chief Officer	Programme Director Customer Focus			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Improve key services							
Milestones				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Carry out a robust review of City Centre governance and management arrangements							
Convene a 'City Centre Delivery Group' to bring together key stakeholders to implement city centre strategies							
Develop an operational improvement plan for delivery of pest control services							
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services						
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee						

Improve our facilities							
Milestones				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Complete construction works at Templemore Baths and launch facility							
Continue to develop business case for Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility							
Continue to develop up options for Leisure Transformation Phase 4 aligned to C&NS Physical Activity Sports Development Strategy							
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes						
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee						

Statutory Assessment - How this achieves our Improvement Duty

Whilst this objective aligns most closely to service quality and availability, it also contributes to all the other statutory improvement requirements in some shape or form. Fit for purpose services can only be achieved through efficiency and innovation, and in keeping with our wider corporate goals, must also support fairness and sustainability.

- Service quality and availability
- Innovation, Efficiency, Strategic effectiveness, Fairness and Sustainability

Improvement Objective 2: Our Communities

What we want to achieve

Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.

Why this is an improvement objective

Our residents have emphasised that our improvement plan must support local people and improve local neighbourhoods. In 2021-2, we aligned our improvement plan to our Covid-19 recovery plan and created a new improvement objective that focused on “our communities”. This theme was particularly well received by our residents so our Elected Members agreed to keep this as a priority moving forward.

Improving health and wellbeing has consistently been one of the highest-ranking priorities for our citizens. However, whilst we believe that our improvement plan must contribute to improved health and wellbeing, we also feel that health improvement requires a partnership approach and therefore is best addressed through the Belfast Agenda. We will continue to work with our Belfast Agenda partners to help address health inequalities, whilst using our improvement plan to identify specific things that we can do to improve health and wellbeing.

This year, one of the biggest challenges facing our citizens is the cost-of-living crisis. In recognition of this, our improvement plan now includes actions designed to help support our residents, especially those most vulnerable, through the cost-of-living crisis

In response to ongoing citizen engagement, we are continuing to focus on physically improving our neighbourhoods and on enhancing our parks and playgrounds. Feedback from the Belfast Agenda and the results from our regular resident survey also show that we need to become better at engaging our communities and local people. Central to this is widening participation and building capacity.

What we will do

- ✓ Improve the physical condition of local neighbourhoods
- ✓ Improve our parks and playgrounds and encourage people to be physically active
- ✓ Support our residents, especially those most vulnerable, through the cost-of-living crisis
- ✓ Enhance and improve how we engage and involve our residents

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	2023	Target
Percentage of residents who are satisfied with their local area a place to live	84%	85%	86%	87%
Percentage of residents who agree council shows good leadership	62%	72%	62%	70%
Percentage of residents who agree council consults and listens to the views of local residents	63%	63%	50%	60%
Percentage of residents who agree that their local area has good quality parks and green space	78%	78%	78%	80%
Percentage of residents using council parks at least monthly	56%	62%	63%	65%
Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-2023	Target
Number of Parks and Green Spaces with Green Flag accreditation	20	20	20	20
Number of responses to consultation surveys per annum (via Your Say Belfast)	n/a	6,797	8,846	not applicable
Public participation levels in PB decision making events	-	-	-	150
Number of residents accessing online cost-of-living support and advice / Warm and Welcome Spaces	-	-	-	not applicable

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Support our residents, especially those most vulnerable, through the cost-of-living crisis					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Develop framework for provision of council services to help address cost-of-living crisis					
Develop a cost-of-living support and awareness campaign to signpost residents to support services and advice					
Develop targeted initiatives to address food and fuel poverty and their impact on low-income households					
Undertake a review of BCC/DfC-funded advice services					
Implement the Belfast Warm and Well programme to support vulnerable people in cold homes during winter					
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of City and Organisational Strategy and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services				
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and People and Communities Committee				

Improve our neighbourhoods - Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund:				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Stage 2: Development (uncommitted projects) - Work with groups at Stage 2 to develop their projects				
Stage 3: Delivery (committed projects) – Work with groups at Stage 3 to implement their projects.				
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee			

Improve our parks and playgrounds and encourage people to be physically active				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Initiate major capital project to improve Marrowbone Millennium Park.				
Initiate major capital project to improve Pitt Park				
Complete major capital project to improve Paisley Park Sportsplex				
Initiate major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields in collaboration with partners				
Deliver the Playground Improvement Programme for 2023 – 2024 including Loughside Park playground, Northlink playground and New Lodge playground				
Maintain our Green Flag and Green Flag Heritage Award status across our parks and open spaces (20)				
Develop and implement a Physical Activity and Sports Strategy				
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee, Strategic Policy & Resources Committee			

Enhance and improve how we engage and involve				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Support the Active Belfast Participatory budgeting (PB) pilot				
Improve how we engage with newer communities and other seldom heard groups within Belfast				
Explore options for enhancing engagement with the Youth Council				
Provide training and develop guidance notes for staff to ensure widest participation and good practice.				
Support the Belfast Youth Council to identify key priorities and actions for taking forward in 2023/24				
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of City and Organisational Strategy and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and People and Communities Committee			

Statutory Assessment - How this achieves our Improvement Duty

This objective helps us to deliver strategic effectiveness, fairness, and innovation. Improving local quality of life and creating inclusive growth are key strategic objectives for council. Our proposed activities support that goal as we look for new, fairer and better ways to support our vulnerable residents, regenerate our neighbourhoods or strengthen community capacity. The actions also contribute to sustainability by protecting and enhancing our green spaces and to service quality and availability as we strive to make our engagement accessible and fit for purpose.

- Strategic effectiveness
- Fairness
- Innovation
- Sustainability
- Service quality and availability

Improvement Objective 3: Our Economy

What we want to achieve

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.

Why this is an improvement objective

Creating better jobs and supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs have been key priorities for our residents since the first Belfast Conversation in 2015 - the engagement process used to develop the Belfast Agenda. Therefore, our improvement plans have always included actions designed to support local prosperity and employment. Last year, we also included activity aimed at supporting social enterprises and cooperatives. This helps support our vision of inclusive growth, where all people share in the success of the city.

A strong and healthy business sector is vital to for the success and wellbeing of our city and for those who live here. This in turn supports employment, which allows us to deliver our vision of inclusive growth. Although other Government departments, particularly the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for the Economy (DfE), have statutory responsibility for the economy, employability and skills development, we do have an important role to play. We run several initiatives to support small businesses and develop entrepreneurs and provide a range of employability and skills programmes to help people to access skills and jobs. We will therefore continue to work in partnership in an integrated and strategic way to ensure that, as a city, local people can access decent, secure jobs that pay well and provide opportunity for progression and development.

What we will do

- ✓ Deliver support through our local business start-up programmes
- ✓ Deliver the 'Go for it' programme for start-up support for 2023-2024
- ✓ Help mobilise and deliver the new enterprise support service

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Target
Number of jobs promoted through the Go For It programme [Statutory PI]	258	311	299	163
Business start-up and growth activity:				
- Number of business plans developed	419	518	476	260
- Number of participants/businesses supported	698	731	503	658

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Support local businesses, social enterprises and co-operatives								
Milestones					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Continue to deliver the 'Go for it' programme for start-up support for 2023-2024								
Work with councils across the region to mobilise the new enterprise support service (launch in September 2023)								
Deliver the new enterprise support service								
Responsible Chief Officer		Director of Economic Development						
Reporting Committee		City Growth & Regeneration Committee						

Statutory Assessment - How this achieves our Improvement Duty

Our key motivation behind this improvement objective is improving strategic effectiveness and fairness. However, it also supports other improvement criteria. We will continue to review and develop what we do in this area to ensure everyone can benefit from the economic development work we do. That means ensuring that our programmes and initiatives are innovative and fit for purpose and can contribute to economic sustainability for local businesses and residents.

- Strategic effectiveness
- Fairness
- Innovation, Service quality and availability, Sustainability

Improvement Objective 4: Our Environment

What we want to achieve

Help tackle climate change, protect our environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.

Why this is an improvement objective

In October 2019, Council declared a climate emergency in Belfast. In response, we created a new climate and sustainability improvement objective for 2020-21. Whilst a small minority of our residents disagreed with this step, explaining that they did not believe in climate change, the majority of our residents were extremely supportive. Given the significant challenges facing our environment and the behavioural changes that will be needed to truly make Belfast an environmentally friendly and sustainable city, we feel it is necessary to keep the environment as an improvement focus for the foreseeable future.

Our focus this year is on ensuring, that as a council, we have appropriate strategies, policies, and initiatives in place that will enable us to support climate action and protect our natural resources. Climate change is a global concern. However, all of us can take steps to help avert this. Key to this is developing a strategic climate plan for council. This will include taking steps to reduce our emission and “green” our fleet of vehicles, managing our waste, enhancing our natural environment and encouraging biodiversity.

Through the Belfast Agenda, we will also continue to use our civic leadership to develop joined-up approaches to tackling climate change in Belfast.

What we will do

- ✓ Help tackle climate change by developing and implementing a BCC Climate Plan
- ✓ Continue to protect our environment by developing a BCC tree strategy, a local biodiversity action plan and by continuing to roll out the One Million Trees programme
- ✓ Increase the level of recycling across the city and reduce our reliance on landfill

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	2023	Target
Percentage of residents who agree that Belfast is an environmentally friendly city	74%	73%	64%	73%
Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Target
One Million Trees Programme - Number of trees planted PA	39,000	24,000	63,500	45,000
Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) score	-	B	A	A
NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey	-	-	-	Silver
Statutory Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Target
Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable BCC collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	35,783	28,437*	28,000
% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use)	43%	41%	41%*	42%
Amount (tonnage) of BCC collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	168,037	158,000*	158,000

Note: the waste figures for 2022-23 are provisional; validated figures will not be available until November 2023.

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Climate Change							
Milestones				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Agree a strategic approach to climate mitigation and action within BCC:							
- Publish a BCC Climate Risk Plan							
- Publish a BCC Climate Plan							
- Publish a BCC Climate Investment Plan							
Roll out the BCC Climate Fund							
Undertake energy audits across 4 key council buildings							
Maintain our Carbon Disclosure Score and apply to the NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey							
Responsible Chief Officer	Belfast Climate Commissioner						
Reporting Committee	Climate & City Resilience Committee						

Protecting our environment				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Develop a 5-year action plan for the delivery of the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy				
Review capacity to ensure compliance with Statutory Biodiversity duty, including control of invasive species, and resource any changes identified				
Take steps to transition council fleet (vehicles) to alternative or greener fuels				
Complete development of a tree strategy for Belfast				
Commence year 1 of associated action plan				
Belfast One Million Trees				
Carry out site identification and assessment				
Carry out tree planting				
Responsible Chief Officer Reporting Committee	Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services and Belfast Climate Commissioner People & Communities Committee and Climate & City Resilience Committee			

Increasing recycling and managing our waste				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Agree the way forward for the expansion of the Kerbside Sortation model for recycling				
Utilize treatment technologies to increase recycling and reduce reliance of landfill				
Work with partners to explore options that promote a Circular Economy				
Develop a proposal for single-use plastics policy for the council				
Responsible Chief Officer Reporting Committee	Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services People and Communities Committee			

Statutory Assessment - How this achieves our Improvement Duty

This objective aligns most closely to sustainability. However, it also contributes to all criteria. We need innovation and courage to transition quickly, but we also need to do this fairly, so that we leave no one behind. Similarly, managing our waste requires us to balance efficiency with service quality and availability, whilst championing our environment and securing sustainability.

- Sustainability
- Strategic effectiveness, Fairness, Innovation, Service quality and availability, Efficiency



Improvement Objective 5: Our City

What we want to achieve

Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

Why this is an improvement objective

Adapted from our 2020 Recovery Plan, we now use this theme as way to identify and prioritise improvement activity that will benefit the city collectively in the longer term. Residents have told us that they want the city centre to be vibrant, safe and welcoming. They recognise that a prosperous and enticing city centre brings social and economic benefits for Belfast and the wider regional economy. Activity to support the city centre will be supplemented by improvements to public spaces and greenways, as well as the continuation of our ambitious city innovation programme to ensure Belfast can harness digital innovation to better address complex urban challenges and support our citizens and communities. These strategic, city development projects contribute to our other improvement priorities such as helping to grow our economy, enhancing our environment or supporting our communities.

What we will do

- ✓ Encourage digital innovation across the city by continuing to deliver the Smart District programme
- ✓ Revitalise and support our city centre by continuing to implement the Vacant to Vibrant City Centre Scheme
- ✓ Improve public spaces and greenways across the city

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	2023	Target
Resident satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live	86%	85%	86%	88%
Percentage of residents who agree the city centre is vibrant and attractive, with lots going on	81%	80%	76%	82%
Percentage of residents who agree that Belfast: - is easy to get about - has good infrastructure	79%	85% 83%	82% 80%	86% 84%
Number of SMEs/companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme	New	New	145	30

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Encourage digital innovation				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
City SME challenge programme				
Complete and gain approval for the £1m City Deal business case	█			
Public launch of the competition		█		
Phase 1 Accelerator for SME applicants			█	
Phase 2 Proof of Concept development				█
Building citizen digital innovation capacity (CODI):				
Complete feasibility and stakeholder engagement	█			
Business Case developed for funding with city partners		█		
Establish core functions for phase 1 CODI delivery				█
Establish first Smart District innovation hub				
Agree optimal location for first testbed programme with partners	█			
Complete testbed programme design				
Submit business case for funding – infrastructure and SME competition			█	
First SME challenge call competition				█
Responsible Chief	Strategic Director of Corporate Services			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Revitalise and support our City Centre						
Milestones			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Vacant to Vibrant scheme: Process applications and manage the scheme						
Vacant to Vibrant scheme: Prepare an interim (year 1) review report for committee.						
Responsible Chief	Director of City Regeneration and Development					
Reporting Committee	City Growth and Regeneration Committee					

Improve public spaces and greenways						
Milestones			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Initiate major capital project to improve Cathedral Gardens						
Complete construction of Forth Meadow Community Greenway						
Complete construction of phase 2 at the Lagan Gateway						
Install new statues and stained-glass windows – Belfast City Hall						
Responsible Chief	Director of Physical Programmes					
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee					

Statutory Assessment - How this achieves our Improvement Duty

This objective aligns most closely to strategic effectiveness, sustainability and innovation. However, as with many of our improvement actions, we expect the outcome of these actions to impact across other areas as we encourage people to share our city and enjoy healthier greenways and public spaces.

- Strategic effectiveness
- Sustainability
- Innovation

Continuous Improvement and Monitoring Arrangements

General Duty to Improve

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

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

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

Improvement Objectives - Reporting Framework

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

Arrangements for Achievement of Statutory Performance Indicators

The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 requires councils to collect and publish information to allow them to measure performance against a number of indicators set by the Department for Communities. This relates to activity in respect of economic development, waste management and planning applications.

Whilst we have incorporated the statutory indicators for economic development and waste within the main body of this plan, they are also set below for information:

	Statutory Performance Indicators	Baseline			Target
		2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-2024
Environment (waste)	Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable BCC collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	35,783	28,437*	28,000
	% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)	43%	41%	41%*	42%
	Amount (tonnage) of BCC collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	168,037	158,000*	158,000
Economy	Number of jobs promoted through the Go For It programme	258	311	299	163

Notes: the waste figures for 2022-23 are provisional; validated figures will not be available until November 2023.

Planning

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) set the targets for councils and issues performance updates. The figures for 2022/23 are currently provisional (will be verified by DfI over the summer). Due to difficulties extracting data from the new Planning Portal, the enforcement data is only available for the first six months i.e. from April to October.

	Statutory Performance Indicators	Baseline			Target
		2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-2024
Planning	Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications	37	31	57.6(p)	30
	Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications	14	17	20.2(p)	15
	% of Enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks	93.2	83%	86.5%(p)	70%

Planning application performance for 2022/23 was severely impacted by the implementation of the new Planning Portal (the replacement regional Planning IT system used by 11 of the 12 Planning Authorities in Northern Ireland). The new Planning Portal was launched in December 2022, but was subject to a number of technical issues, which meant that it was not sufficiently operational until March 2023. This significantly adversely impacted on decision times.

Performance on Major applications dropped from 31 weeks in 2021/22 to 57.6 weeks in 2022/23. This was largely due to delays in issuing decisions post-Planning Committee, principally around the Section 76 planning agreement process. Whilst there are various reasons for such delays, Planning and Legal Services have put in train a number of critical actions to improve performance in this area.

Local applications performance was also impacted by a number of significant staff vacancies, particularly in managerial roles, which adversely affected the throughput of work.

The statutory consultee process continued to limit overall performance. Whilst there have improvements by consultees in some areas, response times from DfI Roads, DAERA and DfI Rivers continues to fall short of what is required.

In August 2022, the Planning Service began experimenting with a new way of processing planning applications following innovative lean system principles. It has experimented with well over 100 applications to date, with very positive results in terms of improved performance and customer delivery. The Planning Service will continue to grow the experimentation in 2023/24 and 2024/25 and it will eventually become the new way of working, rolled out to all areas of the development management process.

Statutory KPIs for enforcement is unavailable for 2022/23 due to difficulties extracting data from the new Planning Portal. However, for the first six months from April to October 2022, performance was 86.5%, being well inside the statutory target of 70% of enforcement cases brought to a conclusion within 39 weeks.

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