



29 February 2024

Committee Chair: Alderman L Clarke

Committee Vice-Chair: Councillor M Stewart

Committee Members: Aldermen – L Boyle, P Bradley and P Michael

Councillors – M Brady, S Cosgrove, H Cushinan,
S Flanagan, N Kelly, H Magill, E McLaughlin, L O'Hagan,
A O'Lone and B Webb.

Dear Member

MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Policy and Governance Committee will be held in the **Round Tower Chamber, Antrim Civic Centre on Tuesday 5 March 2024 at 6.30 pm.**

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Richard Baker".

Richard Baker GM MSc
Chief Executive, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council

PLEASE NOTE: Refreshments will be available in the Café from 5.20pm

For any queries please contact Member Services:

Tel: 028 9448 1301/028 9034 0107

Email: memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

A G E N D A

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REPORT ON BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING ON TUESDAY 5 MARCH 2024

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 G/BCEP/5 DAERA EPIZOOTIC DISEASE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to request approval for the renewal of a continuing partnership arrangement with DAERA during an emergency involving an Epizootic Disease outbreak, and the subsequent signing of an updated Memorandum of Understanding (enclosed).

2. Introduction/Background

The DAERA Epizootic Disease Protocol is a Memorandum of Understanding between DAERA and local Councils. The MOU came into effect on 13 July 2017. The aim of the document is to enable councils to provide support to DAERA if an emergency is declared as the result of an epizootic disease outbreak (e.g. Foot and Mouth, Avian Influenza, Swine Fever, Rabies etc.).

3. Previous Decisions of Council

The Memorandum of Understanding was originally agreed by Council in March 2019.

4. Key Issues/Points

Working in conjunction with the Operational Heads of Service, available resource estimates i.e. staff, vehicles etc to be reviewed and documented. Subject to availability at the time, Councils may agree to provide DAERA with personnel, plant and equipment to provide key services to help manage the outbreak/incident.

5. Financial Position/Implications

DAERA will reimburse Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council for the associated costs of:

- (a) staff redeployed to carry out the Service;
- (b) ancillary costs in redeploying those staff;
- (c) any other service provision associated costs, for example, plant/equipment loaned by the District Council or the provision of kennelling facilities; and
- (d) any other incidental expenses.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members approve the ongoing partnership arrangement with DAERA and the signing of the updated Memorandum of Understanding.

Prepared by: Elaine Girvan, Head of Health, Safety and Resilience

Agreed by: Liz Johnston, Deputy Director of Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

3.2 CE/CS/032 DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLANS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present to Members for consideration and approval the:

- **Organisation Development Directorate Business Plan 2024-25**
- **Finance and Governance Directorate Business Plan 2024-25**

2. Introduction/Background

Members are reminded that Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the Act) puts in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

Specifically, the duties in the Act relate to Section 84(1), 85(2) and 85(9) whereby the Council has a statutory duty to make arrangements to:

- Secure continuous improvement;
- Secure achievement of its improvement objectives; and
- Exercise its functions so that any Departmental specified standards are met.

It is proposed to adopt a formal approach and methodology to business planning which will support and be an integral part of the Council's performance management and delivery arrangements.

Business Plans for; Organisation Development and Finance and Governance Directorates 2024-25 are **enclosed** for Members' approval.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council approved a strategic performance management framework as part of the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan (draft for consultation) 2024-25 in January 2024.

4. Purpose

The purpose of the Directorate Business Plans are to:

- Demonstrate how each of the Directorates are supporting and achieving Council's priorities.
- Provide a clear sense of purpose of the Directorate and the challenges it faces.
- Illustrate how it is aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Measure performance and hold ourselves to account to ensure we deliver for the Council and its residents.

5. Format

The proposed format is robust and follows best practice, to bring together all the key aspects of the Directorate into one place to provide transparency and consistency. It provides alignment with the Corporate Plan; Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan; Financial Plan; Resourcing and Risk

Register.

The format includes:

- Introduction and Background to Directorate
- Directorate Structure
- Directorate Risk Register
- Achievements in 2023-2024
- Alignment with draft Corporate Plan 2024-2030
- Directorate Business Plan 2024-25
- Financial Position 2024-25
- Progress Report (bi-annual report)

6. Governance/Reporting Arrangements

It is proposed that a bi-annual report is presented to Committee (September 2024 and April 2025) on progress and achievement of the business plans.

7. Financial Position/Implications

As agreed as part of the Council's rate setting process.

8. Summary

In summary this proposed approach and methodology to Business Planning will provide a more streamlined and integrated method of tracking and analysing performance and providing enhanced visibility.

9. **Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members consider and approve the following:

- a) Organisation Development Directorate Business Plan 2024-25**
- b) Finance and Governance Directorates Business Plan 2024-25**

Prepared by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

Approved by: Richard Baker, Chief Executive

4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 HR/HR/019 AGENCY WORKERS UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a monthly update on the engagement of agency workers across the Council for January 2024.

2. Introduction/Background

Agency workers are engaged to provide temporary cover for absence such as:

- Maternity leave
- Secondments
- Sickness absence
- Vacant posts
- Seasonal events

3. Key Points

The engagement of agency workers is subject to a rigorous approval process and requires the approval of the Corporate Leadership Team. There is budgetary provision for the majority of posts filled through departmental salary budgets, salary contingency and grant funding.

4. Current Agency Workers

The utilisation of agency workers in January 2024 compared to January 2023 is **enclosed** at Appendix 1. This excludes limited ad-hoc agency cover which is necessary to provide operational cover at short notice.

In reviewing the number of agency workers, it should be noted that there is a significant decrease in the number of agency workers in January 2024 compared to January 2023.

5. Cost implications (Capital Expenditure/Revenue)

Agency Expenditure

The expenditure on agency workers in January 2024 is **enclosed** at Appendix 2. The cost has slightly increased to 7% (of all staff costs) for the period from April 2023 to January 2024 compared to April 2022 to January 2023, which was 6%.

The increased costs have been impacted by:

- The NJC pay increase for the 2023 financial year which is also applicable to all Agency Staff
- The local pay award of the second spinal column point increase which was applied on 1 April 2023, following the Local Pay Agreement in January 2023.

6. Summary

Recruitment exercises are ongoing to fill a number of vacant positions, which will further reduce our reliance on agency workers. There are 3 vacancies within Capital Development currently covered by agency workers that we anticipate filling permanently within the next 2 months.

We are committed to reducing our dependency on agency workers and will continue to recruit directly for vacant positions. However, we may still require agency workers for ad-hoc, seasonal or temporary assignments.

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Pamela Boyd, Human Resources Officer

Agreed by: Pauline Greer, Lead HR Manager (Interim)

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

4.2 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE UPDATE APRIL 2023 – JANUARY 2024

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the management of attendance for the period April 2023 to January 2024 (summary **enclosed**).

2. Introduction/Background

Absence at the end of January was above target by 1.21 days with 11.44 average days lost per employee against a target of 10.23 days. Covid absence is not included in the reported figure as a significant number of these cases work from home during the isolation period.

3. Key Points

There continues to be a positive return to work of short term cases along with 10 long term cases ending in January 2024, 2 of which left the Council's employment.

Further analysis of Absence Figures for January 2024 indicates the following:

4. 100% attendance

In January, 60% of our workforce achieved this against a target of 60%.

If employees with 100% attendance were excluded from the average day's calculation, the actual absence incurred by those employees with absence episodes would be:

Period	% of workforce with absence	Long term average days	Short term average days	Overall average days
January 2024	40% ↑	22.82 ↓	4.85 ↑	27.67 ↓
Same period last year 2022/23	37%	30.39	4.27	34.66

The above figures show a reduction in the average length of long term absence when compared to the same period last year. This demonstrates our active commitment to reducing days lost to long term sickness absence.

5. Formal Case Reviews from April 2023 to date

Formal Case reviews (FCRs) are normally held where all possible steps have been taken and have failed to secure the employee's return to work within a maximum of 9 months.

Cases Concluded	11 , with employees at Formal Case review stage either returned to work, obtained ill health retirement or left the organisation.
Cases In Progress	2
Cases Approaching	1

6. Long Term Absence – 82% of the overall absence figures

Long term absence is defined as continuous absence greater than 20 days. There has been a reduction in the percentage of absence falling under the long term category when compared to the previous month, with 10 long term absence cases ending, 2 of which left the Council's employment and it is expected that the number of cases attributing to long term sickness absence will decrease in the coming year. This is due to our continued efforts to address complex long term absence cases, conduct regular wellbeing meetings with employees, utilising Occupational Health services, promotion of the Staywell App, and holding timely absence review meetings.

- **% of Challenging long term cases – 75%**, this includes absence related to road traffic accidents, surgery, disability related illness and general injuries.
- **Returned to work – 8 cases** have successfully returned to work with a further **2** leaving Council's employment.

7. Short Term Absence – 18% of the overall absence figures

Short term absence is defined as absence less than 20 working days. Whilst it is understood that short term absences are inevitable, it is crucial for Managers/Supervisors, Human Resources and employees to work together to minimise the impact of these absences on service delivery.

- Main Reasons:
 - Cold/flu, stomach bug, infection (accounting for 57% of short term absence)
 - Stress Depression, Mental Health
 - Chest and respiratory issues

8. Overall Absence

Stress-related absence (including work related stress) accounted for 41% of total absence. Proactive work is ongoing to address this by:

- Encouraging open communication to address stress and mental health concerns in wellbeing meetings.
- Providing mental health awareness training for employees.
- Providing access to mental health support services, through Inspire Counselling service, the Council's Occupational Health service, Northern Recovery College and additional information available through STAYWELL.

- Implementing flexible working arrangements, supporting phased returns and reasonable adjustments where possible in the workplace.
 - Encouraging physical activity through the promotion of the Council's employee subsidised Gym Membership Scheme.
 - Encouraging participation in our wellness programme with regular wellbeing activities and health advice promoted weekly through the STAY MORE CONNECTED kudoboard.
 - HSENI Managing Work Related Stress Training "A Line Manager's Approach" was held in the Autumn 2023, with 45 line managers across departments attending out of 74 invited.
 - Partnering with legal advisors and Employers for Disability NI to arrange awareness sessions on mental health illnesses, to provide training to managers on managing stress and how to encourage open communication to reduce stress-related absence and to promote a healthy work environment.
 - To focus on raising awareness of mental health, line managers attended two online sessions led by Inspire on "Managers Promoting Positive Mental Health" during January and February 2024.
 - Inspire delivered an online session on "Mental Health Awareness" for staff in January 2024 with a further session held in February 2024.
9. To improve absence rates and encourage earlier returns to work, the following actions are being undertaken.
- The consultation for the alignment of Terms & Conditions of employment commenced in September 2023 and this includes the proposal of one single policy for managing attendance. Subject to the successful outcome of a workplace ballot, it is anticipated that the agreement of a single policy will support staff, line management and HR in the management of absence cases.
 - Case management discussions are held with legal advisors to support a targeted approach for complex cases. These help Directors, Heads of Services, and HR to review cases, consider reasonable adjustments, and understand the legal context, enabling specific action plans for individual cases.
 - Meetings held with directorates with high or complex absence cases have been increased to analyse cases and agree on next steps, with attendance from relevant Directors, Deputy Directors, and Heads of Service. Formal case reviews are scheduled as needed.
 - The HR Business Partnership team is working closely with managers and Occupational Health on an individual case management basis. This ensures prompt action is taken to keep absences within target and provides support to managers in absence review trigger meetings for fair and consistent

approach.

- Monthly case management discussion meetings are scheduled as needed to review complex cases with an Occupational Health consultant. Case managers attend these sessions to ensure effective use of the Occupational Health service and support earlier returns to work where possible.
- The Corporate and Human Resources Risk registers have been reviewed to reflect the current absence rate position, with actions and interventions recorded to mitigate risks.
- Managers within Parks and Planning have received training on effectively managing absence caseloads. A number of toolkits have been identified and shared on STAYWELL to further assist managers and employees.
- Targeted training is being scheduled in areas of high absence provided by Human Resources, legal advisors, and in partnership with employers for disability or other relevant organisations.
- Development continues on an online training module to promote the importance of attending work. This will be rolled out to new staff initially and then across the wider organisation.
- Annual flu jab clinics have been held in October and November 2023 with 88 employees receiving the vaccine.
- The use of the Wellbeing Calendar is promoted to continue to support employee wellbeing.
- Our Employee Engagement Working Group recommenced in November 2023 with participation being cross departmental and cross generational.
- Physiotherapy services are being provided for appropriate cases of back and musculoskeletal-related absence.
- HR review the absence paperwork, including the absence notification and return to work forms.
- A Managing Attendance Action Plan is being developed by the Human Resources Department.

10. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Victoria Stewart, HR Systems and Analytics Manager

Agreed by: Pauline Greer, Lead HR Manager (Interim)

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

4.3 CCS/CS/006 CUSTOMER CHANNELS REPORT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on achievements to date in relation to performance indicators for the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 customer services objective.

2. Introduction/Background

The Plan sets out the performance improvement target; 'we will achieve high levels of customer satisfaction'. Four indicators were set as measures of success in 2023/24.

3. Customer Satisfaction

We achieve at least 80% satisfaction with overall Council services:

A total of 953 responses have been received in 2023-24, and satisfaction for the year so far is 91.8% and is on track against the target of 80%.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	2023-24 (April 2023 to January 2024)	Status
87.5%	92.9%	80%	91.8%	On Track Exceeding to date

4. Abandoned Calls

The percentage of abandoned calls will be 6.5% (or less):

A total of 148,993 calls were presented from 1 April to 31 January 2023-24, and the percentage of abandoned calls during 2023-24 to date is 5.3%.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	2023-24 (April 2023 to January 2024)	Status
6.0%	5.1%	6.5%	5.3%	On Track Exceeding to date

5. Online Transactions

We have achieved at least 650,000 online transactions:

Officers continue to promote and monitor the shift of transactions to an online basis, where practical and beneficial. Results are reported on a quarterly basis.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	2023-24 (April 2023 to December 2023)	Status
652,593	874,10	650,000	508,920	On Track Exceeding to date

6. ANBorough app

There are at least 8,000 downloads of the Residents App:

Total downloads for 1 April to 31 December 2023 are 10,812 which is 135.15% of target. Figures for January and February will be reported in April.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	2023-24 (April 2023 to December 2023)	Status
14,481	13,963	8,000	10,812	Achieved

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the achievements to date in relation to performance indicators for the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 customer services objective.

Prepared by: James Porter, Customer Services Manager

Agreed by: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

4.4 PT/CI/049 PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2023/24 PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT QUARTER 3

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members that the Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 Performance Progress Report Quarter 3 be noted.

2. Background

Members are reminded that Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 puts in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 was approved in June 2023. This set out a range of robust performance targets, along with six identified improvement objectives and a number of Statutory Performance Targets

3. Previous Decision of Council

As agreed at the August Council meeting, quarterly performance reports will be presented to the relevant committee or Working Group.

4. Key Points

Third Quarter performance progress reports for Finance and Governance (appendix 1) and Organisation Development (appendix 2) **enclosed** and the overall Council Corporate Performance and Improvement 2023/24 (appendix 3) are **enclosed** for Members information.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 Performance Progress Report Quarter 3 be noted.

Prepared by: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Agreed by: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

4.5 CCS/EDP/7 QUARTERLY SCREENING REPORT AND RURAL SCREENING

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the quarterly section 75 and rural screenings which have taken place within the period of October 2023 and January 2024.

2. Background

Members are advised that in line with the Council's Equality Scheme it was agreed to provide quarterly updates on the screening of policies under Section 75. Within the Scheme, the Council gave a commitment to apply screening methodology to all new and revised policies. Where necessary and appropriate, these new policies would be subject to further equality impact assessment.

3. Section 75 and Rural Screenings

The policies noted below have been screened between October 2023 – January 2024

POLICY	SCREENING DECISION
Armed Forces Day 2024	1
Draft Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25	1

- (1) Screened with no mitigation
- (2) Screened with mitigation
- (3) Screened and EQIA required

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the quarterly screening report be noted.

Prepared by: Ellen Boyd, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

Agreed by: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

4.6 G/MSMO/27 ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP MINUTES

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Members that a meeting of the Member Development Working Group took place on Monday 12 February 2024.

A copy of the minutes of the meeting are **enclosed** for information.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the minutes of the Elected Member Development Working Group held on Monday 12 February 2024 be noted.

Prepared by: Sarah Fenton, Organisation Development Officer

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy

4.7 G/BCEP/5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REGIONAL RESILIENCE – REVISED SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information for noting on the continuing partnership arrangement and revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Regional Resilience team and all Councils.

2. Introduction/Background

Due to an increased frequency of emergencies, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed, in 2014, to put in place enhanced civil contingency arrangements at a sub-regional and regional level. A new structure of five Emergency Preparedness Groups (EPGs) was put in place, with Councils playing an important role in supporting and facilitating the administrative function of the EPGs.

In 2016, on advice from the PSNI, it was agreed that a reduction in the number of EPGs to three would allow for greater efficiency. This model came into effect in January 2018, and required a Local Government resourcing model to provide adequate programme management of these areas of work, and to enhance and enable an effective response to emergencies.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) was last updated and agreed by Council in June 2019, with Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council undertaking the lead Council role on behalf of the 11 Councils at that time.

4. Key Issues/Points

The Regional Resilience team work collectively on behalf of Local Government with respect to civil contingencies but independently of each Council. The Team are involved in the preparation, response and recovery phases of civil contingencies where sub-regional, regional or national co-ordination is required. The Team does not make decisions for Local Government but develops and maintains collaborative working arrangements with multi-agency partners, facilitates co-ordination of preparation, response and recovery, and promotes cohesive planning, mutual support arrangements and the development of a consistent approach to emergency planning arrangements across Local Government.

The **enclosed** service legal agreement has been revised updating Regional Team structures, roles and governance arrangements reporting through the Executive Steering Group, and the agreement has been signed by all Northern Ireland Councils.

5. Financial Implication

There are no current cost implications for Council as the Department for Communities (DfC) have agreed to fund the function. However, should DfC

funding be withdrawn, 6 months' notice will be provided to Councils. Any additional costs incurred, associated with a cessation of funding for Regional Resilience, will be shared equally between all parties and made payable to the Lead Council, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted on the continuing partnership arrangement and revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Regional Resilience team and all Councils.

Prepared by: Elaine Girvan, Head of Health, Safety and Resilience

Agreed by: Liz Johnston, Deputy Director Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.8 G/DPFI/2 QUARTERLY REPORT ON FOI/EIR/DPA REQUESTS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a summary of Freedom of Information (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and Data Protection Act (DPA) requests received by Council during Quarter three of the year.

2. Introduction/Background

A report has been prepared on requests received in the third quarter of the year (1 October to 31 December 2023) under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and the Data Protection Act (DPA) which is **enclosed**.

3. Key Points

A summary of the quarter's statistics is as follows:

- The number of requests received was significantly higher than the number in the same period the previous year – an increase of 30%.
- Of the 92 requests received, 75 were under FOI, 12 under EIR and 5 under DPA.
- 77 requests were completed within the quarter.
- 97% of the requests were completed within the legislative deadlines of 20 days for FOI and EIR requests and a calendar month for requests made under DPA.
- The sections that received the most requests in the quarter were, Finance (27), Planning (17), Environmental Health (12) and Human Resources (11).
- Six appeals were received during the quarter. In three of these appeals the Council provided further information/clarification.
- One complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) was notified within the quarter. Once the complaint has been allocated to a case officer, the ICO will proceed to a decision notice or contact the Council directly if they require further information. No further correspondence has been received to date.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Helen McBride, Information Governance Manager

Agreed by: Liz Johnston, Deputy Director of Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.9 CCS/EDP/023 DEAF FRIENDLY COUNCIL – BRITISH DEAF ASSOCIATION SIGN LANGUAGE WEEK 2024

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members activities planned for Sign Language Week 2024 and to advise Members of a successful funding application.

2. Introduction/Background

Members are reminded of Councils commitment to become a Deaf Friendly Council through our signing of the BSL & ISL Deaf Charter. In support of the Charter and our deaf community, a series of events and awareness raising activities are planned as part of Sign Language Week 2024 which will run from Monday 18 March to Saturday 24 March 2024. These activities have been budgeted within the Accessibility and Inclusion budget.

3. Summary of Events & Awareness Raising Activities

Please see below a summary of the events and awareness raising activities planned:

- Mayoral Signed Video
- Awareness Raising Social Media Posts
- Fun day Event with Action Deaf Youth
- Deaf Friendly Signed Tours
- BSL and ISL Deaf Charter Certificate presented to Jordanstown Special School

4. Financial Position/Implication

Members are advised that the Council has been informed of a successful funding application. £9150 has been awarded from the DfC Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG) to deliver BSL Level One Sign Language Training for Elected Members, employees and residents. An update will follow on the arrangements for the delivery of this training, when the letter of offer for funding is received.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Ellen Boyd, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

Agreed by: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy