

Performance Improvement – Statutory Performance Indicators for local Councils 2016-17

A new requirement under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 now entails councils collecting and publishing information allow them to measure performance against performance indicators or standards set by the Department or any other indicators or standards which they choose to use in each financial year.

For the 2016-17 period each of the 11 Councils in N. Ireland was required to collect seven ‘statutory indicators’ measuring specific activity in relation to economic development, planning applications and waste management:

- Number of jobs promoted through business start-up (i.e. completed business plans)
- Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications
- Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications
- % of Enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks
- Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable local authority collected municipal waste that is landfilled
- % of household waste collected by district councils that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)
- Amount (tonnage) of local authority collected municipal waste arisings

Of these seven, five had ‘standards’ (i.e. targets) attached of which BCC achieved 3 and fell only slightly short on a fourth. Overall this represents a slight improvement on last year’s performance. A table outlining BCC’s performance against each of these indicators is included below.

All of this information is already publicly available and the waste and planning figures have already been formally published (in the *NI Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics 27 July 2017* and *NI Planning Statistics 29 June 2017* respectively). However, Part 12 (paragraph 92) of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 also requires the Council to publish this information and the corresponding DoE guidance advises that this should happen before 30th September in the financial year following that to which the data applies. It should be noted that final data for the waste PIs is not provided to the Council from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, until November.

The Statutory indicators and standards set for 2016-17 are therefore reported in this table.

Background Information

There are 7 statutory indicators of which 5 have a required standard (i.e. a target) 3 for Planning, 1 for economic development and 1 for waste.

– Economic Development

The Regional Start Initiative, or “Go for it” programme the programme is delivered In Belfast, through the Enterprise Agency network and there are agencies based across the city. The business start-up figure is based on the output of the ‘Go For It’ initiative. The data for this initiative is collected on a monthly basis by Lisburn and Castlereagh council for each of the 11 councils in the region. The business plans that are produced as part of this programme go through a quality control/audit process which includes a quality vouch by our programme managing agent (Innovation factory) and are later verified by the ‘Go For It’ programme manager in Lisburn and Castlereagh. Once verified the results of the programme are issued to each of the 11 councils as well as being reported to Invest NI and DETI. Comparative statistics across the 11 Councils are contained in Table 2 below.

- Waste

Waste issues have been a priority for the Council over many years and a dedicated Waste Management Section led by a Head of Waste Management supports this work. The Council has a Waste Plan and its delivery is overseen by a dedicated Waste Board chaired by the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services. In an email from DoE received on August 8th 2016 it was confirmed that, following discussions with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Waste Management and the Local Government Auditor, the waste management statistics figures to be used for performance improvement purposes are those end of year figures given in the quarterly report January to March (published July each year). The figures in this report represent council performance *before* any transfer of allowance occurs and therefore gives a true representation of performance. Final figures are made available in November each year.

- Planning

In 2016/17 the number of planning applications processed by Belfast City Council (BCC) increased, with an 11% growth in the number of planning applications received and a 23% increase in the number of decisions issued. Processing ‘legacy’ applications i.e. those applications which BCC inherited from the Department on 01 April 2015 continued to impact on the ability to achieve the statutory performance indicators in relation to Major and Local planning applications but outstanding legacy applications has been reduced to less than 15 (from approx. 400).

Belfast City Council is also focused on achieving the performance target for those applications processed entirely by Council (i.e. excluding legacy applications). The average processing times for local applications excluding legacy applications is almost on target. Processing times for Major applications is impacted by both legacy applications and those major applications which are delayed pending completion of a Section 76 agreement.

Planning Service is currently undertaking a number of areas of work to improve the planning application process. These include a lean review of internal processes, the intended publication of a “Local Validation List” to ensure that the right documentation and information is received with an application at

the outset; exploration of partial digitisation of application submissions, a new suite of standard application forms; and model planning conditions. To ensure that the Committee deals with the applications that it is best placed to deal with, whilst promoting the efficient handling of other types of application the Council has updated its Scheme of Delegation determining which matters are heard by the Planning Committee and which are delegated to planning officers. The Council continues to participate in the Discovery project to replace the existing NI Planning Portal (back-office software), which is essential to the improvement of planning application performance. Belfast City Council also welcomes the principle of the Department's proposed Planning Performance Management Framework for Northern Ireland, which will help drive improved performance across the region.

TABLE 1

2016-17 - YEAR END POSITION – MARCH 2017	Statutory Target from NI Order (BCC)	Belfast City Council RESULTS	2016-17	2015-16
NUMBER OF JOBS PROMOTED THROUGH BUSINESS START-UP (I.E. COMPLETED BUSINESS PLANS)	325 (minimum)	<p style="text-align: right;">Achieved</p> Business start-up activity means the delivery of completed client led business plans under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's Regional Start Initiative or its successor programmes. The figure reported for jobs promoted is based on the number of business plans submitted at the end of the programme. One business plan is equated to one job promoted.	501	445
AVERAGE PROCESSING TIME FOR MAJOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS (WEEKS) MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS HAVE IMPORTANT ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS. THE MAJORITY ARE MULTIPLE HOUSING, COMMERCIAL AND GOVERNMENT AND CIVIC DEV. OF THE 142 RECEIVED IN 2016-17, 27 WERE TO BCC	30 weeks (maximum)	<p style="text-align: right;">Not Achieved</p> NIPS Report: During 2016/17 the average processing time to process major applications to a decision or withdrawal was 68.6 weeks across all councils, up significantly from the 46.2 weeks reported last year. This is over double the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks. No council met the processing time target during 2016/17. Processing times for major applications increased over the year in nine of the eleven councils. The average processing time for major applications in 2016/17, which were processed entirely by BCC (i.e. received post-April 2015), is significantly shorter (47.2 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (81.4 weeks). Issuing decisions on legacy applications and those applications delayed whilst a Section 76 agreement is completed adversely affected the achievement of the statutory target. <i>The average processing times for major applications received directly by Belfast City Council excluding both transfers and Section 76 applications is 29.2 weeks and therefore within target.</i>	60.24 (legacy applications – 81.4 weeks; Council only applications 47.2 weeks)	54.3
AVERAGE PROCESSING TIME FOR LOCAL PLANNING APPLICATIONS (WEEKS) LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS ARE MOSTLY RESIDENTIAL AND MINOR COMMERCIAL APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AND DETERMINED BY A COUNCIL.	15 weeks (maximum)	<p style="text-align: right;">Almost Achieved; Achieved for non-legacy applications</p> NIPS Report: the number of local applications decided in BCC increased by 32% in 2016-17 rising from 1,265 the previous year to 1,671 Average processing time across all 11 councils, 16.2 weeks, was outside the target but an improvement on the 19.4 average for last year. Average processing times for non-legacy cases was over 6 times shorter (15 weeks) than when applications carrying over from the Department are added (94.9 weeks). Issuing decisions on legacy applications has adversely affected the achievement of statutory targets i.e. those received by the DoE prior to the transfer of planning to local government, some of which are a number of years old. <i>The average processing times for local applications received directly by Belfast City Council (i.e. excluding those that have transferred) is virtually within target at 15.6 weeks.</i>	15.6 (legacy applications – 94.9 weeks; Council only applications - 15 weeks)	19.2
% OF ENFORCEMENT CASES PROCESSED WITHIN 39 WEEKS	70% (minimum)	<p style="text-align: right;">Achieved</p> The statutory target is that 70% of all enforcement cases are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint. Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 74.84% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks.	74.8%	76.4%

AMOUNT OF BIODEGRADABLE LOCAL AUTHORITY COLLECTED MUNICIPAL WASTE THAT IS LANDFILLED (TONNAGE)	50,753 (MAXIMUM)	NI Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics published 27 July 2017	Achieved 47,406	45,087
% OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTED BY DISTRICT COUNCILS THAT IS SENT FOR RECYCLING (INCLUDING WASTE PREPARED FOR RE-USE)	No target	NI Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics published 27 July 2017	No Target 39.3%	40.1%
AMOUNT OF (TONNAGE) OF LOCAL AUTHORITY COLLECTED MUNICIPAL WASTE ARISING	No target	NI Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics published 27 July 2017	No Target 172,057	169,740

TABLE 2

	BUSINESS PLAN APPROVALS BY COUNCIL AREA												
COUNCIL AREA	Apr-16	May-16	Jun-16	Jul-16	Aug-16	Sep-16	Oct-16	Nov-16	Dec-16	Jan-17	Feb-17	Mar-17	
Antrim & Newtownabbey	17	14	13	16	19	17	14	0	5	6	1	0	122
Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	30	30	30	22	28	27	41	16	13	20	26	24	307
Belfast	45	55	61	60	53	67	90	0	0	28	30	12	501
Causeway Coast & Glens	25	24	17	20	24	38	38	21	18	21	24	6	276
Derry & Strabane	24	21	20	19	11	32	44	8	1	13	16	17	226
Fermanagh & Omagh	28	28	26	32	32	51	63	18	19	24	20	9	350
Lisburn & Castlereagh	12	20	19	23	22	25	26	9	8	14	21	17	216
Mid & East Antrim	21	19	32	16	19	25	37	13	9	14	19	31	255
Mid Ulster	20	37	32	27	35	35	47	25	20	19	22	20	339
Newry Mourne & Down	21	19	24	18	25	25	32	17	17	15	25	15	253
Ards & North Down	6	19	28	18	17	20	37	0	1	6	9	17	178
TOTAL	249	286	302	271	285	362	469	127	111	180	213	168	3,023