



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

**CORPORATE SERVICES
DIRECTORATE**

**DEMOCRATIC AND CENTRAL
SERVICES**

BUSINESS PLAN 2024-2025

FUNCTIONS OF THE DEMOCRATIC AND CENTRAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Democratic Services

- Ensure the management and administration of the democratic process and formal meetings to meet legal and constitutional requirements.
- Provision of support for Mayor and Elected Members and management of Council's civic and ceremonial events.
- Ensure the provision of an efficient corporate support service including the development of Council's customer service framework and complaints tracking process.
- Co-ordination of local elections.

Land and Property

- Responsible for the strategic, operational and administrative management of the Council's Land and Property portfolio.

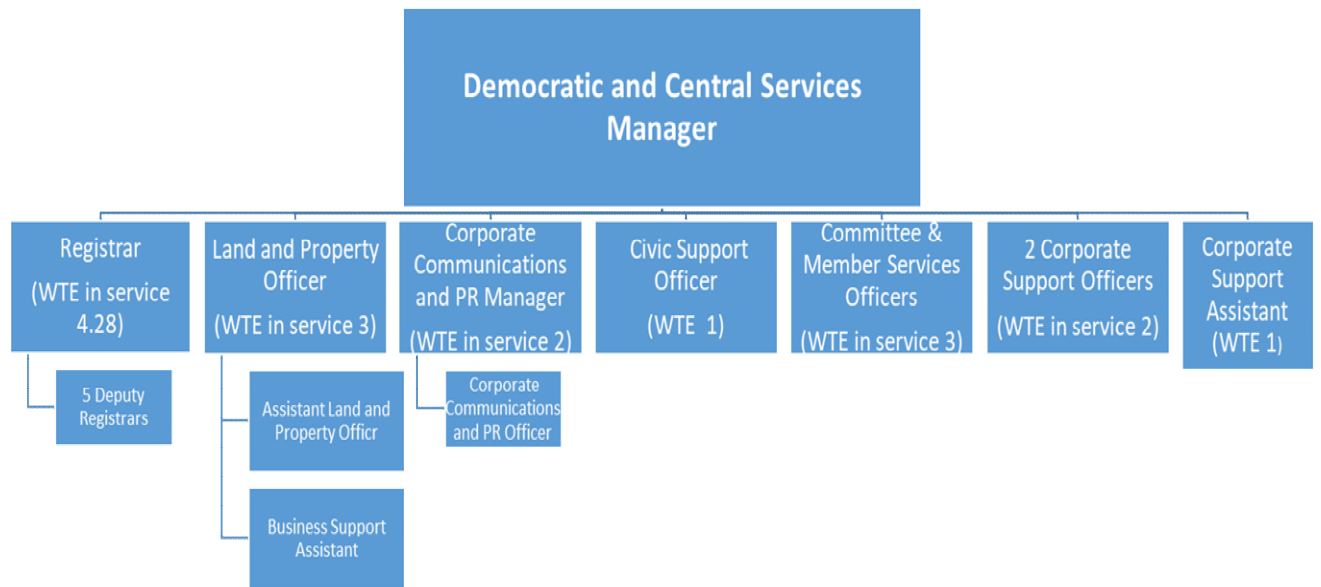
Registration

- Provision of service relating to the conduct of marriages and civil partnerships and the registration of births and deaths

Corporate Communications

- Promote a positive image of the Council through the development and implementation of a Corporate Communication and Engagement Strategy.

DEMOCRATIC AND CENTRAL SERVICES ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

1. THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE ARE TO:

- 1.1 Ensure that the department complies with all statutory and legislative requirements and best practice relating to the governance arrangements for developing and supporting effective decision-making processes, meetings' arrangements and providing advice and support for Elected Members.
- 1.2 Ensure that Elected Members are provided with training and development to build capacity in their democratic role and support strong and transparent local government.
- 1.3 Lead the creation of the Council's Asset Management and Land and Property function and ensure policies and procedures are developed and implemented to ensure the Council's assets are safeguarded and managed in accordance with legislative requirements, current guidance and best practice.
- 1.4 Ensure the creation, development and implementation of policies, procedures and protocols to facilitate the efficient delivery of the internal and external corporate communications function.
- 1.5 Develop, implement and oversee the establishment of a customer service framework and complaints tracking process for the Council.
- 1.6 Oversee the Registration function across the Council area in adherence with legislative requirements and General Registration Office (GRO) guidance.

2. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committed, loyal, reliable and dedicated team.• Relative stability of team with a number of experienced, skilled and knowledgeable officers.• Flexibility at times of emergency• Good relationship and rapport with elected members and senior officers.• Team Working/Strong team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insufficient budget allocated to the department which impacts on resourcing particularly in the Land and Property section.• Delivering a wide range of civic/corporate services through a small team.• Gap between strategy and operational delivery.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Functions/Broad range of services provided corporately. • Quality and consistency of work. • Wide remit of support provided to members. 	
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower members by building capacity through member development. • Maximise use of technology/technological improvements e.g Members' Portal, use of GIS in Land and Property team; recording of corporate complaints. • Staff capacity building. • Improved cross departmental working. • Be a point of contact for elected members. • Format of minutes. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal challenge and reputational damage as a result of council decision making. • Volume of work in all sections. • Timely receipt of report and agenda items. • Inconsistency in interpretation of policies. • Organisation reviews/change and impact on established teams. • Loss of staff through illness or retirement. • No succession planning.

3. LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The functions of the service are shaped primarily by a range of legislative obligations and guidance such as the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and 2014, Land and Property Services (LPS) Central Advisory Unit Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland March 2013, LPS Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland, Department for Communities (NI) Guidance for District Councils Local Government Disposal of Land at Less Than Best Price January 2021, NIAO/Strategic Investment Board (SIB) A Strategic Approach to the Use of Public Sector Assets October 2021.

4. INTERNAL CONTEXT

The functions of the Democratic & Central Services department include customer facing front line services (Registration) and a range of corporate functions which require the co-operation and input of officers across the Council in relation to, for example, the provision of agenda items and reports for Council and Committee meetings, information sharing with Corporate Communications for internal and

external audiences, input and adherence to Land and Property governance from asset owners.

5. EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The Democratic & Central Services function is externally influenced by legislation and by statutory guidance and guidance on best practice issued by the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). It also requires input from external partners, other voluntary and community organisations and the public.

6. PRE-REQUISITES AND EXTERNAL DEPENDENCIES

The following outlines the pre-requisites and external dependencies which could potentially impact or influence this Business Plan.

Sufficient resources (people and financial) are made available to the Department to enable it to function effectively.

Policies which the Department relies on are adopted or reviewed and updated by Council and implemented consistently.

ICT systems support any new technology required to deliver the services of the Department.

7. ASSUMPTIONS

Sufficient resources are in place to enable the Department to function effectively.

Policies and procedures particularly in relation to the management of Council's Land and Property portfolio and complaints handling are adopted and implemented across the Council's service areas.

Processes required for the management of, for example, the timely receipt of reports for Council and Committee meetings and requests to use/purchase/dispose of Council land are in place and adhered to.

Processes for receiving responses to media enquiries are in place and adhered to.

8. BUSINESS PLAN RISKS

- Failure to adhere to Standing Orders and NI LG Act 2014 NI in relation to Council and Committee meetings.
- Lack of awareness of members' needs.
- Members do not receive training to enable them to carry out their role.
- Reputational risk of some media reports.
- Ineffective communication with staff.
- Lack of resource in the department which has service implications and decision making processes.
- Inadequate resources and procedures in place in relation to the review of Council's commercial leases.
- Inadequate resources and procedures in place in relation to the management of Council's Land and Property portfolio.
- Inconsistent implementation of policies, eg complaints handling.
- Lack of cover for essential Registration service.

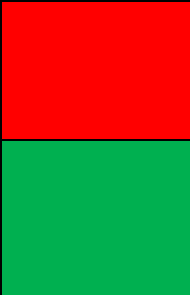
9. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE

- Complete programme of work to modernise and strengthen democratic services.
- Ensure the capacity of Elected Members is maximized.
- Deliver improved customer satisfaction by improving communications, customer support services and processes and provision of effective communication within Council that generates positive profile on all Council services.
- Lead the creation of the Council's Land and Property function and ensure policies and procedures are developed and implemented to ensure the Council's assets are safeguarded and managed in accordance with legislative requirements, current guidance and best practice.
- Ensure that Council delivers its Registration function in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

Directorate	Corporate Services
Service Area	Democratic and Central Services
Reporting Year	2024/25

Business Plan Objective 1: Democratic Services
Complete programme of work to modernise and strengthen democratic services.
Lead Officer(s): Democratic and Central Services Manager Civic Support Officer/Committee & Member Services Officer
Link to Corporate Strategy:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesive Leadership • Improvement and Innovation
Link to Community Plan:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Thriving Economy • A Healthy Safe Community • A Sustainable Accessible Environment
Link to Performance Improvement Plan:
Not applicable

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s) APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
Democratic Services	Provide effective and compliant committee services to support officers and Elected Members in decision making process.	Code 51009	April 2024 to March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options for upgrade of online access to agendas, papers and members' portal-report presented to Committee. 100% agendas published at least 5 days prior to date of meeting. 95% minutes published within 5 working days of the date of the meeting. 95% audio recordings uploaded within 2 days 95% Council meeting actions/decisions lists published within 5 working days. 		
					100%	April – September 2024 – 41 Meetings held
					54%	April – September 2024 – 41 Meetings held
					100%	
					As a consequence of minutes not being published within 5 working days of the meeting	April – September 2024

	Provide support to officers, Mayor and Elected Members with the provision of specialist support and guidance.	Code 51009	April 2024 to March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member satisfaction survey conducted. Number of Mayoral engagements and Civic Events delivered. 	TBC 109	
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Risk Management
Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:

As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.

Business Plan Objective 2: Elected Member Development

Ensure the capacity of Elected Members is maximised.

Lead Officer(s):

Democratic and Central Services Manager
Civic Support Officer/Committee & Member Services Officer

Link to Council Strategy:

- **Cohesive Leadership**
- **Improvement and Innovation**

Link to Community Plan:

- **A Thriving Economy**
- **A Healthy Safe Community**
- **A Sustainable Accessible Environment**

Link to Performance Improvement Plan:
Not applicable

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s) APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
Elected Member Development	Further develop E-Learning that supports a range of member learning styles.	Code 51009	March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85% engagement with Elected Member Development Programme¹. 1 day (=6 hours) on average per Elected Member spent on training. 	47% 0.88 days per member	6 Available Training Opportunities
	Enhance the three-day induction programme to include the role of the councillor reflective of the 21 st century councillor.		March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced three-day Induction Programme developed. 	Agenda issued with report for meeting on 16 September 2024 but meeting was not held	
	Develop an internal mentoring programme.		March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal mentoring programme developed. 	Agenda issued with report for meeting on 16 September 2024 but meeting was not held	
Risk Management						
Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:						
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.						

¹ Source: Corporate Strategy 2021-2025

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Business Plan Objective 3: Communications, Comments, Compliments and Complaints						
Deliver improved customer satisfaction by improving communications, customer support services and processes and provision of effective communication within Council that generates positive profile on all Council services.						
Lead Officer(s):						
Democratic and Central Services Manager Corporate Communications and PR Manager						
Link to Corporate Strategy:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader and Champion • Improvement and Innovation 						
Link to Community Plan:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Thriving Economy • A Healthy Safe Community • A Sustainable Accessible Environment 						
Link to Performance Improvement Plan:						
Not applicable						

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s)	Progress	RAG Status
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		Budget £		APSE Benchmarking Indicators		
Corporate Communications	Provide effective media management and communication.	Code 51002	April 2024 to March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications Strategy Review completed. 	April – Sept 25	
	Report to Council on current corporate PR provision including resources presented with options for consideration including business case.	TBC additional resource may be required.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Citizens' Newsletter issued annually. 	Complete	
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report presented 	Complete	
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 press releases and daily social media activity on corporate Facebook and Twitter monthly target. 	Social media target achieved (Instagram now added) with average of 80 posts per day. (150% over target) Press releases average of 24 per month, 20% over target	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placements secured = Positive monthly Advertising Value 	Positive MAVE figure retained, average of £1.55million		

				Equivalent figure	period Apr – Sep 24 ranging from £16k (Aug) to £1.618m (Sept) rget.	
Complaints	Effective management of corporate complaints process.	Code 51009		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication, monitoring and report of complaints implemented. • 0.37 complaints received per 1,000 head of population. • 18 working days to successfully conclude a complaint. • 75% of complaints rectified within target time. • Identify further training opportunities for staff handling and responding to complaints. 	March Audit Committee	
	Review existing resources and present business case.	TBC additional resource may be required.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Case presented to Council. 	DCS Resourcing Paper	
Risk Management						
Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:						
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.						

Business Plan Objective 4: Land and Property

Lead the creation of the Council's Land and Property function and ensure policies and procedures are developed and implemented to ensure the Council's assets are safeguarded and managed in accordance with legislative requirements, current guidance and best practice.

Lead Officer(s):

**Democratic and Central Services Manager
Land and Property Officer**

Link to Corporate Strategy:

- **Leader and Champion
Improvement and Innovation**

Link to Community Plan:

- **A Thriving Economy**
- **A Healthy Safe Community**
- **A Sustainable Accessible Environment**

Link to Performance Improvement Plan:

Not applicable

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s) APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
Maximise value of Council's land	Renewal of commercial leases.		Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly report on progress of commercial lease renewals 	Quarterly report	

and property assets in line with Council's Asset Management Strategy and Land and Property Policy				presented to Land and Property Sub-Committee to inform of progress in relation to RTTGWG (Report To Those Charged With Governance) Priority 1 recommendation.	presented in April, June, September 2024	
	Recommendations arising from Independent Report into Council's land and property procedures and processes implemented under the Transformation Programme.		End October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estates Strategy review complete and presented to Council. • Land and Property Policy review complete and presented to Council. • Schedules of charges for use of Council land presented to Council. 		
	Implementation of Land and Property policies and procedures.		March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out of policies complete. • Staff training delivered. 		
Risk Management						
Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:						
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.						

Business Plan Objective 5: Registration
Ensure that Council delivers its Registration functions in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.
Lead Officer(s):
Democratic and Central Services Manager Registrar

Link to Corporate Strategy:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader and Champion
Link to Community Plan:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Thriving Economy • A Healthy Safe Community • A Sustainable Accessible Environment
Link to Performance Improvement Plan:
Not applicable

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s) APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
Registration of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships	Provide effective and compliant Registration services in accordance with GRO legislation		Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of Registration Service per head of population = £1.72 		
Risk Management Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:						

As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.