



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

**CORPORATE SERVICES
DIRECTORATE**

**DEMOCRATIC AND CENTRAL
SERVICES**

BUSINESS PLAN 2023-2024

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.

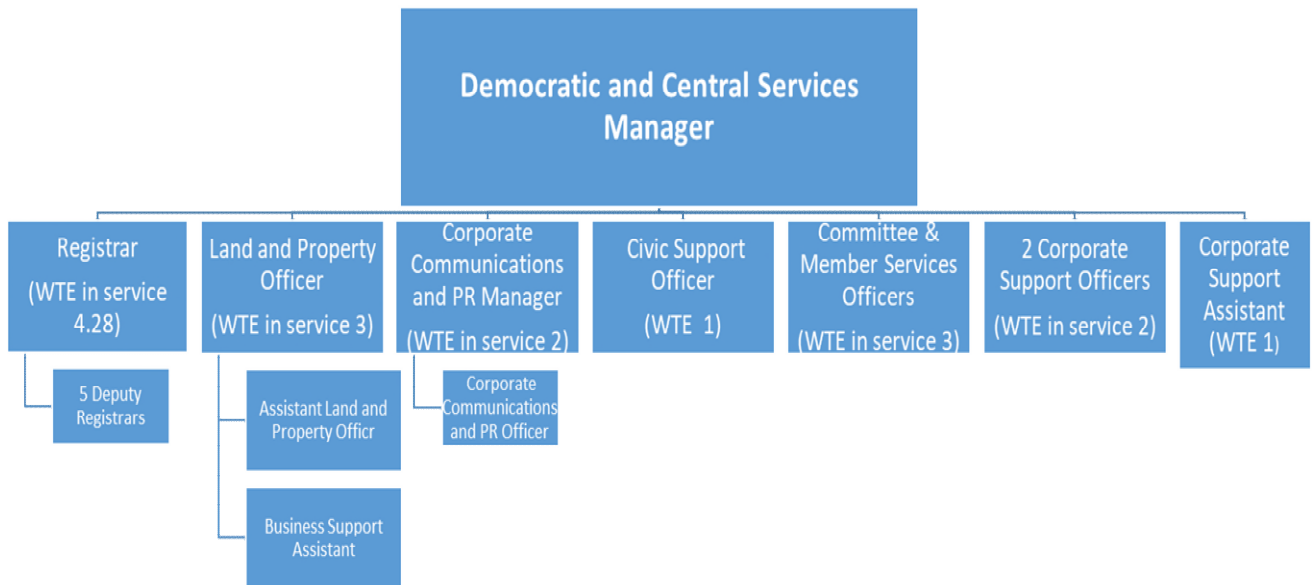
Registration and Cemeteries Administration

- Provision of service relating to the conduct of marriages and civil partnerships and the registration of births and deaths
- Delivery and development of Council's Cemeteries Administration service (under review during 2023/2024)

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.
- 1.7 Audit and review Council's Cemeteries' Administration processes to ensure continued effective and efficient delivery of the service.

2. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committed, loyal, reliable and dedicated team.• Relative stability of team with several experienced, skilled and knowledgeable officers.• Flexibility at times of emergency	<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

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good relationship and rapport with elected members and senior officers. • Team Working/Strong team. • Diverse Functions/Broad range of services provided corporately. • Quality and consistency of work. • Wide remit of support provided to members. 	<p>team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap between strategy and operational delivery.
<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. • Implementation of the recommendations arising from the independent reports following NIAO Extraordinary Audit. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal challenge and reputational damage as a result of council decision making. • Failure of the corporate body to implement the recommendations arising from the independent reports following NIAO Extraordinary Audit. • 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.

In March 2023 3 independent reports were accepted by Council and implementation of the recommendations contained within these 3 reports will impact on the internal context in the 2023/2024 year. There will be significant work for the Land and Property section because of the recommendations contained within the independent report into Land and Property related policies and procedures. The recommendations arising from the other 2 independent reports will also require input.

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.

Legislation enabling the holding of remote meetings continues to be extended.

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.

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.

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 disposal of Council assets. Currently no Asset Realisation Officer in post.
- 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.

- Ensure appropriate resources, systems and processes are in place to manage, protect, inspect and monitor the large land and property portfolio for the Council.
- Ensure that Council delivers its Registration and Cemeteries Administration functions in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

Strategic Objective

1. Complete programme of work to modernise and strengthen democratic services.

Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives Leader and Champion

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicators
Provide effective and compliant committee services to support officers and Elected Members in decision making process.	51009	Permanent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upgrade of online access to agendas, papers - 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.
Provide support to officers, Mayor and Elected Members with the provision of specialist support and guidance.	51009	March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Member satisfaction survey conducted.• Number of Mayoral engagements and Civic Events delivered.

Strategic Objective

2. Ensure the capacity of Elected Members is maximized.

**Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives
Leader and Champion**

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicators
Achievement of Charter Plus in the new term.	£8,000	March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Training Needs Analysis for new Council. • 85% engagement with Elected Member Development Programme¹. • 1 day (=6 hours) on average per Elected Member spent on training.

¹ Source: Corporate Strategy 2021-2025

Strategic Objective

3. 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.

Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives

- Leader and Champion

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicators
Effective management of corporate complaints process.	-	March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model Complaints Handling Procedure adopted by Council and implemented. • Communications Strategy reviewed. • 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. • 1 Citizens' Newsletter issued annually. • 20 press releases and daily social media activity on corporate Facebook and Twitter monthly target. • Placements secured = Positive monthly Advertising Value Equivalent figure
Provide effective media management and communication.	-	Permanent	

Strategic Objective

4. Ensure appropriate resources, systems and processes are in place to manage, protect, inspect and monitor the large land and property portfolio for the Council.

Ensure appropriate resources, systems and processes are in place to manage, protect, inspect and monitor the large land and property portfolio for the Council.

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicators
Maximise value of Council's land and property assets in line with Council's Asset Management Strategy and Land and Property Policy		Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quarterly report on progress of commercial lease renewals presented to Land and Property Sub-Committee to inform of progress in relation to RTTGWG (Report To Those Charged With Governance) Priority 1 recommendation.• Implementation plan for recommendations arising from Independent Report into Council's land and property procedures and processes developed with timescales for completion.

Strategic Objective

5. Ensure that Council delivers its Registration and Cemeteries Administration functions in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives
Leader and Champion

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicators
Provide effective and compliant Registration services in accordance with GRO legislation		Permanent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of Registration Service per head of population

Strategic Objective

5. Ensure that Council delivers its Registration and Cemeteries Administration functions in accordance with legal requirements and best practice.

Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives

Leader and Champion

Review reporting arrangements for cemetery administration within Council.		March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review complete and report presented to Council.
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