



**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.

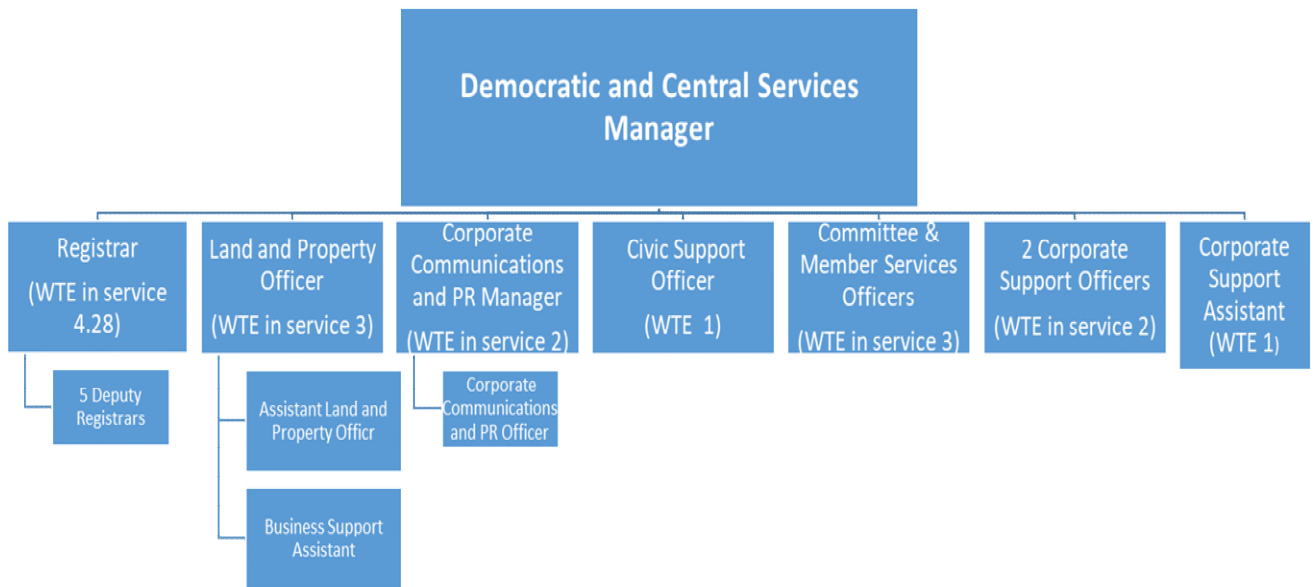
### **Registration**

- 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**

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

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

### 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.

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

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



Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s)  APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
<b>Democratic Services</b>	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"> <li>• Explore options for upgrade of online access to agendas, papers and members' portal-report presented to Committee.</li> <li>• 100% agendas published at least 5 days prior to date of meeting.</li> <li>• 95% minutes published within 5 working days of the date of the meeting.</li> <li>• 95% audio recordings uploaded within 2 days</li> <li>• 95% Council meeting actions/decisions lists published within 5 working days.</li> </ul>		
	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"> <li>• Member satisfaction survey conducted.</li> <li>• Number of Mayoral engagements and Civic Events delivered.</li> </ul>		
<b>Risk Management</b>						

<b>Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:</b>
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.

<b>Business Plan Objective 2: Elected Member Development</b>
Ensure the capacity of Elected Members is maximised.
<b>Lead Officer(s):</b>
<b>Democratic and Central Services Manager Civic Support Officer/Committee &amp; Member Services Officer</b>

<b>Link to Council Strategy:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohesive Leadership</li> <li>• Improvement and Innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Link to Community Plan:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Thriving Economy</li> <li>• A Healthy Safe Community</li> <li>• A Sustainable Accessible Environment</li> </ul>
<b>Link to Performance Improvement Plan:</b>
Not applicable

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s)  APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
<b>Elected Member Development</b>	Further develop E-Learning that supports a range of member learning styles.	Code 51009	March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>85% engagement with Elected Member Development Programme<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>1 day (=6 hours) on average per Elected Member spent on training.</li> </ul>		
	Enhance the three-day induction programme to include the role of the councillor reflective of the 21 <sup>st</sup> century councillor.		March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced three-day Induction Programme developed.</li> </ul>		
	Develop an internal mentoring programme.		March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal mentoring programme developed.</li> </ul>		
<b>Risk Management</b>						
<b>Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:</b>						
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.						

<sup>1</sup> Source: Corporate Strategy 2021-2025

<b>Business Plan Objective 3: Communications, Comments, Compliments and Complaints</b>
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.
<b>Lead Officer(s):</b>
<b>Democratic and Central Services Manager Corporate Communications and PR Manager</b>
<b>Link to Corporate Strategy:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader and Champion</li> <li>• Improvement and Innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Link to Community Plan:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Thriving Economy</li> <li>• A Healthy Safe Community</li> <li>• A Sustainable Accessible Environment</li> </ul>
<b>Link to Performance Improvement Plan:</b>
Not applicable

Work Stream	Actions	Financial Information/ Budget £	Timescale	Performance Indicator(s)  APSE Benchmarking Indicators	Progress	RAG Status
<b>Corporate Communications</b>	Provide effective media management and communication.  Report to Council on current corporate PR provision	Code 51002  TBC additional	April 2024 to March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications Strategy Review completed.</li> <li>• 1 Citizens' Newsletter issued annually.</li> <li>• Report presented</li> <li>• 20 press releases and daily</li> </ul>		

	including resources presented with options for consideration including business case.	resource may be required.		social media activity on corporate Facebook and Twitter monthly target. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placements secured = Positive monthly Advertising Value Equivalent figure</li> </ul>		
<b>Complaints</b>	Effective management of corporate complaints process.  Review existing resources and present business case.	Code 51009  TBC additional resource may be required.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication, monitoring and report of complaints implemented.</li> <li>• 0.37 complaints received per 1,000 head of population.</li> <li>• 18 working days to successfully conclude a complaint.</li> <li>• 75% of complaints rectified within target time.</li> <li>• Identify further training opportunities for staff handling and responding to complaints.</li> <li>• Business Case presented to Council.</li> </ul>		
<b>Risk Management</b>						
<b>Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:</b>						
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.						

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<b>Business Plan Objective 4: Land and Property</b>
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.
<b>Lead Officer(s):</b>
<b>Democratic and Central Services Manager Land and Property Officer</b>

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

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

of Council's land and property assets in line with Council's Asset Management Strategy and Land and Property Policy	leases.			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.		
	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"> <li>• Estates Strategy review complete and presented to Council.</li> <li>• Land and Property Policy review complete and presented to Council.</li> <li>• Schedules of charges for use of Council land presented to Council.</li> </ul>		
	Implementation of Land and Property policies and procedures.		March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll out of policies complete.</li> <li>• Staff training delivered.</li> </ul>		
<b>Risk Management</b>						
<b>Identify Risks and any Mitigating Actions Required:</b>						
As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.						

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

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

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



As detailed in Democratic and Central Services Risk Register.