

Local **2025** G★**overnment** Awards

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Local 2025 Government Awards

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PHOTOGRAPHS

All official photographs from the Local Government Awards event will be available to download for free from the following link from 10am on Friday 28th March -

<https://e.pcloud.link/publink/show?code=kZ95WIZypeLOajtCK7P3l5dpwcuFF1CCfqk>

We will be taking photography and video footage during the local government awards and celebration event. If you do not want to participate, please make a member of staff aware on arrival. To find out how we store and use your data please visit: www.nilga.org/privacy-policy



APSE are delighted to partner with NILGA as sponsors of the Local Government Awards 2025. Good luck to each of this year's finalists!

President's Welcome

As the local government sector comes together to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of new councils, it is essential to reflect on the progress and achievements of the past decade.

During this period, we have witnessed significant milestones, including the transfer of planning responsibilities, the introduction of community planning, and the signing of City and Growth Deals. Furthermore, we have implemented a range of innovations in service delivery that have shaped the sector.

In celebration of this milestone, the 2025 Northern Ireland Local Government Awards highlight the exceptional achievements and successes of councils, councillors, and local government officers over the past ten years.

NILGA, in partnership with the sponsors and partners of the Local Government Awards, warmly welcomes you to the 2025 Awards Ceremony, which will celebrate local government excellence.

The Northern Ireland Local Government Awards recognise outstanding contributions in service delivery, innovative initiatives, and personal dedication from councils, councillors, and partners. These prestigious awards not only provide public recognition but also inspire those who deliver and sustain essential front-line services.

The award categories are designed to encourage innovation, dedication, and excellence across the sector, providing an opportunity for local government staff and members to showcase their achievements and shine.

Thank you to our award sponsors, partners, and judges for your support. We also extend our gratitude to our councils, councillors, and local government officers for taking the time to submit their nominations and for supporting the celebration event tonight.



Councillor Alison Bennington
NILGA President



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Best Outcome of the Past Decade Award

Award partner the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

The Transformation and Modernisation into a U.K. Award Winning Service - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

In 2015, following the merger of the two legacy councils, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council set a bold and transformative vision to revolutionise the Borough's leisure services. Leveraging a strategic combination of rebranding, targeted investment, cutting-edge programming, and staff development, the service has achieved unprecedented success.

Membership has tripled, usage has more than doubled, and the service subsidy has been dramatically reduced, delivering exceptional value for residents. This transformation has not only elevated the health and wellbeing of the community but also earned the service multiple prestigious U.K. awards across both private and public sectors. Recognised as a benchmark for excellence, this model of good practice has garnered acclaim on local, national, and international stages.

Food Heartland - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

The Food Heartland is a council-led initiative launched in 2015, connecting farmers, food producers, and chefs across the Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough. This collaborative network fosters a vibrant food culture, showcasing the region's exceptional culinary offerings. Regular forum meetings and quarterly network gatherings facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration. Annual showcases at Lurgan and Armagh Shows provide a platform to celebrate the borough's rich food heritage and introduce local delicacies to a wider audience.

10-year journey becoming a sustainable, decarbonising and protected environment - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council has worked committedly to reduce adverse impacts on the natural environment from council operations, since 2015. Environmental protection is at the core of the work we deliver. In addition, embedding sustainability across the organisation has been a work in practice, considering new ways to work and taking on-the-ground action to use resources to meet current need, not compromising future generation's need for these same resources. Even prior to the Climate Change (NI) Act 2022, council has been calculating our carbon footprint and making smart choices to invest in energy efficiency, renewable technologies, alternate fuel options and undertaking a council-wide estate review in terms of energy and thermal efficiencies. This has resulted in carbon emission reduction every year, along with continued accreditation to ISO14001:2015 and achieving Platinum level in local environmental benchmarking surveys, demonstrating our commitment to environmental protection.



Find out how LGIU is empowering councils to tackle the biggest challenges we're all facing, today and in the future.



Service Innovation & Improvement Award

Award partner the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)

The Transformation and Modernisation into a U.K. Award Winning Service - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

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Household Waste Recycling Centre Access Management System - Ards and North Down Borough Council

Ards and North Down Borough Council historically experienced excessive waste arisings at its Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) of up to twice the average for NI councils, and lower HWRC recycling rates than other councils.

Two key factors were identified: unauthorised waste from commercial sources within and outside the Borough, and from residences outside the Borough. Strategically, council's poor HWRC performance was significantly impeding achievement against its overall sustainable waste resource management goals.

New site access and usage rules were applied, and an online HWRC access booking system was introduced to facilitate ongoing management of these rules. Consequently, HWRC landfill waste per capita went from a high of 200% of the NI council average to 90%, and the HWRC recycling rate increased above the council average.

This service innovation and improvement initiative has been widely embraced by the Borough's residents and has led to significant environmental and financial gains.



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Causeway Healthy Kids - Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Causeway Healthy Kids is an innovative collaborative community planning programme developed and delivered by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Councils Sport and Wellbeing Development Unit with professional health support from NHSCT Dietetics and Mental Health Departments.

The programme is delivered by council sport and wellbeing staff to all key stage 2 children over an 11-week duration in a familiar school setting. The 11 sessions include sport/physical delivery as a constant across all 11 weeks with the addition of 5 nutrition, and 6 mindfulness sessions. Causeway Healthy Kids aims are:

- To promote healthy nutrition, emotional mental health and exercise
- To create an opportunity for children to appreciate the role of mental health and nutrition in their daily lives
- To develop partnerships and create healthier community attitudes.

Developing the Workforce of the Future: Career Pathways Programme: LCCC Apprenticeship Scheme - Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

LCCC's Career Pathways Programme aims to address future workforce needs through innovation in resourcing. Our bespoke apprenticeship scheme was launched in September 2021 with 6 apprentices. The programme has successfully grown year on year, now supporting 18 apprentices annually, improving our succession planning processes, rejuvenating local government as a career of choice and providing opportunities for development and growth. Recruiting, retaining and developing talent and creating opportunities for hard-to-reach groups is a key focus. The scheme is wide-ranging in career scope and diversity. Positive engagement and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, creative promotions campaigns and tailored support for apprentices has been key to success and evidenced in the number of successfully completed apprenticeships and those who have remained with the council through securing permanent employment or progressing to Higher Level Apprenticeships. The rise in applications from 47 in 2021 to 223 in 2024 demonstrates the positive impact this scheme has had on creating interest in local government careers. It is also evidence of the positive experience of those engaged in the process.

Best Use of Data & Technology Award

Award partner the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)

Creation of a Council-wide Quality Management System (QMS) - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

The creation of a new Council-wide Quality Management System (QMS), launched in 2023, aims to address the challenge of fragmented data capture, analysis and reporting across the organisation, thereby enhancing elected members' decision-making and providing for improvements in the management and delivery of services.

The initiative required extensive cross-department collaboration to determine the scope of data held and needed by various teams. This was essential for the planning, design and development of a digital solution aimed at consolidating data into a central repository supported by formal review and reporting processes. The QMS simplifies data retrieval and utilises Power BI to provide comprehensive insights for managers across departments through a Teams application. Technical solutions were also created to enhance the efficiency and reliability of data capture.

The QMS has marked a significant step toward fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement within council.

Bespoke CRM Digital Solution for Regional Enterprise Support Service - Belfast City Council

The software development of a custom-built CRM solution for the entire Northern Ireland region, to be used by all 11 councils (consisting of 100 users) and 570 external users (consisting of 550 delivery agents, 11 call handlers via a contact centre, and 20 stakeholder organisations). All users create client information, programme documentation (contact reports, sign off reports) and collaborate with

clients via integrated SharePoint regarding business plans. The delivery of the Enterprise Support Service (ESS) consist of 4 key Pillars representing a continuum of support required from pre-startup engagement, foundation, growth, and scaling journeys. The support aims to engage with 22,050 individuals/businesses. Supporting architecture ensures a seamless service delivery for the client and to support councils to monitor and measure delivery, provide audit assurances and report to funders. Belfast City Council led the design and development of the CRM solution including partnership collaboration, and administrative management.

The Development and Implementation of Dashboard Reporting across the organisation - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council have developed and implemented dashboard reporting. The aim is to progress towards data maturity. The project commenced in 2022, with 7 dashboards delivered in 2024. Collectively, the dashboards leverage technology already available and make effective use of existing data.

Tangible impacts of the project include the provision of measurable impact of a pilot project to reduce CO2e emissions, allowing the Council to meet its NIPSO Complaints Reporting obligations efficiently at minimal cost, and communicating the council's Capital Programme.

The collective impact of the project is that data is now better understood, more widely used, open for interrogation and promoted. Dashboards are often now considered almost standard practice.

The project has been a key pillar in the council's ambition to be an organisation with a vibrant, evidence led culture, where data is valued as an asset, insights are derived, successfully used and openly shared.

Mid Ulster District Council celebrates the birth of a new registration appointment system - Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council since Local Government Reform has embraced Continuous Service Improvement as the key to the delivery of its services. The introduction of an Online Booking system for Registration Services within the council has revolutionised service delivery. The project was the first customer facing service built using the principles and themes from the Digital Transformation Strategy which the council launched in July 2022. The focus of the system was to improve and simplify the service for customers, make it available online 24/7, and ensure it was optimised for mobile. The new online booking processes have completely changed the registration service. The improvement in the front-end interface has reduced phone calls by 32% and emails by 40%, as all the information that is needed is on the web for anyone to access at any time. It has allowed our staff to offer a better service to customers.

The small business research initiative (sbri) helps the public sector find innovative solutions for its complex problems.

SIB's sbri team offers specialised, tailored support to public sector organisations, enabling them to use challenge-based pre-commercial procurement to develop innovative solutions, whilst offering private sector businesses new opportunities through fully funded research and development to solve these complex challenges.

For further information contact

Dr. Sian Thornthwaite

Programme Director

sian.thornthwaite@sibni.org

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Engaging Communities Award

Award partner CCLA Good Investment

Family Support and Social Supermarket Programme - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

The Family Support & Social Supermarket Programme is a collaborative initiative between Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, Save the Children and Community Advice Antrim and Newtownabbey. It aims to reduce the impact of poverty on children's lives to alleviate the financial pressures contributing to stress in the household, with a long-term view to improving children's outcomes. Sustainability is key with a support package in place for Pre-Loved School Uniform and Christmas Toy Schemes.

Belfast 2024 Programme - Belfast City Council

Belfast 2024, a strategic pillar of our 10-year Cultural Strategy, was our city's largest celebration of home-grown culture led by Belfast City Council and developed through co-design with city stakeholders, creative sector and citizens. Authentic co-design was core to Belfast 2024. Rather than having a traditional audience role, citizens across Belfast co-created and participated, via community led co-design, development, and decision-making:

- Participatory Budgeting - 28 grassroots projects developed and voted for by communities
- Community Takeovers - creative interventions in public spaces
- Creative Bursaries for 16 artists working in socially engaged practice
- 20 large-scale commissions valuing £3million+ with Outreach, Inclusion and Participation at their core including section 75 communities: LGBTQIA+, minority, people with disabilities, women's groups, men's groups, young people, and deprived areas
- Delivering 750+ events, with 53,657 participants and attendees, 201 community groups and 164 partners.
- This will form the basis of future engagement for Cultural delivery in council.

Bushmills Community Choices - Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Bushmills Community Choices was a participatory budgeting project co-designed and delivered by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, in partnership with Northern Area Community Network and groups and individuals from the community in Bushmills.

Anyone with an interest in the village was encouraged to put forward a suggestion or idea, with several pots of funding totalling £6000 available to progress the most popular project ideas to enhance the local area, decided by a community vote. The project took place over 12 months from April 2022 to March 2023 and groups and individuals were supported to identify and develop community led ideas by a team of facilitators from Council's Community Development and Good Relations Departments as well as the local rural support network Northern Area Community Network.

Connecting Pomeroy - Mid Ulster District Council

Connecting Pomeroy is a £7.1M EU PEACE IV project creating community cohesion, community facilities and a forest and visitor centre in Pomeroy with iconic forest trails delivered by the Connecting Pomeroy Partnership in 2024.

It included a highly anticipated Public Realm Scheme, the construction of the new state-of-the-art visitor centre and new community facilities at the Church of Ireland Hall, the Presbyterian Church and Pomeroy GFC.

Connecting Pomeroy has created a regional iconic shared space and multiple local shared cross community spaces in the rural village of Pomeroy to address the impact of the Troubles, as well as contributing to the breakdown of a rural interface of polarisation and segregation, and the building of the confidence of a rural community to engage together.

Collaborative Partnership Award

Award partner Hays Recruitment

Causeway Healthy Kids - Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

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The programme is delivered by council sport and wellbeing staff to all key stage 2 children over an 11-week duration in a familiar school setting. The 11 sessions include sport/physical delivery as a constant across all 11 weeks with addition of 5 nutrition, and 6 mindfulness sessions. Causeway Healthy Kids aims are:

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- To develop partnerships and create healthier community attitudes.

The Big Tree Project - Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

The Big Tree Project is an initiative that was formulated in collaboration with Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and the Woodland Trust to tackle the ever-increasing environmental issue of limited tree cover within Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is one of the least wooded regions within Europe with less than 9% canopy cover which is far behind the European average of 38%. The need for tree canopy cover is highlighted further due to the threats of climate change and the increase of tree diseases. Trees play a key role in climate change adaptation and mitigation due to the many benefits they provide.

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) collaborated with the Woodland Trust and other partners with the shared primary objective of increasing the number of trees in the LCCC area. This would provide significant benefits for everyone such as improving wildlife habitats and our green canopy.

Science Summer School – Activate Your Curiosity! - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim's (MEA) Science Summer School aims to inspire young people to become the next generation of scientists with an inspirational programme mixing the best of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) through seminars, discussions and hands-on experiments. A key action of the MEA Labour Market Partnership and Manufacturing Task Force the initiative has galvanised school, company, academia and public sector relationships in the borough.

The MEA Science Summer School is not a stand-alone event but is a catalyst for a collaborative vision for the borough to nurture future talent. MEA and partners have developed a comprehensive programme of schools' engagement activities, which take place from September to June wrapping support and learning around a flagship event which takes place in January, hosted by Professor Brian Cox, CBE, FRS.

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Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership: Working Together to Improve Employability in Mid Ulster - Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster is the most entrepreneurial region in Northern Ireland outside of Belfast, but challenges related to skills and employability have been identified as key factors impacting the area's current and future economic growth.

The Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) is a unique, industry-led collaboration involving key business stakeholders, education, community and public sector facilitated by Mid Ulster District Council.

Its aim is to enhance employability outcomes and improve labour market conditions within the region. The LMP boasts the strongest business representation of the eleven LMPs across Northern Ireland and has played a significant role in the success of its first two Action Plans in terms of job outcomes and building a strong, visible presence throughout the district. Partnership and collaboration are the bedrock to all LMP initiatives, and local relationships continue to strengthen, enabling effective implementation and successful employment outcomes.

10 years of delivering for the communities of Belfast

2025 marks the 10-year anniversary of GLL operating Belfast's 16 leisure centres, which are now operated under our Better brand. While there may have been some initial controversy around Belfast City Council contracting a delivery partner for its leisure facilities, our achievements in transforming leisure services in the city are proof of the success of the partnership approach.

GLL

Our social enterprise business model, which means that any profit generated by the Better leisure centres is reinvested into the same centres, has elevated Belfast to a standard that would rival any European city. We now generate £22 million in social impact annually, alongside significant fiscal benefit to the local authority, saving 25% on the previous operating model. We have grown the membership of our leisure centres from 7,500 to over 35,000 members and the use of the facilities from 1.4 million per year to 3 million last year.

Arguably, the highlight of our 10 years in Belfast has been the work we undertook with Council and the National Lottery Heritage Fund to open the stunningly restored Templemore Baths, a real jewel in the crown of our leisure facilities and proof that loving restoration can breathe new life into iconic buildings securing them for future generations to enjoy.



Our cooperative model has seen large scale job creation growing from 300 staff to 1,000 staff and expanding outside of core leisure delivery. We're creating not just jobs but careers with opportunities for growth and promotion; we have seen 30 internal promotions, 32 people funded courses, and are proud

to hold IIP gold standard accreditation. GLL's unique employee-owned status has ensured we maintain real living wage status and have recognised the good work of our employees with a 5-10% pay uplift in the last year.

Our social enterprise model also allows us to cover sport and leisure from the very elite through to the everyday. Through our GLL Sports Foundation, we support 140 local elite athletes with £90,000 of funding going to athletes, including Olympians, across 33 sports. On the other end of the spectrum, 53% of our members benefit from concessionary rate membership and fees and we use our facilities to tackle health inequalities in Belfast, treating over 3,000 people referred by GPs and playing host to 6,000 active ageing members over the age of 60.

Between 2019 and 2024, we have been able to reinvest over £2 million in our leisure facilities in Belfast, with £650,000 of that reinvestment coming in 2024. Over 20 reinvestment projects were delivered in Better facilities across Belfast in 2024, modernising our offering and bringing in state-of-the-art gym equipment across the city in centres such as Falls and Lisnasharragh, as well as the cold plunge pool in Olympia that offers a unique recovery offering for our users, ensuring that not only are we reaching every section of society in Belfast, but we are offering them the best of the best.

None of this would be possible without our social enterprise model allowing us to ensure that every penny spent in our centres is dedicated to improving the user experience. That is what the last 10 years has been about; here's to another 10.



Local Government Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Award

Award partner the Local Government Staff Commission

Inclusive ABC Initiative -

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Inclusive ABC is an initiative that facilitates the mainstreaming of equality through partnership working internally across Council departments and elected members and externally with our community and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

The membership of the Operational Group is drawn from a cross section of council departments and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. It is chaired by the council's Policy, Equality & Diversity Manager and it acts as a conduit for sharing good practice and resolving problems in relation to service delivery primarily linked to equality and disability access.

The Inclusive ABC Strategic Group is chaired by the Chair of the Governance, Resources and Strategy Committee (GRSC) and it informs and supports the work of the Operational Group.

Both groups have provided a central resource and support on EDI issues, engaging with the community, and improving the sharing of information on inclusive facilities, events, and initiatives.

PCSP Disability Project (Hate Crime) -

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

The PCSP Disability Project was launched to raise the profile of disability hate crimes and improve the sense of safety for people with disabilities and their carers. This was identified through crime statistics and feedback from key community groups, revealing the barriers faced by victims in accessing support and justice.

The project was led by the Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP), with support from council officers, and partners including MENCAP, AutismNI,

Disability Action, Causeway Neurodiversity, Hate Crime Advocacy Service, PSNI & EA. These groups collaborated pooling knowledge, resources, and expertise.

The project delivered:

- Training for elected officials, community groups, and council officers.
- An accessible educational hate crime animation.
- Development of interactive lesson plan.
- Networks and partnerships to enhance communication, consultation, and support.
- Living Library events like "Who Are We?" to increase understanding of hate crime across all groups.

The project continues to evolve, building networks and tools to amplify marginalised voices. Recognised as best practice in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, the project won first place in the PSNI Problem Solving in Partnership Awards and is a model for tackling hate crime inclusively.

The Local Government Staff Commission in support of the regional Equality and Diversity Group is delighted to partner with NILGA in sponsoring the **Local Government Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Award**. This award celebrates the efforts of Councils in Northern Ireland that are actively working to address inequalities, foster positive community relations, and acknowledge the valuable contributions of individuals from diverse backgrounds to life across the region. We are delighted to promote this important initiative and look forward to collaborating with NILGA in the future to support and assist Councils to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion as a Civic Leader, an Employer, and Service Provider.



Equality & Diversity
in Local Councils

Autism Friendly Borough Initiative - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

MEABC prides itself in providing strong leadership within the Borough. We have been working collaboratively with Northern Health & Social Care Trust (NHSCT) and a wide range of organisations since 2020 to create an autism-friendly council and borough. This has involved knowledge and skills sharing with our partner organisations ensuring Mid and East Antrim is an accessible, safe, welcoming and inclusive place.

The Autism Friendly Borough initiative has developed a wide range of interventions including an educational awareness raising package, online and printed information, training, information events and other ad hoc supports. Through the delivery of this initiative, we have set Mid and East Antrim as a leading council in Northern Ireland to raise awareness of autism with a range of public, private and community sector service organisations, helping them to improve the experiences of autistic people who avail of their services.

Communications Campaign of the Year Award

Award partner agendaNi

Visit Causeway Coast and Glens Spring Campaign 2024 - Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

The Visit Causeway Coast and Glens Spring Campaign 2024 showcased the region as a premier and must-visit destination targeting visitors from Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

Focused on the iconic landscapes, cultural heritage and diverse experiences of the area, the campaign incorporated a range of innovative traditional and digital marketing strategies to captivate audiences and inspire travel. Key highlights included promoting the world-famous Causeway Coastal Route, unique experiences, hospitality and local events. A strategic mix of engaging social media content, radio advertising and visually stunning creative was used to drive engagement and increase footfall and spend.

This initiative not only boosted visitor numbers, but also strengthened local businesses and added to the local economy. Its success was marked by a significant increase in online engagement and visibility, securing shortlisting for three prestigious awards. The campaign demonstrated creativity and impact, setting a benchmark for regional tourism promotion in Northern Ireland.

NISS Go Succeed - Derry City & Strabane District Council

Go Succeed launched in November 2023, representing a new approach to helping potential entrepreneurs, new starts, and existing businesses, to maximise their potential and contribute to Northern Ireland's economy. Belfast City Council is the Lead Delivery Council with Derry City & Strabane District Council leading out on the Marketing making up the Project Management Office, working in partnership with NI's 11 local Councils. The service is delivered across all council areas, working together collaboratively with local enterprise agencies and delivery partners. Go Succeed provides would-be and existing businesses and entrepreneurs with flexible, tailored and easily accessible advice and support at any stage of their entrepreneurial journey. Go Succeed has put in place a more ambitious approach to the delivery of start-up and growth support, seeking to increase the number, survival, and growth rates of new businesses across the region. The success of the service over its first year has been underpinned by a high-profile communications campaign encompassing press, media and advertising across TV, radio, outdoor, digital, and beyond.

MEA Outdoors - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's outdoor spaces and activities campaign, MEA Outdoors, aims to inspire community engagement and promote well-being by showcasing the rich natural resources available within our local area. Through vibrant storytelling and targeted social media content, we highlight the variety of accessible outdoor spaces—from expansive parks to our iconic coastline and rolling hills. The campaign offers residents an opportunity to discover, explore, and participate in activities like guided walks, biodiversity projects, environmental workshops, intergenerational and group activities.

By using compelling visuals and interactive content, we encourage people to connect with nature, stay active, and build a sense of community. This initiative not only supports physical and mental well-being but also enhances community pride, creating lasting connections and positive impacts on our residents' quality of life.

Home for Christmas Campaign - Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council and Kaizen worked closely together on a special Christmas Campaign for 2024, which brought together the council's events, community, arts and culture, economic development and tourism offering together for the first time in an integrated and cohesive campaign which placed Christmas (and Council) at the heart of the community in Mid Ulster.

There was an emphasis on the overarching message that everything is available in Mid Ulster for Christmas, with the primary aim of encouraging residents to stay, shop and spend locally. The creative approach reflected a further key objective to engage emotion through this campaign, making it more personal and relatable to audiences, and further humanising the Council's brand personality. Across the five week campaign, almost one million people viewed campaign content on social media alone, over 500,000 people were reached, and 3600 interacted with the campaign, showing that it resonated strongly with Mid Ulster residents.

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Best Initiative by a Councillor Award

Award partner Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)

Councillor Mark Cooper BEM - Transformative Leadership - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Councillor Mark Cooper BEM, of Threemilewater DEA, is known for his dedication to sustainable development and community empowerment. His dedication to public service is evident in the numerous projects he has spearheaded, each aimed at improving the quality of life for his constituents. However, it was his groundbreaking initiative of introducing British Sign Language that truly set him apart as a visionary leader.

Alderman Julian McGrath - Anti-Poverty Strategy - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Ald McGrath recognised that there was a need for an anti-poverty strategy for A&NBC to develop a collaborative, cohesive, Borough-wide approach to tackle poverty, ensure efficient use of resources and measurable outcomes. He worked with officers and political parties across the council to have a strategy adopted. The strategy needed to prioritise tackling systemic deprivation through collaboration, targeted initiatives, and sustainable solutions: -

- Within the council: To ensure all Departments work together seamlessly to address poverty.
- Among External Organisations: To engage community groups, charities, local businesses, youth organisations, disability advocacy groups, sports clubs, and senior citizens' forums, among others, to reorganise service delivery, reduce duplication of effort but increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our offering.

- Aligning with Regional Strategies: To coordinate with Stormont Departments to align the Borough's anti-poverty efforts with regional strategies, particularly the forthcoming Government Anti- Poverty Strategy, and funding opportunities.

Councillor Cadogan Enright - Green Economy - Newry Mourne and Down District Council

Councillor Cadogan Enright, representing the Downpatrick and Lecale Electoral Area in the Newry, Mourne, and Down District Council, has been a prominent advocate for the green economy in Northern Ireland.

His efforts have significantly contributed to integrating environmental sustainability with economic development in the region.

Key Contributions:

- Renewable Energy Initiatives
- Advocacy for Green Economy Projects
- Community Environmental Projects

Through these initiatives, Councillor Enright exemplifies the proactive role local representatives can play in fostering a green economy, demonstrating that environmental stewardship and economic development can progress hand in hand.

Employee of the Year Award

Award partner William Johnston Memorial Trust

Steven Andrews - Groundsperson - Ards and North Down Borough Council

Commencing his employment in 2010, Steven has worked continuously on the Ward Park bowling greens. During this time there have been significant changes in greenkeeping practices and Steven has embraced each and every change with gusto. In addition, there have been many chemical products removed from the market that has required introducing significantly different approaches to maintain a quality playing surface. Again, Steven has shown an adaptive approach to finding a solution to each challenge without detriment to the greens. Steven's vision for innovation has delivered several successful initiatives not just to the bowling greens for which he is responsible, but across the other greens in the Borough including mentoring other greenkeepers, work at Bangor Walled Garden and contributions towards the council's horticultural apprenticeship programme.

Gary Scott - Safeguarding Coordinator - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Gary Scott is the Safeguarding Coordinator for both Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council and Newry, Mourne & Down District Council. He has been instrumental in ensuring that both councils have developed and implemented not only our statutory safeguarding duties but also making sure that we are at the forefront of raising the profile of safeguarding and related initiatives internally with staff and externally with communities and the public and laterally has had a significant impact on regional work by all councils in providing consistent safeguarding services and positive outcomes for the public.

His passion, determination and focus to ensure all in our communities across Northern Ireland, can enjoy council services while being protected cuts across all departments and councils regionally. The collaboration and testimony from partners demonstrate the quality of the service he provides, and value others now have for council and its role in Safeguarding.

Helen Morrissey - City Protection Manager (Neighbourhood Portfolio) - Belfast City Council

Helen is responsible for the operational management of regulatory services in the Neighbourhood portfolio of City and Neighbourhood Services. She leads on the delivery of Enforcement, Dog Warden, Animal Welfare, Pest Control and the regional Houses of Multiple Occupation services.

The William Johnston Memorial Trust is delighted to once again join with NILGA in this important event by sponsoring the Employee of The Year Award. The objective of the Trust is to provide awards for the study or research for the benefit of Public Administration in Northern Ireland and to recognise excellence in the delivery of the duties of Local Authorities to their citizens. This award is made on an annual basis and we would encourage applications from anyone who is making an exceptional effort or knows of a colleague who is doing so, to have an application made on their behalf when calls for interest are made. We wish NILGA every success on this special occasion.



WILLIAM JOHNSTON
Memorial Trust

Over the past two years Helen has been responsible for the delivery of a change management programme for various frontline services as part of a wider service review and has significantly contributed to internal audits of the Dog Warden, HMO, and Pest Control services. During this period, the regional Houses of Multiple Occupation service was transferred to her operational management portfolio. Helen has been responsible for the development and implementation of an improvement plan for the Pest Control Unit, the integration of Articles 4 and 5 of the Waste & Contaminated Land Order to our Enforcement unit, the delivery of our Responsible Dog Ownership campaign and the implementation of XL Bully Legislation.

Deirdre O'Connor, Anti-Poverty Officer - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

Deirdre O'Connor was appointed as Community Development Officer (Anti-Poverty) in August 2022. Deirdre immediately embraced her new role establishing relationships and alliances at a local and regional level to advance the councils commitment to support people and communities to minimise impact of poverty.

Deirdre has been instrumental in establishing and implementing immediate support for people through the council 'Hardship Fund' in 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 as well as the development of a delivery mechanism for social supermarket funding, fitting with the rurality of the Fermanagh and Omagh district.

In recognising the need for longer term solutions to address the poverty issue in the district, Deirdre has worked with a wide range of stakeholders to co-design an Anti-Poverty Strategy for the district, 'Pathways out of Poverty'. A high level of support was demonstrated for the direction set out in this strategy during the public consultation phase.

Innovative Planning for the Future Award

Award partner Quadra Ltd

iLead Development Programme - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

The iLead Development Programme is a dynamic and comprehensive initiative designed to enhance leadership and talent management across all levels of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. Structured around three tailored tiers—iAspire, iSupervise, and iManage—the programme equips employees with critical skills in leadership, conflict resolution, communication, and strategic thinking.

iLead combines interactive workshops, coaching sessions, and robust assessments, including 360-degree feedback and DISC profiling. Participants gain practical insights into managing disciplinary matters, coaching for performance, and fostering team cohesion. This targeted approach has cultivated a high-performance culture, strengthened team dynamics, and enhanced leadership capabilities across the council.

ABC Place Plans - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Place shaping in Northern Ireland is vital for fostering vibrant, sustainable communities. It aligns economic, social, and environmental goals, addressing local challenges while maximizing opportunities. By empowering communities, promoting collaboration, and integrating sustainability, place shaping strengthens civic pride, enhances well-being, and ensures the long-term prosperity and resilience of towns and cities. Developing our local place plans has provided an opportunity our Community Planning Partnership and council as lead, to work together with local people and stakeholders, unlocking innovation and change, to improve the quality of life in our places across the Borough for the benefit of all.

The partnership has developed three place plans since 2021, Armagh Place Plan was the first Place Plan to be developed in Northern Ireland (2022), followed by Banbridge Place Plan (2024) and Dromore Place Plan (2025).

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'Augment the City: XR and the future of tourism' - Belfast City Council

The Augment the City programme was developed to support local councils and tourism sector, to better understand the transformative potential of cutting-edge extended reality (XR), advanced 5G wireless connectivity and their application in future visitor experiences (e.g. Belfast Stories).

The programme was structured across two workstreams: Workstream one was a pre-commercial R&D competition encouraging the creative digital sector to develop tourism prototypes that harnessed XR and wireless connectivity. With support from Digital Catapult UK, the companies worked with Belfast Stories to build prototypes addressing their future storytelling ambitions. This workstream received £930,000 from Belfast Region City Deal (with match funding from Belfast City Council).

Workstream Two provided a 5G-enabled immersive experience integrated into the existing Belfast City Hall Exhibition. This world class, XR experience is a collaborative R&D investment with BT. (circa £1 million).

A core tenet was to capture and exchange learning from a technical, commercial and programme perspective.

Connecting the dots

Bringing together local knowledge and global experience to take your business further

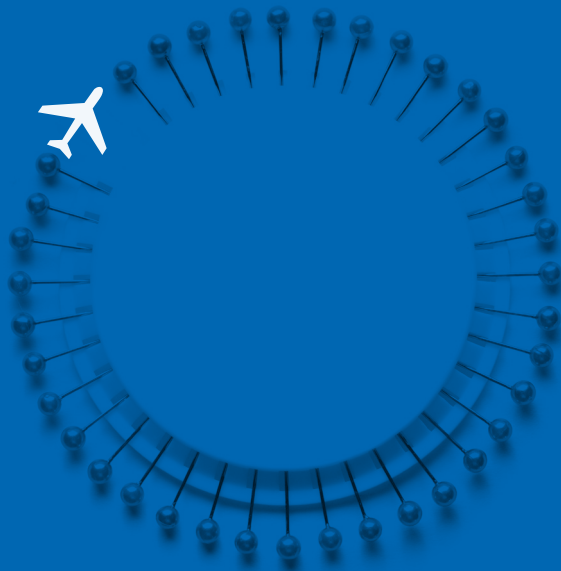
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