



Annual Report 2015-2016

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Introduction

Aberdeen City Council's fifth Planning Performance Framework (PPF) Report, highlights the achievements delivered from April 2015 to March 2016. The focus of this reporting year has been to improve performance especially in average application determination times, whilst providing a high quality planning service for our customers.

From the 2014/15 report it was evident that emphasis needed to be given to accelerating performance improvements started in previous years with the aim of delivering real and significant impact on performance figures and levels of customer service. Historically, lack of resources, issues with the operating system and the need to review roles, responsibilities and procedures have been the key factors limiting performance improvement for determination of planning applications. These factors have been the focus of attention for improvement during the past year.

In terms of planning application determination times, measures have been implemented that have delivered significant improvements to performance and that will enable the momentum to be maintained into future years. Notably, vacant and new posts have been filled, a project management based approach to application processing has been rolled out, 'Stop the clock' for planning applications has been introduced, a new planning application operating system is being put in place and dynamic performance monitoring has allowed performance standards to be visible and tracked in real time. There is still a recognised need to improve - especially in relation to householder and non-householder local developments. However, the 2015-16 figures show continuous improvement across the board - particularly for the economically important major applications where determination times have halved. Furthermore there is evidence that decision making is becoming more robust with 68.8% of appeals upheld, compared to 40% last year. **(PM6)**

The new Aberdeen Local Development Plan is on track to be adopted this year. **(PM7)**

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) certification has been reconfirmed - with four compliance plus and no partial compliance - demonstrating an improvement on previous audits and that the service is listening to and acting on customer feedback and delivering tangible improvements in customer experience. CSE is being rolled out to the Environmental Policy and Local Development Plan Teams in the coming year.

In 2014-15 the Council put in place a refreshed Strategic Business Plan and compliant Planning and Sustainable Development Service Plan¹ based around the six key priorities of Smarter Governance, Smarter Living, Smarter People, Smarter Environment, Smarter Economy and Smarter Mobility.

This report focuses on the improvements and new developments in the planning service since the submission of PPF 2014-15. Unless otherwise indicated it should be taken as read that all the activities and service actions detailed in the PPF 2014-15 are still being undertaken. Appendix 1 – Performance Markers cross references to relevant evidence in the main PPF report and service actions (e.g. **PM1, 2, 3** etc.) to show how the planning service is specifically addressing each of the Performance Markers produced by the Heads of Planning Scotland High Level Group and, where not met, the steps being taken to meet the marker.

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK FEEDBACK 2014/15

The feedback from the Scottish Government on the Planning Performance Framework Report for 2014-15 is summarised below.

The following strengths were highlighted:

- Processing agreements promoted through pre-applications and at the pre-application notice stage and on the website
- Strong evidence of engaging in pre-application discussions and inclusion of elected members
- Pre-application forums (unique in Scotland) provide a platform for discussion for the information required by all parties
- Legal agreement timescales were reduced
- Introduction of a validation checklist for staff
- Service protocols in place
- Joint action plan on flooding
- Consultation with the City's Asset Management on significant applications
- Shared Archaeology Service
- Part of the SOLACE benchmarking group

Areas Aberdeen City Council committed to improve upon:

- Decision making timescales, require improvement in relation to the national average and continuous improvement on the consistency of pre-application advice
- Introduction of a form for pre-application requirements
- Further reduce the legal agreement timescales with consideration of concluding applications with legal agreements within 6 months of willingness to approve
- Reduce the number of legacy cases
- Provide information on project management of the Development Plan Scheme
- Move validation to the Application Support Team from Development Management
- Provide examples of proportionate developer contributions
- Provide recognition of lessons learned from early adopted Masterplans and continued improvements in response to those lessons
- Customer Service Excellence accreditation to be rolled across the rest of the service
- Website improvements
- Community Council engagement

This feedback has provided the service with a basis for the direction for performance improvement and actions to address the main areas for improvement identified above are detailed in the remainder of this report.

National Headline Indicators (NHIs)

Key Outcomes	2015-2016	2014-2015
Development Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of local/strategic development plan(s) (years and months) at end of reporting period. <i>Requirement: less than 5 years</i> • Will the local/strategic development plan(s) be replaced by their 5th anniversary according to the current development plan scheme? • Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year? • Were development plan scheme engagement/consultation commitments met during the year? 	<p>4 Years</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>3 Years</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>
Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established housing land supply • 5-year effective housing land supply • 5-year housing supply target • 5-year effective housing land supply <i>(to one decimal place)</i> • Housing approvals • Housing completions over the last 5 years • Marketable employment land supply • Employment land take-up during reporting year 	<p>22,438 units (City)</p> <p>7,362 units (City)</p> <p>7,668 units (AHMA*)</p> <p>8 years (AHMA)</p> <p>1,966 units</p> <p>3,795 units (to 1/1/15)</p> <p>169 ha</p> <p>26 ha</p>	<p>21,406 units (City)</p> <p>6,575 units (City)</p> <p>7,827 units (AHMA)</p> <p>7.7 years (AHMA)</p> <p>5,805 units</p> <p>3,208 units (to 1/1/14)</p> <p>140 ha</p> <p>26 ha</p>

* AHMA - Aberdeen Housing Market Area

Key Outcomes	2015-2016	2014-2015
Development Management		
Project Planning		
• Percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice	36.1%	36%
• Number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan	2	3
• Percentage planned timescales met	50%	0%
Decision-making		
• Application approval rate	92.3%	94%
• Delegation rate	96.1%	96.2%
Decision-making timescales		
Average number of weeks to decision:		
• Major developments	24.2	47.6
• Local developments (non-householder)	14.1	16.6
• Householder developments	10.8	12.8
Legacy Cases		
• Number cleared during reporting period	71	48
• Number remaining	39	57
Enforcement		
• Time since enforcement charter published/ reviewed (months) <i>Requirement: review every 2 years</i>	3 months*	2 years
• Number of breaches identified/resolved	155/108	175/121

*PM5

Context Statement

The departure of the Head of Service in August and appointment of an Interim Head of Service inevitably lead to a period of uncertainty. However, a number of initiatives started by the Interim Head are starting to pay dividends.

In 2015/16 - 1,656 planning applications were processed generating £1,268,737 in income. There was a 11.4% drop in income and a 5% drop in application numbers compared to the previous year - reflecting the downturn in the City's economic climate as a consequence of the lower price of oil and gas and the resulting relative decline in proposals for larger, higher fee developments.

Decision making timescales were a particular concern identified by both the Scottish Government and by the Council's own PPF last year. A more focussed approach on project management and live performance reporting together with the introduction of 'Stop the Clock' procedures have been effective in 2015-16, with average determination times better across the board for all application categories. **(PM1)**

In terms of the headline indicators, the average determination time for major developments has almost halved from 47.6 weeks to 24.2 weeks whilst 2 weeks or more has been taken off the determination times for both local householder and local non-householder developments.

Local non-householder and householder applications determination times have improved but still fall below the national average, providing a focus for improvement in the coming year. The first two months of 2016-17 show a welcome dip in average determination times indicating that performance will continue to improve in the coming year.

Legacy Case numbers have been reduced with 71 Legacy Cases cleared compared with 48 the previous year. **(PM14)**

Recruitment has been successful and the service moved close to having a full complement of staff. Healthier staffing numbers and lower turnover of staff gave the opportunity to streamline processes and reap greater efficiencies - particularly the transfer of responsibility for validating applications into the Application Support Team. As a result the time taken to validate applications was reduced by over 40 percent.

Looking ahead the implementation of a new ICT operating system (IDOX Uniform) is underway with the aim of greater improvement in customer satisfaction and efficiency in the coming year.

Defining & measuring a high-quality planning service

Quality of outcomes

1.1 Enabling sustainable economic development

1.1.1 Despite a significant downturn in the oil and gas industry Aberdeen is entering an exciting time as it embarks on its greatest regeneration project for 200 years. Colleagues in the Communities Housing and Infrastructure Directorate including asset management, economic development and planning are working in partnership to deliver on ambitious plans for the future of the City.

1.1.2 The City Centre Masterplan (CCMP)² was approved in June 2015 with unanimous political support. The CCMP sets out a strategy and proposals to deliver £1 billion investment through 49 major projects over the next 25 years, creating 5,500 new jobs, bringing 3,000 residents into the city centre, producing 1.4 million square feet of new office space and driving around £3 billion of additional private sector investment. Ongoing major capital projects that have gained planning approval and are well underway include a major city centre retail, office and hotel development at Marischal Square, a £30 million redevelopment of the Art Gallery and a £7 million makeover of the Music Hall.

1.1.3 Investment by the City Council and its private and public sector partners together with City Deal funding from UK and Scottish Governments will also help deliver major transformational projects such as the new Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre, a major extension of Aberdeen Harbour and a start on the construction of thousands of new social, council and affordable houses, as well as the completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and a third crossing over the River Don.

1.2 Delivering Quality Places: Past Present and Future

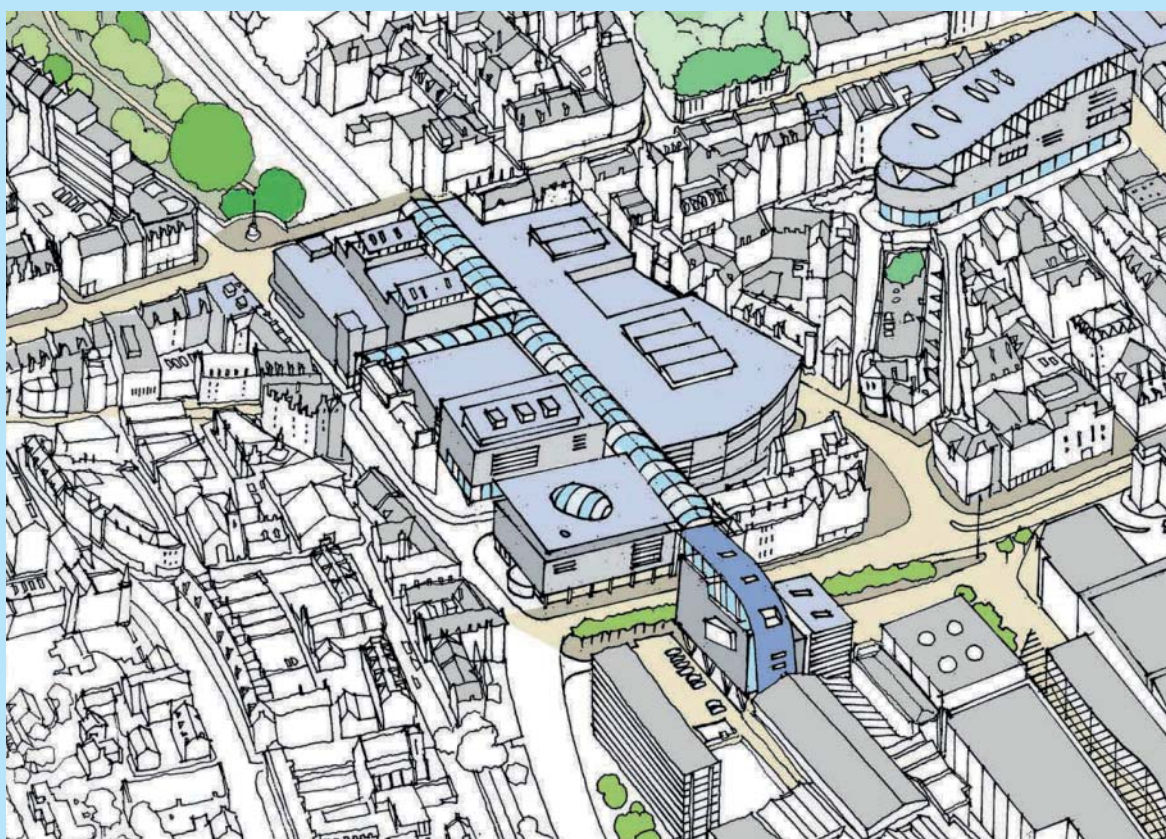
1.2.1 The Masterplanning, Design and Conservation (MDC) team within Development Management continues to provide design and place-making guidance to support the planning process. The Masterplan Process continues to guide Development Frameworks adopted as supplementary guidance for all major allocated greenfield sites in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (ALDP)³. These inform progress through detailed phased Masterplanning, planning permission in principle or detailed planning applications ensuring that place-making criteria for the city are robust, relevant and translated into high-quality development on the ground.

1.2.2 Masterplans for the new Exhibition and Conference Centre at Rowett North; Prime 4 Business Park extension and the existing AECC site in Bridge of Don⁴ have been progressed in anticipation of a newly adopted Local Development Plan.

1.2.3 Complementary to input to the CCMP, planning officers are shaping the delivery of major regeneration projects in the City Centre. There are numerous public realm projects, which will be guided by an emerging Aberdeen Streetscape Manual, which are associated with development proposals.

Case Study: Station Gateway: Partnership Delivery

Station Gateway is a critical intervention area identified in the City Centre Masterplan. Key stakeholder workshops including the Council, Network Rail, rail operators, developers and landowners culminated in the production of the Station Gateway Development Brief⁵. It is worth noting the collaborative effort from each of the key stakeholders in the preparation of the brief with time committed to both workshops. The outcome is clear guidance on the planning/design principles, conservation opportunities, transport and access, public realm and place-making all captured with identified short and medium term actions.



1.2.4 The Service continues to foster relations with the School of Architecture at the Robert Gordon University (RGU), (eg. to support the delivery of the CCMP) and is actively engaged in aligning academic projects with live planning issues related to the City Centre. For instance, architecture students from South Florida University will spend a two week summer field course in June 2016 working collaboratively with ACC/RGU to develop projects in the CCMP.

Case Study: Marischal Square: Delivering City Centre Redevelopment

This mixed use development, including office, hotel, retail, restaurant, leisure, civic space, and landscaping, is now underway. Following strategic transport modelling of the city centre to test the CCMP proposals, the future of Broad Street is currently subject to extensive engagement with the aim to improve public realm in line with new development. The development is an example of the extensive design and place-making engagement undertaken by planning officers through a series of planning and design led workshops.



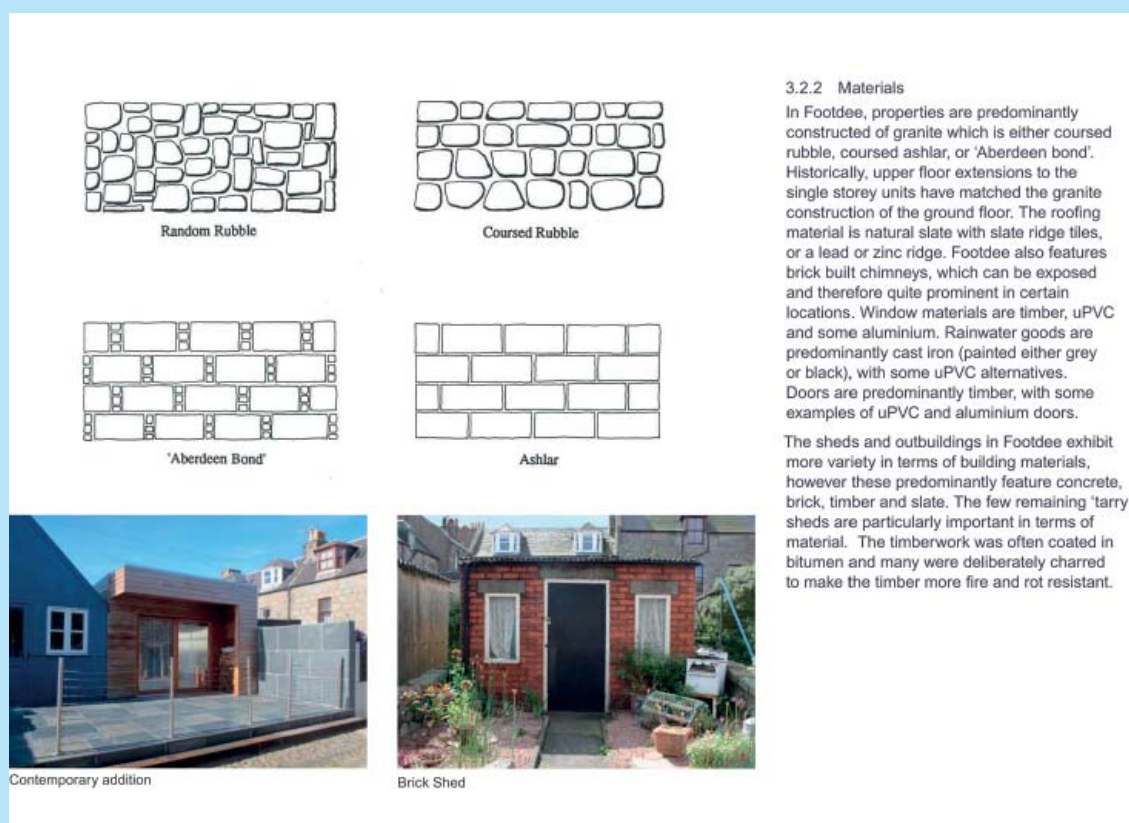
1.2.5 A review of the role and function of the Joint City/Shire Design Review Panel⁶ is being carried out in the context of the added in-house expertise now available with the creation of the new post of Senior Planner (Urban Design).

1.3 Conservation and Heritage

1.3.1 Two further Conservation Area appraisals - Old Aberdeen and Footdee (Fittie)⁷ - were completed during the year bringing the total to nine. These have the status of Interim Planning Advice and sit with a Conservation Area Management Plan. They provide guidance for the City's conservation areas, highlight specific conservation and heritage issues and are actively used in the determination of planning applications.

Case Study: Footdee Conservation Area Character Appraisal - Working with our Communities

A 6 week public consultation was carried out on the draft Footdee Conservation Area Character Appraisal⁶ involving consultation with Statutory Consultees, Community Councils, Ward Members and local amenity groups. A summary leaflet was delivered to all properties detailing the consultation and inviting them to attend a public drop-in session. The consultation materials were published online through the Council's website and social media sources, and hard copies of all documents are available at the Planning and Sustainable Development Reception.



"I am delighted with your final drafted document, it is a well-illustrated and structured document which gives very thoughtful consideration of our village, with useful suggestions for future planning and current maintenance of the squares and their properties and sheds. I am very happy, and appreciative, with the consultation approach that you used to allow residents to comment on the initial draft. Thank you for your hard work on this, much appreciated."

On behalf of Footdee residents

1.3.2 This year the planning service has developed a draft Joint Working Agreement⁸ with Historic Environment Scotland based upon **Our Place in Time** - The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland. The Service also continues to support the Aberdeen City Heritage Trust to deliver conservation grant schemes in the City Centre.

1.3.3 The Aberdeen Conservation Education scheme continues as the first of its kind in the UK to be supported by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC). IHBC accreditation for 6 candidates is nearing completion with membership applications expected later in 2016.

1.4 Environmental Improvement

1.4.1 The Environmental Policy Team has been co-ordinating and contributing to a host of environmental improvement projects.

1.4.2 The double award winning East Tullos Burn and East Tullos Burn Environmental Improvements Project was completed:

Aberdeen City Council's environmental policy team, the countryside ranger service and the contaminated land team launched a project to look at ways to improve the East Tullos Burn in Torry. Sadly the burn had been neglected in the past, suffering with poor water quality and litter problems. The aim of the project was to look at ways to transform the burn into a more natural water feature that helps improve the water quality, provide a haven for wildlife, and become attractive to local communities and visitors to the area.

With the help of the local community, a design was produced and included a new meandering course for the new burn as well as the creation of wetland pond areas, with extensive planting of wetland plants and trees, plus improved access around the area including a new bridge. School children from St. Fittick's Primary School helped to plant the remaining flowers on the site.



The Project has been awarded Highly Commended in the Sustainable Development category of the RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards in Edinburgh and came top in the Herald Society Awards in the Environmental Initiative of the Year category.

Environmental services and countryside ranger service have taken over the management of the site. The St. Fittick's Wildlife Group has been set up as a result of this project and involves local community and schools, who record all the wildlife in the area.



1.4.3 The Seaton Park Wetland Project⁷ design was agreed this year and is currently underway. This project supports the Open Space Strategy and implements a natural flood solution and diverse natural environment able to adapt to change.

The major programme of works includes a man-made wetland surrounded by natural plants, a wooden viewing point, repairing drainage, adding paths, signage and planting.

Case Study: Delivering more than a path

Each year the Council takes further steps towards delivery of its Core Path network, providing ever more routes for walking, cycling and access to the outdoors. Notably in 2014/15, three key sections of a strategically important new Core Path route were successfully delivered, helping to create a long-distance riverside route from coast to country. The focus of this improvement was a 1km new path linking one of the City's Major Parks, Seaton Park, through a new riverside community and onto the City's largest new transport development - the 3rd Don Crossing. This was important for a number of reasons; to connect people and places, create sustainable alternative transport routes, reduce the City's carbon emissions, for health and wellbeing, and to reconnect people to their natural environments. Feedback from park users, local residents and indeed new users has been overwhelmingly positive



"Wanted to say thanks to yourself and the work done by Hunter Construction on the footpath at the side of 50 and the rear of our house into Seaton Park. Delighted with the result after years and years of neglect.... Amazed how many people have just discovered the area. One lady visiting the May fest at the uni, on bicycle discovered the path for the first time. Hopefully others will share her experience!"

"Knowing the area through work, as a local resident and a user of the City's outdoor assets, I can also testify to the positive impact of these works. I have seen many more and different users starting to access the area around the Don. There's people in wheelchairs, with pushchairs, commuter and family cyclists. Everyone is very happy with the improved access and it's having a real and positive impact. Well done everyone for the efforts and results. It's really starting to build a great network for all in this area. Please also pass on our thanks to the funders".

Quality of service and engagement

2.1 Cross-service

2.1.1 The Trinity Group¹⁰ continues to provide a high level partnership between the Council officers, elected members, public and private sector leaders - meeting formally twice during the year including a Q&A session with Cabinet Secretary, Alex Neil.

2.1.2 Two Town Hall¹¹ meetings have been held bringing all staff in P&SD together for workshops on common issues and knowledge sharing.

2.1.3 Active participation of managers in HOPS, DM and DP Sub Groups and regular liaison meetings between Aberdeenshire and City managers to share best practice. **(PM13)**

2.1.4 Through the customer service excellence award the service continues to feed into and support upgrades to the customer contact centre, corporate onboarding and development of the customer services mindset. **(PM12)**

2.2 Local Development Plan Team

2.2.1 The proposed new Aberdeen Local Development Plan (ALDP) and Supplementary Guidance were consulted upon in 2015. Nine drop-in events were organised in neighbourhoods across the city to encourage local community and other stakeholder input with the LDP Twitter and Facebook accounts used to advertise the consultation period. The Proposed Plan was submitted to the Scottish Government for Examination on 15th November 2015 and is expected to be adopted later this year. **(PM8, 10)**

2.2.2 The ALDP Action Programme⁹ is up-to-date, the bi-annual update was completed and sent to Scottish Ministers in May. In addition, a working live version is updated 3 or 4 times a year to provide a more responsive update. **(PM8, 9, 10)**

2.2.3 Examination of the Development Plan Scheme¹⁰ shows that a new Local Development Plan will be delivered as per the timetable. The Report of Conformity Statement showed that consultations commitments were carried out to the satisfaction of the Reporters. **(PM7 and 8)**

2.2.4 Member involvement at Pre-MIR stage was not applicable over the last year because members' settled views were represented in the Proposed Local Development Plan. **(PM9)**

2.2.5 The Development Plan Team continues to respond to new issues as they emerge. Technical Advice Notes on The Repair and Replacement of Windows and Doors¹⁴, Student Accommodation¹⁵ and Aberdeen Airport (Developments in close proximity to) were adopted by the Council. **(PM11)**

2.3 Environmental Policy Team

2.3.1 A review of Tree Preservation Orders, Core Paths, standard planning conditions and Environmental Policy Supplementary Guidance is underway.

2.3.2 Ongoing joint work is being carried out between the Local Development Plan team and Scottish Natural Heritage to determine a landscape strategy to establish capacity for development for the next Local Development Plan and prepare policies and guidance.

2.4 Development Management Team

2.4.1 Early engagement in pre-application discussions continues to be actively promoted including a new dedicated pre-application enquiry page on the Council's website¹⁶. **(PM3)**

2.4.2 Protocols remain in place with all key development management consultees to give clarity and focus on roles, responsibilities, target response times and service standards - including roads, legal services and environmental health teams, key agencies, and Community Councils. A working group produced a draft protocol with the environmental policy team which will be put in place this year. **(PM12)**

2.4.3 The Agents Focus Group¹⁷ was reconvened this year. Agents/developers met to discuss issues and service improvements including project management of planning applications, new validation guidance and the transfer to the IDOX Uniform system.

2.4.4 Customer Engagement has been reviewed Council-Wide and a new Customer Charter developed. Customer service training for all staff is to be rolled out and modernisation of the Customer Contact Centre is underway with self-service areas and floor walking staff to assist and a recent addition is a member of staff to meet and greet customers.

2.4.5 Customer Service Excellence re-accreditation was achieved by Development Management and Building Standards. Four compliance pluses and no non-compliances were awarded - improving on all previous years. Other areas of the service including the planning policy team are being prepared for accreditation in December.

2.4.6 A new simpler Customer Service questionnaire¹⁸ has been developed and rolled out for Development Management via Survey Monkey and the annual agents survey has also been run recently. Telephone surveys will be introduced this year to help shape service improvements based on customer feedback.

2.4.7 A newsletter has been recently introduced to keep our stakeholders updated on service changes building on earlier regular electronic email communication¹⁹.

Governance

3.1 Collaborative working

3.1.1 The planning service is working collaboratively and innovatively to deliver Council priorities in partnership with other Council services, other organisations and the development industry.

Case Study: Countesswells – Future New Community

The Countesswells Development Framework²⁰ is moving into the first delivery phase. A Council led “Place Group” project managed by the planning team has been established to challenge public services, buildings and infrastructure requirements to meet evolving future needs. This will create conditions to build a new community with identity, a strong sense of place - fostering wellbeing and inclusion including smarter living and smarter interaction with services, quality of public realm, sustainable transport and active travel.

The brief is to challenge the traditional service model mechanisms. Architecture + Design Scotland (A+DS) held a workshop with ACC, NHS, the developer and partners. Three key themes emerged that will develop Countesswells as an exemplar of public (and other) service delivery:

1 Estates brief (building design)

- adaptable buildings that can be developed in a town centre cluster

2 Locality brief (service design)

- what can be delivered/controlled digitally

3 Green movement plan (network design)

- ensuring connectivity, healthy and active travel



Some other examples are given in the Delivering Outcomes section of this report

3.1.2 This year a Service Level Agreement for Archaeology has been entered into with Aberdeenshire - to provide comprehensive archaeological advice at all stages of the planning process and making cost effective use of existing expertise and resources.

3.1.3 Aberdeenshire Council continues to provide a shared developer obligation service for Aberdeen City with a framework provided by the adopted Infrastructure Contributions Manual. **(PM15)**

3.2 Process and staff reconfiguration

3.2.1 Project Management: Whilst uptake by applicants has been disappointing, planning processing agreements continue to be actively promoted at the proposal of application stage. This year the project management approach has been extended to require a project plan²¹ for all new applications including requirements for supporting information, a timeline with expected dates for key milestones such as neighbour notification, consultation and decision. **(PM2)**

3.2.2 In tandem with the above approach a dynamic spreadsheet²² has been developed to give a live view of performance - both in terms of average determination times and percentage of applications determined within statutory time periods. **(PM1, PM6)**

3.2.3 The Schedule of Major Developments is now continuously updated – enabling greater monitoring and high level project management of significant and politically sensitive applications and proposals.

3.2.4 'Stop the Clock' procedures²³ have been applied consistently to new applications for the first complete reporting year. This has been instrumental in the performance improvement in application determination times. **(PM1, PM6)**

3.2.5 Aberdeen City Council continues to be unique in Scotland in holding pre-application forums²⁴ for all major applications giving Elected Members an early opportunity to understand future significant developments and ask questions of developers and their agents. **(PM3)**

3.2.6 The new post of Business Support Manager has been created with responsibility for administrative support for the entire service and co-ordinating internal communication and engagement. This post drives continuous improvement and customer focused change service wide. **(PM6)**

3.2.7 A new planning application system (IDOX Uniform) has been procured and rolled out for go live in July 2016. In tandem, the opportunity has been taken to streamline processes and procedures and this will result in more efficient and effective workflow in future years.

3.2.8 Full electronic workflow for planning applications has been implemented this year, eliminating paper application files completely, with consequent improvements in efficiency and speed of processing

3.2.9 The roles and responsibilities of the administrative team been reviewed resulting in:

- the introduction of an additional supervisory post to provide a dedicated supervisor for planning application processing
- full migration of the validation function into the Application Support Team, eliminating hand offs between planners and administrative staff

3.2.10 A reconfiguration of the legal team is underway to facilitate and improve the legal agreement process (see section 5.3) and, in tandem, a review of the developer obligations service provided by Aberdeenshire Council has been launched with the aim of ensuring a streamlined, consistent and co-ordinated delivery of legal agreements and improved decision making timescales. **(PM4)**

3.3 Training and professional development

3.3.1 Two tailored half day Elected Member training sessions have been held covering all relevant aspects of the planning system and the role of Councillors in the LDP process, planning committee and at the Local Review Body.

3.3.2 Continuous Professional Development Workshops²⁵ have provide learning opportunities and a chance to think outside the box. For instance in one workshop, cross service, mixed discipline teams competed to develop new and innovative ways to redevelop an existing city centre site at Haudagain roundabout.

3.3.3 Many officers across planning teams have gained BREEAM accreditation.

Culture of continuous improvement

This section focusses on the improvement actions identified in the 2014-15 PPF report from the Scottish Government and details the measures taken to address them.

4.1 Decision making timescales

4.1.1 These decision making timescales were a particular concern identified by both the Scottish Government and by the Council's own PPF last year. A more focussed approach on project management, live performance reporting together with the introduction of 'Stop the Clock' procedures (see 4.2.1 to 4.2.4 above) have been effective in 2015-16, with average determination times better across the board for all application categories. **(PM1 and 6)**

4.1.2 In terms of the headline indicators, the average time for major developments has almost halved from 47.6 weeks to 24.2 weeks whilst 2 weeks or more has been taken off the determination times for both local householder and local non-householder developments. The table below illustrates these improvements.

	Average determination time in weeks	
	2015-16	2014-15
Major Developments	24.2	47.6
Local Developments (Non-householder)	14.1	16.6
Householder Developments	10.8	12.8
Major Housing Developments	37.4	70.1
Local Housing Developments	21.8	22.2
Major Business and Industry	8.9	62.1
Local Business and Industry	15.4	15.5
Other Consents	12.5	17.1

4.1.3 It is recognised that, a large factor in the improvement has been the introduction of the 'Stop the Clock' provision which now enables a more accurate view of the planning service performance to be reflected in the figures. It is acknowledged that, whilst local non-householder and householder applications have improved, these and other figures still fall below the Scottish national average for 2014-15. The further improvement of performance figures, therefore remains both a priority and an ongoing focus for the coming year.

4.2 Pre-application form

4.2.1 A pre-application enquiry form has been designed in readiness to be rolled out this year coming in tandem with the new IDOX Uniform System.

4.3 Legal agreement timescales

4.3.1 The average timescale for determining applications with legal agreements has increased slightly to 49.9 weeks from 45.8 weeks in 2014-15. On the positive side the timescale for major applications with legal agreements has improved to 40.9 weeks from 63.4 weeks in 2014-15. However, it is recognised that this is an area where significant improvement is still required.

4.3.2 This year Brodies LLP has been dealing with the finalisation of almost all planning legal agreements - a measure put in place because of the temporary lack of internal legal expertise and resource. Whilst this arrangement is now working effectively, there is recognition of the benefits to be gained from having greater control of the entire process. With that in mind, the legal team is being reconfigured and as of 1 June 2016 a new Planning and Environment Team will be in place, taking responsibility for the planning legal agreement process and bringing it, for the most part back in-house. **(PM4)**

4.3.3 In tandem with this team reconfiguration, the developer obligations negotiation process is being reviewed and a draft Section 75 legal agreement template has been produced which will be consulted on and adopted in early 2016-17. The template will ensure consistency, reduce negotiation time and speed up the legal agreement process - with a consequent improvement in decision making timescales. **(PM15)**

4.3.4 One of the committed actions from last year's PPF that has not been progressed is the requirement to put in place is a mechanism for reviewing legal agreements within 6 months of "willingness to approve". This will be a priority for the first few months of 2016-17. **(PM4)**

4.4 Legacy cases - 71 legacy cases were cleared during the year with 39 remaining. An improvement on last year. **(PM14)**

4.5 Project Management of Development Plan Scheme

4.5.1 Has been carried out - see section 3.2 above.

4.6 Move validation to the Application Support Team

4.6.1 Complete – see section 4.2.9 above

4.7 Proportionate developer contributions

4.7.1 The Developer Obligations Procedure Manual²⁶ now clearly sets down prioritisation (hierarchy of policy requirements, critical, necessary, other) to be given to various elements of the developer obligations required by the adopted Infrastructure Contributions Manual. Negotiation is carried out by the Developer Obligations team on this basis in close liaison with the planning case officer and input from the Council's Asset Management Team to provide assessment of economic viability appraisals submitted by developers if required.

4.8 Lessons learned for Masterplans

4.8.1 The benefits of a more collaborative approach to Masterplan formulation have been recognised and this will maximise the potential for delivery on the ground. Case study examples are given in the Station Gateway partnership and Marischal Square redevelopment on pages 7 and 8.

4.9 Customer Service Excellence (CSE)

4.9.1 CSE is now being rolled out to the remainder of the service. A working group is meeting regularly with accreditation targeted for early next year. Questionnaire and web site page improvements have been introduced and work is underway to enhance the customer experience via customer journey mapping.

4.10 Community Council Engagement

4.10.1 A Community Council planning training session has been held this year and more are scheduled.

Supporting evidence

Supporting evidence mentioned earlier in this report can be found below:

- 1.** 2014-15 refreshed Strategic Business Plan and compliant Planning and Sustainable Development Service Plan:
<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s33119/Strategic%20Infrastructure%20Plan.pdf>
- 2.** Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/council_government/shaping_aberdeencity/City_Centre_Masterplan.asp
- 3.** Aberdeen Local Development Plan - Proposed Plan 2016:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning_environment/planning/local_development_plan/pla_2016_proposed_plan.asp
- 4.** Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre (AECC) Site, Bridge of Don:
<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s52567/150824%20-%20AECC%20Bridge%20of%20Don.pdf>
- 5.** Station Gateway Development Brief:
<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s56680/CHI-16-018%20Station%20Gateway%20Appendix%201.pdf>
- 6.** Local Design Review Panel:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning_environment/planning/planning_sustainable_development/pla_design_review_panel.asp
- 7.** Old Aberdeen and Footdee Conservation Area appraisal:
<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s52486/Old%20Aberdeen%20and%20Footdee%20Conservation%20Area%20Character%20Appraisals.pdf>
- 8.** Joint Working Agreement based on our 'Place in Time':
<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s46565/Archaeology%20-%20SLA%20Aberdeenshire%20Council.pdf>
- 9.** The Seaton Park Wetland Project:
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/seatonparkwetlandproject/>
- 10.** Trinity Group - Meeting 1st March 2016 actions are in a separate electronic document.
- 11.** Town Hall meeting agenda and feedback are in a separate electronic document.
- 12.** ALDP Action Programme:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning_environment/planning/local_development_plan/pla_aldp_action_programme.asp
- 13.** Development Plan Scheme:
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=69102&sID=22785>
- 14.** Technical Advice Note (TAN): The Repair and Replacement of Windows and Doors:
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=70932&sID=14394>
- 15.** Technical Advice Note (TAN): Student Accommodation:
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=65742&sID=14394>
- 16.** A pre-application enquiry page on the ACC website:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning_environment/planning/planning_sustainable_development/pla_planning_preapp_enqs.asp
- 17.** Agents Focus Group minutes are in a separate electronic document.
- 18.** New Development Management Customer Service Questionnaire:
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PlanningDM>
- 19.** Stakeholder communication planning is in a separate electronic document.
- 20.** The Countesswells Development Framework:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/council_government/shaping_aberdeencity/Countesswells.asp

21. Planning project plan: http://planning.aberdeencity.gov.uk/docs/showimage.asp?j=160346&index=184920&d=y
22. Example of DM Performance Dashboard information is in a separate electronic document.
23. Stop the Clock Guidance is in a separate electronic document.
24. Pre-application Forum guidance: http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s57059/Procedure%20Note.pdf
25. CPD Urban Design Workshop 1 Summary is in a separate electronic document.
26. Developer Contributions Procedures Manual: http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s38270/EPI.14.050%20-%20Supplementary%20Guidance%20-%20Infrastructure%20and%20Developer%20Contributions%20Manual%20-%20Appendix%20I.pdf

Service Improvements 2016-17

In the coming year we will:

1. Roll-out Customer Service Excellence Accreditation service-wide
2. Conduct a 'lessons learned' exercise and review of plans and policies from other Local Authorities to establish an action plan for improvements to the next Local Development Plan.
3. Introduce a new operating system for planning applications and building warrants. This is likely to result in a performance dip for three to four months as the system beds in and any backlog from the down-time is worked through.
4. Review and streamline processes and procedures in processing planning applications and administrative support and reconfigure roles and responsibilities if required.
5. Review the developer obligations process.
6. Progress alignment of Planning and the Roads Construction Consent Processes.
7. Gain Committee approval and produce supporting guidance to enable reconsideration of applications with legal agreements within 6 months of "willingness to approve".
8. Improve on the application processing performance delivered in the last year in particular by continuing to drive down decision making timescales in line with clearly established targets.
9. Adopt the agreed Section 75 legal agreement template.
10. Reconfigure the processing agreement guidelines and template.
11. Complete the Aberdeen Streetscape manual/guidance.
12. Carry out a review of the Local Design Review Panel.
13. Develop and publish a historical environment strategy for Aberdeen.
14. Complete the Tree Preservation Order, Open Space Audit and Core Path Plan Review.
15. Continue to support staff development and knowledge sharing.
16. Review the Open Space Strategy.

Delivery of our Service Improvement Actions identified in the 2015-16 PPF:

Development Management
Committed Improvement - reconfigure the DM team to facilitate the processing of major applications, including consideration of a Major Projects Team.
Action Taken - Project management and application monitoring improvements have been put in place that are considered to have addressed the issues and removed the need for the creation of a dedicated major projects team.
Evidence - See section 3.2 above.
Service Wide
Committed Improvement - Actively input and participate in wider Council projects, such as the Strategic Infrastructure Plan, City Centre Masterplan and City Region Deal to support the delivery of the Development Plan.
Action Taken - Actions carried out eg. Continued officer involvement in SIP projects, e.g. new AECC.
Evidence – Evidence given pages 6 to 11 of this report.
Masterplanning Conservation and Design
Committed Improvement - Complete the Nigg Development Framework and Harbour Masterplan as outlined in National Planning Framework 3.
Action Taken - Interim Planning Guidance will be adopted by end of the year and Supplementary Planning Guidance as part of the Adopted Local Development Plan.
Evidence - See evidence link 2.
Masterplanning Conservation and Design
Committed Improvement - Develop detailed phased Masterplans to support adopted development frameworks arising, including specifically Craibstone, Rowett South, Rowett North, Bridge of Don (former AECC site) and Grandhome (part of the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative programme).
Actions Taken – Complete.
Evidence - Supporting evidence link 2.
Masterplanning Conservation and Design
Committed Improvement - Develop a Streetscape Manual for Aberdeen to provide clear guidance and certainty in the delivery of Masterplans and support the Scottish Government's Aligned Consents Project.
Action Taken - Draft document produced for finalisation in first half of 2016-17.
Evidence – Draft Streetscape Manual in progress.
Masterplanning Conservation and Design
Committed Improvement - Develop and deliver a programme of 6 conservation and urban design CPD events.
Action Taken - Programme being delivered.
Evidence – See Section 2.3.2 above.
Masterplanning Conservation and Design
Committed Improvement - Carry out a full review of the Local Design Review Panel to ensure relevance and improve efficiency, impact and outcomes.
Action Taken - Ongoing – Senior Planner (Conservation) left and task will be taken up by new appointment on arrival in July 2016.
Evidence - n/a

Masterplanning Conservation and Design

Committed Improvement - Develop and publish an Historic Environment Strategy for Aberdeen.

Action Taken - Ongoing. Senior Planner (Conservation) left and task will be taken up by new appointment on arrival in July 2016.

Evidence - n/a

Development Management

Committed Improvement - Implement a robust Consultation Protocol between Development Management and Environmental Policy.

Action Taken - Complete.

Evidence - Consultation protocol in place.

Development Management

Committed Improvements - Progress alignment of Planning and Roads Construction Consent Processes.

Action Taken - Ongoing. Awaiting recruitment of Team Leader in Roads Development Management Team. Action identified for completion in 2016-17.

Evidence - n/a

Development Management

Committed Improvement - Introduce procedure for reconsideration of legal agreements within 6 months of "resolving to grant".

Action Taken - Ongoing. Action identified for completion in 2016-17.

Evidence - n/a

Cross Service

Committed Improvement and Actions - Maintain Customer Service Excellence accreditation for the Development Management Team and achieve and implement accreditation for Local Development and Environmental Policy Teams.

Action Taken - Accreditation secured for DM and BS. Roll out underway to rest of service.

Evidence - See sections 2.4.4, 2.4.5, 2.4.6 and 2.4.7 above.

Local Development Plan

Committed Improvement - Make innovative improvements to how the Service monitors the ALDP and make this information available to the public, by producing a comprehensive and easy-to-use bulletin about new developments being approved and built in the city.

Action Taken - Joined Aberdeen City Council Research and Information Network (ABERIN) with a view to producing more relevant and comprehensive monitoring outputs.

Evidence - See Aberdeen City Council Research and Information Network.

Development Management

Committed Improvement - Review and amend processing agreement guidelines and template and actively promote to applicants and agents.

Action Taken - Partially complete and ongoing.

Evidence - See section 3.2.1 and 3.2.5.

Cross Service
Committed Improvement - Continue to encourage and enable staff training in more detailed knowledge of specific topic areas, planning-related competencies and transferable skills.
Action Taken – Completed and ongoing.
Evidence - See section 3.3 above.

Cross Service
Committed Improvement - Support staff towards gaining Chartered Membership of the RTPI, and support secondments to other teams to gain a broader experience.
Action Taken – Complete and ongoing.
Evidence - Three planning trainees gained membership of the RTPI and moved to Planner grade. 4 members of planning staff currently seconded to other teams, either on a full time or part time basis.

Cross Service
Committed Improvement - Reconfigure and redesign the planning pages of website including a pre-application enquiry facility.
Action Taken – Partially complete and ongoing.
Evidence - See section 2.4.1.

Environmental Policy
Committed Improvement - Bringing tree orders up to date and implement high hedges legislation.
Action Taken – Stage one of the review complete and consultations underway. Next steps are to complete stage one consultations and to begin stage two of the review which will comprise of onsite reviews.
Evidence - See 2.3.1.

Environmental Policy
Committed Improvement - Review the Open Space Audit to ensure it is current, relevant and appropriate to underpin a review of the City's Open Space Strategy in 2016/17.
Action Taken – Due to commence this summer, following the results of the audit the Open Space Strategy 2011-16 will be reviewed.
Evidence - Aberdeen Open Space Strategy 2011-2016.

Environmental Policy
Committed Improvement - Review the Core Paths Plan to ensure it is current, relevant and appropriate.
Action Taken – Ongoing. Current plan is being reviewed and scope for this is being set.
Evidence - See 2.3.1.

Development Management
Committed Improvement - Implement a new application and electronic document management system and reconfigure administrative support to facilitate and enable electronic workflow.
Action Taken – Implementation well underway. Go live in July 2016.
Evidence - Project Plan.

Official Statistics

A: Decision-making timescales (based on 'all applications' timescales)

		Average timescale (weeks)	
Category	Total number of decisions 2015-2016	2015-2016	2014-2015
Major Developments	15	24.2	47.6
Local developments (non-householder)	465	14.1	16.6
• Local: less than 2 months	227 (48.6%)	6.3	6.9
• Local: more than 2 months	240 (51.4%)	21.7	22.0
Householder developments	672	10.8	12.8
• Local: less than 2 months	305 (45.4%)	6.9	7.2
• Local: more than 2 months	367 (54.6%)	14.0	16.0
Housing developments	81		
Major	3	37.4	70.1
Local housing developments	78	21.8	22.2
• Local: less than 2 months	27 (34.6%)	5.5	7.1
• Local: more than 2 months	51 (65.4%)	30.5	25.7
Business and industry	29		
Major	2	8.9	62.1
Local business and industry	27	15.4	15.5
• Local: less than 2 months	14 (51.9%)	6.3	7.1
• Local: more than 2 months	13 (48.1%)	25.2	18.6
EIA developments	1	2	0
Other consents	311	12.5	17.1
Planning/legal agreements	8	49.9	45.8
• Major: average time	3	40.9	63.4
• Local: average time	5	59.8	41.0
Local reviews	26	8	5.8

B: Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2015-2016		2014-2015	
		Number	%	Number	%
Local reviews	26	20	70.9%	18	72%
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	16	11	68.8%	5	55.5%

C: Enforcement activity

	2015-2016	2014-2015
Cases taken up	195	216
Breaches identified	155	175
Cases resolved	108	121
Notices served*	7	7
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0	0
Prosecutions	0	0

* Enforcement notices; breach of condition notices; planning contravention notices; stop notices; temporary stop notices; fixed penalty notices, and Section 33 notices.

D: Context

Of the 195 cases taken up and investigated, 155 were identified as having planning related breaches warranting further action to resolve either through negotiation or formal enforcement action. The remaining 40 cases were, after investigation, identified to be 'permitted development', or works/activities established to be in compliance with a valid planning approval or permitted planning uses.

Workforce and Financial Information

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Head of Planning and Sustainable Development	-	-	1	-

		DM	DP	Enforcement	Other
Manager	No. Posts	3	1	-	2.5
	Vacant	-	-	-	-
Main grade posts	No. Posts	15.3	5.4	2.5	9.5
	Vacant	-	3.2	-	-
Technician	No. Posts	4	-	-	2
	Vacant	-	-	-	-
Office Support/Clerical	No. Posts	8.5	-	-	-
	Vacant	1	-	-	-
Total		31.8	9.6	2.5	14

Staffing Age Profile	Number (approx.)
Under 30	20
30-39	20
40-49	9
50 and Over	9

Committees and site visits	No. per year
Full Council committees	7
Planning Committees	11
Area Committees (where relevant)	Not applicable
Committee site visits	3
LRB	12
LRB site visits	0

	Total Budget	Costs		Income
		Direct	Indirect	
Development management	215,713	1,419,675	124,782	1,318,959
Development planning	618,378	378,876	57,760	0
Enforcement	Subsumed in DM and DP Budgets			
Other				
Total	834,091	1,798,551	182,542	1,318,959

Appendix 1 - Performance Markers

Driving Improved Performance

Performance Marker	Measure	Source/ Evidence	Policy Support	PPF
1. Decision making: authorities demonstrating continuous evidence of reducing average timescales for all development types	TBC* *Separate note attached	Statistics and National Headline Indicators	Official Statistics and PPF reports	NHIs
2. Project management: offer of processing agreements (or other agreed project plan) made to prospective applicants in advance of all major applications and availability publicised on planning authority website	Y/N	PA to provide	Modernising the Planning System (Audit Scotland); SG website/ template	NHIs; Quality of Service and Engagement;
3. Early collaboration with applicants and consultees on planning applications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all prospective applications • clear and proportionate requests for supporting information 	Y/N Examples	PA to provide	White Paper; Delivering Planning Reform; Planning Reform Next Steps	NHIs; Quality of Service and Engagement
4. Legal agreements: conclude (or reconsider) applications within 6 months of 'resolving to grant' * <i>* this will require production of supporting guidance, following wider stakeholder input</i>	Reducing number of live applications more than 6 months after resolution to grant (from same time last year)	PA to provide	Official statistics; PPF reports; evidence of delays to major developments	Quality of Service and Engagement; Governance
5. Enforcement charter updated/re-published	Within 2 years	PPF report	Planning Act (s158A)	NHIs

Performance Marker	Measure	Source/ Evidence	Policy Support	PPF
6. Continuous improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show progress/ improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators • progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report 	Progress on all commitments	PPF report	Delivering Planning Reform; PPF Report	Culture of Continuous Improvement; Service Improvement Plan

Promoting the Plan-led System

Performance Marker	Measure	Source/ Evidence	Policy Support	PPF
7. LDP (or LP) less than 5 years since adoption	Y/N	PPF report	Planning Act (s16); Scottish Planning Policy	NHIs; Quality of Outcomes; Quality of service and engagement
8. Development plan scheme demonstrates next LDP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on course for adoption within 5-year cycle • project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale 	Y/N Y/N	PPF report	Planning Act (s16); Scottish Planning Policy	NHIs; Quality of Outcomes; Quality of service and engagement
9. Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation	Evidence of activity	PA to provide		Quality of Service and Engagement Governance
10. Cross-sector stakeholders, including industry, agencies and Scottish Government, engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation	Evidence of activity	PA to provide		Quality of Service and Engagement Governance
11. Production of regular and proportionate policy advice, for example through supplementary guidance, on information required to support applications	Evidence of activity	PA to provide		Quality of Service and Engagement

Performance Markers

Simplifying and Streamlining

Performance Marker	Measure	Source/ Evidence	Policy Support	PPF
12. Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit (e.g. protocols; joined-up services; single contact; joint pre-application advice)	Examples from the year	PA to provide		Quality of Service and Engagement Governance
13. Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities	Evidence of activity to pass on and adopt good practice	PPF report	Delivering Planning Reform; Planning Reform Next Steps	Culture of continuous improvement

Delivering Development

Performance Marker	Measure	Source/ Evidence	Policy Support	PPF
14. Stalled sites/legacy cases: conclusion/ withdrawal of planning applications more than one year old	Reducing number of applications more than one year old (from same time last year)	Statistics from SG Analytical Services		Governance
15. Developer contributions: clear expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out in development plan (and/or emerging plan) and • in pre-application discussions 	Y/N Examples	LDP PA to provide		Quality of service and engagement

Front cover photograph:

View looking down Gallowgate towards Broad Street, showing Marischal College entrance tower on the left and the Marischal Square development due to open in the summer of 2017.

Rear cover photograph:

View through one of Marischal College's windows of the Marischal Square development.



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