



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

# Planning Performance Framework

## ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016



## **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

### **Annual Planning Performance Report 2015-2016**

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## **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – Planning Context**

- **Approved 99.1% of all planning applications in 2015/16**
- **Decision time for local development has improved from 12.3 weeks in 2014/15 to 8.9 weeks in 2015/16**
- **On track to deliver our second generation LDP**
- **Outer Hebrides have a large percentage of land, inland water and marine sites designated for nature conservation purposes**
- **70% of the land now under community ownership**
- **Outer Hebrides placed in the top ten in Scotland in Rural Quality of Life Survey**

## PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16



### Part 1: National Headline Indicators (NHIs)

Key outcomes	2015-16	2014-15
<b>Development Planning:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age of local development plan(s) (years and months) at end of reporting period <i>Requirement: less than 5 years</i></li> <li>Will the local/strategic development plan(s) be replaced by their 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary according to the current development plan scheme? (Y/N)</li> <li>Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year? (Y-earlier/Y-later/N)</li> <li>Were development plan scheme engagement/consultation commitments met during the year? (Y/N)</li> </ul>	<b>3 years, 6 months</b>          <b>Yes</b>          <b>No</b>          <b>Yes</b>	<b>2 years, 4 months</b>          <b>Yes</b>          <b>No</b>          <b>Yes</b>
<b>Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established housing land supply</li> <li>5-year effective housing land supply</li> <li>5-year housing supply target</li> <li>5-year effective housing land supply (<i>to one decimal place</i>)</li> <li>Housing approvals</li> <li>Housing completions over the last 5 years</li> <li>Marketable employment land supply</li> <li>Employment land take-up during reporting year</li> </ul>	<b>1270 units</b> <b>633 units</b> <b>360 units</b> <b>8.8 years</b>  <b>77 units</b> <b>538 units</b>  <b>51,198.83ha</b> <i>Base date</i> <i>Nov 2012</i>  <b>0.1644 ha</b> <i>Base date</i> <i>Nov 2012</i>	<b>1428**</b> <b>659 units</b> <b>310 units</b> <b>10.6 years</b>  <b>91 units</b> <b>593 units</b>  <b>51,199 ha</b> <i>Base date</i> <i>Nov 2012</i>  <b>0.5446 ha</b> <i>Base date</i> <i>Nov 2012</i>

\* the most up to date approved figures are to be supplied

\*\*amended figures for 14/15

<b>Development Management</b> <b>Project Planning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice</li> <li>Number of major applications subject to processing agreement</li> <li>Number of applications subject to other project plan</li> <li>Percentage planned timescales met</li> </ul> <b>Decision-making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application approval rate</li> <li>Delegation rate</li> </ul>	<b>51%</b>  <b>0</b>  <b>0</b>  <b>N/A</b>	<b>52%</b>  <b>0</b>  <b>0</b>  <b>N/A</b>
<b>Decision-making timescales</b> Average number of weeks to decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Major developments</li> <li>Local developments (non-householder)</li> <li>Householder developments</li> </ul>	  <b>N/A</b> <b>8.9 wks</b> <b>7.1 wks</b>	  <b>28.5 wks</b> <b>12.3 wks</b> <b>7.1 wks</b>
<b>Legacy Cases</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number cleared during reporting period</li> <li>Number remaining</li> </ul>	  <b>0</b> <b>1</b>	  <b>New Indicator</b> <b>New Indicator</b>
<b>Enforcement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time since enforcement charter published / reviewed (months) <i>Requirement: review every 2 years</i></li> <li>Number of breaches identified / resolved</li> </ul>	  <b>1 month</b>  <b>12/8</b>	  <b>13 months</b>  <b>25/24</b>



## Outer Hebrides Planning Context

### Profile

The Outer Hebrides has a profile of application type consistent with its location, geography, relatively sparse population and abundant reserve of natural resources. The terrestrial and marine areas of the islands have the most extensive coverage of natural heritage designations of any region of Scotland, which places a constraint on the nature and scale of permitted development. In addition, the landmass of North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist is heavily constrained by: Ministry of Defence (MOD) assets, in particular Defence radar for renewables and flooding constraints for housing and commercial development.

### Housing

Approximately 70% of housing is delivered through individual single private houses with the remainder being provided through the affordable house building programme. These individual windfall house sites are not reflected in the [Local Development Plan](#) (LDP) allocations which are generally identified to meet affordable housing needs. In the 2015/16 reporting year there have been no planning applications reaching the planning decision stage which could be categorised as 'Major'.

The number of Householder applications fell in 2015/16 to 16% of all cases, well below the percentage typical of more urban authorities. Housing (local), predominately windfall sites for individual houses in rural settlements, also dropped in number, accounting for 24% of all planning decisions and took an average of 9.3 weeks to determine.

### Renewables

Planning applications for renewable energy generation fell dramatically in 2015/16 with less than 4% of planning decisions of this development type, a consequence of: uncertainty over subsidy; export capacity, and; in the islands of the Uists and Benbecula the increased likelihood of MOD objection due to radar impact. The outcome of the high level of political interest and interaction with the MOD and developers over the past two years has resulted in an increased incidence of pre-application advice for renewable energy proposals and more detailed and informed consultation responses issued by the MOD. The increase in pre-application advice and the continued number of non-fee earning EIA screening assessments coupled with the post-consent processing of larger scale wind energy proposals (in anticipation of DECC announcement and OFGEM submission for a mainland inter-connector) has continued to draw on resources during 2015/16.

### **Aquaculture**

The Outer Hebrides has the second highest number of Marine Atlantic Salmon Farms of any local authority area in Scotland. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a positive planning framework to support the sustainable economic growth of the industry and has grown experience within its development management team to deal with planning advice and applications. The marked expansion in the sector in recent years tailed off in the 2015/16 year. The industry reported 2015/16 had been a difficult year and growth had been less than expected due to biological and environmental challenges. The Government had commissioned (and this planning authority contributed on a number of fronts to) the [Independent Review of the Consenting Regime for Scottish Aquaculture](#). The review was necessary to understand and address ongoing concerns by the industry as to duplication and delay in the wider consenting regime. Significant investments are being made in the industry including development of hatcheries and new techniques involving the siting of holding pens for fresh water in the marine environment from which water is drawn into treatment tanks aboard ships, and fish are bathed to remove lice. This is an innovative and sustainable means of dealing with biological challenges from sea lice. Finfish applications totalled: 3 planning applications (average 10.6 weeks); 3 EIA applications (average 21 weeks) and; 6 shellfish planning applications (determined in an average of 8 weeks). Each of these applications has involved pre-application discussions.

### **Telecommunications**

One of the sectors which has seen marked growth in pre-application meetings, prior notification submissions and a small increase in applications during 2015/16 has been telecommunications. This is due to the roll out of fast fibre internet and investment in network coverage by mobile phone operators. Both the UK and Scottish Governments have impressed upon the authority the need to deal expeditiously with such applications and in turn the Service has given a high priority to applications falling within the Telecommunications development type, with all applications (other than one with a parallel Listed Building Consent) determined inside 8 weeks.

### **Service Challenges**

Required service efficiencies (loss of 1 DM planning officer post), plus the difficulty of recruiting to vacant posts (one Planning officer post vacant from Sept 15 to April 16) and gap in provision of Planning Administration and clerical support through August and September 2015 (due to maternity leave and officer secondment) had a noticeable impact on the workload of a small team which nevertheless worked hard to cover the service requirements, maintain a customer focus and still maintain a good standard of performance.

The physical geography, the need for two offices, the dispersed nature of settlement and worsening weather patterns affecting inter-island ferry travel present challenges in efficiencies of scale and in terms of service delivery in the Outer Hebrides. Despite these factors timescales for determination have reduced and delegation rates increased with legacy cases negligible.

The Development Plan & Marine Planning Team has sought to support corporate service efficiencies and has functioned without a team manager for over two years. Whilst this has not had a significant effect on Plan progress it is increasingly seen as a risk for the service moving forward.





## The Outer Hebrides



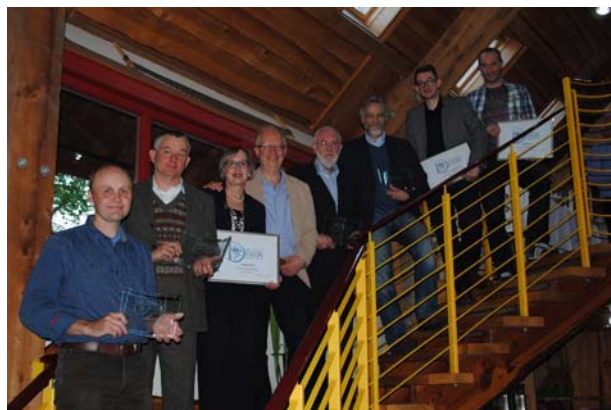
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## Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High-quality Planning Service

### 1 - Quality of Outcomes

#### a) High Quality Development on the Ground

##### CASE STUDY 1: Outer Hebrides Design Award 2016



*Design Award Winners 2015-16*

*"It's important to celebrate good design. Judging the categories was very hard. Those recognised tonight are reaching an exceptionally high standard."*

**Councillor Gordon Murray,  
Design Champion**

The Comhairle continued to promote a fresh approach to design standards in the Outer Hebrides by holding its third [Design Awards Competition](#) in early 2016. To celebrate the National Year of Design, Architecture and Innovation, an array of projects throughout the islands were recognised at the Outer Hebrides Design Awards held in the Woodlands Centre, Stornoway.

There were awards given in four different categories: **Housing – Self-design; Housing – Architect or Designer; Business/Non-domestic; and Conservation.** Comhairle nan Eilean Siar planning officer Helen MacDonald introduced the event and the main speaker, architect Dr Gordon Anderson, who until recently was the president of the Highlands and Islands chapter of the RIAS, (Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland) commented:

*"We are all here because we appreciate good design and it enriches our lives, and it motivates you wherever you go," he said. "None of this is easy, and it's a challenge here, we have to deal with things here which they don't have to face on the mainland, we don't have the opportunity to have flamboyant, whimsical designs here simply because they would get blown away. There were also problems with the durability of materials and the sheer costs of the "Minch factor", getting materials across here."*

**Dr Gordon Anderson**



*Winner of the Business/Non-domestic Award – Three New Business Development Units, Iomairt an Obain, East Tarbert, Harris, North Harris Trust, design by architects 'Rural Design'.*



*Winner of the Housing Architect or Designer Award was 'Porteous Architecture' for 2A Croir, Bernera.*

The awards were presented by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Design Champion Councillor Gordon Murray, who was one of a panel of judges considering the entries, *"It's important to celebrate good design. Judging the categories was very hard. Those recognised tonight are reaching an exceptionally high standard,"* he remarked at the event.



## Appropriate Design in the Countryside

Our Local Development Plan provides a sustainable land use strategy designed to accommodate development in a way that respects the characteristics of the islands' settlement patterns and has regard for the environment. Through the Planning Service, the Comhairle encourages good quality design that enhances rather than competes with the Hebridean landscapes. The Local Development Plan 'Siting and Design' policy sets out the key considerations for achieving a successful design – exemplified by this recently completed Marine fish farming shore base at Maaruig in Harris, a sensitively sited, scaled and designed industrial building on the edge of a rural settlement.



*Shore based facilities, Marine Harvest, Maaruig, Harris*

For the Maaruig application, in a National Scenic Area, the Design Statement detailed the careful and contextual assessments made in developing the design, such as how the form, materials and colours used reflect the Hebridean character. These aspirations are outlined in the Outer Hebrides Design Guide. The larch cladding on the building will weather to a silver-grey, echoing the bedrock of the surrounding landscape. Natural slate again reflects the natural surroundings and also the traditional buildings of the area. The form and scale has been chosen to reduce visual impact and to achieve a more domestic appearance, given that this is the most dominant form in surrounding properties.

## CASE STUDY 2: Lews Castle Museum and Archive Development

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's commitment to supporting the historic environment has been confirmed by the successful completion of conservation and development works at the [Lews Castle](#).



Lews Castle was identified in the LDP as a proposed site for mixed-use development which required a sustainable use

compatible with its historic fabric and 'A' grade listing. LDP policy required that restoration proposals would be assessed against the contribution made to the experience of the Historic Garden and Designed Landscape. With the advice of the Planning Service, the Comhairle's Economic Development Department has been able to take this project forward by securing major investment from partners ERDF, Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Government; Historic Environment Scotland and HIE. This has enabled the restoration of the external stone work and fabric, while the ground floor has been renovated to its former gothic revival glory including new hand-painted walls and plasterwork.



*Hand-painted wallpaper before*



*After restoration*

The project has been undertaken in phases and included works to the external envelope of the Category A Listed building followed by the conservation and refurbishment of the ground floor of the Castle and the

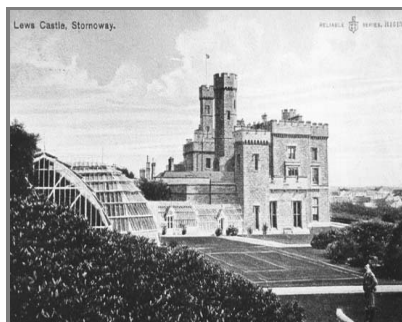


construction of a new museum and archive extension; followed in 2015/16 by the refurbishment of the upper floors of the Castle for hotel accommodation. The project required 2 planning and 3 listed building consents and involved two design teams. The construction period extended over 4 years due to a number of unforeseen circumstances.

During 2015, the Planning Service played an integral role providing regular pre-application and post consent advice, regularly seeking external expert advice and promoting pragmatic solutions to issues as they emerged which ensured that the conservation of the Category A Listed Building was achieved without compromise to its historic character but all the while recognising the challenge of securing a new sustainable end use for the building. The space in the Castle has been leased to hospitality company Natural Retreats and a modern extension, holds [Museum nan Eilean](#) and the Islands' first ever civic archive facility.



*Lews Castle and museum*



*Lews Castle and glasshouses*

The new museum and archive was designed by award-winning architects Malcolm Fraser Associates and established museum consultants, Redman Design, have created the integrated interpretation and gallery layouts. Museum fit-out and object preparation are nearing completion and the venue is scheduled to open in July 2016. Six of the Lewis Chessmen are on long-term loan from the British Museum and take their place as the showpiece exhibits in the new building inspired by the Castle's former glasshouses.

*"From my involvement as client project co-ordinator I know that the design team for Phase 1 and 2 (Malcolm Fraser Architects and Simpson & Brown) were extremely positive about their engagement with the planning process and the Comhairle planning service. Compared to projects in other areas they appreciated the easy access to planning officers, helpful attitude to dialogue both pre-and post-application."*

**Iain Macleod**  
Economic Development Officer  
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar



**The judges commented:**

*“The dramatic but decaying Lews Castle has been transformed into a centre for island culture, through the restoration of the historic castle and the addition of a complementary new museum and archive wing. This project is an embodiment of heritage and modernity coming together in vibrant new uses to bring life to building, landscape and community”.*

***Lews Castle Project wins Award***

The Lews Castle project won an award for ‘Building Conservation’ at the 2016 Scottish RICS awards which celebrate inspirational initiatives across the built environment. The project is also shortlisted for the 2016 Construction News Awards in the category of ‘Projects up to £10m’.

The Planning Service provides a free pre-application advice service and has processed consents for the restoration of ‘A’ grade listed buildings such as the Porter’s Lodge, the arched gateway to the Lews Castle Grounds, and the Boatman’s House in this reporting year. These are two renovation projects proposed in a scheme of improvements to the historic environs of the Castle which will restore the core area of the designed landscape. These new works will improve and develop links between the Castle, its Grounds and the New Museum and archive.

*“Compared to most, the service was very good and compared to some you were angels!”*

**John Sanders  
for  
Simpson & Brown**

### CASE STUDY 3: Heritage-led Regeneration in Island Conservation Areas

#### Conservation Area Grants

To contribute to successful placemaking and maintaining the historic fabric of the Islands Conservation Areas, the Comhairle Planning Service facilitates a programme of activity to support the historic environment which includes the provision of [grants to owners](#) of properties in the Islands' Conservation Areas. The primary purpose of the grant schemes is to bridge the gap to bridge the cost gap between modern construction materials and methods and traditional materials, building repairs and techniques. The outcomes contribute to the preservation and appropriate maintenance of historic buildings, retaining local distinctiveness and character in the Islands.



*14 Scotland Street...after grant assistance*



*14 Scotland Street...before*



### Stornoway Painting Grant

The Planning Service also administers a [painting scheme](#) for Stornoway which is aimed at improving the appearance and appeal of the town centre environment. This reporting year the scheme has benefitted from additional funding from the Town Centre Legacy Fund which supports projects that benefit the town centre area of Stornoway and its environs. The additional funding has meant that applicants can receive up to 75% of eligible costs for their painting project in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

### Planning Officer Advice

A new bistro, 'The Lido' is named after a previous Scots-Italian café that operated in the same building and closed in the 1970s. Planning officers assisted with identifying appropriate style doors and windows that fitted with the context of the building within the Stornoway conservation area.





## CASE STUDY 4: Mackenzie Park



*Pedestrian link, Mackenzie Park*

September 2015 saw the grant of planning consent for the third phase of development at the Melbost Farm proposal site, and it is now well underway. In designing the additional 24 housing units for Mackenzie Lane, the developers were guided by the Comhairle's Supplementary Guidance contained in the [Melbost Farm East Planning](#)

[Brief](#). Being the third consent on the site for the same housing developer, by the same contractor, we have seen an improvement with each proposal received, following detailed pre-application discussions with the planning service teams. Less time was spent on negotiations than previous applications as the developers were aware of the necessary features for the development – this resulted in a mix of single and 1.75 storey dwellings well distributed throughout the site; a good variety of materials and colours giving a distinct character to the area, while reflecting the best aspects of the phases that have already been developed; and an additional informal planted and landscaped amenity and recreation space for residents.

A Masterplan was produced to guide the spatial aspects of the development as a way to visualise key aspects of the Brief, with the planning service providing guidance and feedback on each stage of its development. This gave confidence to the developers that their third submission would be met with a positive response from the planning team. Key aspects addressed included

the importance of a co-ordinated development approach for providing connectivity and shared infrastructure and green spaces between each of the development phases. The third phase infills between Phase 1 and Phase 2 and is the key aspect of how the wider development will realise the aim for high levels of connectivity to create a sense of place for all the area's residents.



*Amenity space, Mackenzie Park*

Completion of Phase 2 was underway in the late summer of 2015, with some key aspects of the development negotiated by the planning service being implemented – traffic lights have been installed across the main public road to the bus stop, accessed by new pedestrian footpaths which link through



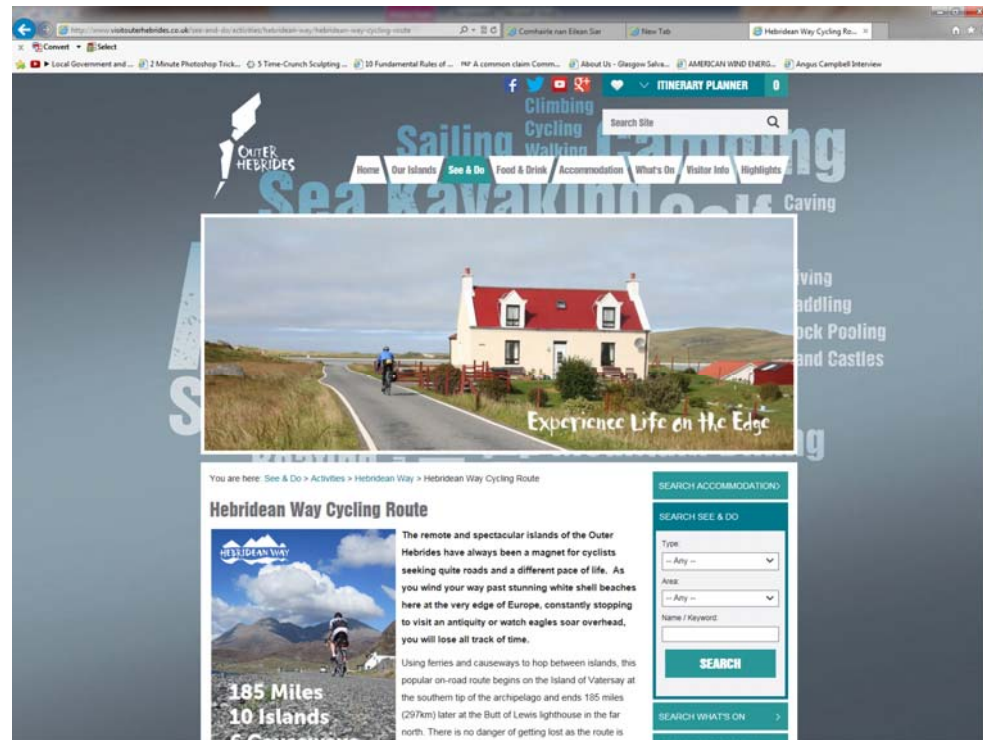
various points across the new housing areas. Landscaping works and tree planting have been completed for Phase 2, along with an amenity area with a recreational space and low impact play facilities in the centre of Mackenzie Crescent, part of the planning conditions for this phase. The outcome is a place which will be, on completion, well connected through pedestrian and green networks; and will be well integrated with surrounding road infrastructure and existing residential development.

#### **CASE STUDY 5: Hebridean Way – improving access to the natural environment**



Contributing to sustainable economic growth, the [Hebridean Way](#) stretches 185 miles along the length of the Outer Hebrides from Vatersay in the South to the Butt of Lewis in the North. 2015 saw the completion of the project on the ground. Much of the initial route planning could not have been completed without assistance from the Planning Service. The Comhairle's planning technician matched drawings to the latest OS map base, collated GPS surveys for the entire route, and created OS base maps to inform route maps marketing the Hebridean Way on the [visitouterhebrides](#) website. The route comprises both existing and new sections of pathway, passing through ten Islands linked by a combination of ferries and causeways, and meandering through a host of landscape types, crossing moors and mountains and running through the fertile machair along the Atlantic Coastline. The Planning Service was engaged in providing advice on the siting and design of certain sections of the Way and included advice of flood mitigation, mineral borrow pit siting and restoration and the process implications as route options/changes/variations came to light during the construction phase. The Planning Service also determined a number of planning applications for the development works. The Hebridean Way is dual aspect, with a walking route and separate National cycle network route. The walking route is comprised of purpose built sections and also makes

use of existing footpaths and traditional rights of way, peat tracks and quiet roads.



Web-site marketing the Hebridean Way

*“A key element of the project was the application for planning permission for all sections of new footpath construction and installation of steel and timber bridges over main river crossings. I found the CnES planning staff to be particularly helpful and supportive in providing advice and explanation of planning requirements and protocols. This partnership, working between ourselves and the Comhairle, who were lead body and grant holders for this ERDF funded project, ensured the successful outcome of what was at times a complicated and protracted exercise given all the varying land ownership issues coupled with crofting communities grazings rights and other land use issues. It was and is of key importance that the planning process provides transparency of purpose whilst safeguarding the legal rights of all interested parties; facilitating their right to question plans which have potential to impact adversely on their livelihood or quality of life.”*

Chris Harris  
Former Project Officer  
The Hebridean Way LDR Project  
Isles of Harris & Lewis

## CASE STUDY 6: The Isle of Harris Distillery

Demonstrating sustainable development and a quality outcome on the ground is the main aim of the Planning Service – pre-application advice and negotiations are the best way to achieve this. The [Isle of Harris Distillery](#) which opened in October 2015 is an excellent example of this co-operative working. This application had potential landscape and visual impact issues due to its prominent site within the main settlement of Tarbert, and its location within a National Scenic Area. After significant negotiation, the final design solution resulted in a striking but low-impact group of buildings, with traditional proportions that fit into the grain of the Tarbert settlement, and modern design details that work with elements of the surrounding landscape.



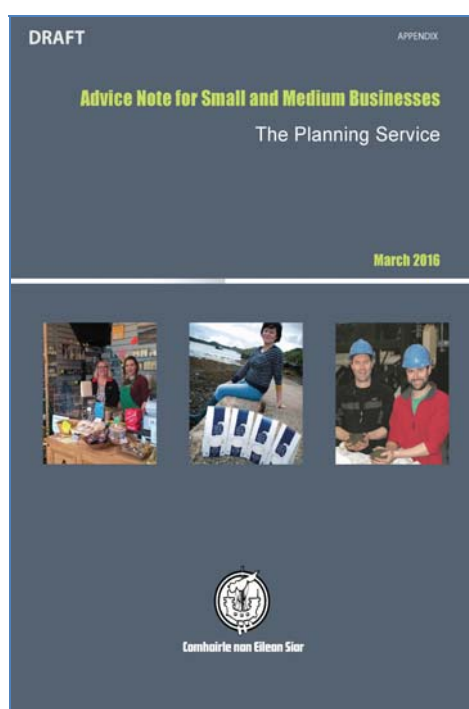
## 2 - Quality of Service and Engagement

### a) Open for Business

- The Planning Service continues to provide a customer focused service with Pre-application discussions actively encouraged to customers over the phone, in communication with elected representatives and in engagement with Community Councils. The pre-application service is provided at no cost to the customer and the Comhairle do not have plans to introduce charging. Early contact is encouraged and Officers meet developers regularly.
- As a development of this customer focused approach the Development Management team has developed closer working

relations with a number of other Comhairle Services that interact with customers who ultimately may become customers of the planning service. These include the Business Gateway team, the Community Regeneration team and the Asset Management Team.

- The Business Gateway Team deal with a wide variety of both new business proposals and business expansion plans with many of their customers having either a property development or advertisement requirement. Business Gateway staff were consulted during the preparation of a new [Advice Guide](#) on planning, tailored for Small and Medium Enterprise's (SMEs) in the Outer Hebrides. Officers within both Business Gateway and the Planning Service have an increased awareness of each other's processes and requirements as a result of the preparation of this guide.



### Engaging with SME's

In a drive to provide a more welcoming and open for business approach to customers, the Comhairle has launched an attractive new Guide, marketed at Small and Medium sized businesses designed to provide accessible information about the planning process to people endeavouring on a business venture that may involve planning.

#### *New Advice guide on planning tailored for SME's in the Outer Hebrides*

- Business Gateway staff can now provide initial planning advice with the help of the guide and, at an appropriate time, provide an introduction for their customer to the Planning Service in order that new business support is rounded and planning input to proposals is made at the earliest stage possible.
- The Community Regeneration team comprise a small service that provides significant support to community initiatives particularly in relation to capital projects. Their work has been instrumental in securing for island-communities, significant external funding to appoint consultants, design, project manage and construct significant community assets. The Planning Service has worked closely with officers providing pre-planning advice and ultimately ensuring that



planning applications that are funding deadline dependent are appropriately project managed and decided within acceptable timeframes.

- The Asset Management team of the Comhairle was established almost five years ago following recognition by the Council that its assets require to be better utilised and surplus assets divested in order to reduce maintenance liability and secure capital receipts to help cushion the local authority's financial situation. The Head of Service attends meetings of the Asset Management Group and has ensured that buildings and land being offered for transfer to other departments, or sold to housing association, community group or exposed for sale on the open market, have the benefit of planning advice and implications at the earliest possible stage.
- The Comhairle is responsible for delivering the Local Housing Strategy and takes the lead role in the development of the Affordable Housing Investment Programme to provide affordable housing throughout the Outer Hebrides. The Comhairle works in partnership with the only Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in the Outer Hebrides. Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) development staff and their Design & Build Contractors are now committed to seeking pre-application advice on all potential housing sites and new housing proposals. Officers from both the Development Planning and Development Management teams work collaboratively to deliver this service which is often time constrained due to housing funding imperatives. This has increased engagement and allowed for better quality applications to be processed and determined efficiently and ensuring timeous delivery of much needed new homes in the local authority area. As mentioned previously on page 16, this was evident in the Supplementary Guidance note provided in the Melbost Farm Planning Brief which assisted in the further phased development of the Melbost Farm site.
- This reporting year four new affordable houses have been built in Habost, Ness and a further six are nearing completion in Barvas. Pictured on the following page is an example of an LDP site where affordable housing has now been delivered in our rural Housing Market Area. This development, known as Leana Ruadh, was for four houses, the first social housing built in the Uig district for over 30 years. The housing was officially opened in August 2015.





*LDP housing allocation, Prop H1a Crowlista, delivered in 2015*

- Following a review of validation guidance as part of the Planning Service Improvement Plan in 2015/16, Development Management Officers now provide advice on validation requirements for applications at the pre-application stage.
- In 2015/16 the Service trialled a duty officer system for both phone enquiries and for customers without appointment presenting at the offices. The scattered geography of the area necessitates an element of geographical remit and while the trial did yield some benefits in releasing officers from customer facing duties at certain times, the conclusion of the officers participating in the pilot was that the advantages of a single point of contact at pre-app carried through to the application stage was greater than the benefits won; but that the model could be adopted at peak times in workload freeing a particular officer from frontline duties according to service requirements. Contact details for each officer, their geographical and specialist remit is provided on the planning website pages and in each stakeholder bulletin.
- In 2015/16 the Planning Service delivered two evening training sessions on the Planning Process to members of Community Council's across the Outer Hebrides. Both sessions were well attended and received positive feedback from members attending. The sessions helped Community Council representatives better appreciate their role in the planning process and how they could bring

forward the views of the community they represent.

- The Comhairle's Development Plan and Marine Planning Team and the Housing Team have now reshuffled their seating within the office space enabling closer working relationships with the Comhairle's Housing Services Team which is facilitating co-ordinated delivery of the Comhairle's Local Housing Strategy (LHS), Housing Needs & Demand Assessment (HNDA), Housing Land Audit (HLA) and LDP.

## b) Certainty

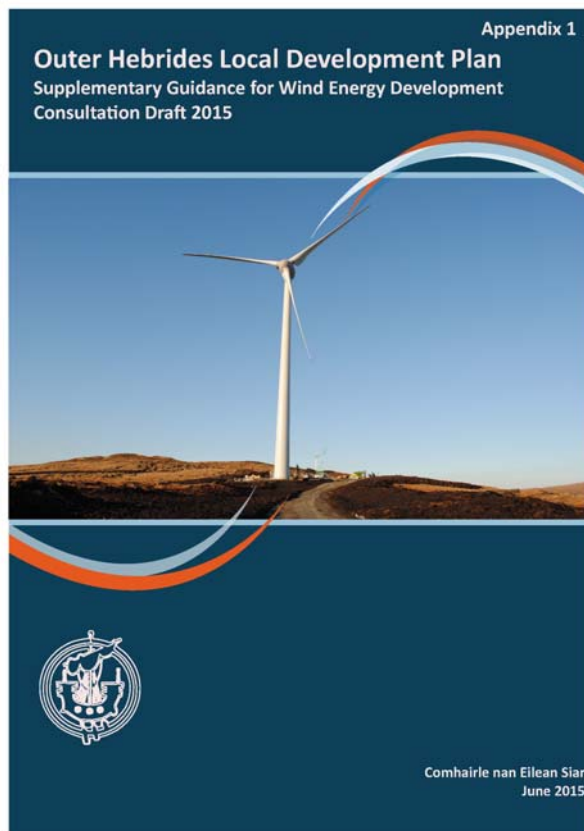
### CASE STUDY 7: Review of Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Developments

The Comhairle has an adopted policy and a spatial framework for wind energy proposals in the form of statutory Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Developments (2013). However, several factors pointed to an early review of the guidance and work has therefore been ongoing during 2015-16 to progress this.

One such issue was the significant increase in MOD objections to wind turbines in parts of the Outer Hebrides, due to the extensive visibility of the land to military radar. This led to a great deal of uncertainty around the progression of wind energy proposals in 2013/14 and 2014/15. As part of the Review, new policy advice has been developed in response to this issue (and others such as updated national policy on wild land and community separation and emerging issues such as cumulative noise impacts). Once adopted, this will provide increased certainty for both communities and developers with regard to where wind energy developments could be located.



*Beinn Ghrideag turbines, Lewis*



*Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development 2016*

*“The Outer Hebrides has a rich renewable energy resource that communities, householders and developers can utilise for a range of important social purposes. The generation of power from wind energy has potential throughout our islands albeit at different scales in differing parts of the islands. Although there are constraints in relation to the resource, the Comhairle is supportive and seeks to encourage appropriate renewable energy generation projects.”*

**Alasdair Macleod**  
Chair, Sustainable Development Committee,  
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

The new guidance will help guide developers to sites which may be suitable for wind energy generation projects, providing spatial guidance and planning policy advice for larger developments, policy advice for other scales of development, and advice and guidance on radar issues for all sizes of wind turbines throughout the Islands.

## **CASE STUDY 8: Arnish**

### **Low Carbon/Renewable North Enterprise Area**



*Aerial view of Arnish Point*

During 2015/16 the Development Management team were actively involved in discussions on the timetable for carrying out statutory pre-application with the community and thereafter drafting and agreeing upon a project management plan and pre-application advice on a National Development application.

The application site was located in on part of land zoned as the Arnish Low Carbon/Renewable North Enterprise Area, for which a [planning protocol](#) is in place.

The Comhairle's Planning Service is committed to the use of processing agreements for larger projects and provides a [processing agreement template](#) on-line. While no major planning applications were submitted in 2015/16, this project management tool was deployed during the pre-application discussion for the National Planning Application submitted in April 2016. The project involved the construction of a high voltage direct current converter station and ancillary infrastructure on the site at Arnish. As the proposal was of national scale in the hierarchy of developments, a processing agreement was used between the applicant and the Comhairle, which included a scheduled timetable for handling the application, setting out key milestones in the process; and clearly indicated what the information was required to process the application efficiently. This protocol has been very useful in ensuring that both developer and the Comhairle are aware of their obligations and responsibilities going forward.



## Outer Hebrides Housing Land Audit

Scottish Planning Policy recognises that market conditions are different in rural and Island areas. As the housing land requirement and market activity are of a more limited scale in the Outer Hebrides, the Outer Hebrides Housing Land Audit is produced every two years. The land audit process identifies a five year effective housing land supply, providing more certainty to developers and in particular the only RSL within the area Hebridean Housing Partnership in these times of increasing market unpredictability but where affordable housing need is still strong.



*Housing Land Audit November 2015*



## c) Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Good communications are integral to our planning culture: we keep in touch with our stakeholders by quarterly Newsletter, informing them about trends, providing information and updates about new developments in Building Standards and Planning.

The Newsletter is circulated to Community Councils; Architects, Planning and Building Standards Agents; Internal Stakeholders; Directors and Heads of service in the Development Department; Business Gateway and Estate Agents.

### Feedback:

*“Thanks for your help this year, much appreciated.”*

*The planning service we have here is as good as I have experienced in my 40+ year career in building design - working all over the UK and abroad too.”*

**David Newman**  
Agent, North Uist

## Engaging with Stakeholders

The Planning Service provides regular updates via Stakeholder Newsletters about new developments and initiatives in Development Management and Development Planning and Building Standards and critically how people can get involved at each stage of the Development Planning Process.



**BUILDING STANDARDS AND PLANNING SERVICE UPDATE**  
Number 6 17 December 2015

**In this issue:**  
Christmas and New Year Holiday Dates  
ePlanning and eBuilding Standards  
Building Standards  
• Consultation  
• Research  
Planning Service  
Development Planning  
• New Team Name  
• OHLDP – Main Issues Report  
• Revision of Supplementary Guidance for Wind Energy Development  
• Outer Hebrides Housing Land Audit  
• Development Management  
• Validation Standards  
• Online Planning Applications and Copyright  
• Electronic Decision Notices  
• Customer Survey  
Performance Information  
• Building Standards  
• Development Management  
Area Responsibility  
Contact us at:  
Planning Service  
planning@cne-siar.gov.uk  
01851 822690 (Stornoway)  
01870 604990 (Balivanich)  
Building Standards  
BuildingStandards@cne-siar.gov.uk  
01851 822692 (Stornoway)  
01870 604990 (Balivanich)

**Christmas and New Year Holiday Dates**  
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar offices will be closed from 5pm on Thursday 24 December 2015 and will re-open on Tuesday 5 January 2016. Please be aware that if you submit an application after 12 noon on 24 December, it may not be processed until 5 January. If you plan to submit an application it would be appreciated if you would do so by Monday 21 December, if at all possible.

**ePlanning and eBuilding Standards**  
In the last Stakeholders' update we advised that the Scottish Government is launching eBuilding Standards and an improved national portal for ePlanning. There will be a single landing page, [eDevelopment.scot](http://eDevelopment.scot) where users can access ePlanning and eBuilding Standards.  
Current users of the ePlanning portal will be familiar with the look and feel of the portal but the upgraded portal will have additional features including the ability to purchase OS based Location Plans from three different suppliers, submit additional documents post-submission, and also submit Notices of Review. User account details are not being transferred to the new portal, and therefore all existing users of ePlanning will need to create an account on [ePlanning.scot](http://ePlanning.scot) before starting a new proposal.  
The Development Management team has been busy testing the new portal over the past few weeks with the national launch of the portal scheduled for 13 January 2016 and the closure of the current ePlanning portal scheduled for 17 March 2016. All new work must be carried out on the [ePlanning.scot](http://ePlanning.scot) portal. If you have started or plan to start an application before 13 January, you will still be able to complete and submit it but you will need to ensure that the application is submitted by 17 March. If you do not think that you will be able to submit your application before this date, it is recommended that you wait until 13 January to start the proposal on the new portal.  
The Planning Service wishes to encourage all agents and applicants to embrace the new portal as e-working will increase efficiency in both the time and cost of dealing with planning applications. From customers' perspective, it will save on the cost of printing plans that are increasingly produced electronically, allow agents to save details for re-use, allow submission of multiple applications e.g. planning and Listed Building Consent without the need to duplicate certain details, and allow on-line payment of fees. The receipt of applications and plans in electronic format means the Planning Service will not require to scan and index these, saving time but, moreover, ensuring retention of the quality of documents in their original electronic format.  
If you have any queries please contact a member of the Development Management team.  
The development of the eBuilding Standards portal has been completed and is about to enter the test stage. There has been additional development work associated with the branding and functionality of the eBuilding Standards portal. This has impacted on the Building Standards launch which has moved from June to August 2016.

**Building Standards Service**  
**Consultation**  
The consultation on the proposed amendment to the Building Regulations to introduce a new building classification for huts and bothies is now live on the Scottish Government website. This can be accessed [here](http://bit.ly). The Scottish

## Planning Service Charter February 2016

In February 2016 the Comhairle's Planning Service Charter was revised and updated to make it more customer friendly, with more emphasis on the pre-application stage which is especially important in the Island context where much of the land is constrained by Natural Heritage designations; Ministry of Defence and airport safeguarding; and flood risk.

### Pre Application Service

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Planning Service has continued to promote and provide a free Pre-application Service. All customers are encouraged to engage with the service in order that

Officers can assist in adding value to projects, identify issues, discussing developer contributions, enhancing certainty and negating abortive work at an early stage in the process.

In terms of buildings, the Planning Service Charter explains that a key aim at the pre-application stage is to raise awareness of good design principles and to discuss the potential impact of a building on the surrounding landscape. This encourages applicants to give significant consideration to the design of the building with a view to achieving better quality outcomes on the ground which will benefit both them and the wider community long term.



## Representing the Five Scottish Planning Authorities with Fish Farming Interests at National Level.



*Photo: Alan Anderson*

Farmed Salmon is Scotland's No.1 food export and Scottish production represents 94% of the EU's total farmed salmon production. During 2015/16, The Planning Service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar hosted the annual meeting of the Planners from each of the five local authorities who have marine fish farming responsibilities. It was also attended by Scottish Government Aquaculture officials. The annual meeting coincided with the Comhairle Planning Service taking over the role of communicant with the National forums on Aquaculture, including the Capacity working Group for Finfish, the Shellfish Working Group and the Ministerial Group for Sustainable Scottish Aquaculture. This has involved consulting partner authorities on a range of consultation documents including critically the [Independent Review of the Consenting Regime for Scottish Aquaculture](#) and forming a collective planning view to feed into these consultations.

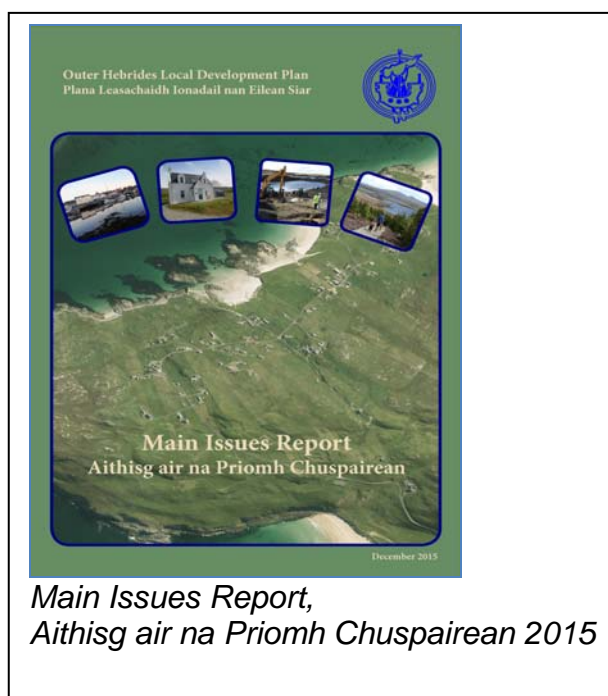
### CASE STUDY 9: Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan

During the 2014-15 reporting year work began on delivering the new Local Development Plan which will replace the current Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (adopted in Nov 2012).

Early in the Plan preparation process, officers held workshops with DM, Members and Key Agencies in Summer 2015 to identify emerging issues. In a drive to encourage island-wide participation in the development plan process, gather information from agencies and stakeholders and provide more certainty for communities and developers, a 'call for sites and issues' consultation was carried out. This action was successful in bringing forward a number of privately owned sites that had not been available for consideration previously for development. A number of land-use issues of concern to the community were also captured during this process. In addition, one to one meetings were held with Key Agencies to discuss

specific issues and eliminate problems at an early stage in the MIR process. In the lead up to the MIR consultation, three online surveys on Local Development Planning were undertaken targeting Comhairle Members; Development Management and Stakeholders.

The Main Issues Report (MIR) was prepared and published for public consultation in December 2015.

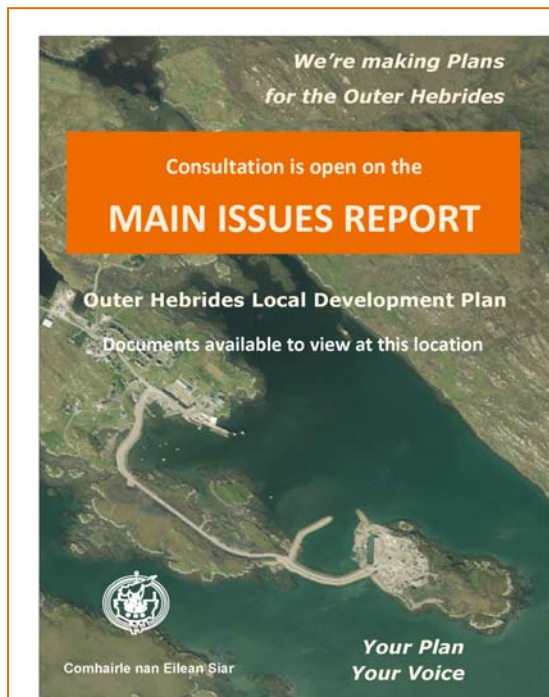


**The Vision**  
To facilitate sustainable economic growth and help build confident and resilient communities, the Plan will provide planning policy that delivers long term benefits to the communities of the Outer Hebrides by ensuring development contributes to the creation of well-designed and attractive places, and that our natural, cultural and marine resources are utilised efficiently and sustainably.

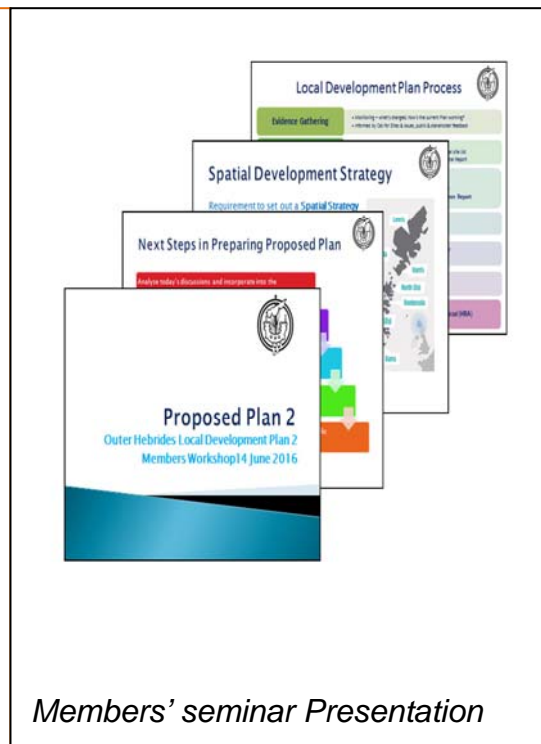
In addition to the statutory methods, officers used innovative methods to engage with difficult to reach groups in a dispersed community: issuing local press releases; using social media: CNES Twitter and Facebook notifications; distributing posters; attending one to one meetings with community councils on request; and keeping stakeholders informed through newsletters and emails. Significant progress on the LDP process has been made during the last reporting year. Following the MIR consultation between December 2015 and February 2016, 175 individual issues were raised through 26 submissions. To stimulate engagement; involve Comhairle members in the Development Plan Process and to encourage them to take on ownership of the next generation Plan, workshops were held to discuss the Main Issues and the approach to the new Development Strategy.

Integral to and vital in informing the new Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation appraisal (HRA) processes will run concurrent with all stages of the Plan's preparation.



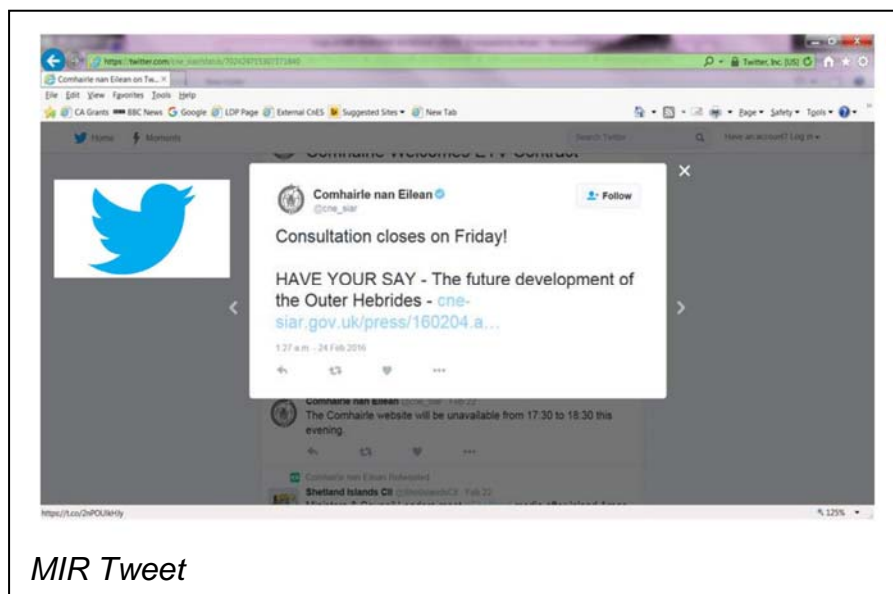


*MIR campaign poster 2015*



*Members' seminar Presentation*

The MIR was also informed by a number of documents including the Monitoring Statement and the Housing Land Audit.



*MIR Tweet*

## Participation in Community initiatives - Charrette for Castlebay Development and Regeneration



### *Community Engagement, Castlebay Charette, Isle of Barra*

During the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> March 2016 the Planning Service participated in three of the Charrette sessions which were organised by the local community and facilitated by Ironside Farrar on behalf of Barra and Vatersay Community Company Ltd in Castlebay (the main settlement in Barra and Vatersay). The purpose of the event was to evaluate the community needs and aspirations and to outline a comprehensive development plan for Castlebay. At the start of each session the charrette process was explained and new attendees were asked to complete the Place Standard Tool and were also asked to identify if they were Barra residents or visitors. The responses provided were then used to facilitate a discussion. The issues discussed included bringing back into use vacant/ repairing buildings; footpaths in and around Castlebay, re-visiting the issue of the creation of Conservation Area in the main settlement and improving the sporting facilities. It is hoped that once the report has been published and considered that this can provide valuable input to the Local Development Plan process.

Castlebay  
Regeneration Charrette Report



**Extract from the  
Castlebay Regeneration  
Charrette Report by  
IronsideFarrar.**

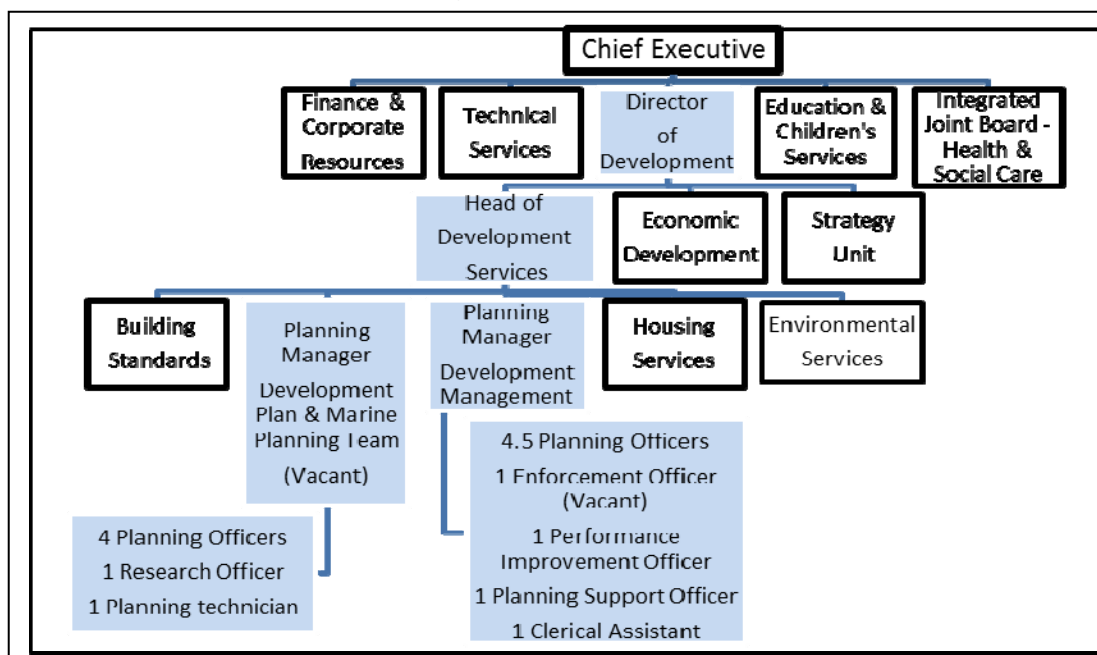
### 3 - Governance

#### a) Efficient and Effective Decision-Making

- The average decision time for local development has improved from 12.3 weeks in 14/15 to 8.9 weeks in 15/16.
- The average decision time for householder has remained static at 7.1 weeks.
- No major applications were determined during the reporting period, an indication of challenging economic conditions.
- Our delegation rate has increased to just over 98% from 95% in the previous year.
- We worked hard to remove legacy cases, with the only one remaining in the system at end of March 2015, withdrawn in early 2016 leaving a nil balance.
- The Environment & Protective Services Committee now has delegation to make planning decisions other than for very particular types of application e.g. National and Major categories and meets 5 times a year. In 2015/16 at the request of the Planning Service, in order to reduce delays in the decision making process, the Comhairle held a special meeting during summer recess to deal with a small number of urgent non-delegated planning applications.
- The Local Review Body meets as and when required in line with the Council Committee cycle (due to costs and geography of elected members).
- Planning and marine planning policy issues reports to the Sustainable Development Committee which also meets 5 times per year and the Development Plan and Marine Planning Team have a Member Officer Working Group as a forum to discuss Policy development issues and guide the strategic direction and policy approach of the Plan.
- In 2015/16 the Development Plan and Marine Planning Team has an on-going project management system in place which includes a Project Board to assist with progressing the new LDP schedule, with focused fortnightly meetings to ensure that the team stay on track and that the timescale for each element in the process will be achieved in good time.

## b) Effective Management Structures

### *Development Department Organisational Chart*



The Planning Service structure is kept under review by the Head of Service in order to react to national changes or local circumstances within the team. Such reviews ensure that staff resource is used as effectively as possible with the aim of delivering efficient and predictable service for our customers. The key risk associated with the structure within 2015/16 was the continued absence of a Manager for the Development Plan and Marine Planning Team. This is to be addressed within the context of 2016/17 service improvements.

### **CASE STUDY 10: Growing our Own**

The Comhairle Planning Service operates a Career Grade Structure for planning officers which encourages staff to progress through planning grades during their career with the local authority. As well as organising a regular programme of CPD for staff, the Service is committed to developing those existing staff who demonstrate dedication and motivation and this is done by using annual Staff Development Appraisals which include a personal development plan. The Comhairle continues to value its people and has invested in them by funding professional development. On-line distance learning courses accredited by the RTPi have been a valuable method of progression for staff who have benefitted from this opportunity to complete a postgraduate degree whilst still being based on the Islands. This 'grow your own' approach has proved successful was of addressing recruitment and retention issues and leads to the development of motivated and committed staff. In 2015/16 there were three internal staff promotions within the Planning Service and one officer achieved Associate Membership of RTPi and two completed their Planning Masters:



- In 2015 career grade Planning Officer Helen MacDonald successfully achieved Associate RTPI Membership.
- Employed as Planning Enforcement Officer for 8 years. Iain, 'the Enforcer' Macleod is now in the post of Planning Officer and is working towards membership of RTPI.
- Career grade Planning Officers, Isla Macarthur and Mairi Maciver successfully completed their Masters in Town and Country Planning in 2015 and are now applying to obtain full MRTPI.
- Planning Technician Susan Rabé moved into a career grade Planning Officer in October 2015 and completed the second year of the Masters in Town and Country Planning. She is currently working on her final year dissertation.
- After working for 18 months as a Clerical Assistant with the Planning Service, Anne Mackenzie was moved to Planning Support Officer in 2007 and has developed her career path once again in the role of Performance Improvement Officer in April 2015.



*Planning Officer, Isla Macarthur*

### **c) Financial Management and Local Governance**

Budget setting is on an annual basis and team budgets are monitored on a monthly basis. The Planning Service finances are monitored on a monthly basis by the service managers. If income or expenditure deviates significantly from the budgeted amount, this is reported on. Planning fee

income is recorded in the case management system. The service manager is able to query the database via a standard set of reports to enable an ongoing monitoring of income.

Corporate procurement policies ensure value for money. To enable the Comhairle to monitor and report its performance it has adopted 'Interplan' as its electronic performance management system. Since August 2009, Interplan has been used to track the progress of the Comhairle service business plans/performance indicators and to report on progress made. Because it provides a real time integrated business planning and performance monitoring system within the Comhairle, it facilitates more frequent and flexible reporting. Quarterly reporting of business plans and performance are now presented to Committee, as noted above. Service improvements put forward in the PPF are monitored through the Interplan performance management system.

#### 4 - Culture of Continuous Improvement

The Planning Service is committed to a range of service improvements, geared to creating a more streamlined planning process, delivering more certainty and proportionate, speedier planning decisions.

Opportunities to develop existing staff and improve their career skills leading to potential opportunities for succession are facilitated through the Staff Development Appraisal process. Agreed training needs are recorded, and yearly progress towards goals reported in the Departmental Training Plan.

In September 2015, staff attended a Development Department Business Improvement Day which involved a workshop – *How Can we Work Better Together?* The feedback from this session is used to inform the Department Business Plan and to help shape a better service for internal and external customers. Presentations were given on the Libraries and Heritage Service and on the Castle Grounds Regeneration Project. An opportunity was also provided for staff to visit the Comhairle's new Museum and Archive project at Lews Castle.

In March 2016, the Planning and Building Standards Service held a Team Training Event to update the team on current developments and trends, including how technology is making the planning process more accessible to customers through the new eplanning.scot portal which was launched in January 2016. The event included workshops on the most effective way to introduce new paperless systems into the Building Standards Service whilst managing the transition and maintaining the current service to the needs of

customers. As well as balancing the distribution of work, new ebuilding standards will enable plans, forms and data to be shared easily between different islands, overcoming the problem of managing a geographically dispersed team.

Staff are encouraged to contribute their ideas to business planning exercises and actively participate in decision-making with Feedback from the Business Processes workshop aiming to shape the service and to best target thinly spread resources that must deal with ever-changing pressures and challenges in the Outer Hebrides context.



*Staff training in new tablet technology*

During 2015/16, the Development Management Team, in tandem with Building Standards, has piloted the use of tablet technology to engage more easily with customers who come to the service desk, reducing the need to rely on paper plans. The next stage is to download Plans and forms onto tablets (from IDOX, Uniform and Public Access Portal) using wireless broadband technology, enabling officers to: view plans on site visits; engage more easily with customers; indicate required changes; and consult forms on location. The pilot has been a success on a number of counts and while experience is still developing, a case has successfully been made to roll out the pilot across the team.



### Managing the Historic Environment

In recognition of the transition of historic environment responsibilities, from Historic Scotland to Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and in light of the economic realities of securing a viable future for many of the historic environment assets in the area, the Planning Service has been working to upskill and increase officers knowledge and confidence in this specialist area. It has been recognised that in addition to skills development, a review of past practice is required and consideration needs to be given on how to align our approaches with the key messages, vision and principles which have emerged in the HES's new guidance, 'Managing Change in the Historic Environment'.

*'the protection of the historic environment is not about preventing change ...change in this dynamic environment should be managed intelligently and with understanding to achieve the best outcome for the historic environment and for the people of Scotland'*  
**HES Policy Statement**

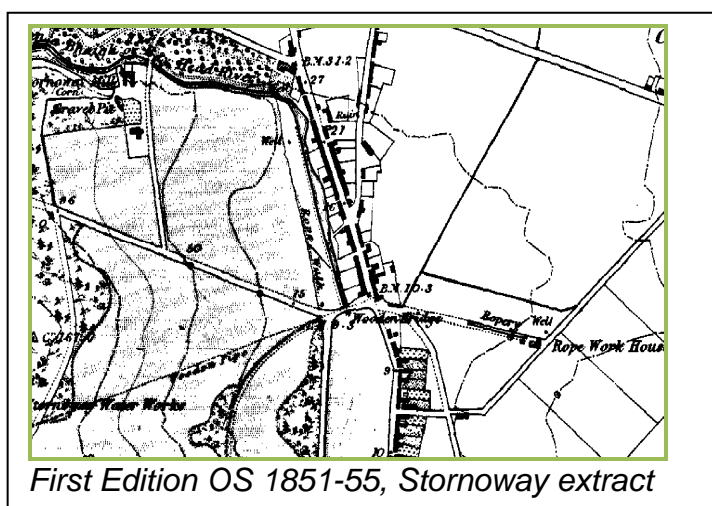
In June 2015 Development Management, Development Planning and Building Standards teams were involved in a sharing good practice with Orkney Islands Council. Their conservation officer provided bespoke training sessions on the Historic Environment and staff participated in conservation workshops designed to develop and enhance practical knowledge of the historic context and setting in the locality and its wider relationship to Scotland. Some staff took part in site visits and tours of Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings to enhance their understanding of the historic fabric and its conservation and maintenance. Further sessions were delivered by staff in-house as part of the Planning Service's own CPD programme.



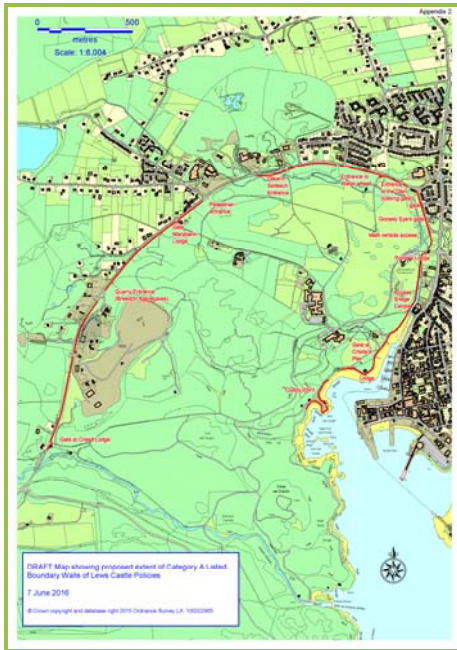
Going forward, the Planning Service is focused on ensuring that the momentum of its skills development initiative continues, and more training events are planned, staff will attend training and events with 'Resourcing Scotland's Heritage' to ensure that they are in a better position to provide information on potential funding to community owned estates and stakeholders involved in renovation or heritage type projects.

### **CASE STUDY 11: Review of Category A Listed Buildings**

As part of its commitment to protecting the Historic Environment of the Outer Hebrides, a Review of Category A Listed Buildings was carried out to provide an up-to-date baseline to inform the development of an action plan to assist the Comhairle meet its duty to protect, preserve and enhance listed buildings, in accordance with legislative requirements and the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan.



Following the review, during 2015, key actions undertaken included writing to owners of listed buildings to inform them of their responsibilities to maintain these; clarifying and ensuring that listings are proportionate and up-to-date; making recommendations to Historic Environment Scotland to delist relevant buildings; amending out-dated descriptions; requesting removal of dual designation from a number of historic buildings; surveying the Lady Lever Park walls. Through setting up a joint-working partnership with Orkney Islands Council, we have been able to share resources, enabling officers to carry out a Building Condition Survey on the Eilean Glas Lighthouse complex to inform our Review. This building is on the Buildings at Risk Register and is one of the four oldest lighthouses built by the Northern Lighthouse Board in Scotland.



*Lewis Castle boundary walls*



*Damaged section of wall*



*Eilean Glas Lighthouse,  
one of the four oldest  
lighthouses in Scotland*



*Structure of original lighthouse  
and roof of 1789 Keeper's House*



*"Light House on the Isle of  
Scalpay, Harris", 1818  
William Daniell aquatint print.*

## Marine Planning

The first National Marine Plan for Scotland's seas was published on 27 March 2015. This Plan sets out a single statutory planning framework for all marine activity in Scottish waters and outlines the framework for establishing regional marine planning partnerships. The Island Local Authorities have been designated to lead the regional marine planning partnerships in their respective marine regions, which includes a defined area for the Outer Hebrides. The Development Plan and Marine Planning Team now leads on matters relating to statutory Marine Planning for the Comhairle (a decision consolidated in 2015/16) and are in the early stages of investigating the establishment and governance of a local Marine Planning Partnership with a view to developing a Marine Plan for the Outer Hebrides.



*Marine Environment, Outer Hebrides*

## Part 3: Supporting Evidence

Part 2 of this report was compiled, drawing on evidence from the following sources:

- [OHLDP Development Plan Scheme 2016](#)
- [Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan November 2012](#)
- Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan Main Issues Report 2015
- [Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan Action Programme Review 2014](#)
- [Housing Land Audit November 2015](#)
- [Service Business Plan: Development Department Management Plan 15/16 – 19/20](#)
- Development Department Management Structure 2016
- [Planning Service Charter – Revised February 2016](#)
- [Advice Note for Small and Medium Businesses](#)
- [Review of Category A Listed Buildings - Action Plan](#)
- Planning Service Customer Survey Results 15/16
- Stakeholder Engagement Newsletters: Building Standards and Planning Service Updates

## Part 4: Service Improvements 2016-17

In the coming year we will:

- Review and implement a new look and more user-friendly web site for the Comhairle Planning Service;
- Roll out the use of tablet technology across the service;
- Appoint a Development Plan Manager following a two year absence of that role within the service;
- Continue to resource a Performance Improvement Officer Post and maintain the momentum of improvement of internal administration systems and increase the efficiency of processes by using e-technology within Development Management;
- During the year complete a review of the Development Management Service and associated staffing to provide greater focus on quality of e-services and based on the outcomes of the work achieved by the employment of a Performance Improvement Officer.



## Delivery of our Service Improvement Actions in 2015-16

Committed improvements and actions	Complete?
<p>During the reporting period the Comhairle Planning Service committed to a range of Service Improvements to deliver more certain, proportionate and speedy planning decisions.</p> <p><b><i>Work with ‘Business Gateway’ to develop an integrated customer care and advice package.</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the Service improvement initiatives during 2015-16 included closer working with the Comhairle’s Business Gateway Team with a view to providing a more customer-focused, integrated service. The Head of Development Services worked with the Manager of Business Gateway to discuss how to work better together. The Business Gateway Team was briefed on who best to contact in the Planning Service and Planning Officers collaborated with Business Gateway staff to ascertain the needs and requirements of their business customers with regard to providing a more accessible and responsive planning process. As a result of discussions, the Planning Service has developed a new information guide designed to contribute towards ensuring an efficient planning application process from the outset by providing appropriate advice for those embarking on a small business venture and tailored for the Outer Hebrides context and including useful links: e.g.: Planning Advice Scotland. In addition, Business Gateway are now included in the circulation list for stakeholder updates for Planning and Building Standards Services.</li> <li>• The <b>Advice Note for Small and Medium Businesses</b> tailored for the Outer Hebrides context draws on best practice from local authorities throughout the country and provides information in an accessible format which is available to customers visiting Business Gateway. The <a href="#">guide</a> is also available on-line on the Planning Service and Business Gateway web pages. Both the Comhairle’s Stakeholder and Business Gateway Updates carried articles publicising the new guide.</li> </ul>	<p>[Yes]</p>

***Reassess drop-in and informal planning queries to ensure [Yes]  
there is adequate time provided to customers for consistent  
and accurate advice.***

- Discussions were held within the DM Team with regard to gathering views on how best to maintain a high quality service for customers whilst still ensuring officers have adequate time to plan. It was agreed that the key to better outcomes was to get to the customer early and to maintain a friendly approachable customer interface. In addition due to the fact that people sometimes travelled long distances to visit the Planning Service, rather than restricting the hours that planners were available or have an appointments only policy, the team felt that it was preferential to retain the informal drop for general enquiries because it provided the opportunity for people to engage at an early stage in the planning journey in order that professional pre-application advice which could improve a development, clarify information, eliminate obstacles and save time and money for the developer at the project outset. The Planning Service currently provides a pre-application service at no cost to the applicant. Another innovation that has been trialled is the introduction of tablet technology to facilitate visitors and officers to view plans and forms easily at the service desk.
- As well as providing web information for people with early, general queries about development, particularly domestic developments and to provide a consistent service to people who visit the Planning Service, the Development Management Team trialled a Duty Officer System in the Stornoway Office between the hours of 09.00 and 17.00 during February 2015. This 'on-call' system was tested over a month, but was found to be unsustainable and impractical as a means of effectively managing day to day general enquiries due to the fact that there are only 2.5 planning officers covering Development Management in the main settlement of Stornoway and the Island of Lewis which is a relatively large geographical area with a broad range of applications, which require site visits. If the office experiences particularly busy periods going forward a Rota System with a duty officer on call will be re-introduced on an 'as required basis'.

***Implement the first year of a Performance Improvement Plan [Yes]  
– led by the newly employed Service Improvement Officer.***

- A post of Planning Service performance improvement officer was established early in 2015/16 with the main objective in Year one of reviewing and amending the front end of the development management process in tandem with the Scottish Government led development, testing and launch of a new e-planning.scot applications submission portal and the transition from the old to the new system. The new post holder reviewed internal processes, held staff discussions and workshops and introduced revised processes in tandem with attending workshops leading up to the testing and launch of the new eDevelopment portal. Online applications are now downloaded via a connector and with increased publicity of the benefits of ePlanning, the percentage of applications received electronically has risen annually from 22.1% in 2014-15 to 38.7% in 2015-16. The last quarter of 2015-16 saw a rise in online application to 52.1%. This trend is encouraging as it also coincides with the first three months of processing online applications via the ePlanning portal.
- The first year of the performance improvement plan included the project management of the launch and implementation of the ePlanning.scot portal which was delivered by the Scottish Government as part of eDevelopment.scot. The new portal replaces the ePlanning Scotland portal which was launched in 2009. The project management of this programme included attendance at several Stakeholder events in Edinburgh hosted by Scottish Government and updating the Project Board at its regular meetings.
- Part of the performance improvement plan included the review of internal procedures, including the promotion and implementation of more electronic processes within the service. To coincide with recruitment of new administrative staff, the delivery of ePlanning.scot and as part of the performance improvement plan, the review of internal processes was commenced. This included the review of existing templates and creating new e-templates as required. The processes for Receipt, Registration, Validation and Neighbour Notification was updated and documented. The use of Public Access as a means of

<p>notification and tracking of applications was promoted within the Comhairle, with the copying of plans to satellite Comhairle Offices no longer required. Work has commenced on the review of the Report of Handling template with a view to having an eDecision Notice process implemented by 1 April 2017. This will remove unnecessary printing and duplication of tasks allowing for more efficient processing of Decision Notices.</p>
<p><b><i>Implement measures to further enhance the level of participation in pre-application discussion.</i></b> <span style="float: right;"><b><i>[Yes]</i></b></span></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-application Advice Service: despite financial pressures the Comhairle Planning Service has continued to offer a free pre-planning advice service to customers;</li> <li>• The stakeholder newsletter has been used to stress to stakeholders that early engagement with the Planning Service is strongly encouraged;</li> <li>• Appointments are being encouraged but the Service has stated that it is willing to continue seeing the small number of people who come in without an appointment in order not to turn customers away;</li> <li>• The website contact page has been updated to encourage customers to make early contact;</li> <li>• An interview room has been released for use in the Uist office by the creation of an additional meeting room;</li> <li>• The space in Lewis office has been re-organised to create a better interview space;</li> <li>• An audio visual presentation in the interview area promotes good design and the benefits of pre-application discussion;</li> <li>• Weekly press advert for neighbour notification and schedule 3 has had a strapline added to promote the free advice service;</li> <li>• Local members have been reminded to encourage their constituents to contact the planning service;</li> <li>• Pre-application advice sits around 50% and efforts will be made in the coming years to increase this percentage further.</li> </ul>



**PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK****Part 5: Official Statistics****a) Decision-making timescales (based on ‘all applications’ timescales)**

Category	Total number of decisions 2015-2016	Average timescale (weeks)	
		2015-2016	2014-2015
<b>Major developments</b>	0	0	28.5
<b>Local developments (non-householder)</b>	(161)	6.8	6.8
• Local: less than 2 months	(94)	12.7	19.5
• Local: more than 2 months			
<b>Householder developments</b>			
• Local: less than 2 months	(48)	5.9	6.5
• Local: more than 2 months	(14)	11.2	13.3
<b>Housing developments</b>			
<b>Major</b>	0	n/a	
<b>Local housing developments</b>			
• Local: less than 2 months	(46)	6.7	7.2
• Local: more than 2 months	(46)	11.8	15.1
<b>Business and industry</b>			
<b>Major</b>	0	n/a	
<b>Local business and industry</b>			
• Local: less than 2 months	(19)	6.9	7.1
• Local: more than 2 months	(9)	11.5	22.9
<b>EIA developments</b>	3	21.5	31.3
<b>Other consents*</b>	66	4.5	7.1
<b>Planning/legal agreements**</b>			
• Major: average time	0	n/a	45.9
• Local: average time	0	n/a	n/a
<b>Local reviews</b>	2	16.4	11.6

## b) Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2015-2016 No.	%	2014-2015 No.	%
Local reviews	2	1	50%		
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	1	0*	0%		

\*Appeal Decision subsequently quashed

## c) Enforcement Activity

	2015-2016	2014-2015
Cases taken up	4	8
Breaches identified	12	-
Cases resolved	8	11
Notices served***	4	8
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

Planning Performance improved during the course of the year due to a refocus of effort within the team following the loss of 1 FTE DM planning officer post as an efficiency and subsequently the difficulty of recruiting to vacant posts (one Planning officer post vacant from Sept 15 to April 16 and gap in provision of Planning Administration and clerical support through August and September 2015 [due to maternity leave and officer secondment]).

The drop in marine fish farming applications in the middle of the year when the service was short staffed was opportune but the credit for achieving a satisfactory standard of performance fell to a small team who are committed, and worked co-operatively to cover the service requirements while maintaining a customer focus.

## Part 6: Workforce and Financial Information

*The information requested in this section is an integral part of providing the context for the information in parts 1-5. Staffing information should be a snapshot of the position on 31 March. Financial information should relate to the full financial year.*

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
<b>Head of Planning Service</b>			<b>1</b>	

*Note: Tier 1= Chief Executive, Tier 2= Directors, Tier 3= Heads of Service, Tier 4= Managers*

		DM	DP&MP	Enforcement	Other
<b>Managers</b>	No. Posts	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>		
	Vacant	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>		
<b>Main grade posts</b>	No. Posts	<b>4.6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	
	Vacant	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Technician</b>	No. Posts	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>		
	Vacant	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>		
<b>Office Support/Clerical</b>	No. Posts	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>		
	Vacant	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8.6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	

*Note: Managers are those staff responsible for the operational management of a team/division. They are not necessarily line managers.*

Staff Age Profile	Number
Under 30	1
30-39	5
40-49	4
50 and over	5

<b>Committee &amp; Site Visits*</b>	<b>Number per year</b>
Full council meetings	5
Planning committees	6
Area committees (where relevant)	n/a
Committee site visits	0
LRB**	2
LRB site visits	0

Notes:

\*References to committees also include National Park Authority Boards. Number of site visits is those cases where visits were carried out by committees/boards.

\*\*this relates to the number of meetings of the LRB. The number of applications going to LRB are reported elsewhere.

	<b>Total Budget £k</b>	<b>Costs (£k)</b>		<b>Income***</b>
		<b>Direct*</b>	<b>Indirect**</b>	
Development Management	288	381	162	291
Development Planning	294	209	70	-
Enforcement	40	38	2	-
Other	15 (Grants)	-	37	23
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>314</b>

Notes:

\* Direct staff costs covers gross pay (including overtime, national insurance and superannuation contribution). The appropriate proportion of the direct cost of any staff member within the planning authority spending 30% or more of their time on planning should be included in costs, irrespective of what department they are allocated to (for example, legal advice, administration, typing). Exclude staff spending less than 30% of their time on planning.

\*\*Indirect costs include all other costs attributable to the planning service. Examples (not exhaustive) include accommodation, IT, stationery, office equipment, telephone charges, printing, advertising, travel & subsistence, apportionment of support service costs.

\*\*\* Include fees from planning applications and deemed applications, and recharges for advertising costs etc. Exclude income from property and planning searches.



PERFORMANCE MARKER	EVIDENCE BASE
1. Decision-making: authorities demonstrating continuous evidence of reducing average timescales for all development types.	Part 1 National Headline Indicators: Page 3; Part 2 (3).Governance, page 33; and Part 5, page 47.
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.	There was one national scale application in pre-app and subject to a processing agreement in 2015/16, although this was determined within target in 16/17; see Case Study 8, page 25.
2. Early collaboration with applicants and consultees on planning applications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all;</li> <li>clear and proportionate requests for supporting information.</li> </ul>	Page 4; page 5; Case Study 2, pages 12-13; Case Study 4, page 16; Case Study 6, page 19; Part 2 (2a) Open for Business, pages 19, 21& 22; Case Study 8, page 25; Planning Service Charter page 28; page 44; page 46.
3. 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>	Part 5 Official Statistics, page 47, no cases with legal agreement in the reporting period.
5. Enforcement charter updated / re-published.	Part 1 National Headline Indicators, page 3.
7. Continuous improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-show progress/improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators</li> <li>-progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report.</li> </ul>	Part 4 Delivery of our Service Improvements Actions in 2015-16, page 43-46; Part 2 Culture of Continuous Improvement, Page 36 & 46; (d) Context, page 48.
7. LDP (or LP) less than 5 years since adoption	Part 1 National Headline Indicators, page 2.
8. Development plan scheme demonstrates next LDP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- on course for adoption within 5-year cycle</li> <li>- project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale.</li> </ul>	Part 1 National Headline Indicators, page 2; Part 2, (3a) Efficient and Effective Decision Making, page 33.
9. Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation.	Case Study 9, page 29-31.
10. Cross-sector stakeholders, including industry, agencies and Scottish Government, engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation.	Case Study 9, page 29-31.
11. Production of regular and proportionate policy advice, for example through supplementary guidance, on information required to support applications.	Case Study 4, pages 16 & 21; Case Study 7, pages 23 & 24.
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).	Case Study 2, page 11; Case Study 4, page 16; Case Study 5, page 17 and testimony page 18; Case Study 6, pages 19-21 & 23; Planning Protocol for Arnish, page 25; pages 29 & 43.
13. Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities.	Page 29, Page 38 & Case Study 11, page 39.
14. Stalled sites/legacy cases: conclusion/withdrawal of planning applications more than one year old.	Page 33.
15. Developer contributions: clear expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- set out in development plan (and/or emerging plan) and</li> <li>- in pre-application discussions.</li> </ul>	Developer contributions are set out in the LDP. This issue will be addressed in LDP2. Planning Service Charter page 28.



<http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/planningservice/>

email: [planning@cne-siar.gov.uk](mailto:planning@cne-siar.gov.uk)

Stornoway Office: 01851 822 690

Balivanich Office: 01870 60 4990

**The Planning Service**  
**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**  
**Sandwick Road**  
**HS1 2BW**

