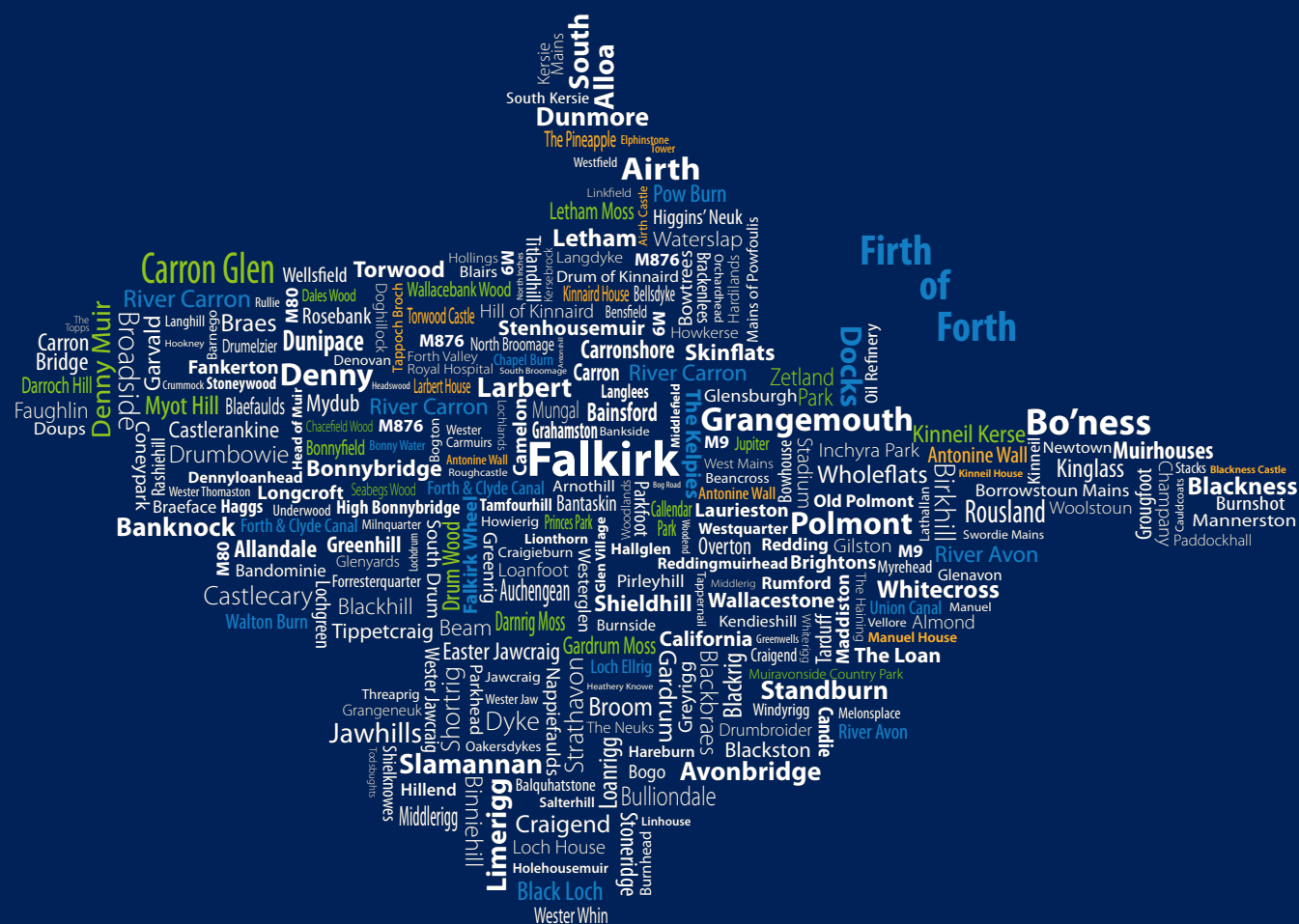


Planning Performance Framework



Falkirk Council

Annual Report April 2016 - March 2017

Foreword

An efficient and well-functioning planning service plays an important role in facilitating sustainable economic growth and delivering high quality development in the right places. Falkirk Council recognises that regular monitoring of service performance and a commitment to improve are essential to achieving this. This Planning Performance Framework report captures the key elements of our planning service:

- Speed of decision-making
- Certainty of timescales, process and advice
- Delivery of good quality development
- Project management
- Clear communications and open engagement
- An overall 'open for business' attitude

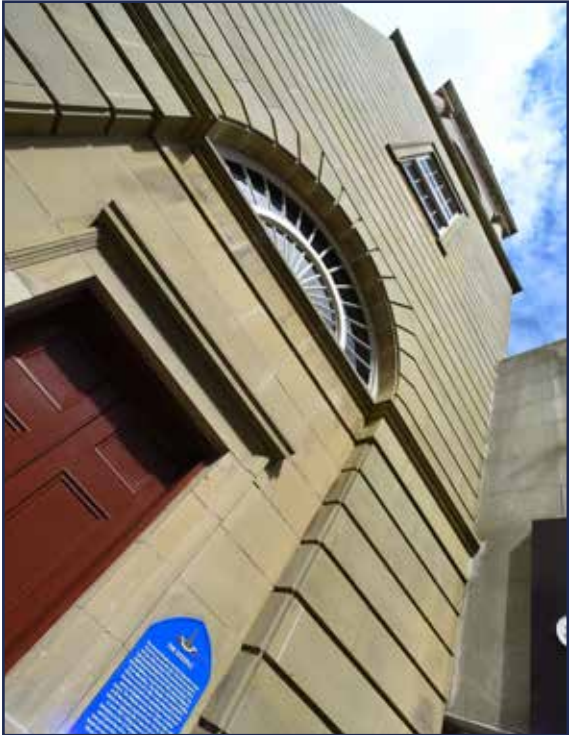
The report reviews the overall quality of Falkirk Council's planning service and sets out our successes and achievements in the period from April 2016 to March 2017.



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Introduction

01. Falkirk Council is pleased to submit its sixth annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) to the Scottish Government. This document highlights the work we have done from April 2016 to March 2017 to monitor our performance and demonstrates our work to maintain and improve the quality of planning service provided by Falkirk Council.
02. The Scottish Government recognises that planning performance has come a long way in recent years and believes that the PPF provides an excellent opportunity for planning authorities to set out the details of their performance and showcase good practice and innovative ideas. All Scottish planning authorities produce a PPF as a means of demonstrating commitment to continuous improvement in the drive towards a consistently high quality planning services across the country. Our sixth PPF follows on from the good work undertaken by Falkirk Council in previous years to critically assess our planning service and to review the performance of Falkirk Council with reference to other planning authorities within our SOLACE benchmarking family¹.
03. Our sixth annual report has been produced with reference to the PPF template and guidance provided to all planning authorities by Heads of Planning Scotland. The report includes feedback on our fifth annual report; assessment of our performance across four areas of activity with supporting evidence. The report also sets out what improvements we wish to achieve in the coming year. Lastly, the report provides statistical information about our performance in relation to national headline indicators, official statistics and provides details of our workforce.

¹ Family 4 – North Lanarkshire, Falkirk, East Dunbartshire, Aberdeen City, City of Edinburgh, West Dunbartonshire, Dundee City, Glasgow City.



Feedback from Previous Report

04. The Council's fifth PPF, covering the period April 2015 to March 2016, was submitted to the Scottish Government in July 2016. Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government and Housing, gave us feedback in November 2016. The Minister was very pleased with the quality of PPF reporting and noted that there have been general improvements across the board. The feedback received from Scottish Government on the performance of the Falkirk Council planning service is, as it was last year, very encouraging and supportive of the work Falkirk Council is continuing to do to monitor, maintain and improve our planning service.
05. The Minister noted that our decision making timescales for local non-householder applications and householder applications are still within the national average and that our timescales for dealing with major applications have substantially improved. It was noted that we offer processing agreements to all prospective applicants and that this is clearly publicised on our website. Scottish Government commented that the Council's website provides clear and easily accessible information on the likely additional information required with submissions including a helpful document, 'Submitting a Planning Application - What do I need'. It was also noted that we now more closely monitor planning applications recommended for approval subject to legal agreement to ensure decisions are concluded.
06. Scottish Government noted that the Falkirk Council Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in July 2015; that work has already commenced on LDP 2, and that we are on target for adoption of the new LDP in January 2020. Our project management for LDP 2 and consultation with stakeholders was noted. The engagement we have carried out with school pupils and college students, and stakeholder workshops with a mix of external agencies, developers, infrastructure providers, Community Councils and officers from services across the Council was also commended. The strong customer focus of the service was recognised with reference to the quality of the Council website, the availability of planning guidance and joined up working across Council services.
07. Overall, the feedback from Scottish Government acknowledged the quality of the planning service Falkirk Council provides and recognised the improvements in our performance. We received 12 green ratings and 3 amber ratings. None of the performance markers received a red rating. The green ratings on which we were commended included our overall work to review the quality of the service and seek continuous improvement; our work to ensure there is an up to date Local Development Plan; our engagement with elected members and all other stakeholders; our service structure and corporate working across services; the continuing professional development of officers'; and our project management of planning applications. Where we received amber ratings it was because Scottish Government noted that although our decision making timescales were within the national average the timescales had slipped slightly from the previous year. Also, Scottish Government felt that we could have provided stronger evidence to demonstrate that additional information sought from applicants is proportionate. Scottish Government also commented that they feel the timescales for the conclusion of planning obligations could be improved.
08. In addition to the Ministers comments we reviewed our PPF with the assistance of our SOLACE benchmarking partner, Aberdeen City Council. The feedback we received from Aberdeen City Council was positive.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Outcomes

High Quality of Development on the Ground

Policy

09. Successful place making and promoting high quality design is a priority for the Council and is embedded in the Falkirk Local Development Plan (LDP) and Supplementary Guidance (SG).
10. The Falkirk Council area has undergone enormous physical change over the last forty years. Industrial decline has been followed by a sustained period of regeneration. The successful redevelopment of many former industrial sites, regeneration of Falkirk Town Centre in the 1980s and 1990s, the Millennium Link in 2002, the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative and recent and continuing regeneration in our town centres, have helped to re-establish the areas identity and confidence. A growing body of contemporary design such as the Falkirk Wheel, Forth Valley Royal Hospital and the Kelpies has also helped to foster a dynamic and forward looking image.
11. With the completion of the Local Development Plan's suite of Supplementary Guidance (SG) (apart from supplementary guidance on the Antonine Wall which is jointly prepared with other planning authorities), a full and up-to-date set of detailed guidance on key topics is available.² Following training sessions with development management and development plan officers on the use of these SGs, they are now embedded in day-to-day discussions with stakeholders on planning applications and enquiries, and are starting to have real benefits in terms of quality of submissions and negotiations to achieve better design outcomes.

² <http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/planning-building/planning-policy/supplementary-guidance/>



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Outcomes

High Quality of Development on the Ground

Case Study: Use of Supplementary Planning Guidance

A general enquiry was received by the Development Management Unit in May 2016 seeking pre-application advice on proposals to convert a vacant former hospital building on Maggie Woods Loan, Falkirk into flats and to build two houses within the grounds. Informal written advice was provided on various planning issues that should be considered. This included reference to relevant LDP policy, supplementary guidance and informal consultation responses from Council services.

A planning application (reference P/16/0510/FUL) was submitted. The application was assessed as being in accordance with the LDP and supplementary guidance. It was recommended that the Council should be minded to grant planning permission subject to contributions towards open space provision in accordance with SG13, 'Open Space and New Development'. The application was called in by a local Member for consideration by the Planning Committee because of concerns raised by nearby residents about the potential impacts of the proposal. The Committee visited the site, listened to residents and sought minor changes to the proposed elevational treatment of one of the proposed houses. The applicant agreed to amendments and permission was granted subject to conclusion of a legal agreement to secure the open space contribution. The legal agreement was concluded under section 69 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and permission issued.

Main points

Pre-application advice about relevant LDP policy, supplementary guidance and the views of consultees allowed the applicant to get a clear understanding of what information was needed on submission of an application, design advice, what contributions would be sought and justification for seeking contributions. It also helped clarify for the applicant what the Council would not be seeking contributions for and to get a clear understanding of the planning process and potential timescales for determination. Whilst the applicant was aware of the views of nearby residents at an early stage the Committee process provided an opportunity for mediation and a forum for all views to be heard and considered.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

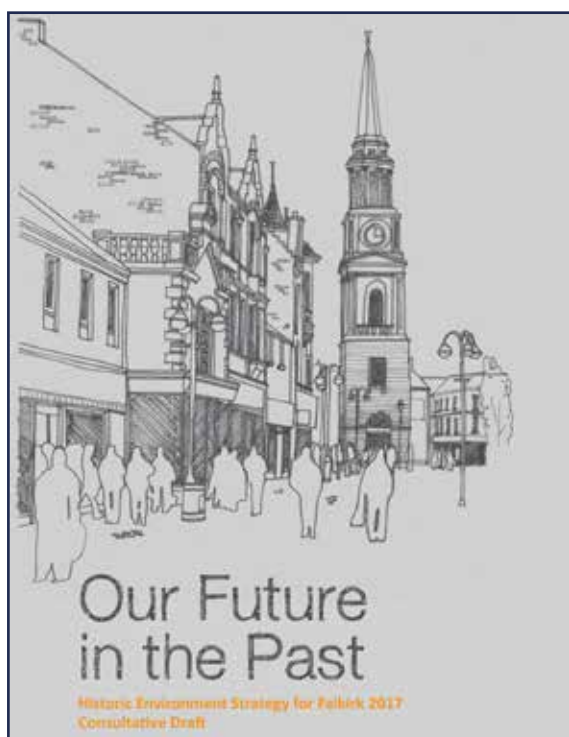
Quality of Outcomes

High Quality of Development on the Ground

12. In 2016 and 2017, development workshops and meetings with key stakeholders took place to inform Our Future in the Past, the consultative draft Historic Environment Strategy for Falkirk. The consultative draft strategy proposes a programme of priority actions for the next five years; these actions are linked to a vision for the historic environment of Falkirk and eight key themes. The actions proposed in this new strategy reflect current challenges and opportunities. The consultative draft was approved for external consultation in March 2017. External consultation using a range of mechanisms including meetings with stakeholders and local heritage groups and an on - line questionnaire took place in April and May 2017. A finalised document will be presented to the Council for approval by the end of 2017.

Design and Landscape Expertise

13. The planning service continues to benefit from professional in-house expertise in urban design, conservation, landscape, outdoor access and biodiversity which can be drawn on in the processing of planning applications, and adds real value to planning outcomes. However, with this resource increasingly constrained given financial stringencies, the availability of Supplementary Guidance, coupled with training, helps development management officers to assess issues without recourse to specialists in every instance. For biodiversity issues, our countryside rangers are now providing support to development management. Involvement of specialists at the pre-application stage is now being given greater emphasis to ensure that prospective applicants are fully appraised of the scope of design, landscape, access and biodiversity issues in advance of submissions.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Outcomes

High Quality of Development on the Ground

Greenspace

14. The Falkirk Greenspace Strategy, which is the local expression of the Central Scotland Green Network, continues to be implemented. Some key projects during the year include:
 - Improvements to the John Muir Way at Bo'ness including path creation, habitat enhancement, public art and interpretation;
 - Range of community growing projects including school orchard planting and an allotment site audit;
 - Habitat management, interpretation and engagement activities at Carron Dams and Kinneil Foreshore Local Nature Reserve;
 - Open space improvement and interpretation within Allandale Conservation Area;
 - Woodland management works carried out at Dorrator Woods, Camelon and Deanburn Glen, Bo'ness with WIAT funding;
 - 10 bog restoration projects identified and funding secured;
 - A further 11.4 km of paths added to the access network, with 10.1 km of existing path upgraded; and
 - Continuing implementation of landscape and biodiversity projects as part of the Inner Forth Landscape Initiative.
15. The Inner Forth Landscape Initiative, which is entering the final year of its 5 year implementation period, received 'Highly Commended' for both knowledge sharing and stakeholder engagement at the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) awards 2017.
16. The Council adopted its second Open Space Strategy in October 2016. The new strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive open space audit complemented by GIS analytical tools which allow accessibility standards to be tested. The Strategy has been integrated with the Parks Development Plan, giving it a much greater focus on action planning and delivery. This has been facilitated by the incorporation of the parks client function within the Planning & Environment Unit of the planning service. The Open Space Strategy has been shortlisted for the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning (SAQP) 2017.

Case Study: John Muir Way

Through the Central Scotland Forest Strategy and the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative, the Council and its partners have with the assistance of Development Plan policy and assessment of planning applications been successfully promoting landscape improvement, woodland creation, habitat enhancement and outdoor access in and around the main settlements of the area for some 20 years.

The Central Scotland Green Network, of which the John Muir Way is a part, is identified as a National Development in the National Planning Framework. A 32 mile stretch of the 134 mile coast to coast route crosses the Falkirk Council area. Since the route was launched in 2014 extensive work has been carried out by the Council and its partners to upgrade and deliver a high quality path network. This has included:

- Upgrading paths from Carriden to Kinneil is nearing completion;
- Work is to be carried out on connecting routes in local communities;
- Upgrading of two sections of the route in Callendar Park have been completed;
- Improvements and upgrading of the surface on the south Falkirk spur route are on-going with detailed designs in place to address the width of path available on the railway underpass at Hallglen.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Outcomes

High Quality of Development on the Ground

Town Centres

17. The £5.5M Falkirk Town Centre Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), now in its fourth year, is enhancing the special character and appearance of the historic town centre; many priority projects have been completed together with many building repair projects including window replacements and shop front improvements. All funding has been allocated from the THI grants common fund.
18. Priority projects completed to date include repair and restoration of the Category A listed early 19th century Town Steeple, external repairs to the category C listed building at 9 -11 Vicar Street and comprehensive external fabric repairs and shop front improvements to a traditional building at 6 - 8 Cow Wynd. A major project to upgrade the Public Realm together with a complementary project to repair and restore the Wellington Statue and the South African War Memorial on Newmarket Street, started on site in May 2017 and will run for a year. Three training courses for contractors and building professionals have also been delivered. Details and photographs of the various THI projects are published on the website, www.falkirkthi.com

Case Study: Falkirk Town Steeple

The Town Steeple is a category A listed building. It is a major local landmark and important symbol for the town. The Steeple was identified as a priority project under the Townscape Heritage Initiative. Refurbishment works started in April 2016 and include repairs to stonework, renovation work to clock faces, mechanisms and bells, refurbishment and replacement of timber sash and case windows, louvres, screens and doors, repair and decoration of timber components panels and weather vane. In addition two original cells located in the building are being restored. These works required significant pre-application discussions and the submission of an application for listed building consent. The case officer and conservation officer have worked closely with the agents to ensure best conservation practice.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Outcomes

Open for Business

19. Phase 1 of the £7.6m Denny Town Centre regeneration project is close to completion. Delivered by the Council, this includes a new library and community space, shop units and upgraded car park. The final element is a new town square featuring five public art projects. The Stage 2 site will be remarketed on completion of Phase 1.

Case Study:

Denny Town Centre

"Five new pieces of public art will soon be unveiled as part of the ongoing regeneration work in Denny's town centre.

From Autumn 2017, the new artwork will feature throughout the town centre and each feature will have unique design.

Some of the designs include posts that are capable of projecting lights and imagery; a treasure trail of small statues; a new staircase with images and text carved into the stone and; a 'timeline' of Denny etched in the town square.

The local community helped to shape the ideas that will feature in the work after a local community panel was established to recruit the 5 artists last year.

Provost Tom Coleman, spokesperson for Economic Development said: "The works will reflect aspects of Denny itself and will help to bring alive the new town centre space. The community has played an important part in this project and their ideas are being used in many different aspects of the ongoing work."

The £170K project is led by Falkirk Council with support from Falkirk Community Trust." (Falkirk News, Summer 2017).

Antonine Wall

20. In partnership with Historic Environment Scotland and the other authorities along the Antonine Wall, the Council has been successful with a Stage 1 application for Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding to help interpret and promote the Wall. A project manager has been appointed and a range of projects will be worked up over the next year for delivery in 2018 -2021.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Open for Business

Contact

21. The planning service is open for business. Officers can be contacted by email, by telephone and in person. Customers can contact us in the way that suits them best. We have general email addresses for mail to the development management unit and the planning policy unit which are publicised on our website. Officers also all have their own personal work email addresses and telephone numbers which are publicised in correspondence and noted and distributed on business cards.
22. The Development Management Unit operates a duty officer service which allows customers to contact an officer by telephone or in person to receive free planning guidance and advice. Planning guidance is also provided on our website and this website is regularly reviewed and updated.
23. We provide a single point of contact within our Development Management Unit for all applicants from pre-application through to determination. Case officer contact details are provided on correspondence and on our weekly lists of applications received. However, for larger or more controversial developments we also set up project teams within the Development Management Unit. When the lead officer is unavailable this allows stakeholders to contact other officers who will have knowledge of the case and be able to assist in the lead officers absence.
24. We set early dates for meetings and telephone calls are returned timeously. Officers endeavour to reply by email where available. This ensures enquiries are acknowledged and answered quickly and customers do not have to wait for postal replies. We have found that this is particularly helpful where planning applications are invalid as it allows issues to be resolved quickly.

Pre-application

25. We have a positive approach to pre-application advice and offer a free service for all types of applications, from small scale householder developments to major and national planning application submissions. Advice and guidance can be found on the Council's website and this includes links to the Scottish Government website and other websites with useful information and resources. Our website provides clear and easily accessible information on the likely additional information required with submissions. The LDP and supplementary guidance and details of procedures are all available to the public. This is reiterated during pre-application discussions and the use of project plans and processing agreements promoted to all applicants.
26. Early collaboration with applicants and consultees at this pre-application stage along with the LDP, supplementary guidance and other useful information available on our website helps to ensure that requests for supporting information are clear and proportionate.

Developer Contributions

27. The LDP and supplementary guidance clearly set out for developers the circumstances where contributions are likely to be required. Contribution levels are regularly checked and updated as appropriate. In relation to education contributions for example, the school rolls and future predicted levels are assessed for each planning application. This ensures that requests for contributions are proportionate and contributions are only sought where necessary.
28. There are regular officer liaison meetings chaired by the planning service with Education, Housing and other Council Services at which contribution levels are discussed and information reviewed.
29. The Council recognises developer concerns about the potential impact of contributions on the viability of development. We encourage the submission of development viability statements where this is a concern. Guidance is provided in our supplementary guidance. Statements are assessed in consultation with the District Valuer to ensure that requests are reasonable and proportionate and comply with Scottish Government guidance in Circular 3/2012, 'Planning Obligations and Good Neighbour Agreements'.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Open for Business

Flexible Team Working

30. The Development Management Unit is structured into 2 geographically based teams but officers are based in the same open plan office and work across the team areas as and when work levels require. This assists the professional development of officers and allows officers to have an overall general knowledge of case load within the Unit. These team working arrangements, particularly for more complex or controversial cases, allows for the sharing of information, discussion of issues, promotes staff development and provides continuity of delivery if staff are absent.
31. In addition we have an officer dedicated to mostly dealing with householder and local applications across the Council area and this helps maintain good householder planning application decision making timescales.
32. There has been very little movement of staff from the Development Management Unit in recent years. As a consequence this means that the Unit is made up of an established team of planning officers who have good general knowledge of the Falkirk Council area and who have developed good working relationships with our various stakeholders.
33. We will continue to review working practices to maintain and to improve performance and staff development.

Assisting Development Delivery

34. The Council's Tax Increment Finance Initiative (TIF) continues to progress, with the aim of delivering major infrastructure and enabling works in the Falkirk and Grangemouth Investment Zones, and removing constraints and financial burdens which would otherwise fall on prospective developers in the area. Key updates are as follows:
 - Improvements to M9 Junction 5 are next in the programme, with design and preparatory works well advanced, and the main physical infrastructure to be undertaken in 2017/18.
 - Design of the A9/A904 improvements is ongoing, with solutions evolving to deal with pedestrian/ cycle movement between the Falkirk Gateway, Stadium and Helix sites, and delivery programmed for 2018/19.
 - Following the preparation of a Preliminary Development Framework for the Falkirk Gateway last year, agents have now been appointed to market the Council-owned sites in September 2017. Other preparatory works are underway including site investigation, a utilities review and a drainage strategy.
 - The Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme has reached the optioneering stage and stakeholder consultation meetings have been taking place to inform this process.
35. The Council has also been in discussion with the Scottish Government with regard to achieving investment zone status along similar lines to the City Deals or Growth Accelerators being pursued across Scotland. This would allow the scope of TIF to be expanded to permit investment in further infrastructure to support sustainable economic growth. Initially, a business case is to be prepared which is jointly funded by the Council and Scottish Enterprise.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Certainty

36. On housing delivery, five of the LDP's 12 Strategic Growth Areas (SGA) are under construction and delivering homes. Recent applications for parts of two further SGAs, at Maddiston East and the Falkirk Canal Corridor are under consideration. In the case of Maddiston East, the process has been assisted by the Council's preparation of a Development Framework in consultation with stakeholders which was approved in November 2016. In the west of the Falkirk Council area, the Banknock North site has gained planning permission. This was a long standing legacy case. Following protracted negotiations with the land owners and applicants the planning obligation has been concluded and the permission issued. The Council has put in a bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund for investment to upgrade sliproads at M80 Junction 7, which are critical to the delivery of both the Banknock and Dennyloanhead SGAs. Progress with the remaining 'stalled' SGAs at Whitecross, Bo'ness Foreshore, and Slamannan has been limited, and these sites are under review as part of the LDP2 process. At Whitecross, where there is still active developer interest, the Council has been meeting with the interested parties to gain an understanding of their aspirations, and current development constraints. Proposal of Application Notices have been submitted for sites at Whitecross and officers are in pre-application discussion with the applicants concerning the form and content of future planning application submissions. The willingness of the Council to enter into processing agreements has been given in all cases in order to try and assist prospective applicants and provide certainty of determination timescales.
37. At Denny South East and Bo'ness South East SGAs, where large housing developments have commenced (Denny - Mydub 1, 307 homes, Bo'ness - Kinglass Farm 1, 167 homes), the developers wish to amend proposals to take account of changes in the market. Officers are working with the developers and stakeholders to deal with the impacts this has on existing planning obligations and existing permissions and the need for new permissions, planning obligations and non material variations in a timeous manner.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Certainty

Development Plan

38. The focus of the reporting year has been progressing the review of the adopted Falkirk Local Development Plan (LDP2) to the Main Issues Report (MIR) stage. The MIR was approved by the Council in December 2016 and published in February 2017. This represented a slippage of some four months compared with the programme set out in the 2016 Development Plan Scheme. The process was initially delayed to allow additional consultation with elected members, which took some time to complete, and then publication was deferred to February to avoid consulting over the Christmas period and the middle of winter.
39. Falkirk Council has found the MIR an effective tool for consulting at the early stages of plan preparation. Our MIR on the adopted Falkirk Local Development Plan was well received by the Scottish Government and stakeholders 5 years ago, so we largely followed the previous template for LDP2, with improvements to graphics and presentation. Again the document has been well received and has helped stimulate debate in local communities about options and choices (see Case Study).
40. A full suite of nine technical reports were produced to support the MIR, all of which were produced in-house. Again the Development Plan team has sought to use the experience of the adopted LDP to make improvements to these reports. In particular, the Site Assessment Technical Report has been upgraded from a basic text document to a desk top published report with embedded maps which is much easier to read and reference. The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment was accorded robust and credible status in August 2016 allowing this information to be fed into the emerging MIR. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process has run in tandem with option development, and the Environmental Report published alongside the MIR, using the tried and trusted template from the adopted LDP. The Falkirk Council area is a complex one from a Habitats Directive point of view, and a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Compliance Statement was also produced.
41. An extensive consultation exercise on the MIR took place between February and May 2017, the planning of which was influenced by the review of engagement on the adopted LDP which we carried out in 2015. An account of the consultation is provided in the 'Customer Engagement' section in paragraphs 51 and 53.

Case Study: LDP2 Main Issues Report

Building on experience from LDP1, the LDP2 MIR is a clear and attractive presentation of the key issues facing the Falkirk Council area. Each of the 11 issues poses a key question, under which policy and site options are clearly presented. There is liberal use of diagrams and photographs to bring the document to life. The intended status of all sites which are currently allocated or were promoted through the 'call for sites' exercise is set out in tables and mapping at the end of the document. One customer commented: 'This is a very comprehensive and well put together document. The logic of town development and housing requirements through to site selection is clear and well presented'. An online interactive version of the MIR mapping is also available allowing easy browsing of sites, zooming in and interrogation of associated site information. The interactive version was viewed just under 4000 times.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Certainty

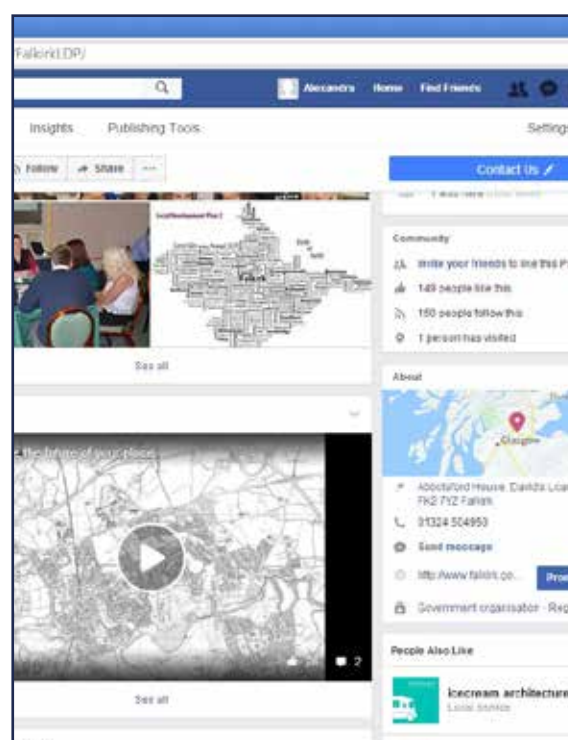
Supplementary Guidance

42. The Council has now adopted 16 out of 17 of its programme of Supplementary Guidance (SG) notes which were to be prepared in conjunction with the adopted LDP. The only outstanding SG relates to the Antonine Wall World Heritage Site which requires a revision of current guidance in partnership with the four other planning authorities along the Antonine Wall. We are currently working with the partner authorities to progress this final SG. During the reporting year, three SGs received approval from the Scottish Government:

SG08	Local Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites	December 2016
SG16	Design Guidance for Listed Buildings and Non-Listed Buildings in Conservation Areas	April 2016
SG17	Renewable Energy	November 2016

43. The Council wishes to ensure that supplementary guidance remains up to date and that, where the SG's set out developer contributions, these remain proportionate and do not unduly impede delivery or viability of development. In the MIR for LDP2, we have proposed consolidating our various SG on developer contributions into a single document, and have stated that contribution rates and any applicable thresholds will be reviewed. In the short term, through consultation between the Development Management Unit and the Development Plan Unit, we have identified some issues with the system of financial contributions to open space set out in SG13 (Open Space and New Development) and have commenced a review. This will seek to link requirements more closely to the Open Space Strategy, and should result in a more proportionate approach.
44. We have been looking at using our interactive online mapping, available through ArcView Online, to enhance the accessibility and usability of those SG's with embedded spatial information. Interactive online versions of SG08 (Local Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites) and SG09 (Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Designations) are now available.

45. As regards non-statutory supplementary planning guidance, the Council has prepared a Development Framework for the Maddiston East Strategic Growth Area (SGA) in consultation with stakeholders. Strategic guidance was particularly needed due to multiple ownership and pressure to develop individual parcels of land within the SGA.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Certainty

Development Management

46. During the reporting period more than 98% of planning applications received were granted planning permission and more than 98% applications were determined in accordance with the officer recommendation.
47. The Planning Service seeks to give certainty to stakeholders in a number of ways. This includes offering a free, extensive pre-application advice service. We also provide clear and concise guidance on our website about what we do, how to contact officers and what information is needed with application submissions. This is supported by easily accessible links on the Falkirk Council website to the Local Development Plan and a suite of Supplementary Guidance, other planning guidance and links to useful resources, such as the Scottish Government website. In addition we work closely with other Council Services when dealing with enquiries and planning applications to ensure a joined up approach. We are assisted in this by the location of many of our principal cross service contacts within the same building.
48. Case officer workload is regularly monitored and reviewed by line managers to check progress and to offer advice, guidance and support as required.

Processing Agreements

49. We continue to encourage the use of processing agreements on major and local applications. There is information about processing agreements on our website along with a downloadable template for a draft agreement. In addition during pre-application discussions officers continue to advise developers of our willingness to enter into agreements. There appears however to be a general reluctance from developers to enter into agreements although applicants/agents appear to be satisfied that the Council has adequate processes in place to ensure that the processing of planning applications is properly managed and that lines of communication are clear. The less formal arrangements we use in the absence of formal processing agreements include regular contact with applicants/agents either in person, by telephone or email to provide updates on the progress of applications and enquiries. This includes discussion of timescales for determination, discussion of submissions received, consultation responses and information requests.

Legal Agreements

50. Where planning obligations and other legal agreements are required the heads of terms are progressed at the same time as the application in order to reduce potential delay. Minded to grant recommendations to the Planning Committee and recommendations in delegated reports on handling of applications are framed to set timescales for the conclusion of agreements or review of the application. There are templates for legal instructions to draft planning obligations and other legal agreements so that all necessary information is provided to legal advisers by officers and applicants/agents to facilitate the drafting process. The progress of legal agreements to conclusion is closely monitored by officers in the planning service and legal service.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Customer Engagement

51. This was a busy year for engagement for the Development Plan team. During the development of the MIR, in early summer 2016, a further round of workshops were held with elected members to review material submitted through the Issues Consultation and 'Call for Sites'. Further meetings with members were held through the late summer to discuss potential options for taking forward into the MIR. As with the adopted LDP, we made time within our programme to circulate a working draft to the key agencies for comment, and this provided a useful mechanism to scope out in advance any major unforeseen issues, and make adjustments to the document prior to publication.
 - Two stakeholder workshops at Callendar House, attended by developers, agencies, organisations, infrastructure providers, different Council services and community councils, with around 50 attendees across the two events. The workshops were well received by agencies, developers and communities alike. A developer commented that 'it was good to hear the issues that the Council faces to help consider constraints and opportunities, whilst a community councillor felt that they 'gave them the opportunity to listen to other very different perspectives on development'. A business representative stated that 'there was great encouragement from those hosting to draw out comment from all'.
52. The MIR consultation itself ran for 3 months from 10 February to 5 May 2017. The consultation plan was guided by our participation statement in the Development Plan Scheme, by our review of consultation on the adopted LDP, and by our determination to extend the scope and reach of our engagement. Key features included:
 - Briefings offered to all community councils. This was taken up by four community councils, with a total attendance of around 30 people.
 - An online consultation response facility, managed through the Council's Consultation Hub, as well as availability of other traditional response methods (e.g. email, post). In total, there were 257 individual written responses.
 - A short film, available on the web site and promoted on the LDP Facebook page, introducing the MIR and the issues it tries to address (see Case Study on page 16).
 - Widespread publicity through a variety of media including a mailing to some 1,500 customers, a feature in the Falkirk Business e-zine reaching some 3,000 business interests, the Council's website, the LDP Facebook page, the Council's Twitter feed, posters in local shops and community buildings, and an article in the Falkirk News which goes to every household in the Council area.
 - Neighbour notification for all new preferred sites in the MIR. Although not required by legislation, the adopted LDP had flagged up the anomaly of only undertaking such notification at the Proposed Plan stage, contrary to the principle of 'front loading' consultation.
 - A newsletter summarising the content of the MIR, which was included in all mailings.
 - A roadshow consisting of a staffed exhibition at venues across the Council area (see Case Study on page 16).



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Case Study:

Main Issues Report Roadshow

To bring the Main Issues Report out to local communities, the Development Plan team took a staffed exhibition out to 17 different venues across the Council area, with a focus on areas where most change was proposed. This was a similar level of service to that achieved with LDP1, notwithstanding reduced availability of staff resources. Over 400 people were engaged through the events. Three supermarket/shopping centre workshops were particularly successful at engaging large numbers of people, many of whom were unaware of the LDP process. Attendances at local community halls, recreation centres, libraries and schools were generally lower but this allowed more in depth engagement with individuals who generally had a more specific interest or query. For two events, we partnered with community planning colleagues to join their participatory budgeting consultation events with our roadshow. Attendees at the roadshow gave the event a high satisfaction rating: all those who responded indicated that the roadshow was useful, with over 80% rating it as 'very useful'.

Case Study:

Main Issues Report Short Film

As part of our review of consultation techniques, we looked at ways in which we could make the process more engaging, particularly for younger people, through the use of visual media. This led to the production of a short film to accompany the LDP2 MIR. To keep costs low, we engaged a student at Forth Valley College to put the film together, which comprises video footage, stills and animated maps showing the growth of settlements, with a voiceover. It is very much a 'taster' film, intended to give people a flavour of what planning is about and the issues involved, rather than attempting to convey a lot of technical content. We believe it has been particularly successful in conjunction with our Facebook page, with 10,500 views of the film recorded through Facebook alone.

53. In terms of the Development Plan team's ongoing communication with our customers and stakeholders, our web site and the LDP Facebook page are actively managed to provide up to date information on development plan preparation, monitoring and implementation. This is supplemented with bi-annual newsletter mailings, of which there were two this year. The reach of our Facebook page has expanded over the year, driven by interest in the MIR consultation which generated a 50% increase in followers. Our initial post advertising the MIR consultation reached 7,700 users, of which 534 followed the link. The web site was also successful in disseminating information; over the reporting year, around 5,000 different customers accessed the LDP2 page and 6,000 visited the adopted LDP page.
54. On youth engagement, the Development Plan team has maintained its relationship with Larbert High School established through the pre-MIR workshops with students, and took part in a 'STEM in the Helix' day involving all the Falkirk schools. Development Plan staff ran two outdoor workshops to teach key planning skills to some 40 children for use in a design project. The first workshop looked at the strengths and weaknesses of the Helix and prioritising improvements, using the Place Standard; the second involved carrying out a legibility analysis of the area. Further classroom based engagement with pupils at Grangemouth High School using the Place Standard is planned for the next reporting year.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

E-Planning

55. We continue to encourage the electronic submission of planning applications online. During the reporting period 539 (67%) of planning applications were submitted online. This is an increase of 11% since the last reporting period and reflects the continuing trend towards online submissions and public access to information online.

Charters

56. Our Development Management Charter and Planning Enforcement Charter are both less than 2 years old. The Development Management Charter and the Planning Enforcement Charter set out what we do, how we do it and provide clear measurable standards. The documents are published on our website.

Plain English

57. All publications are checked for the use of plain English to ensure that information is suitable for all readers. Information is published on our website in a number of different formats to meet the needs of users of the site. Guidance is available on our intranet for all Falkirk Council employees on the use of plain English. Attendance on training courses on report writing and the use of plain English is being rolled out across the Council. During the reporting period many officers in the planning service have attended these courses.

Complaints Procedures

58. The Council has a complaints procedure and details are publicised on our website. The procedure is a 2 stage process, the first being frontline resolution and the second being investigation. The procedures follow the model developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). Each Council service has a nominated lead officer for complaints and a Complaints Officers Working Group is in place. An annual report on the Council's performance in dealing with complaints is produced and published. Our 2015/2016 report highlights that the Council's performance, as a whole, is close to or better than the national average.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Quality of Service and Engagement

Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Customer Service

59. Online surveys are routinely used to collect information from customers about how the planning service is performing. A link to our customer survey questionnaire is provided on staff email correspondence. We also distribute freepost card survey questionnaires with all hard copies of planning decisions and correspondence. Of those who responded to our survey over 90% consistently find development management representatives to be helpful, courteous and polite. These are some of the comments we have received:

"Service was first class."

"I was delighted with the service I received and was given excellent guidance."

"Very helpful and courteous service - application processed promptly and efficiently"

60. The Council holds annual planning/building standards service customer workshops. These workshops are attended in the main by agents and developers although not specifically targeted to these customers. The workshops provide an opportunity for officers to give updates on a range of issues and to seek feedback from our customers. Our next workshop is planned for September 2017 and we are seeking comments from our customers on what they would like to see on the agenda.
61. The Falkirk Council newspaper, Falkirk Council News, is published quarterly and is used by the planning service and all other Council services to bring people news and information about Council policies, projects and services across the Council area. The Council has established a Citizens Panel with more than 1000 local people volunteering to complete three or four surveys each year. The surveys provide feedback on Council services, as well as information about the needs of local communities and other issues. This helps us improve our services and make sure we are meeting the needs of our local communities.

62. We continue to chair the Falkirk Flood Liaison and Advisory Group and have planning representation on the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Group. We also participate in the Development Management sub-groups of the Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS). Our regular liaison meetings with representatives from SEPA and Scottish Water are continuing as are our liaison meetings with the Council housing, education and roads services. In addition, we have established cross service officer working groups to deal with the monitoring and spend of planning obligation financial contributions and also enforcement issues related to abandoned and untidy areas of private land.

Case Study: Vacant and Unmaintained Property

Falkirk Council received complaints about the condition of a property in Denny. The property had been vacant for a number of years, had not been maintained and was in a poor state. Attempts had been made to secure improvements but without success. This was identified by officers as being a common problem across the Council area. There being a number of similar sites that are causing concern for local communities.

A working group has been established involving officers from planning, housing, environmental health and legal services to look at how to resolve such problem sites. Having looked at legislative tools available to the Council it has been decided where appropriate to make use of the powers available to the Council under section 179 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended. A budget has been set aside should direct action be required and the expertise of officers from these different services is being co-ordinated to target problem sites. The working group meets on a regular basis to consider problem sites and to establish priorities for action.

In the case of the property in Denny investigations revealed that the owner was serving a lengthy prison sentence and that this was the reason why the property had been abandoned. A section 179 notice was served and complied with without recourse to direct action.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service Governance

Efficient and Effective Decision Making

63. The majority of planning applications are determined under the Council's Scheme of Delegation (95.6%). The scheme allows applications for local and major applications that are in accordance with the Development Plan to be determined by officers unless called in to the Planning Committee following publication of the weekly recommendation list. Where Members call in an application the Council's Standing Orders require that they must state their planning reasons. The applicant/agent is informed of the call in, who has made the request and their reasons. The planning service encourages Members to discuss applications with officers before calling in applications to see if any concerns or questions they may have about a proposal can be answered and the call in avoided. The number of applications considered by the Planning Committee is therefore small (less than 5%) and is generally restricted to larger and more controversial applications where a degree of greater public scrutiny is justified.
64. The Planning Committee meets every four weeks. Members not on the Planning Committee and applicants/agents can address the Committee.
65. Decision making on the LDP is reserved to full Council. This meets on a six weekly cycle but special meetings can be held to expedite progress and to meet project timescales. Briefings for Members are held in advance of Council meetings to explain processes and proposed policy direction. This helps debate and decision making at the meetings. Other forward planning matters, including Supplementary Guidance are reported to the Council's Executive which meets on a four weekly cycle. The LDP process continues to be subject to a project management approach, with project and stage plans, clear lines of reporting, and a hierarchy of project meetings.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service Governance

Effective Management Structures

66. The effective management and co-ordination of work across the Council is integral to the operation of Falkirk Council Development Services and the Council as a whole. A breakdown of the workforce is provided for the reporting period in Part 6: Workforce Information.
67. The planning service is part of Falkirk Council Development Services. This encompasses a broad range of related services and disciplines including economic development, environmental health, building standards, roads and transportation and, emergency planning and waste management.
68. Under restructuring within Development Services which came into effect shortly after the end of the reporting period, the planning service now sits within a new Planning & Economic Development Division, alongside economic development and asset management functions. This should bring benefits in terms of closer integration of development planning, economic strategy and implementation of key strategic economic growth projects such as the Falkirk and Grangemouth Investment Zones.
69. Within the previous reporting period the Development Management Unit had been restructured with the Development Manager taking on responsibility for the management of Building Standards. Integration with building standards has had positive benefits in relation to closer working relationships and recognition of areas of work that are common. Within the Development Management Unit we continue to recognise the value of flexible team working and its importance given the changing nature of local government and pressures on resources. We identify key development proposals at pre-application or application submission stage. Project teams are set up to allow joint working. This helps staff development but also targets resources where they are needed most. Officer workloads are jointly monitored by line managers to track the progress of cases and to help identify and resolve any difficulties.
70. Within the Planning & Environment Unit, the Development Plan team saw staff reduction through voluntary severance at the beginning of the reporting year. Workloads have been re-allocated, and there is a closer focus on prioritising work. Nonetheless, the LDP2 Main Issues Report and associated consultation has been delivered to a quality higher than the adopted LDP, as we were able to build on lessons learned through the previous process. In terms of environmental project development and implementation, the integration of the parks function within the Planning & Environment Unit has been a positive benefit, allowing parks to be integrated more fully into our wider greenspace strategy.
71. Collaboration with other Council services continues to be an essential part of everyday working. There is a particular focus on liaison with Education (Children's Services), on account of the need to manage widespread school capacity issues and residential development pressures. Formal liaison meetings take place, as well as day-to-day dialogue. Planners have a close relationship with the Council's education forward planning officer through formal liaison meetings, day-to-day dialogue, and collaboration over the preparation of school roll projections.
72. Priority is also being given to improving joint working between spatial planning and community planning. Historically, land use planners and community planners met periodically to share information and progress on their respective plans. However, there is recognition of the need for closer working and meetings are taking place to explore opportunities for greater collaboration and sharing of resources. An early example of this was the bringing together of two of our MIR road shows with participatory budgeting consultations being run by community planning.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service Governance

Unit and Team Meetings

73. Development Management Unit team meetings are held on a monthly basis and attended by all staff. These meetings are structured and minuted with the minutes of the meetings circulated to senior managers. At the team meetings the minutes of senior management team meetings are also relayed to the Units. These Unit meetings allow for work updates, discussion of performance issues and other information to be cascaded to officers. Weekly team briefings also take place as and when required which allow for the discussion of more urgent issues and information. Within the Planning & Environment Unit, Development Plan team meetings are held on a three weekly cycle as part of the project plan for LDP2.



Financial Management and Local Governance

74. The Falkirk Council Corporate Plan 2012 - 2017 sets out a vision for our area with a number of strategic goals and outcomes. This vision must be delivered against the background of a challenging economic climate and increasingly constrained budgets for local government. As the population of Falkirk continues to grow our challenge is to meet increasing demand with reducing resources.
75. Development Services has identified circa £3 million savings for 2016/2017 and is reviewing its services again in order to deliver further savings where possible. It is recognised that this is a very challenging position and that it may mean significant change to what Development Services can deliver and how we deliver it. Development Services is involved in business transformation projects such as strategic property reviews/Council HQ, improved mobile and flexible working and review of business support services across the Council. These projects will be delivered against the background of a revised Council Service structure.
76. The Planning Service has an important role in helping to deliver the objectives of the Council in a regulatory capacity and with regard to our knowledge and skills in problem solving and flexible working. Annual use of budget review templates has ensured revenue and capital budget bids are scored against the Council's stated priorities. Priorities and objectives are aligned through the Single Outcome Agreement, Strategic Community Plan and Corporate Plan. The Service Performance Plan ensures staff are clear what their day to day role is in meeting the Council's priorities. Spend is guided by the Council's Contract Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation and through monitoring by Internal Audit and the Council's Best Value Forum. Council procurement rules and procedures are followed. Regular monitoring of budgets is undertaken between the Unit Managers and the Planning Service accountant.
77. Within the Development Management Unit our resources have reduced as a result of vacant posts not being filled and some staff working hours being reduced through flexible retirement. Workloads have been redistributed, procedures amended and flexible working encouraged to help address this issue.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service Governance

Planning Obligations

78. During the reporting period recording and monitoring of all planning obligations and other legal agreements has progressed. A cross Council Planning Obligations Monitoring Group, led by the planning service, is established. The group includes representatives from services' where planning obligation contributions are required, who can identify levels of contribution, who are involved in the drafting of obligations and who are involved in the banking and spending of monies received. Planning obligations are recorded and have been made more easily accessible for the public to view.
79. Planning applications recommended for approval subject to planning obligations and other legal agreements are reviewed after 6 months if the planning obligation or agreement has not been concluded. Recommendations to the Planning Committee and in delegated reports on handling are worded accordingly. Decisions to reconsider are minuted.

Development Management Unit

80. The Unit has continued to implement service improvements. The improvements we proposed to make in this reporting period were set out in our last PPF and include:
- Review and publication of our enforcement charter
 - We have contacted other Council services to establish procedures for dealing with unauthorised advertisements and fly posting
 - We have looked at ways to make our enforcement register available online. Progress in implementing this change has been delayed due to the vacancy of an enforcement officer post and consequent need to reprioritise work. We still intend to implement this change when we can.
 - We are continuing to reduce the number of legacy cases. At the end of our previous reporting period we had reduced the number of legacy cases from 17 to 11. At the end of the current reporting period there were 6 remaining legacy cases. This has since been further reduced and will be reported in our next PPF. The clearance of these cases has involved detailed discussions with applicants and agents and with Members to ensure cases can be progressed to a determination or are withdrawn if there is no realistic prospect of the development proceeding. A number of legacy cases are planning in principle applications for major land releases with associated planning obligations. We have sought to be as flexible as possible with contribution requirements, the timing of contribution payments and issues of development viability to try to assist developers in recognition of difficult financial circumstances for developers and the Council.
 - We are continuing to work towards making more information available to the public online. Planning obligations have been made publically available and we are looking at what other information can be published online.
 - We have commenced a review of old minerals permissions.
 - A further developer/agent workshop is being arranged and it is anticipated that this will take place in September 2017.
 - We have met with our SOLACE benchmarking partners to share best practice.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Culture of Continuous Improvement

- We are reviewing procedures with Building Standards and Roads to align consent processes. Regular weekly meetings are now taking place between officers in Development Management, Roads and Flooding to discuss applications and enquiries and to identify and discuss at an early stage any issues that may arise. The weekly lists of Building Warrant applications are checked to identify at an early stage any inconsistencies in drawings submitted for building warrant and planning permission and any warrant approvals that may also require a planning permission.
- Our review of Development Management procedures is ongoing to take account of changes in Council structure and other issues as they arise. This is facilitated by regular Unit meetings and cross service and Council working.

81. In addition, we are reviewing hazardous substances consents in consultation with site operators to ensure that old consents are revoked where appropriate and replaced with single new consents that reflect changes in the classification of substances.



Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service Culture of Continuous Improvement

Development Plan Team

82. The Development Plan team has continued to implement service improvements particularly focused on new technology and improved collaboration with other services. These have been referred to previously in the report and include:
- Improvements to the MIR consultation process including use of social media, non-statutory neighbour notification of preferred sites, an online response facility through the Council's Consultation Hub, and production of a short film to engage the interest of a wider audience;
 - Continuing use of contacts in local schools to expand our programme of youth engagement;
 - Continuing to roll out use of online interactive mapping to improve the usability and accessibility of the MIR, SGs and other spatial data sets such as the vacant and derelict land survey; and
 - Increased joint working with Housing Services in relation to the SHIP, and Community Planning with respect to joint consultation on the MIR/participatory budgeting.

Staff Training and Development

83. The Council recognises the need for lifelong learning to gain new skills, to improve performance and to develop careers. Falkirk Council Employee & Organisational Development Team work in partnership with all Council Services to identify the needs of employees, Services and the Council as a whole and to provide training programmes to meet these needs. These programmes are publicised in a quarterly bulletin, with access being open to all employees and attendance being based on identified training needs and agreement of managers. Opportunities range from half day IT sessions to year long management development/leadership programmes.
84. The Council is accredited to deliver the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) programmes at various levels. It is also recognised that attendance at training programmes can be difficult for some people because they work flexible hours or learn in a different way. Learning materials are available in different formats including books, DVDs as well as e-learning material. Most of these resources are work related but there are also resources to help staff with personal development training needs too.
85. Officers in the planning service have attended a range of courses during the reporting period. Courses attended have included the Scottish Planning & Environmental Law (SPEL) Conference, Delivering Design and Place Quality; Scottish Minerals Planning Group training on finance and monitoring; District Valuer training on development viability. The Council has also run training events for Councillors and officers on planning review procedures and practice, and on plain English and report writing. Course details and notes are reported back to staff at Unit meetings and also shared electronically with other officers. Officers also regularly attend RTPI Chapter events, the 'Local Authority Urban Design Forum' and HOPS meetings. Email updates from Scottish Government, Idox, Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS) and others are circulated and discussed at Unit meetings. The planning service subscribes to the Idox Information Service, with all officers having access to its huge database of books and journal articles. Use of the Knowledge Hub is also encouraged. A culture of sharing information and knowledge continues to be encouraged within the planning service and across the Council.

Part 1: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service Culture of Continuous Improvement

Councillors

86. Training for new Members of the Planning Committee took place in the reporting period. These sessions were organised and run by officers from the Planning Service, Roads Service and Legal Services. Member training has taken place following the local government elections in May and will be reported in our next PPF.



Part 2: Supporting Evidence

Part 1 of this report was compiled, drawing on evidence from the following sources;

1. Development Plan Scheme 2017
2. Falkirk LDP2 Project Plan and Stage Plans
3. Falkirk LDP2 Main Issues Report and interactive mapping
4. MIR Consultation Plan
5. MIR Film 'Shaping the Future of our Places'
6. LDP Facebook Page
7. Supplementary Guidance
8. Development Plan Update Newsletters
9. Open Space Strategy
10. Our Future in the Past: Draft Historic Environment Strategy for Falkirk
11. Housing Land Audit 2017
12. Development Management Customer Survey
13. Standing Orders
14. Development Management Charter
15. Enforcement Charter
16. Falkirk Council Complaints Procedure
17. Complaints Annual Report 2014 -2015
18. Development Services Management Structure to 31 March 2017
19. Service Performance Plan 2016 – 2019
20. Falkirk Council Employee Handbook
21. Have your say: A plan for local involvement 2015 – 2018
21. Citizens Panel
22. Council Performance
23. Falkirk News
24. Falkirk Council website
25. Falkirk THI website

Part 3: Service Improvements 2017-2018

In the coming year we will:

Service Improvement	Timescale
Analyse MIR responses and report back to customers through newsletter	October 2017
Roll out interactive online mapping to Housing Land Audit	October 2017
Finalise Historic Environment Strategy	August 2017
Complete review of SG13 Open Space and New Development	March 2018
Prepare 2 year update to LDP1 Action Programme	July 2017
Develop closer working between spatial and community planning	March 2018
Review our Planning Charter	March 2018
Continue review of old minerals permissions	March 2017
Meet with PPF bench marking partners to review PPF and share best practice	September 2017
Continue review of development management procedures	March 2017
Make enforcement register available online	March 2018
Increase public access to electronically stored planning application information	March 2018
Arrange a further developer/agent workshop on application validation requirements	September 2017
Carry out a review of implemented planning permissions	March 2017
Training sessions on SG's and new legislation	March 2017

Delivery of our Service Improvement Actions in 2016-17

Committed Improvements and Actions	Complete?
Publish and consult on the MIR for LDP2	Yes.
Complete the programme of Supplementary Guidance associated with LDP1	Yes. Only Antonine Wall SG outstanding which is prepared jointly with other authorities.
Finalise and approve the Open Space Strategy	Yes.
Prepare Maddiston East Development Framework	Yes.
Prepare a review of the Built Heritage Strategy	Draft strategy prepared.
Reformat Enforcement Charter	Yes.
Create working group on unauthorised advertisements	Yes. Work ongoing to refine procedures.
Make enforcement register available online	No. Completion delayed due to staff changes and need to reprioritise workload.
Continue to reduce the number of legacy cases	Yes.
Increase public access to electronically stored planning application information	Yes but work ongoing to increase public access further.
Commence review of old minerals permissions	Yes.
Arrange a further developer/agent workshop on application validation requirements	No. Workshop being arranged for September 2017.
Meet with benchmarking partner to review PPF and share best practice	Yes.
Commence project with Building Standards and Roads to review procedures to align consent processes.	Yes.
Review of Development Management procedures.	No. This piece of work is ongoing.

Part 4: National Headline Indicators

National Headline Indicators Table

Key Outcomes	2016-2017	2015-2016
Development Planning		
Age of LDP at end of reporting period	20 months	8 months
Will the LDP be replaced by its 5th anniversary according to current development plan scheme?	Yes	Yes
Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers changed over the past year?	Yes (4 months delay)	No
Were development plan scheme engagement/consultation commitments met during the year?	Yes	Yes

Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs		
Established housing land supply	7912 units	8842 units
5 - year effective housing land supply	2611 units	3047 units
5 - year housing supply target	3375 units	3375 units
5 - year effective housing land supply (to one decimal place)	3.9 years	4.5 years
Housing approvals	1138 units	1086 units
Housing completions over the last 5 years	2444 units	2320 units
Marketable employment land supply	268 ha	290 ha
Employment land take-up during reporting year	0 ha	6.3 ha

Part 4: National Headline Indicators

National Headline Indicators Table

Key Outcomes	2016-2017	2015-2016
Development Management - Project Planning		
Percentage and number of applications subject to pre- application advice	27.9% (171)	36.7%
Percentage and number of major applications subject to processing agreement	0% (0)	1
Application approval rate	96.1%	94.9%
Delegation rate	95.6%	94.3%
The percentage of applications valid upon receipt	63.9%	-
Decision making timescales. Average number of weeks to decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major developments • Local developments (non-householder) • Householder developments 	60.2 10.3 7.2	84.3 12.3 6.9
Legacy cases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number cleared during reporting period • Number remaining 	7 6	22 11
Time since enforcement charter published/reviewed	12 months (published June 2016)	20 months



Part 4: National Headline Indicators

Consideration of National Headline Indicators

Development Plan

87. During the reporting year, work on LDP2 has continued, with the Main Issues Report published in February 2017 and consultation on the document completed in May 2017. This represents a 4 month delay compared with the programme set out in the 2016 Development Plan Scheme (DPS), attributable to the need to carry out extended consultation with elected Members, and a decision not to carry out the consultation over the winter period straddling Christmas. Nonetheless, the DPS projects adoption of LDP2 in May 2020, which is still comfortably within the five year timeframe of the adopted LDP.

Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs

88. The five year effective land supply has dropped by just over 400 units since last year's Housing Land Audit, giving just under a 4 year supply. This is due to further projected slippage in the start dates of some significant sites, which is attributable to a number of factors. Nonetheless the upward trend of housing approvals continues, as does the five year completion figure.
89. After the considerable level of activity of last year, there has been no new business land take up on allocated sites this year. This year's audit of employment land has written down the quantity of marketable land due to a variety of site specific factors and constraints, but the overall total remains healthy. There are encouraging signs of landowners and developers taking positive steps to make their sites available, not least the Council's own efforts at the Falkirk Gateway and Ineos' masterplanning exercise and demolition programme at Grangemouth.



Part 4: National Headline Indicators

Consideration of National Headline Indicators

Development Management

Project Planning

90. We encourage developers and agents to seek pre-application advice from the planning service, other Council services and consultees. Falkirk Council does not charge for pre-application advice or for dealing with general planning enquiries. This service is publicised on our website. Procedures are in place to record the percentage of planning applications where applicants have sought pre-application advice. This percentage has dropped in the reporting period which could be attributable to a number of factors. For example the quality of guidance we provide on our website could be such that developers and agents do not feel the need to contact us in advance of submitting applications.
91. There is a continued reluctance from applicants to enter into formal processing agreements despite the proactive stance we take to encourage their use by providing guidance and a sample template on our website. However, with all applications for major and local developments we use informal project plans. This includes a commitment to enter into pre-application discussions with the applicant and statutory consultees, to identify timescales for submissions, responses and Committee dates, to maintain regular contact with the applicant/agent, to identify and seek to resolve any planning issues that may arise to ensure that statutory timescales are met or where appropriate extensions of time agreed.
92. Regular caseload monitoring by case officers and line managers is inherent and has helped us to generally improve our performance timescales since our last PPF. The average number of weeks to determine major developments is still improving although the figure is still skewed as we continue to clear legacy cases. Our average timescales for local non-householder developments have improved by 2 weeks and although our average timescales for decisions on householder developments has increased by just under 2 days it is still better than the national average. There are a number of factors that have affected this very small change in householder performance including greater priority being given to major applications and local non-householder applications. It is also recognised that the figure can be skewed by a small number of applications within the overall total.
93. We are pleased that we are continuing to make good progress to reduce the number of legacy cases. Our delegation rate also remains consistently high.
94. Regular caseload monitoring by case officers and line managers is inherent and has helped us to generally improve our performance timescales since our last PPF. The average number of weeks to determine major developments is still improving although the figure is still skewed as we continue to clear legacy cases. Our average timescales for local non-householder developments have improved by 2 weeks and although our average timescales for decisions on householder developments has increased by just under 2 days it is still better than the national average. There are a number of factors that have affected this very small change in householder performance including greater priority being given to major applications and local non-householder applications. It is also recognised that the figure can be skewed by a small number of applications within the overall total.
95. We are pleased that we are continuing to make good progress to reduce the number of legacy cases. Our delegation rate also remains consistently high.



Part 5: Official Statistics

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

Category	Total Number of Decisions	Average Timescale (weeks)	
	2016-2017	2016-2017	2015-2016
Major Developments	7	60.2	84.3
Local Developments			
(non- householder)	235	10.3	12.3
Local: less than 2 months	69.8%	6.8	7.0
Local: more than 2 months	30.2%	18.6	21.6
Householder Developments	275	7.2	6.9
Local: less than 2 months	94.9%	6.9	6.6
Local: more than 2 months	5.1%	12.2	11.9
Housing Developments			
Major	2	37.5	81.9
Local housing developments	59	13.9	17.7
Local: less than 2 months	55.9%	7.2	7.4
Local: more than 2 months	44.1%	22.5	25.8
Business and Industry			
Major	1	26.0	38.6
Local business and industry	2	17.0	6.9
Local: less than 2 months	0%	----	6.8
Local: more than 2 months	100%	17.0	----
EIA Developments	0	----	----
Other Consents*	95	7.4	8.6
Planning/Legal Agreements**	20	44.7	43.4
Major	2	168.7	154.9
Local	18	30.9	27.4
Local Reviews	12	30.4	24.6

* Consents and certificates: Listed buildings and Conservation area consents, Control of Advertisement consents, Hazardous Substances consents, Established Use Certificates, certificates of lawfulness of existing use or development, notification on overhead electricity lines, notifications and directions under GPDO Parts 6 & 8 relating to agricultural and forestry development and applications for prior approval by Coal Authority or licensed operator under classes 60 & 62 of the GPDO.

** Legal obligations associated with a planning permission; concluded under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 or section 69 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Part 5: Official Statistics

B: Decision-making: Local Reviews and Appeals

Type	Total Number of Decisions	Original Decision Upheld			
		2015-2016		2014-2015	
		No.	%	No.	
Local Reviews	12	4	33.3	0	0
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	6	3	50	3	50

C: Enforcement Activity

	2016-2017	2015-2016
Complaints lodged	143	229
Cases Taken Up	135	174
Breaches Identified	88	174
Cases Resolved	82	104
Notices Served***	1	9
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

Comments in relation to decision making timescales are provided in Part 4 of the PPF. In the context of changes in local government resources we continue to strive to maintain and improve performance and to adapt to change.

Part 6: Workforce Information as at 31/3/16

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Head of Planning Service			1	

	Managers/Team Leader		Main Grade Posts		Technician Posts		Office Support/Clerical		Total
	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	
Development Management	3	0	8	0	2	0.2			13.2
Enforcement	0	0	2	1.4	0	0			2.0
Development Planning	1.3	0	3.3	0	1	0			5.6
Other Planning	0.3	1	4.5		0.5	0.5			6.8
Office Support/Clerical							4.5	0.5	5.0

Staff Age Profile	Number
Under 30	0 (DP), 0 (DM)
30-39	2 (DP), 6 (DM)
40-49	7 (DP), 0 (DM)
50 and over	6 (DP), 9 (DM)

Committee and Site Visits	Number per year
Full Council Meetings	9 (includes 1 pre-determination hearing)
Planning Committees	11
Committee Site Visits	8
LRB	8
LRB Site Visits	4

¹ Other planning comprises landscape, biodiversity, urban design/conservation, greenspace, environmental policy/projects and outdoor access

Performance Markers

Driving Improved Performance

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
1	Decision Making:	National Headline indicators show that our average timescales for dealing with major and local applications have improved. Our timescales for householder applications have very slightly reduced by a matter of days but are still above the national average. PPF Reference: Part 4: National Headline Indicators Part 5: Official Statistics
2	Project Management:	We promote the use of processing agreements. There is guidance and a template on our website. Agreements are invited during pre-application discussions and in correspondence with applicants and agents. PPF Reference: Part 4: National Headline Indicators Contact, paragraph 23 Pre-application, paragraph 25 Flexible team working, paragraph 30 - 33 Development Management, paragraph 48, paragraphs 90 - 94 Processing agreements, paragraph 49 Legal agreements, paragraph 50 Effective management structures, paragraph 69
3	Early collaboration:	We encourage early dialogue with applicants/agents and offer a free pre-application service. Guidance is provided on our website. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Policy, paragraph 11 Case study - use of supplementary planning guidance Case study - Falkirk Town Steeple Contact, pre-application, developer contributions, paragraphs 21 - 29 Supplementary guidance, paragraph 43 Development management, paragraph 47 Customer service, paragraph 62 Part 4: National Headline Indicators
4	Legal Agreements:	The progress of applications subject to legal agreements is closely monitored and applications are reported back to Planning Committee for reconsideration if not determined within 6 months. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Legal agreements, paragraph 50 Planning obligations, paragraphs 78 - 79
5	Enforcement Charter:	The Charter is up to date and will be reviewed before June 2018. This is within 2 years. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Charters, paragraph 56
6	Continuous Improvement:	Progress on National Headline Indicators and Service Improvements are set out in the relevant sections of the PPF. For development planning, there have been continuing improvements in customer engagement as evidenced through the MIR consultation for LDP2, youth engagement, online interactive mapping, and joint working with community planning and housing colleagues. For development management there have been continuing service improvements to reduce the number of legacy cases, monitor case work and to review our procedures. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Part 2: Supporting evidence Part 3: Service improvements Part 4: National Headline Indicators

Performance Markers

Promoting the Plan-Led System

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
7	Local Development Plan less than 5 years since adoption	The LDP was adopted in July 2015, and was 20 months old at the end of the reporting period. PPF Reference: Part 4: National Headline Indicators
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 	DPS 2017 indicates adoption of LDP2 in May 2020. i.e. within 5 year timescale. There has been a four month slippage in the LDP2 programme to allow time for extra elected member input and to avoid consulting on the MIR over mid-winter. However, the fact that the Council has embarked on LDP2 relatively early means that this delay can be accommodated within the 5 year cycle. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraphs 38 - 45 Paragraphs 51 - 53 Part 2: Supporting evidence Part 4: National Headline Indicators Paragraph 87
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation	Member workshops were held in June 2016 to examine options for inclusion in the MIR and to review the pre-MIR issues responses and 'call for sites' submissions. Meetings were held with a sub-group of the Administration in August and September 2016 to explore key choices and provide a further opportunity for input to the process. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraphs 38 - 41, 51 - 54 Case studies
10	Cross-sector stakeholders, including industry, agencies and Scottish Government, engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation	Consultation on the MIR took place from February 2017 to May 2017 with all stakeholders including key agencies, business, housebuilders, community councils and the public using a variety of techniques. PPF Reference: Part 1 Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraphs 38 - 41, 51 - 54
11	Regular and proportionate policy advice, for example through SPGs produced on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information required to support applications; and ● Expected developer contributions 	<p>The Council has continued its programme of preparation of Supplementary Guidance in association with the adopted LDP. 16 SG documents have now been approved by the Scottish Government. Overall, the SGs provide guidance on the detailed implementation of policy, particularly in respect of design and placemaking, built and natural heritage, and infrastructure and developer contributions. The SGs which have been prepared and approved during the course of the reporting year cover Local Nature Conservation and Geodiversity Sites, Design Guidance for Listed Buildings and Unlisted Properties in Conservation Areas, and Renewable Energy.</p> <p>Where relevant the SGs provide guidance on the information required to support applications and checklists for applicants to ensure that all the relevant issues have been considered and addressed pre-submission, to give the application the highest chance of prompt assessment and determination.</p> <p>Those SGs which set out required developer contributions provide clear guidance on the circumstances in which contributions will be required, the scale of those contributions, and how the contributions are derived, thereby demonstrating proportionality. The Council has committed to reviewing contribution rates and thresholds through LDP2, and has embarked on an early review of SG13 on Open Space and New Development to relate contributions more closely to the new Open Space Strategy and address issues of proportionality in open space contributions.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraphs 9 - 11 and case study Paragraphs 25 - 29 Paragraphs 42 - 45, 47 Part 2: Supporting evidence</p>

Performance Markers

Simplifying and Streamlining

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
12	Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit	Regular liaison meetings between planning and other relevant services are held on, housing, education, open space, roads and transport planning and cemeteries. These ensure the integration of plans and strategies, sharing of information, and liaison on day to day issues, including current planning applications and pre-application enquiries. Regular liaison has also now been established with the community planning team. In parallel to this, the Planning Obligations Monitoring Group brings together colleagues from planning, finance, legal and the various delivery services to ensure that developer contributions are taken forward and applied timeously to relevant projects. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service
13	Sharing Good Practice:	Staff have attended forums, conferences, training events and RTPI Chapter events. The Knowledge Hub is used to share information and experience. We have liaised with our SOLACE benchmarking family members in reviewing our previous and current PPF. PPF Reference: Introduction, paragraph 2 Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraph 11, 15, 20, 35, 36, 62, 80, 85

Delivering Development

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
14	Stalled Sites:	During the previous reporting period and the current reporting period the number of legacy cases has reduced from 28 to 11 to 6. We are continuing to work with applicants/agents to further reduce the number of legacy cases PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraph 36, 78, 79, 80, Part 3: Service improvements Part 4: National headline indicators Paragraph 93
15	Developer Contributions: clear and proportionate expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set out in development plan and ● In pre-application discussions 	Our LDP and SGs provide clear guidance on the circumstances in which contributions will be sought, the scale of those contributions and how they have been calculated. We demonstrate that where contributions are sought this is in accordance with circular 3/2012. The LDP and SGs are published on our website. Staff refer to the documents in pre-application discussions and correspondence. We consider impact of developer contributions on development viability in liaison with applicants/agents and the District Valuer. There is regular corporate officer liaison regarding contributions to take account of changing circumstances. Where appropriate, payments are phased to mitigate the impact on development viability and cash flow. PPF Reference: Part 1: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service Paragraph 11, 13, 25 - 29, 42 - 45 Case study - use of supplementary planning guidance



Falkirk Council
Development Services