

The Highland Council- Planning Performance Framework Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd - Frèam Dèanadas Dealbhaidh



Foreword

Welcome to our Planning Performance Framework, which sets out the key highlights of our performance during 2013/14. This was a busy year for the planning service, with a challenging programme of development planning work as well as Highland Council being one of the busiest local authorities in terms of numbers of planning applications being determined.

I am pleased with the progress made in implementing improvements set out in last years' service improvement plan. Notably our Enforcement service has been supported and strengthened, and the way in which customers can contact us, and get updates to their complaints has been vastly improved. We have also achieved performance improvements in terms of reduced timescales for local developments, and have implemented processing agreements for the majority of major planning applications. Improvements have also been made to the speed of dealing with legal agreements, meaning that legacy cases can now be dealt with more effectively.

Engagement with key stakeholders has also improved, and a training programme with community councils, focus groups with agents and an effective training programme for our planning team have all been useful and welcomed.

This Planning Performance Framework sets out the service improvement plan for this year and we are working hard at implementing these. I hope to show further progress made next year.



Cllr Thomas Prag

Chair of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure
The Highland Council

National Headline Indicators

Key Outcome

Development Planning	2013-14	2012-13
● age of local/strategic development plan(s)	1	0
● development plan scheme on track?	Yes	Yes

Please note- Highland-wide LDP was adopted in 2012. Before that 8 Local Plans were in force, some being relatively recent and some being over 10 years old, elements of these plans remain in force through a Parliamentary Order. The average age of the old Local Plans was 8 years.

Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs	2013-14	2012-13
● effective housing land: years supply	>20	Yes
● effective housing land supply	34457 units	31495 units
● housing approvals	636 units	673 units
● effective employment land supply	3752ha	3752ha
● employment land take up	NA	286ha

Please note- during the reporting period no surveys for housing or land supply were undertaken to update the statistics above.

Development Management	2013-14	2012-13
------------------------	---------	---------

Project Planning

● percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice	27.1%	19.9%
● number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan	18	0
● percentage planned timescales met	95.5%	0%

Decision-making

● application approval rate	96.7%	93%
● delegation rate	95.5%	94.3%

Decision-making timescales (average number of weeks to decision)

● major developments	31.6	29.4
● local developments (non-householder)	12.2	15.0
● householder developments	7	7.4

Enforcement	2013-14	2012-13
● time since enforcement charter published/review	10 months	22 months
● number of breaches identified/resolved	120	N/A

Further Information on Adopted Plans

Adopted Local Development Plans/Local Plans	Date Approved	Years Passed
● Highland-wide Local Development Plan	5/4/2012	0
● Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan (as continued in force)	11/9/1997 (5/4/2012)	16
● Nairnshire Local Plan (as continued in force)	21/12/2000 (5/4/2012)	13
● Caithness Local Plan (as continued in force)	12/9/2002 (5/4/2012)	11
● Inverness Local Plan (as continued in force)	2/3/2013 (5/4/2012)	8
● Wester Ross Local Plan (as continued in force)	29/6/2006 (5/4/2012)	7
● Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan (as continued in force)	8/2/2007 (5/4/2012)	7
● Sutherland Local Plan (as continued in force)	24/6/2010 (5/4/2012)	3
● West Highlands and Islands Local Plan (as continued in force)	9/11/2010 (5/4/2012)	3

Emerging Local Development Plans	Stage
● Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan	Proposed Local Development Plan
● Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan	Pre-MIR publication Call for Sites
● West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan	Pre-commencement

Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Open for Business

The [Highland-wide Local Development Plan](#) was adopted in April 2012 and gave us an up to date planning policy framework upon which to base planning decisions. This includes the statutory adoption of 16 [Supplementary Guidance](#) documents, both general policy topic guidance and area/site specific briefs. A number of strategic projects identified within that Plan are also being delivered, most notably the construction of the 87 hectare Inverness Campus. Significant progress has also been made on the Inner Moray Firth Local Development with the publication of the Proposed Plan in late summer 2013 and work has commenced on the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan with a “call for sites” exercise undertaken in late 2013.

We continue to implement our Planning Protocols for the three Enterprise Area strategic sites in Highland - Inverness Campus, Nigg and Scrabster. These protocols commit all partners to work together to successfully facilitate the planning process in these designated areas. Planning applications have been determined within all of the Enterprise Areas – all within the timescales set out within the protocol.

Key to our open for business approach has been a focus on how we deal with planning applications for major developments. This has involved maintaining performance on our pre-application advice service for major developments and ensuring that wherever possible applications are project managed through a processing agreement. Case Study 1 shows this approach in action and is just one example of the positive responses we have had from the development industry.

We continue to monitor and develop our pre-application advice services. Our Major Pre-application advice service continues to be well utilised and supported by the development industry as part of project inception, as a means of case review and as a forum for discussion of issues post determination. Dunmaglass Wind Farm is highlighted as an example of our comprehensive approach in Case Study 2.

Case Review meetings for all major developments are held within 4-6 weeks of submission of an application. This encourages prompt receipt of consultee comments and allows an opportunity for open and frank discussion on the merits or otherwise of the proposal and an opportunity to develop a ‘corporate response’ as early as possible in the process. Monthly meetings are held with the Head of Service to monitor progress of planning applications involving Major Development. The date for the case review is built into the processing agreement.

Recognising the conclusion of Section 75 (and other) legal agreements are sometimes seen as an impediment to development, we now seek to ensure that all proposals subject to a legal agreement are closed within 4 months of a decision on the planning application.

Ensuring that information requested to support planning applications is reasonable and proportionate continues to be a focus for our service. We provide written feedback to

customers using our pre-application advice service which makes clear the information we require for determination of the application. We have also prepared validation checklists and discussed these with agents through our focus groups.

Proportionality in seeking developer contributions continues to be a focus to continue to support development and consider economic viability. As reported in the 2012/13 Planning Performance Framework, we have a statutorily adopted [Developer Contributions: Supplementary Guidance](#). This sets out details of the instances where improvements or financial contributions are likely to be sought and, where possible, an indication of the scale of contributions. The Supplementary Guidance also sets out an approach which can and has been used to determine contribution protocols which can be developed and included in development briefs. An example of this in action is our [Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief](#) which is detailed in Case Study 3. Our Planning Gain Negotiator continues to provide a single point of contact for contributions injecting certainty, consistency and speed into the system.

In February 2014 we published our Development Plans Customer Service Charter within our [Highland Development Plan Scheme](#) (pg. 11) and, as well as establishing a dedicated Enforcement Team, in May 2013 we published our [Enforcement Charter](#).

The [Action Programme](#) which accompanies the Highland-wide Local Development Plan was reviewed in May 2013 to enable us to see how we are delivering against our commitments in our Local Development Plan. Up to that point a number of key pieces of work to support the delivery of the plan commitments and objectives had been completed. Within the reporting period this includes delivery of commitments relating to Nigg Energy Park, Kishorn Yard, delivery of a development brief for Torvean and Ness-side area of Inverness, and progression of the [Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan](#) to further public consultation following publication of the Proposed Plan.

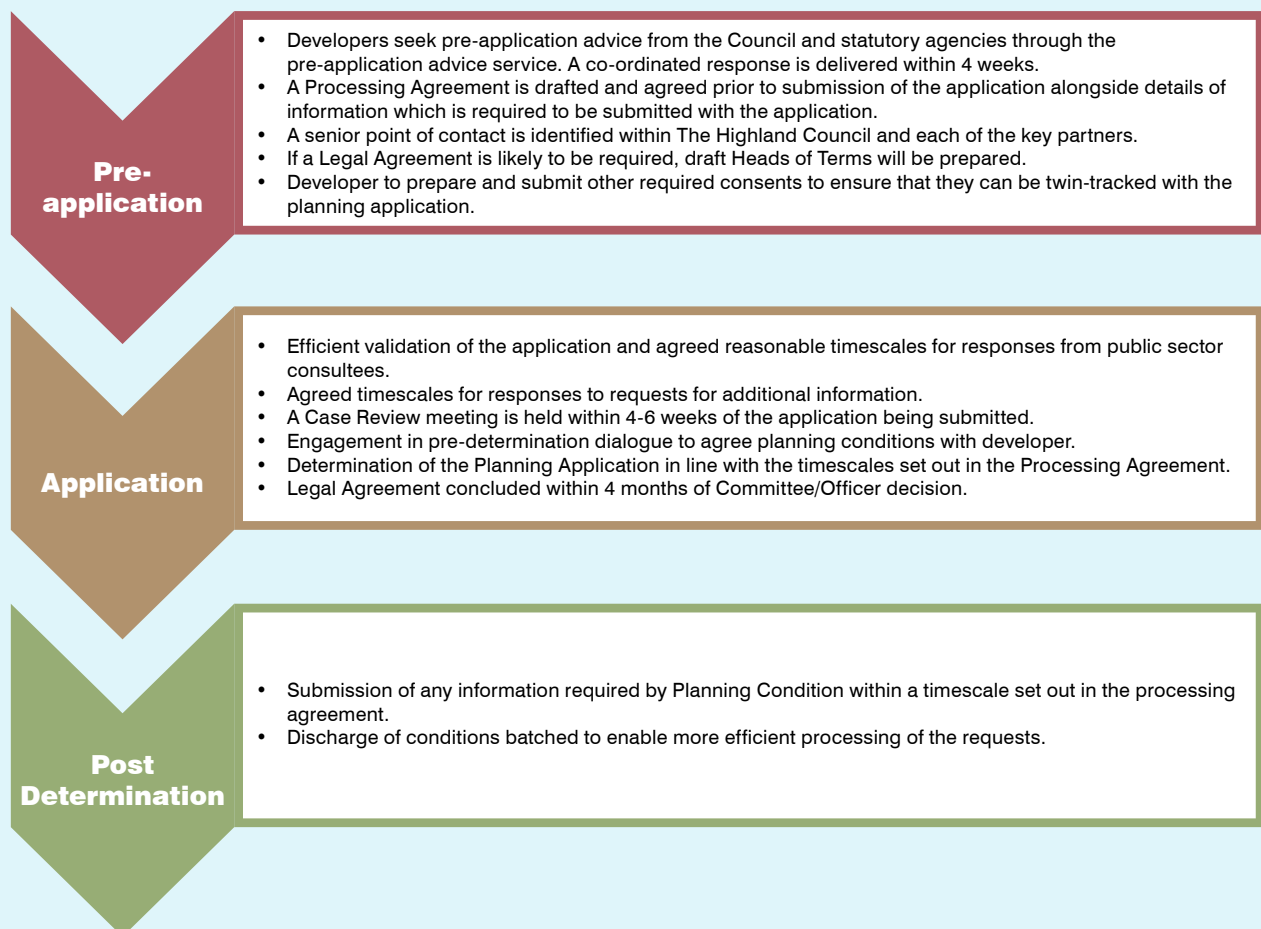
1 - Delivering Strategic Development

We have increasingly sought to deliver major development to support growth sectors in Highland. An example of the process we have in place to achieve this is the expansion of Nigg Energy Park. This major application has followed our carefully structured process (see figure below) that ensures developers are supported from initial pre-application consultation through to determination of their final application. We provided a clear project-managed approach to the developers and, by ensuring early and effective engagement between the developers, the Council gave permission for a project which could lead to the creation of several hundred new jobs and the extension to one of the largest deep water docks in Scotland.



The protocols laid down expectations and created an environment of confidence and certainty ... The initial £20m investment in a new quayside facility is pivotal and the Highland Council aspects of that planning process were delivered very professionally, quickly, with a focus on the outcomes and recognising the importance of the objectives. This is what business should expect of all its regulatory authorities.

Alistair Kennedy, Global Energy Group



2 - Post-application Advice To Deliver Developments



Dunmaglass Wind Farm to the south of Inverness, was given consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act (and deemed planning permission) by Scottish Ministers in December 2010. The site was sold to wind farm operator in 2013. Following the sale and the initial ground and site investigation works, the new owner of the site sought to make a number of changes in order to allow the development to progress in a more efficient manner and make the scheme easier to operate.

In summer 2013 the proposed package of changes and approaches to the discharge of conditions were presented to a meeting of The Highland Council's Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments.

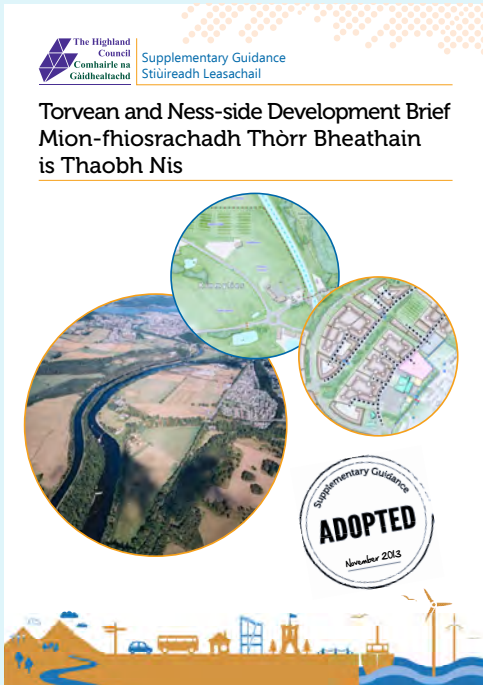
All relevant statutory consultees were present and able to discuss issues related to the discharge of conditions, including finalisation of the Construction Environment Management Plan, Habitat Management Plan and a scheme for protection of the Golden Eagle population. Advice was provided on the level of information required to discharge these conditions.

The proposed changes to the development were listed and considered by those present. The Council committed to a pragmatic approach to dealing with the minor changes as non-material changes. Any more substantial changes, such as new/alterd watercourse crossings, re-location of the substation, additional borrowpits or lengthened access tracks, would be subject to planning applications which the Council would seek to determine as quickly as possible in order to facilitate the delivery of the development, subject to the relevant information being submitted at the time of application.



Construction of the wind farm supporting infrastructure is progressing well and it is anticipated that turbines will be erected and powered on site in 2015.

3 - Torvean and Ness-side Developer Contributions



Development of the Torvean and Ness-side areas of Inverness have historically been held back because there is not enough capacity on the local roads and other infrastructure. However, with significant progress being made to deliver the Inverness West Link Road, a new connection between the east and west of the city, the development potential of this area can be unlocked.

Recognising the need to develop this area to meet the needs and demands of Inverness would take time and require significant levels of investment in infrastructure. A contributions protocol was produced and included in the development brief in line with the approach to identification of requirements and costs set out in the emerging **Developer Contributions: Supplementary Guidance**.

Taking into account the types of infrastructure required, the cost of the infrastructure and the potential levels of development the development brief clearly sets out what infrastructure and services are required to create a balanced and sustainable community with its own identity and sense of place.

This approach provides transparency and certainty to the development industry and will speed up the planning application process and conclusion of any required legal agreement as the requirements are clearly defined and explained in the development brief. To increase transparency in this process a full list of all assumptions made in terms of the infrastructure requirements is included in the development brief.



High Quality Development on the Ground

The implementation of the policies in the Highland-wide Local Development Plan related to sustainable design, design quality and place-making has continued in 2013/14.

We are working closely with our colleagues in Transportation Planning to ensure that developments deliver the principles of Designing Streets. This is evident in the progress made on our emerging Residential Design and Layout Supplementary Guidance which will be published for consultation late in 2014 and reported on in the 2014/2015 Planning Performance Framework. We have recently appointed an Urban Designer who will play a significant role in the delivery and implementation of this document.

In order to help secure high quality design we continue to support PLACE - the Inverness Design Review Panel, and in recognising the contribution of high quality design we continue to support and promote the [Inverness Architectural Association Awards](#).

In recognition of the contribution high quality architecture plays in the creation of a sense of place we have worked with developers, applicants and agents to improve design quality of developments at both pre-application advice and planning application stages to ensure that the development contributes to the unique character of Highland. Case Study 4 shows examples of how, through negotiation, we have delivered a better quality development reflecting the development context. To assist our staff in bringing forward changes to design which help development to relate to their surroundings a number of our staff attended the “Drawing Places” course run by the Scottish Government and Princes Foundation. Case Study 5 sets out how we have worked with colleagues and partners in promoting the historic environment.

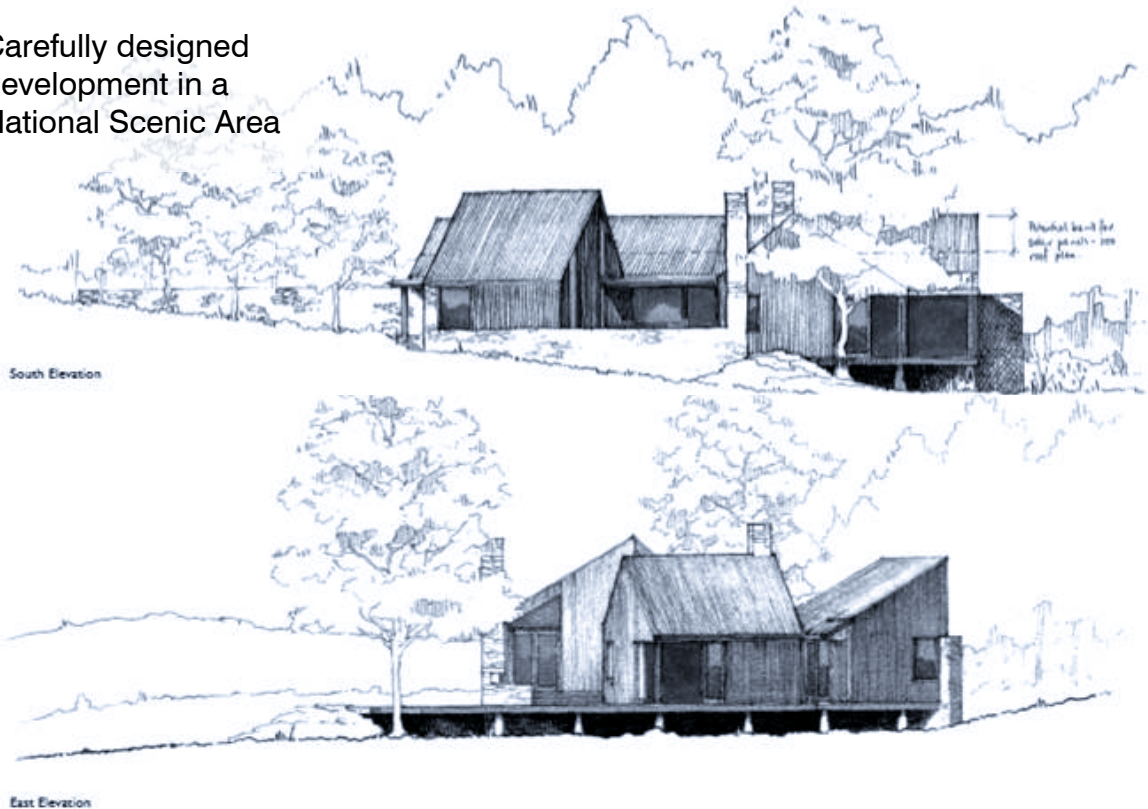
Setting a framework for high quality design provides certainty and presents opportunities from an early stage to help create a sense of place and unique character for an area. In recognition of this, and reflecting the policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan, we continue to set design criteria in our development briefs, frameworks and masterplans. We also work with developers to prepare master plans and material palates for a number of developments. This has enabled us to have control over how the development will look and feel once completed. A great example of this is the Inverness Campus site which is detailed in Case Study 6.

4 - Ensuring high quality development on the ground

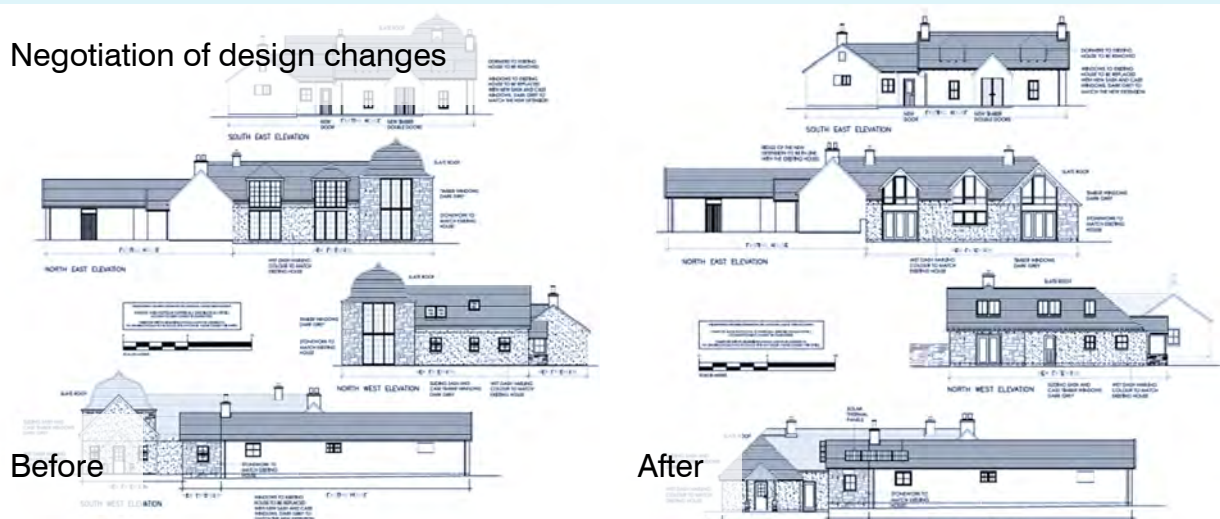
At pre-application stage we encourage applicants to embrace high quality design, respond to the unique character of Highland and design to their site.

Below are examples of where we have supported these types of developments and also examples where we have negotiated changes to the design of buildings to better reflect their surroundings.

Carefully designed development in a National Scenic Area



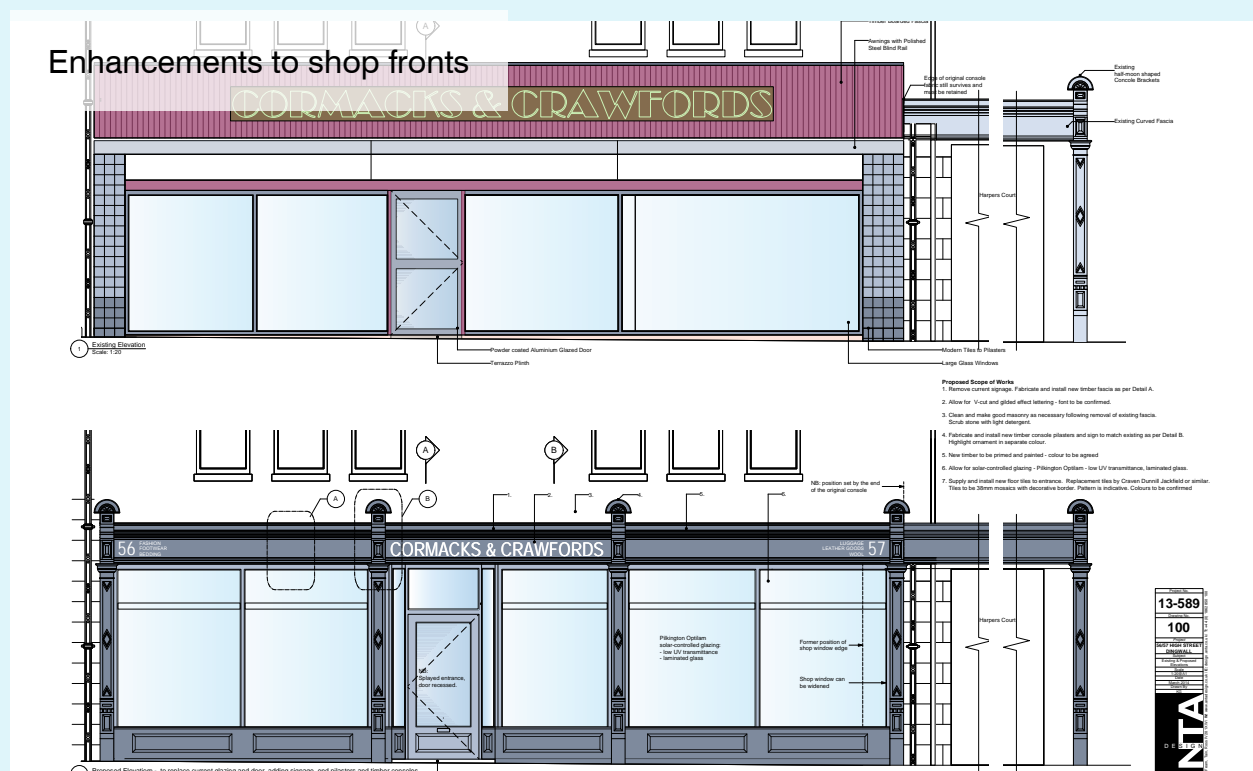
Negotiation of design changes



5 - Protecting and Enhancing our Built Heritage

Our **Historic Environment Strategy** was adopted as statutory Supplementary Guidance in March 2013. This includes a number of strategic aims and commitments to the protection and enhancement of the built environment.

Helping to deliver these strategic aims are the Conservation Regeneration Renewal Schemes. During the 2013/14 period, the Dingwall scheme was in operation and has delivered and is continuing to deliver enhancements to the Dingwall Conservation Area with projects concentrated around Dingwall's High Street. Examples of these are included below. These projects were delivered in partnership between The Highland Council, Historic Scotland and a number of local businesses



6 - Developer Masterplans Creating High Quality Development



Inverness Campus, in the Beechwood area of Inverness is an elevated site next to the A9 Trunk Road and forms a gateway to the City of Inverness.

HIE first announced plans in September 2009 to invest £25m over the following five years to create Inverness Campus on the site of the former Beechwood Farm.

Phase 1 covers some 120 acres of the 215 acre site and comprises: a new road access close to the A9 trunk road junction at Inshes; internal 'shared surface' roads; footways and cycle paths; installation of main services (foul and surface water sewerage, water main, gas, electricity and telecommunications); extensive parkland with hard and soft landscaping; public art, including an island gallery in one of the several ornamental SUDS (Sustainable Drainage System)

ponds, along with a new cycle and pedestrian bridge linking the new Campus to Inverness's Life Sciences district and the city beyond.

A developer masterplan which includes detailed criteria for landscaping, legibility and building design and materials, has resulted in a high quality environment being created providing the setting for education, research and community facilities.



Delivering Certainty

We seek to create an environment of certainty through the delivery of all of our planning functions.

As discussed earlier in this Planning Performance Framework, the [Action Programme](#) which accompanies the Highland-wide Local Development Plan has been reviewed and is delivering against its targets. Each action is designated to a lead agency and progress is continually reviewed.

Realising the benefits of a project management approach to our local development plans, we are now using a project managed approach to delivery of supplementary guidance and development briefs to enable us to deliver to what can be short timescales.

We continue to hold regular liaison meetings with other Council services and key agencies to discuss the level, detail and reliability of advice expected to be provided on development proposals. These partners are aware of the importance of meeting specified timescales for providing advice to development plans and development management for both pre-applications and applications. Standard planning conditions that cover a range of different disciplines were drawn up with input from other Council services and key agencies. These are now being used and help to avoid delay and provide greater certainty.

We are working in partnership with Heads of Planning Scotland and Argyll and Bute Council to develop and deliver a validation checklist to help improve the quality of applications we receive, thus leading to less information requests after the application is validated.

The Council are committed to delivering planning permissions to enable development and support sustainable economic growth. In doing so we have put in place measures to ensure that the number of legacy cases, both pre-2009 and those which have been in the system for more than one year are closely monitored through regular management meetings and action plans are put in place to determine these applications.

In 2013/14, committee dealt with 124 applications, decisions on 16 of these applications were determined contrary to officer recommendation.

To increase transparency in our decision making we now report all major developments recommended for approval to committee for determination.

Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Our Customer Migration project, whereby first-time contact with the Service is processed by a central service centre which currently serves all of our area Development Management offices. Basic advice, forms and guidance notes can be issued by the call centre team. More detailed enquiries are passed to a duty Planning Officer. This helps us target resources effectively and efficiently, and ensures that a consistent level of service is offered. In 2013/14 7,566 enquiries were received. We will continue to improve and develop this service by working with colleagues in Customer Services to enhance the service provided to customers at first point of contact. We also have a dedicated Customer Services Officer for the Development and Infrastructure Service and a two-stage corporate complaints procedure.

We managed to decrease the number of complaints received in relation to Planning and Buildings Standards Services in 2013/14 to 117, a 20% decrease on last year's figure. Where complaints are upheld the Customer Services Officer, in conjunction with senior managers, will discuss lessons learnt and will communicate this where applicable to relevant officers. Dependant on the nature of the complaint, policy or procedure may be changed and/or additional training given to officers. Examples of this are detailed in case study 7.

A link to our [Planning Service Customer Satisfaction Survey](#) is included at the foot of all outgoing emails from Planning Service staff, and a customer feedback form is attached to all completed Local and Major Pre-application advice packs. The results of completed feedback forms and surveys are collated by our Customer Services Officer and reported to senior management and officers. The results help to inform improvements to the service. Further work will be undertaken in 2014/15 to review questions asked and how the service gathers responses, with a view to increasing customer participation and to target wider groups, including customers that make representations to planning applications.

Four Focus Groups attended by 26 agents were held across the Council area in winter 2013. This allowed us to update agents on policy and procedures and to gather feedback on service improvements. A number of recommendations were made by the group, and as a result changes have been implemented, for example, a recommendation to merge future Focus Group meetings with Building Standards. We maintain our online presence through regular planning-related updates on our social networking pages at [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), both of which continued to experience an increase in the number of 'likes' and 'followers' respectively during the reporting period.

The proportion of applications submitted electronically in Highland during 2013/14 has increased since last year to 69%, much higher than the most recent Scottish average of 45%. This figure continues to increase each year since implementation. In 2013/14 approximately 17% of representations to planning applications were submitted online. We continue to actively encourage the use of [Highland ePlanning](#) as the easiest and most efficient way to submit or comment on planning applications.

Various consultations were undertaken during the reporting period. These included public exhibitions, workshops and charrettes. During the Caithness and Sutherland Local Plan call for sites we ran workshops at schools across the plan area (case study 8); undertook consultation with elected members at Ward Business Meetings, and held a range of meetings with internal and external stakeholders. During the [Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan](#) consultation, for the first time, we used the internet as the main method of submit comments. Customers were guided to a simple online form using the 'Wufoo web application' and guided by a [tutorial video](#). We received over 1200 comments during the consultation period, approximately 80% of which were submitted online.

We continue to work with our graphic design team to ensure all our documents are easy to read, and continue to have Crystal Mark status on our [Development Plan Scheme](#). The Proposed Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan was designed with internal hyperlinking to enable efficient and easy navigation within the document. We continue to provide all headings in our publications in English and Gaelic and, when requested, can provide copies of documents in audio, large print and other languages. We continue to make our engagement efforts with hard to reach groups and have in

7 - Customer complaints and lessons learned

A customer complained that his previous correspondence was not considered as a complaint and had not been dealt using the correct administrative processes. In upholding this complaint Senior Management agreed that the customers' correspondence should have been escalated. A reminder of the correct process was sent to all officers, via the Customer Services Officer, on-going training and Customer Service Officer attendance at Team Meetings continue to maintain officer awareness. An apology was provided to the customer.

A customer was unhappy that, when submitting comments online via the planning portal, any formatting such as spacing or bullet points were removed, making it difficult to read online. Whilst not the direct responsibility of the Council, officers contacted the software suppliers that manage the e-planning site, which was installed via a Scottish Government web project. Contact was maintained with the customer and, whilst we did not have direct control of the outcome, our comments and feedback were taken on-board for future improvements.

A customer complained that no clear guidance was available regarding the distance between her proposed application site and neighbouring properties. Officers referred to existing guidance and supplied information to the customer via the pre-application and application stage. However a copy of the guidance was not provided. In reviewing this, Senior Management agreed to update the guidance available on the Council's website and apologised to the customer for any confusion caused.

A customer wrote to the Service to complain that he was not kept informed of progress in relation to a breach of planning control and that no enforcement action had been carried out. Whilst the customers' complaint was not upheld, Senior Management agreed that the customer should have been kept informed of progress at regular intervals and apologised for this. Work is ongoing with the Service enforcement team to clarify procedures for officers and to ensure that customer contact is maintained, in what can be a lengthy process.

Planning Customer Satisfaction Survey

Cancel this survey >>

How Are We Doing?

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey. We are committed to providing a high quality service to all our customers and we appreciate your feedback.

1. Which office or offices do you have most contact with?

☐ Dingwall

☐ Fort William

☐ Golspie

☐ HQ - Development Management

☐ HQ - Development Plans

☐ Inverness - Kintail House

☐ Kingussie

☐ Portree

☐ Wick

2. How would you rate the service you receive from us?

☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Adequate ☐ Poor ☐ Unacceptable

3. If you answered adequate, poor or unacceptable please tell us why.

8 - Caithness and Sutherland School Mini-Charrettes

Building on the skills developed during the Wick and Thurso Charrettes reported in last year's PPF, our Development Plans team designed, prepared and delivered their own charrette-style public engagement. As part of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) Main Issues Report preparation, we took to the high schools of Caithness and Sutherland. We presented the aims and visions of CaSPlan, inspiring school pupils about planning, and engaging them in mapping and design exercises to capture their aspirations for the future of Caithness and Sutherland.


The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Why are we here?

We're preparing a new **Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan** which will contain

- A **vision** - what should happen
- A **spatial strategy** - where it should happen

We want to know what you think!



The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

The Vision

What would you like your community to be like in 20 years?

Environment

What does the built and natural environment look like?

Community


What facilities would there be in the community?
Where would you want to live?

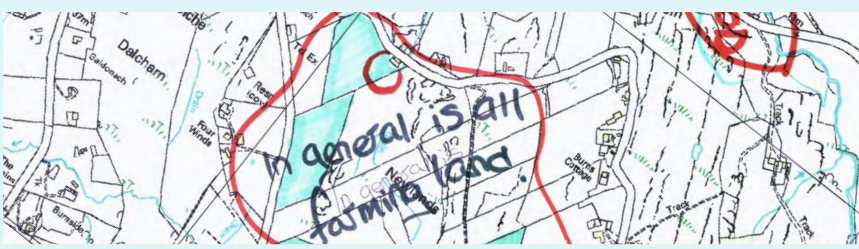
Employment


What type of job would you like to be doing?

Connections

How would people travel around the area and elsewhere?







place a [Protocol for effective engagement with access panels](#). Several Community Council training events were held across the Highland area, to highlight recent changes to Regulations and to highlight how community councils can best engage with the planning process. These events were very well attended and have highlighted a number of improvements which we will taking forward over the coming year.

Efficient and Effective Decision Making

We have two area planning committees (North and South) that meet once a month, and a Planning Review Body that meets every 6 weeks. In 2013/14, committee dealt with 124 applications, 10% of which were applications from the Council. The Planning Review Body dealt with 31 applications. Meetings are webcast and [archived](#).

Decisions on development planning documents are made by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee and/or relevant area committees. In 2013/14 we successfully utilised the new local area committee structures to debate content of planning documents of significant interest to particular areas, giving a more local voice on planning issues without slowing down the process. Changes to the [scheme of delegation](#) enabled more proportionality in the decision making process for planning applications, enforcement issues and development planning.

We have continued to address the number of planning applications that have been in the system for a number of years. This has led to a number of cases being determined, and the current total of planning applications which are more than one year old is 58. Whilst this is still a significant number, given the overall number of planning applications dealt with by the Council on an annual basis, it is a manageable number which we continue to actively manage.

We have successfully project managed our Development Plans work, which has remained on track with targets set out in our Development Plan Scheme. The only exception was the target to publish our Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan Main Issues Report in late 2013. We have delayed this to enable a robust Strategic Environmental Assessment, and in doing so have had extensive and detailed engagement with statutory consultation authorities, these efforts have added value to our site selection process, and will help us minimise our workload downstream, enabling us to meet future targets.

We have regular liaison meetings with many of the agencies that contribute to the delivery of a high quality planning service, and have engaged them in our training and CPD efforts. For example, members of our Development Management team attended a Landscape Capacity training day with SNH in December 2013. This kind of training and partnering with other agencies ensures that we have mutual understanding over policy, procedures and service delivery. This has been particularly important in preparing development plan documents and understanding new approaches to planning liaison from key agencies.

Effective Management Structures

The Development Management function of our business is based across eight locations in the Highlands: The Council Headquarters in Inverness, and Area Offices in Inverness; Kingussie; Fort William; Portree; Dingwall; Golspie, and Wick. The Development Planning and Enforcement teams are based at The Council Headquarters. The structure

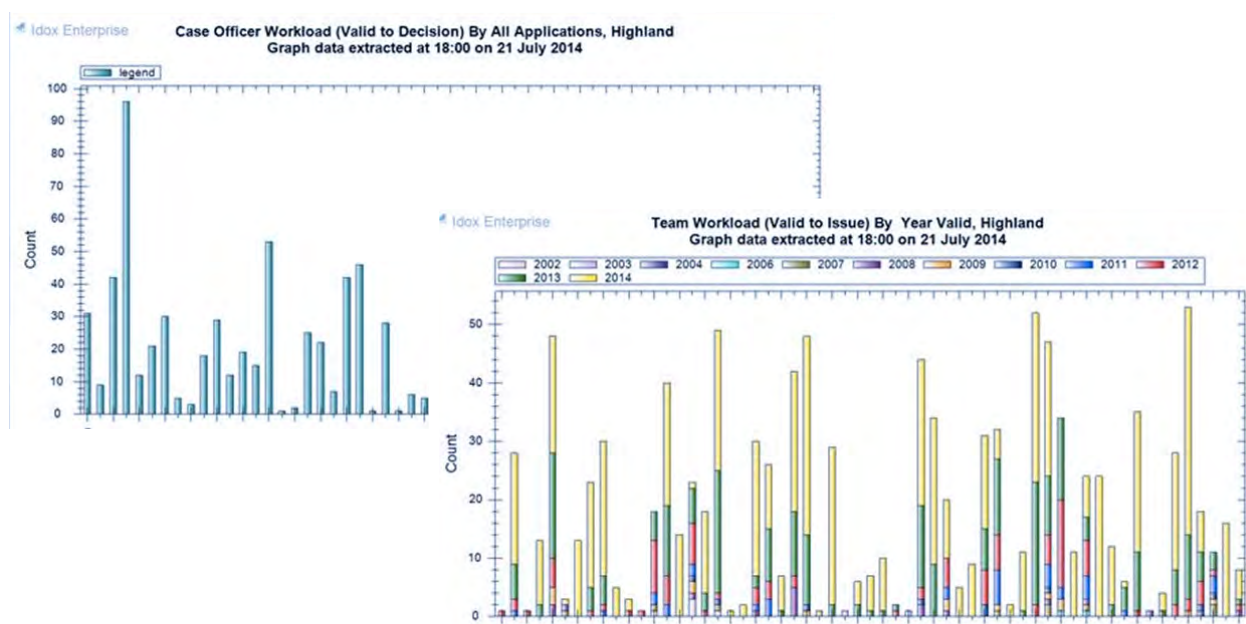
of our teams is set out in the appendix. When area offices have a high workload, cases are shared among other offices to maintain an efficient service and level of decision making. Our staff also work in whatever location is best suited to the needs of the business, to support this we provide a number of 'hot desks' in all of our offices.

One of the most significant developments during 2013/14 was the creation of a central Enforcement team, which is now taking a much more pro-active and structured approach to enforcement than was seen previously. This was partly funded through planning fee increases.

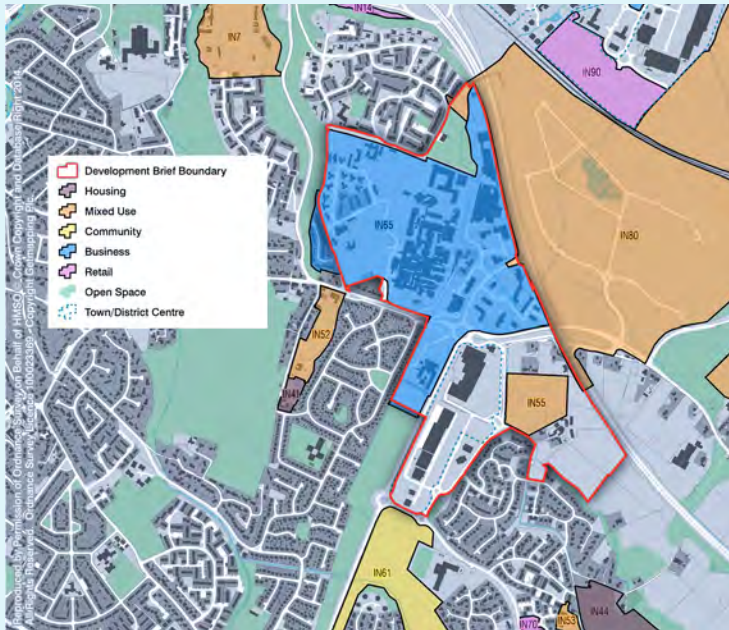
The Council's new Employee Review and Development (ERD) system has shaped the content of our comprehensive service-wide training plan that ensures our team have the skills necessary to meet existing and future needs of our business. Completed ERDs are analysed and results used to deliver tailored training.

During the last reporting period we introduced Idox Enterprise Graphs for Development Management to enable us to improve data quality for performance/management reporting. It has given us the ability to more closely monitor performance against reporting targets, like average time for processing major and local planning applications. This has led to improved management of performance, and in particular, determination of planning applications. During this reporting period we have been working on a further improvement project to implement the workload management and monitoring aspect of Enterprise. This is included within our Service Improvement Plan and will be launched in 2014/15 once we have moved our system applications across to a managed/ hosted service with Idox Plc. The hosting project has a funding commitment of £1M over five years.

We have collaborated closely to deliver joint objectives with other business areas within The Council, with neighbouring authorities, and with other public bodies. Regular cross-service liaison meetings are held within The Council. In particular we work closely with our housing colleagues and other social housing providers and attend regular housing development forum meetings. The Council also has an established Developer Contributions Working Group, members include Council Planning, Transportation, Education and Housing Officers.



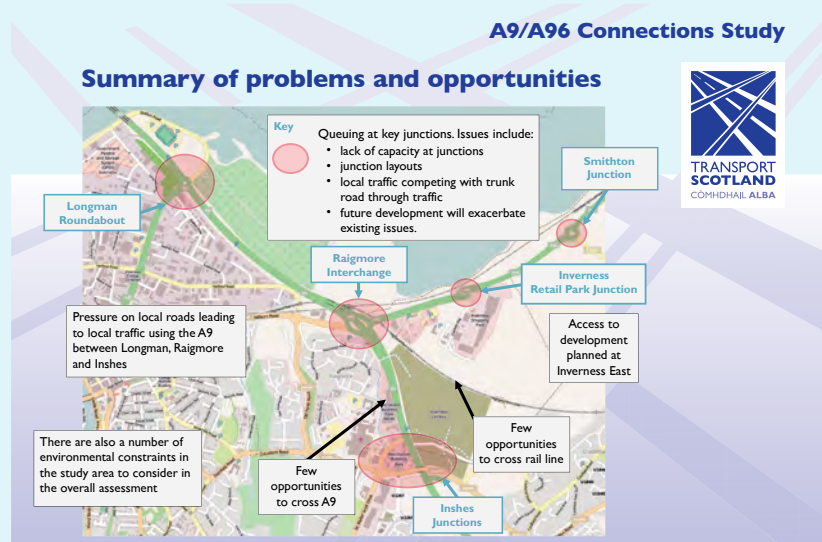
9 - Development Plans, Transport Planning and Transport Scotland partnership



It was essential to develop strong relationships with the Council's transport planning section and Transport Scotland in progressing interdependent plans for transport improvements, a flood scheme and land use changes in south and east Inverness. Transport Scotland were progressing the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Project Review commitment for an 'East Link', the A9/A96 Connections Study. The Council's transport planning section was aiming to relieve congestion and create capacity to accommodate future development and a flood scheme

in the Inshes and Raigmore areas of Inverness. The Council's Development Plans Team was delivering a commitment in the Highland-wide Local Development Plan to prepare a development brief for the same area.

The Council and Transport Scotland recognised the interdependence of the three projects, in particular issues affecting the road network, potential for development sites to be affected by new and/or realigned roads and by the flood scheme. We therefore collaborated to progress the projects. Regular design review meetings were held to ensure proposals were compatible with each other and met common objectives. Technical details were also shared, for example traffic modelling data. This allowed us to work together with Transport Scotland to prepare for a joint public consultation on the emerging options, including exhibitions in spring/summer 2014. These projects continue to progress and will be reported in our 2014/15 Planning Performance Framework.



We work closely with the Cairngorms National Park Authority where we share responsibility for determination of planning applications and other planning-related functions. We have also engaged in the preparation of development plans by neighbouring authorities including Moray Council and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

We continue to meet regularly with neighbouring local authorities to share best practice. We host the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum that brings together eight Local Authorities, including the two National Park Authorities, to share our planning knowledge, experience and best practice, and to deliver tailored training. Our Development Plans team liaise regularly with statutory and non-statutory consultees to share information and gain feedback on Plan preparation progress. Our Development Management teams have regular liaison with SEPA and SNH to gain better understanding of policies and procedures used in delivering an effective development management system. Within the service we also hold regular team meetings, and six-weekly team leader- manager meetings. Two meetings have been held with our benchmarking family, and we have shared a number of working documents, including our UNIFORM manual.

We continue to work in partnership with [Inverness BID](#) to identify plan-led solutions to specific issues within Inverness City Centre. We have also been engaged in joint working to prepare a joint consultation on our [Inshes and Raigmore Development Brief](#) alongside Transport Scotland's [A9/96 connections study](#) (more information on this is included in Case Study 9). We were also one of 15 Local Authorities that engaged in a [benchmarking exercise](#) with Heads of Planning Scotland to better understand the costs of running planning services.

Financial Management and Local Governance

The Planning and Development Service Plan identifies the key actions required to meet the Council's corporate objectives as set out in our Corporate Plan and the Programme for Administration.

We continue to utilise a Consultancy Framework contract in partnership with other local authorities in the north of Scotland. This contract allows call-offs to be made against three preferred suppliers. This has been used to deliver a range of work in the period 2013/14 but most notably allowed us to be able to react quickly to opportunities for funding from Scottish Government.

Planning fee increases have helped in providing additional resources to key areas of work where improvement has been required. As well as the set up of the new enforcement team, investment has been made in the major planning applications team and in the development plans team.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

We continue to strive to improve every aspect of our service, as evidenced by the improvement plan we set out for the 2013/14. The next section sets out how we performed against these targets in more detail.

As mentioned elsewhere in this Framework we are committed to Continuous Professional Development for our staff, elected members and community councils.

We have developed a service-wide training plan to address the needs of the service to ensure we can deliver the best planning service in Scotland.

During 2013/14 we held two planning training days where we brought together planners from across the Highland area and covered issues such as regulation changes, performance management, planning and wild land planning for hydro electric energy schemes (with attendance from SEPA).

Members of our Marine Spatial Planning Team collaborated with Orkney Islands Council to develop a CPD training exercise for colleagues working at the interface of marine and terrestrial planning, and this was delivered at the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum.

We encourage our team to attend external courses and conferences, for example, the Scottish Government EIA forums. We have supported our team through bespoke training, for example 12 Planners from across the service attended the Scottish Government's Drawing Places course in March 2013. We continue to support CPD of our team by working in partnership with the RTPi Highlands and Islands Chapter to deliver free events.

We are currently supporting four Graduate Planners through their RTPi Assessment of Professional Competence, and during the reporting period two members of our team were successful in becoming full RTPi members. All of our committee members received training on the Scottish Planning System during the reporting period, and new members received additional training.

Looking back at the Service Improvements we identified for 2013/14 we are proud of the progress made against the vast majority of these:

Open for Business

- **Deliver 100% of Major Pre-application packs within 4 weeks.**

100% of pre-application packs have been issued in 4 weeks. 31 packs were issued during 2012-13.

- **Deliver at least 80% of Local Pre-application packs within 6 weeks.**

67% of pre-application packs were issued within 4 weeks which falls short of the target set. The delivery of pre-application advice is very important and efforts are being made to ensure that improved performance is seen next year.

- **Ensure that all Major Development proposals are accompanied by Processing Agreements by end of June 2013.**

All planning applications for major developments have been offered Processing Agreements since June 2013. The vast majority of applicants have agreed to enter into these, and they now form a very important part of the service offered by the Council.

High Quality Development on the Ground

- **Prepare and publicise a presentation of high quality developments supported by the Service by March 2014.**

This is now complete, and will be an important input to the preparation of Planning Performance Framework 3, which will be submitted to Scottish Government in September 2014.

- **Prepare a Development Plans Scheme by April 2013 and prepare a progress report by September 2013.**

Development Plan Scheme prepared, reported to Committee and made available on the web-site. Regular updates are provided to Committee.

- **Prepare our Plan documents in line with the timescales set out in the Development Plan Scheme.**

Development Plans consultations and publications were prepared in line with the Development Plan Scheme although charrette-style public consultations on Development Briefs have led to slippage in the preparation of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (as set out in an earlier section). It is anticipated that this slippage will be caught up during the overall preparation timescales.

- **Deliver the actions within the Development Plan Action Programmes to the stated timescales.**

Actions are being delivered to stated timescales.

Certainty

- **Deliver at least 70% of Scoping Opinions within 5 weeks.**

Only 27% of scoping opinions were issued within 5 weeks (10/37), which is well short of the target response time. Options will be assessed to improve performance in dealing with scoping opinions, including looking at whether there should be one point of contact, developing protocols for consulting other services and agencies and assessing whether further training is required.

- **Deliver at least 60% of Screening Opinions within 21 days.**

40% were dealt with within 21 days, which, although short of the target, was a 10% improvement from the previous year. As above, options will be assessed to improve performance in this area.

- **Implement the Protocols for Enterprise Areas and deliver development to stated timescales.**

As set out in this document, all of the planning applications submitted within the Enterprise Areas were determined within the timescales set out in the protocol.

- **Put in place more effective Monitoring Systems for Development Plans (audits) during 2013/14).**

The Research and Information team has developed the monitoring database to ensure that information is readily available for development plans and general information requirements.

Communications, Engagement and Customer Services

- **Deliver Focus Groups for Planning across the Highland area during 2013/14.**

Focus Groups have been held throughout the Highland area, and feedback used to inform service improvements for this year.

- **Provide Community Council Planning training during 2013/14.**

We have held Community Council planning training throughout the Highland area during 2013/14. Some of the key issues that have been raised include potential changes to the format of weekly lists, the need for regular newsletters and the need to engage fully in the development plans process.

- **Provide evidence of efforts to engage with hard to reach groups during 2013/14.**

Emphasis this year has been on engagement with schools, ranging from primary to secondary. Specific engagement has been taking place in connection with the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan.

- **Carry out a comprehensive customer survey during 2013/ 14 and prepare an action plan from the results.**

Survey Monkey links at the bottom of e-mails have again been used to generate customer feedback. The action plan has not yet been completed and the intention is to carry out more structured feedback over the next year.

Efficient and Effective Decision Making

- **Achieve at least an average of 24 weeks for determination of major Planning Applications.**

The average time taken to deal with applications for major developments during 2013/14 was 31.6 weeks. Whilst this does not meet the target, there were a number of older legacy cases which were determined during the 2013/14 period which affected average times. It is more significant that 18 major applications (which do not form part of the official statistics) were dealt with by processing agreements, and 95% met the timeline agreed with the developer.

- **Achieve at least an average of 11 weeks for determination of local Planning Applications.**

The average time taken to deal with applications for local developments during 2013/14 was 10.6 weeks.

- **Achieve at least an average of 9 weeks for determination of Other Applications.**

The average time taken to deal with other applications was 10.8 weeks.

- **Determine at least 68% of all Planning Applications within 2 months.**

During 2013/14 70.7% of all applications were dealt with within 2 months, a 3% improvement on the previous year.

- **Determine at least 90% of Householder Planning Applications within 2 months.**

During 2013/14 88.9% of all applications were dealt with within 2 months, slightly up on the previous year. Whilst it is disappointing that the target was missed, the performance on householder planning applications is significantly better than the Scottish average and our own performance in 2011/12, when only 81% were dealt with in two months. The geography of the Highland area does pose some challenges in meeting this benchmark of 90%, but it is being retained for the 2014/15 period.

- **Determine at least 60% of Non Householder Planning Applications within 2 months.**

During 2013/14 62% of all Non householder planning applications were dealt with within 2 months, which is an improvement from 2012/13.

- **Put in place procedures to ensure that legal agreements are concluded within 4 months following a minded to grant decision.**

A [report](#) detailing new procedures was agreed by the PED Committee - the process still being implemented, and legacy cases are being addressed in a more structured way than previously.

Effective Management Structures

- **Ensure that all staff have Employee Review and Development Plans delivered by end August 2013.**

ERDs were completed and a Service Training Plan developed. Bespoke training courses have been delivered, tailored for the requirements identified within the process. This included bespoke training provided by an external supplier on conditions and enforcement.

Financial Management and Local Governance

- **Contribute to a national project on costs of delivering the Planning Service.**

Highland Council was one of 16 local authorities to take part in the costings project at the end of last year. The findings have been used to inform discussions with the Scottish Government on cost recovery for the planning process.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

- **Implement new Enforcement Charter by June 2013.**

A new Enforcement Charter has been prepared and published.

- **Prepare and implement a Validation Checklist for use by October 2013.**

The validation checklist was produced and is being used on an informal basis. Further development of the checklist is awaiting a national initiative.

- **Implement Development Management for Enterprise by March 2014.**

Work on the roll-out of Enterprise has been carried out and is complete. Capacity issues with IDOX are being addressed to allow use of the system to full capacity.

- **Implement the Uniform Module for Enforcement and new processes for Enforcement by December 2013.**

Enforcement processes have been overhauled and new arrangements put in place to help deliver a more efficient service.

- **Design and implement new systems for gathering, administering and analysing Development Plan responses by March 2014.**

The Council commissioned new web-based software for gathering Development Plan consultations known as Wufoo. The system was extremely efficient in gathering comments thanks to over 80% of comments being submitted online (through hyperlinks from an online version of the Plan) for the IMF Plan.

- **Carry out a benchmarking exercise with other rural Planning Authorities (Aberdeenshire; Dumfries and Galloway; Scottish Borders; Argyll and Bute) during 2013/14.**

Two benchmarking meetings have been held with the rural authorities benchmarking group, which has been expanded to mirror the SOLACE benchmarking families. These discussions have been administered by the Improvement Service and have allowed a structured discussion on performance statistics, regulatory changes and best practice across the group.

Supporting Evidence

In the preparation of this report we drew on a wide range of sources of information to review the performance of our Service. We utilised the following:

- Planning Service Customer Satisfaction Survey results
- Local and Major pre-application advice service feedback questionnaire results
- Results of the Heads of Planning Scotland benchmarking exercise on the costs of running a planning service in Scotland
- A broad range of Council committee reports
- Results of informal auditing and information-gathering by our Performance and Systems team, which are presented in the National Headline Indicators section and other sections of this report
- Various in-house reports, minutes and agendas for meetings and initiatives with our partners, evidenced as hyperlinks within the body of Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

The supporting evidence highlighted above is not an exhaustive list. We sought to fully integrate our evidence within the body of the text by providing hyperlinks to documents and webpages we refer to.

Service Improvements 2013-2014

The Service Improvement Plan for 2013/14 sets out our commitment to continuous improvement in service delivery. Many of the projects have arisen from discussions with customers, Scottish Government and with the input of Highland Council members.

Service Improvement Plan 2014/15

- We will prepare and publicise a presentation of high quality developments supported by the Service by March 2015.
- We will put in place a process for involving Members in providing input to pre-application advice for major developments.
- We will deliver Focus Groups for Planning and Building Standards across the Highland area during 2014/15.
- We will implement improvements to our means of engagement with Community Councils
- We will put in place a refreshed social media presence covering all aspects of planning and building standards and provide more engaging ways to communicate through our website.
- We will carry out a range of comprehensive customer surveys during 2014/15 and prepare an action plan from the results.
- We will ensure that all staff have Employee Review and Development Plans delivered and the Service Training Plan produced by end August 2014.

- We will put in place a managed hosted service for UNIFORM and the Document Management System.
- We will deliver improvement to the project management of consents required for Council projects to assist with the delivery of the overall Capital Programme
- We will put in place new arrangements for the handling and storage of planning application documents.
- We will fully implement Development Management for Enterprise by March 2015
- We will carry out a benchmarking exercise with other rural planning authorities during 2014/15.
- We will introduce performance management measures to monitor the delivery of Development Plans and associated audits and projects against timescales in the Development Plan Scheme and report progress through its annual review.
- We will put in place new project management arrangements for Development Plans to ensure delivery against timescales set out in the Development Plan Scheme.

Planning Performance Targets 2014/15

- We will deliver 100% of Major Pre-application packs within 4 weeks.
- We will deliver at least 70% of Local Pre-application packs within 6 weeks.
- We will achieve at least an average of 24 weeks for determination of major planning applications.
- We will achieve at least an average of 11 weeks for determination of local planning applications.
- We will achieve at least an average of 9 weeks for determination of Other applications.
- We will determine at least 70% of all Planning Applications within 2 Months.
- We will determine at least 90% of Householder Planning Applications within 2 Months .
- We will determine at least 62% of Non Householder Planning Applications within 2 Months.
- We will ensure that 100% of planning applications for major developments are offered Processing Agreements and a Case Review update within 6 weeks.

Appendix 1 - Official Statistics

Decision-making timescales

Category	Total number of decisions 2013-14	Average timescale (weeks)	
		2013-14	2012-13
Major developments	13	31.6*	29.4
Local developments (non-householder)	1792	12.2	15.0
● less than 2 months	62.4 (%)	7.1	6.8
● more than 2 months	37.6 (%)	20.8	26.3
Local developments (householder)	805	7.0	7.4
● less than 2 months	88.9 (%)	5.9	6.0
● more than 2 months	11.1 (%)	15.7	17.5
Major housing developments	1	80.3	51.9
Local housing developments	964	13.0	14.6
● less than 2 months	60.0 (%)	7.3	7.0
● more than 2 months	40.0 (%)	21.4	30.7
Major business and industry	2	16.1	14.7
Local business and industry	268	10.2	9.8
● less than 2 months	70.1 (%)	6.6	6.4
● more than 2 months	29.9 (%)	18.7	16.8
EIA developments			
● Local developments subject to EIA	0	0	28.2
● AMSCs (subject to EIA)	1	7.4	14.1
Other consents			
Listed building and conservation area	138	14.1	13.6
Advertisements	98	6.8	8.9
Hazardous substances	2	14.3	13.4
Other consents and certificates	112	8.2	6.0
Planning/legal agreements	51	32.5	36.1
Local reviews	21	14.8	10.0

*This average time relates only to those major applications (generally older ones) which did not have Processing Agreements to accompany them (13). 18 other major developments were dealt with by us, 95% of which met the target timescales agreed with the developer.

Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2013-2014		2012-2013	
		No.	%	No.	%
Local reviews	28	9.9	35.7	9	42.9
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	19	12.0	63.2	4	40

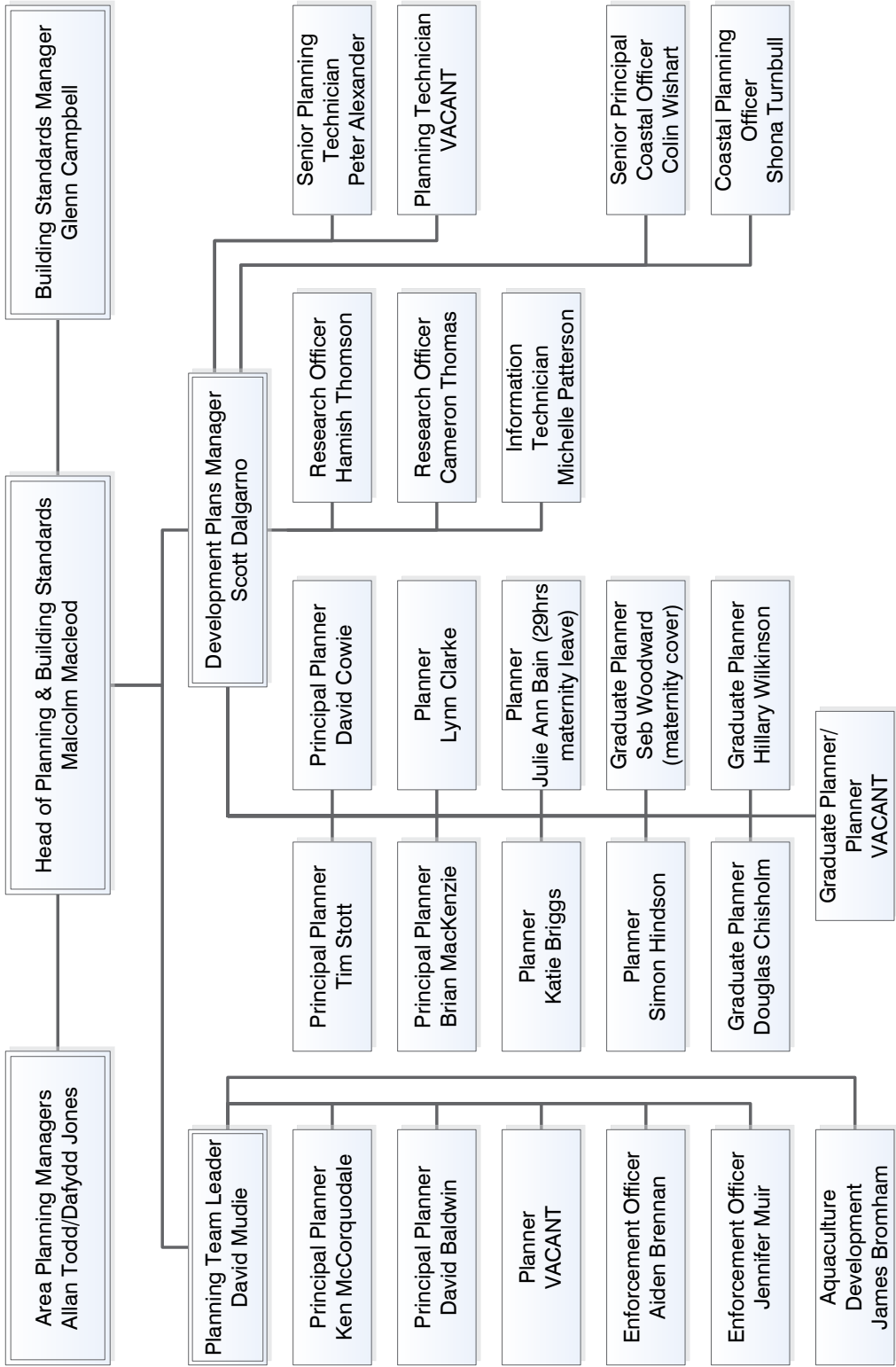
Enforcement activity

Activity	2013-14	2012-13
Cases taken up	249	139
Breaches identified	249	N/A
Cases resolved	120	N/A
Notices served	16	39
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	None	None
Prosecutions	None	None

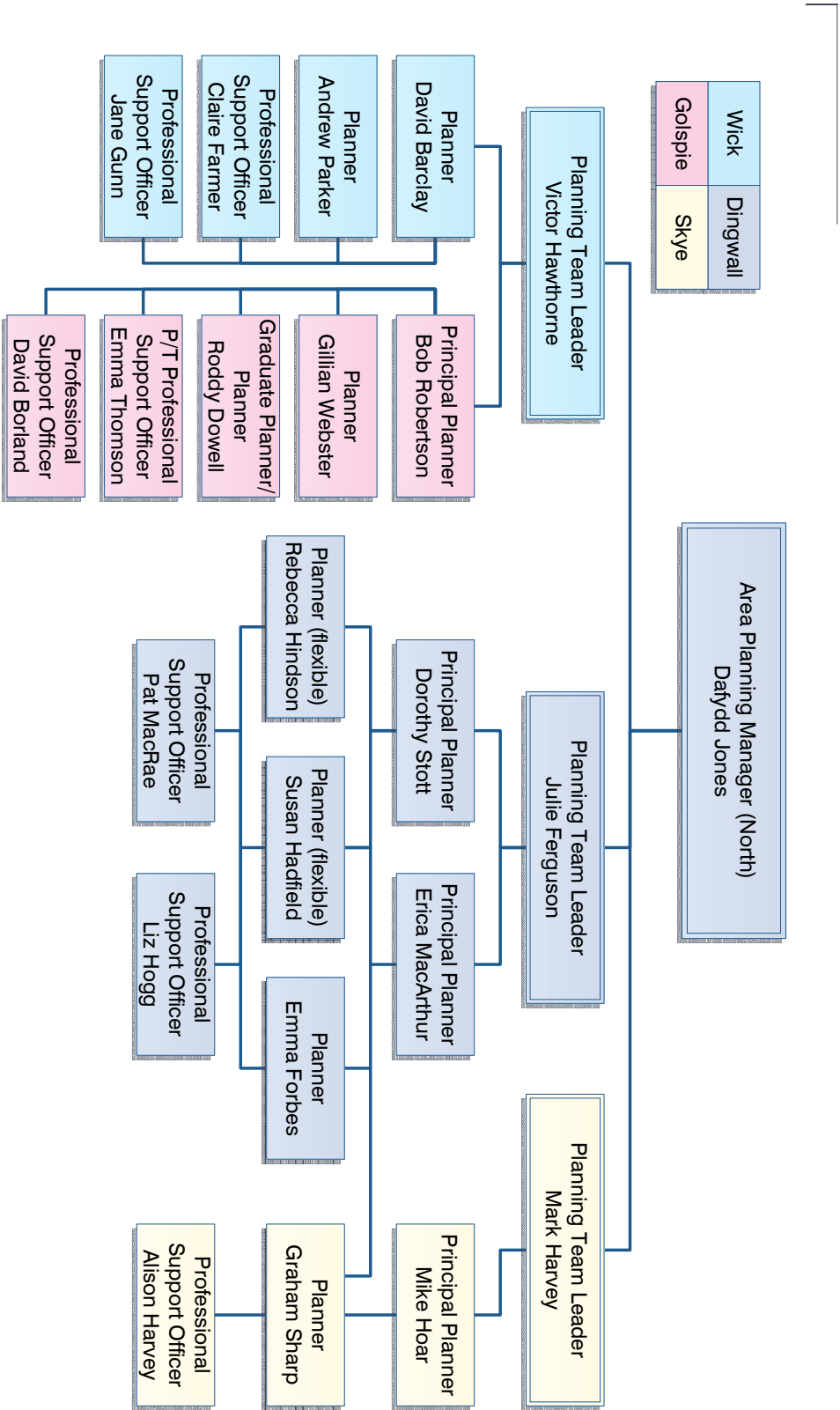
Appendix 2 - Workforce and Financial Information

Team structures

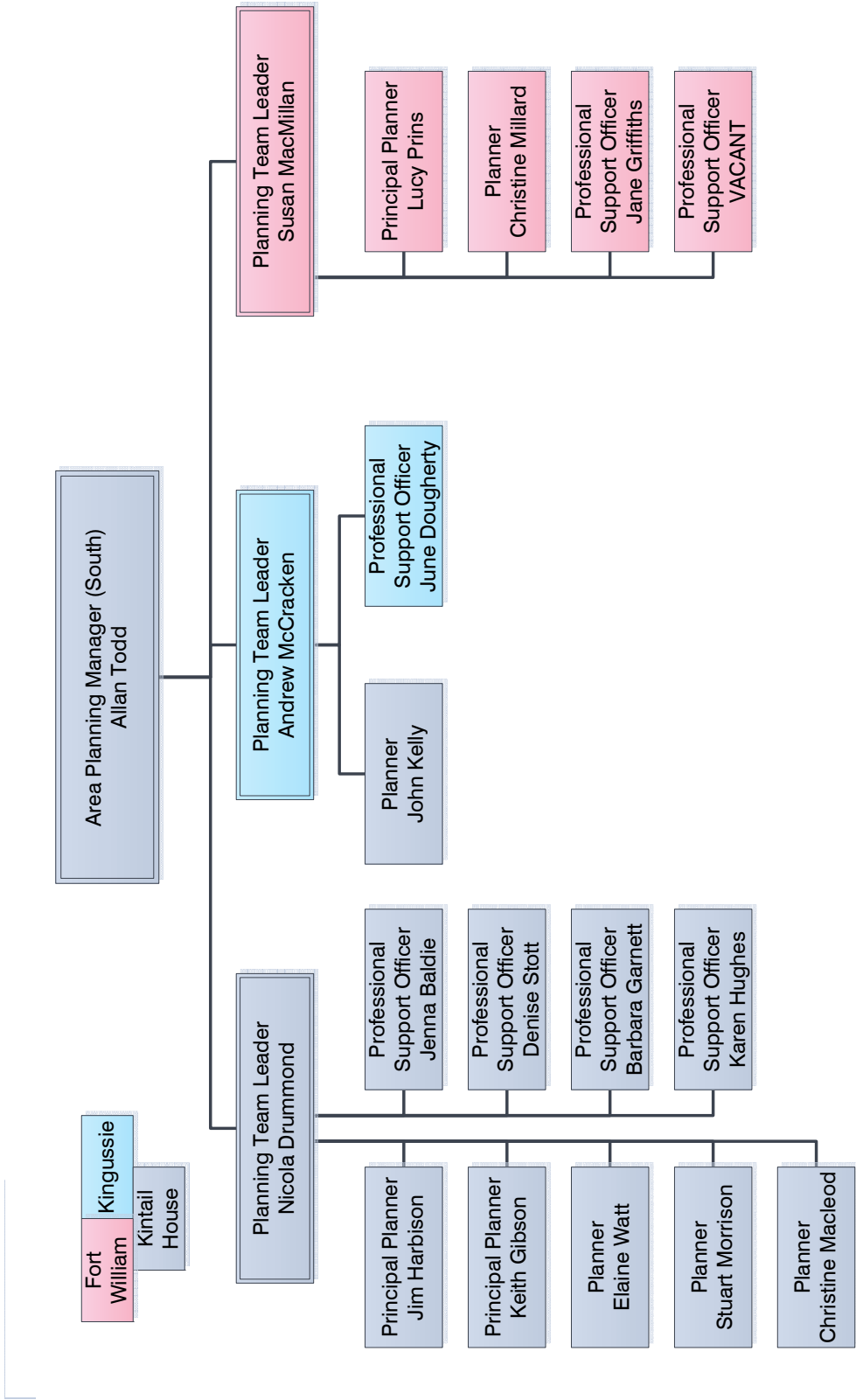
Planning and Development Service: Planning and Building Standards



Planning and Development Service: Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Skye and Lochalsh



Planning and Development Service: Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, Lochaber



Heads of Planning Service

	Chief Executive	Directors	Heads of Service	Managers
Head of Planning Service			X	

Staff Levels

Post/position		DM	DP	Enforce-ment	Other
Managers	Number of posts	3	1	0	0
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
Main grade posts	Number of posts	29	15	3	0
	Vacant	2	0	0	0
Technician	Number of posts	14	2	0	0
	Vacant	1	0	0	0
Office support/ clerical	Number of posts	12	2	0	0
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		61	20	3	0

Staffing profile

Staffing age profile	Number
Under 30	9
30-39	17
40-49	22
50 and over	16

Committees

Committees and site visits		Number per year
Full Council committees		7
Planning committees	Planning, Environment and Development Committee	5
	Planning Applications Committee (North)	11
	Planning Applications Committee (South)	9
Area committees	City of Inverness and Area Committee	6
	Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee	4
	Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey	3
	Lochaber	3
	Skye, Ross and Cromarty	2
Committee site visits		12
LRB		10
LRB site visits		4

Budget Information for 2013/14

Department	Total budget	Costs		Income
		No.	%	
Development Management	2.365m			
Development Planning	0.665m			
Enforcement				
Other				
TOTAL	£3.030m			£2.288m

