

Title of Report:	Planning Department Performance Annual Report 2022/2023
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	27 September 2023
For Decision or For Information	For Information
To be discussed In Committee YES/NO	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them
Lead Officer	Head of Planning

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil
Included in Current Year Estimates	
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	N/A	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:

1.0 Background

1.1 Schedule 4 of The Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 sets out the statutory performance targets for the Planning Department for major development applications, local development applications and enforcement cases and these are reflected in Council's Performance Improvement Plan 2022-23 and the Planning Department Business Plan 2022-2023.

1.2 The statutory targets are:

- Major applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks
- Local applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average of 15 weeks
- 70% of all enforcement cases progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

1.3 The Planning Department Business Plan KPIs are:

- Objective 1: Improve performance in relation to processing planning applications
 - Local applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average processing time of 18 weeks
 - Major applications: process those applications that have agreed solutions with NI Water through pre development enquiry prior to submission of formal application within an average processing time of 50 weeks
 - 70% of all enforcement cases progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.
 - reduce the number of planning applications in the system over 24 months by 15%
- Objective 2: Publish Council's draft Plan Strategy
 - Reviewed LDP Timetable published
 - Staff resources agreed
 - Workshops concluded in accordance with work programme
 - Policies agreed through Planning Steering Group
 - Present draft Plan Strategy to Council for ratification in accordance with published timetable
 - Draft Plan Strategy published in accordance with published timetable
 - Stable staff resources
 - Delivery of Training Plan
- Objective 3: to manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework
 - Reduction in number of temporary staff employed
 - Number of cases where Ombudsman determines maladministration is less than 0.4% of all decisions made.

1.4 The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics is an official statistics publication issued by Analysis, Statistics & Research Team, Department for Infrastructure. It provides the

official statistics for each Council on each of the statutory targets and is published quarterly and on an annual basis.

2.0 Detail

Website link 1

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-april-2022-march-2023> provides the link to the published bulletin for Q1-Q2 of 2022/23 business year. Due to the implementation of the new Planning Portal on 05 December 2022, reports are not currently available to publish accurate statistics for the remainder of this business year.

Objective 1: Improve performance in relation to processing planning applications

- 2.1 Table 1 below provides a summary of performance in relation to major development applications and local development applications for the 2022-23 business year as published in the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics 2022/23 Annual Statistical Tables.

Table 1: Planning Applications

2022/23	Major		Local		Total		Live	
	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Total	Over 12mths
Planning Applications	11	17	1,082	1,068	1,093	1,086	927	270 (29.1%)
Rank	7 th highest	2 nd highest	4 th highest	5 th highest	5 th highest	5 th highest	4 th highest	5 th highest
Average Processing Times	46.4 weeks		21.2 weeks					
Rank	1 st fastest		7 th fastest					
Approval Rate	100%		95.9%		96%		5 th highest	

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics 2022/23 Annual Statistical Tables

KPI1: Local applications processed average processing time of 18 weeks

- 2.2 In the 2022/23 business year, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council received the 1,082 local category of planning applications and determined 1,068 applications to decision/ withdrawal. The average processing time taken to process from date valid to decision of 21.2 weeks did not meet the Business Plan KPI of 18 weeks. The KPI was met in Q1 and Q2 however, within the implementation of the new Planning Portal in December 2022 and the closure of the existing system 2 weeks prior to the go-live of the new system the performance in Q3 dropped significantly and recovered in Q4 to 20.2 weeks resulting in an overall performance below the KPI target at 21.2 weeks, similar to 5 other Local Authorities whose average processing time for local

applications was also in the 21 week range. Approval rate for local applications was above the Northern Ireland average. Work continues with statutory consultees to agree Standing Orders with the aim to reduce consultations on planning applications to assist on improving processing times. Discussions are at an advanced stage with NI Water and DfC HED.

KPI2: Major applications: process those applications that have agreed solutions with NI Water through pre development enquiry prior to submission of the formal application within an average processing time of 50 weeks.

2.3 Improvement in the average processing times for major category of applications continued from the previous year, processing more applications to decision/withdrawal than the previous business year and in a time 8.2 weeks faster than the previous business year at 46.4 weeks achieving the KPI target and edging closer to meet the statutory target of 30 weeks. This average processing time was the fastest out of all 11 Councils and 11.4 weeks faster than the Northern Ireland average.

2.4 Staff resources were impacted during the business year through resignation and sickness. Recruitment of Senior Planning Officer grade completed and staff in post by beginning of Q2. Planning Assistant posts were temporary filled by agency staff by end of Q3 however, 2no. vacant Planning Officer posts remained in Q3 and Q4 due to difficulty recruiting agency staff.

KPI3: 70% of all enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

2.5 The business plan KPI and the statutory target to progress 70% of all enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint have not been reported on in this business year due to the implementation of the new Planning Portal and the requirement to fix a number of elements within the Enforcement module to enable the extraction of the necessary information in a reliable format. From information available the number of live cases has increased slightly from 423 live cases on 31 March 2021 to 463 cases at the end of this business year. As stated above, progression of enforcement cases was impacted by staff resources. Senior Officer post was filled at beginning of Q2.

KPI4: Reduce number of planning applications in the system over 24 months by 15%

2.6 The number of planning applications in the system over 24 months at the end of 2022/23 business year was 75 of which 60% of these issued by the end of March 2023. However, a further 55 applications entered this timeframe over the year resulting in a total of 85 planning applications in the system over 24 months at the end of March 2023, an increase of 13% from end of 2021/22 business year to end of 22/23 business year. Of note, at the end of Q1 the number of over 24 months applications decreased to 70 applications but increased at end of Q2 to 85 applications. By end of November, just prior to go-live of the new Planning Portal, the number of over 24 months applications was reduced to 78, indicating progress in the drive to reduce the number of these older applications in the system. Unfortunately, due to the bedding in of the new system and the reduction in the

number of decisions issued in Q3 (due to the 2 week down-time prior to go-live) and Q4 (due to the bedding in of the new system), and vacant posts, the number of applications in the system over 24 months increased again to 85. However,

KPI5: Stable Staff Resource

- 2.7** Recruitment of staff to fill vacant posts at various grades was undertaken during the business year with limited success. The business year commenced with 1 vacant Senior Planning Officer post due to resignation. Appointment of the permanent Senior Planning Officer was concluded in the middle of Q2. However, a further temporary vacant post at Senior Officer grade occurred at end of Q2 and 2no. Planning Assistant posts Attempts to recruit agency staff at Planning Officer grade to cover temporary vacant posts were unsuccessful, and a further vacant post at despite continuous effort. At the end of the business year 2no. Planning Officer posts remained vacant with resultant impact on caseloads of existing staff and performance. The recruitment of staff to cover temporary posts remains a pressure.

KPI6: Reduction in staff caseloads

- 2.8** The year commenced well with caseloads maintained at the beginning of the year with the exception of the Single Rural dwellings Team which experienced a significant increase in caseloads due to a vacant post mid-way through the year as a result of a resignation within the team. Due to difficulty recruiting a planning Officer to fill this post, resulted in the case load of the vacant post being distributed amongst the remainder of this team from end Q2. As a result, caseloads within this team are extremely high impacting on the ability to deliver a quality and timely service. The other marked increase in caseloads was in the other DEA teams due to staff sickness and vacant post at Planning Officer grade. As a result, by the end of the business year, staff caseloads overall had increased with 7 staff experiencing caseloads above that considered reasonable to manage at Planning Officer grade.

KPI7: Delivery of Training Plan

- 2.9** Training identified by staff was delivered over the business year. Staff availed of specialist training in urban and rural design, environmental governance, validation, consultation and enforcement-related training. Training was also provided for the operation of the new Planning Portal. Informal on-the-job training was also delivered by Senior Managers to their team.

Objective 2: To publish Council's draft Plan Strategy

KPI8: Reviewed LDP Timetable published

- 2.10** The reviewed LDP Timetable was drafted but did not publish as the council meeting held on 01 November 2022 did not ratify the draft Plan Strategy. As a result further workshops were carried out with Members on the draft Plan Strategy and the Timetable remains on hold until such times as there is certainty over the date for publication of the draft Plan Strategy.

KPI9: Staff resources agreed

- 2.11** A new Planning officer has joined the team to replace the vacant post due to resignation. No further staff resources have been identified as necessary at this time. The services of external consultants to undertake Sustainability Appraisal has been undertaken with Shared Environmental Services.

KPI10: Policies agreed through Planning Steering Group for draft Plan Strategy

- 2.12** Policies contained within the draft Plan Strategy were agreed through the Planning Steering Group on 27 January 2022 and 26 May 2022. It was also presented and agreed at planning Committee meetings held 23 February 2022 and 22 June 2022..

KPI11: Present draft Plan Strategy to Council for ratification in accordance with published Timetable

- 2.13** The draft Plan Strategy was present to Council for ratification at the Council meeting held on 01 November 2022. Council resolved to hold further workshops to discuss the content of the draft Plan Strategy.

KPI12: draft Plan Strategy published in accordance with published Timetable

- 2.14** As a result of the resolution of the full Council at its meeting held on 01 November 2022, the draft Plan Strategy was not published in accordance with the published Timetable.

KPI13: Stable Staff resource

- 2.15** The Development Plan Team has retained a stable resource throughout the business year. Vacant post as a result of resignation was filled through the extant list of successful candidates for Planning Officer grade.

KPI14: Delivery of Training Plan

- 2.16** Training was delivered as requested by staff to include Sustainability Appraisals, how to operate the new Planning Portal as well as informal training by Senior Officers on retailing, settlement appraisals, annual monitors and GIS.

Objective 3: To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework

KPI15: Reduction in number of temporary staff

- 2.17** The Planning Department commenced the year with 5 agency staff covering a mixture of 3 FTC posts, a long-term sick leave post and maternity leave post. By 31 March 2023 this had reduced to 3 Agency staff. This was largely due to difficulty recruiting agency staff to cover temporary vacant posts at Planning officer grade.

KPI16: Number of cases where Ombudsman determines maladministration is less than 0.4% of all decisions made

- 2.18** The Planning Department successfully met this KPI. Over the business year, of the planning application decisions issued and enforcement cases closed, there were no cases where the Ombudsman determined maladministration.
- 2.19** A copy of the 2no. cases from the previous business year relating to enforcement investigations and referred to in the 2021/22 Annual Report are available to view on the NIPSO website via the following links <https://nipso.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Case-Ref-201915620-21863-Final-investigation-report.pdf> and <https://nipso.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Final-14740-PDF.pdf>

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Planning Committee note the Planning Department's Annual Report for 2022/23.