

Title of Report:	Third Quarterly Report on Planning Performance
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	27 April 2022
For Decision or For Information	For Information

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	

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.

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 Northern Ireland Planning Statistics is an official statistics publication issued by Analysis, Statistics & Research Team within 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. The Third Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin was published on 31 March 2022 providing planning statistics for this period. It also provides a summary of Council progress across the three statutory targets.

2.0 Details

Website link 1

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-october-december-2021> provides the link to the published bulletin.

Development Management Planning Applications

2.1 Table 1 below provides a summary of performance in relation to the statutory targets for major development applications and local development applications for the year-to-date (April – December) of 2021-22 business year and provides a comparison of performance against all 11 Councils.

2.2 The number of planning applications received Q1-Q3 of 2021-22 has increased by 98 when compared with the same period last year. The number of decisions has also increased by 296 decisions when compared to the same period last year. This is largely due to the reduction in applications and decisions issued in Q1 of 2020-21 due to the pandemic. The knock-on effect from the drop in decisions issuing in 2020-21 has resulted in an increase in the number of applications in the system over 12 months. The approval rate has increased from 95.6% to 96.2% when comparing Q1-Q3 of 2020-21 to Q1-Q3 of 2021-22.

2.3 The Planning Department continues to issue the 2nd highest number of major planning applications and continues to issue these decisions faster than the Northern Ireland average in an improved average processing time of 51.4 weeks, 27.9 weeks faster than the same period last year with 100% approval rate. This continues the significant improvement in performance in assessing major planning applications by

the Department over this business year. The number of major planning applications received remains the same as that received for the same period last year, receiving the 7th highest number of major planning applications year to date when compared to the other 10 Councils.

- 2.4** Almost 100 (98) more local applications were received in Q1-Q3 of 2021-22 and almost 300 (295) decisions issued when compared to the same period last year. The Planning Department sits mid-rank in relation to local category of planning applications both received and decided year-to-date. Improvement is maintained on the average processing times with approval rates 2.8% above the Northern Ireland average and 5th highest out of the 11 Councils.
- 2.5** Of the types of applications received, this Council received the 3rd highest number of residential applications out of the 11 Councils and 2nd highest number of change of use applications in Q3.
- 2.6** The impact of the reduced number of decisions issued in 2020/21 due to restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic continues to have a knock-on effect in relation to live applications and the number of applications in the system over 12 months. Although progress has been made to reduce the number of live applications in the system when compared to Q2, the number of those in the system over 12 months increased from 206 at the beginning of the year to 253 year-to-date. The target set out in the Planning Department Business Plan to reduce the over 12 month applications will not be achieved and focus for 2022/23 will be to focus on reducing the number of older applications in the system whilst balancing this with the need to continue to reduce the average processing times for issuing decisions.
- 2.7** Recruitment of staff within development management section is almost complete. It is hoped that with stability in the staffing resources this will assist in reducing the number of live applications and older applications in the system in the next business year.

Table 1: YTD Planning Applications Statistics

2021/22	Major		Local		Total		Live	
YTD	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Total	Over 12mths
Planning Applications	6	11	963	934	969	945	919	253 (27.5%)
Rank (highest)	7th	2nd	5th	5th	5th	5th	4th	2nd (%)
Average Processing Times	51.4 weeks		18.4 weeks					
Rank (highest)	6th		9th					
Approval Rate	100%		96.1%		96.2%		5th Rank	

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Third Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

Enforcement

- 2.8** Table 2 below shows statistics in relation to enforcement year to date at end of Q3 of 2021/22 business year. The Enforcement Team continues to meet the statutory target to conclude 70% of cases within 39 weeks, improving performance to increase the percentage of cases concluded within the 39 week statutory target when compared to the same period last year. At end of Q3, the enforcement team continues to have the highest number of prosecutions and has also the highest number of convictions out of the 11 Councils. Of the cases closed, 31% were closed due to no breach occurring, 26% were considered not expedient to pursue, 20% were remedied/resolved and 18% were closed due to the granting of planning permission.
- 2.9** However, the number of cases closed and concluded is lower than most Councils largely due to instability of staffing within the enforcement section. Unfortunately, it will be Q2 of the new business year before the staffing within the enforcement section will be stabilised through the appointment of a permanent Planning Assistant and recruitment of a permanent Senior Planning Officer to fill the post due to be vacated in Q4 of 2021-22.

Table 2: YTD Enforcement Statistics

2021/22	Open	Closed	Conclude	Conclusion Times	Court Action	
YTD				70% within 39wks	Prosecutions	Convictions
Cases	245	179	157	77.1%	20	6
Rank (highest)	5 th	8 th	9 th	7 th	1 st	1 st

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Third Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

Other Activity by Planning Department

- 2.10** Table 3 below indicates the level of other activity carried out by the Planning Department year to date at end of Q3 of 2021-22 business year.
- 2.11** In addition to the formal applications received, YTD at end of Q3 the Planning Department received 177 other types of applications relating to planning applications. The high number of discharge of conditions received is a good indicator of the imminent commencement of development. The number of PANs is also a good indicator of the number of major applications likely to be submitted. These two types of 'other activity' indicates a strong interest in investment in this Council area.

Table 3: YTD Other Activity

YTD 2021/22	Received	Rank (highest)
Discharge of Conditions	69	4 th
Certificate of Lawful Development	39	9 th
Pre Application Discussions	30	5 th
Non Material Change	25	11 th
TPOs	4	7 th
Pre Application Notice	10	6 th
Total	177	

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Third Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

Income

- 2.12** Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the income generated by the Planning Department in Q1-Q3 of 2021-22. Income (including Property Certificates) exceeds that predicted for this period by 7%.

Table 4: Income

YTD 2021/22	Received
Planning Applications	£928.8k
Property Certificates	£96.1k
Total	£1,024.9k

Source: Unvalidated Statistics – Internal Reports

Conclusion

- 2.13** In conclusion, performance within the Planning Department continues to steadily improve. The enforcement team continue to meet the statutory target for conclusion of cases. However, due to workload pressures the number of cases brought to a conclusion is lower than most other Councils. With the recruitment of the Planning Assistant to fill the vacant post this will assist in the output of this team. However, monitoring is required to ensure caseloads are reduced to a manageable level.
- 2.14** The knock-on effect from the dip in decisions issuing in 2020/21 continues to impact the number of applications in the system over 12 months. Whilst staff vacancies reduce, the aim is to maintain this performance in Q4 to achieve the Planning Department Business Plan targets for local and major planning applications and continue to meet the statutory target for concluding enforcement cases.
- 2.15** Focus for Q4 is to maintain the improvement in the average processing times for both major and local applications and meet the statutory target for concluding enforcement cases. An action plan to deal with over 12 month applications will be required going forward to address this increasing concern. Continual monitoring of caseloads will ensure that workloads are maintained at a manageable level to assist in continuing improvement in performance.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Planning Committee note the Planning Departments Third Quarterly Statistical Report.