

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Enterprise, Strategic Planning and Infrastructure
DATE	4 th September 2014
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Planning Performance Framework 3 – 2013-14
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/14/233

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the draft Planning Performance Framework (PPF) for 2013-14 which requires to be submitted to the Scottish Government prior to 30 September 2014. It should be noted that the report does not currently include a full list of reference documents and supporting information which will be compiled in time to be submitted with the final document.

The draft PPF is included as Appendix 1 to this report. Last year's report is available on the Council's website.

Annual PPF reports are currently required by the Scottish Government to be prepared in the autumn. They compare performance levels over past years across the planning service of the Council and seek to provide a focus for incremental improvements in performance for the Council's Planning Service as a whole.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee note the draft PPF for the City Council's Planning Service for submission to the Scottish Government. This includes an action plan of service improvements planned for the coming year that included separately for information in Table 1 in Part 5 of this report.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The production of an annual PPF report is an integral part of the planning service function and as such is accounted for in budgets and work programmes.

The Government has recently increased planning application fees but has made it clear that a condition of that increase is that planning authorities demonstrate a sustained improvement in performance. Whilst the PPF takes a holistic approach to measuring performance the Government's key focus is on the average timescales for determining planning applications. Authorities that do not demonstrate an improved performance may have the fee levels that they are entitled to charge reduced by the Scottish Government.

The content of the attached PPF (Appendix 1) clearly demonstrates that performance levels associated with the speed of processing and determining planning applications continue to be below national targets and have been particularly affected by the upsurge in development proposals across the city in recent years. It is considered that in order to address the level of performance being experienced additional resources are required within the Planning and Sustainable Development Service, particularly in Development Management, Roads Projects and Application Support teams.

A business case for additional resources, financed from planning application fee income, is currently being prepared, which will set out actions considered as being required to improve performance.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Continuous improvements are required by the Scottish Government, particularly in those areas identified above and annual feedback is provided on the submitted PPF documents. The PPF process records year on year areas where progress is being made or where actions are required. These matters will be reviewed at regular intervals such that areas requiring action are identified and service improvements undertaken. Clearly action is required to address the performance issues set out within the PPF.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

Feedback received from the Scottish Government on the PPF for 2012-13 was generally positive but identified a number of areas where improvements were required. A report setting out that feedback was presented to members at the ESP&I Committee in January 2014. To summarise that feedback, within the otherwise positive response received one area stood out and was recognised as requiring to be addressed urgently, being: decision making timescales on planning applications, which had slowed in comparison with the 2011-12 PPF figures. At that time steps were to be taken to deal with this issue, both in terms of changing practices and in staff recruitment. However, significant increases in workload during the reporting period have

compounded these performance issues. Latest figures for Q1 of 2014 show yet further increases in workloads.

In the past year the figures show that the average time for determining both major applications and householder applications has increased slightly when compared to 2012-13. From 87.8 to 88.6 weeks in the case of major applications and from 9.8 to 10.0 weeks in the case of householder application. These figures do not compare well to the Scottish averages of 53.8 weeks for major applications and 7.7 weeks for householder developments. It should be noted, however that figures are distorted by a small number of legacy applications from before 2009. If these are removed from the figures then the figure for major applications is a much more respectable 34.6 weeks.

The PPF 2013-14 before this Committee seeks to address these performance issues and it is anticipated that this will drive an improvement of performance over the coming year. It should also be noted that the Scottish Government has the ability to reduce fee levels if planning authorities do not demonstrate improvements in performance and this is a risk for future years if the measures specified in PPF 2013-14 are not implemented.

It is recommended that the Committee note the draft PPF for the City Council's Planning Service for submission to the Scottish Government. This includes an action plan of service improvements planned for the coming year that included separately for information below:

<u>TABLE 1</u>
<u>PPF Action Plan</u>
Local Development Plan Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain Council approval for the ALDP Proposed Plan and submit it for Examination by Scottish Ministers. • Continue to monitor the infrastructure constraints to the delivery of development through the ALDP Action Programme and, where appropriate, instigate Action Programme Delivery Days with developers and relevant key agencies to overcome barriers.
Environmental Policy Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that computerised application system can accommodate environmental consultations as described in the communications, engagement and customer service section in Part 2 above • Ensure that tree protection measures arising from planning conditions are more effective by specifying more rigorous protection in the conditions and by monitoring that the measures are in place before development commences
Development Management (Applications) Team

- Carry out a comprehensive project managed review of resourcing, procedures and information systems in relation to the application administration and consider and implement any recommendations of the review
- Consider reconfiguring team structure/new ways of working in accordance with new structure of P&SD and to address current staff resource including recruitment of new staff and introduction of Major Projects team
- Introduce a Pre-application forum for Councillors to discuss major development proposals at the pre-application stage in line with Scottish Government guidance
- Continue the programme of continuous improvement of the information systems with the aim of improving efficiency, effectiveness and customer service focussing on;
 - web site improvements implemented through an inter-service focus group and assisted by a newly recruited web developer to enable amongst other things real time tracking of application progress and a map based application search and planning alerts facility
 - recording of pre-application enquiries/discussions
 - electronic workflow and mail monitoring
 - full implement electronic payment (phone payment by credit/debit card)
- Implement a programme of measures to address application determination speed including
 - an update and streamlining Processing Agreement template and guidance and
 - a procedure for reconsideration of applications with legal agreements within 6 months of “willingness to approve”
- Continue to work together with the Community Council Forum to finalise a concordat and planning training

Masterplanning, Design and Conservation Team

- Develop a City Centre Masterplan and Delivery Programme including:
 - Co-ordinating procurement of multi-disciplinary team
 - Working with key partners and external agencies
 - Ensuring effective public engagement and ownership of the masterplan
 - Co-ordinate the preparation of detailed phased masterplans supporting development frameworks for Countesswells, Newhills and Grandhome
 - Develop a masterplan for a new harbour at Nigg Bay with Aberdeen Harbour Board
 - Introduce a design surgery to support development management application assessment
 - Review the Design Review Panel remit, membership and operations
 - Develop detailed design policy to support the ALDP
 - Complete appraisals for 4 conservation areas
 - Old Aberdeen, Pitfodels, Cove and Footdee
 - Continue IHBC accreditation training
 - Continue to support the Aberdeen City Heritage Trust

6. IMPACT

Community Plan – The themes of PPF fit well with the two main aims of Community Planning which are described as: making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them; allied to a commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing better public services.

Single Outcome Agreement – The improvement of planning performance will support the aims of outcomes 1, 2, 10, 12, 14, and in particular 15 which relates to high quality, continually improving and efficient public services which are responsive to local people's needs.

5 year Corporate Business Plan – The PPF recognises the priorities of Aberdeen City Council and takes account of budgets. It also recognises the skills, expertise and experience the Council needs, and that staff are our most important asset. In terms of business planning, long term planning and review of past years means that planning can occur in anticipation of external pressures on service delivery. In terms of the priorities stated for 2012-13 the PPF particularly supports Aberdeen's 'Smarter Economy', which works towards ensuring the economic future of the city. Additionally it assists in maintaining financial stability through the elements identified in the business plan: achieving financial targets; using priority based budgeting to guide service delivery; engaging with staff, the public, businesses, local communities, the voluntary sector and partners in service delivery; seeking more ways to work with the community; and working with the

Scottish Government and COSLA to achieve funding which affects the contribution the city makes to the Scottish and UK economy.

EP&I Service Plan – The PPF seeks to support the priorities and outcomes of the service plan by: encouraging future economic and business development; delivering an up to date development plan for the city; protecting and enhancing our high quality natural and built environment; delivering our statutory responsibilities effectively and efficiently; ensure that the ACSEF strategic priorities in relation to the city are developed; facilitate the continuous improvement of service delivery; and engage effectively with our partners, stakeholders, service users and staff.

Interest to the Public – The PPF aims to facilitate a high quality service that meets peoples' needs and makes a visible difference to the quality of the city's urban and natural environment by promoting high quality development and providing an effective infrastructure to make Aberdeen a world class strategic location.

This report is seeking agreement to undertake further work to improve performance and there is no impact on equalities and human rights resulting from this report.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Failure to address the decision making timescales on planning applications could lead to the slowing of delivery of development across the City and a reduced level of quality both in decision making and development on the ground; additionally it is likely that the Scottish Government will make further negative feedback in relation to the lack of progress in this particular area. There is the risk of a reduction in fee levels in subsequent years. These factors represent a Hazard and Control Risk to the Council. In contrast, increased resources will facilitate a high quality service that meets people's needs and makes a visible difference to the quality of the city's urban and natural environment by promoting high quality development and providing an effective infrastructure to make Aberdeen a world class strategic location.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning Performance Framework – Scottish Government Guidance Notes 2013-14:

[See the details](#) here

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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