

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Planning Development Management
DATE	16 July 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Planning Performance Framework 2014-15
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/15/240
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an introduction to the Council's draft Planning Performance Framework (PPF) 2014-15 which is included as Appendix 1 to this report and is also available via this weblink:

[PPF 2014-15](#)

Last year's report is available on the Council's website at

[PPF 2012-13](#)

All Scottish Councils are required to submit their annual PPF reports to the Scottish Government by 31st July 2015. The PPF reports on the performance of the entire planning service of the Council across a range of qualitative and quantitative performance indicators for the period 31 March 2014 to 1 April 2015. It is designed to be a focus for the continuous improvement of the service as a whole.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee note, and take the opportunity to comment on, performance levels and service improvements that have taken place during 2014-15 and approve PPF and action plan that is proposed for the coming year for submission to the Scottish Government.

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.

In 2014 the Scottish Government increased planning application fees whilst making it clear that a condition of that increase was that planning authorities demonstrated a sustained improvement in performance.

Planning fee income has increased slightly from £1.41 million in 2013-14 to £1.44 million in 2014-15.

Whilst the PPF takes a holistic approach to measuring performance the Government's key focus is on the average timescales for determining planning applications. Legislation was passed in 2013 that gives the Scottish Government the ability to reduce the fee levels of local authorities that are not demonstrating an improved performance - the so called "penalty clause".

The Scottish Government has recently confirmed that the penalty clause will not be invoked this year – with planning authorities to be assessed on their performance for 2015-16. This is because Scottish Government wants the administration of the penalty clause to be as transparent as possible and the delay will give it time to communicate the final assessment process to authorities and allow them further time to make any necessary improvements.

The content of the attached PPF (Appendix 1) shows that there has been a significant improvement in the determination times for major applications, with average times halving this last year compared with the previous one. However, there has been slight slippage in performance levels associated with the speed of processing and determining local and householder planning applications and it is imperative that these are a priority focus of attention over the coming year.

Since May 2015 the Development Management Team has been fully staffed for the first time, but a strong case can be made for additional staff resource if required during the course of the coming year. Furthermore procedures are being put in place to improve performance as detailed in the attached PPF report. On 9 June 2015 Finance Policy and Resources Committee gave approval for funding of a new application casework management system and electronic document management system that will enable considerable efficiencies to be made in procedures and processes, not least by enabling full electronic workflow.

With the foregoing in mind it is expected that performance will improve this year and that the penalty clause can be avoided.

The production of the next Local Development Plan remains on target, with the Proposed Plan being published for a 10-week public consultation between March and June 2015. Therefore the next LDP remains on course to be adopted in 2016. The established housing

land supply has remained broadly similar to the figure for 2013-14, as has the 5-year effective land supply which continues to show a healthy land supply in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area. In Aberdeen City, only a small number of new housing sites (of five units and over) have come forward this year. Progress has been made as expected on most existing sites with completions remaining broadly in line with figures from the last five years. There have been no significant changes to the proportion of effective and constrained sites.

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

Performance

The focus of effort in the last year has been to prioritise improvements to the speed and efficiency of dealing with major development applications in response to average determination times that were below the Scottish average in 2013-14 and the consequent identification of this as being in the now “red” category in the Scottish Government’s Annual Planning Performance Report. Determination times have improved from 88.6 weeks in 2013-14 to 47.6 weeks in 2014-15 – a figure that, whilst still very much a focus for further attention, is now better than the Scottish average for 2013-14. It is considered that the recruitment of additional senior level staff (including two experienced Senior Planners) and more of a focus on project management by case officers, systematically monitored by Team Leaders, has had a significant bearing on this improvement which is expected to continue as recently recruited staff gain workload and experience.

Conversely, there has been a small increase in the average determination time for local and Householder development applications. Factors that contributed to this decline in performance include:

- clearing of legacy cases – 48 in the year
- a period of unprecedented turnover of staff in the Application Support Team which has significantly slowed down the validation process
- a very significant increase in the number of Local Review Body cases (from 7 to 25) combined with the introduction of pre-application forum meetings (27 proposals considered in the year) in line with a Scottish

Government requirement/best practice: both of which have demanded considerable staff resource.

- planning officer level vacancies in the applications team which have only recently been filled
- in common with previous years the time taken to determine the legal agreements, whilst improving, had a significant impact on the figures and is a factor over which the planning service has limited control. It should be noted, however, that the average time from “willingness to approve” to decision on an application subject to a legal agreement has halved from 53.94 weeks (2013-14) to 26.75 weeks (2014-15)

Improvement actions

In the coming year it is expected that several factors will result in improved performance and a reduction in average determination times as detailed in the body of this report including:

- introduction of Stop the Clock Procedure for the first time - as of April 2015
- implementation of new ICT processes and restructuring of the administration team, including the appointment of a Support Manager
- fully staffed Applications Team – as of May 2015
- Recruitment of additional staff into the Applications Support Team
- Contracting out of the majority of legal agreements

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is expected that the projected implementation of a new computerised applications system, which will ultimately provide an improved and more efficient application management, is likely to have an unavoidable short-term negative impact on processing times for a period of 2 or 3 months. Measures will be put in place to mitigate this impact as far as possible and the impact will be compensated for by long term permanent improvements in the speed of decision making in forthcoming years.

It is recommended that the Committee approves 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 – grouped under the performance criteria in the PPF and with the lead team in P&SD in brackets where appropriate:

<u>TABLE 1</u>
<u>PPF Action Plan</u>
Open for business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconfigure the DM Team to facilitate the processing of major applications including consideration of a Major Projects Team (Development Management Applications - DM)

<p>High quality development on the ground</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively input and participate in wider Council projects, such as the Strategic Infrastructure Plan, City Centre Masterplan and City Region Deal to support the delivery of the Development Plan. • Complete the Nigg Development Framework and Harbour Masterplan as outlined in National Planning Framework 3 (Masterplanning Design and Conservation) • Develop detailed phased masterplans to support adopted development frameworks as arising, including specifically Craibstone, Rowett South, Rowett North, Bridge of Don (former AECC site) and Grandhome (part of the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative programme) (MPDC) • Develop a Streetscape Manual for Aberdeen to provide clear guidance and certainty in the delivery of masterplans and support the Scottish Government’s Aligned Consents Project (MPDC) • Develop and deliver a programme of 6 conservation and urban design CPD events (MPDC) • Carry out a full review of the Local Design Review Panel to ensure relevance and improve efficiency, impact and outcomes (MPDC) • Develop and publish an Historic Environment Strategy for Aberdeen (MPDC) • Develop and publish Conservation Area Guidance for residents (MPDC)
<p>Certainty</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a robust Consultation Protocol between Development Management and Environmental Policy (Environmental Policy (EP) and DM) • Progress alignment of Planning and Roads Construction Consent Processes (DM) • Introduce procedure for reconsideration of legal agreements within 6 months of “resolving to grant” (DM)
<p>Communications, engagement and customer service</p>

- Maintain Customer Service Excellence accreditation for the Development Management Team and achieve and implement accreditation for Local Development and Environmental Policy Teams
- Make innovative improvements to how The Service monitors the ALDP and make this information available to the public, by producing a comprehensive and easy-to-use bulletin about new developments being approved and built in the city (Local Development Plan)
- Review and amend processing agreement guidelines and template and actively promote to applicants and agents (DM)

Culture of continuous improvement

- Continue to encourage and enable staff training in more detailed knowledge of specific topic areas, planning-related competencies and transferable skills. Support staff towards gaining Chartered Membership of the RTPI, and support secondments to other teams to gain a broader experience
- Reconfigure and redesign the planning pages of website including a pre-application enquiry facility
- Bringing tree protection orders up to date and implement high hedges legislation (EP)
- Review the Open Space Audit to ensure it is current, relevant and appropriate to underpin a review of the City's Open Space Strategy in 2016/17 (EP)
- Review the Core Paths Plan to ensure it is current, relevant and appropriate (EP).
- Implement a new application and electronic document management system and reconfigure administrative support to facilitate and enable electronic workflow (DM)

6. IMPACT

Community Plan – The themes of the 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 2015-16 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.

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 provide 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 but are being managed through the actions set out in the PPF. 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

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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