

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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| COMMITTEE           | Planning Development Management                      |
| DATE                | 14 July 2016   |
| DIRECTOR            | Pete Leonard   |
| TITLE OF REPORT     | Planning Performance Framework Annual Report 2015-16 |
| REPORT NUMBER       | CHI/16/68  |
| CHECKLIST COMPLETED | Yes  |

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an introduction to the Council's draft Planning Performance Framework (PPF) Annual Report 2015-2016 which is included as **Appendix 1** to this report.

Last year's report is available on the Council's website via this weblink:  
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=65660&SID=25216>

All Scottish Councils are required to submit their annual PPF reports to the Scottish Government by 29<sup>th</sup> July 2016. The PPF reports on the performance of the entire planning service of the Council across a range of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators for the period of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016. 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 2015-2016 and approve this PPF and action plan 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 decreased this year from £1.44 million in 2014-2015 to £1.26 million in 2015-2016.

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 "penalty clause".

The content of the attached PPF (**Appendix 1**) shows that there has been a continued improvement in the determination times in the majority of areas. However, there has been slight slippage in performance levels associated with the speed of processing and determining local housing developments taking more than two months to determination and it is imperative that this area is a priority over the coming year.

During June 2015 Finance Policy and Resources Committee gave approval for funding of a new application casework management system and electronic document management system. This system has been purchased, built, and extensively tested, training has been undertaken across the service in its operation and the aim is to change over to the new system mid-July 2016. It is expected that the implementation of the new computerised applications system, will ultimately provide improved and more efficient application management. However, it is expected that there is likely to be an unavoidable short-term negative impact on processing times for a period of 2 to 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.

The production of the next Local Development Plan (LDP) remains on target. The Proposed Plan was submitted to the Scottish Government Planning and Environmental Appeals Division for Examination on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2015. At the time of writing the examination is still on going, however we understand that the reporters are confident that their report will be submitted to the Council later in this summer. Following receipt of the Reporters Report, the Council will work towards formal adoption of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2016, and will progress to adopt all associated Supplementary Guidance as quickly as possible thereafter.

The established housing land supply figure is slightly higher than the figure for 2014-15, as is the 5-year effective land supply figure which continues to show a healthy land supply in the Aberdeen Housing Market Area. Progress has been

made as expected on most existing sites with completions remaining broadly in line with figures from the last five years.

#### 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.

#### 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 2014-15 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 24.2 weeks in 2015-16. 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 staff gain workload and experience.

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

- Clearing of legacy cases – 71 in the year
- A continued high level of Local Review Body cases (26) combined with 36% of applications subject to pre-application advice requesting pre-application forum meetings in line with a Scottish Government requirement/best practice: both of which have demanded considerable staff resource.

##### **Improvement actions**

In the coming year it is expected that several factors will result in improved performance as detailed in the body of this report including:

- Implementation of new operating system for planning applications and building warrants, whilst streamlining processes and procedures
- Improving the decision making timescales in line with clearly established targets
- Review of the developer obligation process
- Gain Committee approval to enable reconsideration of applications with legal agreements within 6 months of ‘willingness to approve’
- Progress the alignment of planning and road construction consent process

It is recommended that the Committee approves the draft PPF for the City Council's Planning Service for submission to the Scottish Government.

## 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 2016-17 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. Additionally it is likely that the Scottish Government would provide negative feedback in relation to lack of progress in this particular area. There is the risk of a reduction in fee levels in subsequent years had improvements not been evident in this years figures. These factors represent a Hazard and Control Risk to the Council but are being managed through the actions set out in the PPF.

## 8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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