

**GUIDANCE**

# National Planning Improvement Framework

Guidance for Year 2

July 2025

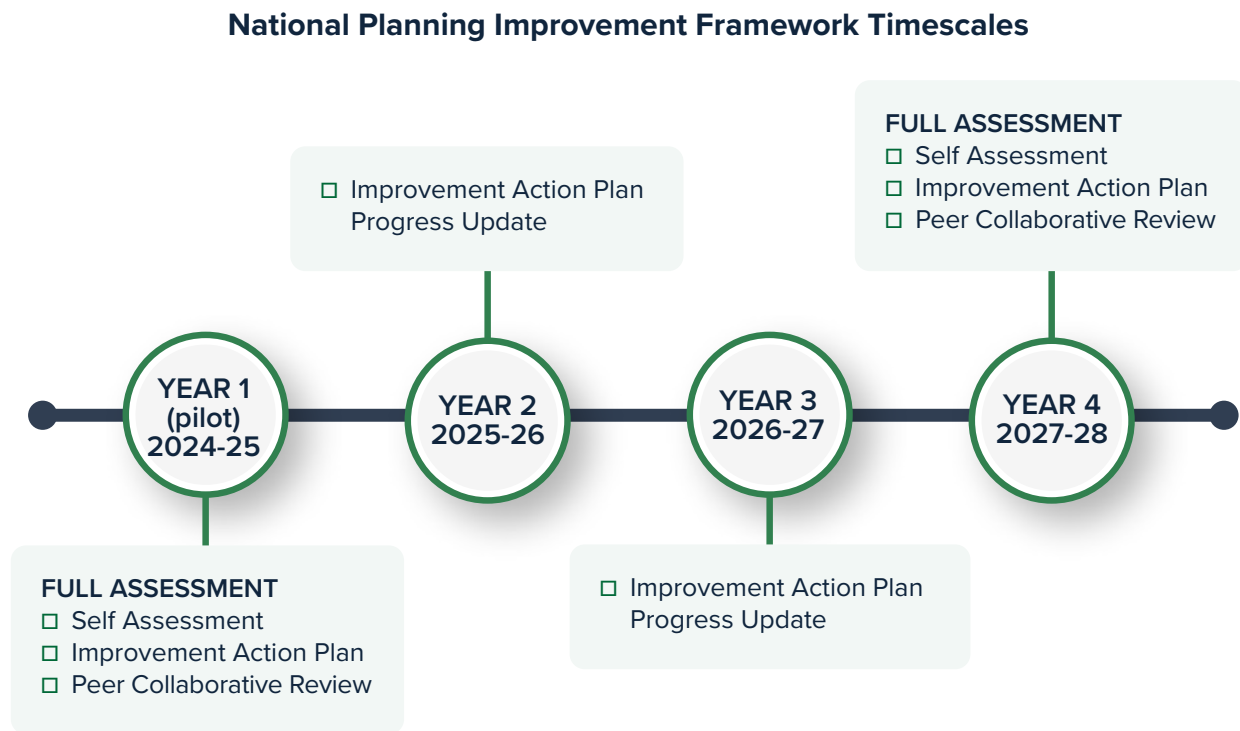


# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Timescales for year 2	3
Key links for year two	3
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) Pilot</b>	<b>5</b>
NPIF timescales	6
What to expect in years two and three (2025/26 and 2026/27)	7
<b>Walk-through Video of Year Two</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Reporting in Year Two</b>	<b>10</b>
4a: Check in with partner authority and peer collaborative review group	11
4b: Complete Year Two Survey	11
4c: Planning authority meets with NPI to discuss improvement actions	12
4d: Year 2 report	13
<b>Sharing of Best Practice</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Analytical Strategy</b>	<b>15</b>
Customer and stakeholder survey (November 2025)	15
Workforce and capability survey	15
<b>Appendix 1: NPIF Year 2 Survey</b>	<b>16</b>

# Executive Summary

As set out in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, you must prepare a report on your performance annually. The below diagram sets out the timescales for the first four years of the National Planning Improvement Framework:



## Timescales for year 2

The below table sets out the timescales to complete year 2 of the NPIF

4a	Check in with partner authority and peer collaborative group	June- September 2025
4b	Complete year two survey	Deadline 30th September 2025
4c	Meet with NPI team	October-November 2025
4d	Year two report	November 2025- January 2026

## Key links for year two

- [Link to Year Two Survey](#)
- [Link to Case Study Survey](#)

# Introduction

We firstly wanted to give a massive thank you to everyone for your support while we tested this new approach over the last year and a half. We appreciate your enthusiasm, feedback, and support. Thank you to those who have completed the first year, and we look forward to working with you in year two of the National Planning Improvement Framework.

This guidance sets out the process for year two (2025/26) of the National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF). It firstly provides some background context on the pilot, followed by what this means for years two and three, then goes into detail on the process you will undertake and finally shares our plans for the rest of this year.

## Contacts

The NPIF will be project managed by the National Planning Improvement team (NPI), based in the Improvement Service. The key contacts are:

- Craig McLaren, National Planning Improvement Champion  
Email: [craig.mclaren@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:craig.mclaren@improvementservice.org.uk)  
Tel: 07742 694468
- Susan Rintoul, Improvement Lead  
Email: [susan.rintoul@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:susan.rintoul@improvementservice.org.uk)  
Tel: 07719 649338

## Rsources

We have a National Planning Improvement **Microsoft Teams group** to provide a space for you to ask questions and start conversations with other planning authorities. We will also use this space to provide updates from the team, and you can also find the guidance saved there. Please email Susan Rintoul if you wish to be added to this group.

The NPI team has published several useful reports, think pieces, case studies and blogs on our webpages that will help provide the background and context to the NPIF, including:

- [NPIF self assessments and improvement action plans](#) for 2023-24.
- [Annual report 2023-24](#)
- [Think piece, peer collaborative review](#)
- [Case studies of best practice](#)



# National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) Pilot

It was agreed that in its first year we would undertake a pilot to test a new approach to measuring the performance and supporting improvement of planning authorities. This led to the development of the National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF). The NPIF was tested incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/25 financial year. The pilot aimed to test the new framework, to explore what works and what doesn't.

We set out some of our journey so far in our [annual report](#).

The pilot has nearly concluded, with just a few planning authorities still to submit their final reports. One of the key learnings from the pilot was around the time and resources needed to complete the process. From this, it was agreed by the High Level Group that planning authorities will only undertake the full self-assessment process every three years. This also allows time for the planning authorities to focus on taking forward the improvement actions that they have identified in year 1.

## **All planning authorities were sent a survey to provide feedback on the pilot.**

We asked for feedback on:

- 12 attributes of a high performing planning authority
- Each of the contributory factors
- Peer Collaborative Review process
- NPIF process
- National Customer and Stakeholder Survey
- Support of NPI team

We will be reviewing the feedback to inform and make improvements on how we take forward the self-assessment process again in year 4.

All the completed performance assessment and improvement action plan reports have been published or are in the process of being published on our webpages, sent to chief executives and the Minister.

[Link to published performance assessments and improvement action plans.](#)



As part of the pilot, each planning authority was partnered with a peer authority. The pairings are:

Stirling	East Lothian
Fife	North Lanarkshire
Scottish Borders	Aberdeenshire
Renfrewshire	East Ayrshire
Edinburgh	Glasgow
Inverclyde	East Dunbartonshire
North Ayrshire	Angus
Orkney Islands	Shetland Islands
Perth and Kinross	Dundee
Highland	Argyll and Bute
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Cairngorms
Moray	Loch Lomond and the Trossachs
South Lanarkshire	West Lothian
Aberdeen	Falkirk
West Dunbartonshire	Clackmannanshire
Dumfries and Galloway	East Renfrewshire
South Ayrshire	Midlothian

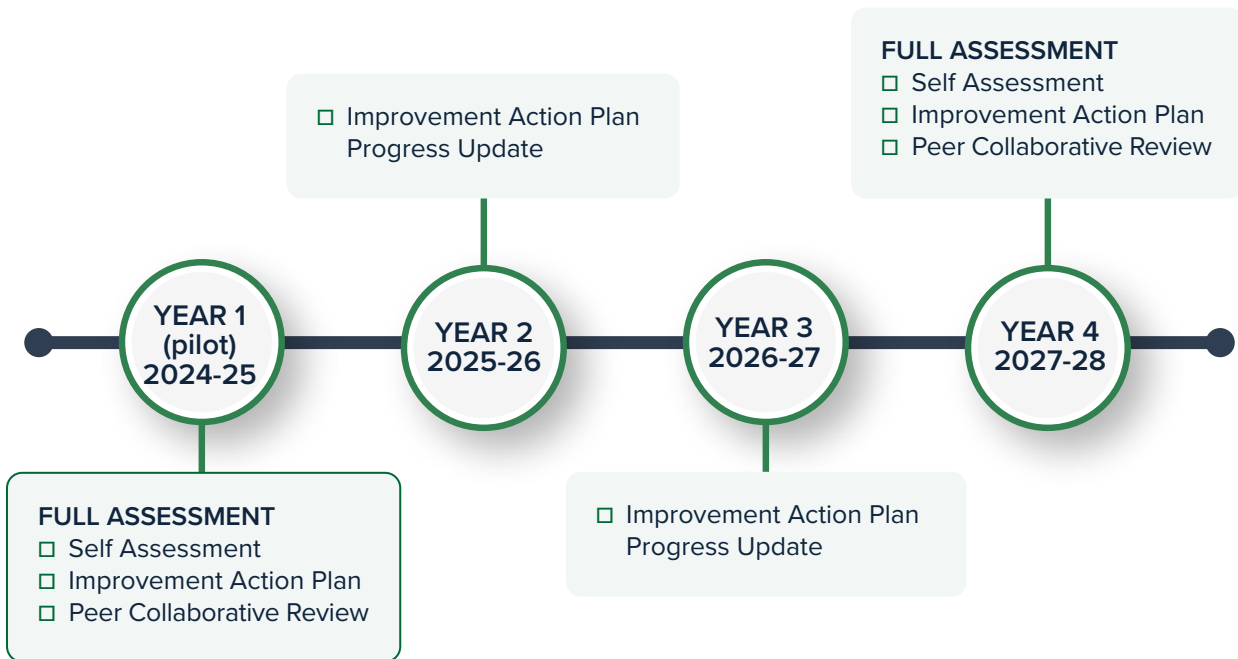
The pairings are going to continue in year 2. Although, there will also be opportunities for further collaboration with other planning authorities.

As part of the end of pilot feedback survey we asked if you'd like to change this for the next round of self-assessments. We will review the feedback to decide the approach in future years.

## **NPIF timescales**

The diagram below shows the timescales of the NPIF. In year 1 (the pilot) this took place over 2024/25 and included the full self-assessment, improvement action plan, and peer collaborative review. Years 2 & 3 you will undertake an Improvement Action Plan Progress Update and in year 4 you will complete the full assessment again.





### What to expect in years two and three (2025/26 and 2026/27)

In years two and three, you won't undertake the full self-assessment, instead you will focus on the improvement action plan and updating on what progress you have made with your actions.

The process for the NPIF comprises of four stages:



In 2025/26 and 2026/27 you will be in stage 4 '**improvement action plan implemented and monitored by the planning authority and NPI team**'.

Each planning authority has an improvement action plan setting out:

- What the planning authority has agreed as its priority activities
- Whether these have short-, medium- or long-term timescales
- The owner of the actions
- The resources needed

We will be looking for you to update us on the progress you have made with these actions.

We are aware that those in cohort 2 and 3 of the pilot may not have made as much progress with their improvement actions given the quick turnaround from year 1 to year 2. This will be reflected in year 2 reports, and more information is given on this in the 'reporting in year 2' section of this guidance.

The improvement action plans are in the public domain, they have been [published on our webpages](#), sent to chief executives and the Minister.

## Walk-through Video of Year Two

The following section sets out how you will report on your improvement actions in year two. We have also put together this video below which talks you through the process.



## Reporting in Year Two

One of the key pieces of feedback we received through the pilot was the need to ensure that any approach was proportionate. As stated above, this has led to planning authorities only having to complete the self-assessment every 3 years. However, every year, each planning authority needs to publish a report on their performance, as set out in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019:

*(1) As soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year, a planning authority are to prepare a report on the performance of their functions (or such of their functions as are specified in regulations made by the Scottish Ministers) during that year.*

*(2) The planning authority are to—*

*(a) submit a copy of the report to the Scottish Ministers, and*

*(b) publish the report.*

This section of the guidance sets out how we intend to do this. As highlighted previously, we are in Stage 4 of the NPIF. The diagram below sets out the order of things you will complete in this stage, and the following sections give details.

<b>4a</b>	Planning authority 'check in' with partner authority and peer collaborative review group	Jun-Sept
<b>4b</b>	Planning authority completes NPIF year 2 survey	Deadline 30 Sept
<b>4c</b>	Planning authority pairs meet with NPI to discuss IAP progress and next steps	Oct-Nov
<b>4d</b>	Year 2 Performance Action Assessment report published and sent to CEO and Minister	Jan

## **4a: Check in with partner authority and peer collaborative review group**

*June-September 2025*

In the pilot guidance, we outlined that you could undertake a follow-up peer review meeting after 6 months. Feedback from the peer review participant follow-up survey showed there is enthusiasm for this. Of those who responded to the survey 98% said they'd like to attend another meeting in 6 months' time.

The follow-up meeting will allow all participants to discuss what progress has been made on the agreed improvement action and to discuss if there is a need to re-prioritise, re-draft or re-think the improvement actions plan or individual actions.

As everyone completed the peer review meeting at different times, some of you will be hitting the 6 months period in year two. Depending on where you fall in the timelines and if you have the resource and time, you could plan to have this meeting before you submit your survey for year 2. There is also the option to provide an update to your stakeholders via email after 6 months and you will also be able to share your year two report with them.

Fife had a successful follow up meeting in February 2025, where the improvement actions progress was discussed with those that participated in the peer review. North Lanarkshire also emailed an update to their participants after 6 months.

If you could please keep the NPI team informed on any follow up meetings you are having.

During this time, we also recommend meeting with your peer partner authority to discuss progress and use them as a critical friend. This will also be an opportunity to share learning on taking forward actions. We also encourage you to share any learning in the teams group.

## **4b: Complete Year Two Survey**

*July-September*

In year two, we are asking each planning authority to complete a survey to update where you are with your improvement actions. Our ambition is to digitise the NPIF process, and we are looking to test this approach in year 2.



The survey will ask you:

- To update on your progress with the improvement actions
- If you'd like to change any actions based on your progress
- If you'd like to add any improvement actions
- If you'd like to provide any reflections on progress made, new actions, and if you've achieved any milestones.

We are looking for **ONE** response per planning authority.

When filling out the survey, you will find your improvement actions will be pre-populated, and you will be asked a series of follow-up questions about them.



The survey can be accessed using the link below and appendix A: sets out the full survey questions, so you can discuss them with your team in advance of filling the survey out.

[Link to Year 2 Survey](#) (this will take you to Kobo Toolbox Platform)



### Cohort 2 and 3

For those in the later cohorts, we recognise that you may not have made as much progress as other planning authorities with your actions. We will make this clear in the final report. The survey should hopefully be quick for you to fill out and there is an option for you to select that you haven't made progress as you were in cohort 2 or 3.

## 4c: Planning authority meets with NPI to discuss improvement actions

*October-November*

The NPI team will play a 'critical friend' role in the process. In doing this, we will probe and challenge the progress being made by the planning authority.

After you have completed the survey, we will read through your answers. The questions asked will help us identify areas where planning authorities are struggling to take forward actions, and where support might be needed.

We will invite you and your peer partner authority to meet with us to discuss your progress and next steps. **This will be an hour-long meeting via Microsoft Teams, taking place in October- November.** During the meeting we will:

- Acknowledge any actions you have completed and discuss the outcomes of these actions.
- Discuss the actions that are in progress or where you haven't made any progress. Then identify where you might need support to take them forward.

#### **4d: Year 2 report**

##### *October-January*

Once we have your results from the survey, we will be able to pull the information out and into a report template.

This should hopefully reduce the amount of time it takes you in year two as you will no longer need to format a report. It will also provide consistency across all 34 planning authorities in the annual reporting.

At the end of the survey you will see there are a few questions around the publishing for you to answer. There is room for you to provide a foreword; this is an opportunity to provide more context or highlight any milestones.

The steps to finalising the report are:

- IS desktop publish the report.
- NPI send through final report to planning authority for approval.
- Once approved, National Planning Improvement Champion writes a letter of endorsement.
- Improvement Action Plan Progress Update report and letter of endorsement are sent to chief executive and the Minister.
- NPI team will publish the Improvement Action Plan Progress Update report on the IS website.



## Sharing of Best Practice

We received over 60 case studies as part of the NPIF pilot. A review of the case studies was undertaken to identify which ones were ready to be published and which needed a bit more information. We have published 9 so far on our webpages over the last few months.


 [Link to published case studies](#)

We have been prioritising case studies in topic areas where there has been a demand for upskilling and training.

### Case studies in year two

We are also giving you the opportunity to provide more case studies in year two and to give those who didn't manage to submit any during the pilot the option to. We will be in touch with you if we think there are areas it would be great to provide best practice on or if we think your case study could be improved before publication.

We have put the case study template in a survey format for you to fill out.

 [Link to Case Study Survey](#) (this will take you to the Kobo Toolbox Platform)

In year two, we will continue to think of ways to share best practice on key areas coming out of the NPIF.

We are continuing to develop the Planning Hub and a programme for delivery will be published soon.

# Analytical Strategy

The NPI team gathers a wealth of evidence, data and opinion through the NPIF, and other research and analysis. We aim to make best use of this to inform approaches on improvement actions that can be put in place by planning authorities and other stakeholders in the planning process.

In year two, we plan to do a **full evaluation of the NPIF pilot**. This will include analysing the feedback you gave us through the 'End of Pilot Survey', the feedback from the 'peer review participants follow up survey' and the conversations we've had with stakeholders on their experiences. This will inform how we will take forward the full self-assessment in future years.

We will also be **analysing the NPIF performance assessments and improvement actions**. This will help us identify areas where planning authorities need the most support in taking forward improvement actions. We will then work with colleagues and partners to identify ways to do this.

We are also planning some further evidence gathering in year two. As you will only be providing a full self-assessment every 3 years, there may be some data that we will want to gather on an annual basis. We will be conducting a number of surveys on specific pieces of information every year and are currently developing an analytical strategy that sets out what these surveys will be on.

## Customer and stakeholder survey (November 2025)

An example of this is the National Customer and Stakeholder Survey, which we will be launching again at the end of 2025. We will be looking for you to promote this. You can use the [communications toolkit](#) to do this. We will send out further information nearer the time.

## Workforce and capability survey

Another area we are looking to collect data on a yearly basis is around workforce and resources. We plan to build on the previous work undertaken by HOPS. We will be sending out a survey to gather information on your workforce during year 2.



## Appendix 1: NPIF Year 2 Survey

Please see below the questions in the NPIF year two survey. Your improvement actions will be populated when you select which planning authority you are. The follow up questions will only appear if you select certain action statuses.

### Contact details

#### Which Planning Authority do you work for?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aberdeen City         | <input type="checkbox"/> North Ayrshire   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aberdeenshire         | <input type="checkbox"/> North Lanarkshire  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angus                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Orkney Islands   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Argyll and Bute       | <input type="checkbox"/> Perth and Kinross  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City of Edinburgh     | <input type="checkbox"/> Renfrewshire   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dumfries and Galloway | <input type="checkbox"/> Scottish Borders   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Ayrshire         | <input type="checkbox"/> Shetland Islands   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Dunbartonshire   | <input type="checkbox"/> South Ayrshire   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Lothian          | <input type="checkbox"/> South Lanarkshire  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Renfrewshire     | <input type="checkbox"/> Stirling   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Falkirk               | <input type="checkbox"/> Highland   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fife                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Moray  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glasgow City          | <input type="checkbox"/> West Dunbartonshire                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inverclyde            | <input type="checkbox"/> West Lothian   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Midlothian            | <input type="checkbox"/> Loch Lomond and the Trossachs<br>National Park Authority |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cairngorms National Park Authority                       |

Please share your name \_\_\_\_\_

Please share your email \_\_\_\_\_

Please share your role \_\_\_\_\_

## Improvement Actions Update

In this section we will be looking for you to update us on your progress with each of your improvement actions.

Please respond to each of your Improvement Actions below.

### Action 1

**Action 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the status of the above action?**

- Complete
- In Progress
- Not Started
- Not Feasible

**What was the outcome of completing this action?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please detail what progress you have made.** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are the next steps you are going to take?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why have you not started this action?**

- We have not had the time given other priorities
- The action was set as a low or medium priority
- We do not have the resources we need to do this
- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround from being in Cohort 2 or 3
- We are relying on a partner or stakeholder to action this
- Other

**If other, please explain why.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please state why here.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please state why here.** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are the next steps you are going to take?** \_\_\_\_\_



**Would you like to update this action?**

- Yes
- No

**Please state below what changes you want to make.**\_\_\_\_\_

***Note: This will be repeated for each of your actions.***

---

**Additional Improvement Actions**

**Are there any additional improvement actions you would like to add?**

- Yes
- No

**Please state the improvement action.**\_\_\_\_\_

**Please state the owner of the action.**\_\_\_\_\_

**Please select the level of importance.**

- High
- Medium
- Low

**Please select the timescale.**

- Short
- Medium
- Long

**Please state the resources needed.**\_\_\_\_\_

**Please state what outcome this action with achieve.**\_\_\_\_\_

**Please select the relevant attribute(s).**

- Attribute 1: The Planning Authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity
- Attribute 2: The Planning Authority has a valued and supported workforce
- Attribute 3: This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement
- Attribute 4: This Planning Authority has sound governance
- Attribute 5: This Planning Authority has effective leadership
- Attribute 6: This planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base
- Attribute 7: This Planning Authority makes best use of data and digital technology
- Attribute 8: This Planning Authority has effective and efficient decision making processes
- Attribute 9: This Planning Authority has good customer care
- Attribute 10: This Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities
- Attribute 11: This Planning Authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places
- Attribute 12: This Planning Authority supports the delivery of consented development

**How will you assess that the action is complete?** \_\_\_\_\_

---

## Peer Review Workshop

**Are you planning a 6-month follow-up meeting?**

- We already held a peer collaborative follow-up meeting.
- We are planning to organise a follow up meeting.
- We have sent an email out updating on progress.
- We are planning to send an email to update on progress.
- No
- Do not know

**When did it take place?** \_\_\_\_\_



**Who was invited?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide more details.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide more details.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide more details.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide more details.** \_\_\_\_\_

---

## **Publication**

We will use the information you provided in this survey to create a report on your performance. Note: We are asking you to provide a foreword for your report. Due to the timing of completing the pilot, many planning authorities asked if they could update on any progress, they have made in the years 2024/25. The foreword gives you an opportunity to provide some narrative on any milestones you might have hit or challenges you may now be facing. Please attach this as a word document and keep it to one page.

**Please insert your foreword (Maximum 600 words).**

**Please attach your organisation's logo.**

