

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Performance Assessment Template

Cohort 1 – Stirling Council

April 2024

1. Please use this document as a template for the self-assessment. If you can please state which planning authority you are and your lead officer below.

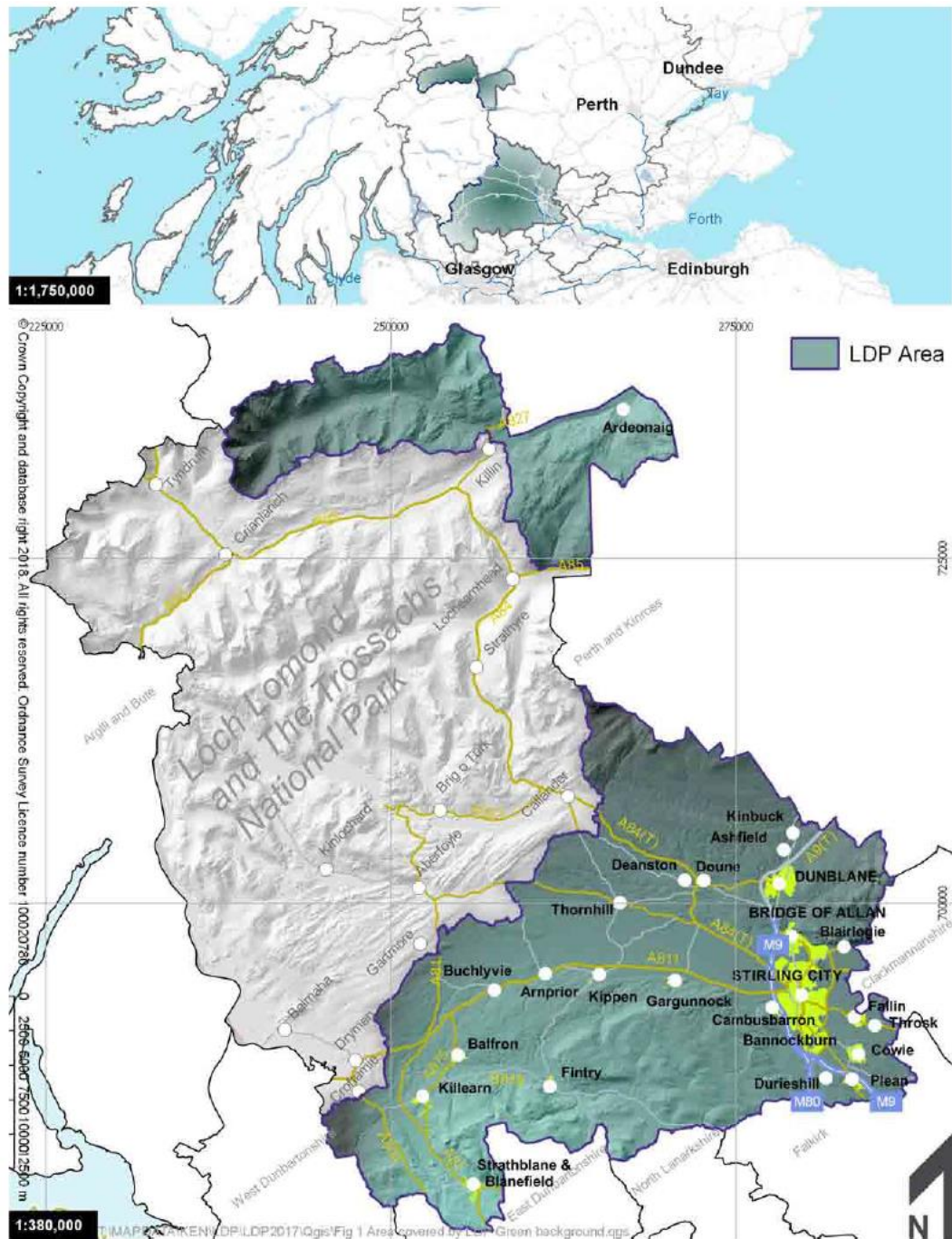
Planning Authority:	Stirling Council
Lead officer:	Michael Mulgrew
Email:	mulgrewm@stirling.gov.uk
Phone number:	01786 233664

2. Please use the below matrix when determining what score you are giving each attribute. We ask that if you score a 1 or 2 that you provide a good practice example, a separate template for this will be provided.

<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Making excellent progress	Consolidate Share learning with others
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Making good progress	Build upon Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	Making fair progress	Develop Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Making limited progress	Review Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	No progress	Prioritise Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken. Engage with NPI Learn from others

Context Statement

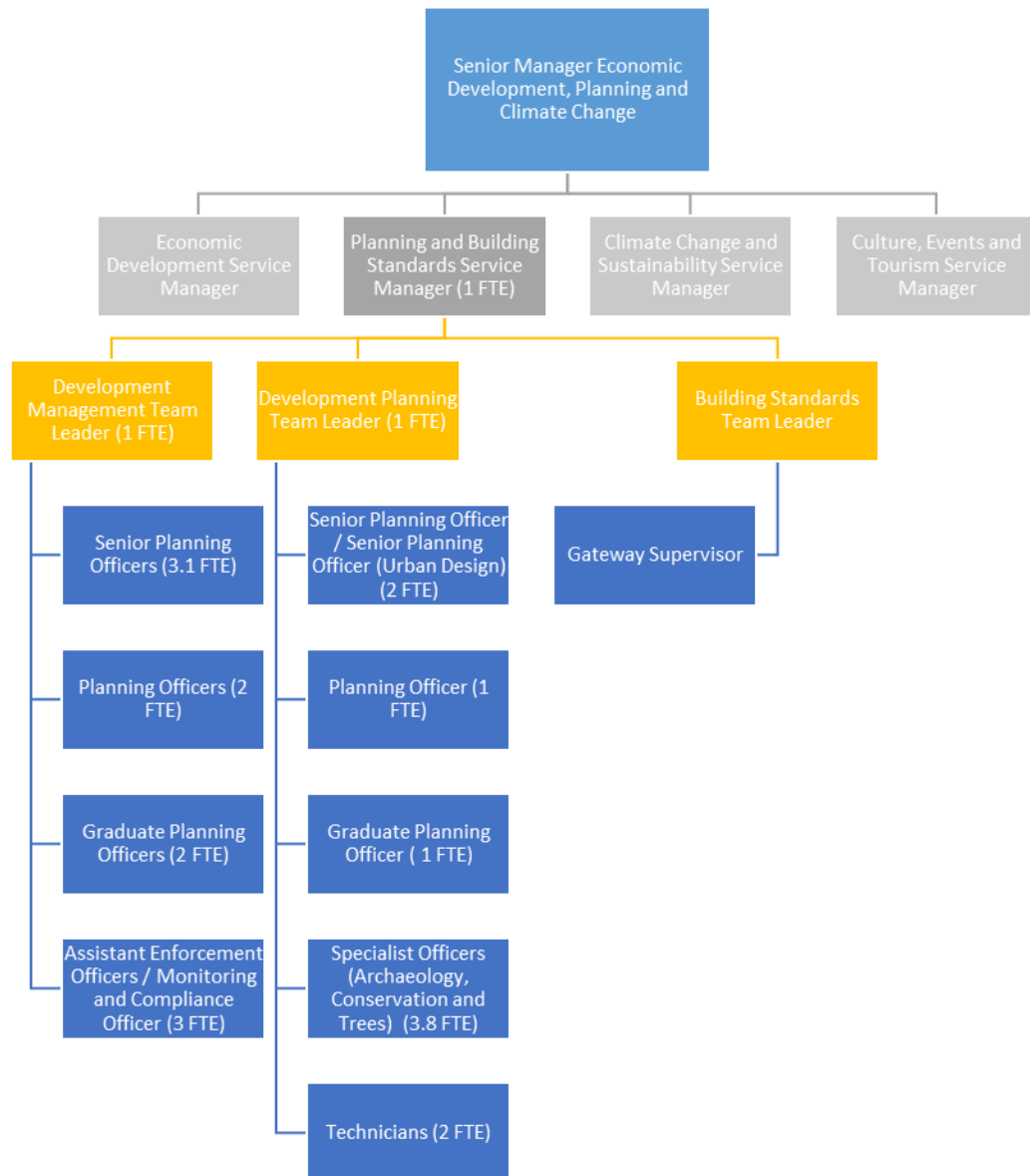
The Stirling Council Planning Authority covers the area of Stirling Council excluding the land in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. All planning matters within the National Park are within the remit of the National Park.



Planning has two teams, Development Planning and Development Management. The Development Planning team is primarily responsible for the preparation of the Local Development Plan and associated planning guidance. The Development Management Team is responsible for the assessment of applications for development. Planning is fully integrated with Building Standards within the Planning and Building Standards Service and have a joint support team, the Gateway Team.

In the wider Council structure, Planning and Building Standards sits within the Economic Development, Planning and Climate Change service. This grouping also includes the sustainable transport and tourism teams. This grouping of services provides opportunity to ensure integrated working to deliver City Region Deal objectives, along with corporate and national outcomes.

This National Planning Improvement Framework aims to highlight that along with fulfilling our statutory planning duties, we work closely with other Council services on a range of corporate strategies and workstreams. Our staff structure, excluding Building Standards, is set out below:



In terms of the previous Planning Performance Framework, the planning service has undergone a period of significant change and improvement. For example, in 2016, out of the 13 applicable markers, we were assessed as being 'red' on 2; 'amber' on 2; and 'green' on 9. By 2022 out of the 14 applicable markers we were assessed as being 'amber' on 2 and, 'green' on 12. The planning authority is committed to continued service improvement and welcomes the opportunity to be part of the first cohort of authorities to undergo this new National Planning Improvement Framework.

NPIF Process

Our assessment process included collaboration with our cohort partner, East Lothian Council, and we would like to thank them for their time and feedback in shaping our final assessment.

Our draft assessment and good practice examples were issued on 1st July to all attendees and our workshop took place on 8th July at Teith House, Stirling. The workshop attendees are noted below:

Attendees

Keith Dingwall – East Lothian Council

Robin Edgar – East Lothian Council

Alan Farquhar – SEPA (Representing the Key Agencies Group)

Andrew Fraser – Riverside Community Council

Mark Hamilton – Stirling Society of Architects

Richard Lewington – Homes for Scotland

Marek Mackowiak – East Lothian Council

Cllr Rachel Nunn – Stirling Council

Cllr Jen Preston – Stirling Council

Facilitators/Improvement Service

Craig McLaren – Improvement Service

Susan Rintoul – Improvement Service

Stirling Council

Mark Laird – Development Planning Team Leader

Sharon Marklow – Planning and Building Standards Service Manager

Michael Mulgrew – Development Management Team Leader

We wish to thank all participants for their time and valued feedback both during and after the workshop.

Overall, workshop participants generally agreed with the view of the Planning Authority on attribute scoring and service improvement actions. Many participants expressed their thanks for being able to take part but did also comment that as many matters relate to internal processes it was a bit hard to comment fully in all sections. Workshop participants also expressed strong support for the recurring improving action around the continued development of a Workforce Strategy and Training Plan as a key component of service improvement, reflective of the fragility of the staff base and issues around recruitment and retention.

Through group work and feedback from the Improvement Service some detailed feedback has been made and these have been incorporated into this document and will follow through to a detailed service workplan that will result from the Improvement Plan.

The Planning Authority has not recorded any areas of disagreement in terms of scoring. The feedback from the workshop suggested that the score of a 1 for Attribute 6 (Robust Policy and Evidence Base) should be revised as we currently have an LDP that is over 5 years old. Whilst we would note that we are on track to have a new plan in place by the required timescales and work is well advanced on the Evidence Report, on reflection, we feel that a score of 2 is more appropriate taking account of the feedback and that the current plan will be 9 years old by time of LDP3 adoption and the current plan predates NPF4. This has therefore been amended.



A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the rights skills set. It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future. It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.

ATTRIBUTE 1: THIS PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS SUFFICIENT RESOURCES AND SKILLS TO MAXIMISE PRODUCTIVITY

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
- Does the planning authority received responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

Narrative

As is common with other Planning Authorities across Scotland, recruitment and retention of planners and related specialist staff has been challenging for many reasons. This matter is further compounded by the continued pressure on Local Authorities budgets, as well as additional duties set out in the Planning Act. There continues to be increasing challenges in achieving a balanced budget, and this results in further pressure on resources, replacing those resources and ensuring a good level of service for all stakeholders.

In recent years, in balancing the competing demands, Development Planning has lost a Planning Technician post due to Voluntary Severance and a part-time Planning Officer post has also been lost from the Development Management Team established structures. In addition, the Planning Authority has sought to maximize its income generation to maintain services along with assisting with budgets and resources for the Council. Planning introduced a charging strategy in

the summer of 2023¹ for Preapplication advice, non-material variations and discharge of conditions. A 25% surcharge on retrospective planning applications.

Currently, there is a reliance within the Development Management Team on temporary posts, often covering just one or two years, that are funded by application fee income and are not part of the funded establishment structure. Whilst performance has improved, see below, it is clear that the service has a fragile staff base and susceptible to unplanned drops in staff numbers (i.e. by long term sickness) and/or an increase in application numbers.

The table below sets out some key facts and figures about the planning structure, including those posts that are qualified planners, i.e. those that have achieved Full Membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (MRTPI). This excludes our shared Gateway Service.

Section	Sub team	FTE Permanent Posts	FTE Temporary Posts	Total FTE Posts	FTE MRTPI Posts
Planning and Building standards Service Manager (Chief Planner)		1.0		1.0	1.0
Development Planning	Team Leader	1.0		1.0	1.0
	Core LDP Team	4.0		4.0	3.0
	Specialists (Archaeology, Conservation and Trees)	2.4	1.4	3.8	0.6
	Technicians	2.0		2.0	0.0
Development Management	Team Leader	1.0		1.0	1.0
	Core DM Team	5.2	2.0	7.2	5.2
	Enforcement	2.0	1.0	3.0	0.0
Total		18.6	4.4	23.0	11.8

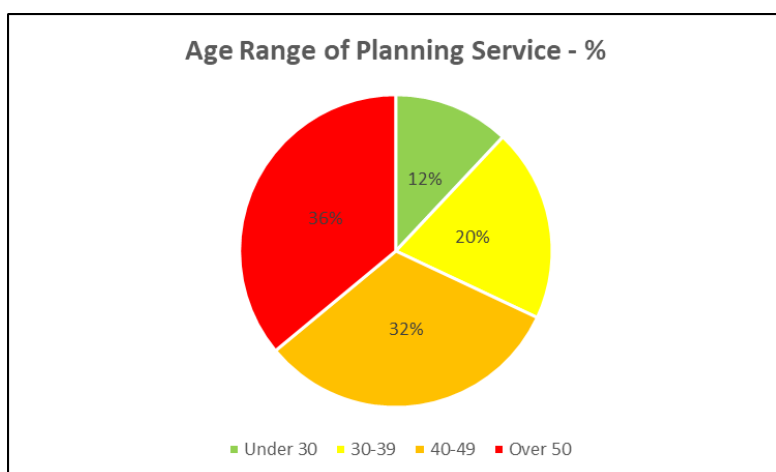
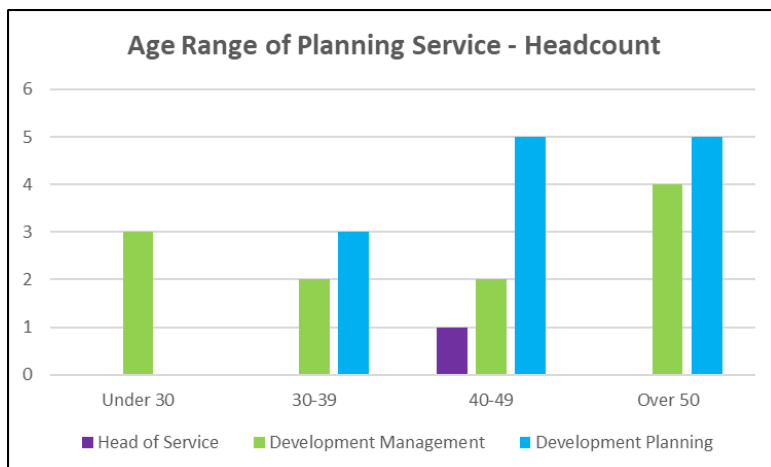
Within the above structure there is a 1.0 FTE post within the Development Planning core team that is currently vacant due to maternity leave, but this position will be filled in summer 2024.

Within the Development Management core team, the structure recently also had a further 1.6 FTE temporary posts and as noted above, a further 0.5 FTE permanent post. The service is

¹ [Stirling Council Charging Charter, April 2024](#)

currently seeking authorisation to recruit a 1.0 FTE temporary post which we hope will be filled by autumn 2024.

The current age profile in terms of headcount is set out in the graphs below.



Our planning fee income for 2023/2024 was £792,408 compared to £549,552 in 2022/2023.

This is despite a fall in applications and reflects the mix of larger, more complex, applications and that we have had 2 Section 36 applications within our area that have been made to the Energy Consent Unit.

Despite the challenges outlined above, the Planning Authority has generally good planning performance. The planning service has in house access to specialists in Archelogy, Conservation, Urban Design and Trees with these officers supporting the Development Planning Team in terms of guidance and plan preparation and the Development Management Team in terms of carrying out, or inputting into, the application process.

The Development Planning Team is well advanced with preparation on the Evidence Report for the next Development Plan, under the new requirements of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The Evidence Report is due to be published this year and a new plan adopted by 2027.²

The additional requirements as set out in the new Planning Act have had an impact on workload for the team. These additional duties and requirements have resulted in staff time being diverted from assisting in planning applications. A new consultation protocol within the team is expected to be in place summer 2024 to reflect staff availability. This new protocol will streamline Development Planning input by focusing on key areas and our existing conservation drop-in meetings will be expanded to ensure that there is still access to advice when required but without the need for a formal consultation process.

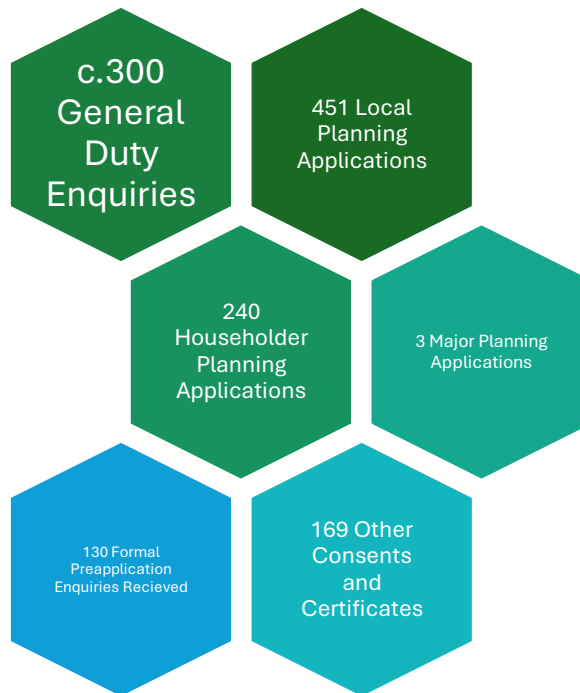
The additional duties and requirements through the new Planning Act, particularly in relation to the assistance in Local Place Plans, has also required a temporary post to be put in place, to cover maternity leave, as the reduction in resources could not be absorbed by the wider team. This post will be the primary coordinator of the Local Place Plan process and is therefore vital for our communities that this resource is maintained.

Over the summer period, the team will also be supported by two student work experience posts. The posts will greatly assist in many areas across both teams. For the student placements this will provide experience in Development Management work, however given the importance of the Local Development Plan preparation their primary projects will be to support the preparation of the Evidence Report.

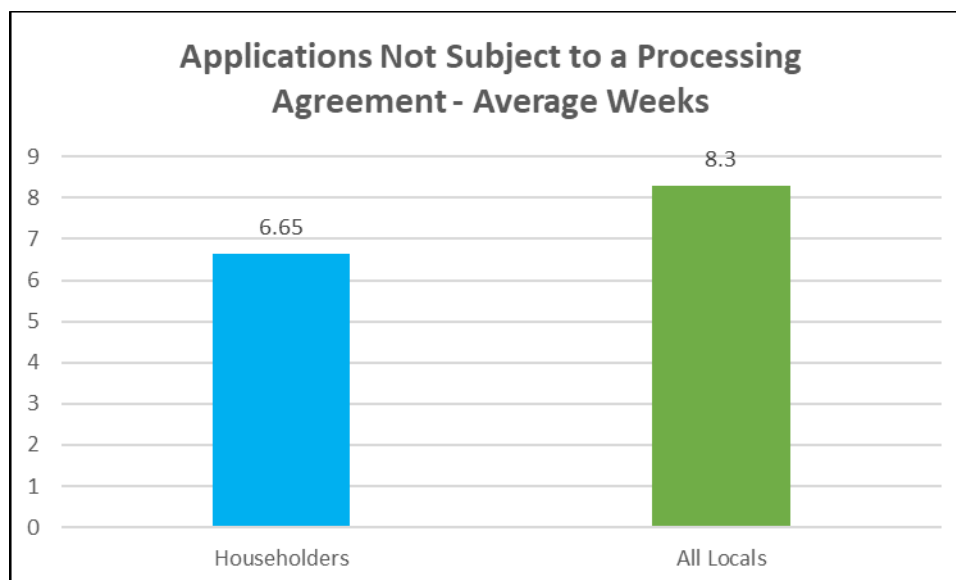
The Development Management Team have had good performance over the last few years, for example, in 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 the planning service generally performed above the national average in processing local applications. Regarding published national figures for 2023/2024 Q1 and Q2, it is noted that the planning service was in the top 10 best performing authorities for local applications. It is recognised however, that the service performs generally slower than the national average in major applications.

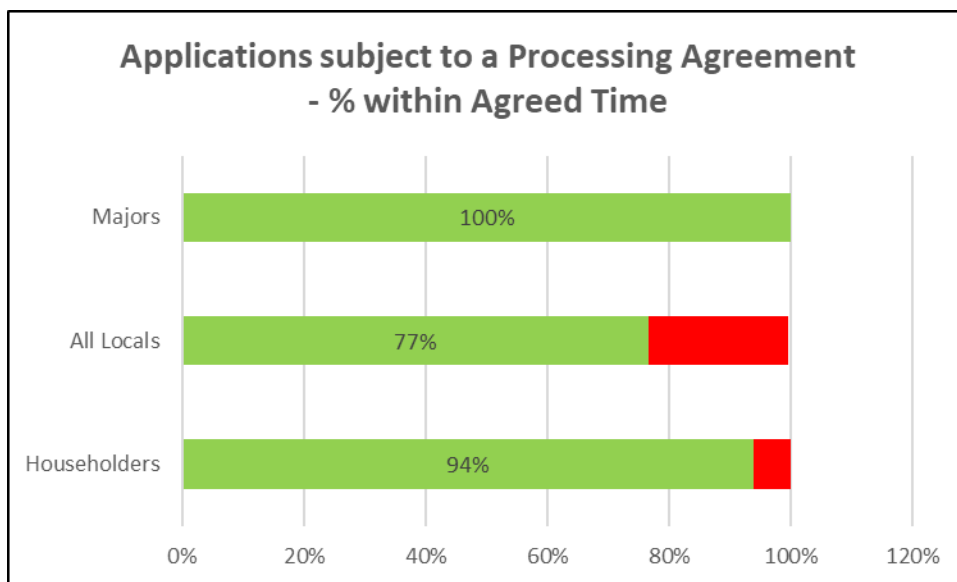
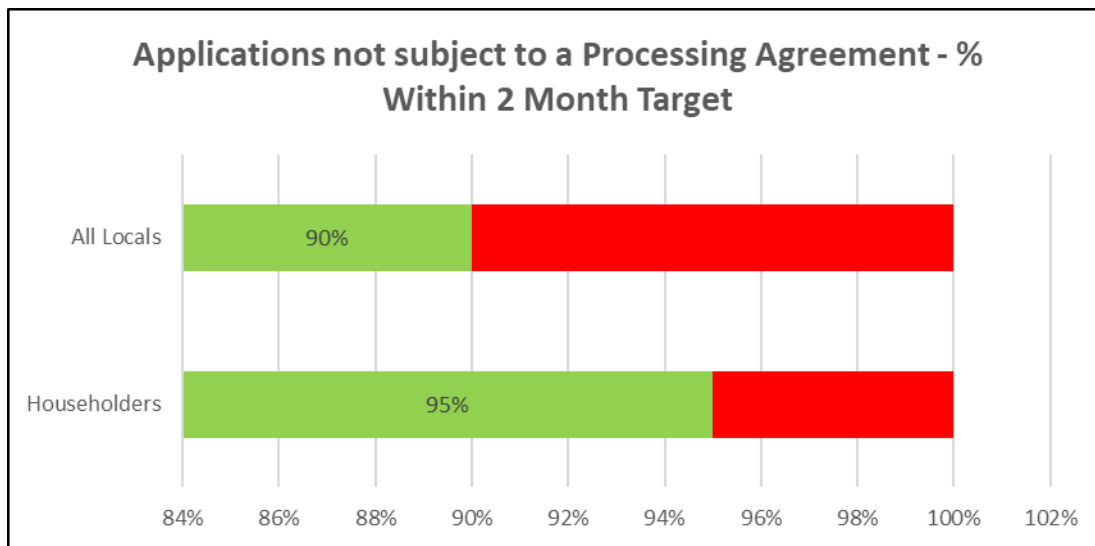
Looking at 2023/2024, key performance data is set out below.

² [Development Plan Scheme](#)



The Scottish Government has set a target that 80% of all local applications should be determined within 2 months, and the graphs below show that we are currently in excess of this target.





The performance figures above are reflective of the successful project management approach that has been put in place to enhance Development Management Performance.

Across both teams, performance and achieving the timescales for LDP3 adoption will be a challenge due to the level of resourcing and it is anticipated that there is likely to be further pressure on the service in terms of the corporate budget challenges and savings.

ATTRIBUTE 2: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS A VALUED AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a workforce planning strategy in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?
- Does the planning authority have a deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?

Narrative

The Planning Authority is currently preparing a formal workforce strategy in partnership with Organisational Development providing analysis of current and anticipated future resourcing needs, challenges and opportunities. The preparation of the NPIF workstream has proved very timely and has become an integral part of this process and a formal workforce strategy and training plan will be fully developed once the NPIF process is complete.

All staff within the service are required to undergo the corporate Personal Development Plan (PDP) process at least annually. The outcomes of which are taken forward to support officers and wider service needs. For example, Development Management PDP's have resulted in, amongst others:



Graduate Officers gaining experience in larger applications to support their Assessment of Professional Development with the RTPI to gain MRTPI status.



A Planning Officer learning the role of an Appointed Officer with regards to validation of applications.



A Graduate Officer leading on the implementation of the recent Phase 3 Permitted Development Rights (Scottish Government) workstream and included presentations and training to the teams, a corporate briefing note and presentation to Elected Members.

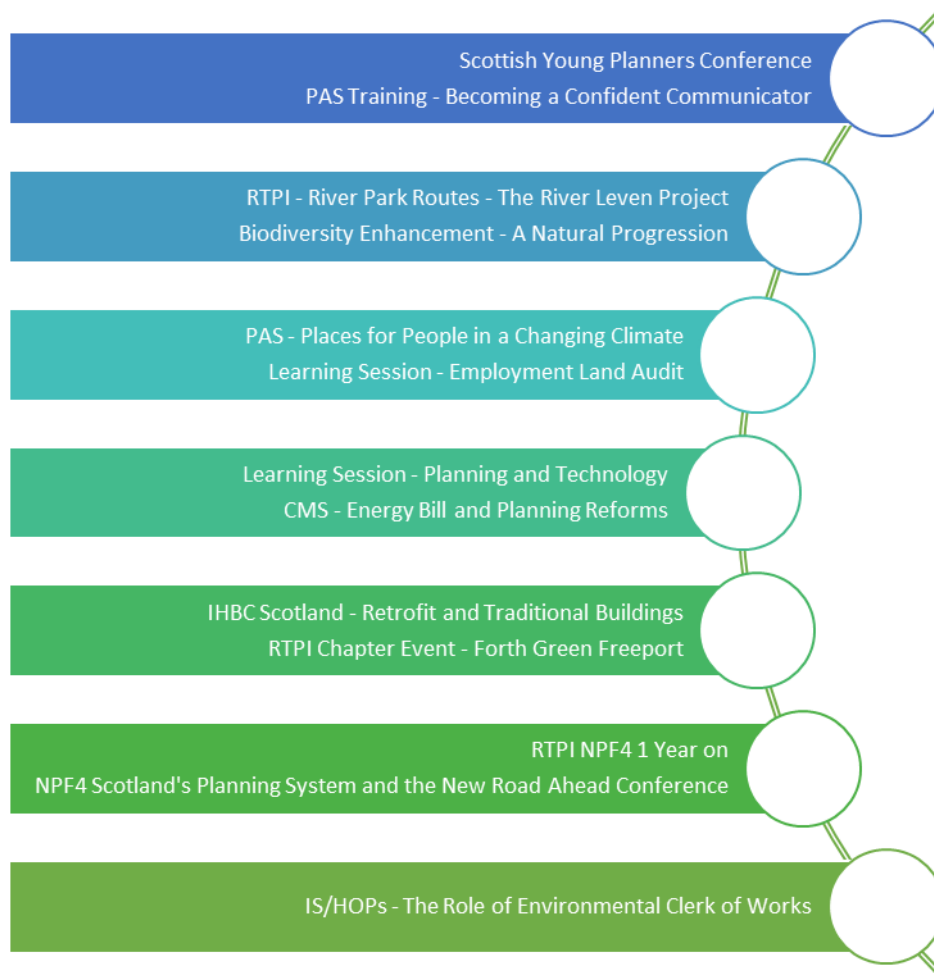
Learning and development has become integrated into the work program of the Planning Service. In 2023, there was a high number of staff who were not MRTPI qualified. To assist

those officers who were either currently going, or will be going, through the RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) process, an APC support and feedback group was set up. This has resulted in two officers in Development Management gaining MRTPI status with a 3rd currently awaiting the outcome of their submission.

Regardless of grade or role, all officers are encouraged to attend training events. In addition, there is a requirement for all MRTPI officers to ensure their learning and development is up to date and complying with the requirements of MRTPI status.

Highlights of some training courses or events attended by the team over the last year includes:





As outlined above, there is a challenge with recruitment and the national shortage of qualified planners, as well as those in supporting roles, both within and outwith the Council. The Planning Service is seeking to highlight this and address this through the Workforce Strategy and Training Plan. This will set out how the service will change and how we will respond to these challenges. Example areas that the Workforce Strategy will look at are outline below:

- Structure of both teams: Do we have the right roles, with the right hours and the right people? Do all tasks that are currently assigned to MRTPI officers need to be carried out by MRTPI officers or is there scope for new roles that do not need to be MRTPI qualified in order to attract a different skill set?
- Career grades: Do we have an attractive offering to prospective employees that we can offer them career enhancement and clear route for their development?
- Student placements: How best can we build on existing student placement offerings within the service to support service needs and to grow the profession in line with RTPI aims.

- Build on our skills gap: In conjunction with the Training Plan how will our strategy ensure that continued learning and development to increase skills and knowledge is embedded within the service?

The service is also committed to continue working in partnership with planning Universities, the RTPi and Scottish Government to support the promotion of planning as a career to encourage more graduates into the system.

In terms of staff health and wellbeing, all staff are encouraged to speak to their line manager about any issues and to discuss what supports are available to them. The Council has a corporate employee assistance programme (Pam Assist) and a monthly programme of events such as menopause support, financial wellbeing, supporting stress, mindfulness and men's health forums and drop in events.

The planning service works in a hybrid manner and line managers are flexible with working arrangements to suit particular needs and situations which are balanced with service delivery. It is recognised that high workloads and unachievable targets can lead to stress on officers and can also be a contributing factor when mistakes are made, i.e. in the processing of an application. All officers have catch ups at least once every month, many more frequently, with either the Service Manager, a Team Leader or a Senior Planning Officer to assess current work tasks, what are the issues and what is the plan to overcome this or to prioritise tasks in the most effective manner.

It is also recognised that this becomes harder to do when work demand outstrips resources and Team Leaders regularly report emerging issues to the Service Manager to be as proactive as possible regarding ways that capacity can be unlocked or enhanced.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	2 The service is currently maximising productively as best as possible within current resources but requires further detailed workforce planning to ensure that the current service performance is maintained and enhanced due to the fragility of staffing levels
2. The planning authority has a value and supported workforce	2 The service currently maximises training and learning opportunities and works with staff to ensure that they are supported within their current role and their development.

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
<p>Develop an ongoing Workforce Strategy and Training Plan, reviewed annual as the PGD cycle completed to support service and individual officer needs, both in terms of resources and skills. Action will include, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of application numbers/types to assess general trends and evidence base for staffing and skill levels require for service operation; • A review of skill gaps (arising from PGD reviews) and opportunities suggested by officers; • Using the evidence above to inform the training plan and how best the skill gaps can 	<p>Planning and Building Standards Service Manager</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Short Term for preparation but medium term for delivery</p>	<p>All planning staff and support staff (Gateway) and cross service support from Organisational Development (OD) and HR.</p>

<p>be filled, e.g. training or additional resource;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of working arrangements in the service to ensure there is flexibility to meet demand across both DM and DP; and • Consideration of a clear progression route from Graduate to Officer and support through the RTPi APC process. 				
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A high performing planning authority has a positive culture through ensuring it has sound governance, effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. The authority has an identified chief planner, who is supported by a strong leadership group to advise on decision-making, policy and operational management.

ATTRIBUTE 3: THIS PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EMBEDDED CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- ✓ Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
- ✓ Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
- ✓ Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
- ✓ Has the planning authority addressed any complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and have evidence of this and that it has learned from valid cases?

Narrative

The Planning Service regularly undertakes assessment of our performance. Annually this was done through the previous Planning Performance Frameworks. Planning also report on the performance internally monthly, and 6 monthly to Scottish Government.

In 2017 the Planning Service Improvement Plan was agreed by the Environment and Housing Committee. This document set out the short-, medium- and longer-term actions for the planning service to reposition the service so that it plays a strategic role in infrastructure delivery and economic growth, manage heritage and environmental assets for a vibrant Stirling in a growth agenda and to strengthen placemaking to provide a sustainable, attractive area with a shared community vision. Many aspects of this plan have been implemented and the planning service is committed to regular and continuous improvement. Following this NPIF work and development of the overall improvement actions, the Improvement Plan will be refreshed to reflect the outcome of this workstream and to focus on more of the detailed actions to enable these actions to be achieved.

Some highlights of the improvements made since 2017 include:

- ✓ Full electronic handling of all applications
- ✓ Integration of Enterprise workflow management tool into Uniform (case management system)
- ✓ Embed project management approach into Development Management process
- ✓ Formal Preapplication process
- ✓ Provision of template reports
- ✓ Development of customer friendly Planning Toolkit to explain planning procedures
- ✓ Introduction of a Learning Champion
- ✓ Minor restructure of Development Management Team
- ✓ Introduction of consultation protocol between the Development Planning and Development Management Team
- ✓ Development of Handbooks for the Development Management team to ensure consistency of process

The planning service also regularly engages with other authorities to share practice exchange via HOPS (Heads of Planning Scotland), either by attendance by the Chief Planning Officer or Team Leaders at the strategic committees/annual conference or via the Development Management and Development Planning sub-committees. In addition, officers make use of the KHUB HOPS forum to post, and respond to, queries with other Planning Authorities.

In terms of complaints, the nature of the planning process can result in dissatisfaction, either from applicants because of a delay or refusal and from objectors when an application is approved. The Council has a robust 2 stage corporate complaints process, and this is proactively managed by the corporate complaints team. There is a process and a system in place to ensure that all complaints that result in identified actions are followed through.

ATTRIBUTE 4: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS SOUND GOVERNANCE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an effective scheme of delegation in place?
- Have all councillors who exercise a planning function undergone statutory training and is there evidence of ongoing training for members?
- Have more than x % of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

Narrative

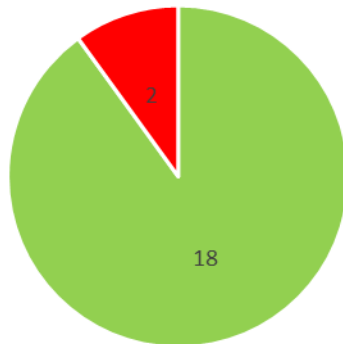
The Planning Service has an effective scheme of delegation. In 2023/2024 there was a delegation rate of 96.64% for all applications processed by the Development Management Team. Our Scheme of delegation is proportionate to balance the need for efficient decision making within the current resources and to ensure that there is input from elected members into the decision-making process and policy formation. The Scheme of Delegation is currently under review by the Planning and Governance Services to ensure that the scheme remains effective and proportionate.

Non delegated Development Planning matters are reported to the Environment, Transport and Net Zero (ETNZ) Committee and Development Management matters are reported to the Planning and Regulation Panel. The Local Review Body (LRB) sits separately and is drawn from a wider pool of elected members.

The service is also supported by a dedicated Planning Solicitor, who sits within the Governance Service, to advise on legal matters across both teams. The Planning Solicitor reviews all non-delegated reports and contributes to a variety of general enquires from the teams, service improvement, such as reviews of standard conditions and implantation of discretionary charging, and elected member training workstreams

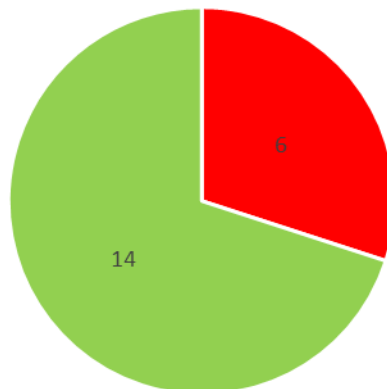
In terms of overturns of officer recommendations on planning applications and officer's decisions at LRB, these are considered to be quite low and reflects the quality of training members have received and the quality of officer's reports and presentations. In total, 90% of officer recommendations at planning panel were agreed in 2023/2024 and in the same period the LRB upheld the officer's decision in 70% of reviews.

Number of Panel Overturns of Officer Recommendation



■ Number of Decisions in line with officer recommendation ■ Number of overturns

Number of LRB Reviews Upheld



■ Number of reviews granted ■ Number upheld

ATTRIBUTE 5: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an identified Chief Planning Officer in place?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise on corporate decision making and policy within the broader organisation?
- Is the planning authority's Chief Planning Officer a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise and support external bodies through engagement in organisations' committees, advisory groups or working groups?
- Does the planning authority have a strong leadership team that supports a culture of continuous improvement?

Narrative

The Planning and Building Standards Manager carries out the Chief Planning Officer function and is supported in these duties by the Development Management and Development Planning Team Leaders. The Chief Planning Officer has over 25 years of experience in public Planning Authorities and is MRTPI qualified.

As noted in attribute 3 above, the Chief Planning Officer regularly inputs into work by HOPS and the Improvement Service.

The Chief Planning Officer supports the corporate management team by leading on planning matters and ensuring that planning is placed strategically within corporate decision making and delivering on corporate outcomes. For example, the Chief Planning Officer is an integral member of the project board for City Deal projects and drives forward this development and advises the team on planning constraints and opportunities.

The Chief Planning Officer meets with the Senior Manager for Economic Development, Planning and Climate Change (EDP&CC) and other service managers weekly to discuss wider service and corporate issues. At a service level, the Chief Planner meets weekly with the service Team Leaders and Gateway Supervisor to discuss operational issues and to plan/share workload.

Individually, the Chief Planner meets regularly, both formally and informally, with Team Leaders and relevant officers with regards to specific applications, service improvement work and to drive forward continuous improvement actions.

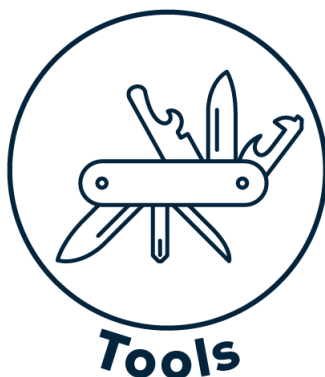
Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	1 The Service currently maximises opportunities for continuous improvement and is embedded into everyday working.
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	1 The Service has sound governance with clear processes in place and commitment to regularly review the Scheme of Delegation to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	1 The Service has effective leadership and shares good practice both internally and externally.

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Complete review of Scheme of Delegation	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager	High	Short Term	Service Manager, Planning Solicitor and Governance
Update service improvement plan with operational updates once NPIF process is	Planning and Building Standards Service	Medium	Short Term	Service Manager and Development Planning/Development

complete to ensure that working practices are aligned with best practice and learning from other authorities. This could include further sessions with our Cohort partner and neighbouring authorities	Manager and Team Leaders			Management Team Leaders
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A high performing planning authority needs to have an effective local development plan and other strategies in place to provide a vision for the future of the area. It needs to be able to set and deliver on policy ambitions and priorities by clearly informing decision making and providing certainty and predictability for communities, developers and investment. The authority's development management systems need to be effective in making the right decisions about development and be efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.

ATTRIBUTE 6: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS A ROBUST POLICY AND EVIDENCE BASE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an up to date Local Development Plan in place and/ or is on track to adoption?
- Does the planning authority have an up to date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/ or on track to adoption?
- Has the planning authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report been approved by the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals and/ or on track for approval?
- Have the application of the Local Development Plan's policies been found to be deficient at appeal or judicial review?

Narrative

The current Stirling Local Development Plan was adopted in October 2018 and is on track for replacement in 2027 by LDP3. Like most local authorities, there has been a slight delay in progressing the LDP review due to delays in the implementation of the Scottish Government's programme for planning reform, which includes a new system for local development plans. With the new system now in place, we have aligned ourselves with the recommended timescales for development and adoption of LDP3 at set out by the Scottish Government.

Regarding progress on LDP3, as outlined in attribute 10, consultation and engagement with a wide range of statutory and key stakeholders took place between August 2023 and June 2024. This includes the most recent consultation on the scope and content of the Evidence Report.

The finalised Evidence Report is expected to be published and submitted to the Scottish Ministers for the 'gate check' assessment in Autumn 2024.

Whilst this work is on track, the Council recognises that the current Stirling Local Development Plan 2018 predates NPF4 and will be 9 years old by LDP3 adoption.

In addition, Stirling Council is working with our regional partners Clackmannanshire and Falkirk Councils with the intention to develop a Forth Valley Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for adoption in 2025. The aim is that the RSS will help to support the preparation of the respective councils Proposed Plans. In 2020/2021 the partnership collaborated to produce the indicative RSS to provide input into the, at the time, emerging national spatial strategy in NPF4.

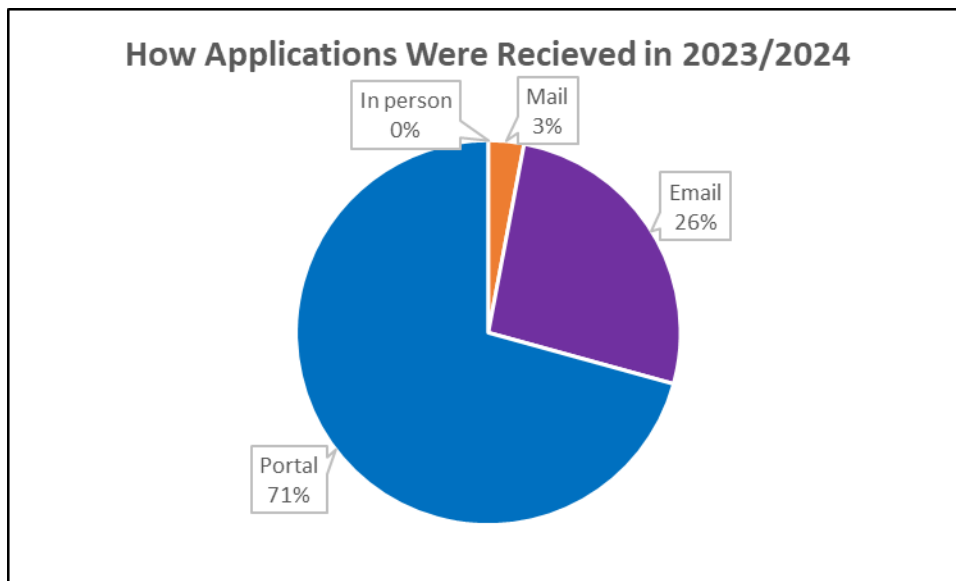
ATTRIBUTE 7: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY MAKES BEST USE OF DATA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Does the planning authority have a data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use digital approaches to engagement, including website, social media and other platforms?

Narrative

The Planning service seeks to direct all applicants to the eDevelopment Scotland portal and note that in 2023/2024 just over 70% of all applications received were received through the portal, with around a further 27% by email. It is recognised that not all applications can be processed through the portal, for example pre-apps. The service does not want to exclude anyone from the planning process, and continues to accept paper submissions, albeit that we then scan in to align with our paperless processes. However, it is noted by the service that this constitutes only 2.97% of all submissions and these came in by post with none made in person.

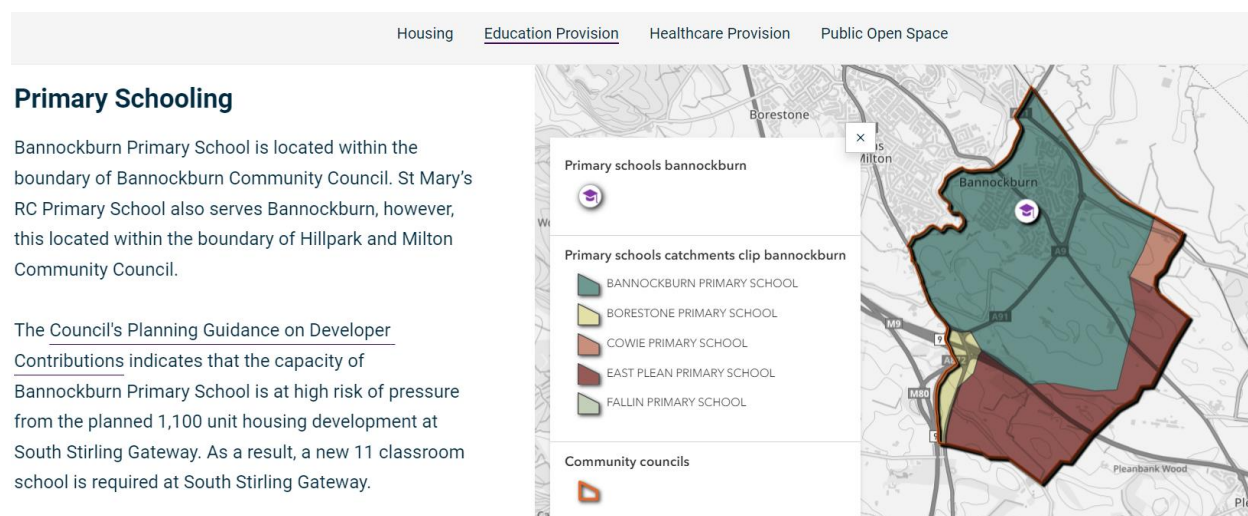


The Council has a corporate GIS system and all Planning Officers received training on this, with further refresher courses taking place in June 2024. The GIS integrates the required spatial

layers for planners, for example, all Conservation Area boundaries and Listed Buildings are spatially mapped. The GIS system does not currently integrate with the Uniform case management system and planning application boundaries cannot be added as a layer, but Uniform does provide spatial data in the form of the forward planning constraints tab which holds a static version of GIS data. For example, areas at risk of flooding and Met office and airport safeguarding zones.

A technician within the Development Planning Team is a key officer for GIS data and works closely with the corporate GIS team.

The Development Planning Team have developed 'Place Profiles' using GIS Story Maps to assist with the preparation of Local Place Plans and to support a place-based approach to the preparation of the next Local Development Plan. The Place Profiles³ provide data and narrative along NPF4 themes of sustainable, liveable, and productive places and provide spatial information on such key matters as historic assets and places, housing tenure and type, education and health provision and employment statistics.



The Council's GIS team is also developing a planning data hub, which will be hosted on our Opendata platform. This will support both planning officers, wider council services, the public and stakeholders involved in the planning process.

The Planning Service does not currently have any service level social media sites. There are corporate processes for the management of social media accounts, and it is not currently the practice of the Council to allow individual services to have service specific accounts.

The Development Plan team uses the Council's Community Newsletter, produced by the Community Development team, to provide progress updates on the new Local Development

³ [Local Place Plan Profiles](#)

Plan. We also work closely with the Communications and Web Teams to promote planning initiatives, such as consultations by the Development Planning Team and to proactively prepare communications in advance of decisions on significant planning applications.

An action has been set out below to consider how best the service can utilise the best approach to digital engagement on general planning matters going forward.

ATTRIBUTE 8: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes?
- Are less than x% of planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review?
- Does the planning authority have an up to date Enforcement Charter in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to resolve enforcement cases?

Narrative

Planning performance is mostly considered in attribute 1 of this assessment. It is considered that overall, the service has the ability to make decisions within the required timeframes, however it is acknowledged that further work requires to be undertaken in relation to major applications. The reduction in capacity of the Development Management Team has also the potential to impact planning performance and improvement actions are noted in attribute 1 and below.

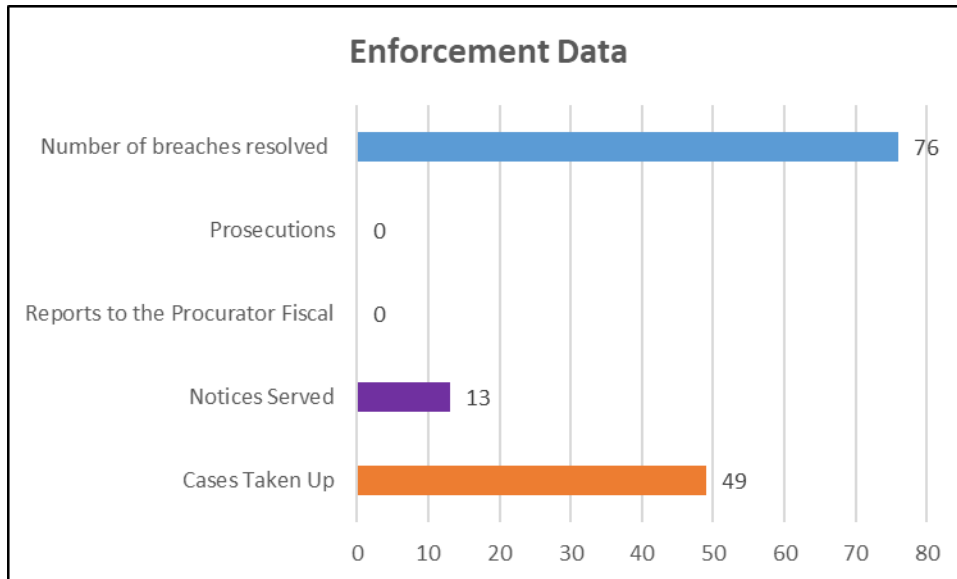
In 2023/2024 only three applications were appealed and decided on by DPEA. This included a High Hedge Notice. In all cases DPEA upheld the decision of the Planning Authority and there have been no Judicial Reviews of any decisions.

In terms of Planning Enforcement, the Planning Enforcement Charter⁴ was last updated towards the end of 2023 and is up to date and sets out how all enforcement enquiries are dealt with. The Development Management Team has a robust but proportionate approach to planning enforcement. The charter sets out how we prioritise enquiries into three different priority categories based on the type of breach and impact on amenity. These are then investigated in line with our available resources. Whilst we have two dedicated Assistant Enforcement Officers, breaches of conditions are passed to the relevant application case officer in the first instance.

We have clear processes in place and an electronic form on our website to submit all enquiries. Over the past few years there has been a concentrated effort to reduce the number of enforcement cases that remained unresolved or historic. This reduction has freed up staff time

⁴ [Planning Enforcement Charter](#)

to review enforcement process and procedures and is allowing us to implement more proactive monitoring, for example numbers of Notices of Initiation of Developments.



Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	2 The Local Development Plan is on track for adoption within anticipated timescales, including the submission of the Evidence Report, however it is noted that the current Stirling Local Development Plan 2018 is 6 years old, predates NPF4 and will be 9 years old by LDP3 adoption.
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	2 The service utilises GIS and has end to end digital processes within Development Management, however does lack a “digital presence”
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes	2 The Development Management Team has good performance currently but is sensitive to sudden increases in applications or unexpected drop in resources

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Complete digital end to end processing of LRB process	Development Management Team Leader	High	Short Term	Team Leader in conjunction with support staff (Gateway) and Planning Solicitor
Develop an ongoing Workforce Strategy and Training Plan, reviewed annual as the PGD cycle completed to support service and individual officer needs, both in terms of resources and skills. Action will include, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of application numbers/types to assess general trends and evidence base for staffing and skill levels require for service operation; • A review of skill gaps (arising from PGD reviews) and opportunities suggested by officers; 	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager	High	Short Term for preparation but medium term for delivery	All planning staff and support staff (Gateway) and cross service support from Organisational Development (OD) and HR.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the evidence above to inform the training plan and how best the skill gaps can be filled, e.g. training or additional resource; • A review of working arrangements in the service to ensure there is flexibility to meet demand across both DM and DP; and <p>Consideration of a clear progression route from Graduate to Officer and support through the RTPi APC process.</p>				
Investigate opportunities to improve digital engagement on general planning issues to ensure that the service is utilising emerging digital technologies effectively to aide the decision making process.	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager	Medium	Medium Term	Planning officers in conjunction with the corporate communications and web teams.



A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.

ATTRIBUTE 9: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS GOOD CUSTOMER CARE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to offer pre-application advice where it is requested?
- Has the planning authority held regular engagement events with developers and communities?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that customers are satisfied with the service offer by the planning authority?

Narrative

It is the view of the Planning Authority that there is significant overlap between attributes 9 and 10 and rather than repeating narratives, both attributes are addressed in the narrative for attribute 10.

ATTRIBUTE 10: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITIES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
- Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes? Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Has the planning authority engaged with a good representation of the community including young people, gypsies and travellers, people with protected characteristics, including disability, race, age, sex and sexual orientation, and including people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds?
- Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

Narrative

The Planning Service supports the front loading of the planning system to improve collaboration and enhance placemaking and offers a proportionate approach to Preapplication advice. This advice can generally be split into general and bespoke. General planning advice is provided to all customers Monday to Friday between 9am and 1pm. The Gateway Team is the initial point of contact and seek to deal with all general enquiries, however where this requires input from a Planning Officer, this is passed to the Duty Officer. As the service works flexibly we seek to direct customers to phone and email channels to ensure that an officer can deal with their request as quickly as possible. Based on Duty Officer data, we estimate that there is a roughly even split of 50% for enquiries received by email or by phone call. Many phone calls are followed up via email response. From officer information and the available data, we estimate no more than 1% of enquiries are made in person at the Council Offices.

As set out at attribute 7, around 70% of applications are received via the eDevelopment Portal.

The service has previously identified through the Planning Service Improvement Plan that we wish to hold regular engagement and update sessions, alongside Building Standards, both with the local architects and agents, and larger developers, and we aim to do these every 12-18 months. The last event was held in October 2022, and another was due by April 2024. However, due to the NPIF process this has been postponed at present as the service will take forward a

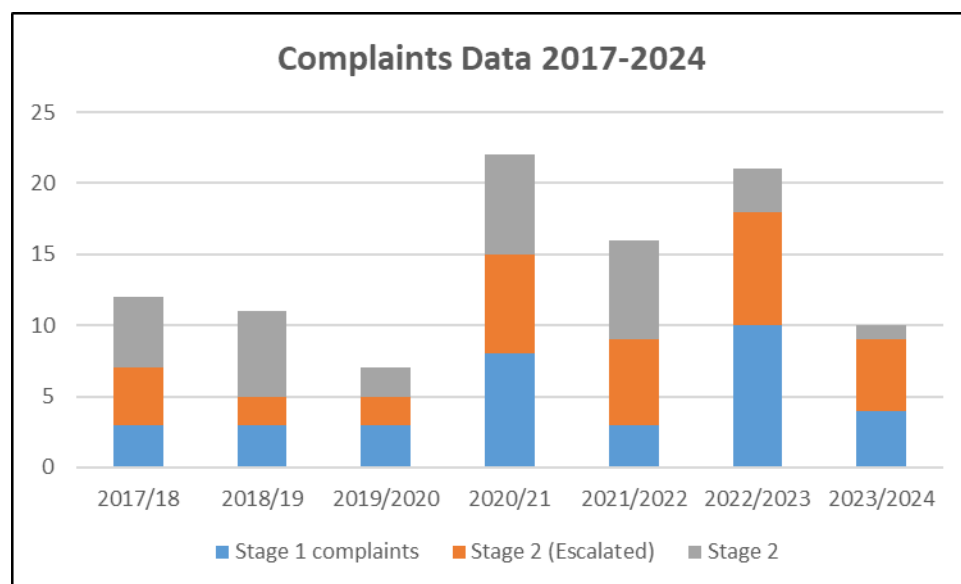
forum once this process has completed to discuss general service news/issues and the improvement plan.

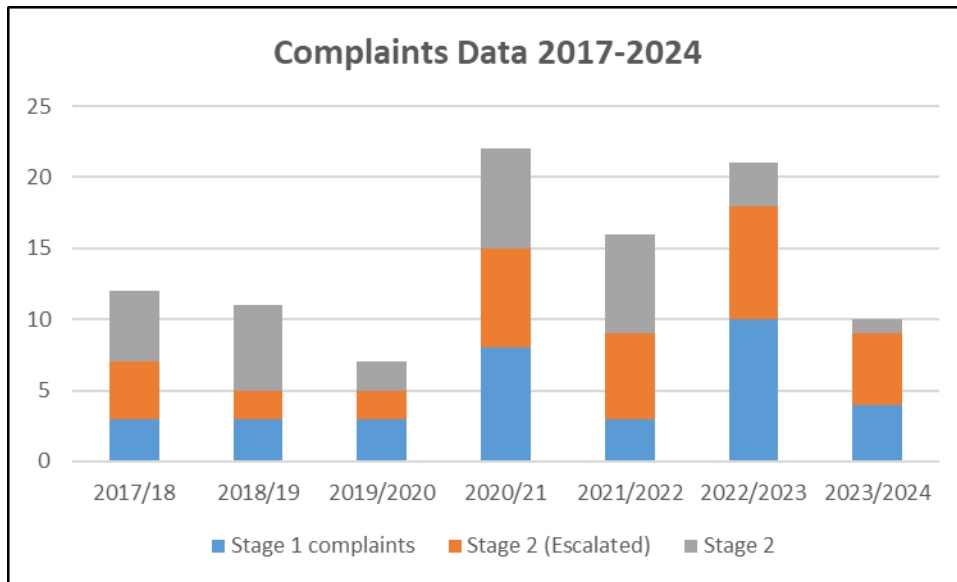
The development planning team has engaged extensively with communities and stakeholders in preparing LDP3. This process began with an initial consultation, titled 'Have a Say in the Future of Your Place,' conducted between August and October 2023. The consultation aimed to gather a range of perspectives on prioritising the development of the Evidence Report and included questions to better understand places and communities using the Place Standard tool.

Following this, consultation feedback reports were produced to engage with community councils and support a second consultation, 'Shaping Stirling's Next Local Development Plan,' held between April and June 2024. This further consultation aimed to validate the data collected from the first consultation and gather additional data to address identified gaps.

Through these consultation and engagement activities, the service has heard the views of a wide range of people, including children and young people, older adults, disabled individuals, and communities with higher levels of deprivation.

It has been sometime since the Planning Service carried out a customer service survey and the service does not hold up to date data regarding customer satisfaction. However, as a proxy, it can be seen from the number of formal Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints over the last 7 years that the number of formal complaints were falling until 2020, with then a rise during Covid and fell sharply in 2023/2024, with the number of partially upheld and upheld complaints falling from a peak in 2020/2021. From the data we can see that a lot of complaints related to timescales and customer service during the pandemic and complaints are falling to precovid levels.





Following the NPIF process and aligning with the anticipated Developer Forum, it is the intention of the service to carry out a customer satisfaction survey, possibly alongside Building Standards, to understand current customer views of the service and ways in which we can continue to improve customer satisfaction.

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
9. This planning authority has good customer care	2 Anecdotally with the fall in formal complaints, and numbers upheld, combined with the sustained increased in planning performance, customer care is assumed to be acceptable, however the service lacks quantifiable data to confirm this.
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2 As well as the required planning consultation on planning applications the service engages extensively with local communities and stakeholders in Development Plan preparation.

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Consider the need for a customer service satisfaction survey alongside the proposed national customer and stakeholder survey to be undertaken by the NPI team	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager and Development Management Team Leader, in conjunction with the NPI team	High	Short term	Minimal, electronic survey with link inviting participation can be included in email signatures and decision letters
Organise an Agents and Architects Forum and seek feedback as to how best to engage with them going forward, and the frequency of such events/communications	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager, Development Planning, Development Management Team Leader and Gateway Supervisor	High	Short – Before the end of 2024.	Staff time
In tandem with the above actions, develop a communications strategy for the service	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager, Development Planning, Development Management Team Leader and Gateway Supervisor	High	Short term	Staff time



A high performing planning authority should demonstrate place leadership by taking a collaborative place-based approach in line with the Place Principle. It should use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making processes, to achieve the three spatial principles outlined in NPF4: Sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; Liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and Productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The planning authority should seek to ensure that there are no impediments to delivering agreed development.

ATTRIBUTE 11: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF SUSTAINABLE, LIVEABLE AND PRODUCTIVE PLACES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Is the planning authority aware of the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#), the evidence that sits behind them and is it using them in decision-making processes?
- Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places and is implementing them?

Narrative

The planning service is fully aware of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and is integrating this approach into the preparation of the next Local Development Plan, particularly in relation to consultation and engagement activities. For example, the Place Standard tool has been used to support the Evidence Report process, which will be integral to future decision-making processes in the production of the next Local Development Plan. The place and wellbeing outcomes and the spatial principles set out in NPF4 are embedded in all work, whether that be in policy/guidance preparation or in development management decisions.

In utilising the Place and Wellbeing assessments to inform decision making, we are currently looking to trial some planning applications over the next year through an assessment of the Place Standard tool embedded within the decision-making process and then to follow this up when the development is complete with residents/occupiers to compare results. The outcomes of which will enable us to see what has worked well “on the ground” and what has not, to inform future guidance and application assessment.

Enhancing placemaking and seeking betterment above policy and guidance minimums is naturally embedded into the work of case officers. However, it can be difficult to capture this work and quantify how applications have been improved due to the nature of how the Uniform case management system is currently used. However, over the next year, the Development Management Team are to trial capturing this data via the “Added Value” option within the case record. This will allow us to quantify how many applications have been approved with added value changes to allow a proposal to comply with, or exceed, policy and guidance requirements.

ATTRIBUTE 12: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF CONSENTED DEVELOPMENT

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

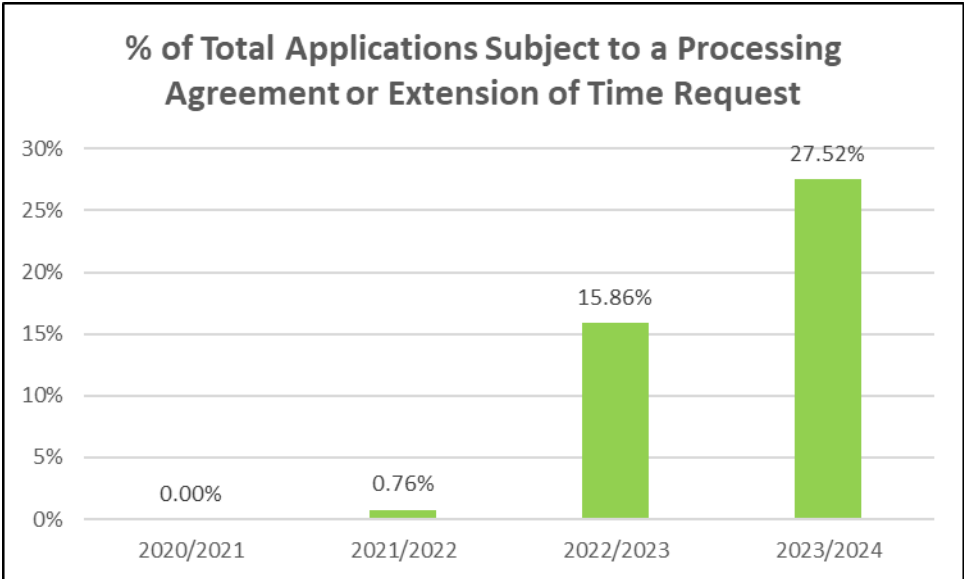
- Has the planning authority provided clear and proportionate expectations of Section 75 agreements and set these out in the LDP and pre-application discussions and they are concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
- Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
- Does the planning authority have an ambitious local housing land requirement that exceeds the Minimum All Tenure Housing land requirements in NPF4 and is it on track to support delivery?
- Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
- Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

Narrative

From current working practice, all development management decisions with Section 75 Legal Agreements are expected to be concluded within 6 months of either the officer recommendation being accepted by an Appointed Officer or by Planning Panel. In the case of Planning Panel recommendations involving a Section 75, all recommendations include a delegation to officers to refuse an application where there has been no meaningful progress to competing the Section 75. Discussions on Section 75's take place as early as possible in the application process and indications of likely developer contributions are included in all relevant Preapplication discussions/responses.

In terms of conditions, the Development Management Team are currently undergoing a review of all standard conditions. Currently work is ongoing relating to Environmental Health, transport and conservation related conditions and advisories. This work has also involved the Planning Solicitor to ensure all conditions are legally robust and fit for purpose. Once complete this will be put in place and the remaining conditions will be reviewed. This work is tied to other service improvement work relating to skills and development of Development Management staff, consultation protocols and new local validation standards to ensure that we are installing a customer friendly approach to ensure that all matters are addressed in the application, ideally at validation, and to reduce the need to impose conditions.

As noted in attribute 1 above, the Development Management Team have implemented a clear project management approach to manage caseloads and to increase performance. In 2020/2021 for example there were no applications subject to either Processing Agreements or Extension of Time requests and this has risen to over 27% by 2023/2024. This has significantly increased performance and reduced the number of applications that have gone over time without agreement. Despite the project management approach to performance, the number of applications subject to such agreements remain fairly low, indicative of the general planning performance of the team and goal to achieve all applications within the statutory timescales.



The planning service places a great deal of emphasis on delivery of LDP allocations and consented development. For example, within the Development Management Team there is a dedicated Senior Planning Officer – Strategic Delivery which is a dedicated resource for the strategic sites at South Stirling Gateway and Durieshill. Collectively these sites are anticipated to deliver a significant portion of the land supply, around 4,500 homes, of which around 1,125 are to be affordable homes for either the Council or an RSL partner. The developments are also expected to deliver 3 primary schools, secondary school provision by either an extension to an existing site or integrated campus provision within 1 of the primary schools, road and active travel improvements, and improvements to the Pirnhall interchange (Junction 9 of the M9/M80). In total the developer contributions are expected to be around £48 million over the next 30 year build out of both sites.

The Senior Planner is also supported by the wider service including a Graduate Planning Officer, Development Management and Development Planning Team Leaders, Senior Planning Officer – Urban Design and the Service manager alongside colleagues from education, roads and assets

to ensure that there are project delivery teams to support the build out of the sites and associated infrastructure. We also work closely with external partners such as Transport Scotland regarding the improvements to the Trunk Road network.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	3 Some progress has been made on this indicator and we do seek quality placemaking but we lack the data to evidence the outcomes and how these are embedded in the decision making process.
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	2 The service has a proportionate approach to Section 75 Legal Agreements and imposition of conditions and a clear project management approach. We also have a dedicated resource within the Development Management Team for the delivery of our key strategic sites but the service is sensitive to workload arising from these sites and ability for the wider team/service/council to support delivery.

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Implement recording of added value on applications to reach, or exceed, policy/guidance requirements to create an evidence base to assess performance against place and wellbeing outcomes. This evidence base will then inform a monitoring and evaluation process to ensure these are being effectively embedded into decision making and review processes.	Development Management and Development Planning Team Leaders	Medium	Short term	All Development Management Staff but in conjunction with Development Planning Team
Develop an ongoing Workforce Strategy and Training Plan, reviewed annual as the PGD cycle completed to support service and individual officer needs, both in terms of resources and skills. Action will include, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of application numbers/types to assess general trends 	Planning and Building Standards Service Manager	High	Short Term for preparation but medium term for delivery	All planning staff and support staff (Gateway) and cross service support from Organisational Development (OD) and HR.

<p>and evidence base for staffing and skill levels require for service operation;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of skill gaps (arising from PGD reviews) and opportunities suggested by officers; • Using the evidence above to inform the training plan and how best the skill gaps can be filled, e.g. training or additional resource; • A review of working arrangements in the service to ensure there is flexibility to meet demand across both DM and DP; and <p>Consideration of a clear progression route from Graduate to Officer and support through the RTPI APC process.</p>				
<p>Complete the review of the standard conditions to ensure that conditions are legally adequate and that all</p>	<p>Development Management Team Leader and Planning Solicitor</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Short term</p>	<p>All Development Management and Development Planning Staff, Planning Solicitor and with support from other</p>

conditions are proportionate and risk based.				services, such as Environmental Health and Roads
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