

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Performance Assessment South Ayrshire Council

Cohort 3

July 2025

Planning Authority:	South Ayrshire Council
Lead officer:	Craig Iles
Email:	Craig.Iles@south-ayrshire.gov.uk
Phone number:	01292 616417

Introduction

Welcome to our first National Planning Improvement Framework. This document forms part of a national pilot along with nine other Planning Authorities in the third Cohort from across Scotland. South Ayrshire Council has been paired with Midlothian Council which has provided an opportunity to support and learn across Councils.

The National Planning Improvement Framework replaces the annual Planning Performance Framework which was submitted to the Scottish Ministers with feedback provided by performance markers.

The National Planning Improvement Framework is based upon what has been identified as the attributes of a high performing Planning Authority. The new framework aims to better measure how planning authorities improve through incorporating attributes that better assess impacts, outcomes achieved, and the quality of the service provided, and by recognising that Planning Authorities depend on others to deliver a good quality service.

This report has been developed through self-assessment through a Peer Review group. The Peer Review has been externally facilitated by Craig McLaren with the group considering the self-assessment and focusing on areas of improvement. The Peer Review Group was selected by identifying key customers both externally and internally to South Ayrshire Council Planning Services.

South Ayrshire Council is a medium sized Council and is located in southwest coast of Scotland and in easy reach to Glasgow. It combines a mix of urban areas and rural areas with the main towns of Ayr, Troon, Prestwick, Maybole and Girvan. It includes particular attractions such as a beautiful coast incorporating Championship Golf Courses and historic buildings. The Council has an up-to-date Development Plan, having recently adopted Local Development Plan 2 in April 2023. Work has commenced on our Local Development Plan 3.



South Ayrshire Council Location





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:

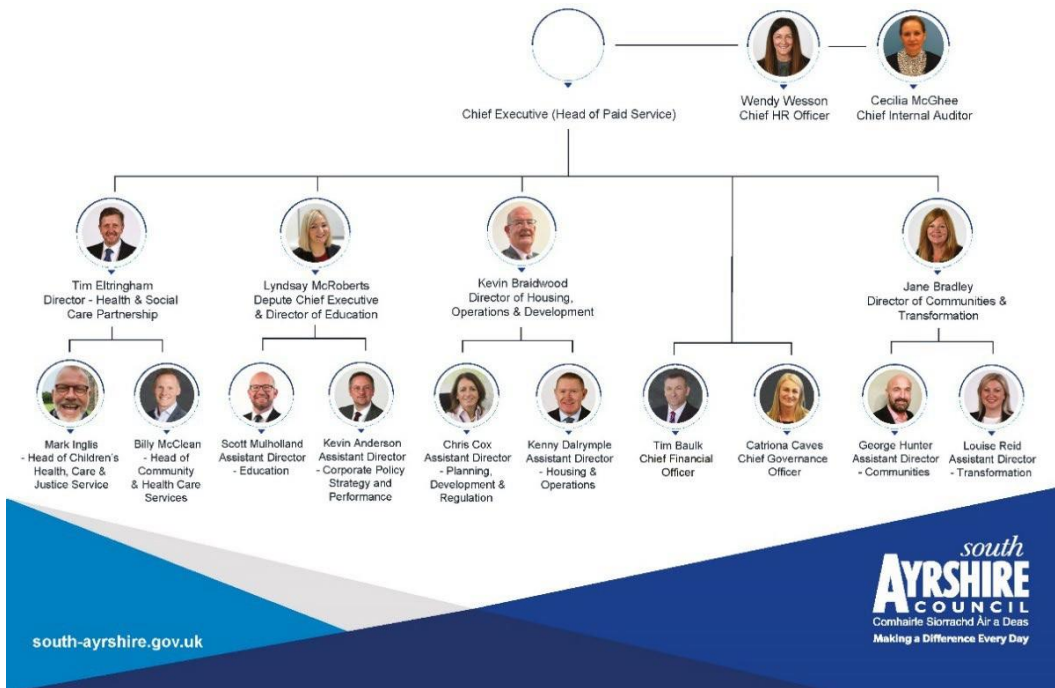
- Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability 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

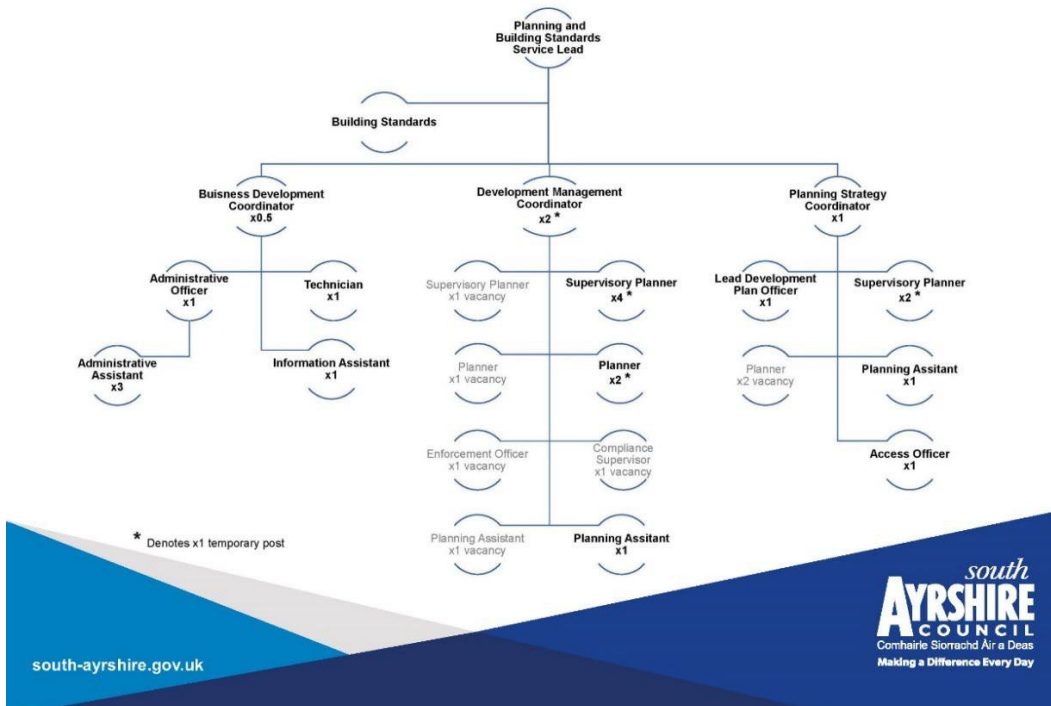
As set out in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 the purpose of planning is to manage the development and use of land in the long-term public interest. The democratically elected Councillors of South Ayrshire Council, under the legislation, are the Planning Authority for their geographical area. In line with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, the duties and responsibilities of the Planning Authority are carried out by Council officials at various levels of the organisation.

The planning function sits within the Planning and Building Standards Service, which in turn is part of the Planning & Development sub directorate which is an arm of the Housing Operations Development Directorate. These diagrams set out the Council's managerial structure as well as the structure of the Planning & Building Standards Service.

South Ayrshire Council Managerial Structure



Planning & Building Standards Service Structure



Duties of the Planning Authority

Development Management is responsible for processing planning applications and other permissions such as Listed Building Consents and Conservation area Consents etc. It provides advice on the need for planning and other related permissions through a pre application advice service. It also considers Section 36 applications for wind farms, battery storage facilities as well as other energy applications. It also deals with enforcement complaints.

Planning Strategy has responsibilities for producing the Local Development Plan, Supplementary and Non-Statutory Planning Guidance, Land Audits, Local Place Plans, Regional Spatial Strategies, Tree Preservation Orders, stopping up orders and Local Review Body.

Business Development has responsibilities for the technical and administration support to Development Management and Planning Strategy including maintaining planning registers, the validation and registration of planning and other applications, issuing of decisions, Planning Committee support. Additionally, it provides support for the development and management of IT systems and for web GIS.

The Planning Authority in SAC has no responsibilities towards delivering projects or schemes.

Staffing

With regards to the question “does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?” The Structure chart above demonstrates that the Service currently has six vacancies.

	Current Structure	Structure with Vacancies	
Planning Service	28 staff	22 staff	21.4 % vacancy rate

It has been well documented nationally that the Planning Act in 2019 and NPF 4 has seen an increase in the duties and expectations placed on the Planning Authority. During this period the number of planning application submissions has remained consistent with the previous years submissions with 631 in 22/23 and 677 in 24/25. The table below shows a decline in performance over the period 23/24-24/25. The highest levels of vacancy are within Development Management and Enforcement. To deal with these pressures determining planning applications have been prioritised over enforcement and non-statutory duties. However, on the evidence available it appears that there has been a negative impact arising from the reduction in staffing levels on planning application performance over the last two years. During this period the level of vacancies/absences have not been monitored and recorded nor have the number of cases-to-hand been monitored and it is not possible to retrospectively demonstrate an increase in cases-to-hand. The dynamic monitoring of cases-to-hand has been identified as an improvement action. This will become a critical data tool to demonstrate a case for increasing resources or protecting existing resources as Council budgets come under pressure.

While the impact on workload of particularly complex planning applications being determined during this period have also not been recorded, there have been two planning applications (Corton) that have undoubtedly drawn significant resource from the service and wider Council service.

	2023/24 (April - Sept)	2024/25 (April - Sept)	Increase in weeks	% time increase
All Developments	7.8weeks	10.1 weeks	(2.3wk extra)	29%
Non Householder	8.3weeks	9.6weeks	(1.3wk extra)	15%
Householder	7.2weeks	10.5 weeks	(3.3wk extra)	45.8%

Professional & Financial Resources

The table below provides a summary of the staffing complement/RTPI membership in the Planning service.

2024-25	Royal Town Planning Institute - Chartered, Licentiate, Affiliate members	No membership
Coordinators	3 Chartered Planners	/
Supervisory Planners	5 Chartered Planners	one
Planners	1 licentiate Planner	one
Graduate Planners	/	two
Enforcement roles	2 Vacant posts	

The Service has a balance of experienced planners and those less experienced. Within a relatively small team an approach is taken to give all planners a mix of planning applications with the more complex applications generally being handled by more experienced planners. It is thought that the service has some well developed experience in energy applications though this needs to be more widely developed with additional resources to meet with the increasing pressures in these areas. The service is thought to be well developed in technical and digital skills with the support of the Business Support team who are constantly improving digital working practices.

Finances 2024-2025

For 2024/25 financial year, the service has seen fee income increase by 13% however we still operate on a net cost basis. It should be noted that the employee budget is circa £1.5m to deliver the service and the fee income budget is circa £0.7m. This position requires the Council to allocate a portion of the Scottish Government Revenue Grant to fund the operation of the Planning Service annually. This position of financial weakness makes it difficult for the Planning Service to respond to workload issues by increasing staffing provision.

Specialist Professional Advice

Consultees play a key role in the local development plan process and in determination of planning applications. Given the broad range of applications received in the South Ayrshire Council area a large number of consultees are consulted both within the Council and externally. The broad approach and ambition of NPF4 and new Local Development Plan requirements has placed additional demands on all consultees for example Nature Scot and SEPA. It is noted that all consultees report that they have been impacted by financial constraints and are adjusting their service provision to meet their budget.

Given the nature of planning applications and the high number of section 36 applications received in South Ayrshire which have work implications over several years, external specialist advice is often sought in terms of noise, as well as visual and landscape assessments and although relatively small in number this is complex area of work and has an impact on the Council's financial resources.

At a time when the Planning Service is operating at a high level of vacancy which is impacting on resource availability, we also fall short in respect to specialist skills in biodiversity, ecologist, placemaking, climate adaptation, flooding, heritage, contaminated land, noise, landscape and visual assessment and specific legal advice. From 1st April 2024 until 31 March 2025, 788 consultation requests were issued by the Planning Service to external bodies across 319 applications. These external bodies are also reviewing their business models to deliver with restricted financial arrangements.

Therefore, a skills review is necessary to determine what skills are required to deliver on NPF4 and LDP3, however this will require to be undertaken within the financial constraints of the Council and those of external stakeholders

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

WorkforceStrategy

South Ayrshire Council recognises that the workforce is its most valuable asset and we benefit from the professionalism, skills, values and determination of a workforce that is focused on working together to achieve the aims of the South Ayrshire Council Plan 2023-2028.

In response to the Council's financial constraints South Ayrshire Council are carrying out a Council wide Service Re-design, which has resulted in a direction to fill vacancies internally first and a near freeze on external appointments. The Service redesign will result in an up-to-date workforce strategy. The drive to fill vacancies internally is welcomed in providing opportunities for the existing team, however, it has resulted in a very slow process of recruitment as vacancy filling is cascaded downwards. Furthermore, the posts that have been filled internally are filled in a temporary basis so as to avoid any negative impacts on individual staff arising from service redesign. This means that the posts that have become vacant are also temporary and this impedes the attractiveness of recruiting the residual posts externally. Recently 2 vacancies have been identified that can be recruited externally and will not impact on the outcome of the service redesign. However, these recruitments and future recruitments (to be released following service redesign) will likely be impacted by the current national shortage of qualified Planners. South Ayrshire Council Planning Authority currently have 6 vacancies in professional roles and it is considered that a focus of the Service Re-design will be to grow our own professionals and provide for succession planning. The national initiatives to support bursaries could be very supportive to our workforce strategy.

With an undergraduate accredited Planning Course in the University of West of Scotland (UWS) likely to take its first intakes in 2025, the Council will hopefully be able to offer placements in future years to support the growth of the profession.

Senior managers recognise that the planning team comprise a particularly professional team that are positive in attitude and their approach to the profession and the Council. This culture is supported by the management approach of the service with the Service Lead, Coordinators and Supervisors all adopting an empowered and supportive approach to the team within a structure of regular 1:1 and team-based support meetings.

Age Demographic

The workforce in Planning Strategy, Development Management and Business Development shows an ageing workforce with four staff under 30, two staff between 30- 40, ten staff between 40-49 six of staff over 50. This demonstrates the importance of workforce succession planning.

Staff Age Profile	Headcount
Under 30	4
30-39	2
40-49	10
50 and Over	6

On a professional level, although restricted finances may limit some opportunities, we are committed to enhancing the skills and knowledge. This particularly relevant in relation to sustainable and liveable places. Staff are encouraged to attend suitable training and development courses which include those hosted by the RTPi, relevant chapter events, HOPS and the Improvement Service and other such providers.

Health and wellbeing is also corporately managed with the Council adopting a commitment to taking care of the wellbeing of all employees. The care extends to helping to improve financial wellbeing, looking after mental health and keeping physically active and healthy. In addition, occupational health also aids the health and wellbeing of staff through offering appropriate support and assistance in instances where it is required. Many staff have found the flexible working arrangements post covid has helped them achieve a positive worklife balance improving mental health. In addition, Senior Managers have recognised the pressures arising from the high levels of vacancies within the service and have taken proactive measures to relieve pressures such as advising customers of delays to service and a flexible approach has been taken to the delay in agreed work programmes such as the LDP.

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	4
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	3

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
Following the Service Redesign focus will be given to filling vacancies including external vacancies that arise.	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	high	Short Term	Maintaining existing budget
Support staff in regular collaborative training	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	high	medium	As Staff levels increase, focus can move away from front line delivery to staff growth and training



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 preparation of this document has provided the opportunity for a period of reflection on the performance of the Service, which had not previously been undertaken. The Planning Performance Framework 2022/23 set out a number of improvement points which have been initiated but not fully undertaken, due to staffing issues. Previous areas for improvement included; review and improvement of website, provision of digital forms, better customer communication and Councillor training.

In addition, the Service takes on board learning points and improvements as and when identified through the Complaints process. There has been limited peer review over the 24/25 period with most collaboration and collective learning being drawn from such events as HoPS sub committees or Improvement Service workshops.

The Planning Service has identified various areas of service improvement such as greater use of Enterprise to manage performance and greater use of Uniform to assist with record keeping. However, the staff resource available is currently focused on the determination of planning applications and progressing LDP 3.

South Ayrshire Council Planning Service has not been entered for any awards scheme this year.

South Ayrshire Planning has not been the subject of any upheld complaint from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

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

Planning Scheme of Delegation

The Planning Authority Scheme of Delegation was approved by Scottish Ministers in January 2023.

The Scheme of Delegation is available on the Council's website at https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/media/8821/Scheme-of-Delegation-Planning/pdf/Scheme_of_Delegation_Planning.pdf?m=1725366930847

Appointed Officers within the Scheme of Delegation are the Director, Assistant Director, Head of Service, Co-Ordinator or Supervisory Planner. The Regulatory Panel (Planning) consists of 9 Councillors from a mix of political parties who meet 10 times year, (approximately 4-week intervals) and can be called for a Special meeting if necessary. All Regulatory Panel Councillors have undergone Planning related training for the year 2024/25 at the Planning Liaison Group and at an LRB Event.

Delegated Decisions by Appointed Officers

97.8 % of Planning applications are determined under delegated Powers terms by Appointed Officers during 2024/25.

Regulatory Panel (Planning)

2.2% of Planning applications are determined by Regulatory Panel (Planning) during 2024/25.

On 3 occasions Councillors determined to the application contrary to officer recommendation

Local Review Body

In line with Regulations, Councillors on the Regulatory Panel (Planning) sit as the appeals panel, (called the Local Review Body) for delegated decisions where the applicant wishes to appeal the delegated decision of officers.

9 appeals were heard by the Local Review Body during 2024/25.

On 9 occasions, the Councillors disagreed with the Delegated refusal Decision and decided to approve the planning applications.

Department of Planning Environmental Appeals

During the period 2024/25, 3 appeals on decisions by the Regulatory Panel (Planning) were made to the DPEA. On 2 occasions the Reporter supported the position of the Regulatory Panel (Planning)

Planning Liaison Group

The Planning Liaison Group is a discussion forum for Councillors from the Regulatory Panel (Planning) with Senior Officials. This group reviews the running and procedures of the Regulatory Panel (Planning) and the Local Review Body, as well providing a forum for updates, “top up” training and discussion on general planning matters.

Local Development Plan 3 Member Officer Working Group

As part of the new Local Development Plan process a member officer working group has been formulated to provide a forum for discussion and oversight of the LDP3 process. This will meet on a regular basis approximately 4 times a year.

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

In South Ayrshire Council, the Role of Chief Planner is split between the Assistant Director of Housing Operations and Development and the Service Lead for Planning & Building Standards. They are referred to as Chief Planning Officer (Strategic) and Chief Planning Officer (Operational) respectively. Both are RTPI qualified Planners with decades of planning experience. This joint role is considered necessary due to the wide range of responsibilities, beyond planning, of the Assistant Director, some of which relate to development and could bring about conflict of interest with regulatory functions of planning. The Chief Planner designation has not been formally recognised within the Council's Scheme of Delegation and consideration is being given to simplifying the designation to the Service Lead for Planning and Building Standards when this insertion into the Scheme of Delegation is made.

The Assistant Director of Housing Operations and Development, oversees the Sub- Directorate of Planning and Development which incorporates Property & Estates Service, Professional Design Services and Special Projects Service, as well as the Planning and Building Standards Service.

In this role, she ensures that planning is reflected in all corporate decisions and that the voice of Planning is heard at the top table as well as ensuring that planning considerations are involved at the inception of Council development projects. As the Chair of Heads of Planning Scotland she is involved in numerous Committees and advisory groups external to the Council.

The Service Lead for Planning & Building Standards working closely with the three Planning Co-ordinators dealing with all other aspects of delivering the planning service.

Partnership and collaborative working are the cornerstone of the leadership in Planning within South Ayrshire Council. We promote a collaborative culture incorporating regular meetings and opportunities for discussion, feedback and knowledge sharing. While it is recognised that there

is a strong culture of collaborative working and clear leadership, the benefits of these strong relationships could be so much more effective if the Service was fully resourced.

The Service has a positive approach to continuous improvement and a very supportive Business Development Team who regularly develop and incorporate new procedures and working practices to maximise efficiency and professionalism.

Both Chief Planning Officers attend a variety of Council working groups and Panels on a range of topics such as housing, education and sustainability.

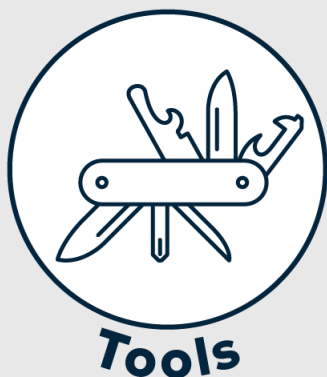
Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	3
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	3
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	3

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
Support staff in regular structured collaborative training informed by a skills review.	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	high	medium	As Staff levels increase, focus can move away from front line delivery towards staff growth and training
Install a dynamic performance and resource monitoring system to track cases-to-hand relative to resource	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	high	Short	As above
Re-establish Architect/Agents Forum	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Low	Medium	As above
Regular review working process	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Medium	As above
Roll out Enterprise in Planning	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Medium	As above

Roll out systematic basis for regular monitoring of high risk planning conditions	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Medium	As above
---	--	--------	--------	----------



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 Planning Authority adopted LDP2 on 31st August 2022 and therefore has an up to date [Local Development Plan](https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/article/28782/Local-development-plan-2). <https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/article/28782/Local-development-plan-2> For clarity, none of these policies have found to be deficient during any Planning appeal and no legal challenges have been brought against them. While NPF4 was introduced after the adoption of LDP2, the Local Development plan aligns well with the national document thus ensuring planning decisions are consistent.

The Plan was produced with collaboration from the LDP Project Board which met for the first time in relation to LDP2 on the 23rd March 2016 and met on more than 10 occasions thereafter, and was previously involved in the preparation of the Town Centre and Retail LDP (2017). It was a significant commitment for Elected Members on the group and for the officers involved across the Council.

In addition, the Planning Strategy team have also worked closely with colleagues in Education, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, the Health and Social Care Partnership and Facilities and Property Management to ensure that the implications of our site allocations on education and medical services are well understood and catered for.

LDP2 ensures that decision making takes account of matters critical for South Ayrshire and is well aligned with the aims of NPF 4, including the drive to achieve net-zero, community wealth building, the delivery of the Ayrshire Growth Deal and the provision of new, well-designed housing and associated infrastructure that helps to achieve good placemaking and well connected, thriving communities.

Local Development Plan 3

South Ayrshire Council have commenced preparation of LDP3. As set out in the proposed Development Plan Scheme (<https://local-development-plan-3-southayrshire.hub.arcgis.com/>), the Evidence Report is the first main stage in the plan process, and work on this is currently ongoing. This is an extensive evidence-gathering exercise on a wide range of factors covering social, economic, environmental, demographic and infrastructure data. This will be used to inform the policy direction for the next stage of the Plan making process.

The initial 'call for evidence' and topic paper stage is now underway to assess what evidence the Council currently holds in relation to NPF4 policies and to identify 'gaps' in existing evidence that will need to be addressed in the final Evidence Report.

It will also provide an early indication of where the LDP3 will need to develop local or bespoke policies, that may supplement or depart from NPF4. The views of stakeholders including other Council services, developers, key agencies and community groups are being sought for this initial evidence checking stage.

To help take LDP3 forward with close input from elected members, the previous Project Board has been redesigned and relaunched as the LDP3 Member Officer Working Group (MOWG). This met for the first time on 11th February 2025 and will continue to meet at regular stages throughout the Plan preparation.

Regional Spatial Strategy

Following Cabinet approval on 15th September 2020 and approval by the appropriate committees of North and East Ayrshire Councils, an indicative Regional Spatial Strategy for Ayrshire was submitted to the Scottish Government on 15 September 2020. As the guidance from the Scottish Government has not been forthcoming this has not progressed. However, recently the three Ayrshire Councils have met to initiate preparation of an RSS.

The Local Development Plan's policies have been tested at appeal (not at Judicial Review) and found to be robust and fit for purpose

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

Digital Transformation

During 2024-25 92% (798) of applications received were submitted through the Planning Portal, with only 68 applications received in paper form. We continue to work with those small group of people to support their transition to electronic submissions. The Planning Service has a data governance strategy for the management of data approved.

The service has access to Enterprise which can considerably improve case handling efficiency and performance management capabilities. However, rolling this out with the business change that is required to support the software will require resource dedicated to the project. At this time there is not resource that can be identified, but once vacancies become stabilised this is an area to action.

The Planning Service utilises Web based GIS systems for Planning Registers, Vacant Derelict land reports, the LDP2 and the LDP3 process.

We work closely with the Council's Communications Team to ensure that all consultations events are widely published on all formats and media.

The Planning Service has a dedicated page on the Council web site and a significant amount of information is available to the public to assist them with their planning issues.

As part of our LDP 3 process we have engaged ESRI software which creates an interactive web page for the LPD process. This system allows developers, the public consultees and any interested party to register on the system and have direct access to the latest updates. In addition, provides the opportunity to make comments or upload representations directly to the LDP3 portal.

This system increases accessibility for the public to the process as well as reducing the administrative burden on the Planning Service of handling LDP3 correspondence. In addition, the communication strategy for the LDP3 process ensures that those people not able or willing to engage electronically can still have their voice heard.

The Service has utilised TEAMS to standardise our internal procedures relating to the consideration of Reports of Handling for Planning application . Thus, providing clear and easily auditable processes.

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 planning have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required time frames?
- 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

When the Planning Authority is taking decisions about a planning application under its Delegated Powers a strict audit process is applied. There will be a Case Officer appointed to the planning application. At the conclusion of the Case Officer's deliberations, they will present a Report of Handling to an Appointed Officer for consideration and determination. An Appointed Officer must hold the role of Director, Assistant Director, Head of Service, Co-Ordinator or Supervisory Planner. This two-step process is followed for all delegated planning applications to be approved or rejected. The wide range of officers who can "sign off" a decision adds to the efficient and timeous processing of applications.

In accordance with legislation all applications are considered against National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) unless material considerations indicated otherwise.

As a result of the near freeze on external recruitment due to the Service Redesign, the speed of determination of applications is not as effective as it could be due to the reduced staffing levels.

For the year 2024/25 the returns from the Scottish Government indicate the following:

****These stats will change once the SG confirms the finalised results****

	2023-2024		2024-2025	
	Apps	Weeks	Apps	Weeks
All Local Developments	501	7.7	508	10.2
Householder	265	7.3	255	9.2
All local developments (non householder)	236	8.2	253	11.1
Housing	67	9.4	64	13.4
Business and Industry	33	8.1	72	8.0
Minerals	-	-	-	-
Waste Management	-	-	-	-
Electricity Generation	-	-	1	18.1
Freshwater Fish Farming	-	-	-	-
Marine Finfish Farming	-	-	-	-
Marine Shellfish Farming	-	-	-	-
Other Developments	128	7.7	106	11.1
Telecommunications	6	6.0	2	7.6
AMSCs (under 2 months)	2	8.9	4	23.4

	2023-2024		2024-2025	
	Apps	Weeks	Apps	Weeks
Other Consents	130	6.3	169	6.6
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent	63	7.4	57	9.0
Advertisements	16	7.0	23	8.6
Hazardous Substances Consent	1	8.1	-	-
Other consents and certificates	50	4.6	88	4.5

Enforcement

The enforcement charter, it remains within the two year period since last reviewed and updated (March 2025) [LINK](#)

This Council places considerable importance on the planning enforcement function, however this has been severely impacted by the retirement of the two dedicated members of the enforcement team in recent years.

In order to address the lack of an Enforcement team the Development Management Planners have been working collectively to identify priorities and address the enforcement cases as they arise. As part of this process Senior staff have been required to provide guidance and support to more junior members in prioritising and resolving these complaints through regular meetings.

While a new Co-ordinator post has recently been filled, which is a positive move, the Enforcement Team remains under resourced, with one of the 2 posts only recently been filled. As a result, the Planning staff have been dealing with Enforcement Complaints which in turn has had a detrimental impact on the processing of Planning applications. This has, however, widened the experience of most of the planning staff and furthered their appreciation of the need for robust planning conditions.

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
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	3
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes	3

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
Explore greater use of the GIS maps including input training for all Planning staff	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Long	Work with Colleagues to provide training
Explore greater use of the Uniform data base and Enterprise systems to improve efficiency	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Short	Work with Colleagues and IDOX
Provide standard guidance on Roads Technical requirements to reduce need for consultations	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	medium	Medium	Work with Colleagues in ARA to produce guidelines.



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

As a result of the reduced staffing levels and the freeze on external recruitment awaiting the Service Redesign, the Planning Service only provides a pre-application advice service on major applications or LPD2 allocated sites. Outwith the Community Council Forum there have been no Community or developer events in recent years, with priority being given to dealing with statutory service provision.

Customers have the opportunity to make a complaint to the Service if they feel aggrieved and they receive a formal written response. Learning points are identified from these complaints and often result in Service Improvements taken forward thereafter.

In November /December 2024 a Survey was carried out by the Improvement Service of the South Ayrshire Council Planning Service's customer. From a very small sample size (nine respondents) it was identified that only 37.5% of customers were very satisfied with the time taken to deal with their enquiry or application. 33.3% felt the communication and quality of information was very good from Staff. 55.5% of customers felt they were treated fairly by Planning Service. With regards to overall satisfaction with the Planning Service 44.4% of people were satisfied or very satisfied.

The customer feedback in the above survey does not sit easily with informal feedback being given to managers and senior managers in the Council where improved satisfaction has been mentioned. The most consistent reasons being given is a change in approach to determining planning applications to allow issues to be addressed rather than moving to determination based upon the first submission. With the filling of key vacancies, it would be intended that further work would be undertaken to gauge customer experience e.g., through the re-establishment of the Architects and Agents Forum, and regular questionnaires.

The Planning Service identifies that it is important to have stronger and open links to our regular users and communities. When resources become available, we will aim to provide regular transparent customer forums and feedback opportunities.

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 application to be submitted through 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 LDP 3 process, using ESRI Hub as an engagement platform

The Planning Service has developed an interactive Hub website for LDP3 to host documents and online consultations for preparing the next Local Development Plan.

In addition to the Participation Statement which forms part of the annual Development Plan Scheme, the Planning Service has gone further to prepare an LDP3 Public Engagement Framework, setting out greater detail on which groups will be consulted and at what stage of the LDP3 process. This Framework emphasises meaningful engagement methods with a very wide range of stakeholders and community groups, including young people and travellers, to achieve a representative spectrum of view are taken into account. At the evidence gathering stage, extensive use is being made of the Place Standard Tool (including the young people version) to seek community feedback on local issues.

Notification and advertisement process for Planning applications

In line with national legislation, due process is followed for the notification and advertisement for every application. In addition, every application is available to view on the Council web site. here. In line with the Scheme of Delegation, prior to the determination of the items before the Regulatory Panel (Planning) members of the public are given the opportunity to address the Panel with their concerns about the planning application being considered. This can be done in person or via a Video Link. This process is set out in our document [Procedures-for-the-handling-of-planning-applications](#)

Outwith the extensive LDP3 consultation process, the Planning Service does not have any specific engagement processes dealing with Planning applications beyond those set out in legislation.

Community Council engagement

The Planning Service has participated in the South Ayrshire Council led Community Council Forum. This gave the Service the opportunity to speak directly to representatives of the Community Councils in an open forum which allowed for frank discussion and feedback. In addition, when circumstances necessitate it, the Service Lead will attend Community Council meetings to speak on specific issues.

Support and guidance have been provided for the small number of enquires made in relation to Local Place Plans, however none of these enquiries have progressed to any meaningful extent.

Further meetings will be held with Community Councils and other community groups later this year as part of the evidence gathering for LDP3.

The LDP3 Member Officer Working Group and Planning Liaison Group ensure close engagement with elected members on the LDP3 preparation process and ongoing Planning Service issues, and to allow feedback on the needs of local communities.

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
9. This planning authority has good customer care	4
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	4

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
Following the Service Redesign focus will be given to filling vacancies permanently and promoting succession planning.	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	high	short	Maintaining existing budget
Obtain appropriate staff to carry out additional engagement with Public	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Short	Finance to support additional roles
Regular Customer Questionnaires	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	Medium	Short	Additional Staff



Place

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

There is a mixed level of awareness of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes amongst Planning Authority staff and uncertainty over whether and how these should be used in decision-making processes. Part of the issue for the Council is what materiality and weight should be given to the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making.

Although, not used directly, many of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes align with policy requirements set out in the Local Development Plan (including New Development Supplementary Guidance) and NPF4. These are the main tools that the Council is using to deliver sustainable, livable, and productive places.

The Planning Authority fully recognises the need for sustainable, livable and productive places, as a fundamental aim of the planning system. This can be demonstrated through recent policy preparation and recent planning application decisions.

The Planning Authority within South Ayrshire Council is not utilised for project delivery and implementation. However, the Assistant Director has a remit across development arms of the Council including capital project delivery and regeneration. This remit ensures that planning considerations are taken into account in the delivery of Council development projects. Other than this relationship, the impact of the Planning Service on the delivery of sustainable, livable and productive places is mostly indirect through implementation of the development plan, taking planning decisions and involvement with internal and external partners in their development delivery. The influence of the Planning Authority manifests itself in the implementation of National and Local Policy in the determination of Planning Applications and influencing wider Council projects & policies.

As indicated previously the impact of the external recruitment freeze due to the Service Redesign is inhibiting the role of the planning Service to be effective as it could be in this Attribute. Ideally a fully resourced Service would be more fully proactive in supporting Council project delivery through for example, preparation of design briefs rather than responding with development advice.

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 deliver programme in place that supports the deliver of development on the ground?

Narrative

Proportionate decision making: Through pre-application discussions with applicants and guidance provided on our website, the Planning Service aims to ensure that planning applications include all the necessary information for assessment from the outset.

This allows mitigation to be agreed and approved prior to the issue of decisions and this in turn reduces the need to attach extensive planning conditions.

The limited resources of some consultees means they have to prioritise 'live' applications over pre-application enquires which in turn leads to the request to attach planning conditions in order to make decisions timeously.

In respect of Section 75 agreements it is recognised that delays can be encountered when seeking to secure planning obligations and in this regard we are considering ways in which to improve this process including the introduction of a S75 model template. It is noted that Heads of Planning Scotland are also working on a similar template, led by our Assistant Director and we will seek to implement the findings of the working group. It is noted that some of the delays in Section 75 agreements are as a result of the legal formalities relating to legal agreements rather than the discussion on the wording of the obligations.

Housing land: Work is progressing to set a Local Housing Land Requirement (LHLR) as part of the emerging LDP3 Evidence Report. The LHLR will be informed by the HNDA study which was prepared to support the Council's Local Housing Strategy . The HNDA study builds on the evidence which was submitted by the Council to inform the Minimum All Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) set in NPF4. The LHLR will be considered through the LDP Gatecheck process and once set the Planning Authority will seek to identify a housing land supply to meet the LHLR in LDP3. The annual housing land audit will monitor delivery and progression towards meeting the LHLR.

Processing agreements: The number of processing agreements being used has reduced in 2024/25 to two occasions while in the previous two years it was 8 & 9 agreements . This service is promoted through the Council's website however due to staffing levels, this has been reduced to cover only Major applications and allocated sites in the LPD2. This service is welcomed by both the Developers and the Planning Service as it helps to project manage the application process.

Following the issuing of the consent and the discharge of planning conditions the Planning Service has limited ability to influence the delivery of development. Therefore, the implementation phase of a development project is primarily dictated by developers and landowners, whose main focus relates to the financial viability and the marketability of their project, thus outwith the control or influence of the Planning Service.

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	4
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	4

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
Consideration will be given to expanding the Pre application process to all applications types with an aim of improving the quality of the developments	Service Lead Planning & Building Standards	low	long	Staff resource required