



National Planning Improvement

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

# Improvement Action Progress Update 2025 Renfrewshire Council



# Renfrewshire NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

## Foreword

Over the past year, following the completion of our National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) and our peer review session, we have sought to progress and implement our agreed Improvement Action Plan.

At the outset we would note the challenging circumstances we have experienced over the past year especially in relation to our Business Admin Support Team. As a result of limited staff resource and staff absence within our support team, a number of officers have experienced increased workloads and pressures including Planning Assistants and Planning Officers. In addition, workload demand and pressures relating to complex and major developments have also had an impact upon our ability to progress some actions within the Action Plan.

In addition to the above, the Planning and Building Standards Service have been reporting to an internal officer Board of the Council – the Performance Board. The Performance Board has enabled a detailed evaluation of many of our processes and procedures, and we are pleased that a number of workstreams have been commenced and progressed as a result of our work with the Performance Board. Many of the workstreams align with actions outlined in our Improvement Action Plan and are detailed in relation of the respective action point.

Notwithstanding the above, we are pleased to report that our Developer Contributions (Education) Planning Guidance was adopted at a meeting of the Planning and Climate Change Policy Board in August 2025.

Progress has also been made in relation to many of our other action points and although not completed to date we look forward to completing them in the coming year. Our professional development plan process is about to be implemented and as such this process has been progressed in partnership with our colleagues in Environment, Housing and Infrastructure. All staff within the planning service will now complete the review and discuss matters with their manager setting individual goals and action points.

Our review of processes is ongoing and continues to help enhance our procedures. Over the past year improvements and enhancements have included new decision notice templates together with the introduction of formalised assessment processes and decision notices relating to applications for treeworks, notification of works to trees in a conversation area, proposal of application notices, EIA Screening opinions, non-material variations and discharge of conditions. Work is continuing and a review of our procedures in relation to planning enforcement has highlighted and identified a number of areas of improvement as we seek to streamline and enhance our processes in respect of enforcement matters. This includes drafting a suite of bespoke enforcement related notice templates and associated letters and coding/embedding these into our Uniform. In addition, we are pleased to be working with colleagues from our IT team to investigate and implement, where possible, the automation of some tasks thus helping to save staff time which can be diverted to other tasks.



We remain committed to ensuring that the planning process is transparent and accessible to all and draft guidance has been prepared in relation to the introduction of hearings at meetings of the Planning and Climate Change Policy Board. The introduction of hearings would enable applicants and those making representations to address the board as part of the consideration of the respective planning application. Further work requires to be undertaken with our colleagues in legal and committee services however we hope to be in a position to introduce hearings early in 2026.

Challenges remain within the service in relation to staff resource; however, we are currently preparing a business case in respect of seeking additional staff, firstly in relation to our Business Admin Support Team and thereafter in addition officers. Additional staff across the service will enable us to continue to progress the Improvement Action Plan but also enable us to improve and enhance our performance as we seek to promote quality developments across Renfrewshire.

## Introduction

The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) was piloted incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/25 financial year. This was to test a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities. The pilot aimed to test the new framework, to explore what works and what doesn't. This resulted in each planning authority producing an improvement action plan and performance assessment.

Each improvement action plan sets out:

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

[Link to action plan for 2023/24.](#)

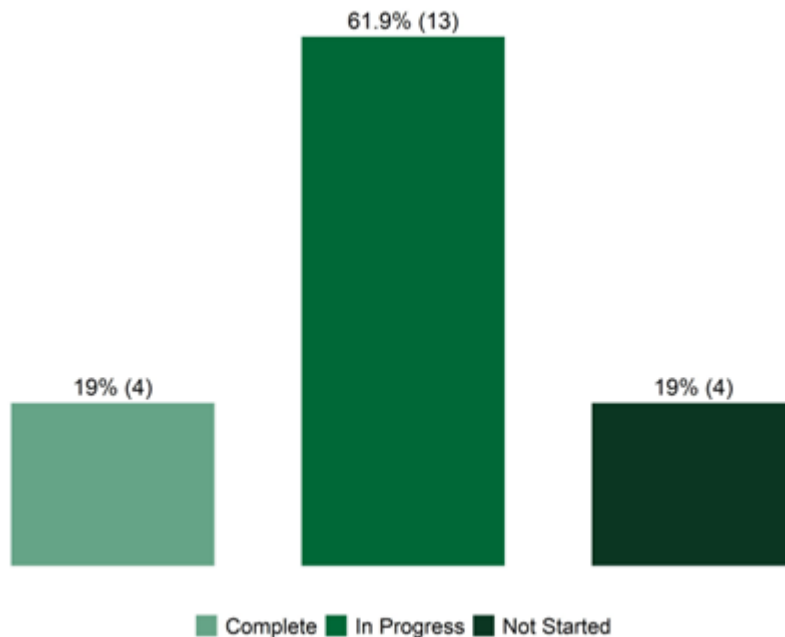
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress Renfrewshire has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

## Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

This section details each of the improvement actions and the progress the planning authority has made.



Renfrewshire has 21 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



## Action 1: Prepare a formal workforce strategy document detailing the adopted approach of grow our own

### In Progress

Progress against this action: The Planning and Building Standards Service has been subject to review and evaluation by an internal board of the Council – the Performance Board. The Performance Board has considered all aspects of our operations and as such as identified and enabled a number of recommendations to be made in respect of our workforce.

Although the preparation of a formal workforce strategy has not yet been completed it is significant to note that a number of improvements points have already been realised as we seek to grow our own. Firstly, we created a new role within the Planning Service – Planning Trainee. The trainee role combines study at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) one day per week together with on-the-job training on the other four days. The UWS course represents a degree apprenticeship and seeks to equip candidates with the academic qualifications while working within a planning authority. We are delighted to advise a Planning Trainee commenced work with Renfrewshire Council in September 2025 and is currently working within our Strategy and Place Team while meeting the study and assessment requirements of the UWS course.

A number of improvements from a workforce perspective have also been identified in relation to our Business Support Officers. The officers are currently based within the respective planning and building standards teams however the current set up lacks resilience, capacity and flexibility to meet service demands and in this regard, we have adopted a new approach with the creation of a new Planning and Building Standards Business Support Team. This new team will bring together all support officers and will help create a more resilient and flexible



team which will be able to adapt to challenging work periods or indeed periods of staff leave or absence. In addition, the new approach introduces two new positions within the team – team leader and task leader. The newly created roles will assist with the co-ordination and management of the team while also increasing the capacity within the team. As part of the grow our own model we currently have one trainee working within the team as we seek to provide opportunities for those seeking work or a return to work while also enhancing our capacity.

In respect of professional posts within the Planning Service a number of recommendations have been made, and a formal proposal has been submitted which is currently under consideration. The proposal would result in an increase in the number of posts within Development Management Team while also providing an opportunity for promotion within the Strategy and Place Team. It is envisaged that should financial approval be achieved; the additional posts will be recruited in early 2026.

The following next steps are proposed: In order to progress matters and to create and establish the Planning and Building Standards Business Support Team, formal recruitment processes will be undertaken and thereafter the team established. Similarly, should approval be granted for additional posts within the respective planning teams the relevant recruitment processes will be commenced at the earliest opportunity.

The formal workforce strategy document will include all the improvements noted above and will be progressed at the same time as the corporate approach to workforce strategy progresses.

## **Action 2: Re-introduction of Professional Development Plans of all staff**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: The PDP document had been created in collaboration with colleagues in Environment, Housing and Infrastructure and seeks to provide staff a comprehensive opportunity to review their development and training needs for the short, medium and long term. The PDP aims to assist, motivate and support staff to achieve continuous professional development. Testing of the PDP has been undertaken with colleagues from ICT with a view to enabling the process to be undertaken online this allowing reports and action lists to be prepared. The PDP will be implemented in early 2026 with all staff required to complete the document prior to discussing matters in further detail with their line manager.

The following next steps are proposed: The PDP process will be implemented in early 2026 and all staff within Planning and Building Standards will be required to complete the document and discuss matters with their line manager. Thereafter an annual review will be undertaken in order to best support staff with their own professional development plans.



## **Action 3: Introduction of Staff Survey to determine training needs and other matters**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: We are currently at the early stages of undertaking a staff survey to determine training needs. It is envisaged that the survey will complement the introduction of Professional Development Plans and help to fully support all staff in maintaining and enhancing their skills and knowledge and also helping staff to achieve their professional development goals.

The following next steps are proposed: We will follow up with our HR colleagues prior to the staff survey going live. Thereafter the survey will go live and will be open for staff to complete for two weeks.

## **Action 4: Review scheme of delegation as it relates to planning matters and make changes as required**

### **Not Started**

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- The action was set as a low or medium priority

To date Action 4 has not been progressed as the action was identified as a low or medium priority. In this regard, it should be noted that initial discussions have been undertaken with the Convenor however it is considered that may be better for such discussions to take place after next local government elections in 2027.

The following next steps are proposed: Further discussions will be undertaken following the local government elections in 2027.

## **Action 5: Review Board timetables and operation of the board including introduction of hearings and the policy relating to site visits**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Action 5 has been progressed however to date it has not been completed. An outline guide of how hearings could be introduced to the meetings of the Planning and Climate Change Policy Boards has been prepared. In addition, discussions have been undertaken with the Convenor and Deputy Convenor of the Board and colleagues from Legal Services and Committee Services. To date a final decision has not yet been reached in respect of the introduction of the Hearings.

The introductions of hearings will also have an impact on the existing site visit protocol and in this regard should it be decided to introduce hearings, the site visit protocol will be re-



considered and amended as required. To is envisaged that should hearings be implemented, the new site visit protocol will be implemented at the same time.

The following next steps are proposed: Further internal discussions require to be undertaken, and considerations given to the wider implications of the introduction of hearings at the Planning and Climate Change Policy. Thereafter it is envisaged that a report will be prepared which will be considered by Elected Members at a meeting of the Planning and Climate Change Policy Board.

## **Action 6: Training programme for elected members**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: The training programme for members in recent months has focused upon LDP matters including National Planning Framework 4, the LDP preparation process and the evidence report. In addition, sessions have also been held in respect of the Developer Contributions – Education. A more formal training programme will be implemented throughout 2026 and ahead of the requirement for Elected Members to undertake necessary training.

The following next steps are proposed: A formal programme of training will be prepared and circulated in the coming weeks. It is envisaged that the necessary Elected Member training will be implemented following the local government elections in 2027. Going forward the necessary training will be supplemented with additional training as required in respect of various topics.

## **Action 7: Increase capability within the Strategy & Place team to undertake more GIS work**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: A member of the Strategy & Place team was one of a limited number of attendees from Scottish planning authorities who attended Improvement Service GIS training. The training was useful and has been practically applied to support the team. The GIS module has been a significant part of the trainee planners course work on the UWS planning course. Regular (fortnightly) meetings with the Council's corporate GIS team have been re-established. Strategy & Place staff have had ArcGIS Pro software installed on devices to enable them to undertake relevant training and work. Staff have become more skilled in the creation and management of ArcGIS tools such as Survey123 and hubs.

The following next steps are proposed: A purpose of the meetings with the corporate GIS team is to discuss what additional GIS work can be undertaken by the Strategy & Place team rather than requested from the corporate GIS team.



## **Action 8: Commence preparation of a data strategy for the planning service and identify planning representative to engage with corporate Data Advisory Group**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Action 8 is in progress, and the Chief Planning Officer is now a member of the Data Advisory Group which has been set up within the Council. The formal strategy document has not yet commenced due to availability of staff resource and as such it is recommended that the timeframe is updated to medium.

The following next steps are proposed: To prepare the data strategy in respect of the Planning Service. The data strategy will be included in the workplan for the next financial year 2026/2027.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Update the timescale to medium.

## **Action 9: Put in place designated Enforcement Officer**

### **Complete**

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Following a number of recruitment attempts, a Planning Officer with dedicated focus on Enforcement matters was appointed in November 2025. The officer in question is now leading on all enforcement matters and reviewing our internal processes. The officer will take a lead role in the review of our Enforcement Charter later this year.

## **Action 10: Review Uniform workflow processes/letters and templates**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Our workflow process as they relate to development management matters have been reviewed from start to finish including all template letters, notifications and reports. The work date includes:

- Review of all workflow process and generated tasks within the uniform system.
- Review of all template letters, acknowledgements, notification and reports.
- Introduction of formal application process relating to discharge of conditions, non-material variations, pre-application enquiries, notification of initiation of development, notification of completion of development etc.

In addition, as part of our internal review with the Council's Performance Board we are also progressing the use automation within the uniform system. The Council are currently testing the use of an automated robot undertaking and completing rule-based tasks such as sending acknowledgment and notification letters and data entry.



The use of Artificial Intelligence is also being progressed throughout the Council with the introduction of the Council's AI powered digital assistant – Millie. The digital assistant seeks to help customers get faster responses to routine queries and reduce pressure on staff. As part of the wider roll out, Millie is currently being adapted to deal with enquiries relating to Planning and Building Standards. It is envisaged that the introduction of Millie will respond to enquiries more efficiently while also creating additional time for staff to process applications.

[Link to more details on Millie.](#)

The Council's Performance Board has also included a review of our Business Support Staff and in this regard a number of amendments are currently being implemented. The introduction of a dedicated Business Support Team serving both Planning and Building Standards will help provide clear and consistent reporting, while also removing single points of failure and indeed increase resilience within the service. The dedicated team will include the appointment of a Team Leader and Task Leader, while the four Senior Clerical posts (currently split between the respective Planning and Building Standards Teams) will be made permanent and sit within the same team. The dedicated team within increased staff resource will assist in reducing the time officers undertake administration and seeks to enhance performance by maximising the time spent processing applications. The long-term aim is for the Business Support Team to undertake initial validation of applications.

The following next steps are proposed: A number of steps have been identified:

- The continued evolution of the uniform system and the review of tasks to help drive performance.
- The instruction of more formal and automated procedures in respect of Planning Enforcement.
- The introduction of automation within the uniform system following detailed testing.
- The introduction of Millie to be the first point of contact when seeking call Planning and Building Standards.
- The formation of the dedicated Business Support Team. Recruitment of the team is due to take place in February/March 2026.

## Action 11: Review of Board and LRB procedures

### In progress

Progress against this action: This action has been progressed at the same time as Action 5 given it covers many similar issues. As previously noted, work has commenced in respect of the operation of our Planning and Climate Change Policy Board in that consideration is being given to the introduction of hearings and the operation of the wider Board. This action has not yet concluded however it will be progressed following further discussions with the Convenor and thereafter any changes will be considered by the Planning and Climate Change Policy Board.

The following next steps are proposed: We will engage with legal and committee services in order to progress the review and make recommendations on the operation of the board and implement agreed changes.



## **Action 12: Review and refresh all planning webpages on the Renfrewshire Council website**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Limited progress has been made to date due to staff resource and availability. The roll out of the new Renfrewshire Council website has commenced and as a result the priority of reviewing and renewing our webpages has increased.

An initial review of our existing pages has taken place and as such it is the intention to prepare the content for our new webpages over the next ten months. In addition, views were sought on the content of development planning related webpages as part of the 2025 Development Plan Scheme consultation. Responses were limited but did provide some useful feedback.

The following next steps are proposed: A timetable of implementation will be prepared and agreed and thereafter we will liaise with our communication colleagues to update our webpages.

## **Action 13: Introduce a customer service survey measuring satisfaction with the level of collaboration in the preparation of the local development plan/local place plans**

### **Complete**

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A survey was issued alongside the draft 2025 Development Plan Scheme seeking views on satisfaction with opportunities to input to the new local development plan, and how to improve opportunities. Unfortunately, only nine responses were received (9), with the majority indicating they were dissatisfied (4) or very dissatisfied (1) and providing reasons why. The same survey sought views on the frequency of local development plan communications, with the majority of responses (5) indicating the frequency was about right. Some of the suggestions received were reflected in the updated Development Plan Scheme and Participation Statement.

## **Action 14: Identify gaps in responses to the have your say survey from places and groups, and run targeted consultations to address this**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: The 2025 Development Plan scheme identifies children and young people, disabled people, older people, local interest groups (e.g. natural and built environment groups) and gypsy/travellers and travelling show people as groups that are to be engaged with during the preparation of the proposed plan. There are also areas of Renfrewshire that will not be covered by a Local Place Plan where an alternative approach to engagement will be required.



The following next steps are proposed: Engagement with these groups and areas will form part of the proposed plan preparation process.

## **Action 15: Regular engagement events with stakeholders and customers to include: - Developers Forum - Community Council Visitations**

### **In progress**

Progressed against this action: To date this action has not yet been completed however plans are currently being progressed in relation to a Developers Forum taking place later this year. The Developers Forum would provide the opportunity for the Planning Service and Developers to engage and discuss pertinent issues including those relating to processes and procedures. In terms of Community Council visitations, Officers continue to attend meetings of Community Councils where invites are received and remain committed to attending such meetings as required. In addition, Officers also attend meetings of Local Partnerships throughout Renfrewshire as required to provide updates relating to particular projects.

A monthly drop-in session is held for those community councils and other community groups that are preparing a Local Place Plan. These have proven to be a useful forum for those organisations to ask questions directly of Council officers and each other.

The following next steps are proposed: We will confirm plans relating to our Developers Forum and confirm arrangements. The Developers Forum will be held later this year.

## **Action 16: Investigate use of customer questionnaire on issue of decision notice, taking account of any national survey implemented by NPI**

### **Not Started**

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We are relying on a partner or stakeholder to action this

This action point has not yet been progressed and as such we have sought to rely upon the national survey which was implemented by NPI. In order to ensure we get the best possible response to the NPI survey from a Renfrewshire perspective, efforts have been undertaken to make applicants, developers and customers aware of the survey and to encourage participation.

The following next steps are proposed: On reflection it is considered that any Renfrewshire specific survey is likely to replicate the work undertaking as part of the national survey. In this regard it is our intention to continue to promote the national survey and indeed respond to the outcomes highlight in respect of a Renfrewshire perspective.



## **Action 17: Investigate charging for preapplication advice**

### **Not Started**

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- Other

The introduction of charging for pre-application advice has not yet commenced mainly as a result of competing priorities and the ability to respond to increased expectations where charging is associated with provide the service.

The following next steps are proposed: Over the next year progress will be made in relation to the introduction of a charging regime in respect of our pre-application service.

## **Action 18: Seek discussion/ training session with Improvement Service to provide planning staff with more knowledge of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and how these can be used in decision-making**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Contact has been made with Irene Beautyman of the Improvement Service who has agreed to provide a training session.

The following next steps are proposed: Confirmation of training session with Irene Beautyman as part of a wider training event.

## **Action 19: Preparation of model template for legal agreement and engagement with HOPS working group**

### **Not Started**

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We do not have the resources we need to do this
- The action was set as a low or medium priority

To date no progress has been made in relation to the preparation of a model template. The delay has been experienced as a result of staff resource pressures with legal services, however it should be noted that the action was identified as low to medium priority.

The following next steps are proposed: We will engage with colleagues in legal services to prepare a model template for legal agreements and take account of any recommendations that come from the HOPS working group.



## Action 20: Publication of guidance relating to Education contributions

### Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Our Developer Contributions (Education) Planning Guidance was adopted in August 2025. The guidance document is now a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and is used by both Children's Services in responding to consultation requests and by Planning in reaching recommendation and decisions in respect of planning applications.

## Action 21: Flooding Officer

### Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Discussions have been undertaken with a neighbouring local authority and the Planning Hub in respect of a shared Flooding Officer Resource. As a result of the discussions and review of current spend it was considered that a shared resource would not be viable and as such we decided, for the time being, to continue to rely on external advice from relevant consultants.

## Peer Collaborative Review Follow Up

As part of the pilot, each planning authority held a peer collaborative review workshop. This brought together key stakeholders and customers to discuss and provide constructive feedback on the improvement action plan.

Status of the peer review follow-up meeting: Staff resources are such that we are limited on time at present. We hope to provide a further update in the near future.

