

National Planning Improvement



GUIDANCE

National Planning Improvement Framework

2026



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Executive Summary

Reporting in 2026-2027 will follow the same process as you completed in 2025-2026 (year two).

National Planning Improvement Framework Timescales



Timescales for 2026-2027 reporting

The table below sets out the timescales to complete reporting for the year 2026-2027.

Planning authority 'check in' with partner authority and peer collaborative review group	Planning authority	June- September 2026
Planning authority completes Improvement Action Update Survey	Planning authority	Deadline 30th September 2026
Planning authority meets with NPI to discuss improvement action progress and next steps	Planning authority/ NPI	September-November 2026
Improvement Action Plan Progress Update report published and sent to Chief Executive and the Minister	NPI	December 2026

Key links

 Link to [Improvement Action Update Survey](#)

 Link to [Case Study Survey](#)

Introduction

We are now moving into the third year of the National Planning Improvement Framework. We wanted to firstly say thanks for your support as we tested a new approach during the second year. We appreciate all the feedback you gave us, and we look forward to working with you again in this third year.

This guidance sets out the process for 2026. It takes on board the feedback you gave us to improve the process from last year.

Contacts

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

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

Resources

We have a National Planning Improvement **Microsoft Teams group**. This space hosts our Improvement Leads Network where you can ask questions and start conversations with other planning authorities. We also use this space to provide updates from the team, links to useful resources, and store documentation. Please email Susan Rintoul if you wish to be added to this group.

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

 [Link to NPI web pages](#)



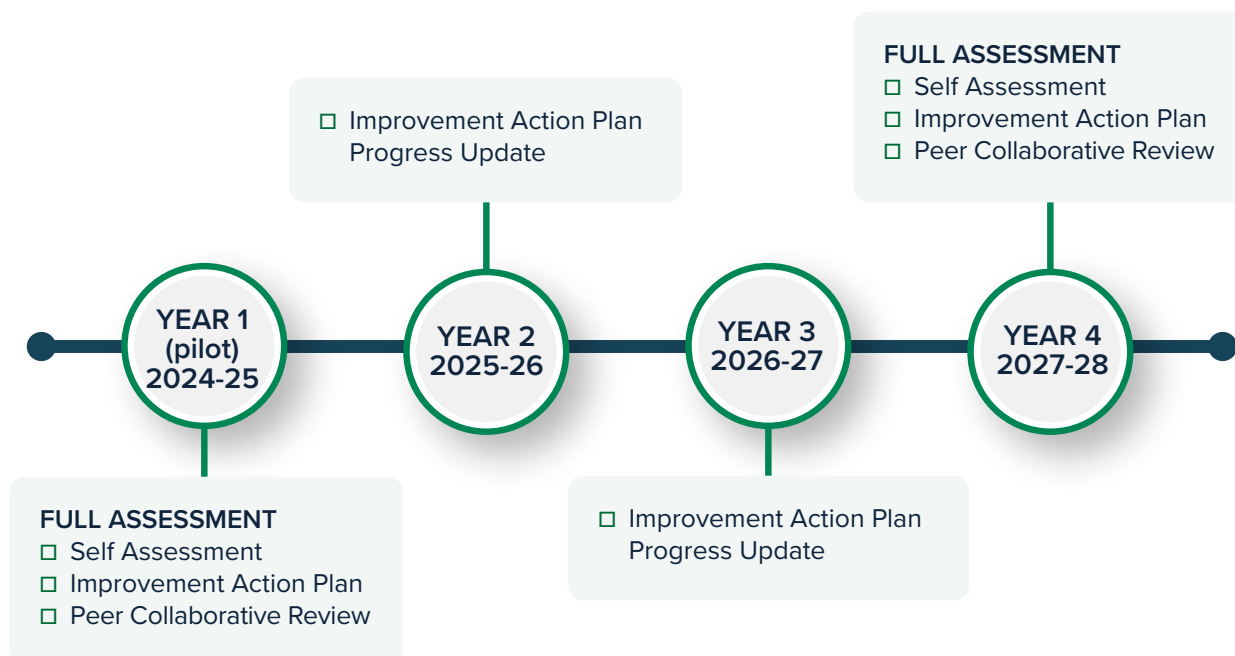
National Planning Improvement Framework timescales

The diagram below shows the overall NPIF timetable. In the pilot year, **2024-2025**, authorities completed the full assessment, improvement action plan and peer collaborative review, reporting on progress from **2023-2024**.

In the second year, **2025-2026**, authorities completed an Improvement Action Plan Progress Update. The process for **2026-2027** will follow the same approach: you will provide an update on progress with your existing improvement actions rather than complete a new full assessment.

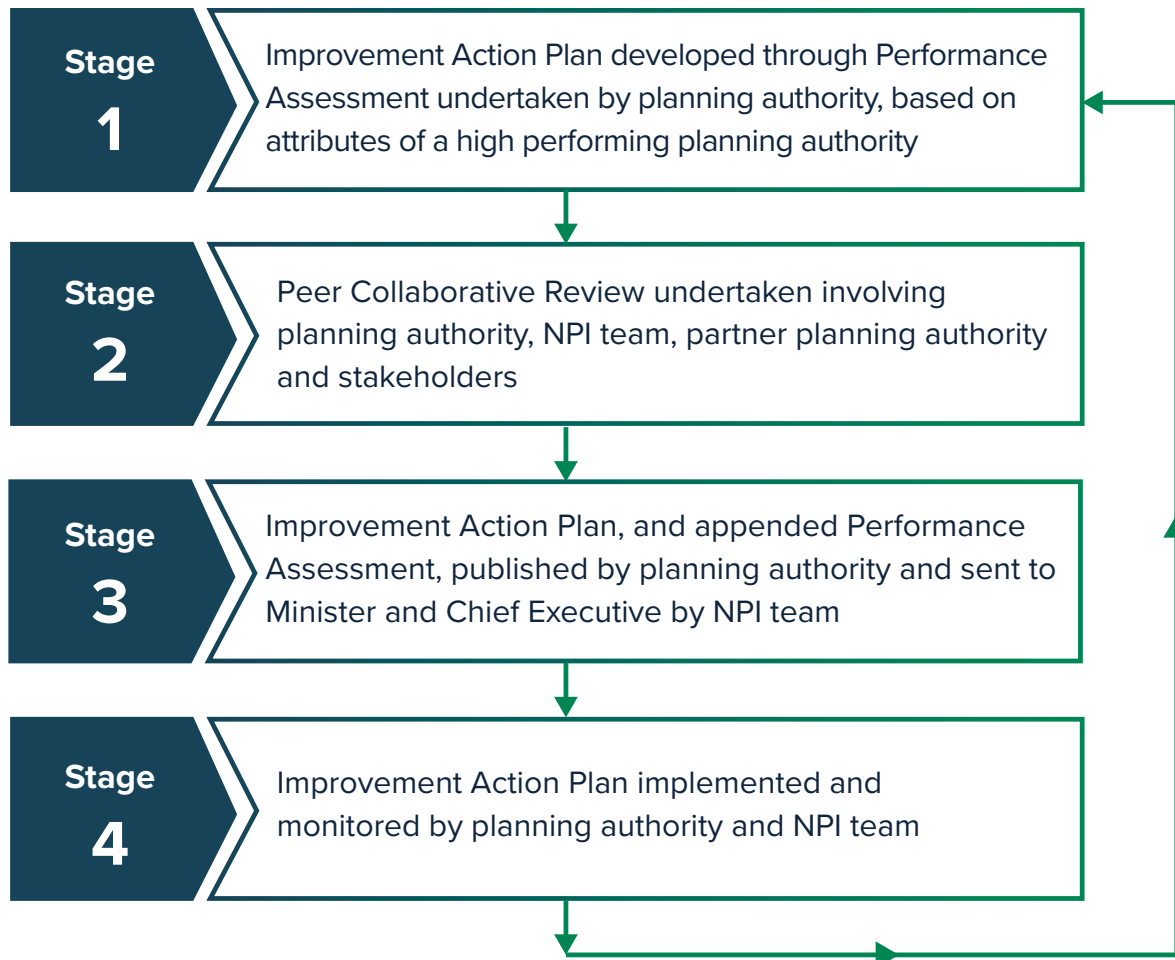
In **2027-2028**, authorities will return to the full assessment process. That full assessment will look back on the **2026-2027** financial year.

For the **2026-2027** update, we are asking you to report on the progress made with your improvement actions **up to the survey deadline of 30 September 2026**. This is a progress update part way through the year. The following year, when the full assessment is completed in **2027-2028**, reporting will return to covering the previous full financial year.



Timescales for 2026-2027

The process for the NPIF comprises of four stages:



As in **2025-2026**, reporting in **2026-2027** sits in **stage 4**: 'improvement action plan implemented and monitored by the planning authority and NPI team'.

For this **2026-2027** stage 4 update, we are asking you to report on progress with your improvement actions up to 30 September 2026. This is an in-year progress update.

Walk through video process for 2026-2027

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



Reporting in year 2026-2027

The diagram below sets out the key milestones for reporting in **2026-2027**. This is a stage 4 progress update, with survey returns covering progress made **up to 30 September 2026**. The following sections explain each step in more detail.

4a	Planning authority 'check in' with partner authority and peer collaborative review group	Jun-Sept 2026
4b	Planning authority completes Improvement Action Update Survey	Submit by 30 Sept 2026
4c	Planning authority meets with NPI to discuss improvement action progress and next steps	After survey submission Aug-Nov 2026
4d	Improvement Action Plan Progress Update report published and sent to Chief Executive and the Minister	Following review and endorsement: Dec 2026

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

June-September 2026

We recommend that you check in with your peer partner authority to discuss progress and use them as a critical friend. This will be an opportunity to share learning on taking forward actions.

We also recommend that you check in with your peer collaborative review group. The check-in can take place at any point throughout 2026-27. You may arrange a meeting with them, send an email update, or you may wish to wait and share the final Improvement Action Plan Progress Update report with them.

We also encourage you to engage and share learning through the **Improvement Leads Network** in the Microsoft Teams group. This is a space to share learning and discuss your improvement actions with other planning authorities.



4b: Complete Improvement Action Update Survey

Deadline 30th September 2026

You must complete the improvement action update survey by the **30th September 2026**. **We won't accept any submissions after this date. Please note, if you do not submit your survey responses on time, a report will be published that states 'no update was provided' and this will be shared with your Chief Executive and the Minister. If there are exceptional circumstances that would make this difficult, please contact us as soon as possible.**

Please note if you want to change the title of an action or remove an action, you must provide those changes to the NPI team before you complete the survey. We won't accept any changes once the survey has been completed.

From the 2027 survey onwards, actions will be created only once. Existing actions should not be rewritten in subsequent years, as this ensures consistent monitoring of progress over time. If new priorities emerge, these should be added as new actions rather than replacing existing ones.

The survey will ask you:

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

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

The survey can be accessed using the link below.

 [Link to improvement action update survey](#) (this will take you to Kobo Toolbox Platform)

We will send you a PDF of your response after the 30th September.

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

The NPI team will play a 'critical friend' role in the process. In doing this, we will probe and challenge the progress being made by the planning authority. After you have completed the survey, we will read through your answers. The questions asked will help us identify areas where planning authorities are struggling to take forward actions, and where support might be needed.

We will invite you and your peer partner authority to meet with us to discuss your progress and next steps. This will be an hour and a half-long meeting via Microsoft Teams, **taking place once you have completed your year two survey between August and November 2026.**

Please book your meeting with us through Microsoft Booking, through the link below.

 [Link to book meeting.](#)

During the meeting we will:

- Acknowledge any actions you have completed and discuss the outcomes of these actions.
- Discuss the actions that are in progress or where you haven't made any progress, then identify where you might need support to take them forward.
- Discuss how you are responding to critical and emerging planning challenges and what improvement actions you have in place or are putting in place to:
 - address the **housing emergency** and support the delivery of new, quality housing as that relates to NPIF Attributes 8 and 12.
 - make the most of potential approaches that use **data, digital or AI** technology as highlighted in NPIF attribute 7.
 - meet the target date of adopting new style **local development plans** by May 2028 as discussed in NPIF attribute 6.
 - improve the **customer experience** with your planning service. This relates to NPIF attribute 9. We expect that planning authorities will take the recommendations and good practice contained in [NPI Review Paper on Embedding Customer Care in Planning Services](#) into consideration in delivering their improvement actions and in identifying new actions

4d: Improvement Action Plan Progress Update report published and sent to Chief Executive and the Minister

Following our meeting with you, we will get your report ready. This will be a similar process to last year. If you have substantial changes to your action updates, we will ask you to resubmit the survey. If there are only a few minor changes, these can be made to the Word version of the report we send you. We anticipate that there won't be many changes to the submissions this year, as authorities are now familiar with the level of information required.



The steps to finalising the report are:

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

Please note, if you do not submit your survey responses on time, a report will be published that states ‘no update was provided’ and this will be shared with your Chief Executive and the Minister.



Supporting Improvement

Over the last year we have been publishing case studies on our webpages and sharing via LinkedIn and other platforms.

If you would like to contribute to a case study, please do so through our case study survey.

 [Link to Case Study Survey](#)

We are continuing to share best practice and support authorities to take actions to support improvement in the key areas coming out of the NPIF. Over the last year we have delivered sessions deep diving into the areas in need of support.

We undertook a **Rapid Review on Embedding Customer Care in Planning Services**. A number of important recommendations that should be considered by planning authorities are contained in the report.

 Link to [rapid review of customer care report](#)

We delivered a webinar looking at **Workforce Planning**. The summary of this can be found in the Sway linked below. We set up a channel in the Microsoft Teams group to continue discussions. We encourage you to make use of this.

 Link to [Sway summarising the discussion](#)

We anticipate that authorities will use the good practice examples highlighted to inform their improvement actions and in identifying new actions. We will discuss this at the meeting between the planning authority and the NPI.

In 2026-2027 we will undertake work examining consistency in development management timescales that will seek to identify steps that can be taken to reduce timescales where required.

We are also planning to look at how best to support planning authorities to take forward place-based approaches. We will continue to work as part of the National Planning Hub, and in doing so will be working with planning authorities to support them to handle approaches to hydrogen, battery energy storage systems, emerging new technologies such as data centres, approaches to public service reform, and adopting new style local development plans.

The National Planning Hub will also continue to support planning authorities through the local development plan process, and to explore approaches to Public Service Reform.



Analytical Strategy

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

Last year we published an evaluation of the NPIF pilot. This includes analysis of the feedback you gave us through the 'End of Pilot Survey', the feedback from the 'peer review participants follow up survey', and the conversations we've had with stakeholders on their experiences. The results of this will inform how we take forward the full assessment in future years.

 Link to [evaluation report](#)

We undertook an analysis of the NPIF performance assessments and improvement actions. This helped us identify the top topic areas where there were most improvement actions. They are:

- Making best use of digital and data
- Improving approaches to development management
- Undertaking workforce strategies
- Delivering elected member training
- Organising forums with developers, community councils
- Taking place based approaches

 Link to [analysis of the improvement actions](#)

We undertook the Customer and Stakeholder Survey for 2025, and we will be launching this again at the end of the year.

 Link to [Customer and Stakeholder Survey 2025 report](#)

We undertook a survey to collect data on workforce and capacity. This was issued again in June 2026.

 Link to [Workforce and Capacity 2025 report](#)



