



PLANNING SERVICES

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

2023 - 2024

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Introduction

Planning Services is part of the Council's Planning Economic Development and Regeneration (PEDR) Directorate. It is one of the smaller Services in West Lothian Council and delivers services which are predominantly statutory functions.

Planning Services itself encompasses Building Standards and both the Development Planning and Development Management functions which enables the team to concentrate on using our resources to best effect while ensuring our processes deliver efficient and effective services to our customers. A multi-disciplinary workforce provides the skills and experience to deliver these functions, as well as innovating and continually improving.

Over recent years, statutory planning work has become more complex, which has made service provision more challenging to deliver within timescales, and requiring ongoing training and development of staff, elected members and where possible, community councils.

Since 2011/12 the Planning Authority has published an annual Planning Performance Framework, submitted to Scottish Ministers with feedback provided and 'marked' in terms of green/amber/red. Over the following period until 2022/23 West Lothian Council, as Planning Authority, through our participation in the annual Planning Performance Framework programme, has demonstrated continuous improvement thorough this critical evaluation of our work.

Planning Performance Frameworks have now been replaced by a National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF), Performance Assessment and this is the first report for 2023/24 under this new format. The report has been prepared through a self-assessment, reviewed through a Peer Review and focuses on areas for improvement.

Recognising both our areas of good practice and evaluating where we feel we can further develop will help us to drive further improvements in our service as we focus on being a high-performing planning authority.

It is our customers who play a key role in identifying areas where we can further improve. Their feedback through the framework is central to helping us produce actions to ensure our service is responsive, flexible and making a positive impact on anyone who lives, studies, works, shops, visits, wishes to relocate to or just passes through West Lothian.

I would particularly like to thank those who participated in our peer review meeting to examine our proposed actions and to guide where we could develop further. Their input has helped us define our actions and has influenced our priorities.

My thanks also go to the team, particularly the key individuals that drove this new process, for their efforts in undertaking this process. I look forward to sharing our progress in future reports.

Craig McCorrison
Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration

Context

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced new statutory reporting for planning authorities. This mandatory requirement means that we must prepare a report annually that will assess our performance and identify actions for improvement. This report and the associated improvement action plan will be published and submitted to Ministers.

The new National Planning Improvement Framework was developed with stakeholders from a range of perspectives and interests in planning. It focusses around five themes that have been identified as being key to a high performing planning authority with 12 attributes.

These are:

Theme	Attribute
People	1. Has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity.
	2. Has a valued and supported workforce.
Culture	3. Has embedded continuous improvement.
	4. Has sound governance.
	5. Has effective leadership.
Tools	6. Has robust policy and evidence base.
	7. Makes best use of digital technology.
	8. Has effective decision-making processes.
Engage	9. Has good customer care.
	10. Has effective engagement & collaboration with stakeholders and communities.
Place	11. Supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places.
	12. Supports the delivery of consented development.

The matrix below has been provided by the Improvement Service, to be applied when determining the score, we have given to each attribute.

Where we have scored 1 or 2, we have provided examples of good practice.

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

Peer Review Meeting

A peer review meeting was held at West Lothian Council's Civic Centre, in Livingston, on 24th April 2025, facilitated by colleagues from the West Lothian Council Economic Development team. The meeting was an in-person workshop with participants split into three groups for discussion and feedback.

The purpose of the peer review workshop was to give stakeholders an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the West Lothian National Planning Improvement Framework performance assessment report and in particular, the draft Improvement Action Plan.

There were 15 stakeholders who attended the meeting, comprising representatives from the following bodies:

- South Lanarkshire Planning and Regulatory Services, as West Lothian's peer review partner
- Bellway Homes (East) Ltd
- Winchburgh Developments Ltd
- PPCA Ltd, Agents
- HAB Architecture, Agents
- Carlton Planning & Development, Agents
- WLC Ecology & Biodiversity
- WLC Environmental Health
- WLC Transportation
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Members of the West Lothian Development Management Committee
- West Lothian Community Council Forum

The Improvement Service's NPIF Project Officer also attended to offer guidance and assistance with the review meeting and three officers from Planning Services were on hand to answer questions and join in the debate where appropriate.

The draft WLC National Planning Improvement Framework performance assessment report and Improvement Action Plan were circulated in advance of the meeting. The draft plan identified 15 proposed actions and improvements. The meeting discussions, therefore, centred on these proposed actions, together with the self-assessment scoring given by WLC Planning Services for each of the Attributes in the NPIF report.

Dividing the participants into three groups encouraged open and honest discussion to take place in smaller groups, which allowed all attendees to comment on the scoring and proposed actions and improvements. All groups generally agreed with the self-assessment scoring, though one group felt that a higher score could be given in the People theme, reflecting the value and support given to staff by WLC Planning Services. Some amendments to the actions and improvements were identified through the

discussions and two of these (Scheme of Delegation and Community Council training) have been incorporated in the finalised Action Plan in Appendix 1 to give a total of 17 actions/improvements.

WLC Planning Services would like to thank all those who attended and contributed to the peer review process. Particular thanks are due to South Lanarkshire Planning and Regulatory Services colleagues who gave advice and support throughout the reporting and assessment process.

PEOPLE



A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the rights skills set.

It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future.

It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.

Attribute 1: This Planning Authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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 receive responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
-

Staffing and Structure

Planning Services sits within Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration which covers the functional areas of Economic Development, Regeneration and Employability, Community Planning, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Climate Change and Planning Services.

Planning Services itself includes Building Standards, Development Management and Development Planning which also encompasses the Education Planning and Contaminated Land functions. The wider service overall comprises 38.72 FTE staff (43 headcount) multi-disciplinary staff and has embedded a more flexible working style through hybrid working arrangements which continues to deliver a good quality of customer service and improved performance.

Within the two planning teams there are 22.34 FTE staff (26 head count).

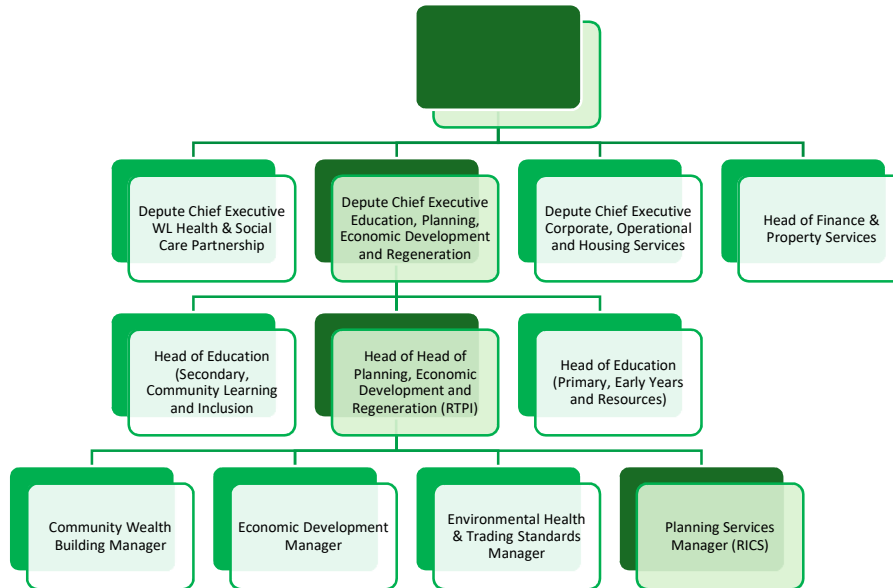
As is common across Scotland, recruitment and retention of planners and related staff has been challenging for a variety of reasons. This matter is further compounded by the continued pressure on Local Authorities budgets, as well as the additional unfunded duties set out in the Planning Act. There continues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

The service, to help overcome the recruitment obstacles, believes in developing employees which has allowed the development and progression of employees through the service from apprentice and graduate placements to qualified professionals. The service continues to progress staff in this 'grow your own' manner to alleviate national professional recruitment issues.

Further to this, the service has sought to maximise its income generation to maintain services along with assisting budgets and resources for the council. For this, the service introduced a charging strategy in April 2023 for pre-application consultations, non-material variations and the discharge of conditions. In October 2023, a 25% surcharge on retrospective planning applications was also applied.

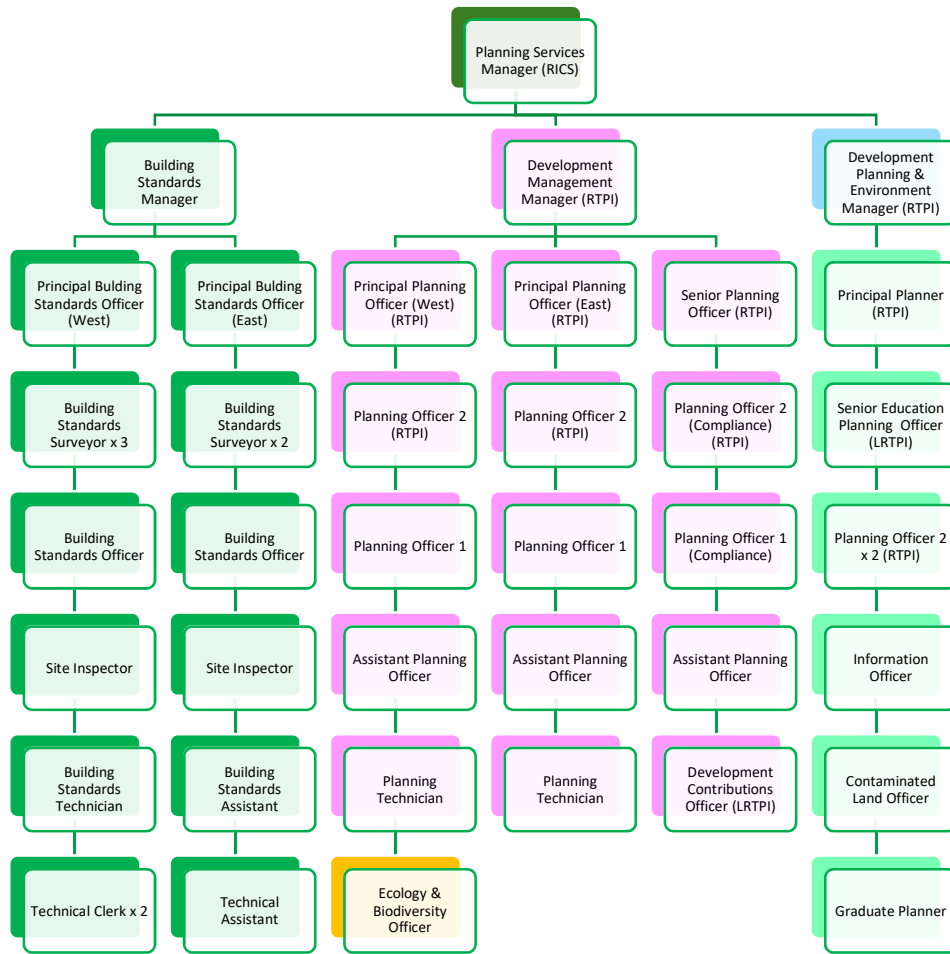
The planning service is recognised as being pivotal in maximising the potential of West Lothian as a place and sitting within this wider functional cluster enables us to combine skills and resources to address challenges through integrated solutions, making our areas attractive business locations, improving employment opportunities, encouraging strong sustainable communities, and enhancing and protecting our natural and built environment.

Organisational Structure



Planning Services Staff Structure

As at 31 March 2023



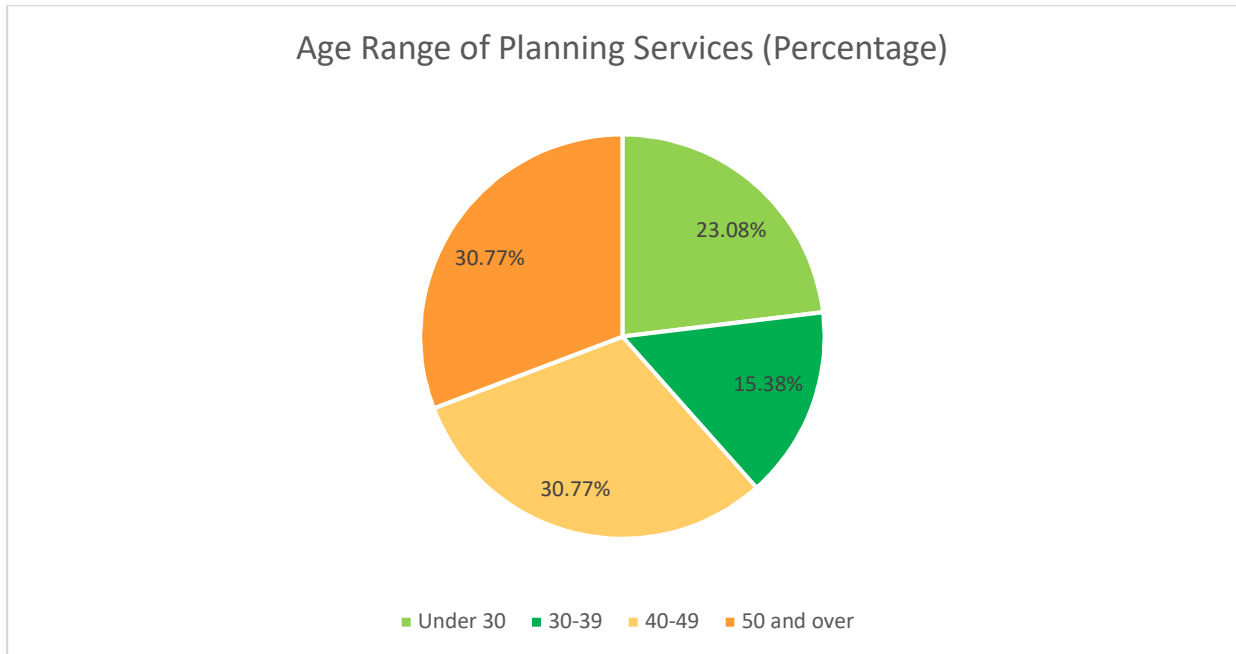
The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a membership organisation and the professional body which mainly represents planners.

The age profile and professional membership status of our Planning team staff is recorded as follows:

Head of Planning Service			1	1

Chartered Staff	14
Non-Chartered Staff	12

Under 30	6
30-39	4
40-49	8
50 and over	8



Carrying out activities within time and within budget

We continually monitor our application levels and ongoing workload levels to ensure that we have sufficient resources and appropriate staff to continue to meet both our statutory duties and our corporate priorities.

All staff have the opportunity to upskill as we aim to ensure robust succession planning across the team. Indeed, we have 2 Planning Services staff members who are hoping to attend university in October 2024, on relevant professional courses, and the service is exploring options to ensure we can facilitate this.

The service itself is structured in such a manner that it allows professional planners to be utilised in either Development Management or Development Planning, depending upon the resourcing requirements of either service at a specific point in time. If adequate staff cannot be found internally then we advertise externally, as and when required.

This broad skill base of the team means that there is no single point of failure and that all team members can progress applications appropriate to their experience and qualifications. Our performance time scales demonstrate the success of this approach

A minor restructure of the development management function has concluded in the second half of this financial year which has seen the creation of 3 Assistant Planning Officer roles in place of 2 Planning Assistant roles.

The Development Planning team will be assessed early in 2024/25 to identify any additional resource requirements for the forthcoming Evidence Report for the next Local Development Plan, LDP2.

Through a suite of reports from both Uniform Enterprise and Crystal reporting all performance is monitored on a continual and ongoing basis with performance being the subject of weekly team meetings and this performance is reported corporately on a monthly basis.

It is intended through 2024/25 and onwards to investigate the migration of our performance reporting to PowerBI dashboards, and further develop the ArcGIS skills of the wider team.

The expenditure budget is regularly monitored through monthly meetings with Finance to explain unanticipated variations in expenditure with longer in-depth review meetings being carried out on a quarterly basis for all service expenditure.

Carrying out activities within time with current income

Planning Services does not have a capital budget, with all its income being received through application fees.

Income is monitored monthly against both current and previous years monthly averages, which allows for budgets to be managed. Budget pressures require to be mitigated, in particular those relating to new and unfunded duties placed on the service, through the Scottish Government, Local Development Plan preparation and digital development.

Discretionary Fees	£ 95,500
Planning Application Fees	£1,259,657

Consultee response times

With the increasing complexity of work involved across the planning service to address the policy context of NPF4, the delivery of planning, whether in determining planning applications or preparing the Local Development Plan, there is an ever-greater reliance on specialist advice and input from both internal and external consultees.

The delay in processing applications arising from the increasingly complex process and the reliance on specialist technical input from both applicants and consultees prior to the determination of applications is a matter of concern. Further to this, difficulties in recruitment into key services are identified as risks to delivering statutory planning functions within expected timescales.

Number of Consultations responded to	711	878	921
Average number of days for consultation response to be received	26.45	18.51	21.15

Accessing advice, expertise, evidence and data

Planning Services staff have access to various specialised services within the council, such as Roads & Transportation, Education, Environmental Health, Housing, Climate Change, Legal, Flood Management, Ecology & Biodiversity, Open Space, Access & Woodlands.

Planning Services funds one of the officers in the council's Ecology and Biodiversity team which was set up in 2023, which allows for a greater element of consultation and advice on these key matters. This has proved invaluable for cases where NatureScot has been unable to deliver less direct consultee advice.

In addition to this, we have access to external advice from both external partners and contracted specialists, such as the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) and contracted contaminated land specialists.

Historic environment and conservation are two key areas where there is less specialist advice available from external statutory consultees or internal colleagues. Assessment in planning cases or for producing reports where these are factors, therefore, relies on planning officers having experience in these areas, attending in-house and external CPD courses and using the guidance on the Historic Environment Scotland website.

Access to data is key to informing the decision-making process around all elements of our business, including meeting our corporate objectives, statutory timescales, performance reporting and Local Development Plan.

Planning services have staff who manage Geographical Information Systems and our data sets within the Planning team, using this data to interrogate and provide evidence-based reporting.

Attribute 1 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to the resources and skills needed to maximise productivity.

Attribute 2: The Planning Authority has a valued and supported workforce

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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?

Workforce strategy

The overarching Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration Service, under which Planning Services sits, has a workforce plan which covers the period 2023/28 and is updated annually.

This plan covers:

- current workforce,
- future challenges,
- future workforce requirements, and
- workforce change.

This plan considers:

- workforce profile,
- age profile,
- gender profile,
- attendance management, and
- staff turnover rates.

A minor restructure of the development management function has concluded in the second half of this financial year which has seen the creation of 3 Assistant Planning Officer roles in place of 2 Planning Assistant roles.

The Development Planning team will be assessed early in 2024/25 to identify any additional resource requirements for the forthcoming Evidence Report for the next Local Development Plan, LDP2.

Through continuous reviews of how and what services we deliver to our customers, we ensure that the service functions and structures are correct to deliver our service.

All of this has led to a number of staff members progressing their careers within the service through attending university while gaining workplace experience.

Staff development

From the above workforce strategy, a separate succession planning strategy is developed for posts which can be classed as likely being hard to recruit and fill. These posts have training requirements attached to them and staff who wish to gain this training are welcome to apply.

Planning Services recognised a number of years ago that there had been more focus on the development of officers in their earlier career years and introduced further leadership and management training across the service management teams. This training has maintained regular training opportunities for all.

The service organises and delivers a wide range of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions throughout the year. The CPD series delivers regular short training sessions on a wide range of topics from both internal colleagues, such as those in the WLC Ecology and Biodiversity Service and external bodies, such as SEPA and Scottish Gas Networks. These sessions are open to other services where relevant.

Each team within the service has an identified training budget and colleagues are actively encouraged to attend relevant work-related events and provide feedback to colleagues who did not attend.

The service aims for all staff to receive an annual development review with regular 1-2-1's and team meetings also taking place to ensure open communication.

The success of our 'grow your own' approach, as covered in both attribute 1 and attribute 2 has been acknowledged at the highest levels within the council itself. Senior staff within the service ensure that they are available to offer mentoring, as and when necessary, to more junior staff.

This approach has allowed for a good level of staff retention and progression, including the service's Information Officer within the Technical Team, being mentored and supported through the RTPI Associate Membership application process. The officer was successful in achieving membership through the 'non-planning degree with three years'

experience' route and is now part way through the Chartered Membership process. The mentoring and support by senior staff and the ability for workstreams to be changed and allocated to the officer, to assist with obtaining the necessary experience, has been fundamental to the successful outcomes for this staff member.

In line with this strategy of focusing on the development of existing staff, senior officers are now in touch with several universities to look at their programmes for appropriate degree level courses for one of the Development Management Assistant Planners to progress from HNC level to degree level through a graduate apprentice course.

Colleagues have participated in national discussion groups arranged by HoPS and Scottish Government during 2023/24, together with other internal and external CPD such as:

- Scottish Government - Stakeholder Engagement Workshop to inform the drafting of new Housing Land Audit Guidance – April 2023
- WLC Ecology and Biodiversity Team – NPF4 Ecology Policies and Practice meeting and site visits – April 2023
- Planning Skills – NPF4 Biodiversity – June 2023
- TCPA-APSE: Living Locally: The role of Housing and Planning within Local Councils – July 2023
- SEPA Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Guidance – July 2023
- HOPs Housing Land discussion – October 2023
- HOPs Local Place Plans discussion – October 2023
- Hops Webinar – The role of the Environmental Clerk of Works - December 2023
- Planning Skills – DPEA Appeals training – December 2023
- Improvement Service – Local Place Plans training – January 2024
- Scottish Government Water, Wastewater & Drainage Consultation Engagement Session - January 2024
- RSK - 'CO2 mine gas best practice in site investigation and risk assessment within local authorities' - February 2024
- Scotland Gas Networks - Major Accident Hazard Pipelines training – March 2024
- Planning Skills – Shaping Places for Wellbeing – March 2024

The council is represented on the HOPs sub-groups covering Development Management, Climate Change, Energy & Resources, Development Planning and Enforcement.

Staff health and wellbeing

It is said so frequently that it no longer has the same impact, but it cannot be forgotten, that staff are our most important asset and Health and Wellbeing are core values which are embedded within the delivery of Planning Service's daily work and workforce management.

The council's online resource 'MyHR', provides an easy to access hub for all council procedures and guides, including our refreshed hybrid working scheme. This is an employee self-service system for all council staff, which can be accessed 24/7 through various devices.

From here staff can access the Employee Health and Wellbeing pages where they can find details on the Four Pillars of Wellbeing under

- mental wellbeing
- physical wellbeing
- financial wellbeing
- workplace wellbeing

Each of these topics has a large variety of associated guidance alongside appropriate signposting for staff.

There are also sections on:

- "spotlight on" which on a regular basis will focus on a particular health and wellbeing topic,
- details on all Healthy Working Lives supports including current events and,
- access to a mental wellbeing counselling service, including a direct telephone number for booking an appointment with that service.

Attribute 2 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to a valued and supported workforce.

Going forward, it is intended that the annual development review (ADRs) will be used more pro-actively for staff to identify specific areas of personal development that are required. All staff will also be supported to undertake further training in NPF4 policies and practices.

Supporting the service's Planning Enforcement team with the high number of enforcement cases, including using other staff where necessary and exploring university qualification for the Assistant Planner in that team, will also be a key priority going forward.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity		3
2. The planning authority has a value 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).

Assess Development Planning team resource in relation to LDP2 production	Kate Hopper	High	Short	Existing staff and resources
Investigate the migration of our performance reporting to PowerBI dashboards	Jim McGinley	Medium	Long	Existing staff and resources
Develop ArcGIS skills of all staff to maximise use of existing data layers within service and ensure efficiency.	Jim McGinley	Medium	Medium	Existing staff and resources
Support any staff who wish to develop appropriate skills for the benefit of the service, including attendance at University where appropriate.	Wendy McCorriston	Medium	Short to Medium	SAAS funding and existing staff resources

CULTURE



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

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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?

Annual assessment of performance

Continuous improvement is embedded in our culture and is critical in ensuring our success as we seek to deliver a high-quality service. These improvements are derived from:

- customer feedback,
- staff feedback,
- appeal decisions, and
- complaints

From these interactions we focusing on improving processes, procedures, and practice.

The quarterly and annual review of our complaints, performance and improvement action plan ensure we continue to monitor and track how we are progressing.

West Lothian Assessment Model (WLAM)

The service undertakes a “West Lothian Assessment Model” (WLAM), self-assessment review every three years. The service completed their latest review in March 2024 and the actions from this will feed into the next National Planning Improvement Framework.

The WLAM is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model – which is a global of excellence that is used by high performance organisations across all sectors.

The EFQM Model is a globally recognised framework that supports organisations in managing change and improving performance.

The Model has changed over time but, the underlying principles are as important today – regardless of the size of the organisation or the sector in which it operates. The EFQM Model continues to stress the importance of:

- the primacy of the customer
- the need to take a long-term view
- understanding the cause and effect linkages between why an organisation does something, how it does it and what it achieves as a consequence of its actions.

The strategic nature of the EFQM Model, combined with its focus on operational performance and a results orientation, makes it the ideal framework for testing the coherence and alignment of an organisation’s ambitions for the future, reference against its current ways of working and its responses to challenges.

The WLAM model can be seen to fit the 12 criteria of a high performing planning authority from the following.

NPIF Theme	NPIF Attribute	EFQM Criteria	List of EFQM Criteria and Sub Criteria
People	1. Has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results	1: Leadership 1a - How leaders develop the mission, vision and values and are role models for a culture of excellence in the organisation. 1b - How leaders are personally involved in ensuring the organisation's management system is developed, implemented and continuously improved. 1c - How leaders are involved with customers, partners and representatives of society. 1d - How leaders motivate, support and recognise the organisation's people.
	2. Has a valued and supported workforce.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 6: Customer Results 7: People Results	
Culture	3. Has embedded continuous improvement.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results	2: Policy & Strategy 2a - How policy and strategy are based on the present and future needs and expectations of stakeholders. 2b - How policy and strategy are based on information from performance measurement, research, learning and creativity related activities. 2c - How policy and strategy are developed, reviewed and updated. 2d - How policy and strategy are deployed through a
	4. Has sound governance.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes	
	5. Has effective leadership.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy	

		<p>3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results</p>	<p>framework of key processes. 2e - How policy and strategy are communicated and implemented</p> <p>3: People 3a - How people resources are planned, managed and improved 3b - How people's knowledge and competencies are identified, developed and sustained. 3c - How people are involved and empowered. 3d - How people and the organisation have a dialogue. 3e - How people are rewarded, recognised and cared for.</p>
Tools	6. Has robust policy and evidence base.	<p>1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results</p>	<p>improved 3b - How people's knowledge and competencies are identified, developed and sustained. 3c - How people are involved and empowered. 3d - How people and the organisation have a dialogue. 3e - How people are rewarded, recognised and cared for.</p> <p>4: Partnership & Resources 4a - How external partnerships are managed. 4b - How finances are managed. 4c - How buildings, equipment and materials are managed. 4d - How technology is managed. 4e - How information and knowledge are managed.</p> <p>5: Processes 5a - How processes are systematically designed and managed. 5b - How processes are improved, as needed, using innovation to fully satisfy</p>
	7. Makes best use of digital technology.	<p>1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results</p>	
	8. Has effective decision-making processes.	<p>1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results</p>	

Engage	9. Has good customer care.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results	and generate increasing value for customers and other stakeholders. 5c - How products and services are designed and developed based on customer needs and expectations. 5d - How products and services are produced, delivered and serviced. 5e - How customer relationships are managed and enhance 6: Customer Results 6a - Perception Measures. 6b - Performance Indicators. 7: People Results 7a - Perception Measures. 7b - Performance Indicators
	10. Has effective engagement & collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results	
Place	11. Supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results	8: Society Results 8a - Perception Measures. 8b - Performance Indicators 9: Key Performance Results 9a – Key Performance Outcomes 9b - Key Performance Indicators.
	12. Supports the delivery of consented development.	1: Leadership 2: Policy & Strategy 3: People 4: Partnership & Resources 5: Processes 6: Customer Results 7: People Results 8: Society Results 9: Key Performance Results	

Planning Performance Framework

Our improvement measures set out in the 10 years of previous Planning Performance Framework reports have delivered progress and benefits that are now being realised.

Marker	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023
1 Decision making										
2 Processing Agreements										
3 Early Collaboration										
4 Legal agreements										
5 Enforcement Charter										
6 Continuous Improvement										
7 Local Development Plan										
8 Development Plan Scheme										
9 Elected Member Engaged Early (pre -MIR)		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
10 Cross Sector Stakeholders Engaged Early (pre-MIR)		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11 Regular and Proportionate Policy Advice										
12 Corporate Working Across Services										
13 Sharing Good Practice, Skills and Knowledge										
14 Stalled Sites / Legacy Cases										
15 Developer Contributions										

Looking back at the service improvements we identified in Planning Performance Framework 12 for 2023/24, these now show as all being completed.

Delivery of service improvement actions in 2023/24

Committed improvements and actions	Progress
Development Management Committee Training – Competent Motions	Completed
Development Management Committee Training – NPF4	Completed
Local Review Body Training – NPF4	Completed
Develop Development Management Committee Training manual	Completed
Develop Local Review Body Training manual	Completed
Review website and correspondence in view of hybrid meetings	Completed

Awards and recognition

West Lothian Council as a whole holds a number of awards which Planning Services has fed into corporately. Examples of these are:

- Customer Service Excellence - which has now been held for 24 consecutive years.
- European Foundation for Quality Management – for which we achieved 5-star recognition in 2016.

Planning Services itself also submits applications based on its projects and innovative business improvements for consideration by national and other bodies.

A review of activities is considered each year to identify potential candidate submissions.

An example of some recent submissions and awards on projects that we have been involved in include:

2023	Scottish Property Awards	Community nomination category for Auldscathie District Park in Winchburgh.	Shortlisted
2022	Environment Analyst's UK Brownfield Awards	The innovative use of an abandoned landfill site to deliver a new 85-acre district park	Award
2019	Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning	Unlocking key development sites – an innovative approach to delivering infrastructure.	Award
2019	Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning	Planning guidance on air quality	Shortlisted

Peer review and knowledge sharing

Planning Services undertakes a wide range of benchmarking and collaborative work with other council's and national bodies such as Heads of Planning Scotland. The Service

regularly feeds into consultations on new legislation published by the Scottish Government and participates in workshops.

As detailed under Attribute 2, staff development, above, colleagues have participated in national discussion groups arranged by HoPS and Scottish Government during 2023/24, together with other internal and external CPD events.

The professionalism and expertise of staff has been recognised by other councils and external bodies who have requested training, presentations and specialist interviews from colleagues. This has included:

- Health Impact Assessment presentation and discussion with Fife Council
- Workshop and presentation to Linlithgow and Winchburgh Academies on town planning and local neighbourhood policies and guidance
- Attendance on the Scottish Government Expert Advisory Group for Climate Change
- Presentation at the Improvement Service/DPEA planning skills appeals training
- Interviews and workshop with RSK specialists working on the Scottish Government's CO2 mine gas best practice in site investigation and risk assessment within local authorities authored by RSK

Complaints

The Service's internal complaint handling process has a formal structure with officer's responding to the complaint feeding back the outcome of investigations both corporately and to individual case officers and where required more widely to the service and identifying improvement actions to be implemented.

For 2023/24 Planning Services received 26 complaints in total of which 16 related to Development Management and 4 to Development Planning. Of these 20 complaints 2 were upheld. One related to an IT issue where the online portal kept crashing and the other to the publication of the name of a representee to an application online. Both resulted in changes to procedures.

During reporting year 2023/24, the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman determined 1 case relating to the Planning Service where the outcome was "some upheld, recommendations". This related to an application where an incorrect reference number in relation the revision was affixed to the determined plans list.

Attribute 3 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making good progress with regard to embedded continuous improvement and this is set out in the Good Practice report for Attributes 3 and 4.

Attribute 4: The Planning Authority has Sound Governance

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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 is evidence of ongoing training for members?
- Have more than of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

Scheme of delegation

West Lothian Council's scheme of delegation to officers sets out the levels of delegation of decision making for the service. Planning Services considers there is an appropriate balance to ensure that significant applications are determined at the appropriate level with this scheme being reviewed as and when required and to be approved by Scottish Government.

The Scheme of Delegation was last reviewed in December 2020 in consultation with Legal Services, staff and Councillors and is available to view on the Council's at [Scheme of Delegation \(Planning Applications\)](#). Although deemed fit for purpose in its current form, a further review of the Scheme of Delegation is to be carried out prior to December 2025 to meet Regulation 6 of The Town and Country Planning (Schemes of Delegation and Local Review Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013.

In addition, the councils wider [Scheme of Delegation to Officers](#) and [Scheme of Administration](#) further supports both elected members of committees and staff in carrying out their operational duties, obligations and responsibilities.

Elected members training

All Councillors receive training specific to their role, from the day that they are elected.

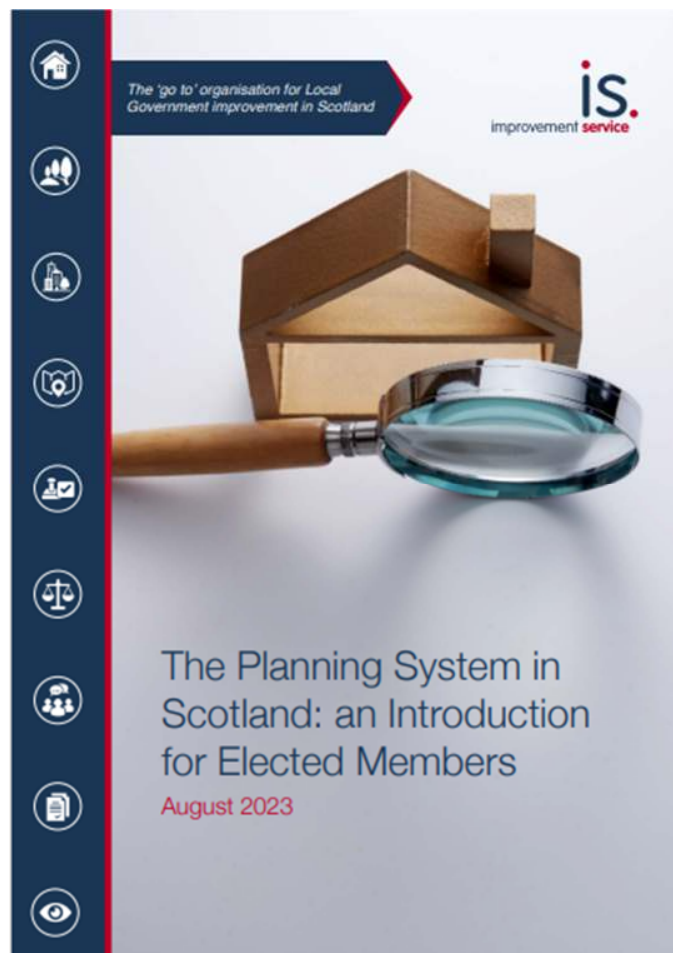
A comprehensive induction programme is led by HR, with collaboration and input from other services of the Council.

The Council also has an internal training data base where the Councillors have their own training platform and can access recordings of previous training events.

The Planning service plays a significant role, as a large part of the Councillor’s remit includes planning decision making, whether as part of the various formal Committees, or as part of the member notification process as set out in the current Scheme of Administration.

As set out above, under Attribute 3 ‘Delivery of service improvement actions in 2023/24’ significant resources have been given to member training during this year. More details of this are set out in the Good Practice report for Attributes 3 and 4.

A copy of the updated guide from the Improvement Service entitled “[The Planning System in Scotland: An Introduction for Elected Members](#)” is made available to all members.



Further training was provided to all elected members who sit on the Development Management Committee and/or the Local Review Body. This training included the provision of a manual for elected members covering the Development Management Committee process and Local Review Body process have been made available to all members of these committees.

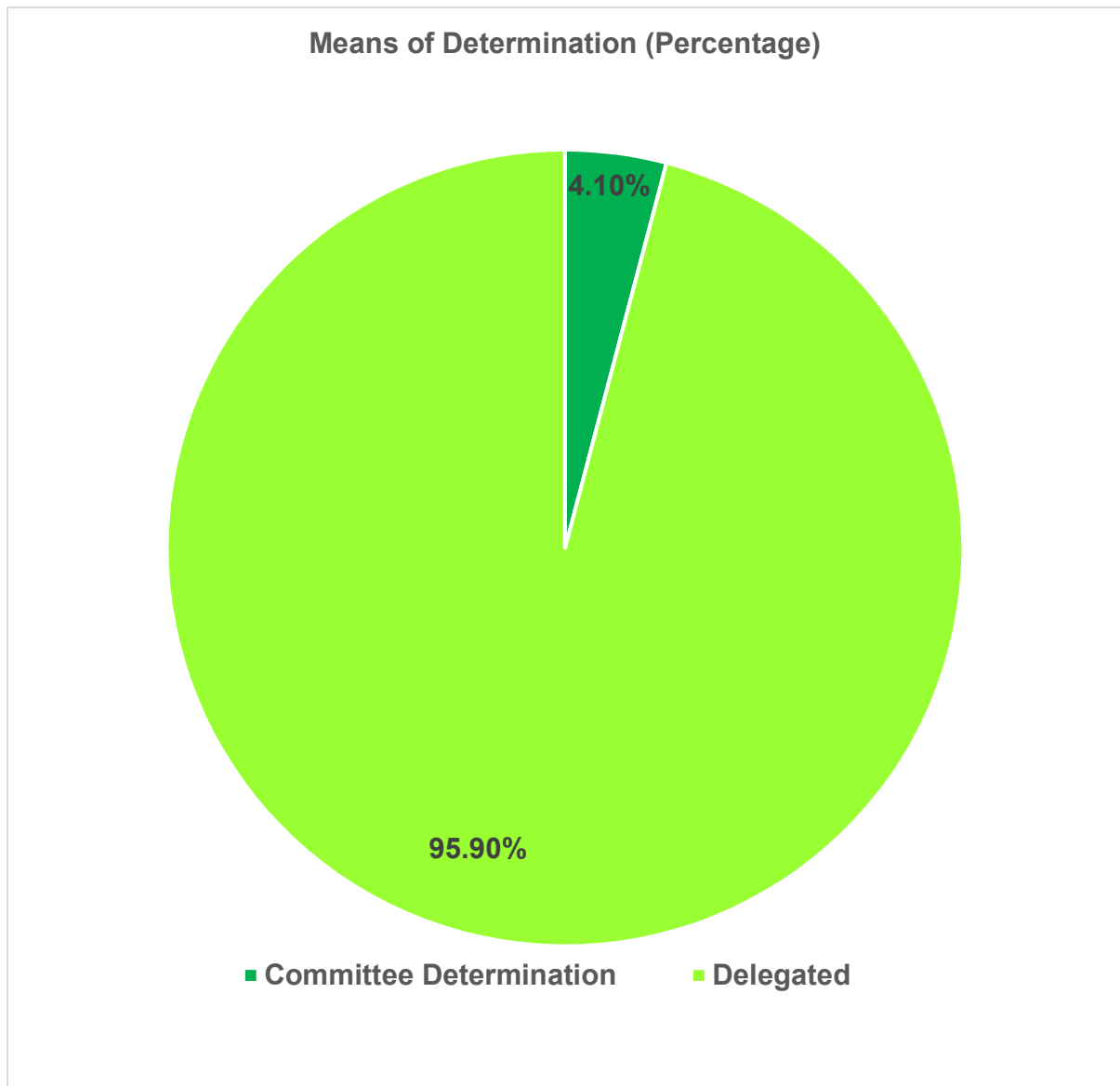
Training specific to planning continues throughout the year, whether the training has been identified and requested by Councillors themselves or arranged by Planning or Committee Services. This includes new legislation, new processes, or refresher training on specific elements of the planning process as deemed appropriate.

All elected members are aware of the importance of having up to date training on planning and their role in the decision-making process. They are also aware that Section 45 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, once in force, will require mandatory training for elected members and this section will prohibit elected members from carrying out certain specified planning functions if they have not completed training specified by Scottish Ministers. Indeed, all members were consulted on and asked to comment on the July 2023 Scottish Government consultation on Mandatory Training on Planning for Elected Members.

Means of Determination

During 2023/24, 95.9% of planning and other applications were determined by the appointed person under the Scheme of Delegation

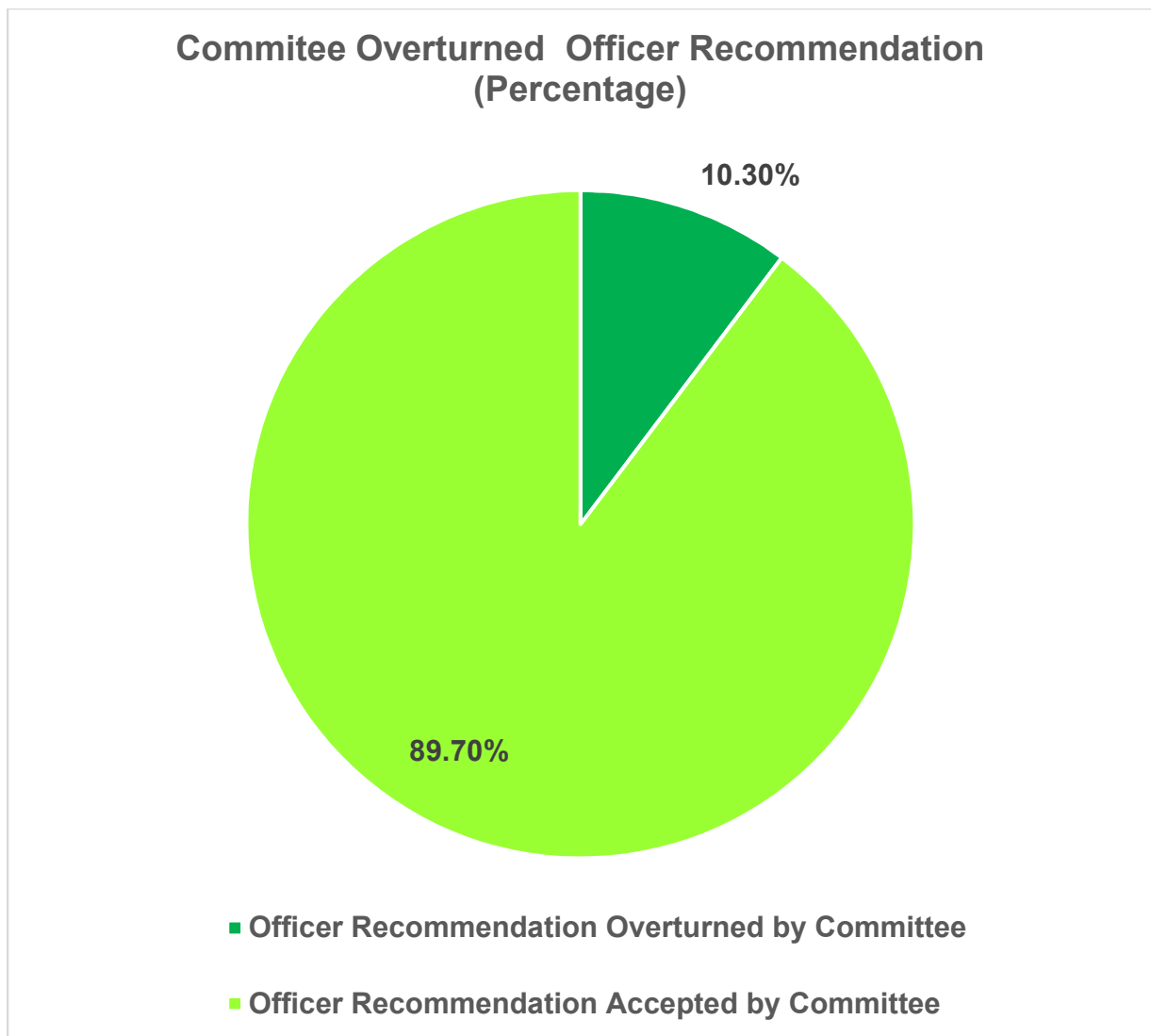
Determination	Number	Percentage
Delegated	674	95.9%
Committee	29	4.1%



Number of Recommendations overturned by Committee

During 2023/24 the Development Management Committee or West Lothian Planning Committee overturned 10.3% of officer recommendations.

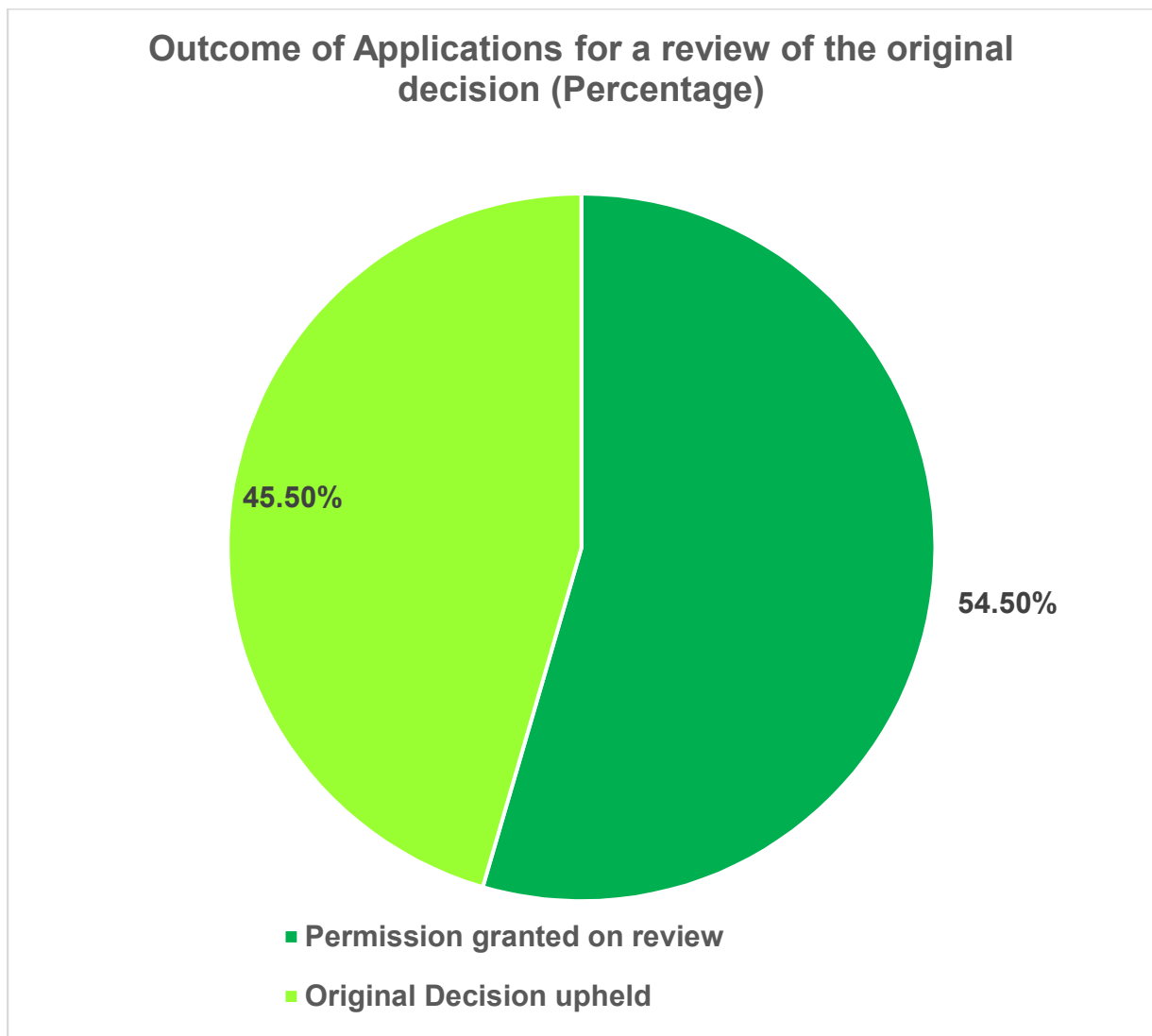
Determination	Number	Percentage
As Officer Recommendation	26	89.7%
Contrary to Officer Recommendation	3	10.3%



Local Review Body

The Local Review Body meets every four weeks if required and over 2023/24 there were 11 cases presented of which 45.5% of the original decisions Council were upheld.

Determination	Number	Percentage
Permission granted on review	6	54.50%
Original decision upheld on review	5	45.50%



A review of all LRB decisions is carried out annually to identify if there are recurring themes which can be addressed to minimise the number of applications for review received.

Attribute 4 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making good progress with regard to sound governance and more details of this are set out in the Good Practice report for Attributes 3 and 4.

Attribute 5: The Planning Authority has Effective Leadership

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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?

Chief Planning Officer

The appointment and role of the Chief Planning Officer will become a statutory requirement in April 2024, to advise authorities on planning and other functions relating to development. The Council is moving quickly to meet this requirement, and will be taking a report to Council Executive in April 2024 where it is expected that the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration will also be appointed as the Council's Chief Planning Officer. In accordance with legislation, details of this appointment will be able to be viewed on our website in the Scheme of Administration.

The Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration is a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Chief Planning Officer / Corporate decision making and policy

One of the duties of the Chief Planning Officer is to work closely with the Council Management Team, which the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration already attends and advises on matters relating to planning and development. During the reporting period, advice has been provided on matters relating

to the Local Development Plan, short term lets, energy related development and key infrastructure projects, such as the potential Winchburgh train station.

Chief Planning Officer and external bodies

The Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration represents the council on the South East Scotland City Region Deal also advises and supports external bodies, such as Heads of Planning Scotland, the Improvement Service and the Association of Community Councils. When in attendance, this will be in the Chief Planning Officer role.

Leadership team

The Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration meets with the Managers of Economic Development, Regeneration, Planning Services, Environmental Health & Trading Standards and Climate Change on a monthly basis to discuss wider service and corporate issues. In addition, they also meet individual managers on a 1-2-1 weekly basis.

Individually, the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration meets regularly, both formally and informally, with Service Managers and relevant officers with regards to specific applications, service improvement work and to drive forward continuous improvement actions.

When in attendance at these, the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration will be in there in the proposed Chief Planning Officer role.

Attribute 5 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to effective leadership and the appointment to the Chief Planner role which will be moved forward during 2024/25 as required by legislation.

Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	2
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	2
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
Ensure the ongoing commitment to continuous improvement	Jim McGinley	Medium	Medium	Existing staff and resources
Continue with the necessary member training, capturing in particular changes to planning legislation and updates on progress with LDP2	Wendy McCorriston Kate Hopper	High	Short to Medium	Existing staff and resources
Conclude the appointment to the Chief Planner Role	Craig McCorriston	High	Short	Existing staff

TOOLS



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

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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?

Policy and evidence

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 sets out a new Development Plan system for Scotland as part of a 'plan led approach' to planning, namely:

- **National Planning Framework (NPF)** - The NPF must have regard to any adopted Regional Spatial Strategy. NPF4 was adopted and published by Scottish Ministers on 13 February 2022
- **Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)** - The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced a new duty requiring local authorities to prepare an RSS. The RSS lays out the long-term spatial strategies for the strategic development of an area.
- **Local Development Plan (LDP)** - Planning authorities must prepare an LDP which sets out a spatial strategy for the development of that area. It must take into account the NPF and any registered Local Place Plan and it must also have regard to any adopted RSS.
- **Statutory Development Plan (SDP)** – The SDP will comprise the NPF and the LDP with the latest published taking precedence in any case of conflict. The RSS, though not part of the statutory development plan, will have an important role to play in informing future versions of the NPF and LDPs

Local Development Plan

The current West Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP1) was adopted in 2018.

A Development Plan Scheme (DPS) is published by the Council annually setting out the timetable for preparation of the next Local Development Plan (LDP2). It also includes a Participation Statement outlining when, how and with whom consultation on the plan will take place.

The Development Plan Scheme 2024 (DPS16) set out the following timetable for the preparation of LDP2.

- Evidence Report submission to gate check – Q3 2024
- Proposed Plan – Q3 2025
- Submission of Proposed Plan and Examination – Q1 2026
- Adoption – Q3 2026

Plan Preparation Stage	Expected Date (DPS No.16)	Change from DPS No.15
Evidence Report and Early engagement	Ongoing	
Council approval of Evidence Report	Q3 2024 (October to December)	Previously Q1* 2024
Submission to Scottish Ministers and 'gate check process'	Q3 2024 (October to December)	Previously Q2* 2024
Preparation of Proposed Plan and 'call for ideas'	Q4 2024 to Q3 2025 (October to December 2025)	Previously Q3* 2024
Council approval and publication of the Proposed Plan	Q3 2025 (October to December)	Previously Q2* 2025
Proposed Plan consultation period	Q3 2025 (October to December)	Previously Q2* 2025
Submission of Proposed Plan for examination	Q1 2026 (April to June)	Previously Q4* 2025
Examination	Q1 2026 (April to June) to Q2 2026 (July to September)	Previously Q4* to Q1* 2026
Adoption of LDP 2	Q3 2026 (October to (December 2026)	Previously Q2* 2026

* New regulations and guidance specify the date convention to be used is fiscal year quarters. Q1 = April to June, Q2 = July to September, Q3 = October to December and Q4 = January to March. Previously the DPS has used calendar year quarters.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The preparation and adoption of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) will provide a long-term spatial development framework at regional level which will identify strategic development needs and priorities. While they will not form part of the development plan, they must be taken account of when an LDP is being prepared.

West Lothian Council has worked collaboratively with SESplan / City Deal partner authorities to prepare an [interim RSS](#) and this was submitted to Scottish Government at the end of 2021. The RSS and other associated documents can be viewed on the [Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal website](#).

Local Development Plan Evidence Report

Preparation of the Evidence Report began in October 2023.

We have invited all community councils and community bodies to prepare Local Place Plans before the 31st May 2024.

The council is currently in the evidence gathering stage and carrying out early engagement. In 2023/24 we:

- Initiated early engagement online with communities in West Lothian through a range of surveys 'How good is your place?'
- Carried out a public engagement exercise 'We need to talk about LDP2' with 10 drop-in sessions across West Lothian.
- Initiated engagement with key stakeholders such as the Key Agencies
- Begun 'place-based' collaborative work with other WLC services to identify and collate evidence relating to climate change, flooding, biodiversity, the natural environment, forestry and woodlands, transport, affordable housing need, open space and play sufficiency.
- Engaged disabled people, children and young people; and the gypsy traveller community and other under-represented groups, and,

As part of the preparation of the Evidence Report we also intend to carry out direct engagement with:

- Community councils and other community organisations alongside wider public engagement,
- Relevant stakeholders on key evidence report themes as these emerge.

Local Development Plan Policies

The current West Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP1) was adopted in 2018. LDP1 replaced the previous West Lothian Local Plan 2009 (WLLP).

LDP1 was prepared to conform with the Strategic Development Plan (SDP) which had been prepared by the strategic planning authority (SESplan) and its purpose was to implement requirements on a more detailed site-specific basis than existed within the SDP. The SDP ceased to have effect following the adoption of National Planning Framework 4 on 13 February 2023.

LDP 1 comprises a written statement and five proposals maps. The written statement provides the general policy context against which planning applications for new development proposals will be assessed. This is supported by the proposals maps which show the range of development opportunities and constraints within the area.

The plan is supported by a suite of Statutory and Non-Statutory Planning Guidance which is used to implement the policies and spatial strategy of the plan. These documents have been subject to public consultation, approved by Council Executive, and in the case of statutory guidance, subjected to additional scrutiny by Scottish Ministers before being adopted.

At the time of the adoption of the West Lothian Local Development Plan 2018 the council was required to publish an Action Programme to support delivery of the plan.

The Action Programme was prepared with input from across the council, the relevant key agencies and other organisations. The first Action Programme following the adoption of the West Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP 1) was published and submitted to Scottish Ministers in February 2019.

An Action Programme must be kept up to date and be re-published whenever required by the Scottish Ministers, or whenever an authority think it appropriate to do so, but in any event within 2 years after last publishing (or re-publishing) it.

The second Action Programme (first review of the original Action Programme) was submitted to Scottish Ministers in January 2021 (delayed because of Covid 19).

Prior to preparation of the third review of the Action Programme, regulations amended the process of preparing an Action Programme and required authorities to review, update, consult and re-publish the Action Programme as a Delivery Programme.

However, in August 2023 an application to the Court of Session (Miller Homes v Scottish Ministers, 'Mossend') challenged the use of National Planning Framework 4 Policy 16 in relation to housing delivery prior to the adoption of a new NPF4 compliant Local Development Plan.

The case also raised the issue of whether a Delivery Programme rather than an Action Programme could be provided under LDPs published prior to NPF4. Preparation of the first Delivery Programme for LDP 1 to comply with the regulations was paused until this case was resolved.

Although beyond the date of this NPIF report, the Court of Session Judgement was issued on the 3 May 2024 and served to clarify that Action Programmes can now be reviewed and subsequently published as Delivery Programmes, this process will start in June 2024.

Attribute 6 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to a robust policy and evidence base. There have been significant changes brought in by NPF4 and the corresponding legislation during 2023, therefore, much of the policy work in 2023/24 has been about understanding and adapting to those changes, together with defending several major housing appeals which centred primarily around the interpretation of NPF4 Policy 16.

Attribute 7: The Planning Authority Makes Best use of Data and Digital Technology

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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?

e-development portal

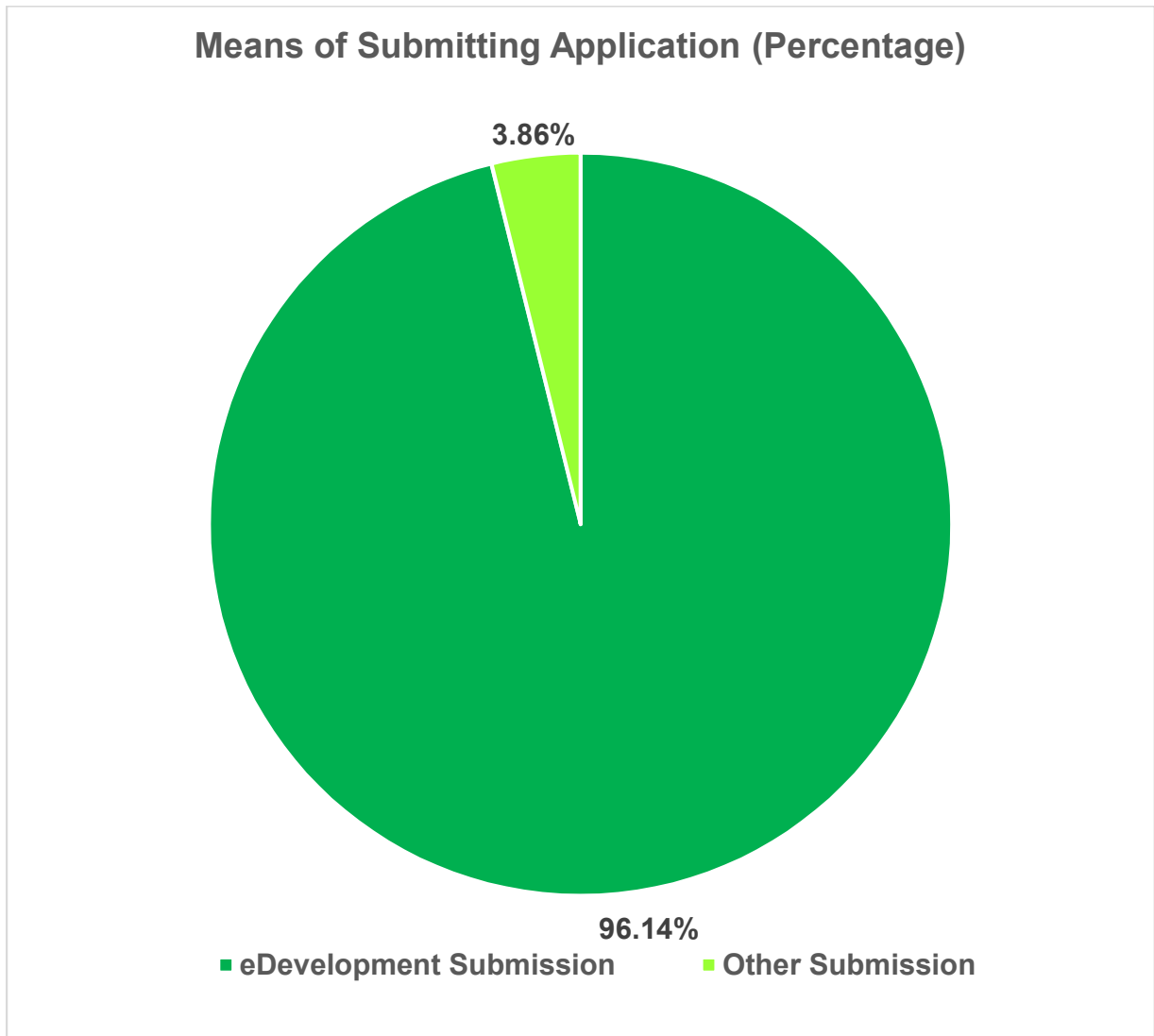
The Planning Service was an early adopter of the principle of moving the submission of applications online and have been reliant on digital technology to provide the requisite services for a considerable period of time.

Website information and guidance promotes the use of the e-development portal for the submission of applications and all related supporting documents through the case management portal.

There is an imbedded technical support team within development management section which is responsible for the administration of all planning applications and documentation through the eDevelopment portal, Uniform and the associated document management system.

As noted in the accompanying statistics 96.14% of valid applications registered were submitted online in 2023/24.

2023/24	Number	Percentage
eDevelopment Submission	723	96.14%
Other Submission	29	3.86%



Data governance strategy

West Lothian Council's planning section continually reviews its operations and systems to ensure compliance with the latest guidance on recommended practice. Our main planning application system is built on the IDOX Uniform platform which assists in the coordination of the day to day management of the planning application process. The systems manage workflow, coordinate the flow of correspondences (mainly via email) and check and manage the storage of boundary and constraint information. Additionally, these systems come with online public access website support, that allow members of the public easy access for viewing documents and commenting on planning applications.

Initial and subsequent submission of application documents is jointly managed in partnership with eplanning.gov.scot, where applicants are encouraged to submit initial and additional information. We receive close to 100% of our planning application workload through the eplanning portal. After initial submission, data management is transferred to our own systems. Departmental support for our system is managed jointly between the vendor, members within the section who have domain knowledge and our ICT central team who focus mainly on security, networking, hardware and backups. These systems allow a significant amount of control by staff in management of their day to day processes.

Our systems and procedures dovetail with our central Information and Communication Technology systems and comply with existing data governance strategy good practice, data retention and the Data Protection Act.

Interactive web-mapping, ArcGIS and spatial data

As part of our annual 2023 review the completion of a former vendor digital mapping contract allowed development management and development planning to take part in a council review of the provision of digital mapping systems. WLC took this opportunity to rebuild provision from the ground up using well established open source software which sits alongside the existing IDOX provision that although highly effective in management of planning application process was struggling to cope with bespoke analysis and automation of other processes in particular local plan management.

In collaboration with central IT West Lothian installed an open source database platform (PostgreSQL), an open source map server platform (Geoserver) and then tied this to a new contract for digital mapping (ArcGIS Online). This has separated management of the data focusing storage into a database allowing concurrent access and editing of important

datasets from management of distribution through tools such as ArcGIS online. Planning sections have already seen marked improvements in how we work and manage our data. We can now publish internal data live to the web while maintaining complete control of all our datasets, reducing some of the endless reconciliation issues we had with duplicate datasets, while opening up the prospect of future automation. The fact that we still manage the data reduces actual data storage cost as well.

The combination of ArcGIS Online and Geoserver has now been running for several months and we are beginning to see increased staff productivity and increased spatial analysis while maintaining security. It is leading to more accurate and quicker identification and classification of housing land sites and improved our ability to engage with the public through the use of tools like digital engagement projects. This will be useful going forward into 2024/25 for the LDP process, where such functions as story maps can be used.

Digital approaches to engagement

Alongside the above one-off project, we have a continual ongoing process of training up staff members on all our IT systems to adapt and improve our procedures, while adapting to the requirements of continual legislative change. In particular we have several members of staff who are able to directly edit and create online documentation detailing procedures. This can be published and shared directly to the web via our corporate website allowing us to adapt to changing circumstances while keeping customers accurately informed.

The council operates several social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. These are to be used going forward by Planning Services to advertise meetings and engagement sessions for the LDP2 process and also to notify the public of the submission of and decisions on significant planning applications. Planning Services, however, only permit formal comments on planning applications through the formal website / Planning Portal, or via email and letter. However, if the council's corporate media do publish articles on social media about planning applications, the formal links to the website are given for members of the public to comment.

Attribute 7 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to making best use of data and digital technology. Progressing into 2024/25, it is intended to use digital technology more widely for the LDP2 process and also to explore an upgrade of Uniform and the use of this system for monitoring and discharging planning conditions, generating LRB decisions and developing a TPO template.

Attribute 8: The Planning Authority has Effective and Efficient Decision-Making Processes

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we have performed over the last year:

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

Decision making timescales

For the year 2023/24 the returns from the Scottish Government indicate the following:

- Approval rate: 90.9%

Average processing times:

- Major development: 114.1 weeks – Scottish average 36.1 weeks
- Local development (all): 13.5 weeks – Scottish average 11.6 weeks
- Householder development: 6.9 weeks – Scottish average 8.3 weeks
- Business and Industry Local: 13.2 weeks – Scottish average 11.5 weeks

In terms of comparison:

Our performance for Major development applications at 114.1 weeks has decreased from the 46.8 weeks in 2022/23. This was as a result of refusing one legacy application from 2015 which on its own took 436.3 weeks, more than doubling the average of the remaining 5 applications. Excluding this one application would have given an average performance of 50.1 weeks. The service also dealt with the 5th highest number of major applications in Scotland

Our performance for Local development (all) applications at 13.5 weeks has decreased from the 9.1 weeks in 2022/23.

Our performance for Householder development applications at 6.9 weeks has improved from the 7.3 weeks in 2022/23.

Our performance for Business and Industry Local applications at 13.2 weeks has improved from the 14.4 weeks in 2022/23.

Development Management have had a particular focus on improving the householder application performance, together with moving on major and local older/legacy cases, during 2022/23. The introduction of a third Assistant Planner has meant that, whilst the majority of the focus of that post has been in the Planning Enforcement Team, there has been some flexibility to allow that post and the Information Officer post to pick up householder and CLU applications to assist with the overall performance in these workstreams. Focus has also been given to requesting applicants to withdraw unacceptable applications; to seek pre-application advice on subsequent schemes and to refuse applications where negotiations are unlikely to produce significant improvements.

The results of this focus have been to see the council's performance for Householder development applications reduce to an average of 6.9 weeks, which is an improvement from 7.3 weeks in the previous year and well above the Scottish average of 8.3 weeks.

In contrast, whilst the strategy of moving on older applications has reduced the 'legacy' cases from the 2022/23 figure of 32 to 29 in 2023/24, with a total of 20 legacy cases being determined, this has meant that performance in local and other applications has reduced slightly.

Moving forward there needs to be a greater focus not only in further reducing the legacy cases but also focusing resources on the newer local applications. However, it has been evident that some of the delay with local applications, in particular is not only with the requirement for S75 legal agreements, which is well documented for housing developments in West Lothian, but also the enhanced requirements through NPF4 for greater reporting, including flood risk assessment; ecology surveys and biodiversity enhancements and contaminated land requirements.

To assist with the above issues, the service has developed guidance around the supporting information and technical reports that different types of application require and makes this available for applicants and agents via the council's website. The intention is that this new guidance will be regularly updated and will evolve as the policies and practices associated with the new NPF4 are imbedded in the planning system.

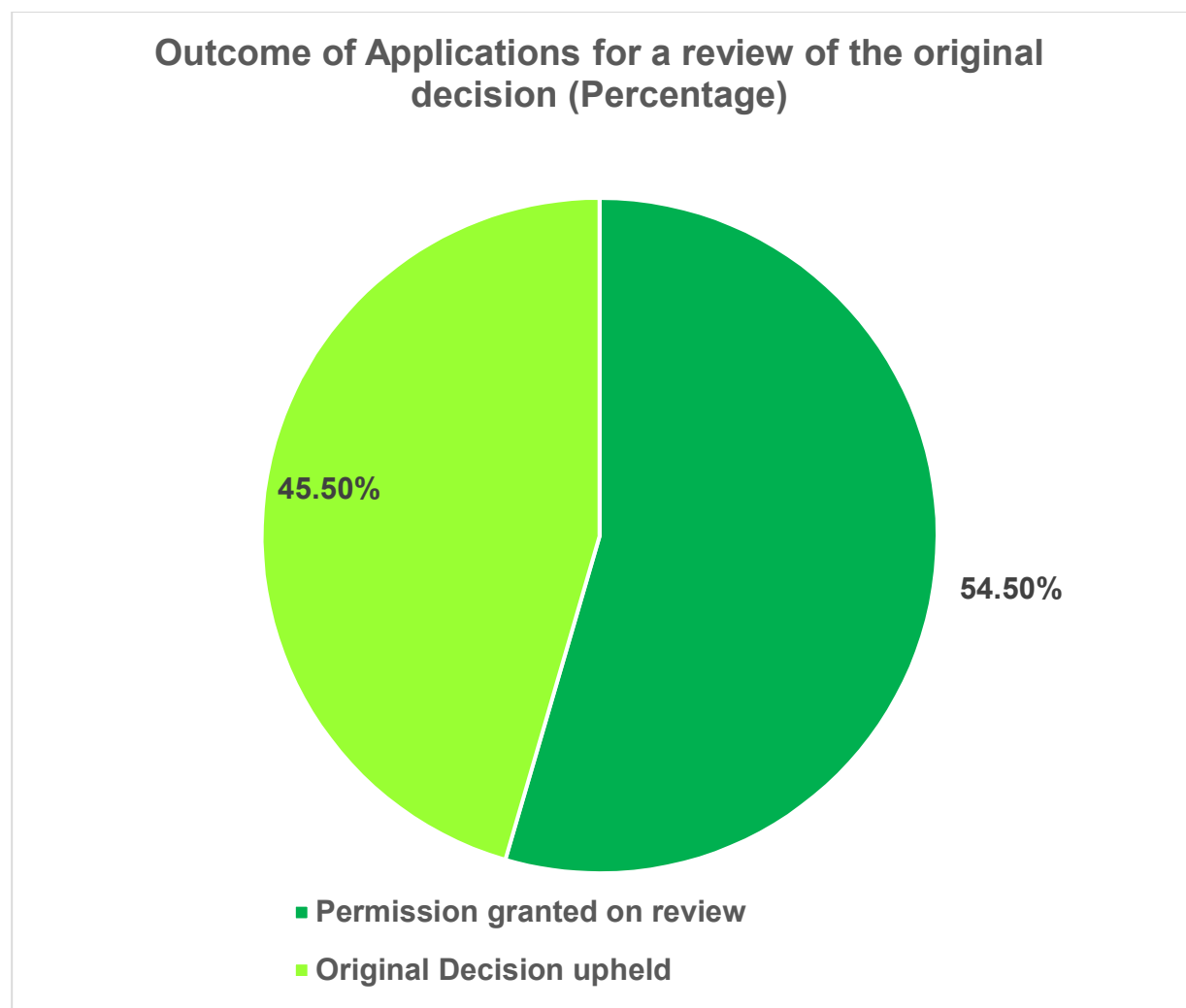
Local reviews and appeals

For the year 2023/24, the Planning Service overall had 28 planning appeal decisions. Of these, 17 were appeals to the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA), and 11 were appeals to the Local Review Body (LRB).

There were no judicial review cases in 2023/24 of council determinations however there was one review of a DPEA decision.

Local Review Body

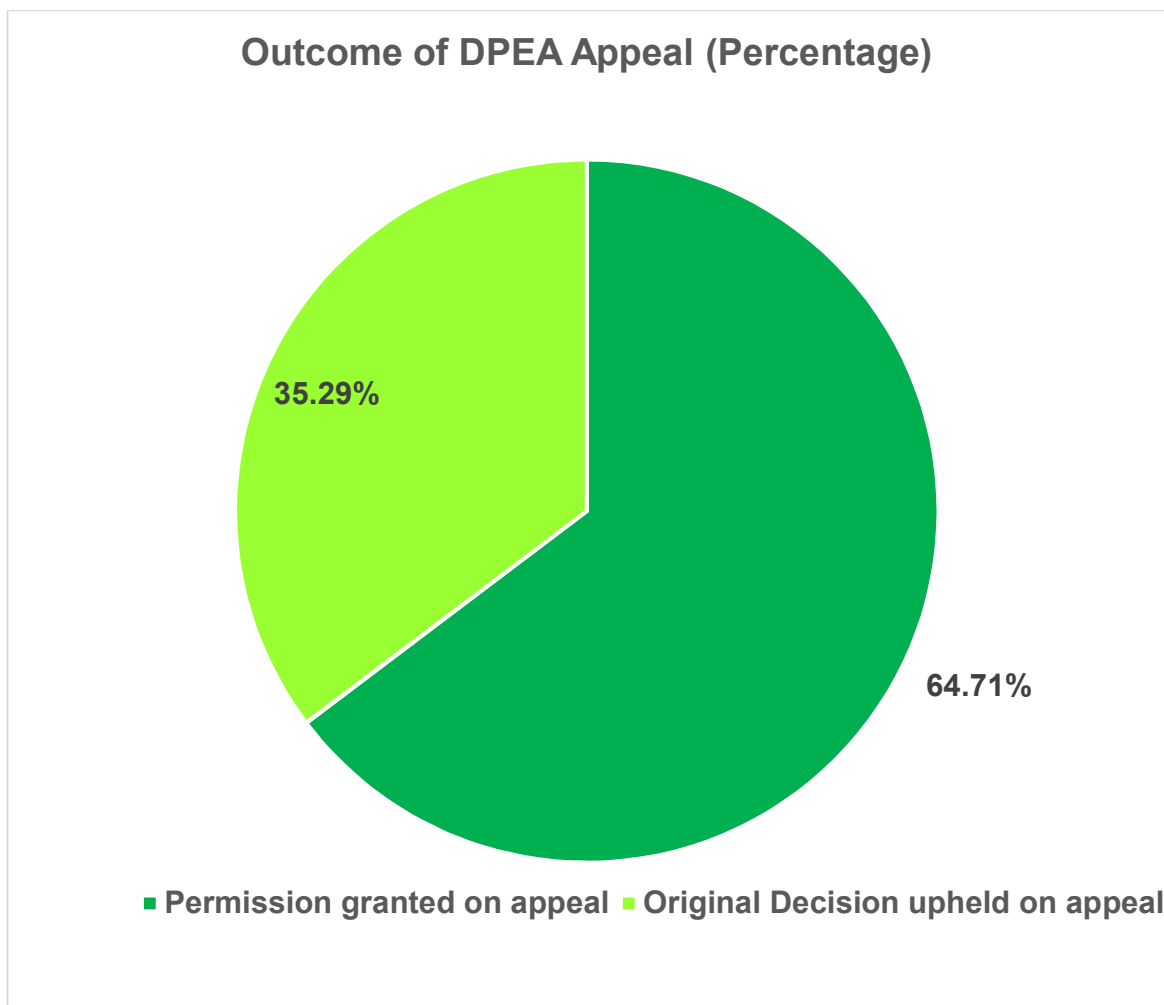
Determination	Number	Percentage
Permission granted on review	6	54.50%
Original decision upheld on review	5	45.50%



A review of all LRB decisions is carried out annually to identify if there are recurring themes which can be addressed to minimise the number of applications for review received.

DPEA Appeals

Determination	Number	Percentage
Permission granted on appeal	11	64.71%
Original decision upheld on appeal	6	35.29%



Enforcement

The Planning Authority has had an up-to-date [Planning Enforcement Charter](#) since 2010. The Enforcement Charter was last updated on 21 March 2023 and will next be updated in March 2025.

During 2023/24, 390 enforcement cases were submitted to the Planning Service for investigation, an increase of 0.78% from the 387 received in 2022/23. 452 cases were closed, and 78 notices served. There were no cases of direct action and no reports to the Procurator Fiscal.



Attribute 8 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to effective and efficient decision-making processes.

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	3
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
Progress with the production of LDP2	Kate Hopper	High	Medium	Existing staff and resources
Explore the use of Uniform for monitoring and discharging planning conditions, generating LRB decisions and developing a TPO template	Claire Johnston	High	Short	Existing staff and resources

Undertake reviews of the LRB and DPEA decisions and determine whether there are lessons to be learnt in terms of the determination of applications going forward.	Mahlon Fautua	Medium	Short	Existing staff and resources
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ENGAGE



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

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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 offered by the planning authority?

Pre-application advice

The Planning Service offers to meet early in the design process with developers through [pre-application discussions](#) to front load the application process which can, in some cases, help with a more streamlined process and better quality of outcomes.

The [pre-application discussions](#) service runs alongside a separate free of charge call back duty service for general planning enquiries provided by the Planning Service.

Advice provided by both of these services also includes details of on any [developer contributions](#) that may be payable along with what information should be submitted with the application to ensure that it is dealt with as speedily as possible.

The paid for service has proved popular with 57 pre-application enquiries determined in the year 2023/24, which makes up around 8% of the cases determined. The service is promoted online and customers are encouraged to use it to improve the quality of planning application submissions and minimise delays in the application process.

We aim to respond to the enquiry within 4 weeks, which benchmarking would suggest is comparable to or quicker than other local authorities. Most simple cases are responded to within target, but larger more complex cases often miss this target. Anecdotally, developers seem to be accepting of a longer timeframe as it allows for further discussion and revisions to plans. We should do further work around our response times, including looking at options to agree an extension.

Whilst the service is mostly used for large scale proposals and for customers who are not regular customers, it has proved less popular with regular agents. Higher engagement from regular agents would help to increase performance and improve the efficiency of the process for our customers. It is therefore important to continue to promote the service and to understand reasons why some regular customers choose not to access it.

Engagement events with developers and communities

One of the key issues identified in Development Management at the beginning of this period was the quality of initial planning application submissions. Developers and agents also commented that they were being asked for additional information, sometimes later in the process, that they did not understand the need for.

Some of this is as a result of changes brought in by NPF4, for example in relation to biodiversity enhancements. The focus of our engagement with developers therefore has been on this supporting information and increasing the quality of the initial submissions, particularly from regular agents. By doing so, we hope to make the application process more efficient, reducing timescales and increasing customer satisfaction.

Rather than focus groups or seminars, we have engaged individually with a number of agents and developers on this topic. We have prepared additional guidance around the supporting information and technical reports that different types of application require.

This guidance has been made available online and we sent out details to developers and continue to direct them to it. This guidance has been adapted following feedback from regular agents.

In terms of regular contact with community organisations, the Chief Executive and other senior officers, including the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration and the managers of Development Planning & Environment and Development Management attend the Community Council Forum meetings which take place bi-annually. This allows community council members to raise any issues at a senior level and for any key information, such as the LDP2 progress and decisions on key applications and appeals to be discussed.

On a day to day basis, community council's engage with officers regarding individual planning applications and seek advice and guidance on any planning matters and officers are happy to engage in this way, which is generally productive for all parties concerned. Officers will also attend individual community council meetings where requested to discuss planning issues and development proposals in the area.

Customer and stakeholder satisfaction

Customer surveys are carried out annually and seek customers views about a range of indicators such as professionalism of staff, communication and quality of service delivered. Surveys are sent to agents, applicants and objectors.

In 2023/24 the results for both Development Management and Development Planning showed improvement across all indicators, most significantly around communication, timeliness and the level of service customers received.

All of these indicators were significantly above the previous 3 years, which is indicative of the efforts from the teams to respond to previous issues.

The results for Development Management are shown below:

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT		
	2023-24 Results (%)	Change from 2022-23 (%) All positive +
Professionalism	82.76	1.81
Employee Attitude	89.29	13.53
Communication	80.7	23.78
Information	84.21	20.36
Timeliness	77.19	25.72
Service Delivered	87.27	33.54
Quality of Service	83.93	21.81

The results for Development Planning & Environment are shown below:

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING		
	2023-24 Results (%)	Change from 2022-23 (%) All positive +
Professionalism	88.89	3.18
Employee Attitude	94.44	11.11
Communication	83.33	26.19
Information	91.67	31.67
Timeliness	82.35	32.35
Service Delivered	88.89	26.39
Quality of Service	94.44	37.30

Some of the feedback suggests there is still room for improvement, especially around the ease of contacting staff and being able to discuss things with an officer rather than being directed to guidance on the website or being given advice in an email. Whilst we will continue to monitor this, much of the comments are as a result of a shift in the way the council, and other organisations, communicate with customers.

Logging of enquiries through the call centre and mostly responding by email allows better tracking of communication and directing customers to advice online helps free up frontline staff to process planning applications.

It is unlikely that we will return to a situation where customers can call a general planning number or visit a planning officer without an appointment.

There are also many positive comments in the survey responses, praising the helpfulness and professionalism of staff. People recognise that it is not possible to always speak to an officer directly. Several comments noted that West Lothian is one of the better authorities to deal with.

Attribute 9 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making fair progress with regard to customer care.

The reintroduction of the pre-application advice service has been successful. We will continue to encourage take-up and introduce performance monitoring of this service.

Further work could be done to engage with developers and communities. This will predominantly be done as part of the LDP process.

We have made good progress on our customer satisfaction. Consideration should now be given to expanding surveys to wider stakeholders and customers.

Attribute 10: The Planning Authority has Effective Engagement and Collaboration with Stakeholders and Communities

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we have performed over the last year:

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

Community engagement strategy

The council's Development Plan Scheme (DPS) No.16 was approved on 12 March 2024 and sets out the council's Participation Statement for engagement on the next Local Development Plan (LDP2) with communities in West Lothian, as well as other key stakeholders illustrated in the diagram below:



The Participation Statement sets out three stages where stakeholder participation can influence LDP2. These are:

- through early engagement in the preparation of the Evidence Report,
- the ‘Call for Ideas’ at the beginning of the Proposed Plan stage; and,
- following the publication of the Proposed Plan.

Engagement carried out to date on LDP2 includes the following:

- Initiated early engagement online with communities in West Lothian through a range of surveys ‘How good is your place?’

- Carried out a public engagement exercise 'We need to talk about LDP2' with 10 drop-in sessions across West Lothian.
- Initiated engagement with key stakeholders such as the Key Agencies.
- Begun 'place-based' collaborative work with other WLC services to identify and collate evidence relating to climate change, flooding, biodiversity, the natural environment, forestry and woodlands, transport, affordable housing need, open space and play sufficiency.

We will continue to engage with key stakeholders through the production of LDP2, including the statutory groups that we are required to engage with.

Community engagement

We will seek to utilise the most appropriate methods for engaging with different groups during the preparation of LDP2.

The methods of engagement chosen will help relevant stakeholders give feedback that can be used to inform decision making on various aspects of LDP2.

The e-development portal

As detailed in Attribute 7, above, the service's website information and guidance promote the use of the e-development portal for the submission of applications and all related supporting documents through the case management portal. Over 96% of applications were submitted that way in 2023/24 and this will continue to be promoted as the council's preferred option for submission.

Engaging with a representation of the community

As noted above, DPS No.16 sets out that we will engage with a good representation of the community when preparing LDP2.

Local Place Plans

We have provided community bodies with a [dedicated webpage](#) to assist with the production of Local Place Plans (LPPs).

An officer within the Development Planning & Environment team will be assigned a LPP when one is submitted for registration and they will be contact point for the community body submitting the LPP.

A deadline for submissions of LPPs to be considered as part of the evidence base for LDP2 has been set for 31 May 2024. Although any community body is still free to submit an LPP after this date.

During 2023/24 one LPP was submitted, which is the [Linlithgow Local Place Plan](#).

Customer and stakeholder survey feedback

Planning Services run an annual customer feedback survey with measures against seven key performance indicators.

The results for Development Planning & Environment are shown below:

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING		
	2023-24 Results (%)	Change from 2022-23 All positive +
Professionalism	88.89	3.18
Employee Attitude	94.44	11.11
Communication	83.33	26.19
Information	91.67	31.67
Timeliness	82.35	32.35
Service Delivered	88.89	26.39
Quality of Service	94.44	37.30

There has been increased satisfaction from customers across all seven KPIs for the Development Planning & Environment team when compared to the 2022/23 customer survey results.

This is a similar picture for Development Management, which is detailed in Attribute 9, above.

Attribute 10 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making good progress with regard to its effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities. An example of this is given in the Good Practice report for Attributes 10, 11 and 12 as detailed below.

Further work will be taken forward to engage with developers and communities as part of the LDP2 process.

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
9. This planning authority has good customer care	3
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2

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
Expand customer satisfaction survey to a wider range of customers (new home owners/pre-app service users)	Gillian Cyphus	Medium	Short	Existing staff and resources
Monitor and review performance of the pre-app service	Gillian Cyphus	Medium	Medium	Existing staff and resources
Progress the engagement with developers and communities through the LDP2 process	Kate Hopper	High	Medium	Existing staff and resources

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

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we 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?

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision -making processes

[A Briefing Paper: Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) states that “a place-based approach is about considering the physical, economic, and social elements that make up a place collaboratively. Thinking about how an intervention to improve one of these characteristics can have unintended positive or negative consequences on another. It takes account of these different interconnections and relationships in a joint working collaborative approach that focuses all the action, effort, and investment in a place to maximise the opportunity for positive consequences and minimise negative ones.”

West Lothian recognises the need to create good quality living environments based on current guidance and design criteria for the long-term benefit of those residents and the surrounding environment.

Tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places

We have been utilising our adopted Supplementary Guidance [Residential Development Guide, 2018](#) in assessing all residential developments. This guide sets out criteria for design and layout principles including privacy distances; minimum garden sizes; scale, height and massing of developments; plot coverage. It also covers matters in relation to road and street layout, materials, boundary treatment and green infrastructure.

This guide, in conjunction with other [policy documentation](#) on Planning and Noise; Flooding and Drainage; Affordable Housing and Planning for Nature to name but 4, are utilised to fully consider not only the internal layout of housing developments and ensure space standards are met but to ensure that new developments fit with the surrounding environment and respect the existing amenity of established residents and natural environment. By recognising and understanding the setting and impact new developments may have on the surrounding area and ensuring enhancement of landscaping and biodiversity, the principles of Place and Wellbeing Outcomes are by default taken into consideration.

Depending on the scale of development, as not all aspects can be incorporated into smaller scale developments, the 5 principles of Movement, Space, Resources, Civic and Stewardship area at the centre of good developments and the creation of attractive, pleasant, safe and distinctive places to live.

The current, and emerging Local Development Plan, identifies land which is appropriate for development and these sites are chosen fundamentally to ensure the correct development is located in the correct location with regards to access to services, education infrastructure, road and rail networks and access to footpath and cycle paths.

The detailed planning process considers the specifics of a development in relation to the technical requirements of the Residential Development Guide, 2018 and the broader suite guidance documents.

Flooding and drainage, ground contamination and the impact on the natural environment are all taken into account to ensure new houses are not affected by flooding, ground contamination and the natural environment is both protected where relevant and enhanced, all for the long term benefit of residents.

Planning works closely with its colleagues in Transportation, Flood Risk Management, Environmental Health, Ecologists and other partners to ensure successful and positive outcomes which makes for well designed, well connected, safe and pleasant places to live.

It is inherent on the planning process that the public is engaged, both at the development of new local plans and during the planning application stage. All representations are taken into consideration and weighted against the scale and impact of the development based on the comments received. Whilst every effort is taken to consider points raised, and where necessary, seek to amend development proposals to either lessen their impact on neighbours or to protect and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment, it is not possible to accommodate all representations.

The resultant development through these processes seek to align not only with the 5 principles of Place and Wellbeing but also with the Six Qualities of Successful Places as set out in National Planning Framework 4.

These qualities are Health, Pleasant, Connected, Distinctive, Sustainable and Adaptable. A pleasantly designed development layout with landscaping, open space, biodiversity enhancement and good safe connections to footpath networks and local infrastructure makes a place which is beneficial to physical and mental health. It also encourages sustainability through walking and cycling and thus creates a well-connected space which reduces car dependency.

Well-designed developments are distinctive in their character and makes a sense of place where residents are comfortable in, and proud of their surroundings.

An example of the ongoing implementation of the necessary tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places is seen through the development of the settlement expansion of Winchburgh. This is set out below in the Good Practice report for Attributes 10, 11 and 12.

Attribute 11 - Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making good progress with regard to its support for delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places. An example of this is given in the Good Practice report for Attributes 10, 11 and 12 as detailed below.

Attribute 12 – The planning authority supports the delivery of consented development

We have considered the following when thinking about this attribute and how we have performed over the last year:

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

Section 75 agreements

The LDP at paragraphs 87-93 sets out the basis for infrastructure requirements and delivery and policy INF1 states the council will seek developer contributions to mitigate infrastructure impacts and that such contributions will only be sought where necessary and in accordance with the five tests set out in Planning Circular 3/2012.

A schedule of infrastructure requirements for employment land is provided at Appendix 1 of the LDP and for housing sites is at Appendix 2. Supplementary guidance sets out the quantum of contributions in detail.

The need for contributions is included as part of the council's pre-application enquiry service, with formal responses setting out the policy basis for contributions, the contributions required and the quantum of them. This ensures requirements are highlighted at an early stage.

The council has a long-standing code of practice for planning obligations that allows six months for S75 agreement to be substantially concluded. There are delegated powers to refuse an application if this timescale is not met.

Planning conditions

The imposition of conditions is determined by the nature of the proposal and are only applied where they meet the six tests set out in Planning Circular 4/1988.

Submission of details during determination of an application to avoid the need for conditions is encouraged.

Where appropriate, conditions that are considered to unexpected by an applicant or may impact on financial viability, are disclosed to the applicant to aid transparency.

Limited use is presently made of the conditions monitoring module in Uniform and there is scope to improve on that, with focus on larger scale developments.

Local housing land requirement

As required by NPF4, the next Local Development Plan (WLLDP2) will identify a Local Housing Land Requirement (LHLR). This is to meet the duty for a housing target and to represent how much land is required. To promote an ambitious and plan-led approach, the Local Housing Land Requirement is expected to exceed the 9850 units for the 10 year Minimum All Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) set out in Annex E of NPF4.

The forthcoming West Lothian Local Development Plan 2 will allocate deliverable land to meet the LHLR. The LDP delivery programme will set out a deliverable housing land pipeline for the Local Housing Land Requirement, setting out when land will be brought forward, with phasing across the short (1-3 years), medium (4-6 years) and long-term (7-10 years).

Work has started on the production of that delivery programme and an update is set out below.

Processing agreements

The Service continues to promote the use of [processing agreements](#), which are published on the [How is a planning application processed](#) page of the website. These [processing agreements](#) encourage a closer working relationship between the council and the applicant. In 2023/24 there were 28 applications determined which were subject to processing agreements, a decrease from the 43 applications in 2022/23.

Delivery programme supporting the delivery of development on the ground

Prior to preparation of the third review of the Action Programme, regulations amended the process of preparing an Action Programme and required authorities to review, update, consult and re-publish the Action Programme as a Delivery Programme.

However, in August 2023 an application to the Court of Session (Miller Homes v Scottish Ministers 'Mossend') challenged the use of National Planning Framework 4 Policy 16 in relation to housing delivery prior to the adoption of a new NPF4 compliant Local Development Plan.

The case also raised the issue of whether a Delivery Programme rather than an Action Programme could be provided under LDPs published prior to NPF4. Preparation of the first Delivery Programme for LDP 1 to comply with the regulations was paused until this case was resolved.

Although out with the period of this review, the Court of Session Judgement was issued on the 3 May 2024 and served to clarify that Action Programmes can be now be reviewed and subsequently published as Delivery Programmes, it is intended that this process will start in June 2024.

Attribute 12 – Summary

We consider that West Lothian Planning Services is making good progress with regard to supporting the delivery of consented development. An example of this is given in the Good Practice report for Attributes 10, 11 and 12 as detailed below.

Good progress continues to be made on delivering Section 75 agreements within the six-month period.

The pre-application enquiry service provides early clarity to applicants by setting out the nature and quantum of developer contributions.

Conditions monitoring could be enhanced through greater use of the module in Uniform.

Improvement Action Plan (Place theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	2
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	2

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
Continue to work closely with legal officers to progress S75 agreements within the 6-month time frame, including introducing monthly progress meetings.	Wendy McCorriston	High	Short	Existing staff
Progress the use of the Uniform module to allow for conditions monitoring to support implementation of development in accordance with consents.	Claire Johnston	High	Short	Existing staff and resources

Good Practice

Attributes 3 and 4

- Attribute 3: This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement
- Attribute 4: This Planning Authority has sound governance

Planning Authority: West Lothian Council

Title: Member Training

Context

West Lothian's PPF 12 for 2022/23, identified member training as a key priority for service improvement actions. This became particularly important following the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023. The training programme was, therefore, set up early in 2023 and ensured that by the end of 2023/24 all six of the identified training actions were fully completed, illustrating the service's commitment to continuous improvement and sound governance.


Delivery of service improvement actions in 2023/24

Committed improvements and actions	Progress
Development Management Committee Training – Competent Motions	Completed
Development Management Committee Training – NPF4	Completed
Local Review Body Training – NPF4	Completed
Develop Development Management Committee Training manual	Completed
Develop Local Review Body Training manual	Completed
Review website and correspondence in view of hybrid meetings	Completed

What happened?

The Planning service plays a significant role in member interactions and training, as a large part of the councillors’ remit includes planning decision making, whether as part of the various formal committees, or as part of the member notification process, which is a key internal process that feeds into the current Scheme of Administration.

With the adoption of NPIF4 it was important that training was provided to all elected members who sit on the Development Management Committee and/or the Local Review Body. This training included the provision of a manual for elected members, covering the Development Management Committee process and the Local Review Body process. These manuals have been made available to all members of these committees.

 <p>West Lothian Council</p>	 <p>West Lothian Council</p>
<p>Development Management Committee (DMC)</p>	<p>Local Review Body (LRB)</p>
<p>Manual</p>	<p>Manual</p>
<p>May 2023</p>	<p>May 2023</p>
<p>Contents</p> <p>Part 1 - Development Plan and Material Considerations 3</p> <p>Part 2 - Framing Competent Motions 6</p> <p>Part 3 - Planning Obligations and Other Agreements 9</p> <p>Part 4 - Planning Conditions 12</p> <p>Part 5 - Listed Building Consent and Conservation Areas 15</p> <p>Part 6 - Advertisement Control 18</p> <p>Part 7 - Councillors’ Code of Conduct 21</p> <p>Part 8 - Natural Heritage 25</p> <p>Part 9 - Trees 27</p> <p>Part 10 - Environmental Impact Assessment 30</p> <p>Part 11 - Enforcement 33</p> <p>Part 12 - Challenges 35</p> <p>Glossary of Planning Terms 39</p>	<p>Contents</p> <p>Part 1 - Development Plan, Material Considerations and a De Novo Approach 3</p> <p>Part 2 - Framing Competent Motions 7</p> <p>Part 3 - Planning Obligations and Other Agreements 10</p> <p>Part 4 - Planning Conditions 13</p> <p>Part 5 - Listed Building Consent and Conservation Areas 16</p> <p>Part 6 - Councillors’ Code of Conduct 19</p> <p>Part 7 - Natural Heritage 23</p> <p>Part 8 - Trees 25</p> <p>Part 9 - Environmental Impact Assessment 29</p> <p>Part 10 - Enforcement 32</p> <p>Part 11 - Further Procedure 34</p> <p>Part 12 - Challenges 39</p> <p>Glossary of Planning Terms 42</p>

Following the introduction of NPF4, the Development Planning team undertook member training in April 2023 which set out the vision statement for Scotland.



The training focused on the key changes in policy which were important for members to understand in their decision-making.

National Planning Policies Key Changes

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High emissions developments ● Development in climate vulnerable areas ● Impact on ecosystems ● Out of town retail development ● Greenfield development ● Housing development outwith planned areas ● Car dependent development ● Peat and fossil fuel extraction ● Disused land and buildings | <p>LESS</p> <p>MORE</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Localism/mixed use ● Town centre development ● Quality and diverse homes ● Blue/green infrastructure, nature restoration and play ● Flexibility for work and business ● Renewable electricity and heat ● Circular economy facilities ● Public Transport and active travel connectivity ● Reuse of vacant and derelict land |
|---|-------------------------|--|

Specific training sessions were then given to all councillors by the Development Management Manager and other team members in May 2023, which gave an overview of the planning system, covering:

- What is Planning
- The Planning Process
- The Development Plan, including NPF4

- Development Management
- Appeals and Reviews, and
- Enforcement



Planning System Overview

Wendy McCorriston
Development Management Manager

May 2023



Areas of collaboration

It was important that the production of the manuals and the training sessions involved not only key officers from Planning Services, but Legal, Governance and Committee Services officers, to make sure that all aspects of the planning system, together with committee and decision-making processes, were covered.

Legal Services had previously undertaken training with members of Development Management Committee covering decision making and how to format competent motions and amendments as part of that process. The opportunity was therefore taken to refresh this training during the 2023 programme.

What was the overall result?

The training was undertaken at a time of significant national change in planning policy and strategy, so it was vital that those making decisions on behalf of West Lothian Council and its residents, employers and employees did so in the knowledge of the most up to date policy position.

Successes

Each element of training was initially given online using a powerpoint presentation in two or three sessions by officers and this ensured that the majority of members were able to attend one of the sessions. There were one or two members who requested face to face training and officers were also able to provide this using the powerpoint in a hand-out format.

Challenges

For those members that were less familiar with the planning process, so did not sit on DM Committee or attend LRB or Planning Committee some of the initial training had to be given in slightly more depth than for those that were more accustomed with general planning terminology for example.

Lessons Learned

The training was generally successful and well received by members. It may have been useful to split the training sessions by the experience of members and their interaction with planning. However, given the pressures on councillors' timetables, offering two or three sessions and then follow-up personal training did allow all members to receive the necessary training.

What contribution will it aim to make towards delivering outcomes?

Please tick all the outcomes below that this example aims to works towards.

NPF4

- Sustainable places
- Climate change and nature crisis
- Climate mitigate and adaptation
- Forestry, woodland and trees
- Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings
- Sustainable transport

Liveable places

- Design, quality and place
- Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- Quality homes
- Blue and green infrastructure
- Flood risk and water management

Productive places

- Business and industry
- City, town, local and commercial centres
- Rural development
- Tourism
- Culture and creativity

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

- Movement
- Spaces
- Resources
- Civic
- Stewardship

Good Practice

Attributes 10, 11 and 12

- ☑Attribute 10: This Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities
- ☑Attribute 11: This Planning Authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places
- ☑Attribute 12: This Planning Authority supports the delivery of consented development

Planning Authority: West Lothian Council

Title: Winchburgh, a sustainable and liveable settlement expansion

Context

Well-designed developments are distinctive in their character and create a sense of place where residents are comfortable in, and proud of, their surroundings.

A good example of these outcomes and qualities lies with the ongoing Winchburgh settlement expansion, which was one of the council's Core Development Areas allocated in the 2008 West Lothian Local Plan. Whilst this development of up to 4000 houses, schools, shops, employment areas, parks, open space, railway station and road infrastructure was originally submitted in 2005 (Ref: 1012/P/05) and granted planning permission in principle in 2012, it is clear from the manner in which this extension to Winchburgh has been carried out that the above principles have been fundamental in the design and layout of this ongoing development area.

At the core of the scheme was the remediation of the former Auldcaithie Landfill to the north of Winchburgh village. This former landfill site has been transformed into a district park with landscaping, footpaths, play equipment for a variety of ages and, now holds the newly formed Winchburgh parkrun on Saturday mornings. The requirement for the remediation of this landfill site was identified in the 2008 Local Plan and then was embedded into the master plan and subsequent planning conditions in the decision. This ensured that the consented development was delivered in a sustainable manner which created a liveable place, even as the large scale development was ongoing.



Site under remediation (courtesy of I&H Brown)



Active play within the remediated Auldathie Park

The footpath network created as part of the Auldathie Park and wider development area connects with existing footpaths to surrounding woodland and the Union Canal which runs through Winchburgh.

The distinctiveness of this Core Development Area is set apart from other areas by a Linlithgow to Edinburgh railway line which runs through the Winchburgh Tunnel and the Union Canal. Whilst the train station proposed for Winchburgh is currently under negotiation, the marina proposed as part of the masterplan has been realised and was opened in spring of 2023. This is a significant and distinctive feature which sets Winchburgh apart from other areas and will be a focal point for the town centre area as it develops further.



Also delivered within the town has been two secondary schools, one new primary and shared sports facilities on the edge of Auldathie Park, with a second primary school under construction on the east of the town.



The development blocks in this core development area have been built, for the most part, by mainstream housebuilders. In this regard it is difficult to achieve unique and locally distinctive house designs. To counter this, the use of facing brick and alternate render colours have been encouraged within developments to add some local distinctiveness as a recognition of the Winchburgh Brick used to construct the miner's rows within the village.



Barratt Development where red brick has been used to pick out a junction point.



Typical Winchburgh Brick

What happened?

Using the Winchburgh Core Development Area as a case example, it can be demonstrated that West Lothian approaches the development of housing areas in a manner that accords with Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and now follows the principles of National Planning Framework 4.

Areas of collaboration

Throughout the development of the Winchburgh CDA, and principally at the start of the process, there was regular engagement by the design team with Winchburgh Community Council, local councillors, primary school children were encouraged to set out what they would like to see in the new development and regular public meetings were held to engage with and walk residents through the design philosophy of the proposals.

As a major application with significant infrastructure works proposed including drainage infrastructure, new road links, including a new motorway junction; canal basin and railway station, the development was subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment.

The application for planning permission in principle (1012/P/05) was subject to public consultation in accordance with statutory requirements and representations from members of the public taken into consideration.

As part of the process, stakeholders consulted on the proposed development included from within the council, Environmental Health, Ecologist, Transportation, Flood Risk Management; and externally a raft of consultees including community councils, SEPA, NatureScot (SNH), Transport Scotland, archaeologists, Edinburgh Airport, Sport Scotland, Police Scotland and HSE.

Collaboration between council planning staff, internal and external consultees, community councils and community engagement helped guide the development proposals and ensure facilities, including a Sainsbury's local store, other small shop units and office space were provided early in the development plan, to the benefit of both new and existing residents.

Lessons learned

Successes

The main success has been that Winchburgh is acknowledged by both original residents from the village and new residents as a welcoming, pleasant and vibrant place to live.

New and original residents have come together in a number of community groups, including the Winchburgh CDT and the innovative Winchburgh Growers and the Winchburgh Wombles.

In terms of physical delivery, this year has seen the opening of a new motorway junction, the hand-over of a marina off the Union Canal to Scottish Canals and the completion of a new Sainsburys supermarket, which is due for opening. The remediation of a former landfill site with the creation of a district park is a great success and the expansion of the park facilities continues. The completion of a road connection across both the Union Canal and Edinburgh railway line, the ongoing delivery of a further primary school and to date 1,500 new homes, including affordable housing, also represent successes in the further expansion of this sustainable, liveable and productive place.

Challenges

The delivery of the railway station continues to be a challenge but partners continue to engage and it is hoped that further negotiations with stakeholder in the coming year will achieve positive results.

At a more detailed level, encouraging housing developers to utilise brick within their materials pallet, tailoring housing developments to meet council standards around noise where development blocks are adjacent to rail and road noise and generally creating more bespoke and tailored house designs have proved challenging, but the introduction of the policy support in NPF4 is noted and welcomed by Planning Services.

Lessons Learned

The production of a master plan and the detailed conditions and planning obligations in the decision, together with the strong working relationship between Planning Services, the developer, other council services, such as Transportation and Public Art and the community have all been fundamental to the success of the expansion of Winchburgh.

Whilst a detailed masterplan is in place for the Winchburgh CDA, the expectation set out have in some cases outstripped what mainstream developers are prepared to provide. Whilst some aspects have been fulfilled, tensions between mainstream house builders, their standard products and market forces has not necessarily reflected the vision. The need for negotiation and clear direction from planning officers has therefore been key to ensuring housebuilders understand the requirements and vision for the masterplan and the council.

What contribution will it aim to make towards delivering outcomes?

Please tick all the outcomes below that this example aims to works towards.

NPF4

Sustainable places

- Climate mitigate and adaptation
- Biodiversity
- Soils
- Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings
- Sustainable transport

Liveable places

- Design, quality and place
- Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- Quality homes
- Blue and green infrastructure
- Play, recreation and sport
- Flood risk and water management

Productive places

- Community Wealth Building
- Business and industry
- Retail
- Tourism
- Culture and creativity

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

Movement

Spaces

Resources

Civic

Stewardship

Appendix 1 – Improvement Action Plan

Score	Importance	Timescale
1= Making excellent progress	High	Short term - 1 year
5 = No progress	Medium	Medium term - 3 years
	Low	Long term - 3+ year

Theme	Attribute	Score	Action	Importance	Timescale
People	Sufficient Resources and Skills to Maximise Productivity	3	Assess Development Planning team resource in relation to LDP2 production.	High	Short
			Investigate the migration of our performance reporting to PowerBI dashboards.	Medium	Long
	A Valued and Supported Workforce	3	Develop ArcGIS skills of all staff to maximise use of existing data layers within the service and ensure efficiency.	Medium	Medium
			Support any staff who wish to develop appropriate skills for the benefit of the service, including attendance at university where appropriate.	Medium	Short-Medium

Culture	Embedded Continuous Improvement	2	Ensure the ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.	Medium	Medium
	Sound Governance	2	Continue with the necessary member training, capturing in particular changes to planning legislation and updates on progress with LDP2.	High	Short-Medium
			Review the council's Scheme of Delegation.	High	Medium
	Effective Leadership	3	Conclude the appointment to the Chief Planner Role.	High	Short
Tools	A Robust Policy and Evidence Base	3	Progress with the production of LDP2.	High	Medium
	Makes Best Use of Data and Digital Technology	3	Explore the use of Uniform for monitoring and discharging planning conditions, generating LRB decisions and developing a TPO template.	High	Short
	Effective and Efficient Decision-making Processes	3	Undertake reviews of the LRB and DPEA decisions and determine whether there are lessons to be learnt in terms of the determination of applications going forward.	Medium	Short

Engage	Good Customer Care	3	Expand customer satisfaction survey to a wider range of customers (new home owners/pre-application service users).	Medium	Short
	Effective Engagement and Collaboration with Stakeholders and Communities	2	Monitor and review performance of the pre-application service.	Medium	Medium
			Undertake planning training for Community Councils.	Medium	Medium
			Progress the engagement with developers and communities through the LDP2 process.	High	Medium
Place	Support the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	2	Continue to work closely with legal officers to progress S75 agreements within the 6-month time frame, including introducing monthly progress meetings.	High	Short
	Support the delivery of appropriate development	2	Progress the use of the Uniform module to allow for conditions monitoring to support implementation of development in accordance with consents.	High	Short