

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

Argyll and Bute Council



Argyll and Bute NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

Argyll and Bute Council's NPIF Improvement Plan was approved in May 2025. In the limited time available we have managed to deliver and initiate a number of the identified improvement actions. It is expected that the Year 3 report will allow a more informed review of our progress in delivering these actions.

Introduction

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

Each improvement action plan sets out:

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

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

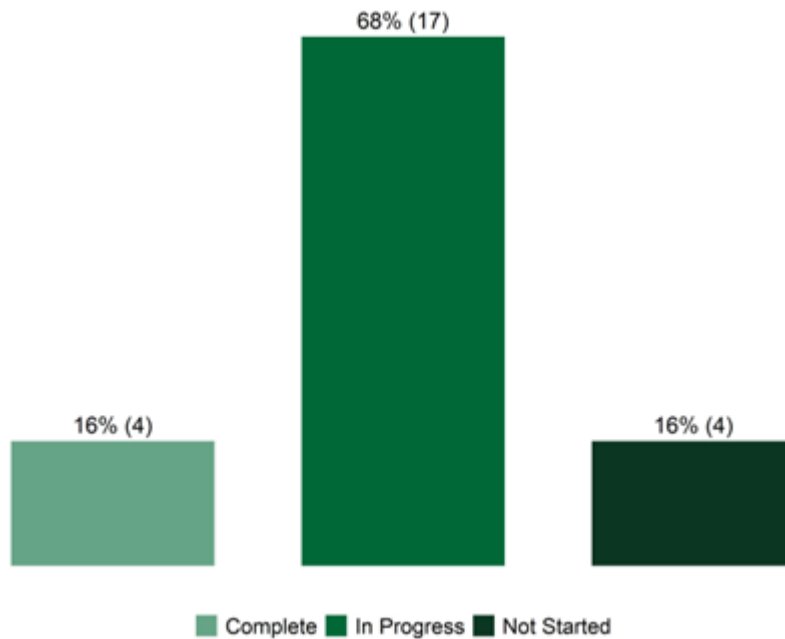
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress Argyll and Bute has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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



Argyll and Bute has 25 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Review of Internal Consultee Arrangements with Roads and Environmental Health

In Progress

Progress against this action: Discussion has been initiated with ABC Roads and ABC Environmental Health with a view to updating service level expectations on planning consultations.

ABC Roads have published updated Roads Design Guidance.

Development Management have part funded the production of updated GIS mapping for potentially contaminated land.

The following next steps are proposed: Work has commenced to review and update model conditions. Work remains ongoing with a view to the development of updated Service Level Agreements. There has been considerable staff turnover and resourcing issues within both Roads and Environmental Health that have impacted upon engagement in the planning process.

Work has still to be undertaken to roll out updated GIS constraints for the identification of potentially contaminated land, and further publication of this information to assist with pre-application identification of issues. This will be taken forward during FQ4 2025/26.



Action 2: Introduce annual survey of Development Management and Policy staff

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: We have not had the time given other priorities.

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

The following next steps are proposed: We are aware that there is a corporate action with HR to develop staff surveys. To avoid consultation fatigue, we are hoping that a DM/DP staff survey can be incorporated within a wider corporate exercise.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: The Council has already implemented an annual survey of all staff members. To avoid duplication of effort, the Planning Service have identified that it would be preferable if elements of this corporate activity could be adapted to make this more relevant to planning. The Planning Service will seek to explore this option further with HR colleagues as an alternative to an independent additional survey of planning staff.

Action 3: Introduce annual DM and Planning Staff Away Day

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

An annual Planning Conference for all professional planning staff was held in Helensburgh in May 2025. The agenda included a presentation from SSEN distribution on electricity network planning, GIS capabilities, Strategic Development Frameworks in Helensburgh and Oban, and Biodiversity/Building with Nature.

The 2026 Planning Conference will be held in Oban and will include a site visit to the 300+ new housing development at Dunbeg.

Day focused on Biodiversity Training for DM staff, particularly in light of new NPF4 approaches. Site visit to largest housing development in Argyll and Bute at Dunbeg, Oban, to be planned for October 2026 and will allow understanding of the masterplan approach to multi-phased and multi-use development.

Action 4: Delivery of training to improve number of planning officers with Carbon Literacy Qualification

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- The action was set as a low or medium priority.



The following next steps are proposed: The Council has been making progress to increase the total number of staff that have undergone caron Literacy training, however there is a funding requirement. This has been put in our training plan in order to allocate funding as it becomes available, with the aim being all policy and development management planners ultimately complete the training.

Action 5: Implement MiniService Redesign to Improve Clarity of Responsibilities and Create Career Path

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Revised service structure and staff grading with the DP service. This has created a triangular hierarchy with greatly improved clarity in roles and responsibilities, contributing to staff wellbeing, and ultimately allowing more efficient and effective project management and delivery.

We will monitor the impact of the new structure, and develop the potential it has created for succession planning and staff progression in the long term.

Action 6: Maintain an up to date DM Team Plan

In Progress

Progress against this action: The DM Service plan was approved in Sept. 2024 and has subsequently informed setting expectations for service delivery and performance standards, securing additional investment, workforce development, and the prioritisation of service improvements.

The following next steps are proposed: The Development Management Service Plan is due to be reviewed and updated in 2026.

Action 7: Improved Customer Satisfaction Survey to include wider range of stakeholders and improved level of feedback

In Progress

Progress against this action: Work has commenced during 2025 to develop improved measures for customer satisfaction with the Development Management Service.

Work completed to date includes benchmarking with other local authorities, including Fife Council, and the production of a project plan for delivery.

The enhanced measures will seek to broaden the scope of customer satisfaction engagement to include not only the applicant but other participants and stakeholders within



the planning process, and where practicable, will be aligned with measures in the NPIF National Customer Care Survey.

The following next steps are proposed: Development and implementation during FQ4 2025/26.

Action 8: Develop and Pilot Place Based Board to deliver coordinated cross service and public sector improvements

In Progress

Progress against this action: Brief currently being developed to commission consultants for feasibility of place-based rationalisation of public sector uses in Oban.

The following next steps are proposed: Appoint consultants. In addition, work is ongoing to set up a Place Based Board for Dunoon with other public sector agencies, and this has been approved at a Senior Management Level.

Action 9: Develop spatial analysis and monitoring of short term let licensing to inform potential development of Planning Control Areas

In Progress

Progress against this action: Project plan to recommend to members to consider a planning control area by end of 2025/26.

The following next steps are proposed: Dedicated officer now working on this and is currently analysing the Council's 3,000+ short term let licenses, by location and type. This is being compared with a detailed Housing Market Assessment for the HMAs which coincide with short term let numbers. Draft policy discussion is arranged with Executive Leadership in March 2026, and then discussion with members will follow during spring/summer 2026 prior to a public consultation if recommended by Members.

Action 10: Better integration of back-office DM Systems for casework workflow document management, and enhancement of Public Access functionality

In Progress

Progress against this action: This improvement action was originally intended to facilitate a move to a new back-office environment that provided better integration between document management / workflow management / performance reporting / case management with all functions being brought under the umbrella of a single software provider.

This position has subsequently been revised as issues outwith the control of the Planning Service have prevented the migration of data to the new work environment.



The focus of this improvement action has during 2025 pivoted to delivering enhanced workflow functionality within our existing back-office environment. This has seen the development of bespoke workflow and staff training which facilitates a new process for the Discharge of Conditions. Lessons learnt about the opportunities to improve the functionality of existing systems will be employed to overhaul and update existing electronic workflow processes moving forward.

The following next steps are proposed: Review of workflow for prior notification type submissions.

Action 11: Review handling of Third Party Late Representations

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given other priorities.
- The action was set as a low or medium priority.

The following next steps are proposed: Initiate during 2026/27.

Action 12: Process for Post Determination Discharge of Planning Conditions and Review of Model Conditions

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

New workflow and processes for the Discharge of Conditions have been developed from scratch and successfully implemented during 2025.

The updated process facilitates the introduction of a fee for this post-determination service. The introduction of electronic workflow for this process allows all submissions to be tracked, allows submitted details to be made available to the public and consultees via Public Access, and ensures that the demands of this previously 'invisible' activity can be accounted for within Team/resource planning.

Action 13: Planning Enforcement Workflow, Procedures and Performance Reporting

In progress

Progress against this action: Work has started on the development of updated processes that will form the basis for the introduction of new electronic workflow and performance reporting measures for Planning Enforcement.

This will continue to be developed with the review and update of the Council's Planning Enforcement & Monitoring Charter during 2026.



The following next steps are proposed: Initiate in late 25/26 early 26/27.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Amend timescale to medium term

Action 14: Improve LDP data management capacity to adequately and timeously manage LDP process

In Progress

Progress against this action: IT are developing an inhouse software system for the management of LDP3 consultation process.

The following next steps are proposed: Test and implement new system. The current review of the Gatecheck process, and requirements likely to be required by the DPEA, particularly format, have meant it prudent to await these outcomes before progressing further detailed system design. This is factored into the DPS and is not anticipated to cause delays. The Council's IT workplan includes this system development.

Action 15: Improve tailored engagement with young people, piloting this in two areas Helensburgh and Oban as part of Strategic Development Plan Framework delivery

In Progress

Progress against this action: Appointed consultants to take forward SDFPs. In school engagement events have been held in Oban and Helensburgh and has been co-designed using consultants and education staff. This has focused on looking at a 40-year time horizon and what you want to see in your area over that time. Feedback has been enthusiastic and positive and will feed into the production of the two Strategic Development frameworks.

The following next steps are proposed: TBC

Action 16: Improve understanding of Housing Market Needs and Demands

In Progress

Progress against this action: Consultants commissioned to produce updated Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, surveys currently ongoing.

The following next steps are proposed: A positive household survey has been held with very good uptake in all 9 HMAs which will give statistically robust evidence. Some population technical papers have been produced. Awaiting launch of revised CMHA model which is during March 26 and will progress to conclusion of HNDA during summer 26.



Action 17: Review and upgrade of existing preapplication enquiry service and self-service publications

In Progress

Progress against this action: Initial engagement with customers seeking their views on the Council's existing pre-application service and their expectations/requirements for a revised offering has been completed.

Work to progress the development of a revised pre-application service has however been temporarily paused due to resourcing issues, including the lack of capacity/availability of suitably trained/experienced system technicians to progress this work. It is currently expected that this project will resume during 2026.

The following next steps are proposed: Development and testing of new pre-app process during 2026.

Action 18: Employ dedicated housing delivery officers to coordinate cross service facilitation of development

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Two FTE employed in roles dedicated to housing delivery effective from Summer 2025. An internal cross service Housing Delivery Working group has been established which allows a collaborative approach to unlocking impediments to housing delivery both by the public and private sector. A programme managed approach is being developed which will ultimately support the Housing Pipeline delivery.

Action 19: Deliver pilot worker housing on an Island

In Progress

Progress against this action: Sites on Mull have been consented and serviced in readiness for delivery of pilot worker accommodation.

The following next steps are proposed: Council have agreed cashflow funds which will allow immediate progression of this project in advance of other funding avenues being confirmed. Currently preparing tender documents for a design and build contract which should be put out to tender during spring 2026. Also developing the details of the operating model business plan.



Action 20: Deliver Market Housing for Primary Occupancy on an Island

In Progress

Progress against this action: Outline business case submitted for approval by Scottish and UK Governments for project on Islay

The following next steps are proposed: Secure agreement of outline business case and move to development of full business case. Exploring two potential site options and combining further match funding opportunities to maximise the number of houses that might be delivered on the island. This options analysis is due for completion in spring 26 and will then lead to further detailed development of business cases for the preferred option/s.

Action 21: Review Local Nature Conservation Sites

In Progress

Progress against this action: Commissioned consultants to review LNCS.

The following next steps are proposed: Consultants to undertake site visits and produce recommendations. LNCS survey work has been postponed over the winter months, many of our LNCS being very remote. During the spring survey work should be completed and will allow a detailed analysis of those LNCS which should be maintained, and those that may not be necessary. This work will form part of the Council's LDP3 Evidence report.

Action 22: Refresh Local Biodiversity Action Plan

In Progress

Progress against this action: Commissioned consultants to review AB LBAP.

The following next steps are proposed: Consultants to produce recommendations. Consultants have engaged with partners over the winter months, and a first draft delivery plan is anticipated in March and will focus on delivery mechanisms that are within the Council's control.

Action 23: Develop Community Woodland in Dunbeg

In Progress

Progress against this action: Funding identified to deliver community woodland.

The following next steps are proposed: Tender documents have been drawn up and will be issued in FQ1 26/27. Intention is consultants to finalise a planting design and implement once approved during the 2026 planting season.



Action 24: Explore the development of a shared workspace for progression of S75 and Planning Legal Agreements

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given other priorities.
- The action was set as a low or medium priority.
- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

The following next steps are proposed: This improvement action will aim to deliver enhanced means of sharing documentation and tracking casework progression between Development Management and the Council's Legal Services using a shared MS Teams environment.

Progression has been delayed due to a lack of availability of a suitably trained/experienced resource. It is currently expected that this action will progress during 2026.

Action 25: Development of Service, Team and Individual Performance Dashboards utilising capabilities MS Power BI to improve performance reporting and management

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Development Management Service have engaged in a project within the Council to deliver the roll out of performance dashboards. The dashboards utilise Power BI to import data which can then be made available in a variety of formats - this will include high level Service performance overview for Senior Management, Team and individual performance data.

Work completed to date has seen included the development of Service level performance data. Work is currently ongoing to automate the import of data from back-office systems into the corporate data warehouse which will see regular quarterly and monthly performance reporting replaced with an automated system.

The following next steps are proposed: Next steps to expand pilot report content to include full scope of current monthly and quarterly reports and replace manual report preparation with Power BI generated content.

Peer Collaborative Review Follow Up

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



Status of the peer review follow-up meeting: We are planning to organise a follow up meeting.

Additional information: Meeting with Highland Council is scheduled for 30th October 2025.

