

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

East Ayrshire Council



East Ayrshire NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

East Ayrshire Council was part of Cohort 1 for the first National Planning Improvement Framework and submitted the assessment in September 2024. Good progress has been made with the 19 Actions with the majority of actions in progress or have been completed.

Action 6 - Scheme of Delegation, Action 13 - Planning Application Process, Action 14 - Preapplication Service and Processing Agreement have been completed. Staffing levels have remained fairly steady in this period with 2 Planning Officers - one in Development Management and the other from Development Planning moving to promoted posts in another Council or organisation. The Development Planning Senior Planning Officer post was filled with an internal candidate whilst the Development Management post has been filled externally. Staff are encouraged to take up training opportunities with good training sessions provided through Council's Organisational Development, HOPS, RTPi and Planning Hub. Recently the Service held a Development Morning which was well attended and was an opportunity for networking and discussing how the service could be taken forward. An Improvement Plan will be produced and discussed with the Service Management Team of how it will be taken forward. The Lead Enforcement Officer is now in post and operates within its own Enforcement team - 1 Enforcement Officer and 1 Graduate Planning Officer reporting to the Interim Development Management Manager. This helps to strengthen the Enforcement Service as well as working across the Planning Service. Work continues on Digital Transformation progressing the use of Power BI and online forms and working with the Scottish Government Digital Team and the HOPS digital sub-group with the benefit of having a better customer and streamline service. The Planning Service is leading on a new GIS system for the Council which will help to provide real time data analysis. At present work is being taken forward on the technical specification with support from the Improvement Service. Collaboration has been key in working with and across services in terms of preparing the Evidence Report for LDP3 or agreeing an approach to the Developer Contributions policy and Supplementary Guidance in terms of Education Contributions with Planning, Property and Facilities Management and Education working very closely together.

The Planning Service held a successful and well attended Housing Developers Roundtable with colleagues in Housing and Estates to encourage interest in housing sites in East Ayrshire. Large, medium and small housebuilders attended together with RSLs and they discussed the opportunities and challenges with the South, North and Town Centre sites. The housebuilders also heard from the Depute Chief Executive, Head of Housing about the opportunities in East Ayrshire and from other officers in terms of an update on the LDP, the importance of customer service and Scotland's Town Partnership. Given the success of this event it is intended to build on this by having more roundtable events in 2026 addressing matters such as depopulation and town centre investment.



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.](#)

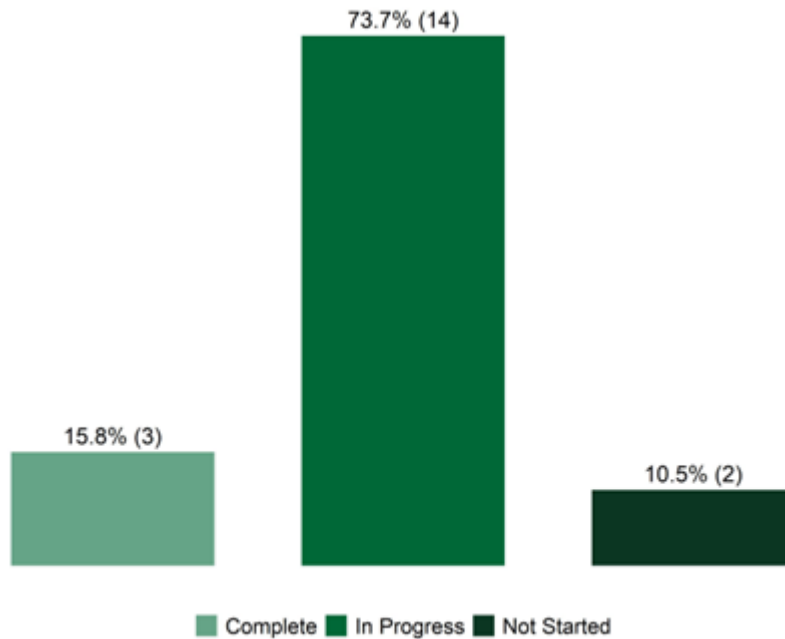
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress East Ayrshire has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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



East Ayrshire has 19 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Review of the Enforcement Function to encompass staffing, workload and digital and to increase the capacity of the enforcement function through upskilling of planning officers

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Lead Enforcement Officer is now in post and reports to the Interim Development Management Manager. The Graduate Planning Officer is now in post who will work across Planning and Enforcement. Work is progressing on digital enforcement forms.

The following next steps are proposed: Embed the new Enforcement arrangement over the Planning Service. Progress digital to reduce emails and phone calls to provide an effective enforcement process.



Action 2: Undertake a Specialist Skills Review in the Delivery of NPF4 and LDP3 and relate to Service Structure. We will feed the outcome of this review to the Improvement Service and HOPS to assist with the development of the Planning Hub

In Progress

Progress against this action: Initial work has been progressed and engagement has taken place with the Planning Hub. Two architects have joined the Planning Team to progress a masterplan for Kilmarnock Town Centre but the wider Planning team are benefitting from them being part of the team. Work has commenced on the evidence report through topic papers and this is assisting in determining skills gaps.

The following next steps are proposed: Progress a Specialist Skills Review.

Action 3: Undertake Workforce Strategy. We will work with the Council Organisational Development and HR Chief Planning Medium Short (undertake) Service Managers/ Planning Staff sections and external partners to deliver a pipeline of future leaders and skilled practitioners by ensuring that appropriate skills and training is provided. We will explore the possibility of utilising modern /graduate apprenticeships, working with the Councils Employability Service and University of the West of Scotland to deliver a future workforce. We will consider the impact of the Planning Hub on the service including our needs, skills and resources to ensure we maximise the output of our workforce

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Planning Graduate is now in post in the Enforcement and Development Management team however modern/graduate apprenticeship opportunities were not taken forward in this financial year due to other commitments and pressures. A new Graduate Planner post is being created in Development Planning & Regeneration, replacing a vacant Planning Officer post to allow succession planning within the team.

The following next steps are proposed: Progress Workforce Strategy and Graduate Post.



Action 4: Promote a positive healthy workplace culture which aligns with the Councils policies and Workforce Strategy building on meaningful work, open communication and FACE values through communication at work events, training and networking sessions within and outwith the office. Investigate and introduce measures for a less risk averse work environment

In Progress

Progress against this action: Some service areas have undertaken the Annual Development Review (FACE). A Development Session was held recently as an opportunity for team building, networking and open communication. It identified top goals, pain points, dependencies and achievements and expectation. This will be put together in action plan.

The following next steps are proposed: Progress FACE conversations and hold future development day sessions and training opportunities. An Inspired Programme related to master planning has commenced with invited speakers every month which is providing opportunities for CPD and networking. The first session addressed the importance of having green infrastructure and landscaping approach with particular reference to the Maryhill Masterplan. Future sessions will address sustainability, heritage and town centres as well as learning from other Planning Authorities and site visits.

Action 5: Review of customer feedback form and process in connection with planning decisions to facilitate easier engagement and feedback by our customers and ensure that it is properly recorded and actioned. We will seek to align this work with the national survey to be undertaken by the National Planning Improvement team

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: To determine whether the customer feedback form remains or replaced by the National Survey as returns have been low in the past.



Action 6: Review of Scheme of Delegation to bring it up to date and to reflect relevant pressures and priorities. This will seek to ensure that the work of committee is proportionate to the nature of the development under consideration and ensure that smaller scale development is determined under delegated power, thereby allowing elected members to focus on strategic and complex developments

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The Planning Scheme of Delegation was approved by Council on 12 December 2024 and by the Scottish Ministers on 20 December 2024. The approved Planning Scheme of Delegation is being implemented

Action 7: Elected member training to bring forward a more structured and consistent approach and greater awareness of current wider development, news and innovation within the Scottish planning sector. We will seek to ensure that training is aligned with forthcoming Scottish Government guidance and legislation in respect of statutory councillor training and to support elected members in decision-making and knowledge gathering

In Progress

Progress against this action: Work is progressing on elected member training and a recently elected Councillor has been trained. Appeal decisions are used for training with Planning Committee members in terms of key considerations, learning what worked well and lessons learned. The Member Officer Working Group (MOWG) in terms of the Local Development Plan is a good forum for members to be involved and influence the shape of the future LDP3. It also gives them an understanding of the Development Plan process. The Elected Members are invited to the Masterplanning talks - Be Inspired Programme - improving their awareness of the components of good design.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to provide training and engagement of members through the LDP process and in terms of the Be Inspired Programme and Planning Procedures.



Action 8: Corporate Management Team workshops to show links between planning and other departments on e.g. developer contributions, place and wellbeing outcomes. We will also involve external stakeholders in sharing good practice

In Progress

Progress against this action: Workshops have taken for Developer Contributions and good progress is being made. The Housing Developer Round Table brought together Planning, Housing, Estates and the Private Housebuilders and RSLs and has helped to encourage more collaborative working to deliver housing on more difficult sites. Work on creating a masterplan for Kilmarnock is bringing together the Executive Management Team, the Chief Officer from East Ayrshire Leisure Trust, the Head of Housing, colleagues from Property and Facilities Management and Planning together with key stakeholders such as Scottish Water, SEPA.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to encourage and facilitate the sharing of the links between planning and other depts and external stakeholders.

Action 9: Introduce new GIS system and layers, which will contribute to a spatial evidence base for LDP processes and planning decision-making, and corporate spatial data sharing and management. Consider linkages of various systems with spatial data to streamline processes – e.g. Uniform and GIS

In Progress

Progress against this action: Project Board set up and Technical Working Group - to progress what is required from a new GIS system. Also being supported by the Improvement Service.

The following next steps are proposed: Progress the implementation of new GIS system to ensure it meets Planning and Corporate requirements and provide transformational change. Progress a User Group once a technical specification has been agreed.



Action 10: Explore further opportunities to use digital solutions to increase automation and improve workflow and provide seamless communication with other systems where relevant – e.g. Implement electronic Enforcement forms and Mailbox Planning Service High Short Planning Staff and IT to focus delivery and reduce timescales and handling

In Progress

Progress against this action: Good progress is being made in terms of the automation of the planning process using Power BI, online forms to ensure that enquiries and complaints go straight into Uniform.

The following next steps are proposed: Progress further digital solutions with the use of AI, Power BI and work with the Scottish Government Digital in terms of new payment system and the Heads of Planning (Scotland) digital subgroup.

Further refine online forms to improve customer experience and smoother internal handling, for example online forms for Discharge of Conditions, NMV.

Action 11: Review Planning and Enforcement web presence to provide a better and more customer friendly experience which is quality, accurate and accessible

In Progress

Progress against this action: This is ongoing to ensure web presence meets accessibility and updates on service improvements.

The following next steps are proposed: To continue to review Planning and Enforcement web presence ensuring they met accessibility requirements and are updated with improvements taken forward such as new preapplication service and fees structure.

Action 12: Update Enforcement Charter to ensure it reflects the Council's current approach to the use of enforcement controls and the monitoring of development

In Progress

Progress against this action: This will be reviewed and updated by Lead Enforcement Officer to meet the new arrangements and requirements.



The following next steps are proposed: To review and update to reflect new arrangements and digital improvements.

Action 13: Introducing new measures to improve local development performance figures, including review of front and back end of planning application processes and benchmark with other Planning Authorities

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Working groups were held including technical support and planning officers which looked at a range of different parts of the process and on the back of that a number of changes were introduced, such as reduced handling and updated delegated reports amongst others, with others to be monitored and reviewed again in due course. We also updated the processing agreement templates and pushed out training on that and stop the clock use through half day workshop session.

Action 14: Review our chargeable pre-application service and the use of Processing Agreements. We will seek to work across Council departments and with external and internal consultees to deliver an improved and streamlined service, that provides applicants with a better and more complete service that is more interactive and can deliver greater certainty earlier in the process to enable them to incorporate feedback prior to submission of their application. This will assist in improving the quality of development and decision making

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Pre-application service has been reviewed, and agreed at the January Planning Committee. Now being implemented. Processing agreement review complete and new templates created to make these easier for the council and applicants.



Action 15: Hold a meeting with agents for householder and local development in terms of validation and registration of applications and customer service

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: This will be taken forward in 2026. Efforts were concentrated on Housing Developers Roundtable.

Action 16: Promote the use of Engagement HQ for consultation with communities and other service departments and external stakeholders

In Progress

Progress against this action: This is being used for engagement in the LDP and Evidence Report. So far, we have published a number of topic papers, Local Place Plan consultations, the development plan scheme, play sufficiency surveys and tell us about your place surveys. This tool allows users to work interactively using maps and placing comments. Engagement HQ is also being used for the masterplan exercise for Kilmarnock Town Centre.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to use and promote the use of Engagement HQ.

Action 17: Engage with communities on Local Place Plans and Community Action Plans and how these will interface with LDP3. Pilot with a community to develop different approaches to consultation moving away from traditional drop-in events to ensure communities are listen to and actions are publicised

In Progress

Progress against this action: This is being progressed with the first Local Place Plan for Galston received. The Development Planning Team are working closely with Vibrant Communities in terms of progressing Local Place Plans. All communities have been offered the opportunity to progress their existing Community Action Plans into Local Place Plans. Officers across planning and community planning are working with communities to ensure that they can meet the criteria to be adopted as Local Place Plans.



The following next steps are proposed: We are aiming to have Local Place Plans in place for May 2026 which will allow them to full inform the evidence report for LDP3.

Action 18: Build on relationships with NHS to build better links to health and wellbeing outcomes through LDP3 and other service departments and link to Attribute 5

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Development Planning team continues to work closely with colleagues in the NHS, both in terms of the NHS Estates and Public Health teams. In particular, as work moves forward on the LDP3 Evidence Report, NHS public health colleagues are proactively engaging in the process, through informally reviewing relevant topic papers, suggesting additional data sources and fulfilling the role of critical friend with regards to the information gathered. This is proving invaluable and will help to produce an evidence report, and in time a plan, that fully explores the link between planning and wellbeing.

In terms of LDP implementation, officers are working closely with NHS colleagues to confirm instances where health care capacity is limited and developer contributions are therefore required to be able to support particular planning applications, with regards to the Infrastructure First policies of the Plan.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to work with NHS to establish a good working relationship in order to input into LDP3 and to support the development contributions policy in LDP2.



Action 19: Create template for legal agreements for most common heads of terms to reduce timescales for completion. Consider and integrate with work being undertaken by HoPS on template legal agreements. Place these documents on our website. Encourage twin tracking of legal agreement drafting during planning application assessment to minimise time post recommendation and work closely with Legal Colleagues. Place these documents on our website. Encourage twin tracking of legal agreement drafting during planning application assessment to minimise time post recommendation and work closely with Legal Colleagues

In Progress

Progress against this action: A template has been devised but not yet implemented.

The following next steps are proposed: Implement the template and work with Legal Services to twin track the Legal Agreement with the Planning Permission.



New Proposed Planning Improvement Actions

The table below details further improvement actions added.

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 year Long term 3+ year	Resources
Hold further Developer Roundtable events on housing depopulation and investment in the town centre. We will feed the outcome into the LDP3 and Kilmarnock Town Centre Masterplan and encourage greater collaboration, partnership and investment.	Planning Service	High	Medium	Service Managers/ Corporate Services. External Stakeholders, Housebuilders/RSLs



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: Collaborative Meeting held 15th December with Renfrewshire Council and NPIF Champion to discuss actions complete, those in progress and those not started as well as sharing good practice.

