



West Lothian
Council

is.
improvement service

National Planning Improvement

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

West Lothian Council



West Lothian NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

West Lothian Council's first NPIF report and Action Improvement Plan allowed the planning authority to recognise both its areas of good practice and evaluate where we feel we can develop further, to help us drive further improvements in our service as we focus on being a high-performing planning authority.

The peer review workshops were particularly beneficial in identifying the key action improvements to take forward on behalf of our customers.

This year 2 action update details the progress that has been made between April 2024 and September 2025. Good progress has been made on using the council's Uniform system to monitor and track the compliance with planning conditions and also produce template documents for promoting a TPO and producing LRB decisions.

There has also been significant engagement with customers and stakeholders in order to progress the council's LDP2 to the 'Gate Check' stage.

As ever, our thanks go to our customers who have engaged positively with staff to ensure the planning service is responsive, flexible and making a positive impact on anyone who lives, studies, works, shops, visits or just passes through West Lothian.

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 West Lothian has made, detailing

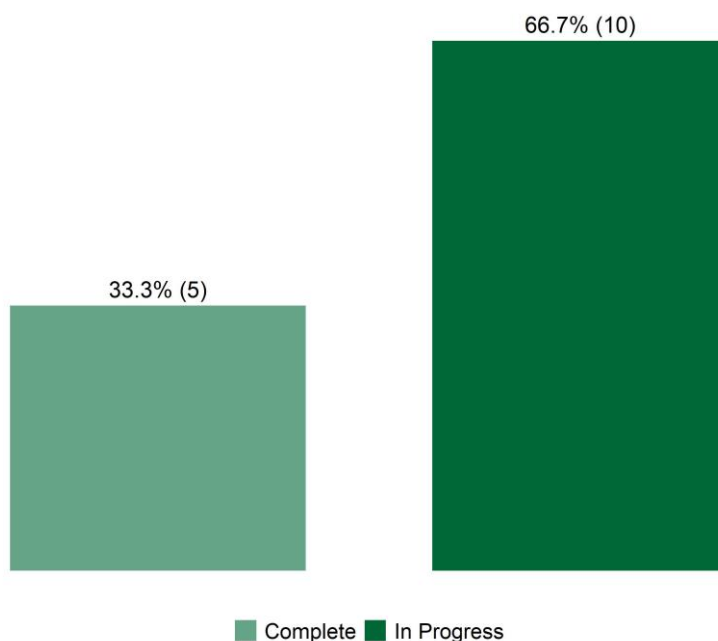


any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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

West Lothian has 15 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Access Development Planning team resource in relation to LDP2 production

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A Level 2 Planner has been seconded to the LDP team and a Planning Technician has recently been recruited. Agreement has also been reached to recruit for a full time Level 1 Planner to replace a Level 2 Planner who will be retiring in January 2026.

The quick turn around from identifying the resource requirements for the production of LDP2 to the recruitment stage, has ensured that there will be minimal gaps in the progress of this priority council workstream.



Action 2: Investigate the migration of our performance reporting to PowerBI dashboards

In Progress

Progress against this action: A draft PowerBI report dashboard for key performance indicators has been completed and is now undergoing testing and refinement.

The following next steps are proposed: It is expected that the refinement process will extend into early 2026. When this process is completed the dashboards will be rolled out as the main performance reporting tool for internal performance indicators and also to feed into the Scottish Government returns.

This action is a good example of the commitment of the service to maximising the benefits of digital technologies, whilst acknowledging the need for staff training to make the most efficient use of these emerging technologies.

Action 3: Develop ArcGIS skills of all staff to maximise use of existing data layers within service and ensure efficiency

In Progress

Progress against this action: This action is in the early stages and currently appropriate layers are being investigated by planning technical staff for migration from CADCORP to Uniform.

The following next steps are proposed: The migration of each of the relevant layers will be tested individually to ensure the data transfers successfully. The aim is for this to be completed by April 2026. Thereafter, the necessary staff training will be undertaken showing again the continuous improvement of the service and the need to ensure that all staff have the tools to carry out their roles effectively and efficiently.

Action 4: Support any staff who wish to develop appropriate skills for the benefit of the service, including attendance at university where appropriate

In Progress

Progress against this action: One of the Development Management Assistant Planning Officers has been successful in securing a place at Napier University to study BSC (Hons) in Construction and Built Environment (Building Surveying) from September 2024. The course is mainly distance learning but includes two weeks in person learning each term. That officer is supported by other team members who offer mentoring and also take on additional duties when the officer is attending university.

Following the secondment of a Level 2 Planner to the LDP team, this has allowed two further internal temporary promotions within the Development Management team for a Level 1 planner to step up to Level 2 and that Level 1 post to be filled by an Assistant Planning Officer. This has allowed each staff member to gain valuable experience and skills in dealing



with more complex applications and processes within the team and plays a pivotal role in the service's succession planning for its workforce.

The following next steps are proposed: The initial university place was agreed for 2 years (entry was accepted for Year 2). The service is now looking to support the staff member for a third year to allow completion of the honours degree. The two promoted staff will be mentored throughout the secondment period, which is likely to be 18 months to 2 years and individual development plans will be put in place.

Action 5: Ensure the ongoing commitment to continuous improvement

In Progress

Progress against this action: The submission of NPIF Action Plan highlights the commitment to continuous improvement. Through team, service-wide and one to one discussion, the service also undertakes regular internal assessments to ensure staff and the service is always looking for ways to improve. Managers and principal officers operate an 'open door' policy which encourages staff to bring forward positive ideas for every day work activities as well as highlighting areas where improvements are necessary.

The following next steps are proposed: The service will work through the Improvement Actions identified in the May 2025 NPIF assessment submission. The service also uses several other continuous improvement models, including the West Lothian Assessment Model (WLAM), EFQM, and CSE. An update of the proposed actions and desired outcomes required through the WLAM from 2023 will also be undertaken in 2025.

As the actions are worked through in both of these exercises, relevant details will be added to each report to showcase progress and reinforce the message of continuous improvement. The service will also consider synchronising the review cycles of the different assessment models to reduce duplication and streamline the continuous improvement process.

Action 6: Continue with the necessary member training, capturing in particular changes to planning legislation and updates on progress with LDP2

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

All the necessary member training was undertaken during late 2024 and early 2025. This included training for attendance at Development Management Committee, Planning Committee and the Local Review Body. The provision of updates on legislation was given as part of the latter training and updates on the LDP2 progress was completed as part of the preparation of the Evidence Report.



Going forward, this training material will be regularly updated and form part of the ongoing training offered to members on a council-wide basis.

Action 7: Conclude the appointment to the Chief Planner Role

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The Chief Planner appointment was approved at West Lothian Council Executive on 16th April 2024. This appointed the Head of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration as the Chief Planner.

Action 8: Progress with the production of LDP2

In Progress

Progress against this action: The LDP2 process has now reached the 'gate check' stage, with this expected to be completed by 7th November 2025.

The following next steps are proposed: Each of the submissions following the 'call for sites and ideas' is now ongoing. This exercise will continue into early 2026. The next steps towards the production of the LDP2 will then be dependent on the outcome of the 'gate check' process.

Action 9: Explore the use of Uniform for monitoring and discharging planning conditions, generating LRB decisions and developing a TPO template

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

- (i) A new process has been implemented for discharge of planning conditions. This includes ensuring the correct fee and forms have been submitted and passed to appropriate officer (electronically through uniform).
- (ii) LRB decisions are now generated through Uniform by Committee Services. All templates and standard letters are within uniform.
- (iii) A TPO template document is now within Uniform for use. This has greatly reduced the amount of legal resource needed and streamlined the TPO promotion process. Standard notification letter & advert wording templates have also been created in Uniform.



Action 10: 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

In Progress

Progress against this action: Officers have extracted data from the Performance indicators for LRB and DPEA decisions made over the last 18 months and are now collating that information to identify patterns in the type of applications/decisions that are overturned by either or both the DPEA and the LRB.

The following next steps are proposed: From the data, patterns will be identified so that balanced decisions can be taken going forward which reflect, or at least take account of, the outcomes at appeal.

Action 11: Expand customer satisfaction survey to a wider range of customers (new home owners and pre-app service users)

In Progress

Progress against this action: Questions are currently being designed by officers, and the customer groups are being finalised.

The following next steps are proposed: Once the questions and groups are finalised, officers need to confirm the format of the survey and how it will be distributed. A meeting is due to take place with the council's Media team in October before the survey is issued late 2025/early 2026.

The service will also look at the design and timing of customer and stakeholder surveys to align local and national questionnaires and examine strategies to improve response rates.

Action 12: Monitor and review performance of the pre-app service

In Progress

Progress against this action: Reports and graphs have been set up in Uniform and reporting against targets is done at monthly team meetings. This data reporting is also being looked at via PowerBI dashboards. Benchmarking against other LAs has commenced but is not complete yet.

The following next steps are proposed: Following the benchmarking exercise, the next step is to make decisions on whether there should be changes to the timescale for issuing the pre-application response, the amount of information included in the response and whether consultees should be involved and also the potential to increase the current fees for this service.



Action 13: Progress the engagement with developers and communities through the LDP2 process

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Extensive engagement was carried out during the LDP2 Evidence Report stage and allowed the LDP team to successfully complete the report and submit it to the Scottish Government on 19 June 2025 to undergo the 'Gate Check' process.

Action 14: Continue to work closely with legal officers to progress S75 agreements within the 6-month time frame, including introducing monthly progress meetings

In Progress

Progress against this action: West Lothian Council uses an external legal consultant for planning services such as drafting S75 legal agreements. A process has been put in place to allow the Heads of Terms to be produced via Uniform and all the necessary information to be filled in on a template, which is then passed to the legal consultants. This has created an efficient process and allows the Heads of Terms to be incorporated in the standard S75 template. With this process and standardisation, this has reduced the time taken for the legal agreements to be passed to the developer team.

The following next steps are proposed: There is a good, robust process in place for liaison between planning and legal case officers. An initial manager S75 update meeting has been held but follow-up arrangements need to be made to ensure any issues can be addressed as soon as they arise. Agreement is still required to introduce more regular monthly monitoring, so this is a priority for establishing before the start of 2026.

Action 15: Progress the use of the Uniform module to allow for conditions monitoring to support implementation of development in accordance with consents

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Uniform Condition Monitoring module has been used for a sample of case study applications. In particular it has been used to monitor/discharge pre-commencement conditions on a larger housing site, as well as for tracking temporary planning consents due to expire. A few other applications where conditions have specific timescales noted have also been created within the system to help remind officers of approaching deadlines. Enterprise Traffic lights have also been created to track and Flag approaching deadlines to officers.

The following next steps are proposed: The next stage is to review the success of the pilot case studies and determine whether any changes are required to the procedures before the



module is rolled out to capture conditions on all new determined applications. The intention would be to use it going forward on 2026 applications and also key large scale earlier applications/decisions.



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
Review the council's Scheme of Delegation Outcome: Submission of the updated Scheme of Delegation to the appropriate committee of the council and to Scottish Ministers. Will assess action is complete when: Reporting of the updated Scheme of Delegation to committee.	Tony Irving	High	Medium	Existing staff and resources
Undertake planning training for Community Councils. Outcome: Community Council's who engage regularly with Planning Services will have a greater understanding of the service, its priorities and how to engage at the right time and in the right way Will assess action is complete when: All those Community Councils that wish to partake in the	Wendy McCorriston	Medium	Medium	Existing staff and resources



training will have been given the opportunity to do this and will have completed the training.

--

--

--

--



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 send an email to update on progress.

Additional information: West Lothian Council undertook its peer review workshop and submitted its NPIF Action Plan in May 2025, as part of Cohort 3. As only 4 months have passed since then, it is intended to send out an update email within the next 3 months.

