

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Guidance for pilot planning authorities

Cohort 3

December 2024

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
BACKGROUND	6
The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019	6
The Development of the National Planning Improvement Framework	6
Learning from the Planning Performance Framework Model	7
OUTCOMES	9
The National Planning Improvement Framework Aims	9
Link with National Outcomes	9
PROCESS	12
STAGE 1: SELF ASSESSMENT BY PLANNING AUTHORITY	14
Aims	14
The Attributes of a High Performing Planning Authority	14
STAGE 2: PEER COLLABORATIVE REVIEW	17
Aims	17
Partner authorities	17
Key principles of peer collaborative improvement	18
Participants	19
Chair/ Facilitator	20
Roles and Responsibilities	20
Outputs	21
STAGE 3: PUBLICATION AND SHARING	23
Aims	23
STAGE 4: IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING	25
Aims	25

INTRODUCTION

This section provides you with contact details for the National Planning Improvement team, gives details on those involved in cohort 1 of the pilot and outlines how we intend building learning into the pilot.

1. Thank you for taking part in the third cohort piloting the new National Planning Performance Framework (NPIF). The NPIF will be the replacement for the Planning Performance Framework, and it is planned to test and learn from it in 2024/5.
2. This guidance firstly provides some background context, followed by a section on outcomes, it explains the process, then goes into the detail of the four stages of the process.
3. The NPIF will be project managed by the National Planning Improvement team (NPI), based in the Improvement Service. The key contacts for participating authorities are:
 - Craig McLaren, National Planning Improvement Champion
Email: craig.mclaren@improvementservice.org.uk
Tel: 07742 694468
 - Susan Rintoul, Improvement Lead
Email: susan.rintoul@improvementservice.org.uk
Tel: 07719 649338
4. We have provided supporting documents for the pilot including:
 - this guidance
 - a performance assessment template
 - an improvement action plan template
 - a good practice case study template
 - a context spreadsheet showing links between attributes, contributory factors, prompts
 - a short guidance paper to support the facilitation of the NPIF peer review workshops
5. These can be found online on the [NPI pages of Improvement Service website](#).
6. We have a National Planning Improvement Microsoft Teams group to provide a space for you to ask questions and start conversations with other planning authorities. We will also use this space to provide updates from the team, and you can also find the guidance saved there. Please email Susan Rintoul if you wish to be added to this group on susan.rintoul@improvementservice.org.uk
7. The new NPIF is being tested incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/5 financial year. All planning authorities are expected to be involved at some stage in the pilots to allow for feedback, adaptation and to ensure preparedness. Given this, the initial version was piloted by cohort 1 in Q1 of 2024/5, followed by a review. As you can see from the table below Cohort 1 has run over slightly in the proposed timeline

(shown in green). Cohort 2 started in August, and is still underway in November, and we are now in cohort 3, starting in December. The timescales are something we are looking to test. You should strive to complete stages 1 and 2 by the end of March, however if this is looking difficult, please tell the NPI team to discuss possible reviewed programming.

2024/ 5	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cohort 1												
Review												
Cohort 2												
Review												
Cohort 3												
Review												

8. The planning authorities taking part in Cohort 3 and their pairings are:

Aberdeen	Falkirk
Cairngorms	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Dumfries and Galloway	East Renfrewshire
South Ayrshire	Midlothian
Moray	Loch Lomond
Clackmannanshire	West Dunbartonshire
West Lothian	South Lanarkshire



9. You will already have taken part in an induction meeting with the NPI team to discuss and clarify approaches being taken to the pilot and each planning authority has been paired with another authority for the peer review exercise. We suggest that you contact your partner authority as soon as possible in the process.

10. This pilot aims to test the new framework. It should be viewed as an opportunity to explore what works and what doesn't so there are no right or wrong answers and nothings is 'set in stone'. Given this, we are keen that you and others involved in the process examine and provide feedback on the:

- ease of use for planning authorities, including the time and resources required.
- ease of management by the NPI team.

- ease of use for other stakeholders with a stake in planning performance and improvement.
- relevance, usability and effectiveness of the identified contributory factors and data sources
- effectiveness in providing evidence on planning authority performance.

11. We are particularly interested in hearing views on the suitability of the contributing factors especially their relevance, accessibility and useability.

12. Feedback and learning will be undertaken through:

- Ongoing discussion, dialogue, and feedback between you and the NPI team throughout the process.
- Asking you to keep provide feedback through the Teams group.
- Asking you to complete an end of process survey.
- Inviting you attend an end of process workshop to test the findings of the survey and dialogue.
- Asking you to participate in a workshop bringing together all 14 planning authorities participating in cohort 3, if possible, to share learning and good practice.

BACKGROUND

This section outlines the background to the establishment of the NPI team, provides details on how the new National Planning Improvement Framework was developed and sets out the differences from Planning Performance Frameworks.

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019

13. The [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) introduced a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities. It made it mandatory for planning authorities to prepare a report on their performance as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year. This report is to be published and submitted to Ministers. The Act also allowed Ministers to set out the form, content, and process in publishing this report, including the quantitative and qualitative information to be included and any outcomes that are to be used to assess the performance of planning authorities.
14. A new role of [National Planning Improvement Champion](#) was introduced in the Act to monitor the performance of planning authorities and provide advice to them, and other persons considered appropriate, on the steps that might be taken to improve.

The Development of the National Planning Improvement Framework

Stakeholder Engagement

15. The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) has been developed by NPIC in collaboration with stakeholders from a range of perspectives and interests in planning covering different sectors. An open call for ideas in October asked three questions:
 - What are the outcomes we need the planning system to deliver to have impact?
 - What makes a high-performing planning authority?
 - How can we measure this?
16. This was supplemented by a series of one-to-one discussions with key stakeholders whilst workshops were organised to enable a 'deep dive' on the questions outlined in the call for ideas. In total 129 organisations or individuals engaged in the discussion comprising a wide mix of interests in the planning system. This included discussion with 31 planning authorities, Scottish Government, COSLA, HOPS, SOLACE, the Key Agencies Group, SOLAR, RTPI Scotland, Homes for Scotland and the Scottish Property Federation.
17. The process has been supported and guided by the High Level Group on Planning Performance which is co-chaired by the Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and the Chair of COSLA's Economy and Environment. It also comprises Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS), SOLACE, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Key Agencies Group, SOLAR. An applicant sub-group comprising 'customers' of the planning service feeds into it.

The Verity House Agreement

18. The NPIF has also been developed within the context of the [Verity House Agreement](#) between Scottish Government and COSLA that promotes:

- Positive working relationships based on mutual trust and respect, recognising the need for effective and responsible joint leadership.
- A focus on the achievement of better outcomes locally for individuals and communities, and the need to jointly develop simple structures for assurance and accountability that recognise local difference but reduce burdensome reporting.
- An approach based on “local by default, national by agreement” that recognises that public responsibilities shall generally be exercised by those authorities which are closest to the citizen.

Learning from the Planning Performance Framework Model

19. The new NPIF builds upon the learning gathered from the last 12 years of [Planning Performance Frameworks](#) (PPFs) delivered by planning authorities and the subsequent marking undertaken by Scottish Government. This process involved:

- Planning authorities drafting and publishing their PPFs based around a template provided by HOPS and submitting these to Scottish Government by the end of June.
- A number of planning authorities undertaking peer review with one another.
- Scottish Government RAG rating each authority and providing feedback to Chief Executives and Chief Planning Officers by December.

20. Building upon this, the NPIF incorporates new principles with the following shifts in approach:

- **From marking to constructive challenge.** In the spirit of the Verity House agreement, the process shifts from one based on planning authority self-assessment and marking from Scottish Government to one that focusses on planning authority self-assessment and constructive challenge. The NPI team will play a ‘critical friend’ role providing constructive advice and testing assumptions arising from your performance assessment and improvement action plan and your peer review. Peer review will also involve another planning authority and users of the planning system.
- **A renewed focus on improvement.** The new process aims to use the self-assessment performance assessment as a stimulus for identifying areas of improvement to be included in your improvement action plan.
- **A high performing planning authority.** Scottish Government marking of 15 areas of work will be replaced by planning authorities’ self assessing themselves against 12 attributes of a high performing planning authority such as having the tools to do the job; engagement; people; culture and place.
- **Peer Collaborative Review.** A peer review stage will be introduced involving the NPI team, other planning authorities, stakeholders and users of the planning system.

- **Measuring quality.** To get a clearer picture of the success and improvement needs of planning authorities the NPIF looks to incorporate measures that assess impacts, outcomes achieved, and the quality of the service provided.
- **A whole system approach.** The NPIF approach aims to recognise the dependencies that planning authorities have in delivering their services including from, for example, statutory consultees, other specialist advice services in local authorities, community planning partners, key agencies, Scottish Government, DPEA (Directorate of Planning and Environmental Appeals), applicants and elected members. The NPIF looks to stimulate discussion between the planning authority and these organisations to assess what works, what does not and what actions should be put in place to improve.
- **Resources.** An important aim in developing the NPIF has been to ensure that, although the publication of a report on the effectiveness of planning authority functions will become statutory, it will be proportionate and not add to the demand on resources.
- **An incremental roll out.** The Planning Performance Framework (PPF) model has built up buy in over a number of years amongst planning authorities. It has also been adapted as and when appropriate. A large part of the success of the PPF model has been the commitment, support and information provided by HOPS and this has enabled the process to be seen as a mainstream part of the work of planning authorities. Given this, it is recognised that any new performance framework should be introduced incrementally to allow for feedback, adaptation and to ensure preparedness.

OUTCOMES

This section highlights the key ambitions for planning and the outcomes it should be seeking to achieve. It outlines how to NPIF links with national outcomes.

The National Planning Improvement Framework Aims

21. The NPIF aims to support a planning authority to assess their performance, identify areas of improvement and ascertain how best to action these to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency. The renewed focus on improvement and the robustness of the new NPIF process aims to provide the range of organisations with a stake in planning with confidence that the planning authority is fully committed to, and ambitious in, continuing to improve their performance.
22. The NPIF aims to support the purpose of planning to “manage the development and use of land in the long-term public interest through” ensuring that:
 - The **planning system** enables the delivery of sustainable, liveable, and productive places.
 - **Planning services** are equipped to work effectively and efficiently, embedding continuous improvement.
 - **Users** are able to engage constructively with the planning system and planning service.

Link with National Outcomes

23. The NPIF recognises the need for a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure planning authority performance more effectively. This has led to a shift to incorporate outcomes-based measures. By way of context there are a number of ambitions for planning and the outcomes it should be seeking to achieve.
24. **The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019** introduced a purpose of planning to “manage the development and use of land in the long-term public interest”. It also contained 6 outcomes for planning:
 - Meeting the housing needs of people living in Scotland including, in particular, the housing needs for older people and disabled people.
 - Improving the health and wellbeing of people living in Scotland.
 - Increasing the population of rural areas of Scotland.
 - Improving equality and eliminating discrimination.
 - Meeting any targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, within the meaning of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, contained in or set by virtue of that Act.
 - Securing positive effects for biodiversity.

25. **The 4th National Planning Framework (NPF4)** sets out the need to plan future places in line with six overarching spatial principles:

- **Just transition.** We will empower people to shape their places and ensure the transition to net zero is fair and inclusive.
- **Conserving and recycling assets.** We will make productive use of existing buildings, places, infrastructure, and services, locking in carbon, minimising waste, and building a circular economy.
- **Local living.** We will support local liveability and improve community health and wellbeing by ensuring people can easily access services, greenspace, learning, work, and leisure locally.
- **Compact urban growth.** We will limit urban expansion so we can optimise the use of land to provide services and resources, including carbon storage, flood risk management, blue and green infrastructure, and biodiversity.
- **Rebalanced development.** We will target development to create opportunities for communities and investment in areas of past decline and manage development sustainably in areas of high demand.
- **Rural revitalisation.** We will encourage sustainable development in rural areas, recognising the need to grow and support urban and rural communities together.

26. These principles will play a key role in delivering on the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Scottish Government's national outcomes and through these spatial principles NPF4 will support the planning and delivery of:

- **Sustainable places**, where we reduce emissions, restore, and better connect biodiversity.
- **Liveable places**, where we can all live better, healthier lives.
- **Productive places**, where we have a greener, fairer, and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

27. Given this, the NPIF assessment of planning authority attributes is contextualised within broader outcomes-based frameworks. It highlights an important role for the **Place and Wellbeing Outcomes** in linking planning authority performance with the quality outcomes. They have a good 'read-across' with the Place Standard and therefore support the implementation of the Place Principle. The 'place' element of the planning authority attributes will use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes to measure the quality of place. Indicators for these are currently being developed by Public Health Scotland.

28. The diagram below sets out the relationships between key measures including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, NPF4 and the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes.



PROCESS

This section outlines the process of the NPIF and includes suggestions on how best to prepare for it.

29. The process for the NPIF comprises 4 stages:

- **Stage 1** where the planning authority undertakes a self-assessment exercise and identifies improvement areas.
- **Stage 2** where the improvement action plan and performance assessment arising from stage 1 undergoes peer collaborative review.
- **Stage 3** where the agreed improvement action plan and performance assessment are published and sent to Ministers and the Chief Executive responsible for the planning authority.
- **Stage 4** where the improvement action plan is actioned and monitored.



30. It is suggested that you develop a project plan to help you agree on how to manage the process effectively and efficiently. In doing this you may want to consider:



- How you will resource the NPIF process, particularly staff time.
- How you will manage the process including who will lead the programme and the role and responsibilities of others involved.
- Any risks you have identified and mitigation that needs to be put into place.
- How the NPIF process and outputs relates to other activities within the planning service or corporately within your organisation.
- How best to communicate the process internally building upon your knowledge of internal communications, committee cycles and intra organisation relationships. In

doing this you may want to consider programming discussions and communication within the planning services, other services with whom you work closely, corporate services and elected members/ board members.



31. In particular, we would advise you to contact your partner authority as soon as possible to arrange times and dates for meetings, bearing in mind that you will be assessed by them and vice versa. You may want to set a date for the peer collaborative review workshop as soon as you can.
32. The cohort 3 pilot is scheduled to begin in December and ideally be completed by March. The pilots will provide an indication if this is do-able or over-ambitious as well as letting us know the factors affecting timescales. You should strive to complete stages 1 and 2 by the end of March, however if this is looking difficult, please tell the NPI team to discuss possible reviewed programming.
33. The assessment you undertake will be based on the data available for the 2023/4 financial year and your experiences in this period.
34. The remainder of this document provides detail on each of these four stages.

STAGE 1: SELF ASSESSMENT BY PLANNING AUTHORITY

This section explains how to complete the self-assessment part of the NPIF.

Aims

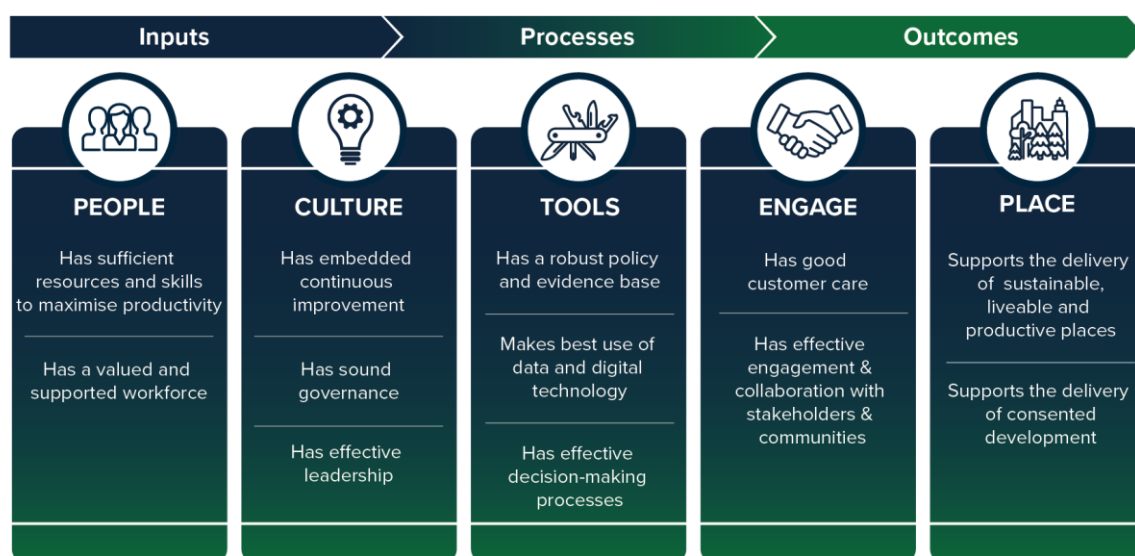
35. Stage 1 will support you to:

- Self-assess your performance.
- Identify those areas of activity that you should improve and what steps you should take to do this.
- Identifying and detail examples of good practice.

36. It is envisaged that the process will involve different parts of the planning service as well as discussions with key dependencies.

The Attributes of a High Performing Planning Authority

37. The self-assessment is focussed on the 12 attributes of highly performing planning authority, which are grouped around 5 themes. These are:



38. No one attribute is the measure of the planning authority's performance. It is important to bear in mind that your performance is best represented through looking at the combination of the 12 attributes to recognise the dependencies and connections between each of them.

39. The NPIF has been framed to allow you to ask questions of yourself, and to ask questions about the effectiveness of your work with those that you may depend upon, who can be outside of the planning department or the local authority. It is hoped that this will allow conversations about improvement actions to be discussed in the round.

40. The framework asks you to assess yourself with regards to the 12 attributes. You should do this by firstly using the contributing factors identified for each attribute, these are included as questions in the template, to help you think about any data that you may have to outline your reasoning to support your overall scoring of each attribute. You need not provide answers to all of these questions. However, in doing this please bear in mind that this will be shared with your peer review partners in advance of the peer review meeting and a final version will be included in your submission to the NPI team, which in turn will be shared with Scottish Ministers and Chief Executive of your organisations. Given this, please ensure that it clearly sets out the data and reasoning for your overall score for that attribute. Please also try to limit jargon and acronyms and write in plain English to ensure it is understandable to the range of partners involved in the peer review.
41. We will provide a template for you to follow. We ask that you please keep the structure of this, so we have consistency across all planning authorities, however you are free to add your own local authorities branding and document style as you see fit.
42. We are particularly keen to test if the suggested contributory factors are useful, easily accessible by you and if they allow us to ‘tell the story’. Please let the NPI team know if there are factors that you feel are important and relevant, but that are not highlighted through the indicators or prompts. This, or any other feedback would be welcomed and could be included in the Teams group. The narrative of your assessment for each attribute should discuss the activities you have undertaken in 2023/4 and the challenges you face as a planning service. This can include discussion of the ‘external factors’ that you feel impact on your performance including the accessibility, behaviours and relationships of other organisations you depend upon.
43. After you’ve written the narrative, at the end of each attribute in the template you will grade them from 1 – 5, see below scoring matrix. The scoring matrix will allow you to develop thinking around the actions that may need to be taken to tackle the issues identified in your assessment.

 PRIORITISE	 REVIEW	 DEVELOP	 BUILD UPON	 CONSOLIDATE
No progress	Making limited progress	Making fair progress	Making good progress	Making excellent progress
5	4	3	2	1
Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken. Engage with NPI Learn from others	Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others	Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation	Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others	Share learning with others

44. The scoring matrix is split into a five-level ranking from 'Prioritise' to 'Consolidate'. The purpose of the scoring matrix is to help you to identify where implementation and action is required. The scores themselves are not the focus, and the aim is not to get all 1's, as there is always room for improvement. It's there to help stimulate your thinking around actions you can take.
45. If you scored 'making excellent progress' or 'making good progress' on the scoring matrix, we ask that you provide an example of good practice, a template will be provided, and consider adding an improvement action on sharing good practice. If you score 'making good progress', 'making fair progress' 'making limited progress', or 'no progress' we ask that you consider improvement actions.
46. From this you will develop an action plan for the areas of improvement identified, it should specify actions, the owner of that action, priority, timescales and resources required. The improvement action plan gives an opportunity to outline the ambitions for the planning service in the short, medium and long term. Some actions you may feel are within your control and other actions may involve partners. It is encouraged that you invite these partners to the peer review meeting to discuss. In each action you should outline what action you will take, and the outcome expected. ^[OBJ]

STAGE 2: PEER COLLABORATIVE REVIEW

This section outlines the approaches to be taken on the peer collaborative review process, including the relations with your partner planning authority, how to organise the peer review meeting and who should be involved.



47. Guidance has been published on facilitating the peer collaborative review workshop and can be found alongside other guidance and templates on the NPI teams web pages. Some of the key points from this are highlighted below.

Aims

48. Stage 2 involves a peer collaborative review to provide constructive challenge on the improvement action plan and performance assessment that has emerged from stage 1.
49. This aims to facilitate a 'deep dive' identifying areas of progress and areas where improvement is required.
50. The peer collaborative review should comprise a workshop held face to face or online. It is envisaged that this would comprise a half-day session.
51. The meeting should take place under the Chatham House Rule which means that anything said in the meeting should not be attributed publicly to the person who said it without their permission. The meeting will not be used to discuss individual planning applications or development plan policies but rather will focus on your proposed improvement action plan and draft performance assessment of the 12 attributes contained in NPIF.

Partner authorities

52. Each cohort 3 authority has been paired with another. The pairings are:

Aberdeen	Falkirk
Cairngorms	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Dumfries and Galloway	East Renfrewshire
South Ayrshire	Midlothian
Moray	Loch Lomond
Clackmannanshire	West Dunbartonshire
West Lothian	South Lanarkshire

53. You should contact your paired authority as soon as possible to:



- Gain a better understanding of how that authority works.
- Explore the key challenges you face.

- Agree common definitions and ways of working.
- Discuss arrangements for undertaking the peer review exercise including if you wish to meet in advance and/ or regularly throughout the exercise.
- Agree a programme and timelines for undertaking the peer review exercise.
- Discuss arrangements you are each putting in place to report on the process internally.
- Agree key contact details.

54. The relationship between partner authorities is important. They will be a source of advice to you, and vice versa. Your partner authority will be part of the collaborative peer review process through:

- Commenting on and constructively critiquing your self assessment.
- Advising you on possible improvement actions that you could take based on their own experiences or their knowledge of others tackling similar challenges.
- Helping you draw out examples of your good practice that others would find useful.
- Generally providing support through acting as a critical friend that you can call upon. You will fulfil the same roles for them as they undertake their own assessment and identify improvement actions.

55. It is for you and your partner authority to agree how best to make your relationship work so that you both get the best out of it. In doing this you may want to consider:

- How early you may want to begin the relationship.
- How often you would like to meet one another and how.
- How you plan to support one another in the run up to and during the peer review workshop.
- Who will be involved from each authority.
- What your relationship will look like throughout the process, especially given the two-way nature of it.
- Arrangements for keeping in touch throughout the process.
- Whether you would like to continue the relationship when the peer review process has been completed.

Key principles of peer collaborative improvement

56. The key principles are:

- The peer collaborative improvement process is led by the planning authority undergoing assessment.
- In engaging in peer collaborative improvement, each planning authority remains responsible for its own development and outcomes.
- Peer reviewers will advise, support and challenge through a solution-focused approach to improvement.
- Sharing practice and learning across planning authorities should help make best use of the expertise across the system to support improvement.

- Peer collaborative improvement is the chance to support one another in addressing common issues across the sector and improving the overall performance of the sector.
- Success is dependent on creating and sustaining high levels of mutual trust, confidence, cooperation, and collaboration to allow effective peer-led improvement to take place.
- All involved will respect the confidentiality of all documentation provided and the content of all meetings and focus groups.

57. The benefits for the planning authority include:

- It receives focused and specific support and challenge around those services or areas which have been identified as in need of development or improvement, from external colleagues with understanding and expertise in the local context and landscape.
- It provides an opportunity for the host local authority to engage in a 'deep dive' on its performance and opportunities for improvement.
- It provides value-for-money, with planning authorities – and others - helping each other to provide improvement support at a lower cost than is available through external consultancy.

58. The benefits for peer reviewers include:

- It facilitates peer reviewers to gain new insights on how planning authorities operate and to bring back learning to their own organisation in ways that both improve outcomes and drive efficiency.
- It allows them to bring their experience to the discussion and be used constructively to support improvements.
- It assists with personal and professional development.

Participants



59. The participants in the collaborative peer review session will be chosen by you. It is thought that a group of around 12 people would work best to allow for a balance of considered perspectives and to make the workshop manageable.

60. The peer collaborative review workshop could, for example, involve representatives from:

- The host planning authority.
- The partner planning authority agreed with the NPI team.
- Other relevant functions within the host local authority or national park authority that have a bearing on how the planning authority works or for example community Planning or public health colleagues.
- Partners and stakeholders such as statutory consultees and Key Agencies.

- Users and beneficiaries of the planning system such as community councils and groups, developers, local agents and architects and appropriate NGOs. It may be useful to use umbrella groups to help identify appropriate people to take part such as Homes for Scotland, Scottish Property Federation, Scottish Renewables, Scotland's Towns Partnership, and the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. You may also want to look for participants from any local engagement groups you have with, for example local planning agents' groups or community forums.
- The NPI team.

61. It might be worth considering sharing some information introducing the planning system to participants in the peer review. For example, the [guidance from PAS](#) and Moray has an [introduction and guide for community councils](#).

Chair/ Facilitator

It is for you to decide who would be best placed to chair the peer review workshop. The role could be undertaken by someone from the planning authority, someone else from the local or national park authority, another stakeholder or an independent facilitator. In some circumstances a member of the NPI team may be able to help. In making that decision the host planning authority should consider the ability of the chair to:

- Ensure that the workshop is inclusive.
- Allow participants to engage constructively.
- Keep the discussion focused upon the draft improvement action plan and performance assessment.
- Have good knowledge of the planning authority, its work and circumstances it works within.
- Have the confidence of participants.

62. We are keen to test alternative approaches to this as part of the pilot so would welcome any other suggestions. In previous cohorts facilitators included PAS, external consultants, and internal learning and development colleagues.

Roles and Responsibilities

63. You will:



- Undertake necessary and relevant preparatory work in terms of considering its area of focus.
- Provide the draft improvement action plan and draft performance assessment and identified best practice case studies to all participants a week before the meeting, stating that you are willing to accept written comments in advance.
- Oversee the smooth running of the process, including ensuring that everyone involved in the peer review have access to all relevant documentation and data.
- Agree who will chair the peer review workshop.

64. The collaborative peer review session should allow for:



- You to set out your draft improvement action plan, based upon your assessment of each attribute. You and your partner authority may want to discuss this in advance of the meeting.
- Discussion amongst all participants of the merits of the draft improvement action plan.
- A collaborative and constructive discussion for all participants to identify improvement actions and their roles and responsibilities in taking these forward.

65. The NPI team will:

- Provide guidance on how the collaborative peer review process should work.
- Attend the peer review workshop to provide our advice on your draft improvement action plan and performance assessment.
- Meet with you in advance of the peer review process to agree how it will work, if required.
- Work with you to help identify and approach partner planning authorities to contribute peer reviewers.

66. Peer reviewers shall:

- Engage in purposeful discussion which supports peer collaborative improvement, for example, through reflective questioning to determine and or confirm the evidence-base in the host planning authority's self-assessment.
- Facilitate change, by helping the host planning authority identify areas for improvement and aid its capacity to change.
- Adopt the role of critical friend, providing supportive, robust, and constructive challenge to help drive improvement.
- Apply their specialist knowledge and expertise to the host planning authority, sharing examples of good practice for their own experience, and providing an external perspective.
- Focus contributions on the planning authority's assessment of the 12 attributes contained in NPIF and its identified actions for improvement. They should not discuss individual planning applications or development plan policies.

67. We have put together a [guidance paper](#) for facilitators.

Outputs

68. After the peer review workshop, you will have a document that has been 'tested' with users and stakeholders. You can then update the draft improvement action plan, performance assessment and good practice case studies where you feel appropriate and in the light of the peer review discussion.

69. After the Collaborative Peer Review workshop, the NPI team will provide brief comments on your draft assessment and Improvement Action plan via email.

70. A final decision on the improvement action plan and performance assessment lies with planning authority, though their report should highlight if any areas of major disagreement have been discussed at the peer review workshop.
71. You should send your final version to the NPI team as soon as you can using the templates provided for the Performance Assessment and the Improvement Action Plan.

STAGE 3: PUBLICATION AND SHARING

This section explains how the improvement action plan, performance assessment and good practice case studies will be shared with others.

Aims

72. Stage 3 is where the agreed improvement action plan and performance assessment are published and sent to Scottish Ministers and the Chief Executive responsible for the planning authority.
73. Once the improvement action plan and performance assessment are finalised in light of the collaborative peer review session, the planning authority will send the plan to peer review participants for information.
74. Despite the desire for the peer review session to be constructive and collaborative, there is the possibility that there will be differences of opinion on the assessment or improvements to be taken forward. If this is the case, the final decision on what is included in the final improvement action plan and performance assessment lies with the planning authority as the owner. However, any significant differences of opinion should be highlighted to the NPI team when the planning authority submits the final documentation.
75. When the improvement action plan and performance assessment has been finalised the planning authority will send this to the NPI team who will then assess it and send it to Scottish Ministers and the Chief Executive of the organisation that the planning authority sits within. This communication will comprise:
- A cover letter from the NPI team providing comments on key areas of improvement required.
 - The improvement action plan.
 - The performance assessment.
76. Once the NPI team has received your documents, we will draft a cover letter to be sent to your Chief Executive and the Minister setting out that they agree with its proposals, or where it does not if this is the case. It is intended to only use the latter option in very exceptional circumstances. You will be sent a copy of the endorsement letter to be sent to you Chief Executive five working days in advance of it being despatched. This will allow you to make the necessary internal arrangements required.
77. It is anticipated these documents will stimulate discussion between the planning authority and the Chief Executive on:
- The ambitions of the service in the short, medium, and long term.
 - The improvement actions required to achieve these ambitions.
 - Priority action and associated support that is required and made available.

78. Throughout this process you will need to communicate internally building upon your knowledge of internal communications, committee cycles and intra organisation relationships. In doing this you may want to consider programming discussions and communication within the planning service, other services with whom you work closely, corporate services and elected members/ board members.

STAGE 4: IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

This section discusses how you should take forward your improvement action plan.

Aims

79. Stage 4 is where the improvement action plan is actioned and monitored.
80. It is important that the planning authority acts on the improvement action plan. This plan will have set 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.
81. This will enable the planning authority to agree what actions should be undertaken when by whom. It may be useful to set out a timetable for this.
82. Once published, the planning authority's improvement action plan will be in the public domain. The planning authority will have regular check ins with the NPI team on progress.
83. After 6 months there will be a follow up peer review meeting with those who took part previously. This will allow all participants to discuss what progress has been made on agreed improvement actions and to discuss if there is a need to re-prioritise, re-draft or re-think the improvement action plan or individual actions. Any revised action plan should be shared with NPIC.
84. The NPIC is looking to establish a network for leads on planning improvement within authorities that will meet on a regular basis and a KHub group. These will be used to share learning across authorities.

The Improvement Service

The Improvement Service (IS) is the 'go-to' organisation for local government improvement in Scotland. The IS was established in 2005 as the national improvement organisation for Local Government in Scotland. We were set up to deliver improvement support that would help councils to provide effective community leadership, strong local governance and deliver high quality, efficient local services.

Our purpose is to:

- Provide leadership to Local Government and the wider system on improvement and transformation
- Develop capability and capacity for improvement within Local Government
- Deliver national improvement programmes for Local Government and partners and support councils to improve at a local level
- Provide research, data, and intelligence to inform Local Government policy-making and decision-making and to drive improvement
- Deliver national shared service applications and technology platforms
- Broker additional resources from out with the sector to support the delivery of Local Government's priorities.
- We do this by providing a range of transformational change, performance and improvement support, data and intelligence services and digital public services.

We ensure that all the work we deliver is firmly focused on achieving our vision and purpose, and on adding value for local authorities, for the Local Government family and for our broader group of diverse stakeholders.

West Lothian Civic Centre | Howden South Road | Livingston EH54 6FF | 01506 282012 | info@improvementservice.org.uk