



NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

Dumfries and Galloway Council



Dumfries and Galloway NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

The Planning Service has begun to address previous capacity and application timescale issues, filled most vacant posts through recruitment, and is reducing reliance on contractors. With new staff in place, legacy case numbers and application timescales for household and local applications have decreased, though older cases still impact statistics; improvements are expected to become clearer over time. The LDP3 Evidence Report was submitted in early 2025, and after initial rejection, the team made revisions and resubmitted. We continue to review and adopt technology, as shown in recent work since the last NPIF report. The service has had a period of stability to that of previous years, with ongoing actions from the National Planning Improvement Framework helping drive recent changes.

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.](#)

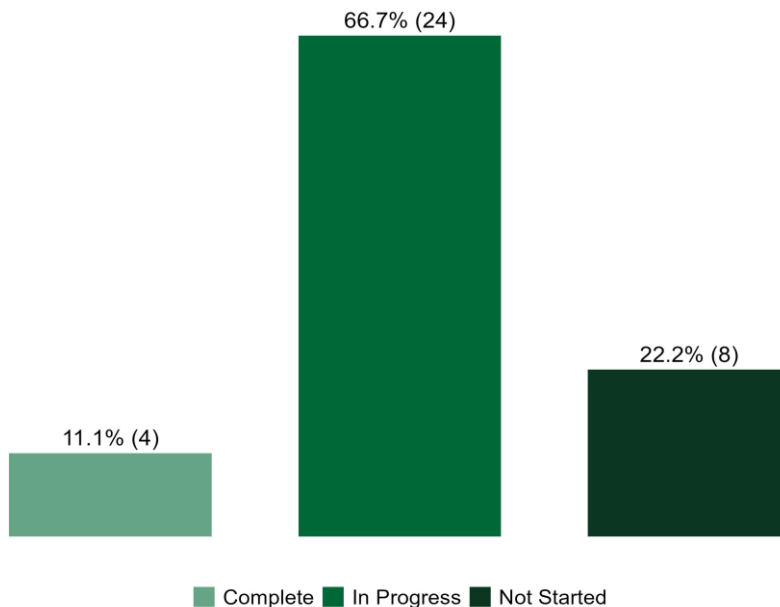
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress Dumfries and Galloway has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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



Dumfries and Galloway have 36 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Continue with a recruitment programme to fill remaining vacancies of the new structure in conjunction with minimising the use of agency staff. Continue to review how to deploy them most effectively.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Following a successful recruitment drive in the Autumn 2024, a Principal Planner (Local Applications), two Senior Planners and two Development Management Assistants were appointed. In recent weeks, a Planner has also been recruited which leaves no vacancies within our Planning Applications Team. Support from external contractors within this team will cease in October 2025. We have been less success in recruiting Senior Planners to deal with Major applications; we currently have three posts vacant which are being filled by external contractors. We have also recently advised for a part time Tree Officer to assist with Tree Preservation Order work. The recruitment of permanent posts with our Planning Applications Team has led to a decrease in the number of older planning applications still in the system and a decrease in application timescales and complaints about delays.

The following next steps are proposed: A recruitment drive is proposed for Senior Planners in our Major Developments Team, with the aim of reducing the reliance on external contractors to support the service.



Action 2: Creation of a project board for LDP3.

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A project board was established to oversee the development of LDP3. The board is providing strategic guidance and support to the team preparing LDP3, share information and work in a joint, collaborative manner in line with the place principle and sign off key stages.

Membership of the board comprises officers from a range of council services including economic development, strategic housing which includes a gypsy / traveller officer, flood risk management, waste management, environment and sustainability, education, roads and transportation including SWestrans, community assets, skills and employability, children and young people, community engagement, community planning and corporate policy. Officers from South of Scotland Enterprise, the Health Board and Integrated Joint Board and a representative from the key agencies group also attend.

Action 3: Continue with workforce planning to create opportunities for staff development to prepare for future challenges.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Two members of the planning team are currently attending the University of the West of Scotland's BSc (Hons) Town Planning course. The Development Team again in the summer of 2025, had a 12-week summer student placement which has been very successful. We are proactive in raising awareness of any potential training courses or CPD available to staff.

The following next steps are proposed: We continue to identify service requirements for future years with a view to ensuring the service can function effectively going forward.

Action 4: Undertaken annual staff surveys to seek the ideas and challenges faced by staff.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Staff surveys were recently conducted at the corporate level, therefore it was agreed to the inclusion of staff feedback as part of an organised development day. Planning and Development staff responded to three key questions about their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Staff attending the event provided anonymous input, which is now being analysed for use in future development days and take forward as actions to implement.

The following next steps are proposed: The next development day is planned for March 2026, with colleagues in Organisational Development hosting a feedback-based session. We are also exploring new methods for staff engagement and feedback in the future.



In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Change action to: Engage with colleagues to seek feedback, ideas and challenges faced by staff.

Action 5: Develop work experience and education opportunities with external partners such as architects, developers, universities, SoSE and Community Councils.

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

The following next steps are proposed: Work experience opportunities will be discussed at the next Agent Forum to determine interest from local agents and developers. Subsequent meetings are proposed with colleagues from SoSE. A connection is being established with the University of the West of Scotland via staff participation in the Scottish Government's BSc (Hons) Town Planning course. A review is planned to assess the resource implications of providing work experience and how this could be delivered to provide an attractive work experience package.

Action 6: Undertake internal CPD events and opportunities for staff to meet as a wider team.

In Progress

Progress against this action: In September 2025, we hosted a development day for all Planning and Development Service staff, attended by 51 participants. We focused on improving collaboration within the service and with external organisations. The event featured presentations and workshops, including sessions led by Historic Environment Scotland. Staff also had opportunities to network informally.

The following next steps are proposed: The next development day is scheduled for March 2026 to address service improvements and enhance customer care.

Action 7: Continue to work with technical consultees to ensure timeous and constructive consultations responses. Review enhancement in mentoring and training of all staff.

In Progress

Progress against this action: The planning service has initiated discussions with internal consultees to seek ways to improve the consultation processes. At the recent development day, colleagues from waste services, street scene and Community Assets, archaeology, and heritage presented their challenges and how they interact with planning. Workshops identified examples of effective collaboration, areas needing improvement, and suggestions for enhancements. Historic Environment Scotland colleagues delivered a presentation and



conducted a workshop on heritage topics, as well as contributing their perspective during discussions about consultations.

The following next steps are proposed: The information gathered from the development day will be reviewed to identify actions aimed at enhancing relationships with consultees. The development day served as continuing professional development (CPD) for all staff. Staff are also attending training sessions provided by the RTPi and Improvement Service when available or through online platforms. We will further review mentoring and training for staff over the coming months.

Action 8: As identified as an action in the DM Review, create a suite of Power BI reports to monitor performance and workloads.

In Progress

Progress against this action: A variety of Power BI dashboards have been developed to facilitate monitoring of performance and workloads. These applications include dashboards designed for case officers to track applications and management information dashboards that provide real-time data on application intake, decision timelines, officer workloads, and legacy cases. All staff within development management have access to these resources. In response to user feedback, the dashboards are being continually refined to better meet the needs of the service.

The following next steps are proposed: Power BI Dashboards for the Planning Enforcement Team are now being created to monitor cases, case numbers and decision timescales in accordance with the planning enforcement charter. The Systems and Performance Team are reviewing the need for other dashboards to assist the delivery of the planning service.

Action 9: Organise future DGC Design Awards.

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 Dumfries and Galloway Council Design Awards were held in 2023; the awards are not annual to allow time for sufficient development to occur. The next award launch will be considered in 2027.



Action 10: As identified as an action in the DM Review, create a SharePoint site to record planning complaints/comments which is accessible to all of the service.

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A SharePoint page is available on the Planning Services site for uploading complaint / compliment information. We now log compliments more proactively, which helps meet biannual corporate targets.

Action 11: Review the working relationship between development management and development plan teams to assist in the preparation of LDP3 and Housing Land Audit.

In Progress

Progress against this action: While engagement methods have been considered, further discussion between the two teams will be limited until the Evidence Report passes the Gate Check, aside from routine interactions. A working group, including the local development plan team, building standards, and the systems and performance team, has been formed to improve Uniform for the Housing Land Audit (HLA) development.

The following next steps are proposed: After the Evidence Report passes the gate check, engagement between the two teams will be considered and events organised to discuss issues related to LDP3 and the Housing Land Audit (HLA). The intention is for the Housing Land Audit (HLA) to be made available through Uniform for 2025/26 and subsequent years.

Action 12: Submit for planning awards where appropriate.

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: Following the appointment of additional staff, we have concentrated on enhancing our service delivery. We will assess opportunities to submit entries for planning awards where appropriate and when we determine that significant improvements have been achieved.



Action 13: As identified as an action in the DM Review, continue to review and update customer guidance on the website.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Additional validation checklists for applicants and agents are being developed to support accurate information submission with applications. During the redevelopment of the Council's website, planning guidance was reviewed to maintain its relevance, currency, and accessibility.

The following next steps are proposed: We are reviewing the need for documents to be in PDF format and are seeking alternative ways to display information such as GIS, Storyboards, step by steps within the web pages.

Action 14: Review the need and frequency of Member training and workshops for those attending PAC and LRB.

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

The following next steps are proposed: A review of requirements for Member training and workshops will be conducted at an appropriate time, in accordance with any relevant Scottish Government legislation or guidance.

Action 15: Creation of officer / Member working groups for LDP3.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Members of the Economy and Infrastructure agreed on 26 August 2025 to establish a Member / officer working group. A draft terms of reference for the group has been circulated to political group leaders; however, the working group will not commence activities until Gate Check is successfully completed.

The following next steps are proposed: To continue establishing a working group.

Action 16: As identified as an action in the DM Review. review how information is cascaded through the service.

In Progress

Progress against this action: A dedicated Teams channel has been established to facilitate information dissemination among all Managers, Team Leaders, and Principal Planners.



The following next steps are proposed: To continue to review the best ways of circulating information.

Action 17: Continue to develop the use of digital technology to deliver the planning service, including the use of potential tools such as AI.

In Progress

Progress against this action: A Power BI dashboard is now available on the Council's website, enabling applicants and agents to view current validation and decision timescales in real time. The Weekly List is now produced using Power BI, providing a more interactive tool for customers to search and review applications relevant to their interests. A set of online forms has been introduced on the Council's website to facilitate customer queries and questions, resulting in increased usage since launch. An online map has been developed to enable customers to locate listed buildings and conservation areas; further enhancements are being considered to allow for additional constraints to be checked.

The following next steps are proposed: The ongoing development of digital technology includes a short-term goal to implement a digital connection between the newly developed online forms and the Idox back-office system, aiming to reduce manual data and document entry.

Action 18: Identify opportunities and new ways of working using GIS, to enable the planning service to be more efficient and effective.

In Progress

Progress against this action: As part of work on the Housing Land Audit (HLA), all sites have been plotted spatially. We now have the mechanisms in place to export spatial data from Idox Uniform to reproduce on the Council's website and within reports. We have moved to Idox UniMap Web which has increased usability of spatial data. We have seen a reduction in staff resource required to register applications as we have automated processes using the functionality of Idox Uniform.

In the recent Call for Sites and Ideas process as part of the work on Local Development Plan 3, interested parties were asked to plot the location and boundaries of the proposed sites directly online themselves. This had the benefit of plotting the sites directly into our GIS, removed the need for staff to have to plot the sites from submitted paper copies, potentially introducing errors to the process. We were then able to use the plotted sites to produce a screening report for each site which was then used to inform the planning and SEA site assessment process. The screening tool ensures consistency across the site assessment process.



The following next steps are proposed: The Housing Land Audit (HLA) to be fully spatial by March 2026. To increase the use of spatial data within reports, guidance and in particular the preparation of LDP3.

Action 19: Work with colleagues within the Councils web team to deliver an updated website.

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

As part of a corporate programme, the planning pages of the Council's website have been updated to improve the customer experience. The pages now include clear a step by step guide on how to submit a planning application which have received positive feedback. The language used is simpler and clearer for the customer and documents have been placed in separate digital libraries rather than links embedded into the text to improve navigation for the user. The project has been considered a success, with positive feedback being received from both users and staff.

Action 20: Undertake a review of the current pre application service in the light of ongoing Scottish Government national review.

In Progress

Progress against this action: As part of the services annual applicant/agent's customer survey, questions were posed on what users would like to see from a revised pre-application enquiry service. These responses will feed into the development of a new service.

The following next steps are proposed: Options for a revised pre-application enquiry service will be developed over the coming months, considering feedback from the survey, staff feedback from the development day and the resource implications of these options.

Action 21: Continue to monitor resourcing to achieve target timescales for adoption of LDP3.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Regular meetings and discussions are held between the Planning and Development Manager and the Team Leader (Development Planning). This practice has proven especially valuable following the initial Evidence Report submission and its timely resubmission. Councillors are consistently updated on the proposed timescales for the delivery of LDP3.

The following next steps are proposed: Regular communication between the Planning and Development Manager and the Team Leader (Development Planning) will continue.



Action 22: Continue to work on the proposed LDP3 in accordance with emerging legislation and guidance.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Our Evidence Report was submitted in January 2025, following an unsuccessful submission, the report was resubmitted in September 2025. Work on the preparation of LDP3 has been continuing by the Development Planning Team in accordance with the legislation and guidance.

The following next steps are proposed: To await the outcome of the resubmitted Evidence Report due by the end of 2025. To continue to work on the required elements for LDP3. Review the timetable for the proposed plan given the delay at the Evidence Report stage.

Action 23: Continue to deliver the Action Plan following the Development Management Review.

In Progress

Progress against this action: The service conducted a comprehensive review of Development Management, resulting in the formulation of an action plan that has been systematically implemented over recent years. Key initiatives included an evaluation of planning resources, enhancements to customer-facing processes, and improvements to internal workflows. These measures led to investment in new equipment for staff and the migration of the service's back-office system to a fully hosted platform. The organisational structure was also reassessed to address bottlenecks within the planning process, with increased emphasis placed on optimising procedures and systems. Customer engagement methods were reviewed, leading to the introduction of mechanisms for gathering feedback and suggestions. Additionally, new guidance materials were developed to support customers throughout the application submission process. The improvements stemming from the Development Management review are not regarded as one-off measures, but as ongoing enhancements. As such, these actions have been integrated into the NPIF action plan for continual assessment and refinement.

The following next steps are proposed: To continue to implement the actions identified in the NPIF Action Plan.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Action no longer required as the actions have been incorporated in the NPIF action plan.

Action 24: Continue to monitor enforcement capacity in response to increasing case numbers.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Progress has been made on the preparation of a Power BI report which will allow cases numbers, email numbers and decisions to be monitored in real



time. Idox Enterprise tasks have been created for Planning Inspectors and Team Leader to monitor the status of current cases.

The following next steps are proposed: The Power BI report to be rolled out to the Planning Enforcement Team.

Action 25: Explore approaches to share information, gain feedback with stakeholders and build relationships such as focus groups, agents forums, webinars.

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Council now publishes a biannual newsletter for its Elected Members, providing updates on developments within the planning service, including recruitment initiatives and procedural changes. This communication also serves to inform Councillors of any relevant legislative updates.

The following next steps are proposed: To continue to explore ways of engaging with users of the service. To carry out a further customer survey in 2026/27. To organise an agent forum before March 2026.

Action 26: Hold engagement events in preparation of the Evidence Report.

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A series of roadshow events have taken place in 48 locations across the region. The roadshows were widely advertised on the Council's webpage, on the Council's Facebook page, and all Community Councils, Elected Members, Council Ward Officers and Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway. Whilst some locations attracted more interest than others, they were considered very successful tool in seeking the views of individuals and groups.

Action 27: Explore and deliver the best methods for involving Elected Members, community groups, the public and those with protected characteristics in the development of LDP3.

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Economy and Infrastructure Committee agreed on 26 August 2025 to establish a working group.

The following next steps are proposed: To explore the best way to engage with community groups, this includes seeking the advice from colleagues who have existing relationships with community groups.



Action 28: Explore how to make information about the planning service more easily available to local communities e.g. sharing what exists, using online/social media, user friendly language.

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

The following next steps are proposed: Organise a meeting with colleagues with the communications team to seeks ways of interacting with users of the service.

Action 29: Carry out an annual customer survey each year.

In Progress

Progress against this action: A customer survey was conducted in July 2025, with 51 responses received over the month-long consultation period. The responses have been compared to those from the 2024 survey. A summary document of the results is being prepared for publication on the website and distribution to members and staff.

The following next steps are proposed: To carry out an annual survey in 2026.

Action 30: Build on existing tools and develop new ways to improve customer service, utilising digital technology where possible.

In Progress

Progress against this action: A Power BI dashboard is now available on the Council's website, enabling applicants and agents to view current validation and decision timescales in real time. The Weekly List is now produced using Power BI, providing a more interactive tool for customers to search and review applications relevant to their interests. A set of online forms has been introduced on the Council's website to facilitate customer queries and questions, resulting in increased usage since launch. An online map has been developed to enable customers to locate listed buildings and conservation areas; further enhancements are being considered to allow for additional constraints to be checked.



The following next steps are proposed: The ongoing development of digital technology includes a short-term goal to implement a digital connection between the newly developed online forms and the Idox back-office system, aiming to reduce manual data and document entry.**Action 31: Continue to carry out annual Agents Forums.**

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: To be deleted - included in Action 25.

Action 32: Continue to work together with communities to develop and deliver Local Place Plans.

In Progress

Progress against this action: There continues to be a strong expression of interest from community groups to produce Local Place Plans. The service continues to engage with communities on their preparations. Thirteen Local Place Plans have now been officially registered and are available on the Council's website, with a number in the preparation stage.

The following next steps are proposed: To continue to engage with local communities on the preparation of Local Place Plans from conceptions to registration.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: remove the action as the improvements are connected to Action 34.

Action 33: Review the processes for recording Section 75 agreements internally.

In Progress

Progress against this action: Discussions have taken place with colleagues in Legal Services to establish the best way to create a register of agreements. It has concluded using the relevant module in the Idox Uniform system would allow this to be carried out.

The following next steps are proposed: To start to compile a register of agreement with a proposed conclusion by March 2026.



Action 34: Engage and support communities on Local Place Plans and Borderlands Place Plans and how they interface with LDP3.

In Progress

Progress against this action: There continues to be a strong expression of interest from community groups to produce Local Place Plans. The service continues to engage with communities on their preparations. Thirteen Local Place Plans have now been officially registered and are available on the Councils website, with a number in the preparation stage.

The following next steps are proposed: To continue to engage with local communities on the preparation of Local Place Plans from conception to registration. To review how Local Place Plans will be incorporated into LDP3.

Action 35: Review the effectiveness of planning conditions, taking account of ongoing national work.

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

The following next steps are proposed: We await Heads of Planning Scotland to publish their work on standardising conditions. Once available, we will collaborate with consultees to align local conditions.

Action 36: Review mechanisms for increasing the use of processing agreement.

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: Review methods for implementing process agreements for major and larger local applications from the submission date.

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: In October/November we are intending to send an update to those who attended the peer review meeting.

