

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

City of Edinburgh Council



City of Edinburgh NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

As one of the first planning authorities in Cohort 1 of the National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF), the City of Edinburgh Council has welcomed this new, collaborative approach to monitoring the performance of planning authorities. Following our self-assessment and peer review in 2024, we are pleased to present this annual report detailing our progress in implementing our improvement action plan.

Like many local planning authorities, we continue to operate in a demanding and challenging context with tight resources to do so. The increasing complexity of legislation and policy, and expectations from applicants, residents and stakeholders involved in the planning system places significant pressures on the service.

In spite of this we were delighted to have won a number of awards at the RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence for:

- Rowanbank Gardens – Best Project – Commended
- Planning Authority of the Year – Winner (short-listed for national awards)
- Edinburgh Futures Institute – Overall winner of the RTPI Scotland Awards 2025 (short-listed for national awards).

These awards are a testament to the collective teamwork across the service and the long-term commitment to the delivery of the highest quality development for Edinburgh.

Another key focus over the last year has been on our workforce. Whilst not an action originally identified, we have developed an Operational Workforce Plan 2024 – 2027 to respond to current and future challenges associated with ensuring the service is suitably staffed. The analysis and actions identified were also used to inform our People Plan 2025 – 2027. Both plans recognise that our service is delivered by a team of highly skilled, enthusiastic and engaged professionals, and that the success of the service relies on our talented workforce. We will continue to work on implementing the actions, particularly focusing on our recruitment strategy, growing and retaining talent and developing future leaders.

A further action which was not originally identified was to review our Scheme of Delegation. We decided to make this a priority following feedback from officers and local elected members on ways to improve decision-making timescales.

Improvement is an ongoing journey, and we will continue to make progress on the actions we have identified. While there is more to do, the steps we have taken are helping in delivering a more resilient, efficient and customer-focused planning service.



Thank you to our officers, local members, customers and stakeholders involved in the planning system for their patience, engagement and feedback as we continue to improve our service.

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.](#)

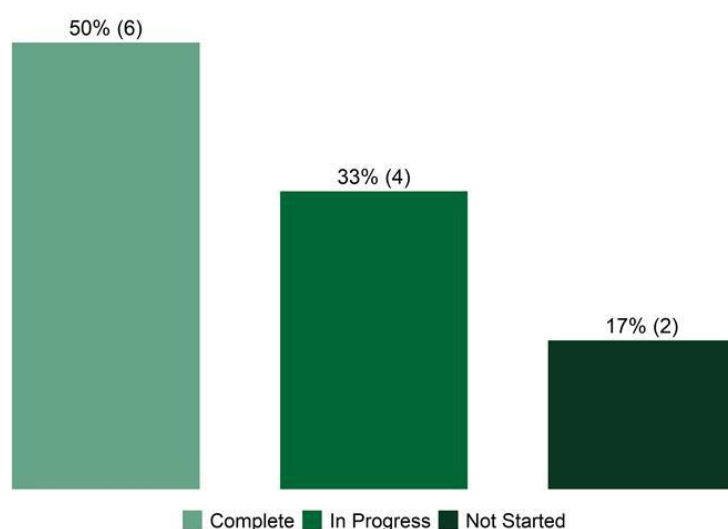
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress City of Edinburgh has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.



Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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

City of Edinburgh has 12 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



New Action: Review the Scheme of Delegation for Planning to ensure applications are scrutinised and determined at the appropriate level.

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Considering the context of Edinburgh and the volume of business the LPA handles with regards to applications, whilst 96% of applications were determined under delegated authority, a significant number of applications are referred to Development Management (DM) Sub-committee because of restrictions within the scheme of delegation. This has an impact on determination timescales as well as officer and local member workloads.

A review of the Scheme has been carried out to measure its effectiveness. This comprised an examination of the current delegated functions and restrictions in the Scheme, an analysis of



Development Management Sub-committee and comparing the Scheme with that of other LPA's.

A report was taken to Planning Committee with recommendations on amendments to the Scheme. This has been agreed by Full Council and approval to update the statutory scheme of delegation for local developments has been sought from Scottish Ministers.

We are required to report back to Planning Committee one year post implementation on the effectiveness of the most recent amendments.

New Action: Prepare an Operational Workforce Plan to respond to current and future challenges associated with ensuring the service is suitably staffed.

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

As part of the City of Edinburgh Council's Strategic Workforce Plan 2024-2027, each service area prepared an Operational Workforce Plan. The Planning Service carried out:

- an analysis of the strategic direction of the service taking into account national, local and corporate drivers that impact on workforce requirements;
- an analysis of the current workforce, and
- an analysis of future workforce requirements and any skills gaps.

The outcome of this work is an Operational Workforce Plan 2024-2027 that responds to current and future challenges associated with ensuring the service is suitably staffed in the context of a complex legislative framework, a nationally recognised skills shortage within the required professions for the service area, budgetary pressures, public and political scrutiny, and new and emerging areas of work.

The plan sets a clear direction for our workforce, and a series of actions required to achieve this. This is monitored corporately and used to inform recruitment decisions.



Action 1: Prepare a People Plan specifically for the Planning Service. The People Plan will cover the following topics: Age profiles and succession planning; Addressing the demands of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF); Developing leadership at all levels; Employment policies; Training; Mentoring Programme; Performance management; Workforce planning; and wellbeing. The People Plan will include an objective for teams to visit projects in terms of Place and Wellbeing Outcomes. The People Plan will set out how the Planning Service intend to receive staff feedback on improvements and how staff will be consulted on and involved in delivering the improvement actions

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Following the completion of the Service Operational Workforce Plan, a key action identified was the need to grow and retain talent and develop future leaders. This research and analysis were used to inform our People Plan 2025-2027.

This plan recognises that our service is delivered by a team of highly skilled, enthusiastic and engaged professionals, and that the success of the service relies on our talented workforce.

It is structure around five themes and contains actions on each theme:

- Attract the best people
- Develop exceptional leaders
- Foster a culture of equalities, diversity and inclusion.
- Grow and retain our talent
- Nurture a healthy workplace where our people can thrive

This will assist us in achieving our service vision and is a reflection of our commitment to fostering a workplace where talent is nurtured.

Colleague engagement sessions were held to launch the plan and timed to coincide with our performance review and development (PRD) period. This allowed colleagues to reflect and consider what the plan means for them and set development goals for the year ahead.



As a result of the positive feedback received from colleagues, we intend to have colleague engagement sessions prior the next PRD period where we will discuss the progress on our People Plan actions.

Action 2: Amended Action Service Improvement Operational Plan. The Planning Service will have an annual operation plan for service improvements

In Progress

Progress against this action: With our NPIF action plan, the progress we have made in other areas of improvement and the need to respond to changing priorities or circumstances, this action has been amended to allow us to be more agile in how we manage change.

The following next steps are proposed: We will have an annual service improvement operational plan

Action 3: Information Governance and GDPR Retention Record Project (Delivering Excellence Projects). Review of policies and procedures in relation to data protection and retention as the Planning Authority holds a large amount of data given the nature of the service

Completed

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A comprehensive review of our information governance practices has been carried out. This identified operational changes required in relation to our policies and procedures.

As a result of this work, new improvement actions have been identified and are detailed below.

Action 4: Digital Solutions. Continue to share best practice with peer authorities while exploring future approaches to horizon scanning of digital solutions and how these could support the planning service

In Progress

Progress against this action: We continue to proactively engage with our corporate Customer and Digital Services team and our public sector colleagues through Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) on digital solutions that could support and improve our service.



Working with our Corporate Insights team, we are developing Power BI dashboards to more effectively monitor performance and workloads using real-time data. The first set of dashboards will be for case officers to track applications and for management to track application intake, decision timelines, officer workloads, and legacy cases.

We are exploring the use of Power BI to assist in development monitoring, particularly in relation to tracking developer contributions from legal agreement stage to delivery.

Given the importance of spatial mapping, Planning have promoted and is actively involved in a high-level review of the Council's use of GIS. This involves working with other service areas to improve the quality of data.

The following next steps are proposed: We will roll out the first set of dashboards and progress the development of dashboards for areas that will have the most benefit.

We will ensure we engage with and feedback to Scottish Government colleagues working on the design and requirements of the replacement eDevelopment service with 'Apply' service.

Action 5: Validation Process Project (Delivering Excellence Projects). The project is to review and streamline the application validation process to ensure submissions are in accordance with regulations, the process makes efficient use of IT systems and provide clear information to applicants on applications requirements where possible

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

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

The following next steps are proposed: We intend to carry out a review of our validation process following the completion of other improvement actions. As the current improvement projects progress, we have identified actions that will impact on our validation process.



Action 6: Consultation Process Project (Delivering Excellence Projects). There are various statutory and non-statutory consultees that play a vital role in the consideration of planning applications. The process for consultee engagement will be reviewed to ensure the process makes efficient use of IT systems, there is a clear understanding of the necessary information requirements for consultees and ensuring recommended conditions are appropriate. Explore future approaches to engagement/communication/consultation with consultees

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

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

The following next steps are proposed: We will continue to monitor our current process and the outcomes to determine whether we need to change the priority given to this action.

Action 7: Annual review of Pre-application Advice Service to improve offering

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A working group was established within the planning service to review the way it provided pre-application advice (PAA) with a view to improving the quality of the service received by applicants, reflecting on customer feedback and experiences.

A simplification of the charging schedule was implemented along with updated response letters and staff training was carried out.

To assist with consistency and continuous improvement, the working group continues to meet on a quarterly basis to monitor the service both internally and externally, and to consider feedback.



Action 8: Carry out customer engagement via customer forums. Exploring future strategies for engagement/communication/consultation with a range of stakeholders

In Progress

Progress against this action: We have carried a range of consultation engagement events in connection with the LDP Evidence Report and new planning guidance. We also regularly engage with our stakeholders through forums such as the Edinburgh Civic Forum and Edinburgh Development Forum.

The following next steps are proposed: We are working towards having a programme of annual customer and stakeholder engagement sessions to build relationships with our customers and stakeholders, gather feedback and suggestions, and keep them informed of the changes we are making to our service.

Action 9: Awards and Performance Accreditation Frameworks. Review Service projects and improvement activities annually to identify potential candidate submissions for awards

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

We were delighted to have won a number of awards this year at the RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence for:

- Rowanbank Gardens – Best Project – Commended
- Planning Authority of the Year – Winner
- Edinburgh Futures Institute – Overall winner of the RTPI Scotland Awards 2025

The Scottish Planning Authority of the Year is a testament to the collective teamwork across the service. The commendation for Rowanbank, a housing development in Corstorphine recognises this excellent project, with the overall winner for the Future's Institute (the University of Edinburgh's restoration of the former Royal Infirmary at Quartermile) demonstrating the long-term commitment to the delivery of the highest quality development within this sensitive context. The good news was shared on the Planning Edinburgh blog, social media and the Council's internal intranet.

A number of Edinburgh projects were also recognised at the 2025 Scottish Design Awards, including: The draft Seafield Masterplan received a Gold Award in the Regeneration and Masterplanning category. 7N Architects were the consultants, with this collaborative project



involving the local community and the colleagues from across the Council's Planning, Development & Regeneration, and Strategic Asset Planning departments. The Edinburgh Gin Distillery and Visitor Centre received a Silver Award which acknowledged the long-term Planning regeneration vision for the area and the challenging context within which the architects had to work in the World Heritage Site and Old Town Conservation Area.

Following our success and reflecting on the efforts required in making submissions, we will be encouraging staff throughout the year to bring forward projects and activities as potential award submissions.

Action 10: Monitoring Process Project (Delivering Excellence Projects) Section 44 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 requires Planning Enforcement Charters to include a statement in relation to the planning authorities monitoring of compliance with planning permissions which have been granted in respect of major developments. The project will establish the process for monitoring. In addition to requirements from the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, the monitoring of development contributions and conditions assist in the delivery of infrastructure and in the creation of successful places. The project will also include a review of the process relating to contributions and conditions

In Progress

Progress against this action: Work is underway on developing a process for recording compliance with legal agreements that can then be analysed using Power BI for monitoring.

There is also a review of the standard planning conditions being carried out.

The following next steps are proposed: Next steps are to finalise the new process for recording legal agreements going forwards and back-date this for extant legal agreements. We will consider how we use this information to inform future guidance and improve communication with other service areas involved in infrastructure delivery.



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
Website Refresh Review the information and layout of the planning webpages to improve user experience. This action will be measured through the monitoring of feedback from complaints and customer forums in addition to officer feedback. It is also anticipated that this will help reduce email traffic to our Help Desk.	Planning Improvement Team	High	1-year	Communications Group and Corporate Customer and Digital Services Team
Service Standards	Planning Improvement Team	High	1-year	Leadership Team and staff from across the Planning Service.



<p>Review of Planning Service Charter and rebrand this as our Service Standards.</p> <p>Ensure our Service Standards reflect our working practices, so customers know what to expect and there is consistency between teams.</p> <p>This action will be measured through the monitoring of feedback from complaints and customer forums in addition to officer feedback.</p>				
<p>Complaints Process</p> <p>Review our process for managing and responding to complaints, ensuring learning outcomes are actioned or incorporated into future work.</p> <p>Staff training will be developed with the Council's Customer team.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of the complaints process will identify whether learning outcomes have been implemented successfully.</p>	<p>Planning Improvement Team</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>1 year</p>	<p>Leadership Team and staff from across the Planning Service.</p>
<p>Managing Public Representations</p>	<p>Planning Improvement Team</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>1 year</p>	<p>Planning Improvement Team, DM Operations Manager and</p>



<p>Review our process for managing public representations made in relation to applications.</p> <p>This will included updated guidance for customers on making a representation and how their comments will be handled.</p> <p>Training will be carried out for staff and local members.</p> <p>The outcome of this work will be evaluated using feedback from staff, the complaints process and customer forums.</p>				<p>staff from across the Planning Service.</p>
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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 to our peer review group

Additional information: We intend to send an email to update on progress and will invite participants to our customer forum sessions in 2026.

Over the course of the year, we have regularly engaged with our partner authority, Glasgow City Council, on a range of matters to share knowledge and experience.

In addition, young planners from both authorities are encouraged to network and build relationships. To date, young planners in Glasgow arranged an afternoon there which included viewing developments and hearing about the challenges and opportunities. A reciprocal visit to Edinburgh will happen in 2026.

