

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Plan 2025

The Highland Council



Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)	Improvement Action	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity.	3	Continue to build and monitor staff levels	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Time All managers
		Seek appropriate opportunities to upskill existing staff.	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Time All managers
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce.	3	Conduct an annual staff survey so staff can share their work experiences, opinions and any concerns they may have.	Business Management & Systems	High	Short Term	Officers Time
		Implement wider corporate workforce planning strategy to create a service specific workforce plan. This plan will identify key competencies and training requirements; consider remuneration, career progression and skills development.	Chief Planner/ Planning and Environment	High	Short Term	HR Time
		Develop training programs in a digital format to support both new and existing staff.	Business Management & Systems	High	Medium Term	Time
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement.	2	Submission of awards/performance accreditation will be prioritised.	Chief Planner/ All Managers	Medium	Short Term	



4. This Planning Authority has sound governance.	2	Seek to amend the Scheme of Delegation to allow for officers to Raise an Objection to Electricity Act applications.	Chief Planner/ The Highland Council	Medium	Short Term	Legal
		Consider opportunities for increasing productivity and proportionality by continuously reviewing the Scheme of Delegation.	Chief Planner/ The Highland Council	Medium	Medium Term	Legal
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership.	3	Appoint Chief Planning Officer	Assistant Chief Executive	High	Short Term	Potential new post
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base.	2	A “live” Delivery Programme for Highland (excluding CNPA area). THC officers to update capital project costs and timescales and use projected developer contributions “income stream” in their infrastructure planning.	All Council Services	High	Medium Term	CEO leadership and commitment
			External stakeholders			External stakeholder commitment
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	2	Engage with agents to improve application quality, review online guidance to reduce invalid submissions. Explore third-party automation.	Business Management & Systems	Low	Long Term	Scottish Government
		Engage with Heads of Planning Scotland and Scottish Government to establish a single validation standard across Scotland.	Chief Planner/ Area Planning Managers	High	Medium/ Long Term	Chief Planner



		Real Time Mapping - Major Electricity Development applications.	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Resource Time
		Encourage Idox to introduce Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) tabs to Uniform throughout Scotland.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Supplier Funding Time
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision-making processes	3	Update our Enforcement Charter	Chief Planner/ Planning Enforcement Team	High	Short Term	Committee
		Recruit additional resource for enforcement.	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Funding
		Streamline the 'validation' of enforcement cases, to either automate or reduce the manual recording required by officers.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Resource Time
		Publish planning decision making statistics on our webpages.	Chief Planner/ Area Planning Managers	High	Short Term	Resource Time
9. This planning authority has good customer care	3	Improve Planning and Environment webpages as part of redesign and launch of a new website.	Managers/ Business Management & Systems	Medium	Long Term	Resource Time
		Review My Council project, if any gaps identified, address them by our own Development Management Customer Charter.	Chief Planner/ Business Management & Systems	Medium	Long Term	Resource Time



10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2	Deliver the Integrated Housing Delivery Service	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Resource Time
		Engagement strategy with development industry.	Chief Planner	High	Medium Term	Resource Time
		Review engagement with Community Councils to encourage the use of consultee access for planning responses.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Time
		Review and update the Community Council training library to provide more specific elements of training, i.e. planning enforcement.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Resource Time
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places.	1	Continue to support the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	Chief Planner	High	Long Term	Officers
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development.	2	Review the wording of the conditions and the reduce the number/extent on planning permissions to take a more proportionate approach.	Chief Planner	Medium	Medium Term	Time Officers





A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the rights skills set. It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future. It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	3
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

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 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Attribute 1: Continue to build and monitor staff levels	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Time All managers
Attribute 1: Seek appropriate opportunities to upskill existing staff.	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Time All managers
Attribute 2: Conduct an annual staff survey so staff can share their work experiences, opinions and any concerns they may have.	Business Management & Systems	High	Short Term	Officers Time



Attribute 2: Implement wider corporate workforce planning strategy to create a service specific workforce plan. This plan will identify key competencies and training requirements; consider remuneration, career progression and skills development.	Chief Planner/ Planning and Environment	High	Short Term	HR Time
Attribute 2: Develop training programs in a digital format to support both new and existing staff.	Business Management & Systems	High	Medium Term	Time





A high performing planning authority has a positive culture through ensuring it has sound governance, effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. The authority has an identified chief planner, who is supported by a strong leadership group to advise on decision-making, policy and operational management.

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	2
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	2
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

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 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Attribute 3: Submission of awards/performance accreditation will be prioritised.	Chief Planner/ All Managers	Medium	Short Term	
Attribute 4: Seek to amend the Scheme of Delegation to allow for officers to Raise an Objection to Electricity Act applications.	Chief Planner/ The Highland Council	Medium	Short Term	Legal



Attribute 4: Consider opportunities for increasing productivity and proportionality by continuously reviewing the Scheme of Delegation.	Chief Planner/ The Highland Council	Medium	Medium Term	Legal
Attribute 5: Appoint Chief Planning Officer	Assistant Chief Executive	High	Short Term	Potential new post





A high performing planning authority needs to have an effective local development plan and other strategies in place to provide a vision for the future of the area. It needs to be able to set and deliver on policy ambitions and priorities by clearly informing decision making and providing certainty and predictability for communities, developers and investment. The authority's development management systems need to be effective in making the right decisions about development and be as efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	2
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	2
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision-making processes	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

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 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Attribute 6: A “live” Delivery Programme for Highland (excluding CNPA area). THC officers to update capital project costs and timescales and use projected developer contributions “income stream” in their infrastructure planning.	All Council Services External stakeholders	High	Medium Term	Corporate (CEO) leadership and commitment External stakeholder commitment



Attribute 7: Engage with agents to improve application quality, review online guidance to reduce invalid submissions. Explore third-party automation.	Business Management & Systems	Low	Long Term	Scottish Government Time
Attribute 7: Engage with Heads of Planning Scotland and Scottish Government to establish a single validation standard across Scotland.	Chief Planner/ Area Planning Managers	High	Medium/Long Term	Chief Planner
Attribute 7: Real Time Mapping - Major Electricity Development applications	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Resource Time
Attribute 7: Encourage Idox to introduce Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) tabs to Uniform throughout Scotland.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Supplier Funding Time
Attribute 8: Update our Enforcement Charter	Chief Planner/ Enforcement Team	High	Short Term	Committee
Attribute 8: Recruit additional resource for enforcement	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Funding
Attribute 8: Streamline the 'validation' of enforcement cases, to either automate or reduce the manual recording required by officers.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Resource Time
Attribute 8: Publish planning decision making statistics on our webpages.	Chief Planner/ Area Planning Managers	High	Short Term	Resource Time





A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
9. This planning authority has good customer care	3
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

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 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Attribute 9: Improve Planning and Environment webpages as part of redesign and launch of a new website.	Managers/ Business Management & Systems	Medium	Long Term	Resource Time
Attribute 9: Review My Council project, if any gaps identified, address them by our own Development Management Customer Charter.	Chief Planner/Business Management & Systems	Medium	Long Term	Resource Time



Attribute 10: Deliver the Integrated Housing Delivery Service	Chief Planner	High	Short Term	Resource Time
Attribute 10: Engagement strategy with development industry.	Chief Planner	High	Medium Term	Resource Time
Attribute 10: Review engagement with Community Councils to encourage the use of consultee access for planning responses.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Time
Attribute 10: Review and update the Community Council training library to provide more specific elements of training, i.e. planning enforcement.	Business Management & Systems	Medium	Medium Term	Resource Time





A high performing planning authority should demonstrate place leadership by taking a collaborative place-based approach in line with the Place Principle. It should use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making processes, to achieve the three spatial principles outlined in NPF4: sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and productive places, where we have a greener, fairer, and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The planning authority should seek to ensure that there are no impediments to delivering agreed development.

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	1
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

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 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Attribute 11: Continue to support the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	Chief Planner	High	Long Term	Officers
Attribute 12: Review the wording of the conditions and the reduce the number/extent on planning permissions to take a more proportionate approach.	Chief Planner	Medium	Medium Term	Time Officers

