

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

Inverclyde Council



Inverclyde NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

Over the past year, Inverclyde Council's Planning Service has undergone a period of significant change, challenge, and positive transformation. The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) process, including the Peer Collaborative Review in December 2024, acted as an important catalyst for reflection and improvement. While the service initially faced pressures arising from staff turnover and capacity gaps, it has since responded with determination, collaboration, and a renewed focus on resilience, staff development, and customer experience. This summary highlights the key milestones achieved, the challenges encountered, and the actions taken to strengthen performance and deliver a high-quality planning service for the people of Inverclyde.

One of the most substantial challenges faced during the year was the loss of several experienced staff shortly after the NPIF Peer Review workshop. This created unavoidable capacity pressure across Development Management and Development Planning functions. However, the service used this moment as an opportunity to modernise its staffing structure, address single-point dependencies, and ensure greater resilience. Working closely with Human Resources, a full review of key posts was undertaken, leading to improved role clarity, strengthened leadership capacity and the creation of new progression pathways within the team. A Planning Team Leader role was introduced to oversee both Development Management and Policy, providing a single point of leadership and improved governance for decision-making. In addition, a new Assistant Planning Officer post was created to supporting GIS functions and provide an entry point to the profession—promoting internal skills growth and future talent.

Investment in staff has remained a core priority. Two members of the team are currently undertaking degree-level planning qualifications, with the Council committed to supporting professional accreditation and ongoing development through RTPI membership, training and mentoring. This dedicated focus on skills and progression aims to support retention and equip the service with the capabilities required for future challenges. By October 2025, all vacancies within the Planning Service had been successfully filled, marking a key milestone in rebuilding capacity and enabling renewed momentum in service delivery.

Alongside structural and staffing improvements, strong progress has been made in enhancing collaboration both within the Council and with external stakeholders. Feedback highlighted the need to strengthen internal consultation processes, particularly with the Roads, Environmental Health, and Building Standards services. In response, structured monthly meetings have been introduced with Roads colleagues, and a joint Planning and Building Standards Forum has been established to provide a meaningful platform for customer feedback, service challenge, and continuous improvement. These steps are already contributing to more consistent, transparent, and customer-focused responses.



The service has also made important progress in advancing the Council’s next Local Development Plan, submitting the Evidence Report for Gate Check in April 2025 and securing valuable contributions from a broad range of Council services. While the need for enhanced engagement with key agencies was identified through the Gate Check process, the Service is now well-placed, with additional staffing secured, to strengthen consultation and community engagement—particularly with underrepresented groups.

Looking forward, a staff survey—scheduled for circulation in November 2025—will allow the service to gather feedback on culture, wellbeing and management support, guiding future improvements in how the team works and delivers value to customers.

The journey over the past year has been defined by collaborative effort, resilience and a willingness to rethink traditional ways of working. With a full staffing complement, refreshed leadership structure, and a culture of continuous improvement now embedded, Inverclyde Council’s Planning Service is well positioned to deliver against its NPIF Action Plan and continue improving performance throughout 2026/27 for the benefit of the communities it serves.

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.](#)

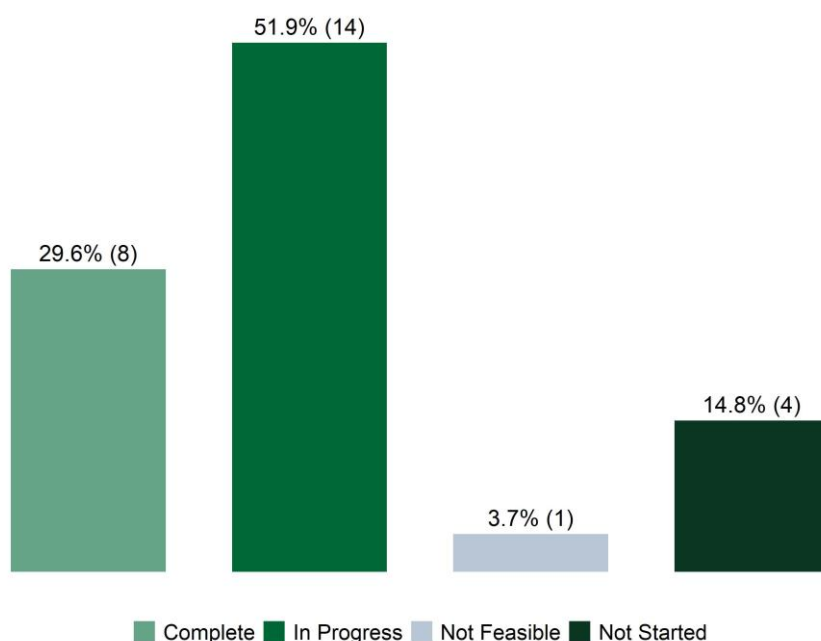
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress Inverclyde has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.



Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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

Inverclyde has 27 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Undertake anonymous staff survey

In Progress

Progress against this action: A digital survey has been drafted and shall be circulated to all staff within the Planning and Building Standards services by November 2025. The survey will also be circulated to support staff and will explore a number of themes, including support from management, team working and work ethic amongst colleagues, wellbeing and understanding of process and practice. The survey data will be utilised by the leadership and management team to consider appropriate changes that may be required to support staff and deliver service wider improvements for the benefit of the staff and customer alike.

The following next steps are proposed: The digital survey will be circulated in November 2025, using the software package Jotform.



Action 2: Follow corporate succession planning guidance and identify high risk posts requiring early development (e.g., Management/leadership posts)

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Following the NPIF Peer Collaborative Review Workshop in December 2024, the service suffered from a number of changes and loss of staff. As a result, a review of all roles within the planning service was reviewed to improve the resilience across the service and ensure that a number of leadership/management posts were sufficiently supported.

Working with colleagues in HR, a review was undertaken of four existing post - this included Development Management Team Leader, Senior Planner (Policy), Planner (Policy) and Senior Technician. To provide greater leadership and management of the planning service, the Development Management Team Leader role was reviewed and changed to Planning Team Leader, with remit for both DM and Policy. This ensured that the service had an identified service lead, where previously there had been no Development Planning Team Leader.

The Senior Technician position was reviewed and changed to Assistant Planning Officer. The Senior Technician role was previously responsible for GIS functions and mapping only. Therefore, it was considered beneficial to introduce a role that would attract a new entrant to the planning profession (with GIS skills/knowledge) whilst also providing support to the DM and Policy functions.

The Senior Planner and Planner posts in the Policy team have also been regraded - ensuring that the service is competitive through recruitment and can attract high quality planning professionals to the team.

With ongoing support from HR, we are continuing to explore training opportunities for all staff that will enable them to undertake progressive roles (i.e. Senior, Team Leader, Service Manager) with financial support for RPTI membership, training courses and degree level study. Two members of staff are currently enrolled in the University West of Scotland's Town Planning BSc programme, with staff attending on a day release basis to upskill.

Action 3: Undertake effective recruitment to reinstate full staff complement

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

By October 2025, all vacancies within the planning service have been filled. This has included the appointment of a new Planning Team Leader (May 2025), a new Planning Officer (start date 01.12.25) and a new Assistant Planning Officer (start date 01.12.25).



Action 4: Review internal consultation processes to aid the fluent processing of planning applications

In Progress

Progress against this action: Feedback from the NPIF Stakeholder meeting in December 2024 identified room for improvement in relation to internal consultation processes for planning applications within the Development Management Team. Further to this feedback, the planning service has reviewed consultation processes with the Roads service, Environmental Health team, Public Protection service and the Building Standards Team. The implementation of a permanent Planning and Building Standards forum, for repeat local agents/customers, has provided customers a platform to continuously review and feedback the implementation of changes in this area. The planning service has now also implemented a monthly review meeting with the Roads service, where both services come together to discuss policy interpretations and review details contained with a planning application to improve the quality of assessment and improve consistency of responses for the benefit of the customer.

The following next steps are proposed: Customers will continuously be engaged through the newly formed Planning and Building Standards Customer Forum (see Action 21).

Action 5: Continue to develop cross service working to ensure that planning service delivery is efficient and customer orientated service

In Progress

Progress against this action: In addition to the progress with consultees as outlined in Action 5, the planning service has been exploring opportunities and efficiencies to enable the service to delivery quality work, notably in relation to the progress of the Council's Local Development Plan. The resource dedicated to the progression of the Council's evidence report equates to 2.6FTE staff. An additional 2.0FTE will join the service in December 2025 to support the revised evidence report, with additional support being provided by consultants. In relation to the production of the evidence report, submitted to the DPEA for gate check in April 2025, the planning service were able to call on support from numerous other service areas, notably the Strategic Housing Officers, who were able to provide detailed information on the Council's Local Housing Strategy, MATHLR, HLA, HNDA. A number of other Council services were able to provide data and summary text for the evidence report, including Environmental Health, Roads, Public Protection, Technical Services (Energy, LHEES), Regeneration in addition to other services with relevant policies or strategies. The planning service has therefore explored every opportunity available in relation to cross service working as outlined in Action 4 and 5.

The following next steps are proposed: The planning service shall endeavour to maintain the working relationships which have recently been established with services through successful cross service working.



Action 6: Review and optimise service structure utilising current and pending vacancies to build in agility and resilience to service delivery

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

As identified in Action 3, a review has been completed in relation to all posts within the planning service and changes made to a number of posts within the service. The Development Management Team Leader role has been replaced by a Planning Team Leader position. The service previously had a Team Leader for Development Management whilst the Development Planning Officers would report directly to the Service Manager. It was considered more appropriate that a single team leader position, with remit for DM, Policy and Enforcement, should be created. This position was filled permanently in May 2025. Further examples of change to building agility/resilience relates to the Development Management Officers and Planner (Policy) roles. The service has previously had a number of single person dependencies, which has created risk/pressure when a member of staff is absent, or resigns. The Local Review Body has previously only been delivered with one member of staff leading as the planning advisor for this purpose. Ensuring that there is no previous involvement in the determination of an application, all DM Officers and Policy Officers are now tasked with acting as planning advisor to the LRB to improve our resilience. A further example of change to support agility/resilience is outlined in Action 7.

Action 7: Introduce a new Graduate or Assistant Planner post into the Planning Service

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Further to the resignation of the Senior Technician (GIS Mapping) in November 2024, the service management reviewed all roles within the planning service. The Senior Technician role was identified as a role that could offer more flexibility - a post which would predominantly leading on GIS mapping functions, but also support DM/Policy/Enforcement when the service was under particular pressure in any of these areas. The planning service has currently retained a Technician post which is part of the support team. The Senior Technician post was reviewed and replaced by a new post - Assistant Planning Officer. The intention with this role was to lead on GIS mapping, but also offer an entry route to the profession for a planning graduate or similar candidate. The Assistant Planning Officer will be presented with opportunities and experience in DM, Policy and Enforcement. The post was advertised in September 2025 - 39 applications were received with 20 meeting the essential criteria. Further to a competitive recruitment process and interviews in October 2025, a preferred candidate was selected and will join as Assistant Planner in December 2025.



Action 8: Encourage as many staff as possible to secure a planning degree and attain Membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute

In Progress

Progress against this action: As of November 2025, two members of staff are currently enrolled in the UWS Town Planning BSc (Hns) degree in Paisley. Neither staff member is from a planning background, and it is therefore the intention of committing two members of staff to this degree study that additional qualified staff will be available to support the Council in its delivery of its statutory duties as a planning authority. The service currently benefits from a high proportion of staff already members of RTPI. Of those who do not hold RTPI membership, one to one conversations have been held discussing the pathway and route to membership through the APC. Inverclyde Council have also agreed to pay all professional membership fees for all staff who require a professional member (as essential) for their role from April 2026. This financial support is intended to retain and attract qualified staff whilst removing any barriers to existing staff pursuing a professional membership, such as RTPI.

The following next steps are proposed: Ensure that staff who require support - mentoring, time off, financial support - are provided with the resource to ensure they can obtain relevant qualifications to support the planning service.

Action 9: Increase engagement with stakeholders and partners and engage in wider peer review to embed continuous improvement

In Progress

Progress against this action: In relation to the progression of the Local Development Plan, some engagement and consultation has been undertaken to date including meetings with community bodies who are interested in pursuing a Local Place Plan. The service has also received a recent request from a local High School who have invited the planning service to talk to high school pupils on the importance of the planning profession, the importance of policy and to seek their views and opinions on the future of their local area. The DPEA's response to the Council's evidence report identified a need for increased consultation with key agencies and pursuit of responses from key agencies where no response has been provided. With additional staff joining the service in December 2025, it is intended to use the extra resource to address these challenges.

The following next steps are proposed: With new staff joining the service in December 2025, it is intended to use this resource to tackle this action.



Action 10: Obtain recognition for high performing staff/customer engagement/project work through awards

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: We have not had the time given other priorities.

The following next steps are proposed: With a return to a full staff compliment, it is intended to refocus efforts to improve overall performance and service delivery to delivery award worth work.

Action 11: Increase resilience around decision making process, CPO/Committee responsibilities

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The appointment of the Planning Team Leader has provided a clear point of contact within the service with responsibility for sign out of delegated decisions. Additionally, the Planning Team Leader will now act as a deputy to the Chief Planning Officer where the CPO is unavailable or absent. As outlined under Action 6, an area of previous resilience risk orientated around the planning advisor role to the Local Review Body. A review of this has ensured that there will be at least 5 members of staff available to act as planning advisor where previously there was only one. This has fundamentally increased the resilience around the decision making process for Planning board, LRB etc.

Action 12: Minimise total number of complaints received

Not Feasible

This action was not feasible for the following reason: Further to a review of this action, it was considered that the Action was not feasible as the task was not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Action 12 will be revised as follows. ““Ensure that all complaints received by the planning service are handled in a timeous, professional manner in accordance with the Council’s Complaints Handling Procedure to learn from complaints and ensure service improvements are implemented””.

Action 13: Explore other ways of upskilling staff and enabling staff development, for example developing relationships with planning staff in other organisations

In Progress

Progress against this action: Extensive progress has been made to upskill staff internally and progress staff development through internal training opportunities, whilst external training



opportunities have been pursued through UWS. Staff will be encouraged to engage with RTPI West of Scotland, HOPS, Improvement Service and other sub-groups that encourage planning colleagues to work together to share knowledge and understanding.

The following next steps are proposed: Use future team meetings, one to ones to encourage staff to engage with organisations external to Inverclyde Council to improve knowledge and understanding of relevant policy areas.

Action 14: Maintain performance levels and timescales as achieved to date in 2024/25

In Progress

Progress against this action: Performance levels and statistics which outline response times are monitored on a monthly basis. It has been observed that current progress is slightly ahead of the previous year which may represent an overall improvement in work quality, process changes etc.

The following next steps are proposed: Performance levels and statistics which outline response times are monitored on a monthly basis. It has been observed that current progress is slightly ahead of the previous year which may represent an overall improvement in work quality, process changes etc.

Action 15: Ensure that LDP/Evidence Report is progressed timeously and has content that is robust to allow the plan to form appropriate conclusions as to policy and land allocations

In Progress

Progress against this action: In April 2025, the Inverclyde Council Evidence Report was submitted to the DPEA for Gate Check. The report was returned with comments in July 2025. An ongoing exercise is currently in progress to review and update the plan. In relation to policy and land allocations, the service is currently in dialogue with Homes for Scotland on the appropriate method of engaging through the progression of the revised evidence report to ensure the methodology and approach is open and transparent.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to progress the revised evidence report and take an open and transparent approach to consultation.

Action 16: Maximise digital engagement

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: We do not have the resources we need to do this.

The following next steps are proposed: Whilst some digital engagement has been undertaken in relation to the Council's press release on Local Place Plans, the Development



Planning Team have not been able to progress digital engagement as far as desired through a shortage of staff. Appointment of two new staff members in December 2025 will enable the progression of this task.

Action 17: Prepare an updated timetable for preparation of the new Local Development Plan

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A revised timetable was presented to the Environment and Regeneration Committee in October 2025. The revised timetable aims to resubmit the Evidence Report by Q4 2025/26 and adopt a new plan by Q1 2027/28.

Action 18: Continue to support Clydeplan's regional planning work to set an overall long-term vision

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Inverclyde planning service continue to engage with the Glasgow City Region and partnering authorities on the progression of a Regional Spatial Strategy for for the Glasgow City Region.

The following next steps are proposed: Next steps shall include attendance and presentation at GCH Head of Policy Group, Economy Group and Environmental Groups to ensure that Inverclyde are actively participating.

Action 19: Continue to monitor enforcement through existing systems described in section 8.4

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Inverclyde Council Enforcement Charter was revised and published in October 2023. In addition to the update of the charter, the planning service has been working closely with the Building Standards Service on the joint approach to reviewing complaints from members of the public which relate to unauthorised works, dangerous/defective works or works which may constitute a breach of planning control otherwise. The service has invested in new drone technology which has been used extensively to capture aerial footage of works in progress. The drone also avoids the need for site visits at properties whereby the visit may become difficult or confrontational for the officer.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to improve enforcement practices and work with other Council services to share knowledge and information relevant to enforcement.



Action 20: Prioritise engagement with community bodies and underrepresented groups in 2025/26

In Progress

Progress against this action: The planning service has been able to engage with some community bodies following a corporate communications press release on Local Place Plans. This included the participation of planning staff with some community bodies at in person events. However, the service acknowledges that there is a need for wider engagement with a number of underrepresented groups.

The following next steps are proposed: The planning service will return to a full complement in December 2025 and engagement will be improved.

Action 21: Develop PBS Customer Forum, working with group participants to benefit customer and applicant experience

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The Planning and Building Standards Forum was adopted in May 2025 and there have been two meetings of this group. The group meets on an in-person basis and allows local, repeat customers (architects, agents) lead the agenda and topic discussion on challenges they may be experiencing with the service and review of any improvement areas.

Action 22: Develop pre-application process to give customers valuable feedback

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: We have not had the time given other priorities.

The following next steps are proposed: Customers have been encouraged to contact the service and utilise pre-application meetings, however a documented/published process, including a possible new charge for pre-app services, has yet to be formally adopted.

Action 23: Deliver effective community engagement events to promote the importance of the planning service and planning profession

In Progress

Progress against this action: As referred to in previous actions, the planning service have engaged with some local community groups, community bodies and schools to promote areas of planning policy and the important of local authority planning services. The service



accepted that this is an area for continuous growth and improvement and delivery. Engagement by the planning service will be increased with a full staff complement in the Development Planning team.

The following next steps are proposed: The planning service will return to a full complement in December 2025 and engagement will be improved.

Action 24: Develop new customer survey to ensure qualitative and quantitative data is available for analysis by leadership team

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: We have not had the time given other priorities.

The following next steps are proposed: Whilst positive progress has been made to engage with customers through the Planning and Building Standard Forum, a survey document has not been produced to collect qualitative and quantitative data.

Action 25: Continue to encourage communities to prepare Local Place Plans and provide resources to communities to enable them to produce Local Place Plans

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Further to a press release and engagement strategy for Local Place Plans, the Council have been informed that as many as five Local Place Plans will be produced by community groups within the Inverclyde area.

Action 26: Work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure that appropriate development is enable through the planning process

In Progress

Progress against this action: A number of actions within the survey have identified the need for cross service working, industry engagement and positive collaboration with stakeholders and partners to deliver a quality planning service which can enable development. Inverclyde Council hosted a Housing Summit in May 2025 to engage with housebuilders and RSLs. The service will continue to explore all appropriate opportunities to help enable development through collaborative working practices.

The following next steps are proposed: The service shall endeavour to work with, and engage, stakeholders of the planning service with the view of enabling development through the planning process.



Action 27: Ensure that the Council supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable, and productive places

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Council endeavours to support the delivery of sustainable, liveable, and productive places by continuously improving in all aspects of performance and operational activity contained within the NPIF Improvement Action Plan.

The following next steps are proposed: The Council shall aim to address, implement and improve on all NPIF Actions by the end of 2026/27.

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 already held a peer collaborative follow-up meeting.

The peer review collaborative follow-up meeting was held on: 2025-08-24.

The following organisations/groups/individuals were invited: Danny Henderson, Katrine Dean (IC) Heather Holland, Stewart McNally, Susan Wilson (EDC)

