



**ABERDEEN**  
CITY COUNCIL

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improvement **service**

National Planning Improvement

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

# Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

**Aberdeen City Council**



# Aberdeen City NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

## Foreword

Aberdeen City Council's Strategic Place Planning service was in the later Cohort 3 of the trial year of the National Planning Improvement Framework. Furthermore, current absence and associated acting up arrangements at senior management level are having an impact on management capacity to take forward improvement actions. With that in mind, there has been limited capacity and time to advance the formulation of a workforce strategy which is also contingent to an extent on wider Council reorganisation. Progress has been good on the other actions as detailed in the report.

## 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.](#)

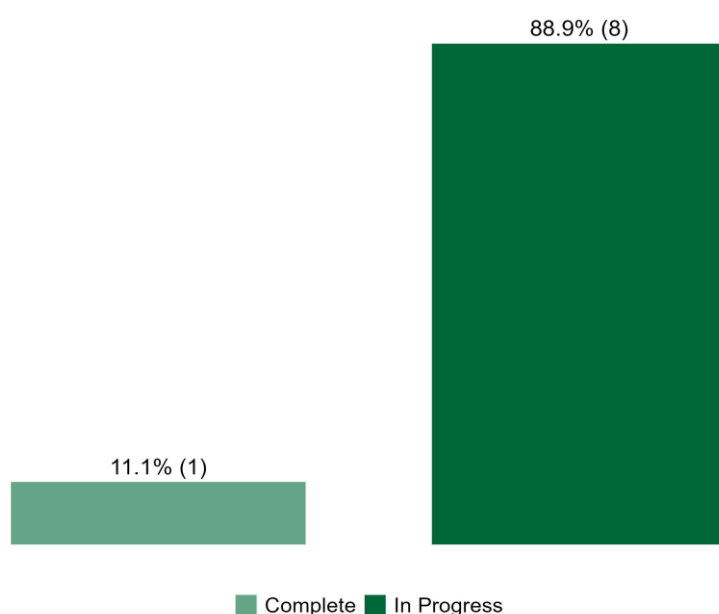
In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress Aberdeen City has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.



# Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

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

**Aberdeen City has 9 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:**



**Action 1: Preparation of a workforce planning strategy including consideration of team reorganisation, skills audit, career progression pathways, succession planning, enhancement of service resilience, vacant post redesign. Improved service capacity, resilience, and adaptability**

## **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Early progress has been made to look at areas of the team where there currently exists a 'single point of failure' and where no immediate succession plan is in place. Work has started in relation to addressing this issue for the developer obligations and enforcement functions of the team. A business case is in development to help scope out additional resource for the Developer Obligations Team, which is currently managed by a single officer. A similar approach is underway in terms of the enforcement function.

The following next steps are proposed: Over the next year the Senior Management Team will develop a formalised Workforce Strategy to scope out further aspects of team design and



service delivery priorities. The initial focus will be on the potential reconfiguration of the current Planning Trainee role and the progression pathway to Planner level and beyond, with the aim of attracting highly skilled and able applicants and encouraging them to stay long term. It is intended to investigate and gather information from other councils regarding their trainee and workforce planning approaches to identify potential lessons learned.

## **Action 2: Local Review Body monitoring and review including promote attendance of 5 members, careful consideration of all refusals by Team Leaders, refresh LRB-specific elected member planning training. To increase percentage decisions in accordance with recommendation**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Officers from the Development Management and Legal Services teams have worked together to produce a report and set of recommendations into options for improvements to the operation of the Local Review Body (LRB). LRB training for Elected Members has been undertaken in person and online with a recording available for all members to view.

The following next steps are proposed: The next step is for these recommendations to be considered by the Chief Officer of Strategic Place Planning and the Convenor and Vice Convenor of the Planning Development Management Committee. Any changes agreed will then subsequently be implemented. LRB decision making will also be closely monitored by planning and legal officers to help identify any further improvement actions in the future.

## **Action 3: Support interested staff to undertake training in leadership and management skills where the current management team feels it would benefit their professional development. To support good succession planning**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: This is an ongoing action. Through the Council's Continuous Review and Development process appropriate and interested members of staff are actively encouraged to take up opportunities for leadership and management skills training. As a result, most senior planning staff have undertaken a selection of appropriate management related courses from the wide range on offer by the Council. Succession planning is integrated into the continuous review and development process, with an emphasis on identifying potential leaders and encouraging participation in more intensive programmes.

The following next steps are proposed: Continue to support this take up, with a focused approach on areas of the service where gaps in succession planning have been identified.



## **Action 4: Refresh planning and LRB training for elected members and cover emerging planning issues such as short term lets and battery energy storage**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Two separate planning training refresher sessions have been held to which all elected members were invited. The first session covered Development Planning, Development Management decision making, the Code of Conduct and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The second session was more focussed on the specific procedures and decision making considerations at the Local Review Body

The following next steps are proposed: 1-2-1 or small group training has been offered to those elected members who were unable to attend the sessions. Regular planning training is part of the Council's elected members development programme. Consideration is being given to more focussed, subject specific training on topics such as short term lets, design or battery energy storage.

## **Action 5: Draft and implement guidance for planning case officers and template reports of handling. Reduction in determination timescales**

### **Complete**

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A comprehensive guidance note on the format and content of reports of handling has been completed. This is accompanied by revised report templates. Compliance is being monitored. The resulting structured approach to report writing means that reports are consistent, shorter, clearer and more focussed on key determining issues.

## **Action 6: Utilise Microsoft Power BI as an internal reporting tool. Put in place a suite of relevant reporting and monitoring. This could also be linked into the Delivery Plan monitoring**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: The Development Management team has worked closely with the Council's Data Insights Team to finish configuring a Power BI tool for reporting on "added value". This tool enables reports and illustrative graphs to be produced on the value added to development proposals during the application process in terms of a variety of indicators including design quality, road safety, sustainable transport and ecological enhancement. This information provides a balanced qualitative counterpoint to standard quantitative performance measures such as speed of decision making.



The following next steps are proposed: Building on the knowledge gained from configuring the added value report, a start has been made on extending the use of Power Bi to report on a range of indicators including monitoring of development plan policies and a “live view” of statutory planning application performance indicators.

## **Action 7: Agents forum meetings (full range of agents) to be arranged at least once a year. To promote dialogue, learning and service improvement**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: Internal and external consultation has started with view to determining the agenda and attendees for a prospective agent's forum group in order that meetings can be focussed, productive and worthwhile for all participants. The aim is to expand the focus of the agent's forum beyond development management to cover wider development plan, climate, and environment issues. Contact has been made with East Ayrshire and Glasgow City Councils to learn from best practice.

The following next steps are proposed: The team will hold an agents forum meeting early in 2026.

## **Action 8: Reconfigure the planning webpages. Improved customer experience and ease of use - reducing burden on staff resource**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: The planning team has carried out an initial redesign of the planning webpages to fit the prospective new corporate format and style.

The following next steps are proposed: The Council’s Customer Experience Team are taking the lead on this corporate project and progress depend on actions and decisions outside the control of the planning service.

## **Action 9: Building on the ‘health in policies’ approach taken in LDP3, consider how to incorporate local work on the social detriments of health and the Marmot City Principles into the next LDP. A strong Local Development Plan, grounded in prevention**

### **In Progress**

Progress against this action: In February 2025 a collaboration was announced between Aberdeen City Council, NHS Grampian and Public Health Scotland and Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director of University College London’s Institute of Health Equity. The aim of this collaboration is to strengthen local plans to reduce health inequalities and improve



wellbeing in communities, thus enabling people to live longer, healthier lives by addressing the root causes of health inequalities and preventing illness before it starts. Eight Marmot Principles have been developed, and these have already been used for each Topic Area within the Evidence Report to determine how each Topic relates or aligns to them. Aberdeen will seek to further embed the eight Marmot Principles within the Proposed Plan.

The following next steps are proposed: The next Local Development Plan 2028 will be developed in the context of the Marmot Principles. It will look at health, alongside the nature and climate emergencies which will be much expanded.



# New Proposed Planning Improvement Actions

The table below details further improvement actions added.

<b>Improvement action</b> What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Importance</b> High Medium Low	<b>Timescale</b> Short term- 1 year Medium term – 3 year Long term 3+ year	<b>Resources</b>
Consider how use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as Microsoft Copilot can benefit the planning service and support staff efficiency.	SPP Senior Management Team	Medium	Medium Term	All planning staff. Council Digital & Technology Team.
Consider how day-to-day operations can better inform the external Customer Service Accreditation programme.	SPP Senior Management Team	Medium	Medium	All planning staff.
Consider how the next Local Development Plan for the city can help tackle	Policy & Strategy Manager	High	Medium Term	Local Development Plan Team Housing Strategy Team



the national housing emergency, as declared by the Scottish Government in 2024.



# 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: An e-mail update will be sent to all participants in the NPIF Peer Review meeting updating them on the Council's progress with the NPIF actions as detailed in this report. This e-mail will offer the opportunity for peer review partners to make comment and enter into further dialogue. Any feedback received will be taken into account in the NPIF assessment review process.

