NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Performance & Improvement Assessment

April 2025

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Planning Authority details

Planning Authority:	Moray Council
Lead officer:	Beverly Smith
Email:	Beverly.smith@moray.gov.uk

The Planning Service has used the below matrix when determining what score we have given each attribute:

Score	Attribute	Good Practice Example
1	Making excellent progress	**Consolidate** Share learning with others
2	Making good progress	**Build upon** Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others
3	Making Fair Progress	**Develop** Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation
4	Making Limited Progress	**Review** Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others
5	No Progress	**Prioritise** Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken Engage with NPI Learn from others

Introduction

Moray Council is one of the smaller local authorities in the north of Scotland compared to its neighbours Highland and Aberdeenshire on either side. It is, however, still geographically substantive compared to many other local authorities. As a Planning Authority we share some planning functions with the Cairngorms National Park Authority, which covers a portion of southern Moray.

The council as Planning Authority has sought to be supportive of traditional industries (such as whisky distilling and food production including agriculture), embrace new technologies and sought to support the local economy and communities with up to date policies, strategies and guidance. The planning service is delivered by the Strategic Planning and Development and Development Management teams supported by consultancy, legal and transportation and environmental health teams.

For the last 12 years the Planning Authority has published an annual Planning Performance Framework, submitted to Scottish Ministers with feedback provided and 'marked' in terms of green/amber/red. Over that decade Moray Planning Authority has demonstrated continuous improvement under the Planning Performance Framework, which has now been replaced by a National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF). This is the first report for 2023/24 and is part of a national pilot along with other Planning Authorities from across Scotland. Moray Planning Authority has been paired with Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority through this pilot, which has provided an opportunity to support and learn across Councils.

This report has been prepared through a self-assessment by the Planning Authority, reviewed through a Peer Review group. The group considered the Authority's self-assessment, and focused on areas for improvement. The group was selected by identifying a focused group of key customers/stakeholders (externally and internally to Moray Council).

Whilst this is a pilot of the NPIF, for 2023/2024 this process will set up a pro forma for future review and reporting on performance, reflecting, listening and considering improvements for further change.

An important aspect of the assessment has been through the Peer Review group, who provided their time with an open and honest approach to the review. I would like to thank those individuals for their contribution.

David Gordon

Chair of Planning & Regulatory Services Committee

Moray Council

Peer Review Meeting

A peer review meeting took place with key customers involved in the planning system in Moray in April 2025.

Customers are both internal and external to the Service and include organisations, services and businesses with whom the Planning Authority engage with. The group consisted of the representatives invited from the following: -

- Joint Community Councils of Moray (JCC)
- Springfield Properties
- Craig Mackay (CM Design Architects)
- Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning and Regulatory Services Committee
- Key internal consultees (Transportation, Flood Risk Management)
- Moray Council Planning staff

Of those invited, the JCC and Springfield Properties were unable to attend.

PEOPLE

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 1

This planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
- Does the planning authority receive responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

Narrative

Strategic Planning and Development (SP&D) and Development Management (DM) are comprised of 28 FTE multi-disciplinary staff, 14 of whom are Chartered Town Planners, 2 Associate Members and 1 Licentiate. In 2023, fourteen of these staff were over the age of 40, with seven of these over 50. Both teams are supported by other employees including a Systems Support team and administration staff that are shared with other functions of the wider Economic Development and Growth Service. Of note Development Management has 1 permanent and 1 temporary Technical Planning Assistant.

In 2023 the Head of Economic Growth & Development was supported by the Development Management and Building Standards Manager & Strategic Planning and Development Manager. Due to wider Council restructuring, from around March 2024 the Chief Planner post was added on to the title of the Acting Head of Economic Growth and Development, and one of the Principal Planning Officers became Acting Development Management and Building Standards Manager (job share).

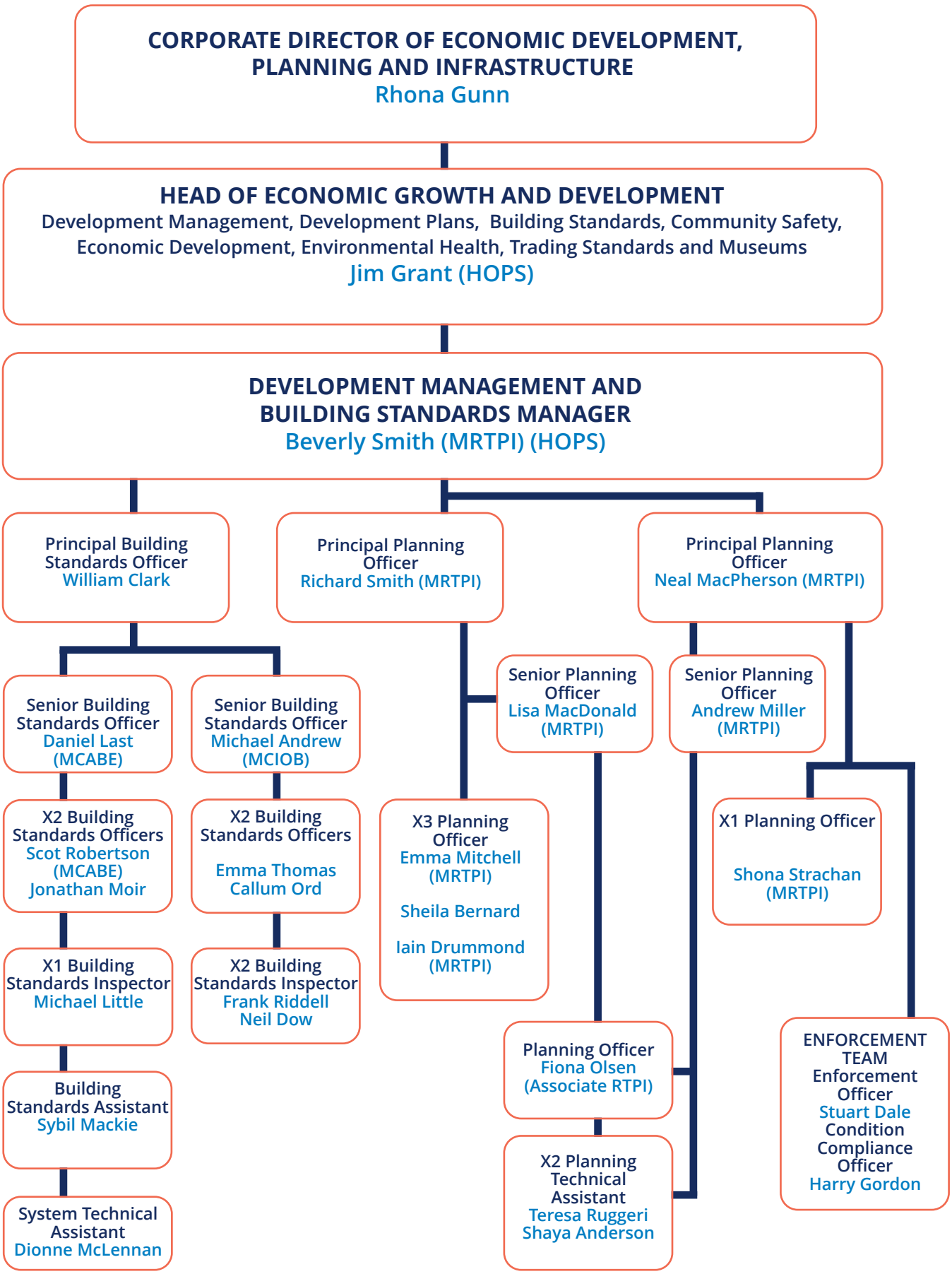
The following are managed between the two planning managers:

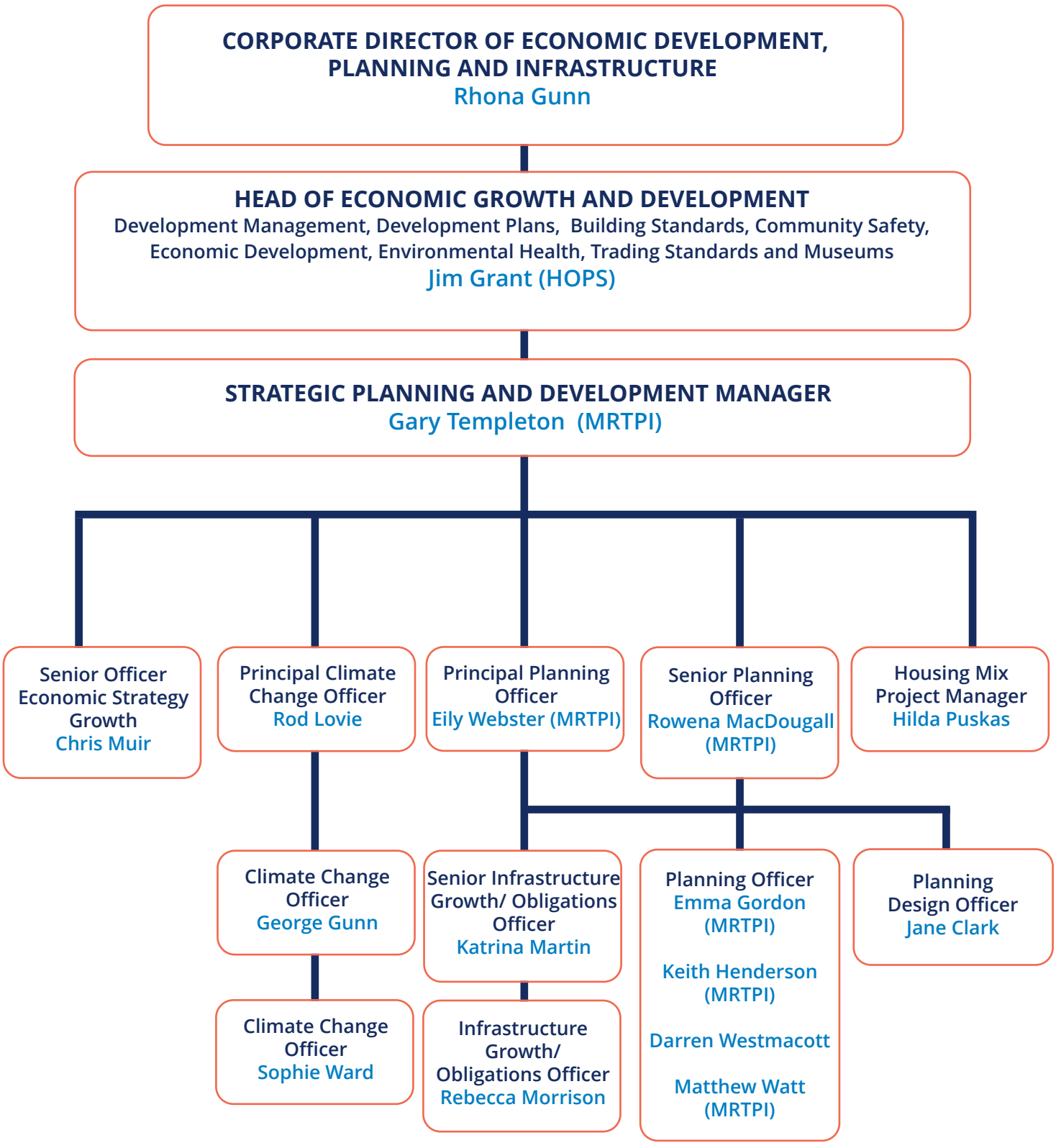
Strategic Planning and Development	
Local Place Plans	Zero Waste
Local Development Plan	Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy
Supplementary Guidance	Sustainable Development
Levelling Up Fund	Housing Land Audit
Strategic Environmental Assessment	Environmental Strategy
Developer Obligations	Infrastructure Delivery
Climate Change Strategy and advice	Tree Preservation Orders
Climate Change projects	Planning Application Consultations
Woodland and Forestry Strategy	Minerals review
Conservation Area reviews	Landscape Sensitivity Study
Moray Growth Deal Housing Mix	Elgin Neighbourhood Board
Delivery Project	Biodiversity

Development Management	
Validate / Register Applications	Major pre-application meetings
Determine Planning Applications	Pre-App Enquiries
Listed Building Applications	EIA Screening / Scoping
Conservation Area Consents	Prior Application Notices (PANS)
Section 36 and 37 consultations	Short Term let correspondence
Licensing consultations	Performance Reporting
Permitted Development Enquiries	Processing agreements
Planning Enforcement	Internal Council consultations/advice
Certificates of lawfulness	Section 75 legal agreements
Condition monitoring	Training CPD
Permitted Development Enquiries	Protocols/Service Level Agreements
Committee site visits	e-Planning / Webpages upkeep
Advertisement Consent Applications	Direct Action for planning enforcement
Telecoms consultations	Consultations with neighbouring Authorities
Appeal responses	Local Review Board (Committee Services)
	Planning advisor

Resources and budgets

As with many Councils, the year 2023 – 24 saw increasing budget constraints and pressures. Both Strategic Planning and Development and Development Management saw a reduction in staff in 2023/24 from natural wastage due to budget pressures. Alongside this, legislative and national planning policy requirements have increased, with a subsequent strain on resources.


CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE
Rhona Gunn
HEAD OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
Development Management, Development Plans, Building Standards, Community Safety, Economic Development, Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Museums
Jim Grant (HOPS)
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND BUILDING STANDARDS MANAGER
Beverly Smith (MRTPI) (HOPS)
Principal Building Standards Officer
William Clark
Principal Planning Officer
Richard Smith (MRTPI)
Principal Planning Officer
Neal MacPherson (MRTPI)
Senior Building Standards Officer
Daniel Last (MCABE)
Senior Building Standards Officer
Michael Andrew (MCIOB)
Senior Planning Officer
Lisa MacDonald (MRTPI)
Senior Planning Officer
Andrew Miller (MRTPI)
X2 Building Standards Officers
Scot Robertson (MCABE)
Jonathan Moir
X2 Building Standards Officers
Emma Thomas
Callum Ord
X3 Planning Officer
Emma Mitchell (MRTPI)
Sheila Bernard
Iain Drummond (MRTPI)
X1 Planning Officer
Shona Strachan (MRTPI)
X1 Building Standards Inspector
Michael Little
X2 Building Standards Inspector
Frank Riddell
Neil Dow
Planning Officer
Fiona Olsen (Associate RTPI)
ENFORCEMENT TEAM
Enforcement Officer
Stuart Dale
Condition Compliance Officer
Harry Gordon
Building Standards Assistant
Sybil Mackie
X2 Planning Technical Assistant
Teresa Ruggeri
Shaya Anderson
System Technical Assistant
Dionne McLennan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Jim Grant (HOPS)
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER
Gary Templeton (MRTPI)
Senior Officer Economic Strategy Growth
Chris Muir
Principal Climate Change Officer
Rod Lovie
Principal Planning Officer
Eily Webster (MRTPI)
Senior Planning Officer
Rowena MacDougall (MRTPI)
Housing Mix Project Manager
Hilda Puskas
Climate Change Officer
George Gunn
Climate Change Officer
Sophie Ward
Senior Infrastructure Growth/ Obligations Officer
Katrina Martin
Infrastructure Growth/ Obligations Officer
Rebecca Morrison
Planning Officer
Emma Gordon (MRTPI)
Keith Henderson (MRTPI)
Darren Westmacott
Matthew Watt (MRTPI)
Planning Design Officer
Jane Clark

Working style and culture

The Service has embedded a hybrid work style and a more flexible way of working, whilst continuing to maintain a level of service with increased average determination times. Post Covid, the acceptance of hybrid working became more imbedded and alongside a rationalization of office accommodation, staff now operate rota's for attendance in the office. Office accommodation is now more flexible with few staff having 'fixed' desks. Virtual meetings and discussions are normal practice. The Councils recruitment policy and processes openly support staff of different ages, races, gender, and neurodiversity. There is currently within the planning related functions of the Council an even balance of genders across the staff structure. Recruitment in the north of Scotland of planning professionals remains challenging, but several valued staff have taken the workplace based route to obtaining RTPI membership as Associate Members. The Planning service has been really supportive of growing our own Planners, 2 members of staff have been supported through planning degrees funded by the Council and aiming to enroll 2 more in January 2026 helping to create a pipeline of Planners.

Taken from the Moray Council Corporate Plan 2024 the below diagram summarizes the Councils values, that inform its actions and aspirations.

Our values

FAIR	AMBITIOUS	IMPROVING	RESPONSIVE
• tackles inequalities • treat people fairly • promote equalities and awareness • consider our impact on others	• promote and celebrate Moray • be a great place to work • ensure sustainable and efficient council services • improve life for the most vunerable	• drive improvement • encourage innovation • take commercial opportunities • invest in transforming to meet future needs	• be open and transparent • promote community participation and involvement • listen to and involve our communities

Workforce Information

RTPI - The Royal Town Planning Institute is the professional body representing planners in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It promotes and develops policy affecting planning and the built environment.

Licentiate - Licentiate membership is for graduates who have completed a fully RTPI accredited qualification. It is the first step towards becoming a Chartered Town Planner via the Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC).

With the broadening remit of the Council as Planning Authority, not all of the employees in the service hold planning officer roles. Within the SP & D Section there are now for example, Climate Change Officers and within Economic Growth & Development a Community Wealth Building officer (temporary 1 year contract). The council considers that this is a strength to be built on and developed to provide the flexibility and resilience to meet the policy challenges within the NPF4, the place-based development context and the everchanging dynamics of climate change.

Additional staffing resources have been identified namely a one-year temporary Planning Officer post and a Performance Coordinator post. Although the reporting year is 2023/24 National Planning Framework 4 and the Planning Act 2019 introduced significant changes such as a focus on delivery of Local Development Plans, Local Place Plans, Carbon and Biodiversity assessments. The supporting information that is now required from applicants to enable planning applications to be determined meeting policy requirements has significant introduced a wider and more complex range of topics. These have all required in depth policy analysis and more time to be spent on preparing handling and committee reports.

There has been a greater focus on the engagement process for both the local development plan and preparation of local place plans. Regular catch ups and shared learning sessions with communities has taken up considerable staff resources.

In terms of internal specialist expertise we do not have officers that are able to provide tree, landscape, ecological advise. We have a partnership agreement with Aberdeenshire Council to deliver our Archaeological service. Our Planning Enforcement Officer is now a part-time post.

RTPI Staff and Qualified Staff (2023/24)	Headcount
Head of Service (Chief Planner)	1 MRTPI
Development Management (inc Manager)	14 (8 MRTPI) & 1 Associate
Strategic Planning and Development	14 (6 MRTPI)

Budget/Income

The income is set out below in respect of the Development Management Planning functions of the Service. Budget pressures require to be mitigated relating to new and unfunded duties placed on the Service through the Scottish Government, Local Development Plan preparation, and digital development. These pressures will where possible be mitigated through increasing non-statutory income.

Unexpected costs such as procurement of specialist advice, is adding pressure to budgets and moving forward it is likely that more budget will be required for external specialist advice. This occurs in both the SP&D and DM functions.

Development Management Fees increased significantly in 2022 with the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications) (Scotland) Regulations 2022, and this is intended to ensure planning authorities are well resourced. While this has increased income, other wider council costs, costs is support staff/services, and other resources go beyond the budget set out below.

	Budget 2023/24	Income 2023/24
	Budget	Statutory Planning Fees & Discretionary Fees
Development Management	£ 929,043	Statutory - £1,338,043 Discretionary - £113,834
Strategic Planning & Development	£100,000	N/A

Consultation Response Timescales

With the increasing complexity of work involved across the planning service to address the policy context of NPF4, the delivery of planning (whether determining planning applications or preparing the Local Development Plan) has resulted in an ever-greater reliance on specialist advice and input from both internal and external consultees. In the years 2023/24 windfarm Public Local Inquiries have necessitated specialist consultee advice including Landscape and Visual Impact Advice. Just as NPF4 broadens the need for technical and specialist inputs into the determination of planning applications and policy development, wider national issues facing recruitment of such specialists into local government are presenting themselves. Difficulties in recruitment into these key services are identified as risks to delivering statutory planning functions within expected timescales. The Strategic Planning and Development and Development Management sections have been under pressure to respond to the increasing range of issues now raised by NPF4. Pressures on all sections meant that consultees for more complex applications (involving matters such as carbon assessments, biodiversity gain)

became more involved. It is also perceived that there is pressure on external consultees, which see their staff and resources more thinly spread. Many are stating they are less able to involve themselves as much as was previously the case and refer us to standing advice and online guidance i.e SEPA and Nature Scot.

Average Days for Planning Application Response to Consultation & Number of Consultation Responses

Consultation Detail	Average Days 2022/23	Average Days 2023/24
Internal	23	24
External	19	18

Development Management Performance including processing agreements.

In Moray 2023/24 there were 646 planning applications determined, of which 95.8% were approved. 80.5% of all local developments were determined within 2 months.

2023/24	Number of applications not subject to processing agreements	Average Time (Weeks)	Number of applications subject to processing agreements	% of applications with processing agreements concluded within agreed timescales	Total Number of Decisions
Total Applications with Legal Agreements	4	10.1	13	84.6%	**17**
Major Developments without Legal Agreement	3	12.6	2	50.0%	**5**
Major Developments with Legal Agreement	-	-	2	100.0%	**2**

2023/24	Number of applications not subject to processing agreements	Average Time (Weeks)	Number of applications subject to processing agreements	% of applications with processing agreements concluded within agreed timescales	Total Number of Decisions
Local Developments without Legal Agreement	443	7.1	107	64.5%	**550**
Local Developments with Legal Agreement	4	10.1	10	90.0%	**14**
Other Consents	72	12.2	17	47.1%	**89**
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent	43	7.2	13	53.8%	**56**
Advertisements	12	8.0	-	-	**12**
Hazardous Substances Consent	1	378.1	4	25.0%	**5**
Other consents and certificates	16	6.1	-	-	**16**

In 2023/24 the Strategic Planning and Development team continued preparation of the next local development plan subsequently being the first planning authority in Scotland to successfully pass through the Gate check process for the new style Evidence Report, whilst simultaneously preparing supplementary guidance to support National Planning Framework 4 to assist its implementation. This plus carrying out the other functions listed above saw a busy year, with a range of projects and strategies progressed.

Attribute 2

The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a workforce planning strategy in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?
- Does the planning authority have a deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?

Workforce Planning Strategy

The Corporate Plan and relevant Service Plan from 2023-24 seek to ensure staff resilience and continuity for all services. Attracting planners to the north of Scotland has been an issue for some time, and this was a challenge in the years post covid. In both Teams planners have been upskilled and have chosen to move into the role of planning and gaining RTPI Membership via the route of associate membership and gaining experience over a number years with the aim of becoming qualified. Some have done distance learning as part of the process, which has been supported by the Council. As both planning teams are relatively small, the managers and Principal Officers hold routine meetings and catch-ups with individual staff. As a hybrid working style is adopted, care is taken to keep in contact with all staff, where some may work remotely more than others.

Moray Council has a Workforce Policy and Strategy Team within its Organisational Development Service. They support provision of a variety of staff training, continuing professional development (CPD). An Employee Charter, various guidance relating to workplace conflict resolution and a workforce culture toolkit for managers assists the Council also. While there are now limited training budgets available, the Organisational Development Service does provide a range of training opportunities and courses relevant to planning.

Supporting the workforce

A flexible approach to working is adopted, with many staff part time, working compressed hours, and working flexibly from home or office to accommodate personal needs and commitments. The council also has an independent counselling service available and guidance to support entitled 'Time for Talking'. There is a culture of accessibility and an 'open door' to staff from managers, which is aided by the size of the service.

Staff feedback – Service Improvement Actions

Moray Council conducts annual employee surveys to gain feedback from staff and inform decision making.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	4
2. The planning authority has a value and supported workforce	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 1: Update Applicant Validation handbook incorporating revised procedures and process map	DM Manager	High	1	Using existing temporary 1-year resources
Attribute 1: Temporary Planning Officer post – 1 year	DM Manager	High	1	Use resources from Acting up arrangements
Attribute 1: Performance Coordinating role within Economic Growth & Development Service	Chief Planner	High	1	Use additional fee income
Attribute 2: Dedicated Planning skills training plan with focus on areas for improvement. Consider shared training with other councils and Improvement Service	SPD & DM Manager	HIgh	2	Use existing shared resources and Planning skills programme
Attribute 2: Future Planner training programme	SPD Manager	HIgh	1	Resources from corporate training budget

CULTURE

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 3

This planning authority has embedded continuous improvement

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
- Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
- Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
- Has the planning authority addressed any complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and have evidence of this and that it has learned from valid cases?

Narrative

The Service has used the previous Planning Performance Framework (PPF) document to set out the Service improvement objectives for the forthcoming year. The case studies from the Planning Performance Framework 2022-23 Annual Report cited case studies within Strategic Planning and Development and Development Management that provided best practice and lessons learned moving forward.

Moray has been fortunate in achieving almost entirely greens in previous measurements of key performance and the improvement plan in the PPF created an opportunity to identify actions and we now need to refocus and embed continuous improvement into the service.

Part 3 of the Planning Performance Framework 2022-23 Annual Report identified the following improvements for the coming year 2023-2024

1. Review of Procedures relating to governance
2. Review Delegation Scheme
3. Ensure new planning policy guidance is embedded within Development Management decision making
4. Identify further shared working opportunities with Building Standards and Development Management
5. Set up stakeholder groups to support development of Regional Spatial Strategy and Evidence Report
6. Establish stronger networks to support work relating to biodiversity networks
7. Development session between Strategic Planning and Development and Economic Growth and Regeneration to identify further shared working opportunities
8. Collate and review actions identified in Plans and Strategies
9. Review developer obligations evidence base

Of the noted improvements above, all have been progressed or completed. 13, 5, 7-9 have been completed, 4 is ongoing and a review of the wider of team structure with Development Management and Building Standards has informed how this improvement will be shaped. Improvement 6 is nearing completion with nature networks throughout Moray soon to be plotted as a GIS layer informing planning decisions and biodiversity enhancement and is leading the way in Scotland.

Annual Performance

The council has used monitoring of various National Headline Indicators to assess its planning performance and changes from the year previous. These statistics are measured in addition to performance improvement arising from the PPF reports and case studies. Performance for the year 2023/24 is provided above and did see some improvements across indicators from the year previous.

Awards

No awards were applied for during 2023-24 and the benefits of preparing and making submissions have been lost opportunities. Moray Council as planning authority continues to meet its levels of meeting standards set out nationally remained high, with the overall performance in the various statistics sitting within the top 5 local authorities in Scotland according to the Scottish Government Planning Applications Statistics 2023/2024.

Much of the focus in 2023 was on recovery from pandemic lockdowns, and staff focused on the economic recovery of the local economy.

Improvement Activities

The council continually seeks to improve its performance and regular reporting to committee ensures scrutiny of various planning activities.

Moray Council runs a series of staff awards internally to give recognition and acknowledge good working within the Council. These awards involve nominations and voting by the staff and some stakeholders and give recognition to not only committed staff but also highlight those who adopt best working practices. As mentioned previously the Council also conducts an annual employee survey to obtain feedback in the previous years experience and include the opportunity for any other feedback or ideas. The survey is designed to be largely anonymous to aid participation. This survey then influences and guides other decisions of the Council and influences higher level policy and priorities.

Complaints

Moray Council has a complaints policy and guidance, which see any complaints addressed in the first instance via frontline resolution (usually involving the service manager) who are likely most aware of the issue. Any escalated complaint or specifically addressed corporate complaint would be issued by the Chief Executive, but usually involves investigation on their behalf by senior management if the frontline resolution did not address the complainants' concerns. Beyond this, if still not satisfied, the matter can be escalated to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The figures for 2023/24 below reflect that that Development Management and Building Standards share a service manager, but it is likely that of those 11, most will sit with Development Management.

Development Management & Building Standards	11 received and closed (10 not upheld and 1 resolved)
Strategic Planning & Development	4 received and closed (all not upheld)

In this period 2 Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) complaints were received about the council as planning authority, with one partially upheld.

Moray Council does seek to respond to complaints within a set timeframe, and this is breached only where the level of investigation has taken longer to undertake. Where SPSO complaints are upheld, the Council seeks to learn lessons and undertake any recommendations within the ombudsman response.

Attribute 4

The planning authority has sound governance

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an effective scheme of delegation in place?
- Have all councillors who exercise a planning function undergone statutory training and is there is evidence of ongoing training for members?
- Have more than x % of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

Narrative

Scheme of Delegation

Moray Council has a well-functioning scheme of delegation in place with high level of delegated authority to Officers such that only major planning applications, and Electricity Act 1989 Section 36 and 37 consultations typically go before Moray Councils Planning and Regulatory Services Committee, which sits approximately 6 times a year.

Scheme of Delegation - Development Management

All categories of development applications submitted to Moray Council as Planning Authority for consideration may normally be determined for approval or refusal by the appointed officer with the exception of applications of which one or more of the following applies:

- An application is submitted by, or on behalf of, an Elected Member of the Authority or an Officer involved in the statutory planning process;
- The appointed officer considers, following the consultation process, that the application raises matters of wider community interest and/or planning significance The decision to refer to Committee or hold a hearing rests with the appointed officer and this discretion to refer may be exercised where, for example, all ward members and the chair consider that an application raises matters of wider community interest.
- The application falls within the category of “major development” as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 (the Hierarchy Regulations) which came into force on 06 April 2009).

In 2023-24 the number of planning decisions made at committee was 17 planning applications, 1 high hedge application and 2 Electricity Consent applications.

Training for Elected Members on Planning Committee

All Elected Members sitting on the committee undertake training that covers the legal, strategic and development management aspects of the planning system. This usually involves group or one to one sessions with the Legal Services Manager, Strategic Planning & Development Manager and Development Management Manager.

The topics covered in the training schedule so far have been:

- Strategic Planning & Development
- Climate Change, Biodiversity & Regeneration
- Development Management & Enforcement
- Application Types and Permitted Development
- Wider planning strategies and supplementary guidance
- Legal on conduct and operation of the planning committee
- Development Plans and Community Planning
- Material Planning Considerations
- Energy Consents Section 36 & 37 consultations
- Appeals and Local Reviews

Moray Local Review Body

The Moray Local Review Body (LRB) operates on a regular basis, but this is determined by number and frequency of reviews. Elected Members on the LRB have all had training in the planning process, and will have visited the sites before the LRB. All planning reviews are led by an experienced senior planning officer and a solicitor from legal services to ensure that decision making is based on the appropriate planning context and policy framework. The level of overturns in Moray does cause concern, but review of these decisions points to the LRB making case by case decisions rather than pointing to any failing of a particular planning policy.

LRB 2023/24	Number	Decision upheld	Average time (weeks)
Overturned at Local Review	9 (with 7 upheld)	44%	10.7

Attribute 5

The planning authority has effective leadership

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an identified Chief Planning Officer in place?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise on corporate decision making and policy within the broader organisation?
- Is the planning authority's Chief Planning Officer a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise and support external bodies through engagement in organisations' committees, advisory groups or working groups?
- Does the planning authority have a strong leadership team that supports a culture of continuous improvement?

Narrative

The Council has acknowledged both the government Climate and a Housing emergency, with the Chief Planner having a key role in delivering services and decisions that address this. The Chief Planner is a former Chair of the Development Management Sub-committee Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) and currently is on the HOPS Executive committee.

Other Moray Council staff are members and participate in other HOPS group such as Climate Change, Energy & Resources sub-committee and Development Planning sub-committee.

Within the Council, the wider service regular meets as a Service Management Team involving the Head of Service, Strategic Planning and Development Manager, and Development Management and Building Standards Manager. Other managers attend also from the service including Environmental Health, Economic & Regeneration Manager, System support lead and lead administration officer to coordinate and oversee the wider function of the service. The Corporate Director of Economic Development, Planning and Infrastructure has regular management meeting with the Heads of Service.

Freedom of Information requests

	2023/24
FOI requests (planning specific)	45

Freedom of Information of Information requests are regularly submitted to the service, and of note these often relate to several section within the council. Both the Strategic Planning and Development and the Development Management Sections receive FOI's receive such requests, which cover a range of topics. Many relating to specific planning applications and developments are easily responded to with Members of the public directed to the Councils e-planning service where current and past planning applications are publicly accessible.

It is noted that many appear to be statistic gathering for a variety of purposes, and other may relate to research. A notable amount of time is spent on FOI information gathering by planning staff, especially where the request is complex and requires data recovery.

Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	3
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	1
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	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 3: Review Pre-application advice process. Review if fast, focused advice can be provided	DM Manager	Medium	3	Internal resources
Attribute 3: Succession plan for Development Management & Strategic Planning & Development	SPD & DM Manger	High	1	Internal resources
Attribute 4: Member Training Plan and Refresher/ update training	SPD & DM Manager	High	1	SG & Planning Skills, Internal resources
Attribute 5: Chief Planner Job description part of Management re-structuring	Chief Executive	High	1	Internal

TOOLS

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 efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.

Attribute 6

The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an up to date Local Development Plan in place and/ or is on track to adoption?
- Does the planning authority have an up to date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/ or on track to adoption?
- Has the planning authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report been approved by the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals and/ or on track for approval?
- Have the application of the Local Development Plan's policies been found to be deficient at appeal or judicial review?

Narrative

The Moray Local Development Plan 2020 was adopted on 27 July 2020. It outlines the Council's vision for the development of Moray up to 2030 and beyond (excluding the southern part of the region within the Cairngorms National Park, which has its own Local Development Plan). Together with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the MLDP constitutes the Development Plan for Moray.

The Strategic Planning and Development team are currently preparing the next local development plan (anticipated to be adopted in 2027) and whist it is noted that this report covers the period 2023/24 progress has been made since then in various stages of the plan formulation.

The aim is to make the plans more effective, with greater community involvement and increased focus on delivery. More detailed timescales are set out within the 2025 Development Plan Scheme but are summarised below. With the main headline being the first planning authority in Scotland to successfully pass through the Gatecheck process.

2023	Data Gathering	Gathering data to inform direction of plan and engagement with communities and stakeholders
2024	Publish Evidence Report	Publish Evidence Report and submit to Scottish Ministers for review (a step referred to as a "gatecheck").Following approval by Council on 24 April 2024 the Evidence Report was submitted to the Scottish Government Division for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA). On 26 August 2024 notification was received that the Reporter appointed by Scottish Ministers found the evidence report to be sufficient to enable the planning authority to prepare its Local Development.
2025	Prepare Proposed Plan	ongoing
2026	Publish and consult on Proposed Plan	On target
2027	Examination and adoption	On target

Regional Spatial Strategy

Moray Council has an agreed an indictive Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to be put in place.

Local Development Plan Evidence Report

The Moray Local Development Plan 2027 Evidence Report was approved by Council on 24 April 2024. This was submitted to the Scottish Government Division for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) for the Gatecheck. On 26 August 2024 notification was received that the Gatecheck was completed and that the Reporter was satisfied that the evidence report contains sufficient information to enable the planning authority to prepare the local development plan.

The Evidence Report sets out the baseline information that will inform the new Moray LDP. The Report contains a summary of what the evidence means for the new LDP. In addition to the Evidence Report, the Council has prepared planning guidance on Carbon, Biodiversity and Community Wealth Building to aide interpretation of NPF4, although outwith the reporting period.

Extensive engagement has informed the evidence base for the new Moray LDP. The Engagement Statement within the Evidence Report sets out in detail how the views of the groups specified in the Act (children and young people, disabled people, gypsy's and travellers, Community Council's, the public at large and key agencies) have been sought and taken into account.

Local Development Plan Policy – Appeal/Judicial Review

In the reporting period 2023/24 there were 3 appeals to the Scottish Government, of which 2 were upheld. None however pointed toward any deficiency in local development plan policies. One was for a certificate of lawful use, and the other upheld appeal related make differing conclusion about interpretation and weighting of policies.

Attribute 7

The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Does the planning authority have a data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use digital approaches to engagement, including website, social media and other platforms?

Narrative

E-Planning Portal

Supported by the services Systems Support team, the online submission of applications is working well for Moray Council, with regular uses (architects and developers) now consistently using the portal for submissions including post submission information (e.g. Non-material Variation Requests). As noted in the accompanying statistics 97% of applications were submitted online in 2023/24.

Detail	2022/23	2023/24
On Line Submissions	812	864
Paper Submissions	51	58

Data Governance

Moray Council has a number of guides and policies relating to management and data governance, and the planning function of the Council adheres to these. Both planning teams seek to comply with GDPR legislative requirements, and supporting administration staff have specific guidance about the redaction of personal information, signatures, addresses applied to published documents and online planning application information. Similarly for committee reports, post decision the Councils Committee Services staff ensure that any information such as objectors addresses are not published. Redaction of documents published on the e-planning portal is a daily role of the Technical Planning Assistants and supporting administrative staff.

Part of the data governance is an ongoing review of data retention and storage capacity. Matters such as proper version control, avoidance of duplication etc. are all approaches being taken to reduce the storage requirements of data held.

Interactive Web Mapping, Geographical Information Systems

The Council provides a variety of interactive maps, including the current Moray Local Development Plan 2020, which enables detailed examination of designations and constraints by the public. Additional maps relevant to the planning process are also accessible online, such as ward and community council boundaries, statutory designations, and other information. These maps allow the public to evaluate their position or site of interest in relation to the available data layers.

Supported by the Systems Support team within the Economic Growth & Development, there is a highly integrated GIS mapping system which pulls through all constraints and planning histories directly into case files once plotted in the Uniform database.

Interactive mapping also forms a useful resource in those contributing to the local development plan and local place plan formulation process. It allows the public, in their own time to view constraints, designations and other information at their own pace.

Digital Technology

Greater use and reliance of hybrid or wholly virtual meetings has been enabled via the widespread adoption of Microsoft Teams software, which see many if not most interactions occurring via virtual meetings. Where Moray Council has sought to rationalise its estate, and now most staff work in a hybrid working pattern (home and office, with hot desking) virtual meetings have become the norm.

Moray Council already makes good use of the Idox Uniform database for Development Management with a high level of integration with processes. All letters, reports and decisions are generated through Uniform, with imbedded templates kept up to date and used widely by all officers ensuring consistency across the team. Uniform condition Monitoring and Enforcement modules are also utilised within Moray, and provide a focal points for storing and recording date on non-application processes carried out by the team.

Moray Council Development Management also utilises the Uniform Enterprise module to track and monitor all stages of the planning application from receipt through to discharge of conditions. The process is broken down into a series of active tasks which must be undertaken in order to progress to the next stage, and this has enabled all development management officers to track the progress of their applications. Such tasks include site visit date, population of policy fields in consideration screens and other useful markers. This has aided officers in prioritising task and ensure no steps are overlooked.

Attribute 8

The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority planning have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes?
- What % of planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review?
- Does the planning authority have an up to date Enforcement Charter in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to resolve enforcement cases?

Narrative

Ability to determine gain within timescales

The changes to the planning system, most notably the two layers of policy requirements brought in by National Planning Framework 4 has added some additional complexity to the planning application process.

As mentioned elsewhere, with the remit of planning now including a range of matters including carbon balance, biodiversity gain, and community wealth building. Determination of applications is dependent upon the ability of applicants and the planning authority to receive and assess specialist submissions. In 2023 Moray Council had in place a Climate Change Team, Economic Growth Officer who in part assist in reviewing Biodiversity plans, Carbon assessments and Community Wealth Building plans. Performance delivery relies on the timescales being met by consultees external to the council, some delays are experienced with external consultees such as the Health & Safety Executive.

Decision Making

In terms of the average number of weeks taken to determine planning applications is meeting the timescales it set itself within PPF 12 2022/23 and the figures for 2023/24 and shown in the tables above on page 11. Moray Council in the reporting year was achieving green lights in terms of performance/headline indictors set out by the Scottish Government such that is was able to make decisions within the required timeframes. Moray Council is also meeting the development plan timescales, given the stage they are at indicated in Attribute 6 above. Of note external factors like resource pressures on external consultees, was becoming more evident.

In the year 2023/24 Moray Council Local Review Board considered 16 appeals, of which 9 original decisions were overturned. In the same period 3 appeals were lodged with the Scottish Government Directorate for Planning Appeals, one dismissed, one upheld and one withdrawn.

As detailed under Attribute 4, LRB appeals have also been determined on average at 10.7 weeks from the date of submission, and is considered to be a reasonable decision timescale from submission to determination given the need to notify interested parties and await responses from these where necessary.

Enforcement Charter/Cases

The Enforcement Charter was reviewed and updated in 2024. In 2023/24 Enforcement cases are managed by a Planning Enforcement Officer and Condition Compliance Officer who covered the most of Moray, but of note the Cairngorms National Park Authority covering the south of Moray has its own planning enforcement officer. Moray Council Enforcement Officers sought to comply with the Charter particularly in terms of initial content and site visitation, which often contributed to the resolution of enforcement matters and led to matters being resolved or regulated.

Enforcement Statistics

Detail	2023/24	2022/23
Enforcement Cases Received	332	313
Breaches Resolved	353	334
Enforcement Notices Served	3	15

Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	1
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	3
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes	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 7: Review how data is stored moving from existing server to share point	SPD & DM Manger	Medium	3	Internal resources
Attribute 7: Review of Planning Web pages. Improve Elected Member access to GIS mapping	SPD & DM Manager	High	1	Internal resources
Attribute 8: Review committee presentations moving to power points slides to aid understanding of proposals	SPD & DM Manager	High	1	Internal
Attribute 8: Review DM procedures and use of Uniform	DM Manager	High	1	Internal
Attribute 8: Review of handling reports to ensure effective and efficient decision-making. Use of shorter, focused reports. Review standard conditions	DM Manager	Medium	3	Internal

ENGAGE

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 9

The planning authority has good customer care

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to offer pre-application advice where it is requested?
- Has the planning authority held regular engagement events with developers and communities?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that customers are satisfied with the service offer by the planning authority?

Narrative

Moray pre-application advice service for householder, local and major developments (which includes hosting a meeting with relevant consultees to discuss virtually or face to face the proposed development). These meetings provide meaningful pre-application engagement with planners and main consultees i.e. Strategic Planning & Development, Transportation, Environmental Health and Flood Risk Management. This assists applicants to prepare planning submissions with supporting information to comply with national and local policy and guidance. As a result this improves determination times due to consultees not requiring to seek additional information.

The Council also provides an “Informal Determination” service, which offers a more “informal” application to confirm whether planning consent is required for householder/smaller scale development in lieu of a Certificate of Lawfulness application. This service does not require plans to the usual validation standard, and is charged at a much lower rate via discretionary fees (£66 in 2023/2024).

Our website offers a range of pre-application advice and guidance from the Strategic Planning and Development Section providing detailed strategies and supplementary guidance on a range of policy issues. There are also a number of masterplans online, covering specific areas, which give detailed advice to prospective developers.
In the period 2023/24 Moray Council received

2023/24	Number
Local Pre-application enquiries received.	73
Major pre-application enquiries received.	14
General enquiries	20
Informal Determinations (is permission required?)	619
Listed Building advice	6

The Development Management Team also operates a desk duty service, where members of the public could telephone or email general enquiries to a development management planning staff member. This service is well utilised, receiving 971 calls in 2023/24, recognising that some customers wish to talk to staff despite the availability of online service.

Customer care

Moray Council cares about what our customers think. We want to put customers at the heart of our services, and aim to give those who receive services from us:

- Options in how they access our services, whether this is by telephone, online, in writing or face to face
- Services that are designed around their needs, taking their views into account
- A responsive service, where issues are resolved at the first point of contact whenever possible
- A consistent customer experience in line with corporate customer care standards

To achieve this, we have developed a Customer Focus Strategy (PDF) and a Customer Charter. The Strategy provides a route map showing how the Council will listen to and learn from our customers, improving services and the Charter describes the standards which we promise to meet, depending on how you contact us.

In the period 2023/24 there was no specific customer survey or questionnaire. Both the Strategic Planning and Development team and Development Management Team are committed to customer care and a responsive to and engage with individual customers on a routine basis. Due to sickness and a lack of resources there are delays in returning phone calls and responding to e-mails and this has been added as an action into the improvement plan.

Attribute 10

The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
- Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes? Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Has the planning authority engaged with a good representation of the community including young people, gypsies and travellers, people with protected characteristics, including disability, race, age, sex and sexual orientation, and including people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds?
- Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

Narrative

Extensive engagement was undertaken to support the preparation of the Evidence Report. The graphic on page 37 sets out the key stakeholders and target audience for engagement, the varied methods used that were tailored to specific stakeholders and an indication of the reach of engagement.

A particular focus was placed on engaging with children and young people and this reached over 650 children and young people in P5 to S6. Primary aged engagement focused predominantly on play spaces working with children from two primary schools in the north and south of Elgin. Pupils were given a cut out of a t-shirt for top things about play areas and a cut out of trousers for pants things about play areas as a fun way of capturing their comments. In addition to this mapping of where children play was undertaken for Elgin North and Elgin South. The information gathered directly influenced the approach to identifying informal play areas for the Play Sufficiency Assessment. An audit and site visit to a local park was also undertaken by primary school pupils from one school to inform survey work for the PSA.

Two local living inspired events were undertaken with local secondary schools in Elgin and Aberlour. One of the events was a full school day with 600 students having sessions with experts on topics such as renewable energy, active travel, biodiversity, infrastructure and housing in the morning and using this knowledge to design their own 20 minute neighbourhood in the afternoon. The key messages that came out of the Elgin session were the need to address

homelessness with more affordable housing, bringing existing homes back into use and specialist housing for the elderly. Increasing biodiversity enhancement opportunities by increasing the number of allotments, ponds, wildlife areas and encouraging wildlife into existing parks featured heavily. The need for more recreational facilities was also a high priority including more leisure and sports facilities including astro pitches, basketball courts and swimming pools. As part of the session pupils completed a Place Survey based on the Place Standard and over 10,000 comments were gathered. The key headlines reinforced the desire for more recreational facilities that are well maintained, secure and safe. A shorter version of this engagement was undertaken at Speyside High School in a rural area with a smaller group of 35 young people. The key messages that came across were slightly different from Elgin. Promoting tourism opportunities for the local economy was identified as a way to capitalise on the River Spey for water sports and Speyside as a brand. Public transport was highlighted as an issue, specifically the lack of evening and weekend services and connectivity to train services to access Inverness and Aberdeen.

The Council worked in partnership with Moray UHI to develop/design a climate change game that would be delivered through an app for an audience of children and young people. Computing and Digital Design students created graphic content for a concept app setting out strategies to address climate change and the Council chose the best concept. Due to issues with resources, licensing and data sharing the app was never fully developed.

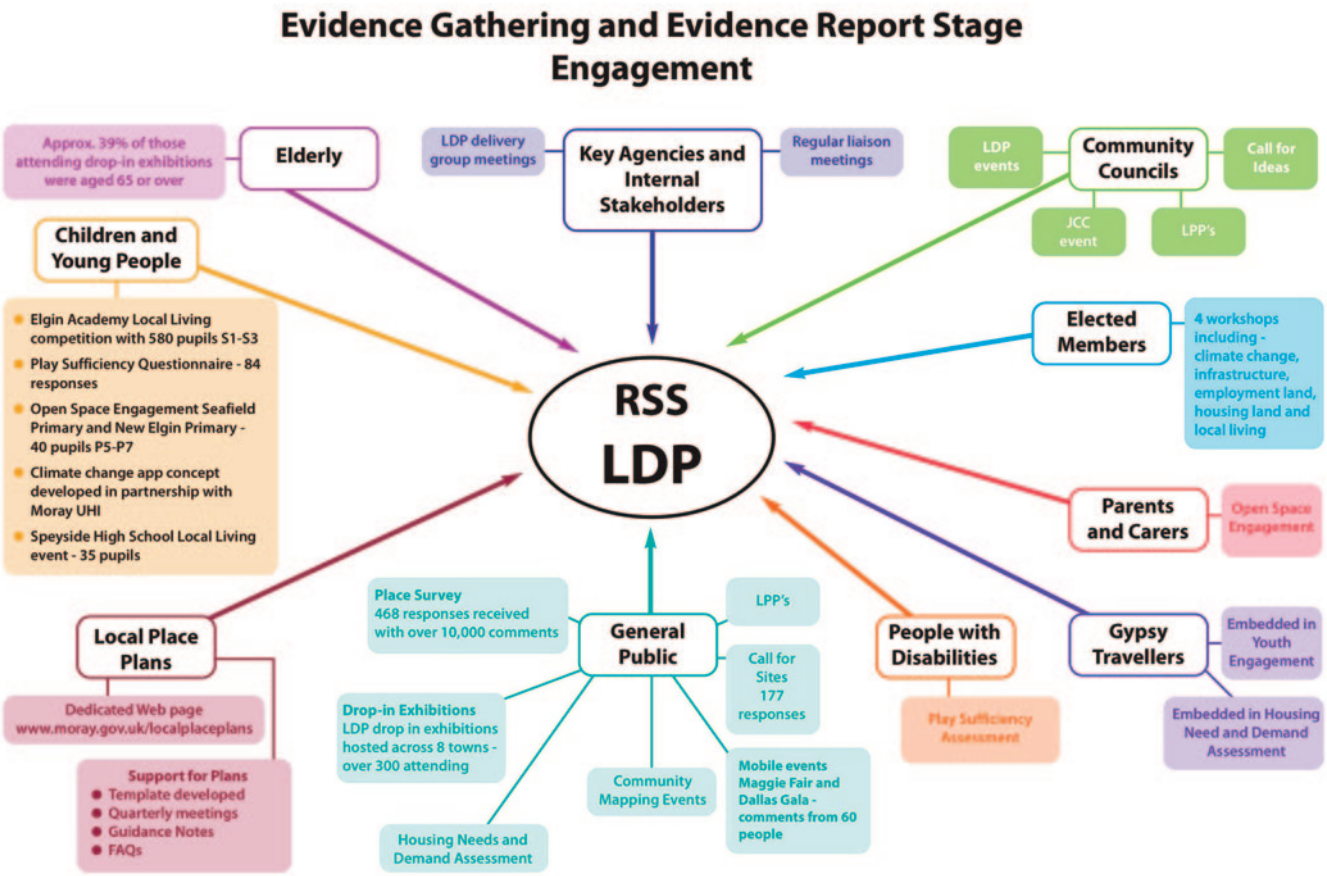
Engagement with an Additional Support Needs (ASN) parent and carer group through a Play Sufficiency Assessment Survey highlighted the limited inclusive and wheelchair accessible play opportunities within Moray. The comments provided identified the needs of different groups with reference to the needs of children with autism, mobility issues and wheelchair users. As part of the engagement for the Housing Need and Demand Assessment a survey was undertaken as part of wider work to inform requirements for wheelchair accessible housing.

Interviews were undertaken with gypsy/traveller families on private sites during the preparation of the Council's Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA).

Community Councils were invited to attend engagement events and to make submissions to the Call for Ideas to highlight the key issues and concerns of their communities. A meeting was held with the Joint Community Councils in February 2023 on the new LDP process.

Eight drop in exhibitions were hosted across Moray from March to September 2023. Council Officers also attended two annual community events. The drop in events were widely promoted through press releases, social media posts and working with colleagues in the Community Support Unit to circulate to local networks. Overall, the events were well attended, and officers engaged with over 360 individuals.

In February 2023, a Call for Ideas was launched which sought ideas on how to shape Moray. The Call for Ideas was promoted through press releases and on the Council's social media with emails sent to all contacts on the LDP mailing lists. A total of 195 submissions were received and there are similarities with comments raised at the LDP Drop in Exhibition events.



Local Place Plans

To allow communities to have a more direct role in the decisions that influence their place, when preparing the next Local Development Plan the Moray Council will consider any registered Local Place Plan. These are community-led plans, setting out proposals for the development and use of land and offer communities the opportunity to develop proposals for their local area, expressing their aspirations and ambitions for future change. Once they have been registered by the planning authority, there is a legal responsibility to take them into account in the preparation of the Local Development Plan.

The Strategic Planning and Development team have hosted regular collaborative support sessions with community groups, sharing learning on Local Place Plans.

In February 2023, the Council wrote out to all Community Council's and issued a press release and social media posts highlighting the opportunity for constituted community bodies to formally express an interest in preparing a Local Place Plan (LPP). The support offered by the Council to assist communities to prepare their LPP includes the creation of a dedicated webpage www.moray.gov.uk/localplaceplans and email address. The webpage includes a FAQ's section, links to Local Place Plan (LPP) Scottish Government guidance, a resources section to signpost communities to information including up to date community plans. A LPP template and engagement table have also been created and added to the webpage as well as being circulated to all community groups who have expressed an interest to date. In addition to this a series of quarterly meetings have been hosted by the Strategic Planning and Development Team. An online session was held in September 2023 providing an overview of the requirements of LPP and timeframes for submission.

E-development portal

As discussed under attribute 7, 97% of planning applications were submitted online in 2023/24 and this is a reflection of the encouragement and support given to regular applicants to use the online service. This includes encouragement to submit amended plans, additional supporting information via the portal, rather than via paper or email submissions.

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

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: Embed improved timescales for customer e-mail and phone call responses	SPD & DM Manager	High	1	Internal
Attribute 9: Annual stakeholder workshop with Agents /consultees	SPD & DM Manager	Medium	1	Internal
Attribute 10: Annual Community Council stakeholder workshop	SPD & DM Manager	Medium	1	Internal
Attribute 10: Prepare a plan to engage with Secondary schools on the role Planning plays in communities	SPD Manager	High	3	Internal

PLACE

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 11

The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Is the planning authority aware of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes, the evidence that sits behind them and is it using them in decision-making processes?
- Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places and is implementing them?

Narrative

Moray Council embraces Place and Wellbeing outcomes and its ambitions such as delivery of local living and 20-minute neighbourhood that are required by NPF4 policies.

Delivering Sustainable, Liveable and Productive Places

Moray Council has prepared its Evidence Report for the new Local Development Plan (LDP). The Evidence Report presents the baseline information that will inform the new Moray LDP. Extensive engagement has informed the evidence base for the new Moray LDP. The Engagement Statement sets out in detail how the views of the groups specified in the Act (children and young people, disabled people, gypsy's and travellers, Community Council's, the public at large and key agencies) have been sought and taken into account. Simultaneously, the Council is providing as much support and assistance as practically possible, to local community groups who have expressed an interest in preparing a Local Place Plan (LPP).

The approach taken in the forthcoming LDP will accord with the approach set out in NPF4 and the latest Scottish Guidance and thinking about how we deliver sustainable, livable and productive places. There are a variety of tools in place to deliver this and in the period 2023/24 the Council progressed various development and implementation of masterplans for large scale development areas, as well as Town Centre Improvement Plans and the Elgin City Centre Masterplan.

An effective tool used consistently for larger residential or mixed use local and major planning applications is the Placemaking Quality Audit, which seeks to ensure a range of matters are covered to create "successful, healthy places that support good physical and mental health, help reduce health inequalities, improve people's wellbeing, safeguard the environment and support economic development." Policy PP1 Placemaking, Moray Local Development Plan 2020 is an important primary policy. The below diagram illustrates the matters that are covered under the quality audit process and these marry with the aims and policy requirements of NPF4 Liveable Places policies 14 – 22. Delivering Successful Places through Quality Auditing won the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning (SAQP) in 2019 and has been instrumental in delivering high quality development in Moray.

These have seen developments approved and delivered which host distinct character areas, with a higher biodiversity value, feature a reduction in on street car dominance and generally providing a pleasant, productive living environment with access to services.

Design Principle	Audit	Comments	Mitigation
1. Connections			
2. Public Transport			
3. Safer Environment			
4. Car Parking			
5. Legibility/Street Hierachy			
6. Character and Identity			
7. Housing Mix			
8. Access to Facilities and Amenities			
9. Natural Features			
10. Open Space			
11. Biodiversity			
12. Landscaping			

Both planning teams in Moray, in carrying out their strategic and regulatory roles, work closely with colleagues in Housing, Education, Economic Growth and other disciplines within the Council to bring together other objectives and identified needs to address the Design Principles of the Quality Audit process.

Moray Council operates a Developer Obligations process where financial contributions sought from applicants to mitigate the impact of their development on the existing infrastructure and facilities to ensure there is no negative impact on existing residents. When a development takes place, there may be a need for infrastructure and facilities to accompany it. This can include Education, Healthcare, Transportation, and Sports provision. Provision has also been made for contributions to be sought towards Community and Recreational Facilities, Public Realm and Public Art; and City and Town Centres. This process further ensure that developments do not diminish the amenity or quality of life of existing communities host to new development.

Attribute 12

The planning authority supports the delivery of consented development

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority provided clear and proportionate expectations of Section 75 agreements and set these out in the LDP and pre-application discussions and they are concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
- Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
- Does the planning authority have an ambitious local housing land requirement that exceeds the Minimum All Tenure Housing land requirements in NPF4 and is it on track to support delivery?
- Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
- Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

Section 75 Agreements

Moray Council proactively manages Section 75 legal agreements and the planning service works collaboratively with Legal Services to secure timely agreements being issued. It is noted however that the time taken to issue legal agreements is also reliant on the applicant and their agents. Delays are often experienced in awaiting the signing of legal agreements by various parties such as landowners and also due to our own legal resources.

Developer Obligation officers are a fundamental part of the decision-making process preparing reports, requesting viability assessment and ensure compliance with signed S.75 agreements. In 2023/24 there were 17 Section 75 legal agreements and smaller number of modifications to existing agreements.

Planning Conditions

Planning conditions are applied only where necessary and in line with the relevant circular regarding the use of conditions. We have a set of model planning conditions that aids officers to ensure compliance with the relevant tests. Moray Council in 2023/24 had a dedicated condition compliance officer who works closely with the Planning Enforcement Officer. This includes a process for vetting consented developments, where the Notification of Initiation of Development had been received, and files are checked to see of any outstanding suspensive conditions have been satisfied. If not, the outstanding matters are raised with the applicant.

Housing Land Supply

Moray Councils preferred approach to supply of housing land is one accommodating growth reflecting the Councils wider aspirations. The current and future local development plans sought to ensure generous provision of housing across all settlement in Moray, including identified sites within existing small rural groupings. Regular Housing Land Audits inform the extent of local housing land needed and carried forward for future designation.

The Evidence Report for the new Local Development Plan sets out the housing land requirement for the new Plan, which exceeds the Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) set out in NPF4 of 3,450 units for the 10 year period. The 15 year housing land requirement from the base line of 2024 through to 2037 is 5,732 units which equates to 3,730 units over a 10 year period. A target of 10% of housing completions over the 10 year Plan period (5% of these within town centres) is also set out and agreed within the Evidence Report.

Delivery of Development on the Ground

Beyond housing, the Strategic Planning and Development team routinely assess the supply demand and future needs for a range of different types of development, such as industrial and business. This is contained with the accepted 2024 Evidence Report for the next local Development Plan. One sector of demand that became increasingly evident over 2023/24 was the need to designate land (often in rural locations) for energy, bio- energy production and energy infrastructure has significantly increased. Pressure from battery storage developments, electricity transmission infrastructure, compressors, photovoltaic developments, aerobic digestion plants etc. has seen such developments apply pressure to farmland and encroach near existing electricity substations (rural and urban).

Processing agreements

Processing agreements are used routinely in Moray by the development management section, and have proven useful in keeping applicants, consultees on track to meet agreement determination timescales and committee deadlines. These have however not prevented other factors beyond the applicants or councils control from preventing determination with the agree timeframes. External factors such as difficulty obtaining specialist consultant advice can effect the determination of applications.

2023/24 processing agreements	Total Number of Decisions	% Within Agreed Timescales
TOTAL	139	64.7%
Major Applications	4	75.0%
Local Applications	117	66.7%
EIA Applications	1	100.0%
Other Applications	17	47.1%

Improvement Action Plan (Place theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	2
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: Prepare a plan to focus on brownfield sites, vacant land, empty homes and re-use of existing properties	SPD Manager	Short	3	Across all services
Attribute 11 & 12: Re-engage with RTPI and Planning Awards to promote high quality development in Moray	SPD & DM Manager	High	1	Internal resources