



# **NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK**

## **Performance Assessment South Lanarkshire Council Cohort 3**

**May 2025**

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## Introduction

### Overview of South Lanarkshire Council

South Lanarkshire Council covers an area of 1772km<sup>2</sup> from the boundary with Glasgow to the Southern Uplands and is Scotland's fifth largest authority in terms of population.

Historic assets and natural features include New Lanark World Heritage Site, 30 Conservation Areas, Natura sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. South Lanarkshire is a well-connected area through major road and rail networks and attracts a wide range of house builders and commercial development.

Challenges affecting our Council area include economic restructuring, an ageing population and climate change. However, the vision of both the Council Plan and current Local Development Plan seek to address these challenges, and Planning is at the forefront of this.



*Figure 1: Extracts from the Council Plan Connect 2022-2027 and LDP2*

The Planning and Regulatory Service within SLC is part of the Community and Enterprise Resource which is responsible for diverse services that impact significantly on the quality of life experienced by residents, businesses, and visitors to South Lanarkshire.

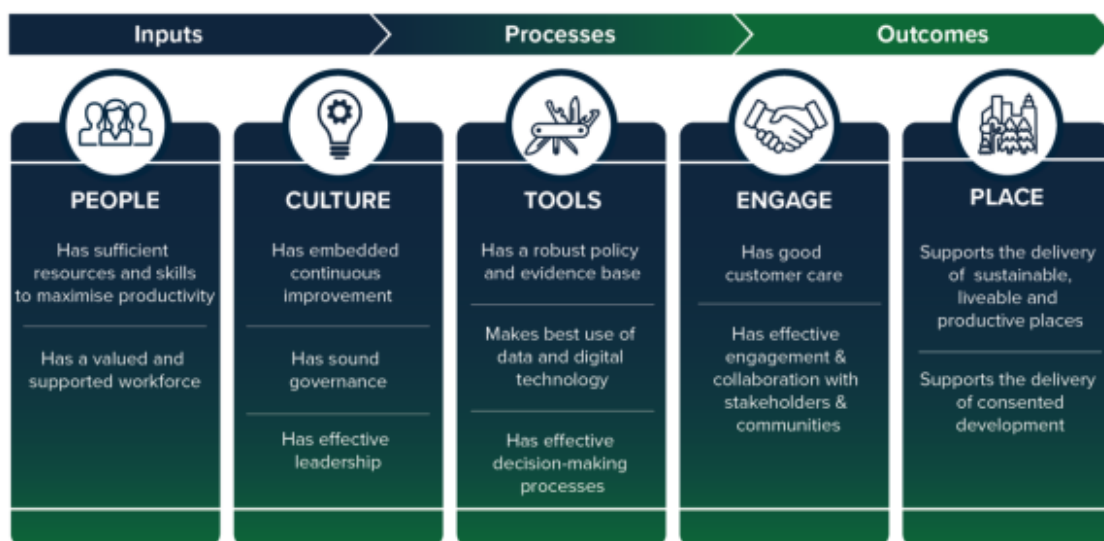
A service plan for Planning and Regulatory Services is updated annually. This sets out our main performance measures against our outcomes; and describes the key actions we will take in the coming year to respond to the challenges ahead and improve services and outcomes.

## Overview of Self-Assessment

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced the new statutory requirement for planning authorities to annually report on their performance and improvement plan. South Lanarkshire Council is pleased to be involved in Cohort 3 of the National Planning Improvement Framework 2023/24. This report replaces the previously submitted Planning Performance Framework, which was last submitted for the year 2022/23.

Undertaking the self-assessment enabled the Planning Service at SLC to review current practice, identifying our strengths and weaknesses, and allowing us to establish actions for improvement to support delivery of a high-quality planning service.

This document follows the template provided by the Improvement Service and includes a self-assessment of how our service performed in 2023/24 against 12 attributes of a high quality planning service, based upon 5 themes of people, culture, tools, engagement, and place.



*Figure 2: Themes and attributes of a high quality planning service*

As part of the self-assessment process, a narrative for each attribute provides context to our performance, and a score on our progress has been provided based upon the matrix below.

 PRIORITISE	 REVIEW	 DEVELOP	 BUILD UPON	 CONSOLIDATE
No progress	Making limited progress	Making fair progress	Making good progress	Making excellent progress
5	4	3	2	1
Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken. Engage with NPI Learn from others	Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others	Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation	Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others	Share learning with others

*Figure 3: NPIF Self-assessment scoring matrix*

Following the self-assessment, a series of actions were listed in the accompanying improvement action plan.

## Overview of Peer Review

This report (including the self-assessment and improvement actions) was peer reviewed at a meeting which took place on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> May at Low Parks Museum in Hamilton. This involved early engagement with our partner authority, West Lothian Council, and a meeting of a Peer Review Group, comprised of the following participants:

- Fraser Carlin- Chief Planning Officer SLC
- Jane Weir- Planning Performance Team Leader SLC
- Tony Finn- Policy Manager SLC
- Councillor Richard Nelson- Chair of Planning Committee
- Councillor Gerry Convery- Depute Chair of Planning Committee
- Jonathan Read- SLC Housing
- Stuart Laird- SLC Roads
- Fraser Jack- SLC Roads
- Heather Robertson- SLC Community Engagement
- Susan Rintoul and Darius Jack- Improvement Service
- Wendy McCorriston- West Lothian Council
- Kevin Murphy- Homes for Scotland
- Graeme Kerr and Laura Guild- Bellway
- David Ritchie Architect
- Holly Brown- Historic Environment Scotland
- Catherine Stewart- Network Rail

Following a healthy discussion where our performance and improvement actions were critically evaluated, minor changes were suggested around the theme of culture. We have self-assessed ourselves as a score of 4, 4 and 3 for attributes 3-5. The members of the peer review meeting considered that all of these should be increased to 2, 2 and 3 respectively.

In summary the feedback surrounding this was that operational meetings with planners are helpful for developers (both private and SLC housing). Discussion surrounding Elected Member training took place, as well as praise for the effective leadership of the service. While such feedback has been taken on board, we still consider that the scoring is reflective of the reporting period 2023/24, and improvements since then would result in a higher scoring. The actions remain relevant for that period and beyond, therefore the scores have not been updated.

Otherwise, general comments regarding communication and pre-application discussion with planners, digital transformation, training, enforcement, built heritage reviews, the use of processing agreements, public engagement and developer contributions were raised and discussed in detail. However, the peer group felt that the scores were accurate with no significant amendments to the action plan suggested.

There was considerable discussion around the matter of discretionary fees for matters such as pre-application advice. This is something that the service will review in detail and as a result will undertake a project evaluation.

We are therefore pleased to submit this to the Scottish Government and to work towards delivering the identified improvement actions over the next reporting year and beyond.



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 received 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

### Staff Structure

### Staff Structure

South Lanarkshire Council's Planning Service sits within the Community and Enterprise Resource of the Council directed by David Booth. Community and Enterprise comprises

- Facilities, Waste and Grounds Service
- Planning and Regulatory Services
- Roads, Transportation and Fleet Services
- Enterprise and Sustainable Development Services



The Chief Planning Officer, Fraser Carlin, is the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services which comprises of the Planning Service, Building Standards and Environmental Health. He is a Tier 3 Manager.

During the reporting period, Planning was structured into Development Management Area Teams and a Headquarters Team as shown in figure 4:

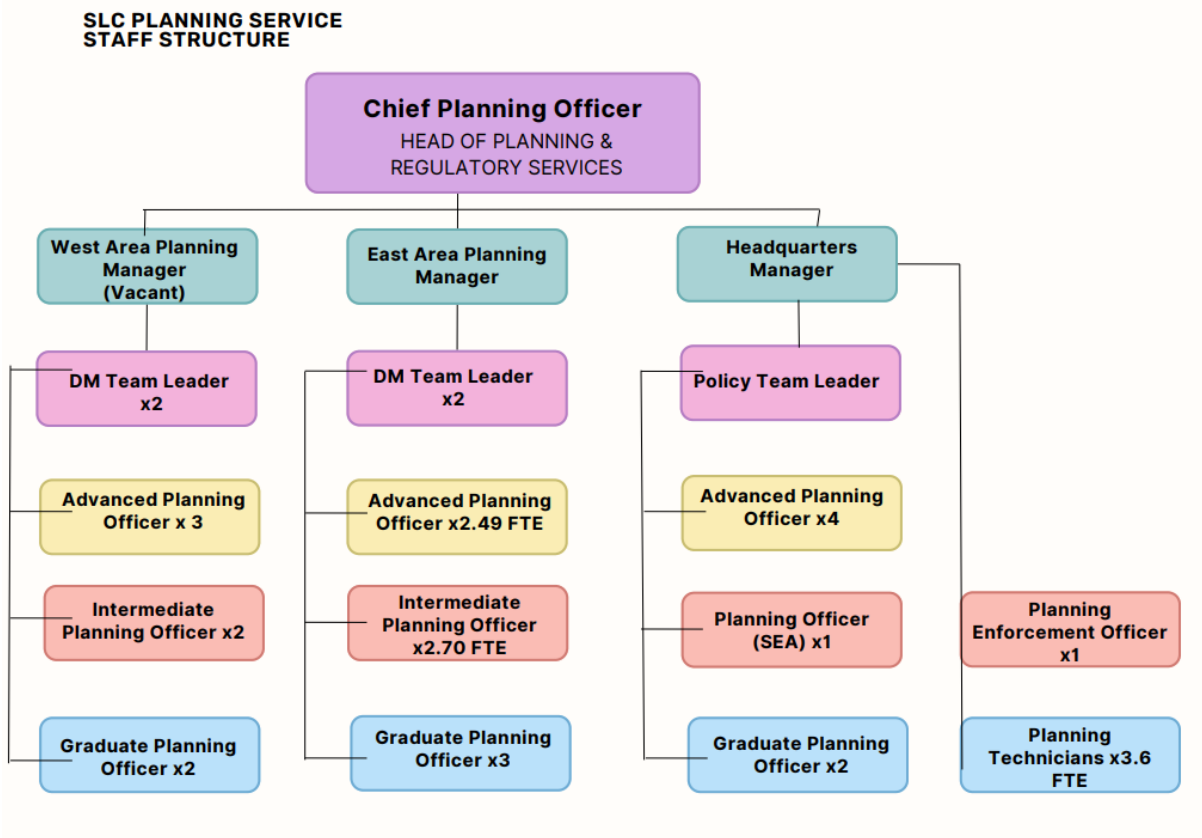


Figure 4: Staff structure

From Graduate to Advanced Officer the complexity of work increases. Area Managers and Team Leaders were responsible for committee, authorising and delegating tasks, responding to complaints and Freedom of Information requests, staffing responsibilities, and mentoring as well as supporting the other teams and services. The Headquarters team were responsible for development planning policy, enforcement, renewables, and minerals. Included in this team are planning technicians and an SEA officer.

### Unfilled posts

Resourcing the planning service is a national concern. Within the feedback received for the 2022/23 PPFs the Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning commented that resourcing remained a key priority affecting planning performance. Similarly, The Future

Planner's Report commissioned by the Scottish Government outlined the key issues with resourcing the planning service, including staff and skills shortages, retirement, reduced higher education and promotion of the role.

These factors are considered to have affected the retention of staff at SLC, as staff retired, and others successfully gained promoted posts at other authorities (where there are also several vacancies). While this led to opportunities to internally promote staff, the loss of experienced staff has led to vacancies at advanced level, and the lack of planners coming through education at graduate level compounds recruitment issues.

At this time, the Planning Authority comprised 34.7 full time equivalent staff (31 full time staff and 5 part time staff). There were 5.6 unfilled posts comprising:

- 1x West Area Manager
- 2x Advanced Planning Officer
- 1x Graduate Officer
- 1.6 Enforcement Officer

Staffing and resourcing remains a key priority for the service. It is the intention to fill the Area Manager role imminently. It is proposed to appoint a dedicated Developer Obligations Officer and consider appointment of a new Data Analyst post (as discussed further in this report). These would be specialist positions that provide data provision and assist in the delivery of consented applications, to further support a high quality planning service.

### **Age profile**

The age profile of staff is shown in table 1.

<b>Age Bracket</b>	<b>Number of Staff</b>
25-30	5
31-40	8
41-50	11
51-60	7
60+	5

*Table 1: Age profile of staff*

This identifies that of 36 members of staff within the Planning Service, one third of staff are aged over 50, with 5 members of staff over 60 years old. Only 14% of staff are aged 30 and under, which aligns with the findings of The Future Planner's Report 2022 with regard to an ageing workforce and the risk of filling posts and loss of expertise and knowledge.

### **Professional Membership**

In terms of RTP1 professional membership, all officers at Advanced level and above hold full accreditation as well as one Intermediate Officer in the Development Management West Area

team. This is over half of the workforce, which is a positive position. Some graduate planners are also working towards submission of their APC within the required licentiate timescales.

One Team Leader is an RTPI Accredited APC Assessor who held engagement and workshop sessions which were well attended by graduates and intermediate planners across all teams. This is a valuable resource, and one that encourages professional development of staff.

## Resourcing

As outlined in figure 4 above, within the service are 5 Team Leaders, 15.19 DM planning staff, 6 Policy Planners, 3.6 technical staff, 1 SEA Officer, and 1 Enforcement Officer. The service has no specialist teams.

There is a lack of professional specialists in terms of the following roles:

- Built heritage
- Natural heritage
- Uniform technical staff
- Digital specialists
- Continuous Improvement champion(s)
- Drainage specialist

While we lack specialist officers, we have representation on the following external groups:

- HoPS Development Management Sub Committee
- HoPS Development Planning Sub Committee
- HoPS Energy & Resources
- HoPS Performance and Practice- chaired by the Chief Planning Officer
- HoPS representation on Flood Risk and Land Use Planning (organised by SEPA)
- RTPI APC Assessor
- Planning Aid Scotland Board Member
- Conservation Officers Group members

We have trained several planners to conduct daylighting tests to minimise reliance on external advice. This has also supported the upskilling of staff, particularly in relation to advanced digital software, and it allows for efficiencies when assessing planning applications as this can be carried out internally, with less onus on developers/agents/applicants.

During 2023 some structural changes took place, as well as a change in role responsibility. When the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services was appointed in January 2023, the structure remained as above, however into the 2023/24 reporting period the responsibilities for committee were undertaken by the Head of Service. This role is also known as the Chief Planning Officer since the requirement of The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 was introduced (see attribute 5 for further information on this role).

In 2022/23 Planning Enforcement Officers successfully obtained permanent Graduate Planning Officer positions in both DM and Policy Teams, meaning only one full time Enforcement Officer remained in the HQ team. As such, the role of planning enforcement was transferred from the

HQ team to the area DM teams in October 2023<sup>1</sup>. This is being implemented to support the upskilling of DM planners who have gained experience in enforcement, and it has freed up capacity of the HQ team to support delivery of the LDP. This change requires to be monitored over time to consider the implications of this restructure.

During this reporting period the key officer who had responsibility for Uniform upgrades and systems review retired, leaving a further skills gap. This post was filled by an internal administration supervisor in a varied role as Technical Support Officer. In light of this, approval was granted within the recruitment budget to appoint 2 Data Analysts. The aim of this role was to support both DM and Policy in terms of obtaining and presenting spatial data and supporting a long term review of planning systems which includes coding of Uniform. Advertisement of these posts attracted in the region of 80 applicants. Short lists were made, and interviews took place in February 2024. Two officers (one with a qualified planning degree and relevant planning work experience) are due to commence in their roles in summer 2024.

Planning Support staff responsible for administration tasks comprise 4.5 full time equivalent officers. While responsible for Planning and Building Standards tasks, structurally they sit out with the Planning Service, within the Enterprise and Sustainability Service, managed by Alison Brown who is a professional member of the RTPI and is Head of Economic Development, Sustainability and Support Services within SLC.

## Budgets and Income

Income generated through the submission of planning applications is shown in table 2. This increased from the previous year's figures by £122,000. Reasoning for this difference can be attributed to a combination of fee increases and submission of larger applications.

Year	Number of Applications	Income from Planning Applications
2022/23	1737	£1,532,000
2023/24	1657	£1,654,000

*Table 2: Income from planning applications*

No capital budget exists for Planning, only revenue generated through income as shown in table 2. The service budget for 2022/23 was approximately £1,675,000, increased to £1,725,000 for 2023/24.

The approval rate of planning applications decreased from 98.9% in 2021/22, to 98.4% in 2022/23, then to 84.7% in 2023/24- when a proportion of the refusals related to legacy cases which had been continued for a number of years. However, it is noted that the appeal rate for applications increased from 5 to 10 for Scottish Ministers and 9 to 15 for Local Reviews from 2022/23 to 2023/24. This increase in refusals generated a higher workload as many applications progressed to appeal and this places an onus on planning staff in terms of input into appeals/reviews and the workload of presenting officers at LRB.

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<sup>1</sup> This restructure was formally changed in the 2024/25 reporting year; hence it is not shown on the organogram in figure 4.

Furthermore, increased pre-application discussion surrounding NPF4 and larger committee agendas, together with DM planners undertaking enforcement duties, meant that, despite a reduction in application numbers by 80 from the previous year, an associated reduction in DM workload was not realised.

Notwithstanding, performance timescales (as discussed further below under attribute 8) demonstrate a significant improvement in the reduction of legacy cases, and a slight improvement in the processing of householder applications. However, our performance and timescales regarding major applications reduced.

The budget constraints affected staffing levels continues to affect the performance as the Council would benefit from more experienced staff as well as wider resourcing of services and support staff that feed into the planning process, particularly in relation to major applications and those subject to legal agreements in order to improve timescales. A dedicated Developer Obligations officer will assist with this in the long term.

## Discretionary Fees

In May 2022, a discretionary fee for the submission of non-material variation (NMV) requests for local and major planning applications was introduced at SLC. This fee is charged at £200 per request (with no fee for householder applications). In 2022/23 NMV requests totalling £8,300 additional income was received, and comparatively NMV requests totalling £8,500 additional income was received for 2023/24. While a modest increase of £200 (equating to one additional request), the amount received supports the workload involved for such applications. This was the first trialled discretionary fee implemented, and discussion is underway regarding introducing fees for the discharge of conditions and pre-application advice.

One aim of introducing the fee for NMVs is to ensure agent/applicants submit the best version of their proposal at the first stage, to avoid multiple NMV requests and in turn speed up delivery of development on the ground and to ensure quality design is achieved. It also allowed the work involved with NMVs to be proportionately compensated as this constitutes additional workload tasks which were not funded. We subsequently established a Uniform process for such types of tasks, and an action is to improve the customer service behind this including introducing online payment systems and forms.

## Training

The Planning Service benefits from a healthy training budget of £15,000, which allowed for staff attendance at the following external paid courses:

- RTPI Scottish Young Planners Conference April 2023
- Trees Planning and Development Seminar May 2023
- Planning Skills - NPF4 Biodiversity - Information Sharing Event June 2023
- RTPI Heritage and Conservation Masterclass, November, and December 2023
- Planning Skills - Appeals Training with the DPEA December 2023
- HOPS Webinar - The Role of Environmental Clerk of Works December 2023

- Written Communication for Planning- RTPI January 2024
- Make Space for Girls. Feminist led Town Planning February 2024

We used internal training resources to hold events on NPF4, placemaking, and an overview of LDP3 which were administered by the Policy team at an external Council venue and formed a workshop format. In terms of DM training, workshops on report writing, representations, PD right changes and validation took place informally.

## IT Budgets

It is proven that the lack of GIS and other digital software advances impacts on the performance of the service, as further discussed under attribute 7. Primarily it is evident that there is a lack of specialist skills in coding to allow the Uniform system to function to its full capabilities, and a limited GIS resource means that spatial analysis or data checks cannot be carried out to the best ability. A meeting to share learnings with North Lanarkshire in February 2024 highlighted the fundamental IT limitations of our service, demonstrating the opportunities available for IT improvements, particularly in relation to Uniform, Power BI, and GIS. Discussions have taken place with IT to evaluate our contracts with Uniform and IDOX, and further review of IT budgets in relation to this will be explored in line with procurement contracts.

## Consultee Responses

We have close working relationships with services also within the resource including colleagues in Environmental Health and Roads, who are consulted the most. We work collaboratively with colleagues in Housing and Education to support delivery of local affordable housing sites across the authority and the sustainable refurbishment of a schools (see example under attribute 12). Improving pre-application processes will be fundamental to support further delivery of Council projects like these through further engagement with internal consultees. Externally, regular liaison meetings with SEPA are held.

Reviewing consultee protocols is a priority task for the service. Consultees are consulted via Uniform; however, responses are not consistently submitted with some services using emails, public access, or an internal Objective file management system to respond. Consultees are encouraged to respond within 21 days. Unfortunately, we do not hold data on the response times from all consultees, and this is both a failing in the way consultations are handled and our Uniform reporting mechanisms, as outlined within the IT constraints above.

## Expertise, Evidence, Data

In terms of tapping into expert advice when assessing planning applications, due to the nature of the service structure we can conveniently engage with Building Standards and Environmental Health as they sit under the same Head of Service, meaning regular engagement takes place. We also have good working relationships with services within the wider Community and Enterprise Resource, with monthly liaison meetings held with the Roads Development

Management Team for example, and workshops with Economic Development on projects which engage the Planning Service. However, we have limited internal and Council wide resources. For example, the Council's Flooding team are extremely under resourced, and therefore fail to respond to consultations on time. Similarly, environmental colleagues responsible for all tree related works within the Council are limited in what they can respond to.

In terms of evidence gathering, the Council's next Local Development will be evidence driven with the requirement to prepare the first stage Evidence Report highlighting the need to gather and analyse a wide range of data.

Following the publication of the Scottish Governments guidance on development planning, an exercise was carried out to identify the type of evidence required to inform each of the NPF4 topic areas, who holds that information and how any gaps can be filled.

The Council's Research and Improvement Unit provides analysis and interpretation of large datasets and information systems including official unemployment and employment statistics, data on benefits, the Census of Population and Scottish Government Statistics datasets.

Many of these datasets are contained on an information system holding a wide range of small area information that can be compared with the overall Council and Scottish situation and analysed over time as well as being capable of being aggregated up to produce information for user defined areas. The information is aligned to the council's strategic outcomes: communities and environment, education and learning, children and young people, health and wellbeing, housing and land and our economy.

Other Council services hold extensive information that will aid preparation of the evidence report. Collaboration is taking place with the Community Planning team who have data on SIMDS; Housing Services in respect of the work they carry out on the Local Housing Strategy; Education Services in terms of school catchment areas and capacities of individual schools; and the Health and Social Care Partnership in relation to health indicators. We have also started working with external organisations such as NHS Lanarkshire, Public Health Scotland, VaSLaN (who represent the voluntary sector in South Lanarkshire), the University of West of Scotland and South Lanarkshire College.

Looking forward we will liaise with the Glasgow City Region Intelligence Hub to gather information to inform economic profiles, vacant and derelict land, and town centre health checks. The approved Data Analyst positions discussed above will also support this role going forward.

## 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?

### Narrative

#### Workforce planning strategy

The Council's corporate People Strategy and Workforce Plan set out our longer term people requirements, taking into account our strategic priorities, working environment and service delivery plans. These documents provide us with a strategy and a road map to ensure the council has a flexible, committed, and well-trained workforce to deliver excellent services now and in the future. However, it is noted that the People Strategy and Workforce Plan are both out of date from 2019.

While this is outdated, it identifies the 5 key challenges to workforce planning which are applicable to the Planning Service:

- The Council's Financial Strategy predicts ongoing efficiency savings for the foreseeable future. A key action for the workforce plan will be ensuring that reductions in the council workforce are carefully managed and appropriately targeted
- Services such as IT and Education have skills gap challenges in certain key roles and subject areas
- An aging workforce presents a range of issues for both employer and employee such as increased caring responsibilities (for both children and aging parents); age related health issues, and recruitment and retention challenges as experienced workers retire
- the need for flexible approaches to learning and training which suit a modern and flexible workforce who will be IT literate and agile in their work patterns and location
- Commitment to retaining jobs and services within the Council will continue however reduction in employee numbers and transformational change will be an ongoing feature of future business strategies

This is set against a backdrop of financial constraints and increasing cuts. It is evident that simply recruiting more staff is not the only solution.



## Recruitment Strategies

There is currently no fixed plan to deal with future resourcing contingencies or recruitment strategies within the individual planning service. Currently there is no recruitment freeze within our service, and therefore when a vacancy arises, we look to fill this as soon as possible.

When a member of staff leaves the Council exit questionnaires are sent to staff. This is monitored on a corporate basis rather than service specific. Informally, exit interviews are conducted by Manager's, however no record is formally kept or reviewed.

Within the Planning and Regulatory Service Plan 2023/24, two key actions are to consider implications of National Planning Framework 4 on skills and resourcing of the Planning Service and thereafter deliver the identified training needs; and to ensure IT systems are able to support Planning and Building Standards Service functions. At this moment in time, it was intended to participate in the development and implementation of the Scottish Government's digital transformation programme which recently ended.

## Modern Apprenticeship Schemes

In due course we are keen to work closely with the RTPi and higher education providers such as University of the West of Scotland (UWS) to develop an apprenticeship scheme. Early discussions have taken place between the Chief Planning Officer and the university, with input from RTPi and HOPS. This area is something we look to support as a local authority and with some interested administrative support staff. Awareness gained by our APC Assessor of the Degree Apprenticeship Scheme in England and Wales supports the implementation of this in Scotland in partnership with UWS. We currently have a Building Standards apprentice in post, and this way of working is proving to be successful, such that we are keen to expand this into planning.

## Staff development

### Career Development

To support the Council in delivering on our values and objectives we need a motivated, engaged, knowledgeable and empowered workforce. As a Council we commit significant resources to improving the skills and knowledge of our workforce and our employees bring their enthusiasm and commitment to the learning process. We are proud of our workforce and their continued ability to deliver high quality services in a competent and professional way.

We strongly support the career development of our staff. In the year 2023/24 two graduate Development Management planners were promoted to intermediate level. 2 Enforcement officers were appointed to permanent planner positions- 1 in DM and 1 in Policy. A member of the Support team also transferred from an administration officer to a Technical Support Officer role. This shows the Planning Service's approach to '*grow your own*' is successful through

internal promotion. While it is regrettable when staff leave our service, when this is for promoted posts elsewhere it is evident that their personal professional development has improved to be in a position to apply for and successfully be appointed promoted positions.

## Personal Development Plans

All members of staff should have an annual performance appraisal known as a Personal Development Plan. However, these have not been carried out formally for the reporting period. Notwithstanding, regular 1-1 or 1-2 meetings with Team Leaders and Team Managers are held with officers. This is generally on a monthly basis, or as required. Since moving into the Almada Street offices, an in-person team meeting for each time is set up. This is carried out weekly for the West Area team, fortnightly for the East Area team and monthly HQ team. This provides opportunity for staff discussion on any updates or changes and is considered a good opportunity for the teams to work together, particularly when working hybrid between home and office. This has developed staff relationships and allowed Team Leaders and Team Managers to support staff.

Weekly Manager meetings are held by the Chief Planning Officer, as well as meetings to discuss the weekly list and committee agendas. As discussed above, planners are also supported through the APC process for chartered RTPI Membership. The Planning Service supports the use of some work time to facilitate this.

## Learning and Development

Planning and Regulatory Services prepare an annual Learning and Development Plan covering topics such as climate change, NPF4 policies, digital, appeals, agreements, design in a combination of external courses, online learning, peer learning and internal CPD. In terms of training, the Council's online learning hub '*Learn Online*' provides many courses, including corporate mandatory courses. Officers are encouraged to carry out independent learning through RTPI courses available online.

As outlined above, many officers attend both external and internal training courses throughout the year. The internal CPD workshops have been successful at both engaging Policy and DM teams and updating on legislative policy changes since the introduction of NPF4 and duties imposed by the Planning Act 2019. Overall, this supports staff development.

Upon retirement of the only Uniform specialist in house we had limited expertise in this field. While a Technical Support Officer was appointed, there is a significant training gap. There is no dedicated team to service improvement or digital improvement. This was evident from peer review with North Lanarkshire Council, Fife Council and Aberdeenshire Council.

## Staff wellbeing

As per the Council Plan for 2022-2027 we believe that the people who work for SLC are our biggest asset, and we will continue to support the wellbeing of all employees with a safe and healthy working environment where all are treated with dignity and respect.

In relation to this, corporately SLC has an Employee Assistance Programme. The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) offers practical and emotional support for all council employees. Whether the issue is personal, or work related there may be assistance within the EAP which could help. The EAP can also assist managers in supporting their employees with difficult or sensitive issues. This includes matters such as financial advice, counselling, physiotherapy, occupational health support and mediation.

A workforce plan is currently being worked on (2025) which considers the approach to an ageing workforce and considers health and wellbeing. Currently, there are many wellbeing support, policies, and resources for staff available via the intranet.

As noted above, Managers and Team Leaders are available to support staff and maintain a high standard of regular engagement whether this is in-person or via Microsoft Teams. Personnel circulars are regularly sent to all staff relating to wellbeing opportunities such as yoga sessions or meditation events, as well as support with finances, loneliness and caring. The Council's focus on people and staff wellbeing is paramount, and this is supported through leadership within the Planning Service.

We record all dignity at work complaints however do not detail specifics related to harassment. Any complaints will be treated confidentially and professionally with team leaders and above completing training on such staffing issues.

Staff morale was considered to be low on return to the office post-covid when workloads were high, and staff turnover was also high. Managers and Team Leaders have worked hard to support staff and lead by example to ensure that a comfortable and approachable working environment is provided. The office layout supports wider engagement through hot desks, and an 'open door' approach to engaging with managers.

### 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- Making limited progress
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	3- Making fair progress

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
Support staff development further.  This includes using the full training budget to upskill staff- particularly in the specialist areas/ technical matters and mentoring of graduates through their APC submission. It also includes carrying out annual PDPs for all staff to	Planning Team Leaders and Managers	High	Long Term	Management External agencies (including training courses, events, webinars, conferences) Benchmarking with other Local Authorities Personnel systems

<p>ensure their wellbeing is prioritised,</p> <p>This will inform staffing and workforce strategies which will feed into future service plans and help prepare a Planning recruitment and retention strategy in the long term based on a skills assessment.</p>				
<p>Appoint in-house specialists.</p> <p>This includes Data Analyst and Developer Obligations roles</p>	<p>HQ Team Leader and Manager</p> <p>Chief Planning Officer</p>	High	Short Term	<p>Management Personnel systems</p>
<p>Use IT budget to improve Uniform and GIS provision, including coding and spatial data.</p> <p>Explore PowerBI for workload management, reporting, and customer service.</p>	Managers	High	Medium Term	<p>Internal IT Service Improvement Service</p> <p>External training sources</p>

Consider introducing further discretionary fees to support further income and proportionate cost recovery for matters such as conditions or pre-application enquiries.  Publish a fee charter accordingly.	Managers	Medium	Medium Term	Management
Develop further systems including online forms and payments for NMVs.	Team Leader	Low	Short Term	Administrative and IT services
Update and implement consultee protocols which include consistent methods for consulting and responding.  Record data and timescales pertaining to this, and coordinate this with effective internal pre-application advice processes.	Working Group- led by Team Leader(s)	High	Medium Term	Internal services Planning staff

Explore opportunities to implement an apprenticeship scheme with UWS and RTPI.	Chief Planning Officer and appointed Improvement Officer			Engagement with secondary education establishment and other Local Authorities
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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

Continuous improvement within the service is a significant component of our work. Between feedback from the last Planning Performance Framework 2022/23 and Customer Service Excellence accreditation from 2013-2023 together with annual Service Plans, the Planning Service continues to develop actions and strategies for ongoing service development. The service highly values customer feedback and takes seriously any complaints.

## Annual Assessment of Performance and Improvement Actions

### Planning and Regulatory Service Plan 2023/24

A service plan for Planning and Regulatory Services is set and updated annually. Within this target performance measures are established such as reduced average timescales, and upskilling staff, as well as actions grouped by themes around the economy, health and wellbeing, housing and land, and communities and environment. The following outcomes were measured with proposed actions for 2023/24 set against these:



- Physical development and land use in the area is enabled, guided, and controlled to help facilitate economic growth
- High-quality streets, parks and other public areas ensures South Lanarkshire is a place where people want to live, work, visit and invest
- The council addresses climate change by reducing carbon emissions, protecting our natural environment, adapting to the impacts of climate change, and acting sustainably
- An appropriate supply of housing land (including affordable housing) is maintained
- Our economy is fair, inclusive, sustainable, and low carbon, with thriving town and neighbourhood centres which provide a focal point for local communities

## Planning Performance Framework 2022/23

The previous Planning Performance Framework from 2022/23 reported on quality of outcomes, quality of service and engagement, governance, and the culture of continuous improvement. Within this submitted document, it was stated that a comprehensive review of the service to reflect the requirements of a high performing service as well as to address legislative changes brought in by NPF4 was underway. Unfortunately, due to staff changes this review was stalled.

In terms of government feedback on the 2022/23 PPF, SLC received 2 red, 1 amber and 10 green markers. This remained consistent with the previous year with legal agreements turning from an amber to a red rating, and legacy cases improving from a red to an amber. Figure 5 shows the RAG ratings against the PPF performance markers.

**SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**Performance against Key Markers**

Marker		13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23
1	Decision making timescales	Red	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Amber	Red	Red	Red	Red
2	Processing agreements	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
3	Early collaboration	Green	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
4	Legal agreements	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Amber	Red	Red	Amber	Red
5	Enforcement charter	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
6	Continuous improvement	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
7	Local development plan	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Green
8	Development plan scheme	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
9 & 10	LDP Engagement	N/A	N/A	N/A	Green	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	Regular and proportionate advice to support applications	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
12	Corporate working across services	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
13	Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
14	Stalled sites/legacy cases	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber
15	Developer contributions	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

*Figure 5: RAG Rating feedback from 2022/23 PPF*

Since then, we have sought collectively to address the red and amber markers and continuously improve on the green markers. The key commitments and actions for service improvement for the coming year set out in the PPF included:

- **Customer events:** This will be a joint planning and building standards action and will involve two events – one with the development industry and a second with local agents.
- **Customer Service Excellence:** Prepare a submission for re-assessment of Customer Service Excellence accreditation in the autumn of 2023. The key action this year will be to address the three areas of partial compliance noted in the assessment of the Service in order to achieve full compliance and to reaffirm CSE accreditation.
- **Service review:** Finalise the Service Improvement Plan following the service review and develop detailed action plans. Staff resources to be kept under review with opportunities to add to the establishment including the introduction of officers to deal with developer contributions and validation.
- **Digital planning:** Continue to review and develop essential IT systems, including further exploration of mobile working solutions. Consider amendments to processes and new software/hardware to address legislative change and the implementation of the Scottish Government's digital transformation programme.
- **Member training:** A programme of training will be developed as the statutory duty for member training comes into effect
- **Community Councils:** Further develop awareness training for community organisations and other local stakeholders as part of the preparation of the LDP3 evidence report
- **Internal stakeholders:** Continue to review and develop better working practices with internal consultees. In particular planning officers and corporate colleagues will be invited to CPD events to widen their knowledge of the planning system and increase understanding of the changes in NPF4.
- **Review of Residential Design Guide:** This work reflects the emerging themes of placemaking, achieving high quality design and access to active travel options and quality open spaces.
- **Planning Conditions:** Carry out a review of planning conditions including through engagement with internal consultees

## Customer Service Excellence 2023

The Planning Service continued to uphold Customer Service Excellence for the year 2022/23 (see attribute 9). This shows a year on year improvement with 18 compliance plus ratings and 2 partial compliance ratings against 57 criteria.

## ***Improvement actions***

Between the aforementioned service plan, PPF feedback and CSE ratings, the following targets have been set:

- Improve on reducing average timescales: targets set at 50 weeks for Major applications, 11 weeks for Local (non-householder) and Business and Industry applications, and 7 weeks for Householder applications
- Drive the reduction of legacy cases to 50% target (see attribute 8)
- Appoint more staff
- Prepare a draft Open Space Strategy
- Complete the Shaping Places for Wellbeing project in Rutherglen
- Produce an annual SEA report for Executive Committee, and other governance groups
- Prepare Supporting Planning Guidance on climate change & sustainability and 'green' issues as an interim measure pending preparation of LDP3
- Undertake awareness sessions to be developed for Elected Members, planning officers and developers/agents
- Carry out annual housing land audit to ensure maintenance of a minimum five year supply of all tenure housing land across the council areas and within the four sub market areas
- Work in partnership with Economic Development to develop a town centre strategy and action plan which will form part of the evidence report for LDP3
- Prepare a revised Residential Design Guide

Two main projects included the start of preparations of the South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan – this includes commencement of preparation of the Evidence Report which forms first stage of LDP3 process. This will include working in partnership with other Council services and partner organisations together with community engagement and monitoring effectiveness of policies in adopted LDP2.

Secondly, a service wide review of processes used in the assessment of planning applications (and building warrant applications) is a major priority. An action programme relating to this will be developed to support the delivery of improved performance. This is a long term project which requires significant project planning and technical input. A single point of contact to coordinate this review is required. Therefore, it is considered appropriate to appoint a continuous improvement/performance officer to oversee the project planning and delivery of this review, and subsequent implementation of improvements. Planning areas of improvement to deliver a high quality DM service includes:

- Updating planning conditions
- Updating standard descriptions
- Updating validations guides
- Updating template letters
- Updating template reports of handling and committee reports
- Preparing consultee protocols
- A whole scale website review

It is considered that the establishment of working groups to undertake such reviews is necessary for ongoing continuous improvement. Such project work will be factored into a service improvement plan. Overall, this will facilitate better working efficiencies in DM, therefore

the Uniform functionality needs to be updated to support this. In addition, it will allow staff to develop their experience and add to their skillset.

## Planning Awards

Ceangal House, located rurally outside East Kilbride was a Gold Award winner at the Scottish Design Awards 2023.



(Figure 6 source: [Ceangal House – Scottish Design Awards 2023](#))

This development is an example of high quality rural housing design, which is evident by the award.

The application sought the conversion of a steading to form a modern dwellinghouse which responded to the agricultural setting and landscape, incorporating high quality material finishes suitable for the rural context. The scale, massing and layout uphold the steading appearance, while achieving a contemporary aesthetic. This demonstrates quality design and shows the drive to continuously improve on this through preparation of further supplementary guides for use by Development Management planners.



(Figure 7 source: [Ceangal House – Scottish Design Awards 2023](#))

## Peer Review and Sharing Good Practice

SLC is represented on both Heads of Planning Scotland Development Management and Development Planning sub committees. This forms a good basis for knowledge sharing and engagement across all authorities with attendance at quarterly meetings. Key issues facing planning authorities are raised and discussed, with best practice shared. This extends online to Knowledge Hub which has been particularly useful following the introduction of NPF4 as we seek to consistently apply new policies.

A DM Team Leader has recently visited or participated in Microsoft Team's calls with other authorities to benchmark our practices in terms of committee processes and reports. This included Aberdeenshire Council, Dundee City Council, Fife Council and North Lanarkshire. This informal arrangement was highly beneficial to understand best practice elsewhere and implement updates here.

As a result, the committee process was updated to reduce the number of touchpoints in the process by support staff and to simplify file management and version control. This also involved a fundamental update to template committee reports which have been successfully rolled out across the DM area teams. This review has streamlined committee processes and made efficiencies for officers by pre-populating text and has led to positive feedback from Elected Members on the Planning Committee. Overall, committee reports are more consistent, and processes are effective. Similarly, householder reports have been made into a standardised

template to capture consistent wording for NPF4 and to support faster processing for the bulk of applications.

A meeting with North Lanarkshire in February 2024 was insightful in relation to Uniform practices. This has informed a basis for a proposed wholesale Uniform review and the working relationships established from this has been highly beneficial. Regular contact is upheld to trouble shoot issues, share knowledge, and practice and discuss implementation of new matters. Having seen firsthand the benefits of an in-house Data Analyst this led to the approval of such a role which attracted many applicants. A further meeting with Fife Council consolidated the resourcing required around such updates and has led to continuous engagement.

Engagement with West Lothian Council throughout this NPIF process has been helpful to compare working practices also. This will be beneficial going forward following review of their action plan and drawing upon other best practice cases from earlier cohorts.

## Complaints

The Council has an effective internal complaints system that the Planning Authority works to. The Council's Complaint Handling Procedures follow the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO) model complaints handling procedures with a two stage complaint process.

When recording the details and outcomes of each complaint, the responsible officer/manager is required to complete a field on our record system relating to learning from the complaint. Every complaint is reviewed centrally and any opportunity to learn identified. Services are regularly asked for learning from complaints examples.

Within the Planning Service quarterly meetings to review complaints and learning from this previously took place until approximately 2022/23. This has since paused due to workload; however, such issues are discussed regularly at weekly management meetings.

A new process for FOIs since the appointment of the Technical Support Officer is in place. This enables much more efficiency and control of FOIs by having one responsible officer gather all documents/correspondence and preparing the response for review.

In 2023/24 we received 40 stage 1 and 29 stage 2 complaints and 3 Ombudsman complaints. One Ombudsman complaint which related to a Building Standards matter received feedback that we should provide more advice on how to direct the customer to other services- this is something that will improve as the website is updated and internal consultee protocols are prepared.

## 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 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

For the reporting period 2023/24 the Planning Authority's Scheme of Delegation was outdated. A decision-making process guide dated from 2015 was the only relevant document used to outline the route of determination for planning applications. Many issues arose with this as new application types not covered by this guide were introduced, legislative changes brought in new requirements and structural and political changes took place. Unfortunately, this contributed to delays in the decision making process, and the guide was not considered a competent document. For example, telecoms applications attracted many objections, but were not removed from the scheme of delegation, requiring such applications to proceed to committee, however this affected statutory determination periods covered by Class 67 of the legislation. Similarly, no formal procedure or guidance is available for Committee site visits, which led to issues when a site visit was requested.

As per the previous PPF, delegation rates were 96.3% for 2021/22 and 95.3% for 2022/23, respectively. This demonstrates that it is imperative that we have an effective and current Scheme of Delegation.

Supporting documentation surrounding the Council's political management arrangements was formally approved by the Council at its statutory meeting in May 2022, with the Scheme of Delegation subsequently amended according to the Schedule of Revisions at the end of the documentation. In 2024 the Council was approaching the mid-point of this Council term, and therefore in March 2024 early notice was given to Council services to carry out a mid-term review of the following documentation to take account of any legislative amendments and to reflect and/or streamline working practices:-



- Standing Orders on Procedures
- Terms of Reference
- Scheme of Delegation
- Standing Orders on Contracts
- Financial Regulations

At the end of March 2024, early discussions took place with Management and Legal to establish the nature of the review. It was established that a wholesale review of the Planning section within the Scheme of Delegation was required. A DM Team Leader was appointed as lead officer to conduct this review and prepare a draft updated Scheme of Delegation for late summer 2024. A priority action is therefore to adopt a Scheme of Delegation which is fit for purpose and has political and government support.

## Councillor Training

Councillors when elected received corporate training. While no dedicated Planning training arrangements are in place, informal training for Elected Members has been made available by the Planning Service on an ad-hoc basis. The Chair and Depute Chair of the Planning Committee work closely with the Head of Service. Such collaborative working allows for any issues to be identified and addressed swiftly. Formal training arrangements will be established in line with the mandatory requirements set by the Act.

## Committee and LRB Decisions

Of the 1657 determined applications for 2023/24, 96% of applications were determined under delegated powers, as per the Decision Making Guide, and the remaining 4% (79 applications) were determined at Planning Committee. Of these 79 committee decisions, only 1 application decision was overturned. A total of 15 reviews (as shown in table 3) were received in relation to the delegated applications, and 10 DPEA appeals were submitted.

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Upheld	Reversed	Varied	Non-deter (Granted)	Non-deter (Refused)	Total
8 (53%)	6 (40%)	0	0	1 (7%)	15

*Table 3: LRB decisions*

Such decisions occurred during the time NPF4 was introduced. A decision was taken by the Head of Service in consultation with the Chair of the Planning Committee to determine applications where there was conflict between the LDP and NPF4 at Planning Committee. This was predominantly in relation to housing in the countryside or greenbelt and can somewhat explain the increased number of appeals and overturned decisions. An overturned decision rate of 40% at LRB is a fairly high level, demonstrating the need for Councillor training, particularly in relation to green belt and rural development following the introduction of NPF4. This also outlines the need for a supporting guidance document to sit alongside the Scheme of Delegation to outline appeal and review procedures as well as other determination matters such as committee site visits and pre-determination hearings.

## 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

#### Chief Planning Officer

As noted in figure 4 Fraser Carlin is the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, appointed in January 2023 and is the first Statutory Chief Planning Officer appointed for South Lanarkshire Council. This post has a duty to contribute to the development and maintenance of plans and strategies which support the achievement of national planning priorities, through promoting economic growth, sound environmental management and ensure social benefits are equitably delivered via an inclusive and accessible planning system.

The status of the Chief Planner role also presents duties that are set out in legislation amongst which is the need to provide an independent role in promoting and enforcing good governance and for making sure that the Council complies with legislation.

Planning plays a vital role that influences and helps to shape the activities of all the Resources and Services of South Lanarkshire Council and in turn this delivers places, investment and a wide range of benefits that ensures the ongoing success of all of our communities. The Chief Planning Officer plays a critical role in presenting at Planning Committee meetings and Senior Corporate Management meetings. In terms of corporate decision making, Fraser is one of four heads of service within the Resource Management Team that oversees the strategic budgetary and operational activities of the resource which employs over 4,000 staff. The Chief Planning Officer therefore plays an important leadership role corporately and engages with all levels of staff within his service.

Having been employed in Scottish Local Government and a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute for over 30 years, the Chief Planning Officer is committed to promoting the Planning Service as a positive and proactive public sector activity. Fraser is the Chair of the Heads of Planning Scotland Policy and Performance Sub Committee and is a past RTPI Scotland Convenor.

In order to achieve promotion of the service and role, Fraser recognises that it is essential to have a robust policy framework, a consistent and open decision process and a skilled and committed staff resource that is focussed on delivering the best it can for South Lanarkshire. As Head of Service and Chief Planning Officer, Fraser is engaged with officers and senior management to carry out a review of the service and encourage continuous improvement.

## Leadership and Continuous Improvement

With the appointment of the Chief Planning Officer, the introduction of NPF4, staff turnover, preparation of LDP3, hybrid working and reliance on digital technologies a shift towards embedding a culture of continuous improvement is underway.

It is evident that the status quo has remained in terms of policy and practice within the Planning Service for a significant period of time, and a wholesale review of the service (including systems, supporting guidance, digital advancements processes and practices) is required. It is considered beneficial to appoint a lead officer with planning experience to oversee and coordinate service improvement projects as the extent of this work is vast. This would involve regular liaison with management and the Chief Planning Officer, preparation of a programme of work and a project development tracker, the development of short life working groups with all staff involved in service improvement projects, and the roll out of new practices.

Involving staff in such improvement developments and making change is considered to successfully motivate and embed the culture of continuous improvement through ownership and sharing ideas. This approach will require performance to be monitored as well to ensure workloads are manageable alongside project work.

At a corporate level, service plans are updated annually seeking continuous improvement; and therefore, the culture of this is considered to be embedded.

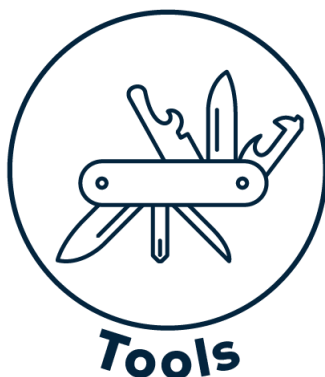
### Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

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

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

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
<p>Appoint an experienced planner to a continuous improvement and performance role to lead on the delivery of continuous improvement projects and implement changes.</p> <p>This role will primarily be DM focused to create efficiencies in handling applications in order to achieve improved</p>	Chief Planning Officer	High	Short- Medium Term (appointing officer short term, but implementing changes over the medium term)	Planning staff

average determination timescales and further reduce legacy cases.				
Update and prepare guidance documents on design for rural housing and placemaking	HQ Team	Medium	Long Term	Policy planning staff
Prepare template reports, conditions, descriptions, and letters	Appointed Improvement/ Performance Officer role	High	Long Term (documents evolve over time)	Appointed Improvement/ Performance Officer role
Prepare an updated Scheme of Delegation for Scottish Government and Committee approval	Management, Chief Planning Officer	High	Short Term	Management Legal Planning Committee approval
Establish a training programme for Elected Members	Chief Planning Officer	Medium	Medium Term	Management and Committee Services



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

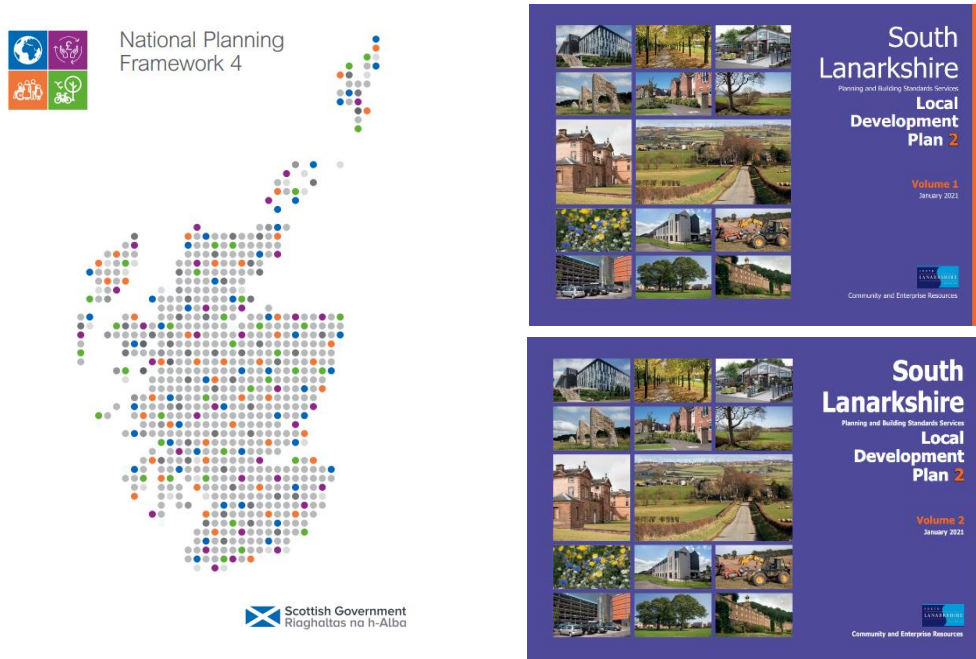
Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- 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 Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 sets out a new Development Plan system for Scotland as part of a 'plan led approach' to planning. The Development Plan in South Lanarkshire comprises

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which was adopted by Scottish Ministers on 13 February 2022
- South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan 2 (SLLDP2) which was adopted by the Council in 2021.



*Figure 8: Development Plan comprising NPF4 and LDP2*

## Local Development Plan Status and Regional Spatial Strategies

The Act also removed the requirement to prepare a Strategic Development Plan and replaced it with the need to prepare a Regional Spatial Strategy. Although not part of the statutory development plan, the RSS will have an important role to play in informing future versions of the NPF and LDPs. South Lanarkshire is one of 8 authorities of the Glasgow City Region (GCR). Work to prepare the Glasgow City Region Regional Spatial Strategy will begin once statutory guidance from the Scottish Government is published. This is currently anticipated to be in 2027/2028. In the meantime, a new Head of Place role has been established within GCR, and it is expected this post will be filled in 2024/25. Meanwhile the authorities continue to collaborate through various forums at Head of Planning, policy manager and planning officer/topic led levels.

Planning authorities have a statutory duty to prepare an LDP which sets out a spatial strategy for the development of their area. It must take into account of NPF4 and any registered Local Place Plan and have regard to any adopted RSS.

### *South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan 2*

Local Development Plan 2 was adopted in 2021 and is therefore halfway through its 5 year timeframe. The spatial strategy seeks to encourage sustainable economic growth and regeneration, move towards a low carbon economy, protect the natural and historic

environment, and mitigate against the effects of climate change. A range of delivery mechanisms are identified including;

- Direct new residential led development to community growth areas at 6 sustainable locations across South Lanarkshire and at a range of mixed use development framework sites and residential masterplan sites across the Council area.
- Deliver the aspirations of City Deal including the provision of strategic transport infrastructure
- Support the development and regeneration of 5 Strategic Economic Investment Location including the Clyde Gateway area

### South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan 3

Committee approval was given on 8 August 2023 to start preparation of the Council's next Local Development Plan and for the adoption of the 2023/24 Development Plan Scheme (DPS). The DPS sets out the proposed timetable for the preparation of LDP3 and includes a participation statement describing the engagement activity that will be carried out.

The first stage of LDP3 is the preparation of an Evidence Report which involves identifying and assessing the evidence available for each policy topic in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) taking account of the local development planning guidance issued by the Scottish Government in May 2023.

Policy officers have identified other Council services and partner organisations who hold information and data and have their own strategies and projects that will inform the document. This involves establishing a series of internal officer groups to help understand any plans and proposals that individual services have that includes a spatial element as well as advice on, and participation in, appropriate engagement activity. Close working relationships have already been established with a range of services including the Community Engagement Team, Housing Services, Education Resources, Social Work and the Health and Social Care Partnership.

Extensive engagement will also be carried out at this stage which will involve a wide range of activity to meet the needs of interest groups, stakeholders, and communities. The Planning Service has started engagement with the Community Planning Partnership while discussion has taken place with VasLan in terms of their key role in facilitating engagement with voluntary organisations. In addition, regular discussions take place with officers at NHS Lanarkshire and Public Health Scotland. Cross boundary working with colleagues in North Lanarkshire Council is also being explored where pan Lanarkshire issues arise such as open space/green network and health. We have also developed an engagement strategy that will run alongside the evidence report work and this is described in more detail in Attribute 10.

In 2024/25 a range of topic papers will be prepared which will outline the relevant evidence that has been identified so far, an initial assessment of that evidence, potential connections to other evidence or topics, implications for site selection and potential policy implications for LDP3. We will seek the views of stakeholders and other interested parties before the evidence report is



finalised. This process will ensure we can demonstrate a robust evidence base to inform our Evidence report.

As part of the personal development of officers the Service will identify opportunities for officers within the Development Management team to take the lead on specific policy areas in order to build up knowledge and expertise in discrete policy matters that can be applied in decision making and contribute to the preparation of the evidence report.

It is expected that the Evidence Report will be submitted to DPEA by end of 2025.

#### *A Development Framework for the Hagshaw Energy Cluster: Planning for Net Zero*

This framework has been developed in partnership with NatureScot, East Ayrshire Council and windfarm developers and operators. It focusses on the cluster of windfarms near Hagshaw Hill in the Douglas Valley.

The purpose of the framework is twofold. Firstly, it sets out, at a strategic level, the opportunities for the cluster in terms of maximising renewable energy output and provides guidance on the location and design of future renewable energy projects in the subject area in the context of the significant landscape change created by renewable energy projects in the area. It is also an opportunity to deliver a far greater range and scale of social, economic, and environmental benefits for communities, the environment, and the local economy in a more collaborative and coordinated way while minimising any negative environmental impacts. This approach of bringing wind farm developers together in this way is the first time of its kind in Scotland.

The Framework was adopted as non-statutory guidance to inform decision making in 2023 alongside NPF4 and SLLDP2. A series of action plans to deliver the community and social benefits are being developed, and shape future development within the cluster in a clear, coordinated way. (See attribute 12).

## **LDP Policies at Appeal**

The adopted SLLDP2 reflects many of the intentions and directions of NPF4. This has mainly allowed for sound and robust decision making to be made on planning applications, which not only continue to contribute to the delivery of improved economic opportunities and the delivery of high quality development on the ground, but also resist inappropriate development particularly in relation to proposals for new housing in the green belt and rural area. The introduction of NPF4 crystalised our approach to proposals in the greenbelt and rural area where the LDP was arguably more permissive than the policies set out in NPF4.

Appeal decisions in 2023/24 have corroborated the position taken by the planning service. During 2023/24, 10 appeals were lodged against the refusal of planning applications with only one sustained. The following links lead to committee reports summarising the cases and the outcome of each.

[Planning Appeal Decisions – April to October 2023](#)

[Planning Appeal Decisions – November 2023 to March 2024](#)

In addition, work started in 2023/24 on a review of the way in which the Housing Land Audit to ensure it is fit for purpose in terms of policy direction in NPF4 and takes account of the direction of travel in the draft guidance on HLAs which was published during the year.

## 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

Digital technologies are paramount to effective planning service. This includes the website, Uniform, IDOX, public access, ePlanning, objective, adobe, and other systems. Digital improvements are administered by the Council's IT service, which limits service specific improvements to corporate plans. From benchmarking with other authorities, it is evident that there are significant limitations in our digital systems, and this is a priority improvement project for customer service and planner efficiencies when assessing applications, as well as supporting preparation of the next LDP and Housing Land Audit.

### Submission of Planning Applications

Applicants are encouraged to submit applications and enquiries online. 86% of planning applications were submitted via the ePlanning portal for 2023/24, this is consistent with the previous year, therefore further promotion is encouraged. The service continues to function paperless as far as possible, and online forms should be developed for all enquiry types. PDF forms should be reviewed to make better use of digital advancements.

### Data Governance and GIS

SLC has an Information Governance Board and every year each service has to submit an Information Governance Checklist. This checklist covers Vital Records, Register of Data Transfers and Data Retention Capabilities/Major Systems List. However, information and data are held by several services within the Council so there is no co-ordinated approach to the holding of data. The Estates Service hosts the Corporate Address Gazetteer which the technicians in the planning service have access to and use extensively. This will become a valuable resource as evidence is collated for LDP3. The planning service itself holds a wide range of spatial data and also uses the spatial hub at the Improvement Service. However other data sets are held by a number of services including roads infrastructure, play and open spaces and school catchment areas. It is recognised that a more joined approach is now required, and this will be explored further. One identified issue is coordinating UPRNs across Planning and

Building Standards to assist with the Housing Land Audit, which places reliance on accurate data and the CAG officer.

The ability for planning officers to access data and spatial information is limited due to the lack of appropriate GIS licences. This in turn means public access to data is limited. IT services are currently investigating an upgrade of the GIS platform which once implemented will allow viewing licences to be provided. In addition, in recognition of the new data analyst post a review of their needs together with the existing technicians will be carried out.

As noted above, the Senior Planning Officer responsible for updating Uniform retired in 2023, meaning that this skillset was lost. The appointment of a Technical Support Officer and Data Analyst should support improvements in respect of this, however specific training is required, and an identified gap in training is in relation to coding for Uniform.

With hybrid working the uptake of Microsoft Teams has increased. This is still in its infancy and use of this for storing and sharing documents as well as staff engagement and project management work can be utilised better.

## Digital Engagement

The website holds information and guidance; however, this is outdated and is required to be reviewed. Promotion of the planning email account should be rolled out to ensure engagement with members of the public for duty enquiries is primarily via email.

In terms of our ability to use digital approaches to engagement, the engagement strategy for LDP3 identifies the use of a range of platforms in order to reach as wide audience as possible. This will include the use of the Council's social media accounts, its online newsletter, and a dedicated email account. We will also publish updates and documents on the website when they become available.

## 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?
- Are less than x% 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

#### Decision Making Timescales

The 2022/23 Planning Performance Framework awarded SLC a red rating for timescales. For all applications, our performance was slower than the Scottish average. Similarly, average timescales for concluding legal agreements were 52.4 weeks slower than the Scottish average, awarding another red rating; and while a large number of legacy cases were cleared, this remained high at 104, awarding an amber rating. Overall, the performance was poor, and limited progress was made on previous years.

Turning to the reporting year 2023/24, the approval rate for South Lanarkshire was 87.4%.

#### ***Average processing times were as follows:***

- Major development: 67.9 weeks
- Local development (non-householder): 32.9 weeks
- Householder development: 10.3 weeks

#### ***And the number of legacy applications were as follows:***

- Number determined during 23/24: 121
- Number remaining 33

In terms of comparison, our performance has been impacted due to the emphasis on clearing legacy applications. During the 2023/24 period, 121 legacy applications were determined,

leaving only 33 under consideration. The result of determining so many legacy applications has impacted on performance, with the timescales to determine major applications increasing by 20 weeks to 67.9 weeks. While this has increased average timescales, the clearance of such a significant number of legacy applications has improved workload capacities amongst DM staff, meaning that this should have a knock on effect on average timescales for all other categories of applications. This clearance has also enabled delivery of development where approved.

An overview of the workload was undertaken which identified that performance was severely impacted by the number of legacy applications which were continually being determined in order to improve the service and reduce the average timescales to determine applications it was necessary to make the processing of legacy applications a key priority for this accounting period. This was achieved by regular 1-to-1 meetings with Advanced Planners and making regular contact with developers and their agents. The DM team utilised spreadsheets and Microsoft Teams to track legacy cases and reasonings for delays to identify common issues which could be addressed on a bigger scale. It was recognised that until such time that the legacy applications were reduced it would be difficult to achieve Government targets regarding average timescales. This drive to reduce legacy cases instilled a culture of improvement amongst officers, and this will be evident over the next few years as fewer legacy cases will be delayed.

Non-householder local developments have also seen an increase of processing times by 5 weeks to 32.9 weeks, while householder figures have improved with a reduction in processing times by almost 4 weeks to 10.3 weeks.

It was envisaged that the focus on clearing legacy applications would be detrimental to the performance in the majority of the measurement categories. However, the change in performance culture which is being implemented combined with the successful recruitment of staff will contribute to significant improvements which are anticipated to be fully evident in the 2025/26 accounting period. As noted throughout this report, appointment of a dedicated Developer Obligations Officer will also contribute to the reduction in legacy cases and S75 Legal Agreements will be managed more effectively.

Overall, focusing on legacy cases remains a key priority. It is a proactive step toward fostering a system that is more responsive and agile and makes us more capable of meeting performance targets effectively.

Despite a slight downturn in the number of applications received, this was not significant to affect resourcing capacities. The use of processing agreements and pre-application engagement has had low uptake, and therefore an improvement priority would be to roll this out more widely to support reducing average timescales and transparency in the system. The Planning Service constantly reviews workloads and capacity across the service and looks to ensure that resources are deployed to meet workload pressures where these arise in different teams.

## Appeals

Table 4 below outlines the number of appeals for 2023/24

Appeal Type	Total Number 2023/24	Dismissed (refused)	Upheld (approved)
Scottish Ministers	10	8	2
Local Review	15	9	6

*Table 4: Number of appeals*

In terms of appeals to Scottish Ministers for planning decisions, 10 application appeals were determined by the DPEA. Only 2 of the 10 appeals were upheld, equating to a 20% overturn rate. It is encouraging to note that the majority of the decisions made by the Planning Authority were not overturned during the appeal process and that whilst decision making timescales require to be improved, the recommendations and decision-making of the applications has been shown to be robust.

15 Notices of review were determined by the Local Review Body during 2023/24, with the original decision upheld in 9 of those cases. In terms of the number of planning application decisions made contrary to the officer's recommendation at Local Review Body (LRB), there is no evidence of any policy deficiency arising from the decisions taken by the LRB. Outcomes

from LRBs and Appeals are circulated to officers for awareness. Any key issues arising from a particular case is fed back to the relevant teams within the service.

The links noted on page 40 above provide further context to the appeals.

## Enforcement

The enforcement charter remains within the two year period since it was last reviewed and updated (December 2021). It is currently being reviewed and will be updated. It is located on our website via the following link [Planning enforcement charter](#)

The Council places considerable importance on the planning enforcement function and have one dedicated Enforcement Officer. During this period, the operation of the enforcement function has been reviewed in order to improve the service provided and make the most efficient use of resources. As a result of this review, it was determined that it would be more effective for enforcement to sit within the two area development management teams as opposed to the current location within the Headquarters Team which is responsible for a variety of functions including: local plan preparation, GIS, minerals and renewables applications. The restructuring of the enforcement function was undertaken in January 2024 and there has not been a sufficient passage of time to fully assess any impacts associated with this change.

### ***Enforcement Statistics:***

	2023/24
Enforcement Cases Received	383
Breaches Identified	434
Notices Served	1
Direct Action	0
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0
Prosecutions	0
Cases Closed	367



### 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	3
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	5
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes	4

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
Continue preparation of Evidence Report	HQ Manager	Medium	Long Term	Policy planning staff Data team
Establish a programme of policy topic specialisms within the Development Management team	HQ Manager and Team Leader in collaboration with DM teams	Medium	Long Term	HQ Manager and Team Leader in collaboration with DM teams
Develop a new approach for carrying out the 2023/24 Housing Land Audit that reflects the requirements of	HQ Team	Medium	Medium Term	

NPF4 and the preparation of LDP3				
<p>Work with IT Services to improve the use of digital technologies, including:</p> <p>Ensuring GIS platforms and licencing arrangements are fit for purpose, to be able to use this for DM assessments and policy preparation.</p> <p>Update the website to promote better self-service, use of online forms for all enquiry types, and the use of a robust duty planner service through promotion of email.</p> <p>Promote better use of Microsoft Teams especially for project work</p>	Management/ appointed Improvement Performance Officer	Medium	Long Term	Policy planning staff
Identify additional digital means of engaging with	Management	High	Long Term	IT Service

communities and stakeholders				Benchmark with other Local Authorities
<p>Carry out a wholesale review of Uniform.</p> <p>This includes reviewing processes regarding the receipt, allocation, consideration, and determination of planning applications, and updating standard practice accordingly.</p> <p>This requires staff training to be able to code Uniform for system updates to map the application process to generate efficiencies throughout</p>	Establish a working group	High	Medium Term	<p>IT Service</p> <p>Benchmark with other Local Authorities</p> <p>IDOX</p>
Reduce the number of legacy applications to subsequently reduce the average time taken to determine all	DM staff	High	Short-Long Term (implement efficiencies in the short term, but	<p>Planning Staff</p> <p>Power BI resources for monitoring purposes</p>

<p>categories of planning applications.</p> <p>Appointment of a Developer Obligations Officer will assist in this by supporting quicker conclusion of legal agreements.</p>			<p>review and improve on this long term)</p>	
<p>Develop pre-application enquiry process (using Uniform) including major application meetings to promote a smoother application process.</p> <p>As above, consider discretionary charging for this service.</p>	Management	Medium	Medium Term	<p>Planning Staff</p> <p>Power BI resources for monitoring purposes</p>
<p>Review the operation of the enforcement function in light of the structural changes that have been made in order to demonstrate/assess improvements.</p>	Management	Medium	Medium Term	Planning staff

Update the Enforcement Charter accordingly to ensure it reflects the Council's current approach to the use of enforcement controls and the monitoring of development.				
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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

Customer care is of significant importance to the Planning Service. Obtaining Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation for 10 years is evident of this.

The CSE standard is a Government initiative that aims to deliver excellent customer focused services and keep the customer at the heart of public service. It looks at areas including service delivery, timeliness and quality of service, information and access, customer insight and the culture of the service. The CSE standard is measured against 57 different criteria.

The Planning Service first achieved Customer Service Excellence recognition in July 2014 and has retained this accreditation through further assessment in subsequent years with the most recent successful re-assessment taking place in January 2024.

At the time of the initial award in 2014 five criteria were rated as compliance plus which is the highest rating available. Eight areas achieved a partial compliance rating requiring further work to be carried out to achieve the required standard. The first of the annual reviews of the award

was carried out by an assessor in June 2015. This resulted in one further area being rated as compliance plus with only three still judged as achieving partial compliance.

In 2021 the Planning and Building Standards took the decision to make a joint application to include the Building Standards service which had been applying for separate awards since 2013. This was in recognition of the close working relationship between the two teams.

Currently, of the 57 criteria against which the Service has been assessed, we fully meet the standard in 55 areas, including 18 areas that were rated as compliance plus. We have 2 areas that are partially compliant.

Some of key outcomes for each of the 5 areas assessed are listed below:

#### Customer Insight

- Consultation continues across a wide range of stakeholders, partners, and customers, including very specific engagement with the Gypsy and Traveller Community, Seniors Together Dementia Friends Scotland, young people, disadvantaged groups, and the re-introduction of the Agents Forum.
- Consultation remains at the heart of all the service does and the increased level of activity is highly appreciated with extremely positive feedback. ,
- Customers said the service has a good reputation of providing a high level of customer service.

#### Culture

- Outcomes from extensive consultation and engagement are analysed and segmented professionally, informing policy and strategy including the Engagement Strategy, Local Development Plan 3, and Participation Scheme.
- Staff commitment and leading on many of the initiatives is appreciated and proving very beneficial to identifying customer needs and prioritising improvements. The assessor was informed by representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller, Dementia Friendly and Seniors Together communities that confidence in service delivery has been enhanced.
- Staff are polite and friendly and have a clear understanding of customer needs, which comes from a desire to engage meaningfully, listen carefully and agree next steps. The collaborative way in which leaders, managers and staff work together is commendable.

### Information and access

- The service showed it is fully committed to providing a wide range of quality information, including charges for services, which are well published ensuring that customers fully understand the charging scales. However, appreciation was expressed by customers that no charge is set for pre-applications.
- Publication is supported by well-informed staff, including those at the Call Centre and Duty Officers.
- Partnership working remains extremely strong and with it a firm strategy of accountability. Joint working arrangements are well embedded but have enhanced arrangements with vulnerable communities such as Dementia Friendly and Seniors Together.

### Delivery

- Clear service delivery promises are made on the Web Site and Customer Charter but augmented verbally throughout customer journeys. The outcomes outlined in the Planning Performance Framework, show positivity and desire to tackle issues.
- There has been an upsurge of activities with vulnerable and harder to reach groups.
- Procedures for complaints are well embedded.

### Timeliness and quality of service

- Commitments to making promises about timeliness and the quality of customer service continue to be published formally through the Web Site and Customer Charter but augmented by personal commitments made at various stages of customer journeys. This arrangement meets customer expectations.
- Initial enquiries continue to be tackled promptly, with data from the Call Centre and Duty Officers records showing good results including follow up information.
- It was highlighted that the level of service in Planning for determining planning applications has not improved. However, some improvement was noted towards the end of 2023 and leaders and managers are well aware of the need for improvement.
- Although timeliness remains an issue the quality of customer service remains very satisfactory, with positive customer feedback.



Once the assessment report is received an action plan is created to identify areas that require to be addressed in the following 12 months and also ensure good practice that was submitted for that year's assessment becomes embedded in service improvement. Outcomes from other avenues such as agents' events and customer satisfaction surveys are also included.

## Pre-application Advice

In 2022/23, pre-application advice was awarded a green rating in the PPF for early collaboration because the website sets out how to seek pre-application advice. At the time of reporting pre-application enquiries were recorded in the Council's file management system 'Objective.' This was combined with all general enquiries and complaints, and therefore we do not hold figures on the number of pre-application enquiries received. It is therefore considered important that we aim to establish a Uniform process for recording and responding to enquiries going forward to track this.

Notwithstanding, general enquiries can be submitted online and are responded to by planning officers, primarily via email.

## Engagement

A Planning and Building Standards Services Agents event was held in May 2023. Both local architects and developers, as well as some of the Council's own services were in attendance. The event focused on an introduction to NPF4 and offered an opportunity to meet the new Head of Service, Managers and Officers. The event was effective to identify points of interest in relation to customer service.

## Customer and Stakeholder Surveys

Uptake on customer and stakeholder surveys is extremely low. However, when feedback from customers is received this is recorded and reported to management. An example of positive feedback from a meeting with a mass housebuilder is noted below:

*"Can I thank you all for your time this morning – it was great to have such a positive meeting, and I certainly look forward to working with you all going forward"*

Notwithstanding, complaints regarding performance and timescales are dealt with and this has also focused the priority to clear legacy cases and improve average timescales.

## 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

## Participation Statement

### Development Plan Scheme and Participation Statement

The Council has a statutory duty to prepare an annual Development Plan Scheme (DPS) which is to set out the proposed timetabling for each stage of the plan preparation. It also includes a Participation Statement which describes how and when interested parties can get involved and methods to reach under-represented groups. A new requirement of the Planning Act is consultation on the Participation Statement. This was carried out on a draft version during June and July 2023. Over 50 responses to an online survey and other publicity were received and they highlighted a range of views on the preferred way to engage and consult different groups of people, and across the diverse localities in South Lanarkshire, as well as suggestions on who we should contact. The Participation Statement, and format of the DPS itself, was reviewed and updated to take account of the responses.

The Participation Statement describes at a high level the way in which engagement will be carried out and it is intended to prepare separate detailed programmes for individual groups so that their requirements can be met. It is a 'living' document that is updated annually to reflect good practice and changing circumstances and after listening to feedback from those involved in engagement. The approach to engagement on LDP3 will be shaped by the principles highlighted in the as well as the [Effective community engagement in local development planning guidance: consultation](#) published in May 2023.

The Participation Statement makes a commitment to carry out engagement using an inclusive approach. This includes encouraging participation from as wide a range of stakeholders as possible and making it as easy as possible for everyone with an interest to engage in its preparation. Information will be provided in accessible formats to meet the needs of our varied stakeholders. We understand that using technology will not always be the best method for everyone, and in these cases, we will use alternative methods. We recognise that engagement with children and young people, older people, disabled people and Gypsy and Travellers is a statutory requirement and so we will work with the council's Education Service as well as organisations such as the Youth Panel, Seniors Together, the Access Panel, Lanarkshire Ethnic Minorities Action Group and Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project to develop appropriate methods to engage. It also commits to developing a programme with Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire to facilitate engagement with the many local voluntary groups across the council's area.

## Community Engagement

### Engagement workshop

In order to inform what the engagement strategy would comprise a workshop facilitated by Nick Wright Associates was held in late 2023. As well as policy officers a number of other services and organisations were represented. This event established a number of keys and principles for engagement, a timetable for carrying out engagement, identified the networks that already exist and who and how we should engage in the longer term. A report was prepared which will be used to develop further engagement work in 2024/25 as well as next year's DPS.

### Gypsy/Traveller engagement

The Planning Service first engaged with the local Gypsy and Traveller community in March 2023 when officers were invited to an event facilitated by the Scottish Government in relation to their then consultation on the definition of a Gypsy and Traveller. This in turn led to the development of a relationship with the local community and the beginning of an understanding of their needs. In partnership with North Lanarkshire Council, we have held a successful engagement event with the Gypsy and Traveller community. As a result, we have agreed to work jointly on Planning guidance tailored for the Gypsy and Traveller Community and to host a workshop through Heads of Planning Scotland on engagement with Local Development Plans.

## Local Place Plans

The formal invite to community organisations to prepare Local Place Plans took place during 2023/24. Local Place Plans are community-led plans setting out proposals for the development and use of land in local areas. They have been introduced as part of the Scottish Government's

reform of the planning system. Plans should set out a community's aspirations for its future development and, when registered, will be considered in the preparation of NLLDP2.

A dedicated Local Place Plan webpage has been created which provides a wide range of information for local communities and groups who may be interested. [Local Place Plans - South Lanarkshire Council](#). We have had early discussion with several communities as a result of this activity and it is anticipated the first local place plans will be submitted for validation in early 2025.

## Customer Surveys

The response to customer surveys has been low and this is something that requires further promotion.

### 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.	3

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

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Develop and implement an action plan following analysis of the CSE feedback.	HQ Manager/appointed Improvement Performance Officer	Medium	Long Term	Management Performance and Development Officer
Develop a range of engagement methods to ensure all stakeholders in the LDP process are reached	HQ Team	Medium	Long Term	Policy planning staff
Embed the use of the Place Standard tool in the engagement process	HQ Team	Medium	Long Term	Policy planning staff External engagement groups
Prepare and promote staff surveys	Management	Medium	Short- Long Term	Management Corporate resources



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

#### Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

The Planning Authority is aware of the Place and Wellbeing outcomes and the evidence that sits behind them and is using them in some, but not all, decision-making processes. The Place Standard Tool was used as part of the consultation and engagement processes during the preparation of South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan 2 and these processes in turn informed the content of the adopted plan.

#### Shaping Places for Wellbeing

The Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme was introduced in 2022 with the aim to improve Scotland's wellbeing and reduce inequalities through changing collective approaches to the places where we live, work and play, enabling partnership-based, wide-ranging action at a local level while addressing the health of our planet. Rutherglen in South Lanarkshire was chosen as one of the 7 project towns.

At the heart of the Programme is the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes – which are the features of what every place needs to enable those who live, work, and relax there to experience wellbeing. These Outcomes and the evidence which sit behind them, have provided the steering group

comprising the Council, NHS Lanarkshire, partners (such as Healthy 'n' Happy, Burnhill Action Group, Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire, the Health and Social Care Partnership and Clyde Gateway) and local communities with a means to consider place in a consistent and comprehensive way. The Planning Service was represented on the group as well as colleagues from Economic Development and Community Planning.

The three key elements of the process involved

1. Knowing what people in an area are experiencing
2. Understanding the evidenced features every place needs
3. Considering the impact of the decisions we are making on both of these.

A key element was to recognise that data-led decision making significantly impacts on place. The programme has pulled together local publicly available data to give insight on population groups experiencing inequality. This was led by Public Health Scotland and the data analysis was then sense-checked by community groups and stakeholders to gain insights (the lived experience) of their needs. This concluded that some groups in Rutherglen face particularly significant inequalities relating to life expectancy variances between neighbourhoods; the proportion of people living close to derelict sites; children living in poverty; people on low incomes and receiving out of work benefits; and people with a problem substance use involving alcohol.

Some of the outcomes that can be addressed through the planning system include

- Public transport through the town could be improved along with links to health services in South Lanarkshire.
- Connectivity to transport links could be improved in some communities with the maintenance of paths to access services and addressing some safety concerns.
- There are large areas of free and open spaces within Rutherglen, including green spaces. However, in some areas, the quality rather than quantity of spaces is the issue.
- This importance of place of mental health and wellbeing in particular the emergence of land use and the proximity to derelict sites for a significant proportion of the population.
- Within some communities there is a concern over aspects of community safety, with low-level lighting, anti-social behaviour in open spaces and underpasses and connectivity to town centre highlighted. Safety concerns about open spaces and the impact of contaminated land are also raised.

With regard to the preparation of the next Local Development Plan, evidence gathering to assist in achieving Place and Wellbeing outcomes is also part of the process and the Council is using our experience with the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme to draw from as a wide an evidence base as possible whilst compiling our Evidence Report. This includes Local Place Plan register, Self-build register, Urban Capacity Study, Green Belt Review, Settlement Boundary Review, Open Space Audit, Play Sufficiency Assessment, Town Centre Health Checks, Vacant

and Derelict Land Survey, Housing Land Audit, Employment Land Audit, Conservation Area Appraisals, and Equality Impact Assessment.

## Tools and Approaches to Delivering Sustainable, Liveable and Productive Places

In addition to the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme, SLC has identified specific tools and processes to secure sustainable, liveable, and productive places through the life of the current plan and also as part of delivery of the next LDP including:

**Adjustment of policy delivery** following adoption of NPF4 – NPF4 is more restrictive on green belt and rural development than LDP and its introduction has led to us discouraging development in unsustainable locations at a higher rate than previously. This has then been backed up by the DPEA via the consideration of planning appeals as discussed above.

**Town Centre Masterplans** for East Kilbride and Hamilton (responding to loss of retail occupiers) with Council-led redevelopment focused on residential presence, night-time economy, civic functions, reduced parking standards and strengthening of sustainable transport options.

**Local Place Plans-** Our first Place Plans are being prepared by communities increasing engagement in the planning of our settlements and providing material considerations to be considered in determining planning applications.

**Placemaking Guide-** A tool for case officers and developers to ensure that proposals consider Placemaking principles in the early stages of the project, encouraging them to address Place and Wellbeing outcomes in a submission and maximising the chances of applications that aligns with the relevant LDP policies and securing permissions to allow delivery of said developments.



## 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?

### Narrative

#### Section 75 Legal Agreements

The SLLDP2 has a specific policy together with Supported Planning Guidance on Community Infrastructure Assessments leading to best practice. In 2023-24, there were no S75s concluded.

In the 2023-24 period, the Council was still experiencing a disjointed approach to Section 75s. Despite this, a good relationship has always been maintained with all Services including Housing, Education and Legal. This matter will be required to be addressed through an inventory process of Section 75s from their initial conception through to the completion of developments. Born out of this has been the approval for the appointment of a Developer Obligations Officer who will lead on co-ordinating such agreements and all monies which follow.

#### Conditions

The Service has historically used a number of non-standard conditions, together with approximately 300 standard conditions. This has, at times, caused issues for applicants and planning officers trying to purify and cleanse them. An initial informal review has seen the removal of unnecessary conditions such as materials on every application, and a push to

receive details upfront. A main concern surrounding conditions is the lack of technical resources to discharge planning conditions such as drainage and flooding. A reliance on other services for this activity creates delays. There is an identified skills gap in respect of such matters, and the need for a fundamental review of conditions is required.

Through the submission of business and industry applications in the Shawfield area which is heavily contaminated with chromium, a process was established with colleagues in Environmental Health to seek a stage 1 site investigation report prior to validation of the application (effectively pre-application stage) to establish what further reports and conditions would be likely for the relevant proposal. This allowed the applicant/developer to consider the viability of the development further before proceeding with the expense of producing technical reports, only to be met with restrictive conditions which would render the development unviable. This pragmatic approach has enabled early engagement and smooth submission of supporting documents and subsequent discharging of conditions in consultation with Environmental Health. A case study example of this is the proposal for 6 industrial units at Baronald Street in Rutherglen, where extensive pre-application engagement was undertaken to ensure the correct reports were submitted and to allow the applicant time to prepare this while considering cost implications. This process has been used in a number of cases in the area and is something that will be formally included in any future consultee protocol documents.

## Housing Land Requirements

For South Lanarkshire, the NPF4 requirement for the Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) is 7,850 units. The Council is in agreement with this figure and details on how it will be delivered will be provided as part of the preparation of South Lanarkshire Local Development Plan 3. The next LDP will have a 10 year local housing land requirement which will be prepared as part of the Evidence Report. We have started to review the methodology we use to carry out the HLA in anticipation of the new guidance being produced by the Scottish Government. The LHLR will be informed by, among other things, the Glasgow City Region HNDA3 which has been signed off as credible and robust.

## Processing Agreements

SLC has seen a steady increase in the use of processing agreements. Staff training in their implementation was rolled out over the course of the year. This has been done to tie-in with a significant push in reducing decision timescales and improving performance coming out of the pandemic.

Processing Agreements are now encouraged for all planning applications within South Lanarkshire, with a particular focus on Major and committee applications. These agreements help to deliver more certainty for the applicants and provide a broader understanding of the expected timescales in the determination of planning applications. Whilst this has been a relatively new tool for the Service, in 2023-24 a total of 41 processing agreements were used. This was an increase of 28 from the 2022-23 total of 13. A template has been prepared for various scenarios which is used consistently by officers- further roll out of this as standard is encouraged and should be promoted at pre-application stage.

## Delivery Programme

At this stage, the delivery programme had not yet been prepared- it will be developed as part of the Evidence Report.

The Service has supported the effective delivery of development on the ground, which is shown in the following examples:

### Hagshaw Hill Wind Farm

As discussed earlier in this report, Hagshaw Hill Windfarm is the first in Scotland to be re-powered by way of dismantling the existing 28 turbines and their replacement with 14, larger turbines. Through 2023-24, the Council continued to work with the operator and the Scottish Government to ensure that development is delivered on the ground. Please refer to page 40 for further information on the framework for this development.



Figure 9: Hagshaw Hill

## Community Growth Areas East Kilbride CGA



The East Kilbride CGA is a significant housing led project which provides approximately 2,500 houses, together with retail facilities, a new primary school, community facilities and a new spine road. Planning obligations delivered from the site will be used to improve the wider road network, public transport facilities and active travel routes. In addition, a significant area of open space will be delivered providing a new community facility for the south-western corner of East Kilbride. In the 2023-24 year, both the spine road and the new primary school were delivered. In addition, 230 units were completed and delivered to the market. The Service works closely with developers and other agencies to deliver development on the ground.

**Hamilton Urban Area**

**LEGEND**

- Application Site Boundary
- Residential Development Areas
- New Green Belt Boundary
- Existing & Proposed Woodland
- Public Open space / Buffer zones
- Sustainable Urban Drainage System attenuation / detention basins
- Potential Neighbourhood Centre
- Spine road / footpath and cycleway
- Primary roads & footpaths
- Footpath / cyclepath
- Potential Community Facilities
- Site subject to separate application (Reference number 406/05/0438)

**STATUS - Planning**

**Project Name:** [Redacted]  
**Location:** [Redacted]  
**Scale:** 1:10,000  
**Author:** [Redacted]  
**Check:** [Redacted]  
**Date:** 10/10/2011  
**Project Number:** 10/10/2011  
**Project Name:** [Redacted]  
**Location:** [Redacted]  
**Scale:** 1:10,000  
**Author:** [Redacted]  
**Check:** [Redacted]  
**Date:** 10/10/2011  
**Project Number:** 10/10/2011

Hamilton CGA is a housing led development which will ultimately deliver around 2,000 houses. During the period of 2023-24, the Council continued to work with developers to assist in the delivery of the appropriate housing in line with the approved masterplan.



## Newton CGA



*Figure 11: Newton Community Growth Area*

Newton CGA has been underway since 2005 when work commenced on the first phase. A 2<sup>nd</sup> phase commenced in 2015, and the site is approaching completion. When complete, the development will have delivered 2,500 houses, provided 2 schools, a community wing, a full size 3G sports pitch, and valuable open space. The final part of the project involves the completion of an integrated cycle link and a retail area which received planning permission in December 2023.

## Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, East Kilbride

The OLL school improvements are in the process of being delivered. These are directly linked to the East Kilbride Community Growth Area (EKGCA) in that its redevelopment has utilised funds from developer obligations.



Figure 12: School refurbishment project

This application required efficient determination of the planning application by DM staff to allow the approved works to take place during the school holiday period. The proposed substation for electric charging facilities was controversial with many objections received in relation to this. Handling this effectively with a positive outcome at Committee, and swift processing of subsequent amendments meant this was delivered efficiently.

Overall, SLC maintain good working relationships with Homes for Scotland, developers, agents, architects, and applicants to deliver high quality development. It is evident that early engagement is paramount to the successful delivery of this including in relation to developer contributions, design, efficient processing, condition discharge and meeting housing targets.

### 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	3
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	4

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
Chart progress of Town Centre Masterplans	HQ Team	Low	Long Term	Spatial planning resources Policy planning staff
Review submitted Local Place Plans	HQ Team	Low	Long Term	Policy planning staff
As above, appoint a Developer Obligations Officer who will set up a process and handle all S75 Legal Agreements- simplify the process and engage early with developers to ensure delivery of appropriate	Chief Planning Officer/ Appointed DO Officer	High	Long Term	Management Personnel systems



infrastructure to local communities				
<p>Carry out review of conditions and include this in consultee protocols- benchmark with other authorities in relation to this.</p> <p>Seek out training courses for technical matters such as flooding, training, contamination in relation to conditions to ensure quicker cleansing of conditions to enable quicker on site development rather than a reliance on technical experts.</p>	Management and DM staff	Medium	Short – Long Term	HOPS DM Staff
Increase the use of processing agreements (particularly for major applications and committee items) to provide more certainty to developers and case officers and to assist	DM Team Leaders and Managers	Medium	Long Term	DM Staff IT Service to update website

<p>increased performance improvements- publicise this more readily on the website</p> <p>Introducing such a project management approach to the determination of planning applications will help to reduce the average time taken to determine all categories of planning applications.</p>				
Continue work on LDP3 to meet the NPF4 target in the MATHLR	HQ Team	Medium	Long Term	Policy planning staff
Continue good relationships with developers to improve delivery of development on the ground.	All	High	Long Term	All
Update HLA and corresponding delivery programme in preparation of LDP3	HQ Team	High	Medium Term	Policy planning staff

## Appendix 1: Summary of Scoring

Attribute	Score	Reasoning
1	4- Making limited progress	While resourced to undertake statutory duties required of the Planning Service, we lack specialist resources that contribute to a high quality service. There is a need to appoint dedicated staff to specific roles to support plan preparation and delivery of sites. There is opportunity to explore introducing further discretionary fees and wider training is required.
2	3- Making fair progress	While staff are highly supported and valued, more career development and replacement of lost skills is required. We have recently internally promoted staff and continue to support their personal professional development. PDPs are required to be undertaken more regularly.
3	4- Making limited progress	Through various methods we have an embedded continuous improvement although this lacks a dedicated resource.
4	4- Making limited progress	The Scheme of Delegation was considerably outdated and further training for Elected Members is required.
5	3- Making fair progress	With the appointment of the Chief Planning Officer, the Planning Service has effective leadership, and this should be built upon to deliver continuous improvement.
6	3- Making fair progress	The next LDP3 is underway in terms of the DPS and Evidence Report with sound and wide engagement with communities.
7	5- No progress	There is a severe shortage of technical expertise to enhance the digital technology that supports a DM service that is fit for purpose. Fundamental improvements to IDOX/Uniform, GIS and the website are required.
8	4- Making limited progress	While the performance timescales are poor, considerable work has been undertaken to reduce legacy cases. Enforcement has undergone a restructure, and the charter is up to date, meaning that while timescales are slow, we are making some progress.
9	3- Making	Achieving CSE and receiving positive feedback ensures we are making fair progress. Delivering on the actions will continue to improve on this.

	fair progress	
10	3-Making fair progress	Wide ranging engagement with stakeholders is underway, and this will progress further as the LDP process advances.
11	3-Making fair progress	Many workstreams are underway to support place and wellbeing outcomes.
12	4-Making limited progress	We lack a streamlined process for S75 legal agreements, and the use of conditions and processing agreements needs reviewed. However, we have supported the delivery of large housing and renewable energy sites, albeit this can be significantly improved.