

## ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE

# National Planning Improvement Framework





# Elected Members Briefing Series

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The Improvement Service (IS) has developed an Elected Members Briefing Series to help elected members keep pace with key issues affecting local government.

Some briefing notes are directly produced by IS staff but we also make available material from a wide range of public bodies, commentators and observers of public services.

We will use the IS website and elected member e-bulletin to publicise and provide access to the briefing notes. [All briefing notes](#) in the series can be accessed on the IS website.

## About this briefing note

The purpose of this briefing note is to:

- Advise elected members on the piloting of the new National Planning Improvement Framework and the change this brings for scrutiny and improvement of the Planning Authority
- Support elected members to understand their role in the National Planning Improvement Framework and how they may be involved in the peer review process.
- Advise elected members on the role and functions of the National Planning Improvement team.



# Summary

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- The National Planning Improvement Framework is a new approach which supports planning authorities to improve. The framework is being piloted over 2024/15 and elected members could be invited to join the peer collaborative review hosted by the planning authority.
- It is important to be aware of the new approach, and if you sit on a Planning Authority body, to understand that you may be actively involved in the review process. Regardless of this, you should be aware of your Planning Authorities performance and improvement action plan following its involvement in the process.



# What is the issue and why does it matter?

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The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities. It made it mandatory for planning authorities to prepare a report on their performance as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year. This report is to be published and submitted to ministers.

Alongside this a new role of National Planning Improvement Champion was introduced in the Act to monitor the performance of planning authorities and provide advice to them, and other persons considered appropriate, on the steps that might be taken to improve.

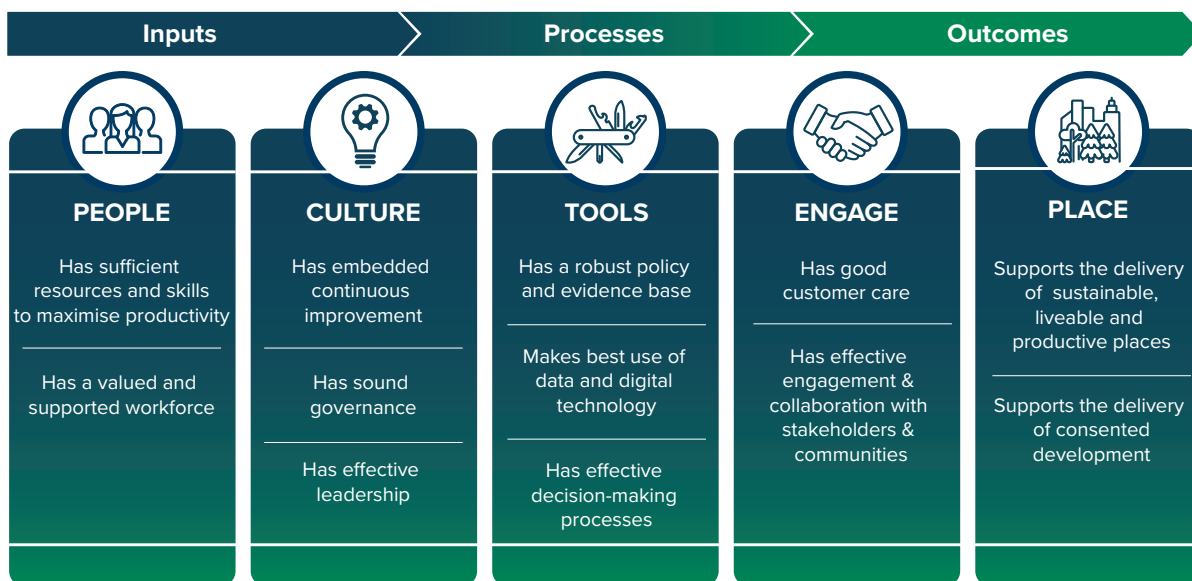
This led to the creation of the National Planning Improvement team which sits within in the Improvement Service and has three key roles:

- To monitor performance and provide advice, through the new National Planning Improvement Framework
- Identify, share and apply good practice
- Identify strategic challenges and broker action.

The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) has been developed in collaboration with stakeholders from a range of perspectives and interests in planning. An open call for ideas in October asked three questions:

- What are the outcomes we need the planning system to deliver and have impact?
- What makes a high-performing planning authority?
- How can we measure this?

From this the 12 attributes of a high performing planning authority were developed, which form the basis of the NPIF.



The process is being supporting and guided by the High Level Group on Planning Performance which is co-chaired by the Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and the Chair of COSLA's Economy and Environment. It also comprises of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS), SOLACE, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Key Agencies Group, and SOLAR.

The NPIF is being tested incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/5 financial year. Cohort 1 was completed at the end of 2024 and Cohort 2 and 3 are underway and due to be completed in April 2025. All planning authorities are expected to be involved at some stage in the pilots to allow for feedback, adaptation and to ensure preparedness.

Cohort 1 planning authorities and pairings are:

Aberdeenshire	Scottish Borders
East Ayrshire	Renfrewshire
East Lothian	Stirling
Edinburgh	Glasgow
Fife	North Lanarkshire

Cohort 2 planning authorities and pairings are:

Inverclyde	East Dunbartonshire
North Ayrshire	Angus
Orkney	Shetland
Perth & Kinross	Dundee
Highland	Argyll and Bute

Cohort 3 planning authorities and pairings are:

Aberdeen	Falkirk
Cairngorms	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Dumfries and Galloway	East Renfrewshire
South Ayrshire	Midlothian
Moray	Loch Lomond
Clackmannanshire	West Dunbartonshire
West Lothian	South Lanarkshire

The pilot aims to test the new framework. It should be viewed as an opportunity to explore what works and what doesn't, there is no right or wrong answers, and nothing is 'set in stone'.

Planning authorities and their stakeholders are being asked for feedback on:

- Ease of use for planning authorities, including the time and resource required.
- Ease of management by the NPI team
- Ease of use for other stakeholders with a stake in planning performance and improvement.
- Relevance, usability and effectiveness of the identified contributory factors and data sources
- Effectiveness in providing evidence on planning authority performance.



# What does 'Good Practice' look like in the area?

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The new NPIF builds upon the learning gathered from the last 12 years of Planning Performance Frameworks (PPFs) delivered by planning authorities and the subsequent marking undertaken by Scottish Government. The NPIF incorporates new principles with the following shifts in approach:

- **From marking to constructive challenge.** In the spirit of the Verity House agreement, the process shifts from one based on planning authority self-assessment and marking from Scottish Government to one that focusses on planning authority self-assessment and constructive challenge. The planning authorities will now undertake a self-assessment, which feeds into an improvement action plan. These will then be discussed as part of a peer review process. The NPI team will play a 'critical friend' role providing constructive advice. Peer review will also involve another planning authority and users of the planning system – providing further opportunities for Planning Authorities to learn from one another.
- **A renewed focus on improvement.** The new process aims to use the self-assessment performance assessment as a stimulus for identifying areas of improvement to be included in the improvement action plan.
- **High performing planning authority.** Scottish Government marking of 15 areas of work will be replaced by planning authorities' self assessing themselves against 12 attributes of a high performing planning authority such as having the tools to do the job; engagement; people; culture and place.
- **Peer Collaborative Review.** A peer review stage will be introduced involving the NPI team, other planning authorities, stakeholders and users of the planning system.
- **Measuring quality.** To get a clearer picture of the success and improvement needs of planning authorities the NPIF looks to incorporate measures that assess impacts, outcomes achieved, and the quality of the service provided.
- **A whole system approach.** The NPIF approach aims to recognise the dependencies that planning authorities have in delivering their services including from, for example, statutory consultees, other specialist advice services in local authorities, community planning partners, key agencies, Scottish Government, DPEA (Directorate of Planning and Environmental Appeals), applicants and elected members. The NPIF looks to stimulate discussion between the planning authority and these organisations to assess what works, what does not and what actions should be put in place to improve.

- **Resources.** An important aim in developing the NPIF has been to ensure that, although the publication of a report on the effectiveness of planning authority functions will become statutory, it will be proportionate and not add to the demand on resources.
- **An incremental roll out.** The Planning Performance Framework (PPF) model has built up buy in over a number of years amongst planning authorities. It has also been adapted as and when appropriate. A large part of the success of the PPF model has been the commitment, support and information provided by HOPS and this has enabled the process to be seen as a mainstream part of the work of planning authorities. Given this, it is recognised that any new performance framework should be introduced incrementally to allow for feedback, adaptation and to ensure preparedness.

The approach being taken is creative and a relatively new way of working. As this is a pilot, we are asking for feedback from stakeholders in how the process has worked. Following the peer review workshops we have been sending out a feedback survey, to understand how people felt the process worked and how we can improve.





# What does this mean for Elected Members?

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Elected members have an important role to play in the planning system through their general duties as a ward member, but also through positions on the Local Review Body, Executive Board or full council.

The improvement action plans the planning authority produces as part of the NPIF will allow you to understand where they are looking to improve.

Planning authorities decide who they would like to invite along to the workshops and in cohort 1 of the pilot, several elected members were involved. Elected members may be asked to join one of the collaborative peer review workshops for their planning authority. This will give elected members an opportunity to share constructive criticism on the improvement action plan and help take forward the actions.

At one of the peer review workshops a developer highlighted that speaking to the elected member during the workshop allowed them to understand their different perspectives and how they can work together better.

Elected members can champion this new approach by highlighting the significant benefits to taking this more collaborative approach. Where there are improvements needed that are out with the planning authorities control or influence, elected members can encourage partners to support with these.



# Key issues for Elected Members

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Following your Planning Authorities participation in the pilot, make sure you are aware of:

- How your Planning Authority is performing against the 12 attributes?
- What actions have been identified in the improvement action plan?
- What actions you can take to support the Planning Authority with its improvement action plan? This could include supporting better collaboration with partners, and engagement with citizens and stakeholders.

## Further support and contacts

Email: [npi@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:npi@improvementservice.org.uk)

If you would like to find out more about the work of the National Planning Improvement team and the National Planning Improvement Framework, you can visit our [webpages](#).

West Lothian Civic Centre  
Howden South Road  
Livingston  
EH54 6FF

Tel: 01506 282012  
Email: [info@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:info@improvementservice.org.uk)  
[www.improvementservice.org.uk](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk)

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