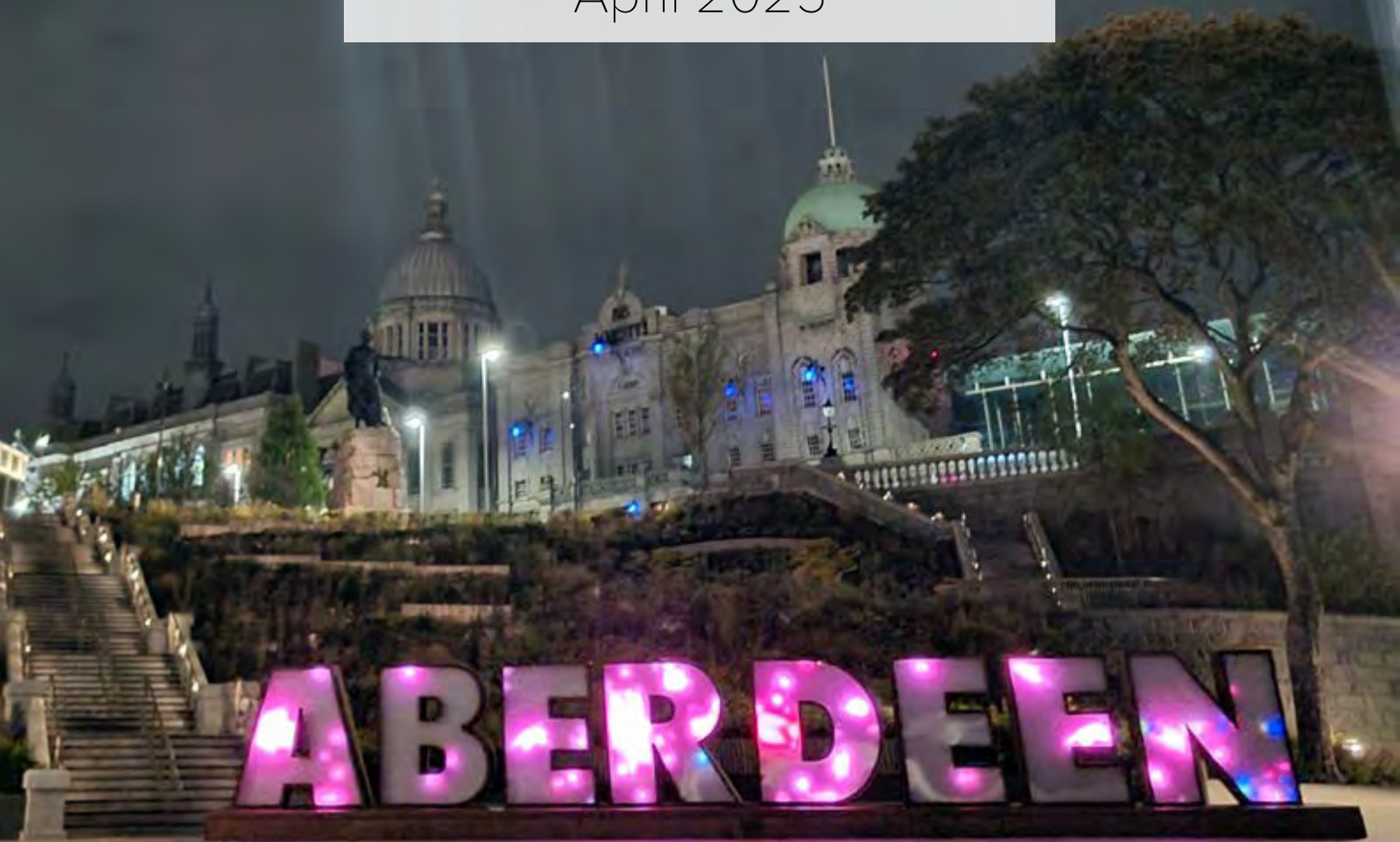


ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL
Strategic Place Planning

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Performance Assessment

Cohort 3
April 2025



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Introduction

Aberdeen City Council's Strategic Place Planning Aberdeen is located on the northeast coast of Scotland and is the commercial hub that drives the regional economy. It is Scotland's third most populous city, with a population of about 227, 750 and a geographical area of 186 square kilometres. In the coming years, Aberdeen is projected to have fewer people of working age and will see a rise in the number of older people, particularly those over 75. The Council's ambition is for Aberdeen to be "a place where all people can prosper regardless of their background." At the heart of this is a commitment to tackling poverty and inequality and supporting the city's people to live healthy and happy lives.

Aberdeen is experiencing an economic transition toward a low-carbon economy, with a clear focus on developing greater diversity across business sectors. Energy remains a key component in this, though more on developing the renewables sector, with tourism and financial and business services sectors also important in the mix. Although the wealth gap between the region and Scotland is narrowing, in 2023 people in Aberdeen were still wealthier per head of the population than the Scottish average.

The Strategic Place Planning Cluster is located within the Council's City Regeneration and Environment Directorate and delivers a range of inter-related functions within the context of the Council's social and economic objectives and city-wide regeneration.

The focus of Strategic Place Planning is to strategically enable and facilitate the needs of transport, environment, housing, planning, building standards and digital initiatives that help deliver major infrastructure projects, meet the objectives of the Council's Local Outcome Improvement Plan and advance sustainable city growth at all scales of development.

Aberdeen City Council's Strategic Place Planning cluster is committed to providing an excellent service direct to customers, which is timely, detailed and meets their needs and expectations as set out in our vision statement. This has been recognised by the award of formal accreditation for Customer Service Excellence.

The adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) presents both opportunities and challenges for the service. As the planning service leads on Net Zero Aberdeen and Aberdeen Adapts, the city's climate mitigation and adaptation plans, as well as the Council's own Climate Change Plan, NPF4 provides many new tools to help deliver on the objectives of these plans. Nevertheless, these additional tools, and many of the additional duties within NPF4, will also stretch the planning service at a time when both resources and recruitment remain a challenge.

For more than a decade the Planning Authority has published an annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF), submitted to Scottish Ministers with feedback provided and 'marked' in terms of green/amber/red. Over that decade, Aberdeen has demonstrated continuous improvement as evidenced through the PPFs. Planning Performance Frameworks are now being replaced by a National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF), coordinated through the Scottish Government's Improvement Service.

Aberdeen City Council is part of the third and final cohort of planning authorities trialing this new national reporting structure. Aberdeen City Council has been paired with Falkirk Council through this pilot, which has provided an opportunity for mutual support and learning between the two Councils.

This report has been prepared through a self-assessment by the Planning Authority, reviewed through a Peer Review group. Externally facilitated by David Miller of the James Hutton Institute, the peer group considered the Authority’s self-assessment and focused on areas for improvement. The group was selected by identifying key customers (externally and internally to Aberdeen City Council).

Whilst this is a pilot of the National Planning Improvement Framework, the process has assisted the Strategic Place Planning service in assessing performance as well as reflecting upon, listening to and considering improvements for further change.

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

In terms of self-assessment, the attributes of a high performing planning authority have been defined by the Improvement Service following a nationwide consultation in 2023-24 and consist of 12 attributes under 5 main themes illustrated in the diagram below.




The Improvement Service has provided the scoring matrix below for individual planning authorities to use in marking themselves against these defined attributes (see 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

The remainder of this document consist of Aberdeen City Council’s assessment of its performance against these themes and attributes. The findings of the NPIF assessment have informed improvement actions that has been incorporated in a separate Improvement Action Plan which will be monitored by the planning authority and the Improvement Service. It is important to note that the final assessment and scoring has been shaped and determined by feedback from the Peer Review meeting on 10 April 2025, as well as by input the Improvement Service and our partner planning authority (Falkirk).

Attribute 1:

This Planning Authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity

	<p>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.</p>
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- The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:
1. Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
 2. Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
 3. Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
 4. Does the planning authority receive responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
 5. Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

The structure of the Strategic Place Planning Cluster is illustrated below:



The Cluster has 59 staff in teams responsible for the planning function of the local authority – 30 of these staff are Chartered Members of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The lack of RTPI-accredited higher education courses for planning in the North East of Scotland means that filling vacancies is becoming increasingly difficult for the service, as new graduates must be attracted to move to the area rather than being drawn from a pool that would otherwise be available in the City after graduation. At the Peer Review Group workshop on 10 April 2025 the Improvement Service acknowledged that the lack of qualified planning staff was a problem that was being faced by all planning authorities in Scotland. Initiatives were underway to address this, including 30 bursaries for postgraduate students through the RTPI. Welcome help in training was offered by participants in the workshop (NHS Grampian and SEPA).

SPP had an annual revenue budget of £5.9 million in 2023-24 of which staffing costs were £5.16 million (87%). The second biggest budget line was supplies and services at £430,000.

A useful discussion on the overall nature of the service in terms of staffing, budgets and income was held with Fiona Simpson, the Scottish Government’s Chief Planner, when she visited Aberdeen in November 2023.

Development Management

The Development Management Team consists of 24 staff, split into 3 teams - Major applications (larger, more significant developments and enforcement), Applications (all other applications) and Masterplanning, Design and Conservation (placemaking, built environment and heritage).

Local authority budgetary constraints make it difficult to gain approval to fill vacant positions and, when approval is given, it is increasingly difficult to attract experienced planners to Aberdeen given perceptions of relative remoteness which puts it at a disadvantage in the competition for the ever decreasing pool of experienced planners or new planners coming through higher education. Several experienced planners have left to work for Scottish and Southern Electricity in the last few years. As a result, the team currently has vacancies for 5 full-time staff. The additional workload for the team stemming from this reduced staff resource was exacerbated by a surge in applications for short-term lets (190 lodged in 2023-24) and related enquiries (almost 700) in 2023-24.

Considering the foregoing, the team has performed well when measured against its statutory duty to determine planning applications as explained in detail in relation to Attribute 8 later in this

assessment report.

Enforcement of planning control is a key component of the planning system. The service has only one Planning Inspector, supervised by a Senior Planner who also carries a full planning application caseload. Furthermore, due to the lack of staff resource in enforcement, individual planning officers are required to take a leading role in enforcement action in relation to their own caseload – both factors that diminish the capacity of these officers to determine applications. The service is overstretched and under resourced compared to other similar sized planning authorities in Scotland and this is also a single point of failure i.e. loss of the current inspector would mean that there is no viable alternative way of providing the enforcement service in at least the short term. Reconfiguration of a vacant Planner post in Development Management to create a further Enforcement Officer post is proposed as an integral part of a Workforce Strategy in the Improvement Action Plan.

A significant issue in 2023-24 was the inability to proceed with direct action following the service of formal notices and lack of compliance by the offender. There are financial implications associated with the complex process of direct action which would involve the expense of commissioning a contractor or other Council services to rectify breaches of planning control identified through investigation. A small number of enforcement cases therefore remained paused due to the inability to take direct action. These include unauthorised shopfronts and signs on Union Street, the key City Centre thoroughfare, as well as other unauthorised works throughout the city. To help address this issue £25,000 has been made available as part of the 2024/25 budget to progress direct action in respect of cases within the City Centre. An action stemming from this is to put in place a formalised procedure for taking direct action.

Income from planning applications increased by around 20 percent in 2023-24 compared to the previous year due to an increase in more significant applications with a higher fee, and this level of fee take has been maintained for 2024-25. This income amounted to approximately 75% of the staffing cost of the development management team (the comparable average for the previous 5 years was 63%). However, this money is received corporately and is not ring fenced for investment in the planning service.

Policy and Strategy

The Local Development Plan Team consists of 8 members of staff, supervised by an overarching Policy and Strategy Manager, who also oversees the Developer Obligations and Transport Strategy and Programmes teams. In the 2023-24 year the Council's Housing Strategy Team also sat within this part of the service.

The Local Development Plan (LDP) team is made up of a Team Leader, 2 Senior Planners, 4 Planning Officers and 1 Trainee Planner. The Developer Obligations (DO) function is led by a senior officer at Team Leader grade, who provides support to a number of other teams across Strategic Place Planning and the wider Council. Although additional support is available for the Development Obligations function with the Local Development Plan and Development Management teams, there is a risk that some of this skills and experience could be lost if the lead DO officer were to leave the Council and not be replaced. It is an action stemming from this assessment to address this "single point of failure" through the proposed Workforce Strategy. A large proportion of the DO Officer's time is also spent on administrative tasks, and so a supporting Project Officer role should also be considered in the Workforce Strategy to free up the DO lead for more strategic tasks.

In June 2023 the Council's 3rd Local Development Plan was adopted by Council, following an independent Examination in Public by Scottish Ministers. In the year ahead the team will need to begin preparation of the next Local Development Plan, which will be their first under the new legislative requirements from the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2019. The additional, unfunded, requirements that will be required to undertake this task will be challenging for the team to address. The statutory requirement to have a new Plan in place by Spring 2028 will be an incredibly difficult

task, particularly given the similar resource constraints of key agencies and other key stakeholders given the need for all other new LDPs in Scotland to be in place by this date.

Climate and Environment Policy

The Climate and Environment Policy Service consists of two teams, Natural Environment Policy Team and Climate and Sustainability Policy Team, managed by an overarching Climate and Environment Policy Manager. The Natural Environment Policy Team is made up of a Team Leader, 2 Senior Environmental Planners and 4 Environmental Planners. The Climate and Sustainability Policy Team is a made up of a Team Leader, a Senior Climate Change Officer, 2 Climate Change Officers, a Senior Sustainability Officer and 2 Sustainability Officers.

The spheres of natural environment, climate and sustainability are broad, fast paced and ever evolving, which means demand is very high on both teams. As well as feeding into Planning (whether that be Planning applications or policy), both teams provide advice and lead on work across the Council; as well as co-ordinate activity with city stakeholders and citizens to develop a range of place-based plans for climate and nature.

• Responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale?

The response time of statutory and non-statutory consultees, both within the Council and external to it, is a key factor in terms of the overall speed of decision making on planning applications. Average response time for both external and internal consultees are generally within the prescribed times (3 weeks). In 2023-4 there were no occasions where “stop the clock” on an application was applied by the planning authority because of a delay in a response from an external consultee. The speed and quality of responses is facilitated by close working between the relevant parties. For example, the Development Management Team as regular scheduled liaison meetings with key officers from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and internally with key officers from the Councils Legal Services (Planning and Environment), Corporate Landlord and City Development Teams. There is an agreed written protocol for response time and format in place with the Roads Development Management Team which is a key internal consultee, and this was comprehensively reviewed in 2024.

• Ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

The growing complexity of new assessments and tasks resulting from the policy context of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) requires increasingly specialised advice and input from both internal and external consultees. The Strategic Place Planning cluster has access to a range of appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data. Within the cluster there are specialists with appropriate knowledge of masterplanning, design, historic environment, arboriculture, natural heritage, open space, outdoor access, climate change, building standards, planning policy and developer obligations. Elsewhere in the Council there is access to expert advice on road safety, transportation strategy, environmental health, affordable housing, drainage and flooding. The Council also has established a working relationship with NHS Grampian to provide advice on health matters - particularly health impact assessments. Data requirements for the service have increased dramatically over the last few years, and the ability to view and manage data consistently is a key action area in the future.

Attribute 2:

The Planning Authority has a valued and supported workforce

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

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

The planning service has structured its job profile and progression process to enable the service to “grow its own” staff in-house, from planning trainees to fully qualified and accredited planners. It has, however, become apparent that the job profile and gradings of the Trainee and Planner posts need to be reviewed to make sure that talented staff can be attracted to the organisation at trainee level whilst ensuring that the pathway to chartered membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute is still encouraged and incentivised. In this regard, it is recognised that SPP would benefit from having a formal Workforce Strategy in place. It is acknowledged that a Workforce Strategy would identify skill gaps, help succession planning, ensure that more junior staff are being prepared to step up to more senior or management roles in the service and avoid creating single “points of failure” in terms of service delivery. The preparation and implementation of a Workforce Strategy is identified as an improvement in the improvement action plan in this NPIF report.

- **Ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?**

The planning service has taken positive action to support staff development and upskilling of staff. All staff have a Continuous Review and Development Plan in place that forms the basis of annual appraisal, identifying training needs and allocating training opportunities. All staff are also required to ensure their Continued Professional Development (CPD) for their accredited body is kept up to date.

A central training budget has been established for SPP and is managed by colleagues in the Council’s Organisational Development Team. Applications for spend on training go through this team, and there is no separate training budget managed at service level. A dedicated MS Teams page is used to notify staff of any relevant training opportunities, courses, webinars or conferences. Over the year, planners were able to attend a range of courses and events including:

- RTPI Scotland Annual Conference in Dundee
- Scottish Young Planners Conference in Glasgow
- Planning Skills - Appeals Training with the DPEA
- SOLACE Scotland Conference in Edinburgh
- SOLACE Scotland Springboard Programme
- North East Scotland Place and Wellbeing Network Conference in Haddo House
- Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum Conference in Edinburgh
- Scotland’s EIA Conference, 2023
- Governing Natural Capital and Biodiversity for Scotland: Conference 2023

- Scottish Outdoor Access Network (SOAN) Conference 2023: People Make Paths - Engaging Communities in the Management and Development of Community Path Networks
- North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership and NESCAN Hub Seminar: Supporting our wild pollinators, 2024
- 4th European i-Tree Conference and Urban ReLeaf Conference 2024
- CIEEM 2024 Scotland Conference, Reshaping Scotland: Nature Restoration in Action
- Scottish Outdoor Access Network (SOAN) Conference 2024: Climate Change and Paths

The planning service has structured its job profile and progression process to enable the service to “grow its own” staff in-house, from planning trainees to fully qualified and accredited planners. At the Peer Review Workshop on 10 April it was suggested that a trainee planner rotation program across different local authorities could be pursued by the Scottish Heads of Planning Group.

• **Deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?**

Aberdeen City Council continues to hold mental health and wellbeing among its top priorities and this can be seen outlined in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026. The management team within SPP believes that mirroring this commitment internally for our employees is vital to ensuring the right support is in place to deliver the Council’s vision for Aberdeen as a place where everyone can prosper.

Training available to support employees through workplace pressures include; Managers training in Mental Health Awareness, QWL Stress Risk Assessments and Reasonable Adjustments Passports. Access is available to activities such as physical exercise classes, walking workplaces step count challenge initiatives that are accessible and open to all age ranges.

The recent Employee Experience Survey contained questions specifically asking about any harassment staff might have experienced and is currently being analysed to identify trends and will be used to improve staff experience. Formal reporting through the Council’s Dignity and Respect Policy is recorded and investigated formally. The Council has a variety of proactive self-help, information and resources available on its Intranet with access to our Employee Assistance Programme and Able Futures counselling and coached support services.

The planning service works in a hybrid manner with a balance of home and office based working tailored to suit both the team and the individual. Managers are flexible with working arrangements to suit particular needs and situations which are balanced with service delivery. All officers have regular 1-2-1s with their line manager or supervisor at least once every four weeks. Management teams keep a close eye on emerging issues related to staff mental health and workload pressure and proactively try and avoid issues emerging.

At the Peer Review Group workshop on 10 April 2025, the planning agents present stressed the importance of more opportunities for face-to-face meetings to improve overall engagement. They also highlighted the benefits of in-person interactions for professional development and effective teamwork and emphasised the importance of junior staff being present in the office to facilitate better learning and collaboration.

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	3
2. The planning authority has a valued a supported workforce	2

Based on the gradings above, the following areas of improvement have been identified to form part of, and be taken forward through, an Improvement Action Plan that is a companion document to this assessment report.

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
		High	Short Term: 1 year	
		Medium	Medium Term: 3 years	
		Low	Long Term: 3+ years	
Action: Preparation of a workforce planning strategy including consideration of team reorganisation, skills audit, career progression pathways, succession planning, enhancement of service resilience, vacant post redesign etc. Outcome: Improved service capacity, resilience and adaptability	Chief Officer SPP	High	Short Term for preparation, but medium term for delivery	All planning staff and corporate business support



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

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

1. Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
2. Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
3. Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
4. 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?

- **Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?**

Aberdeen's Planning Performance Framework 2022-23 identified a number of commitments for service improvement for the year 2023-24. These are monitored and assessed continuously by the senior management team in SPP. Work on these is continuing with the following progress made to date:

Local Development Plan Team

i. Adopt Local Development Plan 2023, and associated Aberdeen Planning Guidance

This action has been completed, with the City's 3rd Local Development Plan being adopted in June 2023. A suite of non-statutory Aberdeen Planning Guidance (APG) has also been prepared to support the new Plan, and additional APG documents will be prepared in the near future to reflect additional Scottish Government guidance on topics such as Health Impact Assessments.

ii Prepare for gate check of evidence for next Local Development Plan and implement ways to streamline/digitise the process of data capture for audits.

This action is underway as initial preparation for Gate Check is ongoing. Digitisation of audit information will be trialed through the Play Sufficiency Assessment as part of this process.

Natural Environment Policy Team

i. Finalise the Local Nature Conservation Site Review.

The Local Nature Conservation Site Review is nearing completion and is due to be taken to the Council's Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee in March 2025 for approval. Once approved, it will be shared with relevant internal teams and published on the Council's web-site.

Development Management Applications Teams

i. Review and reconfigure as necessary the development management related planning pages of the Council's website to improve customer access service and usability.

The project to redesign the ACC website is now being led and coordinated by the corporate Customer Experience Team. A SPP task group is working to map service interactions (e.g. applying for, paying for and viewing planning applications) as a framework for configuring the planning webpages to improve the customer experience. This is an ongoing action that is the subject of an improvement action stemming from this assessment.

ii. Reconfigure report of handling template and guidance

A standard base template has been developed for householder applications to cut out routine and repetitive drafting and enable a focus on evaluation especially of more complex applications. Work is almost complete on finalising report writing guidelines designed to improve the conciseness, consistency and pertinence of reports of handling. This is an ongoing action that is the subject of an improvement action stemming from this assessment.

Masterplan, Design and Conservation Team

i. Complete the Silver City Heritage and Place (SCHP) Programme Development Phase and submit the final applications to Historic Environment Scotland and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

All these actions have been completed successfully and the SCHP programme is well underway led by an experienced project officer and with Phase 1 funding of £172,000 from Historic Environment Scotland and Aberdeen City Council.

ii. Complete the City Centre Conservation Area Management Plan including formal adoption by Planning and Development Management Committee.

The City Centre Conservation Area Management Plan is currently being drafted and is due to be finalised before being taken to Planning Development Management Committee for formal adoption this year.

• Recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks

The Strategic Place Planning Service won the 2023 Scottish Planning Authority of the Year Award at the Royal Town Planning Institute's awards ceremony in Glasgow.

The Aberdeen Net Zero Routemap won both the Scottish and the UK and Ireland Best Plan award for 2023 at the Royal Town Planning Institute's National awards ceremonies in Glasgow and London

Union Terrace Gardens won the gold award in the "Public Building" category of the Scottish Design Awards 2024

The following projects were shortlisted for the Scottish Design Awards 2023:

Arbor House in Cults,

The Concourse Pavilion Redevelopment at Aberdeen Station, and

Greyhope Bay Dolphin Watching Centre.

• Peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities

The Planning Service regularly engages with other authorities through Heads of Planning Scotland and all the subgroups. Representatives of the Aberdeen planning service routinely attend HOPS and other forums to keep up to date on good practice. Informal networks are used to reach out to colleagues in other authorities, for instance members of the Natural Environment Policy team regularly meet with colleagues at Aberdeenshire Council. As part of the Planning Performance Framework (PPF) process in previous years the Service has had an annual peer review twinning events with designated Partner Authorities. These PPF events have led to further conversations about best practice and enabled contacts for further discussion. In 2022-23, and for the 7th successive year, the Service co-ordinated a collaborative peer review exercise with that year's PPF twinning authority, West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC). The day involved over 20 participants and the findings were documented to capture learning and to inform future service development.

• Complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

The Council has adopted a robust, rigorous and thorough corporate complaints handling procedure that is followed in the planning service. The emphasis is in answering complaints at Stage 1 which seeks frontline resolution within 5 working days. Where customers are still not satisfied, or the issue is more complicated, the complaint is dealt with by way of investigation by a senior officer (Stage 2).

There were 17 formal complaints lodged in 2023/24, of which 4 were upheld. So far in 2024/25 there have been just 3 complaints, none of which have been upheld.

One complaint against the planning service was partially upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman in 2023-24. This related to the clarity of the methodology for measuring plot coverage for house extensions. The identified actions (to clarify the procedure and brief case officers) were subsequently carried out in full.

Attribute 4:

The Planning Authority has sound governance

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

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

• Effective scheme of delegation in place

The Council has an adopted Scheme of Delegation for planning matters that has been approved by the Scottish Government and that is reviewed on an annual basis by officers in planning and legal services. This resulted in 96.7 % of applications being determined under delegated powers in 2023-24 - slightly higher than the Scottish planning authority average. It is considered that there is an appropriate balance of delegation in place to ensure that significant applications are determined at a suitable level.

The service is also supported by a dedicated Legal Team (Planning and Environment) who draft legal agreements for planning applications, review Committee reports and are available as an invaluable resource to answer general legal queries relating to planning matters.

• Statutory training for Councillors

All Councillors who sit on the Planning Development Management Committee have undergone training in planning (development plan and development management) and this is a requirement for appointment to the Committee.

In addition, the Natural Environment Policy team held an Elected Members Development - Natural Environment Training session in October 2024. This session was held in-person but has since been recorded for uploading to the Councillor development internal training site, so that it is available to all Councillors.

Community Councillors are also given regular planning training by senior officers in the planning service. The planning service has an agreed Planning Concordat with the Community Council Forum that sets out how the Community Councils and Aberdeen City Council will work together to ensure that the views of local communities are considered in the planning process.

The Council has developed 2 training courses on climate change, which are available to staff and elected members. This includes Meeting our Climate Duties and the addition of a Taking Action on Climate Change courses.

At the Peer Review Workshop on 10 April the elected members present expressed general satisfaction with the training provided for Councillors but it was agreed that there was a need to bring planning and LRB training up to date and for training to cover emerging planning issues such as short term lets and battery energy storage. With that in mind this has now been included as an explicit action in the proposed Improvement Action Plan.

- **Officer recommendation overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body (LRB)**

A very significant majority of applications determined at Planning Committee are in accordance with officer recommendation. Recommendations on 3 out of 41 applications (7%) were overturned in 2023-24 and the comparable figure so far for 2024-25 is 2 out of 25 (8%).

In some recent years Aberdeen City has had a high proportion of recommendations to the LRB overturned. For instance, in 2023-24, 65.4% of delegated decisions by officers were overturned by the LRB compared to a Scottish average of 40.8% for that period. However, the annual figures over the last five years show a wide degree of variation - for instance, the figure for the previous year (2022-23) was 40.7% and not too different from the Scottish average of 36%. Nevertheless, past PPF reports have rightly identified this as an area of focus for improvement and the intention would be to continue with and further embed improvement actions that are already being implemented as detailed in proposed NPIF improvement action plan (below).

Attribute 5:

The Planning Authority has effective leadership

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

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

• Chief Planning Officer and leadership team

The planning authority has an identified Chief Planning Officer (the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning) who is a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The Chief Officer SPP reports directly to the Executive Director of City Regeneration and Environment who is one of the Council's four-strong Corporate Management Team and who is also a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and a former head of planning.

The Chief Officer of SPP is also a member of the council's Strategy Board which is chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and includes two Executive Directors and six Chief Officers. This board sets the strategic direction for the council, and spatial planning has been at the heart of this process for several years. Through this forum the planning authority have also worked closely with NHS Grampian and the Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership in assessing the health impact of policies for both the previous and upcoming Local Development Plans.

The Chief Officer of SPP is also a member of the City Development Board, which oversees a range of regeneration projects across the city, the council's recently established Energy Board, as well as being the council lead on Net Zero Aberdeen and Aberdeen Adapts the citywide climate adaptation and mitigation plans.

The planning authority has a leadership team that meets weekly and works closely together to deliver an effective planning service. This is evidenced by the delivery of awards like the RTPI Planning Authority of the Year and successful accreditation in Customer Service Excellence as detailed above. Corporate information is cascaded to individual teams via team meetings and MS Teams channels. In person, service wide events are also organised. For example, in August 2023, the Town and County Hall hosted over 80 members of our Strategic Place Planning service as teams from across the service gathered to attend the first of a new series of annual in-person Town Hall meetings. A further event took place on 13 June 2024.

In order to prepare a management team for the future and in line with the improvement action commitment to producing a Workforce Strategy, a further action proposed for the NPIF Improvement Action Plan is to support interested staff to undertake training in leadership and management skills where the current management team feels it would benefit their professional development.

Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1: Making excellent progress, 5: No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	2
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	3
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	2

Based on the gradings above, the following areas of improvement have been identified to form part of, and be taken forward through, an Improvement Action Plan that is a companion document to this assessment report.

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
Action: Local Review Body monitoring and review including: - promote attendance of 5 members - careful consideration of all refusals by Team Leaders - refresh LRB-specific elected member planning training Outcome: To increase percentage of decisions in accordance with recommendation	Development Management Manager	High	Short Term	Planning Convenor Development Management Manager Senior Planner (LRB Advisor)

Action: Support interested staff to undertake training in leadership and management skills where the current management team feels it would benefit their professional development Outcome: To support good succession planning	SPP Senior Management Team	Medium	Medium	Council's Organisational Development Teams
Action: Refresh planning and LRB training for elected members and cover emerging planning issues such as short term lets and battery energy storage	Service Managers	Medium	Medium	All planning staff (as relevant to training to be provided)



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 the best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.

Attribute 6:

The Planning Authority has a robust policy and evidence base

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

- 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 and/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?
- **Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Local Development Plan in place and/or is on track for adoption**

The 3rd Aberdeen Local Development Plan was adopted by Aberdeen City Council in June 2023 and is supported by a suite of statutory and non-statutory planning guidance. Work is currently underway on the next Local Development Plan for the City, the first under the new legislative requirements of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2019. The intention is to submit an Evidence Report to Scottish Minister for Gate Check in Summer 2025, with adoption programmed for early 2028.

- **Does the planning authority have an up to date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/ or on track to adoption?**

An interim Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was prepared in order to assist the Scottish Government with the drafting of the 4th National Planning Framework. Production of a full Regional Spatial Strategy will be progressed once the relevant parts of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2019 are enacted and Scottish Government guidance on the subject is completed. It is currently expected that the previous Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) boundary will be used to guide RSS production.

- **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?**

The Gate Check of our Evidence Report is currently programmed for Summer 2025. The team are on track to meet this target date, however this will need careful management due to the new tasks involved and associated resourcing pressures on both officers and important stakeholders and consultees, for example the key agencies.

Attribute 7:

The Planning Authority makes best use of data and digital technology

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

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

• **Promotion of applications through e-development portal**

The Council's website clearly indicates that all planning applications must be submitted via the e-development portal and there is a link to a webpage that allows for quick and easy electronic payment.

• **Data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data**

The Council has corporate information policies in place supported by a corporate information handbook that sets out the Council's minimum standards for managing information across the organisation. Dedicated and visible planning web pages specify the approach that the Council takes to planning data in line with relevant legislation, corporate policy and procedure which is explained for both applicants and those making representations on applications. A Data Retention Schedule has been adopted to govern the length of time, and how, planning data is retained. Guidance is also in place for staff on the redaction and online display of planning data. Information Governance training (including data protection) is mandatory for all Council staff.

Data requirements for the service have increased dramatically over the last few years, and the ability to view and manage data consistently is a key action area moving forward.

• **Interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data?**

All planning staff have access to, and the ability to use, an Arc GIS interactive web map with includes all relevant layers of planning data to aid decision making and development plan preparation (eg planning and pre-planning applications, flooding, local development plan zones, flood risk, airport noise contours, pipelines etc).

- **Ability to use digital approaches to engagement**

The Council has corporate social media platforms which are used by the Service to publicise consultations and promote engagement opportunities. The Local Development Plan team also has its own social media pages which are used to reach more targeted audiences.

In the 2023-2024 year the Council used Citizen Space as its online engagement platform, however contract end dates with the provider mean an opportunity to consider other providers in the future.

The local development plan newsletter, found on the Council's website, also includes details of all upcoming public consultation events. The newsletter is emailed directly to interested parties who sign up for alerts.

North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP):

The Council is a key partner of NESBiP, and we believe that this partnership approach to tackling threats to biodiversity and facilitating conservation action for local biodiversity is essential to achieve our outcomes under the Biodiversity Duty and also our responsibilities under NPF4. One of the big benefits coming out of the partnership has been the updated website with its "Developer's Hub", which is a resource primarily aimed at developers, and which also provides lots of useful information for the region's local authority planners. The Hub has been developed by NESBiP and its partners to support planning decisions within the three local authority areas covered by the partnership and in doing so, facilitate protection and enhancement of biodiversity through the planning process.

North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC):

The Council is a partner with NESBReC who collects, stores, manages and disseminates biological data for various organisations including local authorities. Through a Service Level Agreement (SLA), NESBReC provide information that assists the Council in making decisions in a nature conservation and land-use planning context.

In common with almost every other planning authority in Scotland the Development Management Team uses IDOX Uniform as the computerised casework management system for processing planning applications. The reporting functionality of this system (Enterprise) is limited, restricting its effectiveness and usefulness as a monitoring and performance management tool, and meaning that reporting quarterly and annual statistics to the Scottish Government is time consuming. A project has been launched to configure Microsoft Power BI to use the planning data in IDOX Uniform system to create a full suite of relevant real time reports that maximise the potential for reporting, especially in terms of graphically displaying performance related information and statistics in real time and enabling the rapid collation of planning statistics for internal use and for collating these for the Scottish Government.

Attribute 8:

The Planning Authority has effective and efficient decision making processes

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

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

• Ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes

The planning authority's performance for 2023-24 in terms of the average number of weeks to determine a selection of application types is set out in the table below. The performance for the national headline indicator application types (major, all local and householder developments) was better than the Scottish average with the sole exception of householder applications (9.4 weeks against 8.3 weeks). Notwithstanding, this householder figure met the target set by the Council's published Development Management Charter (less than 10 weeks). It should also be noted that the percentage of householder applications determined within the statutory timeframe of 2 months (76.9%) was marginally better than Scottish average (76.6%), indicating that the average timescale in weeks is being skewed by lengthy determination times for a limited number of more complex applications. The proposed improvement actions to improve performance are to draft and implement;

- guidance for planning case officers that focusses on or these more problematic applications in terms of early communication and establishing clarity for applicants on the planning service's position, the supporting information required and determination timescales.
- template reports for householder and other application types and an associated guidance note

Aberdeen City Council approved 92% of all planning applications in 2023-24 - a figure almost identical to the Scottish average of 92.3%.

Comparative Application Determination Times (average weeks and % <2 months)								
Application Type	Aberdeen City				Scottish Average			
	2023-24		2022-23		2023-24		2022-23	
	Weeks	% <2mths	Weeks	% <2mths	Weeks	% <2mths	Weeks	% <2mths
Major	24.2	-	87.3	-	36.1	-	39.5	-
All Local	10.5	68.3	9.0	80.8	11.6	63.7	11.5	60.4
Local (non householder) <i>ACC Target <12 weeks</i>	11.2	63.0	10.0	74.1	14.8	51.4	14.4	48.0
Householder <i>ACC Target <10 weeks</i>	9.4	76.9	8.1	87.0	8.3	76.6	8.9	71.5
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consents	13.0	-	9.3	-	11.0	-	10.9	-
Other consents and certificates	7.9	-	5.3	-	6.8	-	7.1	-
Legal agreement applications	30.9	-	53.6	-	41.7	-	41.1	-

• Percentage of planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review

57.1% of applications that were appealed were overturned at appeal in 2023-24, compared to a Scottish average of 46.1%. Over the last 5 years the figure has fluctuated from year to year and there is no discernable trend. The 5-year average 2018/19 - 2023/24 was 53.34% which is not too dissimilar a Scottish average of 47.68%. This statistic will be monitored carefully in future years to determine whether any action is required.

• Enforcement Charter

An updated version of the planning authority's Enforcement Charter was published last year in July 2024.

• Ability to resolve enforcement cases

SPP typically deals with in excess of 220 enforcement cases every year. The majority of such cases are minor and tend to be resolved through negotiation and discussion, without recourse to formal enforcement action. In other cases, the submission of a planning application and eventual grant of planning permission has resolved the breach. Where negotiation or submission of a planning application has not been an appropriate option and the breach is detrimentally impacting on other citizens or the built and cultural heritage of the City, formal Enforcement Notices, Breach of Condition Notices and Amenity Notices have been served. In terms of numbers, more than 60% of cases are resolved without recourse to formal action. Around 10% of cases result in the service of formal Notices. In summary, ACC uses a range of approaches and tools to seek to resolve any breaches of planning control, in a proportionate and reasonable manner.

As outlined earlier there is insufficient staff resource to effectively carry out the enforcement function and this is proposed to be addressed by an improvement action to draft and implement a Workforce Strategy that is intended to involve, amongst other actions, the reconfiguration of vacant Planner post to create an Enforcement Officer post.

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	2
7. The Planning Authority makes best use of data and digital technology	4
8. The Planning Authority has effective and efficient decision-making processes	2

Based on the gradings above, the following areas of improvement have been identified to form part of, and be taken forward through, an Improvement Action Plan that is a companion document to this assessment report.

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
Action: Draft and implement guidance for planning case officers and template reports of handling Outcome: Reduction in determination timescales	Development Management Manager	Medium	Short Term	Team Leaders (Major and Applications Teams) Planning case officers
Action: Utilise Microsoft Power BI as an internal reporting tool to manage and analyse data Outcome: Put in place a suite of relevant real time reports to maximise the potential for reporting and monitoring. This could also be linked into the Delivery Plan monitoring	Policy and Strategy Manager and Development Management Manager	High	Medium	LDP and DM planning staff and Corporate Services - Data Insights Team



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

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

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

It is recognised that customer service excellence is an integral part of a high performing planning authority. Improving the legibility and ease of navigation of the planning pages on the Council's website has been identified as fundamental to enable customers to self-serve and thus ease the pressures on limited staff time and resource. With that in mind a project to redesign the ACC website is now being led and coordinated by the Corporate Customer Experience Team. A SPP task group is working to map service interactions (e.g. applying for, paying for and viewing planning applications) as a framework for configuring the planning webpages to improve the customer experience. This is an ongoing action that is the subject of an improvement action stemming from this assessment.

The Development Management Charter has been reviewed and updated in 2023 /2024 and is published on the Council's website setting out what customers can expect from the service and setting our service standards.

The Enforcement Charter is also published on the web-site and was updated in 2024. It explains the purpose of the Council's planning enforcement service, the process for handling enquiries, and sets out the standards of service we seek to achieve.

- **Ability to offer pre-application advice**

The planning authority offers pre-application advice. The service's pre-application advice procedure is published on the planning pages of the website. A charge is made for the service that is calibrated to the scale and complexity of development proposed. In the interests of customer service and taking into account the ability to pay, the advice is still offered free for householder developments. In 2022-23, 10.9 percent of applications (63) were subject to pre-application advice.

- **Regular engagement events with developers and communities**

Strategic Place Planning has engaged regularly with developers and communities.

In terms of community councils, there is regular communication between community council planning representatives, case officers and the development management team in relation to individual planning applications. Training events are held for Community Council representatives - most recently in March 2025. In 2023 a Planning Concordat was jointly agreed between the planning service and the community council forum that sets out how the planning function operates in the City, clarifies roles, responsibilities and timescales and explain how the service will work together with community councils to make sure that local communities' views are taken into account in the planning process.

The service has a track record of coordinating regular Agents Forum meetings between the planning team and architects and agents and consulting with this group on major service changes (e.g. the introduction of chargeable pre-application advice service). The most recent meeting was with representatives from the Aberdeen Architect's Society in September 2024. At that meeting it was recognised that it would be beneficial to convene more frequently scheduled meetings (at least once a year) that, as in the past, involve all agents involved in the planning process. This is an identified improvement action for the planning service.

Local Development Plan

For the Local Development Plan Team, the Participation Statement in the Development Plan Scheme explains how local communities and other stakeholders will be engaged and how they will have an opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the next Local Development Plan. The first Development Plan Scheme for the fourth Aberdeen Local Development Plan was adopted in 2023 and updated in 2024.

The participation statement includes detail on the following:

- Consultation partners
- National Standards for Community Engagement
- Advertisement and awareness of consultations
- Consultation engagement

• Customer and stakeholder surveys

Since January 2017 the whole of SPP has been an accredited holder of the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Award (overseen by the Cabinet Office). SPP has been successfully gained CSE re-accreditation at all the scheduled reviews with a steadily increase in the number of assessment criteria against which the auditor considers SPP to be exceeding the service standards required for compliance - the service currently has 18 criteria graded compliance-plus, with full compliance in the other 39 criteria.

An integral part of the assessment process has been customer surveys of applicants and agents for planning permission. The results of surveys are reviewed and lessons for service improvement assessed and actioned, if necessary, by a CSE Working Group. Based on experience of poor returns to survey links on emails/decision documents it has been found that the best way to maximize response rates to this survey has been for it to be carried out by telephone to a randomised selection of target customers. The latest report by the auditor in 2023 concluded that *“the service’s customer-centric, solution focused approach is endorsed in survey feedback and consistently high rates of satisfaction”*.

As part of the latest customer telephone survey in November 2024 a random sample of applicants and agents were contacted to assess their satisfaction with the Development Management service and 93% of these applicants and agents were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of service provided.

Attribute 10:

The Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

1. Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
2. Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes?
3. Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
4. 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?
5. Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
6. Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

• Community engagement strategy and infrastructure

A key element of the Council's Development Plan Scheme is the Participation Statement. This Statement explains how local communities and other stakeholders will be engaged and how they will have an opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the Local Development Plan.

Community engagement

Community engagement is a key element in Plan making. Our approach to engagement for the Local Development Plan adopts the principles set out by the National Standards for Community Engagement. The Team take a joint approach to supporting exercises such as the Place Standard Tool with colleagues in Community Planning Aberdeen.

Engagement with cross-section of the community

SPP co-ordinates and collaborates with our partners at every opportunity. In 2022 the Disability Equity Partnership (DEP), a constituted sub-committee of the Council representing people with disabilities in Aberdeen, accepted our invitation to be a local consultee for urban realm planning applications with a particular focus on accessibility, neurodiversity and legibility for all. This follows many years of direct partnership working with DEP on physical regeneration projects. A weekly meeting with the DEP continues to be hosted by a senior planner to respond to placemaking opportunities as they arise.

Preparation of the Local Development Plan also ensures engagement with a wide cross-section of the community. This includes targeted engagement exercises with children and young people, gypsy / travellers and other targeted groups. In March 2024 the Council was awarded the People's Choice Award at the Scottish Planning Innovation Awards (SPIA) for its engagement with young people in the Beach Masterplan (<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/news/council-takes-home-top-planning-award>)

• Customer and stakeholder surveys

A telephone survey was carried out of a cross section of applicants for planning permission in November 2024 as part of Customer Service Excellence accreditation. 93% of customers who participated were either very satisfied (57%) or satisfied (37%) with the service that was provided.

It is recognised that it would be beneficial to reinstate a schedule of regular meetings between the planning service and agents for applications (architectural agents, planning consultants etc) an, with this in mind, this is an action for the Improvement Action Plan.

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

Attribute	Score (1: Making excellent progress, 5: No progress)
9. The Planning Authority has a robust policy and evidence base	2
10. The Planning Authority makes best use of data and digital technology	2

Based on the gradings above, the following areas of improvement have been identified to form part of, and be taken forward through, an Improvement Action Plan that is a companion document to this assessment report.

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
Action: Agents' forum meetings (full range of agents) to be arranged at least once a year Outcome: To promote dialogue, learning and service improvement	Development Management Manager	Medium	Short Term	DM Manager Team Leaders

Action: Reconfigure the planning web-pages Outcome: Improved customer experience and ease of use, reducing burden on staff resource	Customer Insights Team	High	Short Term	Members of all planning teams
Action: Consider new approaches to community consultation tools for strategy production e.g. using different online options Outcome: Improved customer experience and ease of use reducing burden on staff resource	Policy and Strategy Manager and Customer Experience Team	High	Short Term	Policy and Strategy Manager LDP Team Leader and Seniors



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

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

1. 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?
2. Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places and is implementing them?

• Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

The Service has a sound awareness of the Place & Wellbeing Outcomes and has run training with other Council services on their use and the importance of place-based decision making. The LDP Team in particular is well placed to consider how best to incorporate the Outcomes into the next Local Development Plan, building on the “health in all policies” approach taken in the 3rd LDP.

Health and wellbeing are key components of creating successful, sustainable places. As well as a “health in all policies” approach, a section of the adopted Aberdeen Local Development Plan is dedicated to Health and Wellbeing. Policy WB1 – Healthy Developments states that national and major developments, and those requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment must submit a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to enhance health benefits and mitigate any identified impacts on the wider determinants of health; this may involve planning obligations. Further guidance will be produced in subsequent Aberdeen Planning Guidance on Health Impact Assessments.

- **Approach to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places**

The next Aberdeen Local Development Plan includes a range of policies and guidance to help deliver sustainable, livable and productive places. The next Local Development Plan will also explicitly focus on these elements through a local lens within the context of NPF4.

The planning service is aware of the need to develop monitoring tools to measure variables contributing to place and wellbeing outcomes and sustainable, liveable and productive places. In that regard, for the last 5 years, case officers in Development Management have been recording “added value” on the IDOX Uniform. This data provides a balanced qualitative counterpoint to standard quantitative performance measures related to speed of decision making. The data showed that in 2022-23 the planning service was instrumental in positive improvements to 59% of development proposals at the pre-application or application stage - an increase from the 51% achieved in 2021-22. Most enhancements relate to design (49% of all applications with improvements) - achieved via negotiated modifications to the layout, elevational treatment, materials or scale or massing of proposals. Other notable areas where value was added were to:

- Amenity (additional open space, increased garden ground or daylight and sunlight levels) - 16% of all amended applications
- Natural environment (enhanced landscaping, wildlife protection and tree protection) - 8%
- Road safety - 6%

Other positive changes were secured to improve, amongst other things, active travel, noise, air quality, waste collection and drainage.

Attribute 12:

The Planning Authority supports the delivery of consented development

The following questions have been considered in assessing how we have performed against this attribute:

1. 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 are they concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
2. Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
3. 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?
4. Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
5. Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

• Section 75 Agreements

Clear and proportionate expectations are set for the developer obligations to be secured through legal agreements which are laid out in the adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance on Planning Obligations. Where a legal agreement might be required this is flagged to prospective applicants in any pre-application advice. To help ensure consistency and speed of drafting the planning authority has produced template legal agreements that are made available on the Council's planning webpages. The Council has a dedicated Planning and Environment Team in its legal service with experienced knowledgeable lawyers who liaise regularly and work closely with the planning teams. In the last three years the average time for determining applications subject to a legal agreement has halved from 60 weeks in 2021-22 to 30.9 weeks in 2023-24. The Scheme of Delegation allows for refusal of an application under delegated powers if no progress has been made on progressing a legal agreement after the elapse of 6 months from a decision of willingness to approve.

• Proportionate approach to imposing conditions

The planning authority only imposes conditions when they are considered essential and when they meet the 6 tests required by Scottish Government Circular 4/1998.

• **Housing land requirement**

From February 2023, the National Planning Framework became part of the statutory development plan and set out a 10 year Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement of 7,000 units for Aberdeen City. The adopted Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2023 was prepared on the basis of the Strategic Development Plan that was part of the statutory development plan at that time, and which set out a Housing Land Requirement of 21,450 for 2016 to 2032. Proposals are already progressing or are in the pipeline for much of the land that will accommodate these requirements.

Most of this requirement will be met through established sites identified through the Local Development Plan 2023, with a focus on sites that are deliverable within the timeframe to 2032. There is also a continued emphasis on meeting the needs of the whole community including through the provision of affordable housing, and monitoring and review of the contribution of the land supply to delivering affordable housing will be important in this respect.

All the major greenfield sites from the previous Local Development Plan 2017 have approved Masterplans and a number are already delivering homes. A range of other established sites are anticipated to contribute to the requirements set out above. Much of the work in dealing with the complexities of larger sites has been completed.

• **Processing Agreements**

The Council promotes processing agreements on the planning pages of the website, particularly for major developments which have proven to be an effective tool for project managing the application process and helping to make planning statistics more reflective of performance. There is no identifiable trend in terms of the number of processing agreements that have been entered into over the last 5 years, with the total number varying between 203 and 285 agreements. The figure for 2023-24 was 249 agreements (about 25% of all planning applications).

• **Effective Delivery Programme**

The Delivery Programme sets out how Aberdeen City Council proposes to implement the Aberdeen Local Development Plan, adopted June 2023. The Delivery Programme is a working document which supports the implementation of all types of development across Aberdeen City in accordance with the Local Development Plan.

The Delivery Programme is updated every two years to reflect the progress of development proposals. In addition to the formal update, a working version will be published to reflect changes and identify any new actions.

The 2023 Delivery Programme was prepared using a multi-disciplinary approach. Colleagues from various services across the Council representing roads, public transport, transport policy, housing strategy, education, culture and sport, development management and developer obligations and, colleagues from Key Agencies such as Transport Scotland, Nestrans, Scottish Water, and NHS Grampian, fed into the programme and will continue to do so.

The Delivery Programme sets out, where possible:

- A list of actions required to deliver each of the Plan's proposals and policies;
- The name of the person/organisation who is to carry out the action; and
- The broad timescale for carrying out each action.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1: Making excellent progress, 5: No progress)
11. The Planning Authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	2
12. The Planning Authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	2

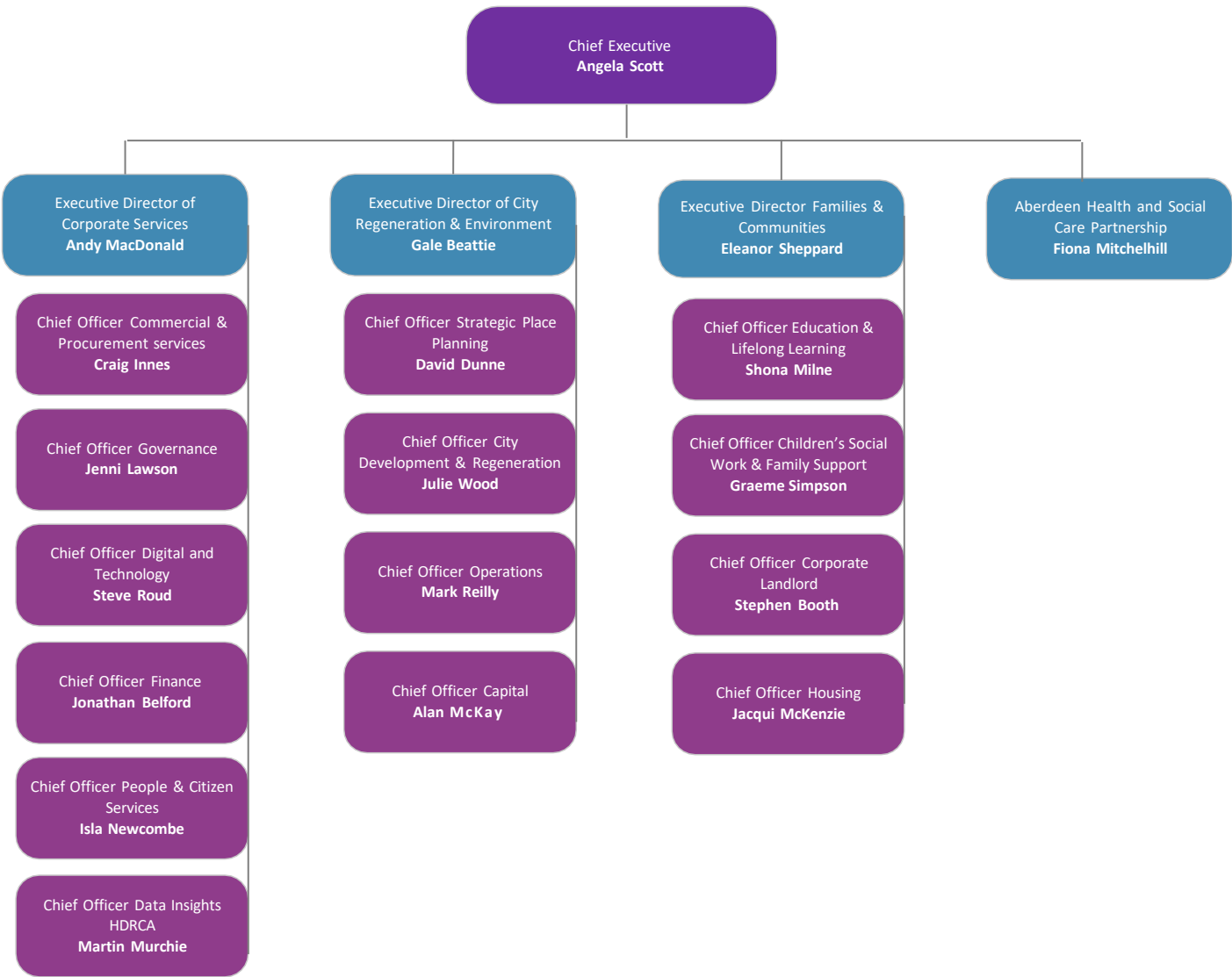
Based on the gradings above, the following areas of improvement have been identified to form part of, and be taken forward through, an Improvement Action Plan that is a companion document to this assessment report.

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
Action: Building on the "health in all policies" approach taken in LDP3, consider how to incorporate local work on the social determinants of health and the Marmot City principles into the next LDP Outcome: A strong Local Development Plan, grounded in prevention	Policy and Strategy Manager	Medium	Short Term	Local Development Plan Team NHS Grampian Public Health Scotland

Further Information

Council Structure

Aberdeen City Council is led by a Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team of four Executive Directors. Each Executive Director has responsibility for a function. Within each Function is a set of Clusters which are led by a Chief Officer.





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