

Title of Report:	Planning Review Report Action Plan
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	22 December 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Noting

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them
Lead Officer	Head of Planning

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil
Included in Current Year Estimates	
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	N/A	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to deliver the action points from the independent review of Planning.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Council at its meeting held on 01 September 2020 ratified the recommendation of the Corporate Policy and Resources held on 25 August 2020 as follows:

“Given the strategic significance of planning to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council – this Council calls for a full Independent review of Planning processes by an appropriate qualified body or Group, to include Service Users, Agents and Applicants; and for this to be carried out within a 6 months’ timescale.”

- 2.2 On 01 December 2020 Council approved a direct award contract to Mr Jim Mackinnon to provide the full independent review.
- 2.3 The report was presented to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee at the meeting held on 28 September 2021 and ratified by Council at its meeting held on 05 October 2021. Council further resolved at that meeting that a working group be established of 8 Members to meet bi-monthly to take the action plan forward.
- 2.4 The first meeting of the working group was held on 29 November 2021.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 **IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Planning Committee **Note** the attached Planning Review Report Action Plan.



**Causeway
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Borough Council**

REVIEW OF PLANNING ACTION PLAN 2021/22

Review of Planning Report – Action Plan 2021/22

Purpose

The purpose of this Action Plan is to set out the timeline for the implementation of the recommendations detailed in the Planning Review Report presented to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 28 September 2021 and ratified at Full Council on 05 October 2021.

This Action Plan builds on the momentum to improve performance to create a more timely, certain and transparent planning system whilst improving customer service.

The Action Plan addresses the recommendations set out in the Planning Review Report and recognises the critical role the planning system plays in the Council's economic and social recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic. It outlines the key initiatives to improve planning legislation and policies, efficient processing of planning applications and improving customer satisfaction.

Background

The Planning Review Report was commissioned to consider concerns over performance, in particular the scope for greater efficiency in handling planning applications and other significant issues raised on customer service, enforcement and the local development plan. Views were sought from staff in the Planning Department and a range of stakeholders including business interests and agents. The Report concluded that there is scope for significant improvements in the way the service is delivered and outlined a number of recommendations to be considered for implementation.

Action Plan Initiatives

The Action Plan sets out 4 overarching goals:

- Seek amendments to the complex planning legislation and detailed policy;
- Improve efficiency in the processing of planning applications;
- Improving communications with customers to improve customer service; and
- Stabilise staffing resources.

Monitor and Review

A working group consisting of Members from the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee will be set up to monitor and review progress in the implementation of this Action Plan. The Group will meet on a quarterly basis.

Actions Arising from the Review of Planning

Review of planning legislation and policies to streamline the development management and local development plan processes					
	Activity	What needs to be done	Anticipated Completion Date	Progress	Lead Officer
1	Pressing for reforms to the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 in relation to validation/simpler neighbour notification form/stricter time limits for making representations	Respond to the Call for Evidence on the Review of the Planning Act	Draft response issued 15 April 2021; final response issued 29 April 2021	Complete – Dfl to consider	Head of Planning
2	Pressurising Dfl for a fundamental rethink on the form and content of LDPs and the processes for their preparation	Respond to the Call for Evidence on the Review of the Planning Act	Draft response issued 15 April 2021; final response issued 29 April 2021	Complete – Dfl to consider	Head of Planning
3	Setting out a programme of agreeing protocols with key consultees for streamlining the process	Agree Standing Advice for consultations with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dfl Roads • NI Water • DAERA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dfl Roads SA agreed and implemented by October 2021 • NI Water SA agreed and implemented by January 2021 • DAERA SA agreed and implemented by March 2021 	<p>Complete</p> <p>Draft under preparation</p> <p>Request for meeting to discuss issued 07/10/2021;</p>	<p>Head of Planning</p> <p>Head of Planning</p> <p>Head of Planning</p>



				<p>follow-up sent 02/11/2021; Standing Advice Issued by DAERA 08/11/2021. Training for staff 01/12/21. Complete.</p>	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up meeting with DfC HED to discuss 	Not commenced	Head of Planning
4	Promote the use of the checklist for the content of planning applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek change to Planning legislation on validation • Agree validation checklist with Planning Committee • Discuss with Planning staff • Discuss with agents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included within response to Call for Evidence to DfI 29 April 2021 • Checklist agreed as an information document by Planning Committee • Information document discussed with Planning staff by September 2021 • Information document discussed with agents facilitated 	<p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Meeting to be arranged</p>	<p>Head of Planning</p> <p>Head of Planning</p> <p>Head of Planning and Senior Planning Officers</p> <p>Head of Planning and Development Manager and Enforcement Officer</p>

			through Membership bodies by November 2021		
5	Review Enforcement Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree reviewed Enforcement Strategy with Planning Committee • Implementation of Enforcement Strategy by staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed Enforcement Strategy agreed by Planning Committee September 2021 • Reviewed Enforcement Strategy implemented by staff October 2021 	<p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p>	<p>Head of Planning</p> <p>Enforcement Senior Planning Officer and Development Management & Enforcement Manager</p>
6	Develop interim guidance on rural development responsive to Members' aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review reasons for officials' recommendations on refused applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 2022 	Data on applications overturned extracted November 2021; Workshop with Planning Committee Members to be arranged.	Development Management & Enforcement Manager and Senior Planning Officers



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop interim guidance with Members on rural development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2022 	<p>Dfl PAN issued August 2021 discussed at Planning Committee meeting held on 23 August 2021, and raised development of rural guidance; mixed responses from Members on need; PAN withdrawn by Dfl 16/10/21; Response issued to Dfl by HoP on behalf of Planning Committee on 04/11/2021</p>	<p>Head of Planning and Development Management and Enforcement Manager</p>
Efficient processing of planning applications					
	Activity	What needs to be done	Anticipated Completion Date	Progress	Lead Officer
7	Establishing target(s) for decisions on householder and minor applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review statistics for Q1 and Q2 of 2021/22 Reduce timeframes for average 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> December 2021 Include performance targets 	<p>Statistics extracted</p> <p>Timeframes being considered – target set for Q4: 60% of</p>	<p>Development Management and Enforcement Manager and Senior Planning</p>

		processing times over next 2 years to achieve 12 week average processing time by 2023/24	in yearly business plan 22/23	householder and minor applications to be processed within 15 weeks	Officer (Minors Team)
8	Develop more succinct reports on non-contentious applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop template reports for minor types of applications Implement use of new template by staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> November 2021 November 2021 	<p>Under review</p> <p>Discussions commenced</p>	<p>Development Management and Enforcement Manager and Senior Planning Officer (Minors Team)</p>
9	Ensure planning reports balance central government policy with other material considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss within Senior Planning Officers Senior Officers discuss content of reports with their teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 2021 September 2021 	<p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p>	<p>Head of Planning</p> <p>Senior Officers</p>
10	Greater front-loading of assessment on planning applications, including requests for amendments/further information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff training on front-loading assessment of planning applications Review procedures for staff on planning application process to empower staff to make early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> December 2021 March 2022 	<p>Discussed at Staff Team Brief October Training to be rolled out in December</p> <p>Review of Procedures not commenced</p>	<p>Development Management and Enforcement Manager and Senior Officers</p>

		assessment of application and recommendation to senior officer for agreement and agree			
Customer Service					
	Activity	What needs to be done	Anticipated Completion Date	Progress	Lead Officer
11	Draw up Concordat with local business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up meeting with Chamber of Commerce(s) • Agree Concordat with Chamber(s) • Agree Concordat with Planning Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 2021 • February 2022 • March 2022 	Meeting held 03/11/2021 Meeting being held with each chamber separately - Ballycastle Chamber 22/11/2021; a/w dates from other Chambers	Head of Planning
12	Introduce regular surveys of customers' experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop customer survey template • Seek agreement at SLT and Planning Committee • Roll out surveys to those participating in the planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2022 • February 2022 • April 2022 	Council Customer Survey issued – Planning not included, therefore need to issue separate survey	Head of Planning



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13	Hold regular meetings with development, conservation and community interests to identify areas for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up initial meeting with stakeholders through RIBA, RICS, RTPI etc. • Seek input into Customer Charter to clarify standards and behaviours • Agree Customer Charter through SLT and Planning Committee • Hold meetings on a bi-yearly basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 2021 • December 2021 • February 2022 • Ongoing 	Email to be sent to stakeholders requesting meeting	Head of Planning
14	Adopt a more proactive approach to media communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue good news stories when appropriate • Issue quarterly media reports on performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing 	Media Report issued October on Planning Review and Q1 performance a/w publication of Q2 statistics and prepare media report	Head of Planning and PR Section
15	Introduce a process for impartial advice on design issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme of Delegation amended to allow Members to refer planning applications to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 2021 	Complete	Head of Planning



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		<p>refused on design issued to Planning Committee for determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of Senior staff to complete masterclass in Planning and Good Design • Scope procurement of impartial design arbitrator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled through RTPI for March and May 	Staff identified	Senior Officers
16	Promote an Awards Scheme to promote good planning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify award through Causeway Chambers awards • Identify award through Mayor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards ceremony October 2022 • Mayor awards ceremony 	Agreed with Chief Executive October 2021 Discuss with Mayor	Senior Officer
Staffing					
	Activity	What needs to be done	Anticipated Completion Date	Progress	Lead Officer
17	Recruit a dedicated lawyer (part-time) to support court actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise, interview and recruit for solicitor to be used 2 days per week for Planning issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2021 	Complete	David J Hunter
18	Appoint a specialist to deal with HRA Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek agreement to recruit for environmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2022 	Not started	Head of Planning and ODHR



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> planning officer through SLT and Planning Committee • Advertise, interview and recruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 2022 		
19	Maximise efforts to establish a stable complement of professional planners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill vacant permanent planning assistant posts through recruitment process • Fill vacant permanent business support assistant posts through recruitment process • Fill vacant temporary Planning Officer posts through Agency staffing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 2022 • December 2021 • March 2022 	<p>Agency staff appointed to final vacant post; recruitment exercise January 2022</p> <p>Recruitment campaign underway; interviews November 2021</p> <p>Last appointment agreed and commencement date awaited.</p>	Head of Planning and ODHR
20	Supporting the Head of Planning in developing a stronger leadership role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete PCDR • Identify areas to reduce pressures on Head of Planning to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October • March 2022 	<p>Complete</p> <p>Not started</p>	Head of Planning and Director of Corporate Services Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services



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		enable time to provide greater external facing role			and Head of Planning
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