

Title of Report:	Quarterly Report on Planning Performance
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	26 January 2022
For Decision or For Information	For Information

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 Background

1.1 Schedule 4 of The Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 sets out the statutory performance targets for the Planning Department for major development applications, local development applications and enforcement cases.

1.2 The statutory targets are:

- Major applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks
- Local applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average of 15 weeks
- 70% of all enforcement cases progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

1.3 The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics is an official statistics publication issued by Analysis, Statistics & Research Team within Department for Infrastructure. It provides the official statistics for each Council on each of the statutory targets and is published quarterly and on an annual basis. The Second Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin was published on 16 December 2021 providing planning statistics for this period. It also provides a summary of Council progress across the three statutory targets.

2.0 Details

Website link 1

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-july-september-2021> provides the link to the published bulletin.

Development Management Planning Applications

2.1 Table 1 below provides a summary of performance in relation to the statutory targets for major development applications and local development applications for the year to date (April – September) of 2021-22 business year and provides a comparison of performance against all 11 Councils.

2.2 The Planning Department has issued the 2nd highest number of major planning applications out of the 11 Councils year to date with all 9 applications approved in an average processing time of 52.4 weeks, a staggering 35.4 weeks faster when compared to the same period last year. This is the 5th fastest average processing time out of all 11 Councils and faster than the Northern Ireland average. This is a significant improvement on performance in this area with continued reduction in average processing times moving closer towards meeting the statutory target. Although we have received the 2nd lowest number of major applications during this period, we have received the 4th highest number of pre application notices indicating the intention to submit the formal major planning application.

- 2.3** In relation to local planning applications, the Planning Department continues to receive the 5th highest number of this hierarchy of planning applications and issue the 5th highest number of decisions. Of note, this Council received the highest number of agricultural applications in Q2 than any other Council and the 4th highest number of commercial and mixed use categories of development.
- 2.4** In terms of local applications decisions issuing, again this Council sits mid-rank in terms of the number of decisions issued. Improvement continues on the average processing times; 1.8 weeks faster when compared to same period last year and just 3.4 weeks off the statutory target at 18.4 weeks and 2.4 weeks below the Northern Ireland average. Of the decisions issued, 95.8% were approved, the 5th highest approval rate out of 11 Councils and higher than the Northern Ireland average.
- 2.5** The decrease in the number of applications issuing in Q1 and Q2 of 2020/21 due to restrictions resulting from the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an increase in the over 12 months applications in the system. It will be important going forward to continuously reduce the number of these applications in the system. It is considered that the target set out in the Planning Business Plan for 2021/22 will unlikely be achieved. Focus on the over 12 month applications in the system continues, balanced against progression of other applications in the system. However, stability of workforce is an important factor in the drive to improve performance. The need to transfer applications from one officer to another officer impacts considerably on the processing of such applications. Recruitment of agency staff to fill existing vacant posts due to their temporary nature e.g. sick leave/maternity leave/fixed term post continues but progress is slow due to difficulty attracting those with the necessary qualifications and experience.

Table 1: YTD Planning Applications Statistics

2021/22	Major		Local		Total		Live	
YTD (end Q2)	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Total	Over 12mths
Planning Applications	2	9	662	624	664	633	925	232 (25.1%)
Rank (highest)	10th	2nd	5th	5th	5th	5th	4th	3rd (%)
Average Processing Times	52.4 weeks		18.4 weeks					
Rank (highest)	5th		9th					
Approval Rate	100%		95.8%		95.8%		5th Rank	

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Second Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

Enforcement

- 2.6** Table 2 below shows statistics in relation to enforcement for year to date at end of Q2. The Enforcement Team continues to meet the statutory target to conclude 70% of cases within 39 weeks. During this period, the enforcement team had the highest number of prosecutions and 2nd highest convictions out of the 11 Councils. Of the cases concluded, 32.3% were closed due to no breach being identified. Nevertheless, these cases still required to be visited and research undertaken and report written and discussed at a meeting with the authorised officer to agree the 'no breach' decision.
- 2.7** The reduction in staffing due to maternity leave has impacted on the number of cases closed. As the number of cases opened continues to exceed those closed, the number of live cases continues to rise with the 4th highest live cases out of the 11 Councils.

Table 2: YTD Enforcement Statistics

2021/22	Open	Conclude	Conclusion Times	Court Action		Live Cases
YTD			70% within 39wks	Prosecutions	Convictions	
Cases	174	111	73.9%	15	2	407
Rank (highest)	6 th	8 th	8 th	1 st	2 nd	4 th

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Second Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

Other Activity by Planning Department

- 2.8** Tables 3 below indicates the level of other activity carried out by the Planning Department year to date at end of Q2 of 2021/22 business year.
- 2.9** In addition to the formal applications received, YTD at end of Q2 the Planning Department received 116 other types of applications relating to planning applications; 3rd highest number of discharge of conditions indicating the commencement of development and 4th highest number of Pre Application Notices indicating the intention to submit a major planning application.

Table 3: YTD Other Activity

YTD 2021/22	Received	Rank (highest)
Discharge of Conditions	51	3 rd
Certificate of Lawful Development	24	10 th
Pre Application Discussions	21	5 th
Non Material Change	11	11 th
TPOs	2	8 th
Pre Application Notice	7	4 th
Total	116	

Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Second Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

2.10 In addition to the formal applications received and other activity detailed above, YTD at end of Q2 the Planning Department received 42 requests for information, 236 general correspondence and 24 complaints at varying stages. This is a decrease in the number of general correspondence and complaints received when compared to the same period last year and an increase in the number of requests for information.

Income

2.11 Table 5 below provides a breakdown of the income generated by the Planning Department year to date end of Q2 of 2021/22. Income (including Property Certificates Q1 and Q2) was above that predicted by over £72k.

Table 5: Income

YTD 2021/22	Received
Planning Applications	£612,047.56
Property Certificates	96,101.67,
Total	£708,149.23

Source: Unvalidated Statistics – Internal Reports

Conclusion

2.12 In conclusion, the statutory target for enforcement continues to be achieved with the highest number of prosecutions out of all 11 Councils. Performance continues to steadily improve towards meeting the other statutory targets. Significant improvement has been made in the average processing times for major planning applications, processed faster than the Northern Ireland average. The approval rate for both major and local planning applications is also above the Northern Ireland average.

2.13 Focus going forward remains on the number of planning applications and enforcement cases in the system over 12months and the reduction in time taken to process both major and local applications. Stability of the workforce is an important element in achieving further improvement and recruitment of suitably qualified staff into vacant posts is therefore a priority. Improving processes for the assessment of planning applications by the implementation of Advice and Guidance from key statutory consultees to reduce consultations will also assist in reducing timeframes and will be a key area of work going forward.

3.0 Recommendation

3.1 IT IS RECOMMENDED that the Planning Committee note the Planning Departments Quarterly Report.