

Title of Report:	Planning Department Performance Annual Report 2021/2022
Committee Report Submitted To:	Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	28 June 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 and these are reflected in Council's Performance Improvement Plan 2021-22 and the Planning Department Business Plan 2021-2022.

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 Planning Department Business Plan KPIs are:

- Objective 1: Improve performance in relation to processing planning applications
 - Local applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average processing time of 19 weeks
 - Major applications received in this business year to be processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average processing time of 50 weeks
 - 70% of all enforcement cases progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.
 - reduce the number of over 12 month applications in the system by 10%.
 - Stable Staff Resource
- Objective 2; to manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework
 - Reduction in number of Agency staff employed
 - Number of cases where Ombudsman determines where maladministration is less than 0.5% of all decisions made.

1.4 The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics is an official statistics publication issued by Analysis, Statistics & Research Team, 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 2021/22 Annual Statistical Bulletin will not be published until July 2022 and therefore unvalidated statistics are used to analyse performance at this time.

2.0 Details

Website link 1

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-october-december-2021> provides the link to the published bulletin for Q1-Q3 of 2021/22 business year.

Objective 1: Improve performance in relation to processing planning applications

- 2.1 Table 1 below provides a summary of performance in relation to major development applications and local development applications for the 2021-22 business year based on unvalidated statistics.

Table 1: Planning Applications

2021/22	Major		Local		Total		Live	
	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Rec'd	Dec'd/ W/D	Total	Over 12mths
Planning Applications	10	16	1,248	1,214	1,258	1,230	923	252 (27.3%)
Average Processing Times	54.6 weeks		18.8 weeks					
Approval Rate	93.3%		95.8%		95.8%			

Source: Unvalidated Statistics

KPI1: Local applications processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average processing time of 19 weeks

- 2.2 In the 2021/22 business year, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council received the 1,248 local category of planning applications and determined 1,214 applications to decision/ withdrawal. The average processing time taken to process from date valid to decision of 18.8 weeks met the Business Plan KPI of 19 weeks. It demonstrates continuous progress in reducing the average processing time for local applications in a drive to meet the statutory target of 15 weeks. It is 2 weeks faster than the previous business year and the fastest since transfer of powers in April 2015. It is important to continue this improvement into the next business year with the front-loading of planning applications and assessments.

KPI2: Major applications received in this business year to be processed from date valid to decision or withdrawal within an average processing time of 50 weeks

- 2.3 Analysing the statistics based on major hierarchy category there was a significant improvement in the average processing times for major category of applications, processing more applications to decision/withdrawal than the previous business year and in a time 31.6 weeks faster than the previous business year at 54.6 weeks. Of the 16 major planning applications decided/withdrawn, 1 has been determined within the 50 week business plan KPI and the remainder remained live in the system but still with the potential to be determined in less than 50 weeks. Therefore, this business plan KPI has been achieved. Focus will continue into the next business year to process the remaining major applications received within the 50 week target and drive forward to reduce the average processing time closer to the statutory target of 30 weeks. However, delays due to NI Water infrastructure issues has the potential

to impact on average processing times where applicants have not engaged with NI Water and agreed a solution prior to the submission of the application.

KPI3: 70% of all enforcement cases progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

2.4 Table 2 below provides a summary of performance in relation to enforcement activity for the 2021-22 business year.

Table 2: Enforcement

2021/22	Open	Conclude	Conclusion Times	Court Action		Live cases
			70% within 39wks	Prosecutions	Convictions	
Cases	294	212	78.8%	20	8	423

Source: Unvalidated statistics

The business plan KPI and the statutory target to progress 70% of all enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint have both been achieved in this business year. Due to staff vacancies within the Enforcement Team and backlog of site visits due to the Covid 19 restrictions, the number of live cases has increased. A permanent planning assistant has been appointed and this will assist in relieving some of the pressures on other staff within the team in dealing with new cases, allowing them to balance their casework with other workload including enforcement appeals and attendance at court. Going forward, caseloads will require to be carefully monitored and the vacant SPTO post filled to further reduce pressures on staff and continue to meet the statutory target and reduce live cases.

KPI4: Stable Staff

2.5 Recruitment of staff to fill vacant posts at various grades was undertaken during the business year resulting in appointment of permanent staff into the vacant posts and agency staff to fill FTC posts including secondments. At the end of the business year only one permanent Planning Assistant post remained to be filled and this had been offered to the successful candidate who was at that time undergoing the pre-employment checks. The appointment of a solicitor to deal with planning on a part-time issue is also complete. The recruitment campaign to fill the vacant post at Senior Planning Officer grade due to resignation in February 2022 will be undertaken in Q1 of the next business year. The successful recruitment of staff over this business year has resulted in a stable compliment of staff at the end of this business year and hence achieving this KPI.

Objective 2: To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework

KPI5: Reduction in the number of temporary staff

- 2.6** The Planning Department commenced the year with 7 agency staff covering a career break, secondment, maternity leave, fixed term contract posts etc. By 31 March 2022 the number of agency staff has reduced to 5 covering a mixture of 3 FTC posts, a long-term sick leave post and maternity leave post. This has been achieved through the recruitment of permanent staff, return of staff from career break and secondment.

KPI6: Number of cases where Ombudsman determines maladministration is less than 0.5% of all decisions made.

- 2.7** The Planning Department successfully met this KPI. Over the business year, of the planning application decisions issued and enforcement cases closed, the number of cases where the Ombudsman determined maladministration was on 0.14% of decisions. This related to a total of 2 cases requiring the issuing of a letter of apology and a review of the enforcement strategy and the review of the case central to one of the determinations. A review of the complaints procedure is being undertaken centrally.

Other Activity

Development Plan Team

- 2.8** Over the business year the Development Plan Team continue to engage with key stakeholders in the Local Development Plan (LDP) process. Work continued on the gathering of evidence and completing the necessary studies to inform the policies, including landscape study, settlement appraisals and annual monitoring work. Workshops have continued with Members on the review of LDP policies for inclusion within the draft Plan Strategy. The LDP Steering Group agreed the first batch of policies on 18 January 2022 and these have been discussed with Shared Environmental Services who will undertake the Sustainability Appraisal on behalf of Council. At the end of this business year only 1 workshop remained to be held, in line with the work programme.
- 2.9** Collaborative working with internal and external stakeholders continued throughout the business year including AONB Masterplans, Town Teams, Revitalise and extensive work in the development of the new Planning Portal. This work continues into the next business year.

Planning Review

- 2.10** The report from the independent Planning Review was published in this business year and work commenced on implementing the key recommendations from the report. A Planning Review Steering Group was established incorporating 8 Members, the Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and Head of Planning to oversee the implementation of these actions. An Action Plan has been developed and progress on each of the actions is reported to the Steering Group. A number of meetings with key stakeholders including the Chambers of Commerce and professional bodies were undertaken over this time to improve relationships and encourage engagement in agreeing improvements to the planning process. Positive engagement with key stakeholders continues and work continues in implementation of the key recommendations from the report.

Other Reviews

- 2.11** Over the business year there were a number of other reviews of the planning system in Northern Ireland including DfI Review of the Implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011, NIAO Report on Planning in Northern Ireland and Public Accounts Committee Review of Planning in Northern Ireland. The actions from these reports are currently under consideration and we will continue to work collaboratively with DfI to improve the planning system in Northern Ireland. Key actions from the reports that apply to this council will be taken forward in the next business year.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee note the Planning Departments Annual Report.