

Regional Planning Directorate

To: All Council Heads of Planning

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Our Reference: SUB 1222/20

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Dear Heads of Planning

URGENT REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: DELIVERING LOCAL PLANNING SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

First and foremost I sincerely hope you, your families and loved ones are all well at this time. In these difficult circumstances it is important that we strive to do all that we can in the coming weeks and months to keep the planning process running as close to normal as possible whilst respecting all government advice and PHA guidance. This is, by no means, an easy task and I am aware, to some extent, of the various approaches councils are adopting in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. I understand a number of council Planning Departments have closed entirely, until further notice, whilst others are operating a reduced service.

The Minister is keen that the Department works hard to explore the range of options available to it that might assist councils at this very difficult time. I have issued a Chief Planners Update (CPU) with more information and advice.

As it is essential that we work collectively on current challenges, we want to engage with all councils regarding your ideas or suggestions on how together we can help deliver the planning process during the current crisis, particularly in order to support the delivery of essential services. Therefore, it would be most helpful if you could all consider the following questions and respond with the information requested:

INFORMATION REQUESTED:

1. Please advise if your council planning office is open or closed to the general public and/or planning staff and are your planning staff able to work effectively remotely?

2. Are you receiving new planning applications and are these being validated and processed insofar as possible (including outlining your approach to site inspections, group meetings etc)?
3. What contingency arrangements has or will your council put in place to maintain some degree of service (correspondence, uploading documents to the portal, register/open file viewings/meeting requests; public consultation in relation to LDPs) or has your service been completely closed?
4. Will current applications in the system continue to be processed or are some to be identified as being held?
5. Have planning committee meetings been suspended? If so, what contingency arrangements, if any, have been implemented?
6. What are the key issues arising and what are your suggestions to help improve the process during this crisis, including any ideas of necessary legislative or administrative interventions, particularly to support the delivery of essential services?

Thank you for your help and given the urgency, if you would be able to respond by **COP 31 March** that would be much appreciated. Please **'reply to all'** with your returns so we can all build up an understanding of the position across Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely



ANGUS KERR
Chief Planner &
Director of Regional Planning

Cc
Council Chief Executives