

Planning Business Plan 2019 20	23rd October 2019
Planning Committee	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environments and Assets
Outcome	Pro-active decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough
Lead Officer	Denise Dickson
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

FOR DECISION

1.0 Background

- 1.1** The Planning Department produces its Business Plan on an annual basis setting out the key objectives for the year going forward. This year's Business Plan is focussing on 2 key areas: performance against the statutory targets and financial planning.

2.0 Details

- 2.1** The attached Business Plan sets out the key objectives for the 2019/20 Business Year.
- 2.2** The first objective is to improve performance in relation to the processing of planning applications. The Business Plan sets out a number of actions that are proposed to deliver two key workstreams to assist in meeting this objective; streamline the planning application process and maintain sufficient staff resources.
- 2.3** The second key objective is to manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework. Two key workstreams are identified to be delivered over this business year with the associated actions. These workstreams are to ensure all Audit recommendations are implemented and secondly, to reduce expenditure in line with budget reductions.
- 2.4** The detailed actions to deliver both these objectives are set out in Section 3 of the attached Business Plan.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1** **IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Planning Committee agree the attached Planning Business Plan.



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

PLANNING

BUSINESS PLAN 2019-2020

SECTION 1

Purpose of this plan

- Give a clear sense of what the service is for and the challenges it faces.
- Show how it is supporting Council's priorities.
- Show how it is contributing to the efficiency drive and transformation of service delivery.
- Show how it is aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Help us to hold ourselves to account and ensure we deliver for Council and its residents.
- Bring key information together in one place about the service, which Members, staff and stakeholders can understand.

The Vision for the service area

'Working in partnership with our community we will seek to protect and enhance our environment, promote well-being, and support a sustainable economy.'

Strategic Themes / Functions

The key functions of the Planning service area are:

- Local Development Planning – creating a plan which will set out a clear vision of how the council area should look in the future by deciding what type and scale of development should be encouraged and where it should be located to create a sustainable environment; designation of conservation areas; issuing Building Preservation Notices and Tree Preservation Orders.
- Development Management – determining the vast majority of planning applications and other planning consents, including waste and minerals applications, conservation area consents, advertisement consents, certificates of lawful development, non-material changes, and discharge of conditions.



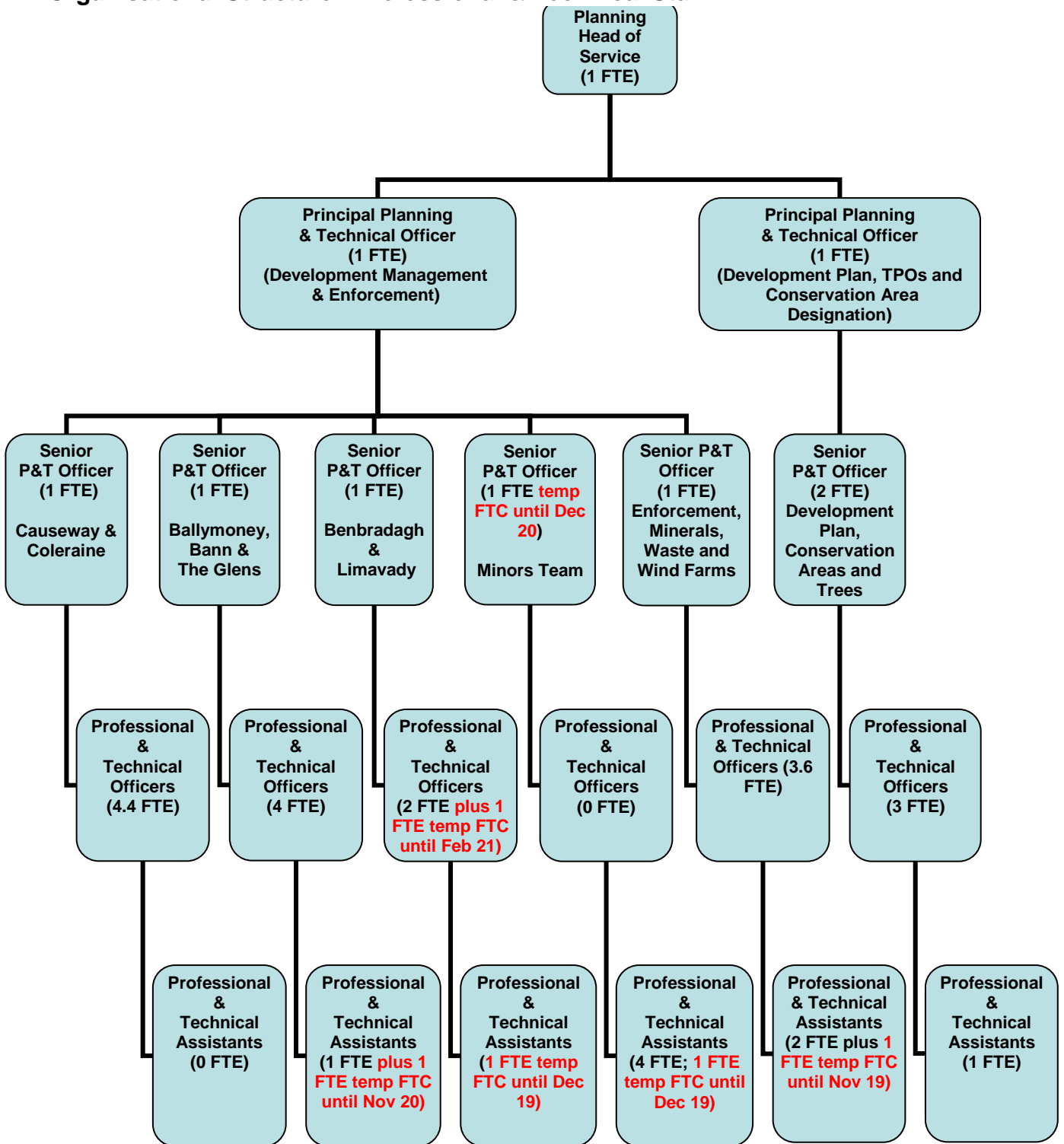
- Planning Enforcement – investigating alleged breaches of planning control and taking action where it is considered expedient to do so; issuing of Urgent Works Notices.

Strategic Aims of the Service

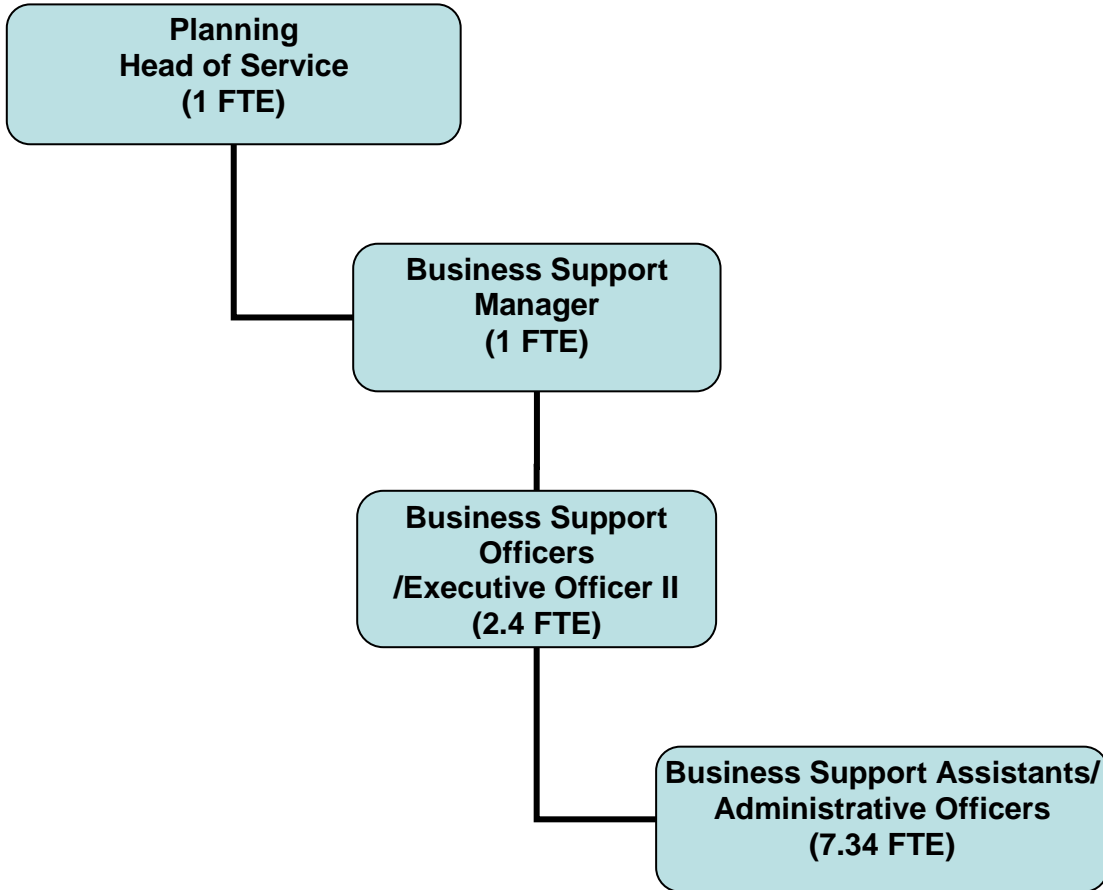
1. To contribute to the growth of a sustainable economy and investment in the Borough by making timely decisions and developing sound planning policies.
2. To contribute to the protection of the environment and the creation of safer communities by making sound decisions and developing sound policies through the development plan process.
3. To engage customers, stakeholders and partners more effectively in order to increase understanding of and compliance with processes and regulation.
4. To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within a strong corporate governance framework.



Organisational Structure - Professional & Technical Staff



Organisational Structure – Administrative Support



SECTION 2

SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater engagement with Elected Members in the Local Development Plan process bringing greater local awareness of needs • Agreed Protocol and Scheme of Delegation with Planning Committee in place and regularly reviewed. • Experienced staff at senior level employed on permanent basis with wide range of knowledge and skills • Positive attitude throughout the office. • Clear assigned roles in relation to Development Management, Development Plan and Enforcement. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience in staff at lower grades with over 12% of P&T staff on fixed term contract. • Great uncertainty for developers due to political input into decision making process with increased numbers of officer's recommendations overturned by Planning Committee. • Increasing complexity of legislation and environmental areas/issues which limited internal expertise. • Increased number of complaints regarding delays in the planning process and decisions. • Detailed policies within SPPS constrain Council's ability to develop policies specific to needs of Borough within its new Local Development Plan (LDP).
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity through the SPPS to develop better partnership working – between Council, the Department for Infrastructure, other Councils and the general public. • Participation in the development of new Planning Portal IT System procurement process ensures Council's input into specification is fully considered. • Opportunities for collaborative working with other council staff. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater risk of challenge through Judicial Reviews/Ombudsman etc. on environmental governance • No control over number of planning applications submitted and hence income generation. • Risk to breaches of confidentiality/data protection due to high volumes of correspondence received and uploaded onto the Planning Portal. • Loss of staff to other councils/private sector resulting in increased workloads.

Summary Narrative

Planning is a demand-led service and we are affected by the wider economic factors which determine the level of applications received. Enforcement is similarly reactive process as the majority of complaints are received from the public. Planning staff negotiate with agents on planning applications in an attempt to secure an acceptable scheme, however this has a negative impact on Council's ability to meet the statutory targets for local and major category of planning applications.

The receipt of letters of representation and documentation submitted as part of the planning application and enforcement processes and requests for copies of documentation under the Environmental Information Regulations carry a risk in terms of data protection under the General Data Protection Regulations. These correspondence add to the workloads of staff and carries with it the risk of data breaches should all information not be adequately redacted including judgement calls of defamatory remarks. With 3 fixed term contract posts coming to an end in November and December 2019, and 3 fixed term contracts coming to an end the following year, consideration must be given to whether to extend these contracts for a further 2 years and make the SPTO grade, one Planning Officer grade and one Planning Assistant grade permanent given the stability in application numbers over the last 2 years and the increased workload associated with the level of applications determined by Planning Committee.

Council is now responsible for the publication of a new Local Development Plan that will, when adopted, form the basis of all decision making within the Borough. Over this business year workshops will commence with Elected Members to prepare the strategic policies for the Draft Strategic Plan. This will have to be carefully monitored over the forthcoming months in terms of staff workloads.

With the contract for the Planning Portal due to expire on 31 March 2019 and the existing system becoming unsupported from December 2020, there is a risk that a new system will not be in place in time to replace the current system. Planning staff are actively engaged with Department for Infrastructure and other Councils to assist in the development of the specification for the new system. This has resulted in a number of staff being diverted away from their normal duties to work on the procurement and testing of the new system; this involvement will continue over the next business year.

PESTEL Analysis

Political	Local accountability – Elected members have responsibility for decision making for those applications not delegated to planning officers and for agreeing the new development plan. The lack of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly in Stormont is impacting on the ability to have planning legislation reviewed.
Economic	Receipts are closely related to general economic activity in the Borough. Planning can be an enabler of development and can be viewed as an income generator to the overall benefit of the Council. The reduction in the Housing Growth Indicators will have major implications for the new LDP due to the reduction in predicted housing growth for the Borough.
Social	Opportunity to improve the wellbeing of citizens of the Borough through the linkage with the Community Plan and greater community involvement in the development plan process. Continue to implementation the agreed Statement of Community Involvement and consider reviewing.
Technological	Development of the Planning Portal/Website will contribute to improvement in customer accessibility and engagement in the planning functions. Consider use of software and modern communication methods to engage with those who submit letters of representation to Planning.
Environmental	Ability to protect the environment and encourage economic development through a balanced delivery of the planning system. The new development plan process will encourage greater political and community involvement in the local development plan process with each option appraised through the Sustainability Assessment and other Assessments. Continuation of the collaboration with other council staff will improve knowledge and evidence to produce sound policies to promote sustainable development.
Legal	Working in a complex legal environment increases the risk of challenge through Judicial Reviews/Ombudsman cases. Large number of European designated sites in the Borough and increased scrutiny through The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 and the Council Directive 92/43/EEC raising complex issues.

Summary Narrative

Planning is largely constrained by complex legislation and policies implemented through central government. In the absence of a Minister, amendments to the legislation cannot be made. The risks involved in failing to comply with these can result in a significant financial cost to Council. It is therefore important to ensure that Planning has sufficient staff resources with the necessary skills and knowledge to make sound decisions and reducing the risks of administrative errors.

SECTION 3

Planning service area Strategic Aims and Objectives Aligned with Council's Strategic Aims and Objectives:

BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVE 1: Improve performance in relation to processing planning applications

WORKSTREAM	ACTION	OUTCOMES	BUDGET	TIMESCALE	KPI	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	PROGRESS	RAG STATUS
Streamline the planning application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify blockages in the process Hold a workshop with Elected Members to review the planning process to identify ways to streamline Develop a Development Management Strategy based on agreement at workshop Planning Committee agree to implement Development Management Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear framework for efficient delivery of development management function Reduction in timeframes to improve performance against statutory targets 	No budget required; within staff resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q2 Q3 Q4 Q4 	Achieve yearly target for 2019/20: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local applications average processing time of 19 weeks; Major applications average processing time of 45 weeks. 70% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint 	Denise Dickson Head of Planning		
Maintain sufficient staff resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare Business Case to retain Fixed Term Contracts on mix of both temporary and permanent basis Seek agreement on Business case through SLT Seek agreement of Business Case through Planning Committee and full Council if necessary Recruit/retain agreed staff resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in agency staff if permanent appointments agreed Retain staff workloads at a manageable level Reduction in timeframes to improve performance against statutory targets 	Budget is already provided through existing staffing structure for temporary posts; ensure business case does not increase staff salary costs over that allocated for both permanent and agency staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q3 Q3 Q4 Q4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable staff resource Achieve a reduction in the number of applications in the system over 12 months to under 130 applications 	Denise Dickson Head of Planning		

BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVE 2: To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework.

WORKSTREAM	ACTION	OUTCOMES	BUDGET	TIMESCALE	KPI	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	PROGRESS	RAG STATUS
Ensure all Audit recommendations are implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine number of Agency staff employed within planning • Prepare Business Case to retain Fixed Term Contracts on mix of both temporary and permanent basis • Seek agreement of Business Case through SLT, Planning Committee and full Council as necessary • Recruit/retain agreed staff resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree staffing resources • Agree reduction in agency staff from 9 to 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within current budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q2 • Q3 • Q3 • Q4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve a reduction in number of Agency staff employed in accordance with Audit recommendation 	Denise Dickson Head of Planning		
Reduce expenditure in line with budget reductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree budget reduction and income generation • Allocate budget against costs • Monitor budget expenditure and income generation and report to SLT and Planning Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient budget set • Underspend/ overspend identified at earliest stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate within allocated budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q3 • Q3 • Q4 • Q4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve savings of budget • Expenditure in line with reduced budget allocation 	Denise Dickson Head of Planning		

**SECTION 4
Financial Position for 2019/2020 Provisional**

Service Area	Expenditure & Income	Detail Sub Category	Total
Head of Planning	Expenditure	Staff Costs – Salaries (Incl Agency & supperann)	£2,155,000
		Training/Course Costs	£2,900
		Stationery, Postage & Printing	£21,000
		Protective Clothing	£300
		Legal Services	£20,000
		Planner RTPPI Membership	£4,700
		Hospitality	£350
		Advertisement	£35,000
		Subscriptions/Licences	£28,000
		Travel, Subsistence and Carparking	£26,250
		Development Plan Costs	£65,000
		Surveys	£3,000
		Expenditure Total	£2,361,500
		Estimated Income	Receipts from planning applications and Planning Property Certificates
Income Total	£1.5m est.		
Head of Planning Total (Gross)			£861,500