

Applications Over 12 Months Old- Action Plan 2017/ 18	23 rd August 2017
PLANNING COMMITTEE – FOR DECISION	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Outcome
Leader and Champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our Elected Members will provide civic leadership to our citizens working to promote the Borough as an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit.
Protect the environment in which we live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All environments in the area will benefit from pro-active decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough.
Lead Officer	Head of Planning
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

1.0 Background

- 1.1 An action plan has been prepared to reduce the number of live planning applications over 12 months old. This relates to the target set in the Planning Business Plan 2017-2018 to reduce the number of applications over 12 months old to 60 by the end of March 2018.

2.0 Detail

- 2.1 The action plan reviews the success of the 2016/2017 Over 12 Months Old Action Plan. It reviews current performance in the efficiency of processing planning applications. The Action Plan introduces a new approach for the 2017- 2018 Business Year to seek further improvements. Proposed actions are set out along with a system of regular reporting.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 **IT IS RECOMMENDED** that Members agree to the above regarding implementing the Action Plan for applications over 12 months old.

APPLICATIONS OVER 12 MONTHS OLD – ACTION PLAN 2017/ 18

Purpose

This Action Plan is being put in place in order to assist in improving customer service by bringing a conclusion to those older applications that have been in the system over 12 months. This Plan provides continuity, with an adjusted approach, to the Over 12 Month Old - Action Plan relating to the 2016/17 Business Year.

As part of a measure to improve development management performance generally, this Action Plan should work towards assisting in meeting the statutory targets set out by The Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. As Major applications have a statutory target of 30 weeks and Local applications have a statutory target of 15 weeks, all applications over 12 months old have failed to meet the relevant target.

2016/17 Over 12 Month Old Action Plan

The previous Action Plan identified that there were 109 applications over 12 months old at 31st March 2016. The Action Plan set a target of a reduction to 55 applications in this category by 1st April 2017. By 31st March 2017 there were 78 applications in this category (Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics 2016/17 Annual Statistical Bulletin). While the Action Plan did achieve a substantive reduction in the number of applications in this category by just under a third (31), it nevertheless failed to achieve the target.

Performance

Progress on reducing the overall number of applications in this category is set out in the table below. This shows that while sustained progress was made to a minimum level of 78 applications the level of applications in the 12-18months and over 24 months remain continuously high.

Table 1 Breakdown of over 12 month applications (Sept 2016 – March 2017)

Applications Live	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
12-18 months	38	31	36	35	39	45	36
18-24 months	17	15	17	18	20	13	13
>24 months	33	32	32	33	30	30	29
Total	88	78	85	86	89	88	78

Source: Unvalidated Statistics; Excludes: Pre-Application Discussions; Certificate of Lawful Development Proposed or Existing; Discharge of Conditions; Non-Material Change.

In seeking to ascertain further information to the trend of applications in this category, greater analysis has recently been undertaken of the statistics. This analysis had regard to the number of applications in this category being continuously high. The number of applications in this category is defined by two key factors:

applications that are decided and leave this category and; applications that reach their first anniversary and fall into this category.

Looking at each of these in turn and using an 8 week sample, this shows that on average, 2.5 applications in this category are decided each week. However, this is frustrated by the number of applications that reach their first anniversary and fall into this category. Again, using the same sample over an 8 week period, this shows that on average, 2.9 new applications fall into this category each week. This points to a more systemic problem in the extended processing times of applications well beyond their target times. Therefore, it is improvement in the 6-12month category of applications that has the most potential to reduce the number of applications in the over 12 month category.

Expressed as a percentage of overall live caseload of 680 at the end of March 2017, 11.5% of applications are over 12 months old. While it is likely that there will invariably be a percentage of all live applications over 12 months old, this figure is higher than what could be reasonably expected.

Proposed Target

The Planning Business Plan 2017-2018 sets a target of reducing the number of applications over 12 months old to 60 by the end of March 2018.

Proposed Actions

As has been achieved in the previous year, sustained efforts should be made to ensure that applications that are already in the over 12 months old category are progressed to a decision.

Some factors which adversely affect processing times are difficult to overcome. These include, for example: complex applications which require multiple amendments and re-consultations; those applications which require EIA screening consultations; significant delays on the submission of required information from agents such as detailed surveys and reports (which necessarily take time); delayed responses from consultees and; to some extent, referral of applications to the Planning Committee post presentation on the Contentious Delegated Decisions Ready to Issue list.

However, the above scenarios are only likely to account for a limited percentage of the overall live caseload. The potential for significant improvement in processing times can be achieved through a combination of: sufficient staff resources and; improved staff efficiency.

Sufficient staff resources can be monitored using management reports. Central to this is consideration of the number of applications received, their complexity and live caseloads. A business case has been prepared for Council's approval to recruit additional staff for the Development Management Section for a temporary 3 year period.

Improved staff efficiency can be brought about through adherence to the timeframes and best practice set out in the new Development Management Internal Advice and

Guidance Note 2 Efficient Development Management. Application of this method of working is the responsibility of the case officers and line management. Central to this approach is underlining the importance of efficient development management and promoting a culture of efficiency to achieve targets. Specific actions are set out below.

Actions	Action Owner	Timescale	Comments
Monitor overall applications over 12 months old	PPTO	• Weekly	
Monitor progress on applications already over 12 months old	PPTO, SPTOs	• Monthly	
Monitor applications received and caseloads	PPTO, SPTOs	• Monthly	
Application of DM Internal Advice and Guidance Note 2- Efficient Development Management	SPTOs, HPTOs, PTOs	• Timeframes set out in document.	
Performance Management using MIS Reports	SPTOs, HPTOs	• Weekly	
Management of assigned caseload	PTOs, HPTOs	• Weekly	

Reporting

An update on Development Management Statistics report is presented to the Planning Committee Monthly. This report will continue to set out the number of applications over 12 months old at the end of the preceding month as well as previous months to show progress.

Conclusion

Adherence to this Action Plan offers the two-fold benefit of reducing the number of applications over 12 months old as well as improving performance against processing targets. This, in turn, will offer tangible benefits in terms of service delivery and positive economic outcomes for the Borough.