

Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 11 August 2021

Planning Improvement Plan – Update

Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	<u>1,4,10-15,18,28</u>

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee notes the progress which has been made on the implementation of the Planning service's Improvement Plan and progress against internal audit actions on developer contributions.

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Report

Planning Improvement Plan – Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's refreshed Planning Improvement Plan (PIP).
- 2.2 Progress has been made in a number of areas since the PIP was refreshed in February 2021. Additionally, all recommendations of an internal audit on developer contributions have now been implemented and closed. The new and revised procedures which resulted will continue to be subject to quality assurance processes.

3. Background

- 3.1 The PIP 2018/21 was first approved by Planning Committee in [December 2018](#). It sets out a series of key actions in relation to Leadership and Management, Customer, Continuous Improvement and Performance.
- 3.2 In [February 2021](#) the Planning Committee approved an interim refresh of the PIP, to reflect changes in the wider context since 2018 and to cover the remainder of 2021 and early 2022.
- 3.3 Regular updates on progress have been provided :
 - 3.3.1 in progress reports as listed in section 8 below; and
 - 3.3.2 in Business Bulletins updating on quarterly decision making time performance, also listed in section 8 below.

4. Main report

- 4.1 To date, 2021 has been a particularly challenging year for the service, with major projects to progress and record levels of incoming applications coinciding with the coronavirus lockdown restrictions in the first months of the year.
- 4.2 Despite this, progress has continued to be made across all improvement themes and actions.
- 4.3 A summary of activities is attached as Appendix 1.

- 4.4 Achievements in 2021 to date include:
- 4.4.1 Realignment of staff and teams in response to retirements of senior staff, making use of the service's future operating model;
 - 4.4.2 Use of new practices to distribute application caseload across teams on a flexible basis and in response to shifting pressures;
 - 4.4.3 Ongoing work by the staff wellbeing group to help staff support their wellbeing while working from home;
 - 4.4.4 The service's first virtual Customer Forum sessions, to be followed up with more later in 2021;
 - 4.4.5 The rollout of new simple report templates for householder and local developments. As reported to Planning Committee in February, it is intended to extend this approach to reports to the Development Management Sub-Committee later in 2021;
 - 4.4.6 Improvements in average decision times, as reported in Business Bulletin updates to Committee;
 - 4.4.7 Significant progress in resolving stalled/legacy cases, which had been pending for over a year; and
 - 4.4.8 Introduction of a new quality assurance method for checking that processes are being followed.
- 4.5 The new quality assurance method was introduced to implement an action recommended in an internal audit relating to developer contributions. These recommendations were set out in a report referred from the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee to Planning Committee in [May 2019](#) and summarised in reports to Planning Committee, most recently in [February 2021](#). All outstanding actions from that audit are now implemented. The quality assurance method will be used for other internal processes, as well as to periodically check on the end-to-end s75 process.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Work will continue to implement actions in the improvement plan. Priority will continue to be given to activities which support staff wellbeing, to actions which sustain improvements in decision making timescales, to actions which establish a cycle of monitoring and improving the quality of outcomes on the ground.
- 5.2 The Scottish Government's feedback on the service's [Planning Performance Framework](#) for 2020/21 is expected later in 2021 and will be reported to a future meeting of the Planning Committee.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The costs associated with implementing the proposed improvements in the PIP will be met from the Planning and Building Standards Service budget.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The refreshed Improvement Plan included a customer and stakeholder engagement programme involving several virtual Customer Forum sessions. Three sessions were held in March 2021, focusing on community groups, agents for householder applications, and agents, developers, architects and solicitors dealing with major and large local applications.
- 7.2 The findings of these sessions are feeding into improvement actions. Follow up sessions, and sessions focusing on other customer groups, are being planned.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Planning Improvement Plan – Interim Refresh, Planning Committee [3 February 2021](#)
- 8.2 Legal Review of Council Planning Processes, Planning Committee, [2 September 2020](#).
- 8.3 Adaptation and Renewal Programme, Report to Policy and Sustainability Committee, [28 May 2020](#).
- 8.4 Internal Audit – Developer Contributions – referral from the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, Planning Committee, [15 May 2019](#).
- 8.5 Planning and Building Standards Improvements Plans, Planning Committee, [12 December 2018](#).
- 8.6 Previous updates have been provided as follows:
- 8.6.1 [May 2021](#) – Business Bulletin providing time performance monitoring figures for Quarter 4 of 2020/21;
 - 8.6.2 [February 2021](#) – Business Bulletin providing time performance monitoring figures for Quarter 3 of 2020/21;
 - 8.6.3 [December 2020](#) - Business Bulletin providing time performance monitoring figures for Quarter 2 of 2020/21;
 - 8.6.4 [October 2020](#) - Business Bulletin providing time performance monitoring figures for Quarter 1 of 2020/21, using new, nationally-aligned indicators;
 - 8.6.5 [September 2020](#) – report providing an update on progress in implementing the improvement plan, with time performance figures for Quarter 4 of 2019/20 and an update on progress addressing the recommendations of an internal audit on developer contributions;

- 8.6.6 [February 2020](#) - report with a Business Bulletin item providing time performance figures for Quarter 3 and the Scottish Government's feedback on the Council's Planning Performance Framework for 2018/19;
- 8.6.7 [January 2020](#) – report updating on progress in implementing the improvement plan, with time performance figures for Quarter 2 and an update on progress addressing the recommendations of an internal audit on developer contributions;
- 8.6.8 [August 2019](#) – Business Bulletin providing time performance monitoring figures for Quarter 1 of 2019/20. The Council's Planning Performance Framework, which is submitted annually to Scottish Government, was also reported for information;
- 8.6.9 [May 2019](#) - report summarising implementation of actions over the first six months of the Improvement Plan; and
- 8.6.10 [February 2019](#) - report on the Scottish Government's feedback on the Council's Planning Performance Framework 2017/18.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Planning Improvement Plan – Summary of Activities.

Appendix 1 - Planning Improvement Plan – Summary of Activities

Improvement Theme and Activity	Description of Activity
Leadership and Management	
Future Operating Model	Addressing the need to reshape the Service to address the challenges of future provision.
Making best use of resource	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing caseload across whole service;• Scheduling efficient meetings with clear purposes; and• Creating capacity for change across the service's staff.
Supporting our workforce	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wellbeing, including providing support to staff-led wellbeing group and linking to wider Council activities;• Communication – internal;• Performance management; and• Training and development.

Customers & Stakeholders	
Communication with customers	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing a programme of customer engagement throughout the year; • Three virtual Customer Forum sessions held in March 2021; and • More intended later in 2021.
Review of website content	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing website content for ease of use and clarity; • Making updates in parallel with Delivering Excellence changes; and • Updating non-statutory planning guidance.
Review of incoming calls/emails/Helpdesk	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the volumes, types enquiries coming in through a number of channels; and • Prompting channel shift were possible, using social media/web to deal with enquiries.
Newsletter / Blog	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the benefits of introducing a newsletter in parallel with Planning Edinburgh blog.
Customer Satisfaction	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the use of how we test satisfaction on our service delivery.
Review of Complaints (Process)	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing actions from review and mapping out to improve the current process.
Develop options for Equalities Monitoring	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining how we address equality and diversity in our day to day application/decision making; and • Developing options for introducing monitoring.
Digital Planning	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in national programme; • Pursuing benefits in reducing customer enquiries ; and • Prompting better online awareness /involvement in planning of city

Performance & Continuous Improvement	
Delivering Excellence programme	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New reports – Phase 1 (Householder & Local under implementation. Phase 2 (Committee – due later in 2021); • Appeals, including review of guidance for Local Review Body; • Enforcement, including review of Charter; • Review of Weekly Lists; • Internal consultations; • Tree cases; • Post-decision processes; and • Forward planning projects.
Framework of statutory and non-statutory performance measures	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Performance Framework (annual) ; • Scottish Government statistics submissions (6 monthly); • Place Directorate assurance report (annual); • Quarterly business bulletin on time performance to Planning Committee; and • Fortnightly statistics for management meetings.
Develop cycle for measuring and improving quality of outcomes	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot of tool for surveying quality of outcomes from planning process once completed.
Improve processes and time performance for Legal Agreements	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve how Planning and Legal Services actively manage legal agreement process to minimise delays; and • Actions arising from Customer Forum session with developers and their solicitors.
Develop Quality Assurance checking programme	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new quality assurance process introduced following recommendations of internal audit on developer contribution process; and • Intend to use quality assurance method for other internal processes.
Clear stalled sites/legacy cases	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolving planning applications which have been pending for over a year; and • One of the national headline indicators.