

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK



ANNUAL REPORT April 2012 - March 2013

Director of Development Services
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Falkirk Council
Development Services

Falkirk Council Area

The Falkirk area is located at the heart of Central Scotland and its road and rail network. It is a compact area, with a diversity of landscapes and a proud history. Its population of 156,000 lives in a network of towns and villages. Falkirk is the principal administrative and service hub, but each community has its own distinctive identity. The area was one of the cradles of the industrial revolution and retains a strong manufacturing base, within a diversified economy.

The vision for the Falkirk Council area is set out in the Council's Strategic Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement. It is based around the following five principles:

- ❖ The legacy of our past and the potential of our future are protected;
- ❖ Our area is at the centre of Scottish life;
- ❖ Our future is as one of the most culturally diverse and distinctive areas in Scotland;
- ❖ Our future has investment in jobs and learning, homes and leisure for all; and
- ❖ Our area is the place to be in the 3rd Millennium.

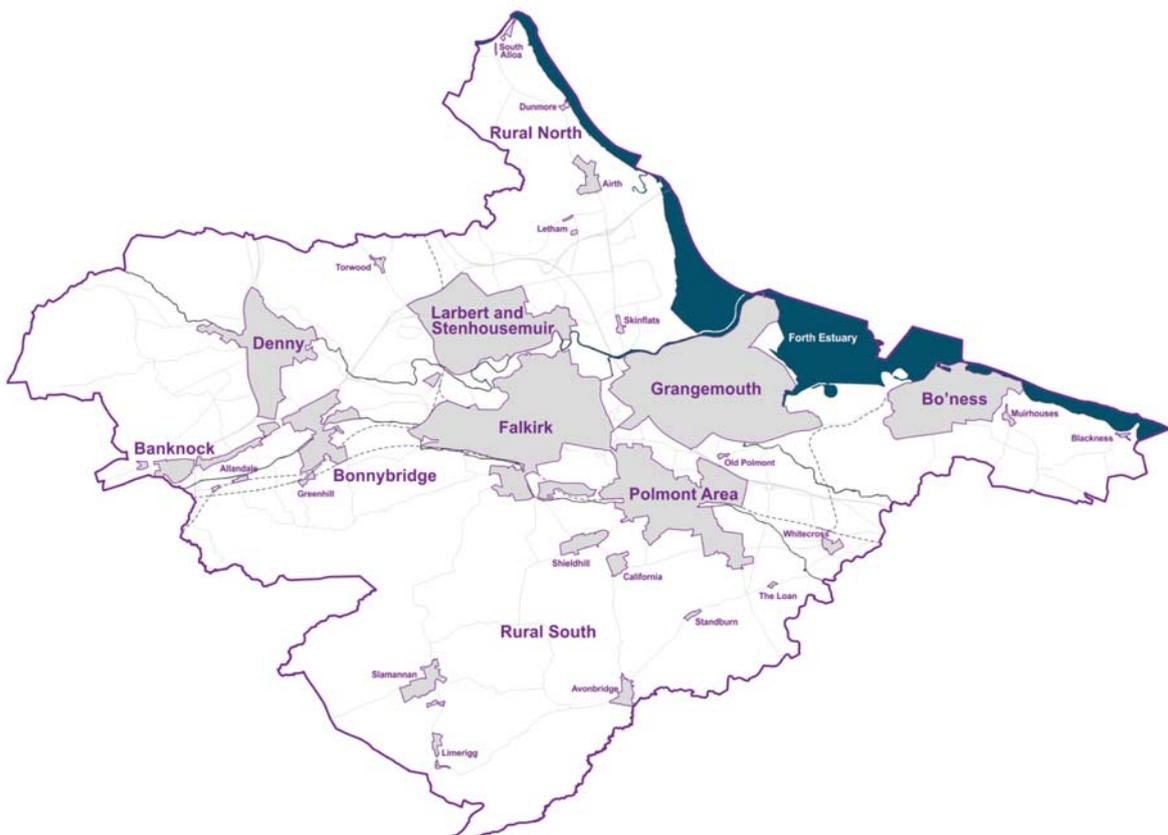
These principles inform the vision set out in the emerging Local Development Plan which reads as follows:

The vision for Falkirk is a dynamic and distinctive area at the heart of Central Scotland, characterised by a network of thriving communities and greenspaces, and a vibrant and growing economy which is of strategic significance in the national context, providing an attractive and sustainable place in which to live, work, visit and invest.

In order to achieve this vision, Falkirk Council's planning service continues to make progress in improving its service provision and performance. The following framework forms the second annual report produced by the Council and reflects on performance in the period April 2012 to March 2013. In addition to this, it sets out how improvements will be made over the next reporting period.

"All dealings with any person that has been related to my project have been polite, helpful and often gone above and beyond what may normally be required."

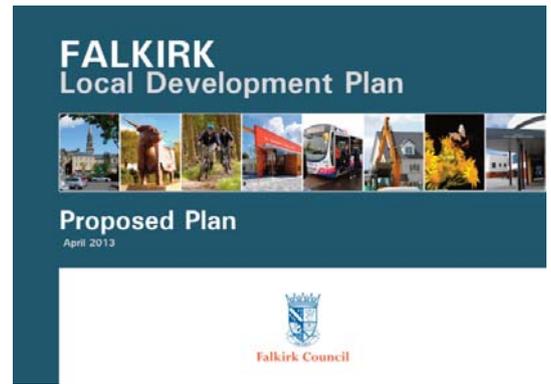
(Development Management Customer Survey, 27th September 2012).



Feedback from Previous Report

The Scottish Government's feedback report on the Council's 2011-2012 Planning Performance Framework highlighted a number of strengths and included positive comments in relation to such things as the progress being made towards adopting the Local Development Plan and the essential role this plays in giving a clear lead and certainty for future investment and development. It also acknowledged the commitment to playing a proactive role as facilitators, with collaborations across sectors to support infrastructure developments. These commitments have continued into the current reporting period and are set out in further detail in this report.

The feedback also made reference to where further improvements could be made and these have been addressed in more detail in the report. The issues included such things as speeding up the determination of major developments, and applications subject to legal agreements and taking a proactive approach to processing agreements.



1. National Headline Indicators

Key Outcomes	2012 - 2013	2011 - 2012
Development Planning		
Age of Local Development Plan (LDP)	LDP in preparation. *1	LDP in preparation.
Development Plan Scheme on track	Yes - minor delay. *2	Yes
Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs		
Effective housing land : years supply	5	5
Effective housing land supply	2670 units	2099 units
Housing approvals	523 units	344 units
Effective employment land supply	258.6 ha*3	217.7 ha
Employment land take up	0.5 ha	14.7 ha
Effective commercial floorspace supply	Definition unclear	Definition unclear
Commercial floorspace delivered	Definition unclear	Definition unclear
Development Management - Project Planning		
Applications subject to pre-application advice	0 *4	0
Number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan	0 *5	0
Percentage planned timescales met	-	-
Decision-Making		
Application approval rate	94.4%	93%
Delegation rate	88.9%	91%
Decision Making Timescales (Average number of weeks to decision*6)		
Major Developments	184.4 *6	122.3 *6
Local Developments (non-householder)	18.4 *6	14.6 *6
Householder Developments	7.3 *6	7.6 *6
Enforcement		
Time since Enforcement Charter reviewed	1 year *7	Revised Aug 2012
Number of cases taken up	149	153
Number of breaches identified	76	
Number of breaches resolved	53	122
Number of formal notices served	0	0
Number of reports passed to Procurator Fiscal	0	0
Number of prosecutions	0	0
Appeals		
Number of Local Reviews	7	4
Number of Appeals to Scottish Government	7	5

*1 Falkirk Local Development Plan to be adopted in February 2015 (May 2015 if notifiable modifications required).
Current Falkirk Council Local Plan adopted December 2010.

*2 Proposed Plan was published in April 2013, 1 month's slippage from March 2013 date set out in 3rd DPS (March 2012). This was due to the timing of committee dates which were not known at the time of preparation of the DPS.

*3 The employment land supply figures only include sites in the adopted Local Plan which meet the relevant criteria for marketability and effectiveness.

*4 The Council's system does not distinguish between general enquiries and pre-application advice, as such statistics on 'applications subject to pre-application advice' cannot be provided. Work is ongoing to resolve this issue and will form a service improvement target.

*5 Falkirk Council are in the process of setting up guidance on using planning performance agreements which is discussed in more detail below.

*6 Falkirk Council's call-in scheme is such that once a recommendation is made, the application is added to a weekly list. This list runs each Friday and results in an additional week being added to the determination date.

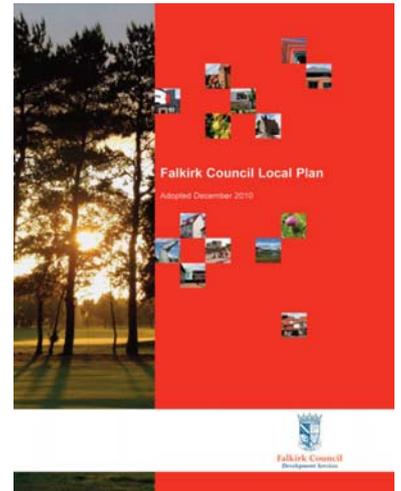
*7 To be reviewed before August 2014.

1. National Headline Indicators

CONSIDERATION OF NATIONAL HEADLINE INDICATORS

Development Planning

The Council remains on target to adopt its Local Development Plan well within the 5 year lifespan of the current Local Plan, maintaining up-to-date coverage.



Effective Land Supply

The housing land supply has increased and continues to provide 5 years effective supply. Housing approvals are also up, signifying a degree of recovery in the housing market. The effective employment land supply has risen from 217.7 ha shown last year to 258.6 ha. This is because sites previously considered to be constrained are likely to come forward sooner as a result of infrastructure improvements associated with TIF funding. Although take up is only 0.5 ha, this masks considerable activity within existing employment areas and other developments e.g. the Falkirk Business Hub serviced office accommodation, the implementation of road works associated with the Gilston business site, and planning consents for roads infrastructure associated with the new settlement at Whitecross.



1. National Headline Indicators

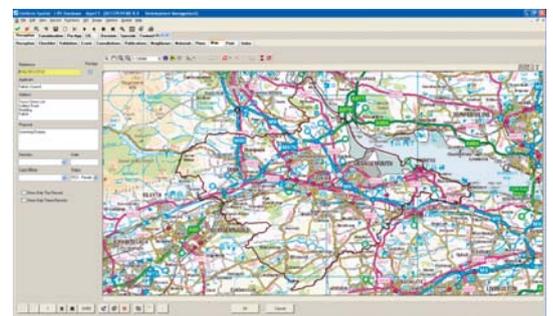
Development Management Decision Making

The statistics show a decrease in the time taken to determine householder planning applications. This has come as a result of regular monitoring and review of officer case work. Further improvements have continued in the first quarter of this year (2013-2014) with householder developments being determined within 6.6 weeks on average.

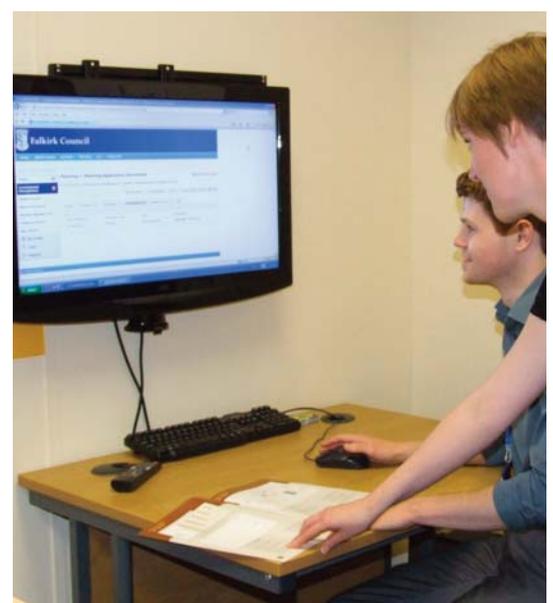
There was a three and a half week reduction in the time taken to deal with householder developments which took more than 2 months to determine. There was also a considerable reduction in the time taken to deal with local business and industry applications which reduced from an average of 26.7 weeks down to 14.4 weeks. The statistics showed a reduction of approximately 5 weeks on other consents and certificates.



There was an increase in time taken to determine major applications which is disappointing. Steps are however being taken to improve timescales and the intended introduction of processing agreements will assist this. There were 2 major applications determined in the PPF period, resulting in an average number of weeks to decision of 184.4 weeks. One application was subject to a complicated legal agreement which took time to resolve. The second application was significantly contrary to the Local Development Plan and therefore required to be determined by Full Council. In the first quarter of this year (2013-2014) 3 major applications were determined with an average timescale of 37.3 weeks which represents a significant improvement.



The average time taken to determine local developments (non householder) has also increased. A further analysis of the statistics showed that 500 were determined without legal agreements in an average of 11.8 weeks. There were 10 local developments which included legal agreements with an average determination time of 64 weeks. This increased the combined average to 18.4 weeks. There were 11 applications in total which included legal agreements and these were determined in an average time scale of 74.9 weeks. This was a reduction on the previous reporting period where the average time scale was 127.3 weeks. Progress has been made with reducing the timescales for dealing with legal agreements however it is accepted that the Council needs to make further inroads in to reducing the time taken. The proactive approach of promoting the use of processing agreements should assist in meeting this objective. The first quarter for this year (2013-2014) shows a significant reduction in the time taken to determine all non-householder local developments, with the average time taken being 11.3 weeks.



2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Assisting Development Delivery

Work on the Council's £67m Tax Increment Finance Initiative has continued in 2012-2013 with the final approval from the Scottish Government secured in August 2013. Its purpose is to deliver major infrastructure and enabling works, much of which is identified in NPF2 under the Grangemouth Freight Hub National Development, in order to unlock strategic development opportunities identified in the development plan within the Falkirk-Grangemouth area. Work has commenced on more detailed masterplanning work to link development proposals with the phased implementation of key infrastructure. The NPF Grangemouth Freight Hub Implementation Group continues to meet, co-ordinated and administered by the Council.

The Local Development Plan Proposed Action Programme was approved for consultation along with the Proposed Plan in March 2013, setting out the actions required to deliver the plan, the relevant agencies and the timescales involved.

Considerable resources continue to be devoted to progressing the Council's SIRR developments (Special Initiatives for Residential Led Regeneration), particularly with regard to the Whitecross New Settlement where the Council has employed external legal advice to expedite the completion of a complex S.75 obligation, and is working with the lead developer to get early infrastructure consents issued and to clear draft conditions whilst waiting for the S.75 to be finally signed.



Pre-application Advice

Customers are strongly encouraged to enter into discussion in advance of making a planning application for any scale of development and to maintain close contact with the case officer throughout the process. Where general enquiries are submitted and it is established that planning permission is required the customer is offered free pre-application advice. The Falkirk Council [website](#) provides clear information on how to access informal pre-application advice and on how to initiate the statutory Pre-Application Consultation process. One point of contact is provided at the pre-application stage and this officer will inevitably deal with the application, should one be submitted following pre-application discussions.



2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

Management of Workload

The development management staff structure is flexible which ensures appropriate resources are deployed to processing planning applications efficiently and effectively. The team is divided in to two area teams with an additional specific officer who is able to cover both areas and accommodate changes in workload. Regular workload meetings between Coordinators and individual staff also ensure that cases are managed effectively and changes can be made to workload if required. In addition to this, for more general enquiries, a Customer Liaison Officer and Duty Officer are available during normal office hours with a voice mail facility available for all officers. All correspondence is responded to quickly.

The case officer will have the appropriate level of authority required for the type of application. Where larger applications are under consideration, project teams are created to ensure there is always a point of contact and the application can be progressed in a timely manner.



“The staff were very helpful, courteous and gave great assistance with my enquiry.”

(Development Management Customer Survey, 29th October 2012).

2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT ON THE GROUND

Design Policy

The Council has included a revised suite of design and placemaking policies in its Proposed Local Development Plan, approved by the Council in March 2013 and published in April 2013. These will be complemented by revised supplementary guidance which will be published for consultation next year.

Greenspace and Placemaking

The Council's plan-led Falkirk Greenspace Initiative (FGI) was the overall winner in the 2012 Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning and was shortlisted for the national RTPI awards in 2013. The FGI has achieved a step change in the environmental quality of the area over a 20 year period, providing an exemplar for the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN). A sharing best practice event to celebrate FGI has recently been held with delegates attending from across the country.

Project work has continued through the 2012/13 year, with highlights being

- ❖ Significant progress on the £43m Helix project between Falkirk and Grangemouth, assisted by the efficient processing of major applications for the canal hub and the central park elements;
- ❖ The launch of the £200k Lionthorn Greenspace project in South Falkirk, delivered using developer contributions from the adjacent housing development to lever in wider package of funding;
- ❖ The completion of the Larbert Woods project at Forth Valley Royal Hospital, a ground breaking partnership to manage and provide access to the surrounding wooded estate for the benefit of patients, staff and the local community. This project was conceived and driven by a development framework and a S.75 obligation on the hospital planning consent;
- ❖ The designation of two new Local Nature Reserves at Kinneil Foreshore and Carron Dams.

Meanwhile the Council has reviewed and refreshed the initiative and approved a new Falkirk Greenspace Strategy for consultation in February 2013. The CSGN Local Authority Concordat was signed by the Council in December 2012.

The Council's joint £2m bid with the RSPB to the Heritage Lottery Fund for an Inner Forth Landscape Initiative received Stage 1 approval in July 2012. Work is progressing on the Stage 2 bid, comprising detailed project specifications. Partnership funding has been secured and a project team appointed.

An updated qualitative audit of the Council's open space resource was completed in 2013 (596 sites) as a basis for a review of the Open Space Strategy which is due to commence in 2014.



2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

Town Centres

The £5.1million Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative is progressing well. A grant of £1.6m was secured from Historic Scotland's Conservation Area Grant Scheme in February 2013, to complement the HLF funding. The Stage 2 HLF bid was submitted in May 2013, and approval has just been received. A Building Stone and Slate Survey has been carried out for Falkirk Town Centre which will assist in ensuring that appropriate materials are used in repairs and alterations.

Denny Town Centre regeneration is now being taken forward as a Council-led initiative. A revised proposal has been formulated, and a phase 1 comprising retail units, library and community space was granted planning permission in February 2013. The first stage of remarketing of the Grangemouth Town Centre regeneration project was initiated in April 2013.



Historic Environment

The Council has revised Article 4 Directions for all of its nine conservation areas. [Conservation Area Management Plans](#) have been prepared for all but Falkirk Town Centre, with the latter planned for completion in 2013/14.



Negotiation on Development Proposals

Many applications have benefitted from negotiations, resulting in improved designs. The Council has expertise in a number of specialist areas, including landscape, biodiversity, urban design, conservation and listed buildings.

This year a weekly Development Management Surgery was established, which allows officers to discuss urban design, conservation area and listed building issues with the urban design officer. There are also regular consultations between the Development Management Unit and Planning and Environment Unit where the latter advise on cases and aid negotiation when required.

*“Excellent, prompt, valuable service as always. Nomination for Council of the year!
Thank you.”*

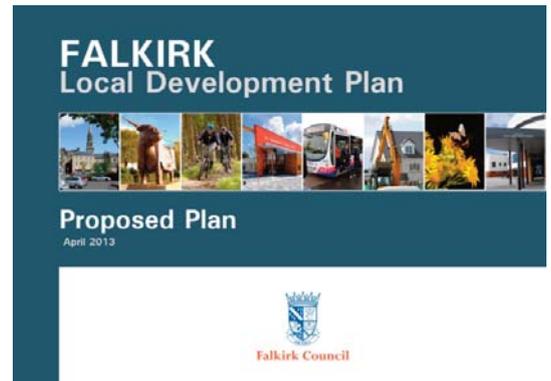
(Development Management Customer Survey, 28th February 2013).

2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

CERTAINTY

Development Plan

The Council continues to maintain up-to date development plan coverage through the Falkirk Council Structure Plan and the Falkirk Council Local Plan, which was adopted in December 2010. The Proposed Falkirk Local Development Plan was approved in March 2013 and published in April 2013 becoming a material consideration in the determination of applications. It is on target for completion in early 2015, well in advance of the 5 year life of the existing Local Plan.



The LDP is subject to a project management approach governed by clear management and decision making structures, an overall project plan, stage work programmes, and regular progress meetings with the Council Administration, senior management and the project team. For the Proposed Plan points to note include:

- ❖ Relevant Proposed Plan Stage was completed according to project plan, although there was one month's slippage on the original timetable due to timings of Committees, which were not known at time of preparation of project plan.
- ❖ Key agencies were circulated with working drafts of Proposed Plan early in drafting process and feedback taken on board.
- ❖ A comprehensive review of housing site effectiveness/phasing was undertaken in response to developer comments on MIR.
- ❖ A complex HRA exercise was completed (partly outsourced) and SEA Environmental Report comprehensively revised.

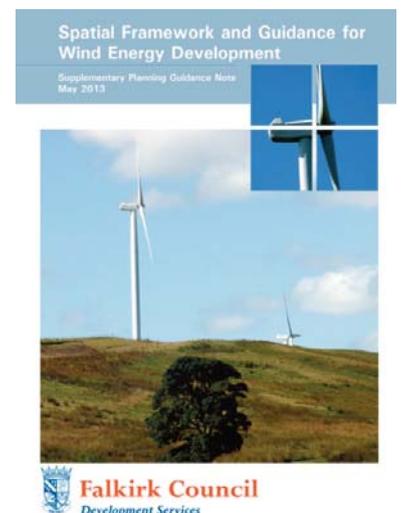
The Development Plan provides a clear framework for decisions on planning applications. Its robustness is highlighted by the fact that there have been no recorded approvals contrary to the Development Plan.

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

The Council has a comprehensive suite of non-statutory supplementary planning guidance. The following SPGs were issued for consultation during 2012-13:

- ❖ Affordable Housing (review of existing SPG).
- ❖ Spatial Framework and Guidance for Wind Energy Development.
- ❖ Delivery of Denny Eastern Access Road.

The completion of the Wind Energy Spatial Framework, which was informed by a comprehensive landscape character review, is a significant milestone, bringing the Council into conformity with SPP, and providing a detailed and consistent framework for assessing the continuing high level of wind turbine applications. A programme of statutory supplementary guidance, as highlighted in the Proposed Local Development Plan, is being worked on and will be released for consultation in batches through 2014. This will ultimately replace the current SPGs.



2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

Internal and External Collaborative Working

There are regular liaison meetings with education, housing, roads and environmental protection services with regard to emerging issues and key projects. In particular there are weekly meetings with colleagues in the Roads Unit to discuss applications and advise where they are likely to provide comments timeously. Development management staff have had input to the preparation of the LDP and continue to have close involvement in the drafting of supplementary guidance. The planning service continues to chair the Falkirk Flood Liaison and Advice Group.

Processing Agreements

Case officers currently project manage the determination of applications and informal agreements with developers currently exist. The Service is however working towards formally recording the project management in the form of a processing agreement. The Planning Service is in the process of actively encouraging the use of processing agreements and will shortly publish additional guidance on the website. All applicants who have recently submitted Proposal of Application Notices have been contacted regarding the offer of a processing agreement. In the meantime case officers continue to project plan larger applications with regular contact and updates to agents/applicants.

Progress on Applications

During the reporting period, 1.5% of applications were determined contrary to officer advice. Of these applications 5 were appealed to the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals and 4 of these were allowed.

During the same period 55% of applications were not validated at the first attempt. One of the main reasons for this relates to the lack of a fee, with applicants making the application online and submitting the fee by post or in person. The service introduced an online payment system through the Council website during the reporting period and it is hoped this will go some way to reducing the number of invalid applications.

Supporting Information at Application Stage

In terms of the planning application process, comprehensive supporting information is often necessary to minimise delays. Where pre-application advice is given, this often includes details of the additional information likely to be required at the application stage. Guidance is also provided on the Council website. When the application is submitted, a risk management approach is taken, with some information requested immediately following validation of the application, such as a Coal Mining Risk Assessment. Additional information if required is also then requested following the consultation process. Requests made are proportionate to the proposal and its impact. This methodology ensures requests are clear and proportionate.

At the earliest stage e.g. at pre-application stage, officers assess and advise on the need for applicant contributions in respect of related infrastructure. This information is also clarified in the Council's wide range of supplementary guidance which is available [online](#).

“The response time has been excellent, I submitted some missing information on the 30th am and received confirmation by 1pm the same day. When I spoke to the DMS rep this morning they were very helpful.”

(Development Management Customer Survey, 30th April 2012).

2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

COMMUNICATIONS, ENGAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer Engagement

In order to gain constructive feedback on customer experience all Development Management staff e-mails contain a signature with a link to a customer survey. Surveys are also handed out to visiting members of the public. There have been many positive comments received through the customer survey. The survey shows that 91.7% considered the overall level of customer service provided by the Development Management Team to be Excellent or Good. While 97.9% found the Development Management representatives to be helpful, courteous and polite.

“The staff were very helpful, courteous and gave great assistance with my enquiry.”

(Development Management Customer Survey, 29th October 2012).

A number of comments also provided feedback on how the Council could improve the service. For example, a request was made that, where applications were submitted online, future correspondence relating to the application should be communicated by email, rather than letter. The use of electronic decision notices should also be considered. The Council is committed to improving communication and maximising the use of electronic correspondence.

A customer feedback survey is planned for the development planning service in the next reporting year. This will gather data on the customer experience of the LDP process which will inform a wider review of the effectiveness of engagement techniques used in the course of plan preparation.

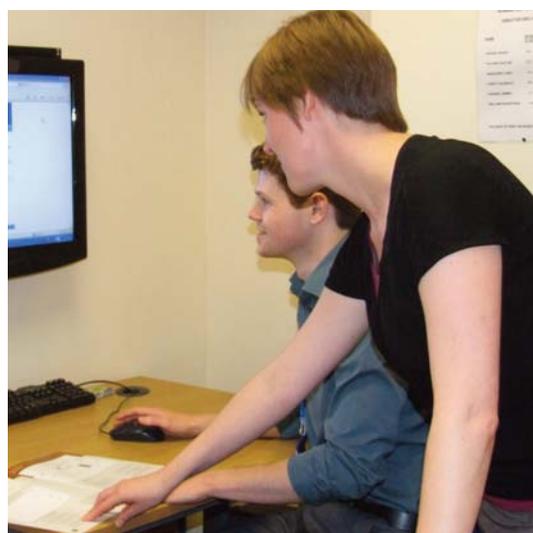
A development plan newsletter was published and distributed to all customers and stakeholders in summer 2012. Feedback on the [Main Issues Report](#) consultation was conveyed to all who contributed to the document, with links to detailed reports on the consultation exercise and individual responses.

The need for more concise, clear and attractive development plan documents, which engage customers, has been a key consideration in the preparation of the LDP. Following on from the MIR, which was commended by the Scottish Government, the format and style of the Proposed Plan represents a marked improvement from the current documents. It is more concise (76 pages + appendices compared with 270 pages of current Local Plan) and attractive (includes graphics, photos, diagrammatic maps)

The service continues to operate within the corporate Customer Relations Management system, which logs and allocates complaints and monitors compliance with turnaround targets. The service also continues to follow the [new complaints process](#) (National Model) which was updated towards the end of the reporting period.

A further annual Developers Workshop was held in August 2012 to promote and update on the activities of the planning service and record stakeholder views.

Where significant changes have occurred in the way the Planning Service deals with planning applications or enquiries, the Council have advised the regular agents by letter. This has proved useful in clarifying and communicating issues. For example a letter was sent out explaining which applications would require Coal Mining Risk Assessments and the sort of information required for submission.



2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

E- Planning

Between 2012-2013, 39% of all applications were submitted using the E-Planning Portal. This represented a small increase on the previous year and there continues to be a relatively small but increasing trend towards online submissions. Development Management staff email signatures give information and the direct link to the E-planning portal. The Council produced a guidance document for users of the website which clarified the rights and responsibilities of those viewing planning documents.

Development plan information continues to be presented through comprehensive and well used pages on the Council's web site. PDF version of development plan documents are supplemented by use of the interactive Online Local Development Plan, although numbers of representations coming through the OLDP are disappointing.



EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING Committees

The scheme of delegation allows a high level of delegation to officers, which was reviewed after the reporting period for this document. Pre-agenda meetings continue to be held with the Convener and Depute Convener of the Planning Committee to identify issues for Members and officers. Monthly planning committee meetings are held with Local Review Bodies scheduled as and when requests for reviews are received.

Whilst the Planning Committee deals with development management matters, the policy and environment sides of the planning service have reported mainly to two Scrutiny Committees: Economic Strategy & Development, and Leisure, Tourism & Community, with executive decisions reserved to the Policy & Resources Committee or full Council. From April 2013, a new Cabinet structure for the Council has been implemented. The Planning Committee is unchanged, but other reports are now taken directly to a single Executive for decision.

Staff

Monthly unit meetings are programmed six months in advance with upward reporting of minutes to senior management mandatory.

Systems are in place to ensure planning case loads are monitored and reviewed and potential delays highlighted at an early stage.

Dealing with Delays

The Council has 20 planning applications which are more than 6 months old. 15 of these have been delayed due to the requirement for a legal agreement. Unfortunately progress on applications with complicated Section 75 agreements has in some cases been slow. Most of the delays are due to the applicants. The Council are working through these applications and agents and applicants have been advised to make progress or have the application determined on the basis of the information before the Council.

Local Development Plan

Under the LDP project management approach, decision making structures and regular progress meetings and are in place to ensure that the process is managed efficiently.

2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The planning process is coordinated by a senior management team led by the Head of Service. A breakdown of the workforce is provided in Appendix 2, workforce and financial information.

The ability to have flexible team working has been recognised to ensure work load pressures when identified are resolved by targeting appropriate staff resources. In Development Management “key development” proposals are identified at either pre-application or submission stage, project groups are set up with junior colleagues shadowing more senior colleagues on applications.

The Development Management Team have implemented Profess Time Recording which will, in time, show how officer time is divided between such tasks as enquiries, pre-application discussions, appeals and applications. The intention of this is that in time the service will be able to quantify the cost of processing a planning application.

The Planning & Environment Unit comprises planners and environmental specialists (covering landscape, biodiversity, urban design and conservation, and outdoor access) who work flexibly to develop policy, support Development Management, and implement a range of projects and initiatives. The maintenance of this in-house specialist advice service remains a major asset to efficient and informed decision-making on planning applications. For example, it has assisted with processing the recent surge of wind energy applications without recourse to external landscape consultants.

Planning is located within Development Services, which also embraces transport, economic development, environmental protection architecture, roads and building standards. This helps to provide an integrated ‘one-stop shop’ for developers, and fosters an integrated service to deliver sustainable economic development.

Formal and informal partnerships with a variety of agencies and organisation continue to be integral to service delivery. This is exemplified by the range of environmental project work previously described.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Annual use of budget review templates has ensured revenue budget bids are scored against the Council’s stated priorities. Priorities and objectives are aligned through the Single Outcome Agreement, Strategic Community Plan and Corporate Plan. The annual Service Performance Plan ensures staff are clear as to their day to day role in meeting Council priorities. Spend is guided by the Council’s Contract Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation and monitored by Internal Audit and the Best Value Forum.

To best utilise the enforcement resources available to the Council, the Enforcement Charter sets priorities for investigation and this is followed to ensure cases are prioritised appropriately. The Enforcement Charter was last updated in August 2012 and will be updated again prior to August 2014.

Council procurement rules and procedures are followed. Regular monitoring of budgets is undertaken between unit managers and the service accountant.

The Council has established a Corporate Planning Obligation Working Group chaired by planning to improve the monitoring and general handling of planning agreements and the cash / projects they generate. The group has assessed external providers of IT systems and carried out process mapping and is about to recommend licensing a progressive application developed by Aberdeenshire Council.



2. Defining and Measuring a High-Quality Planning Service

CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Staff

The service continues to work to the Investors in People standards. Annual staff appraisals are mandatory and backed by Training Plans and budgets. In-house Institute of Leadership and Management training take-up is high. In the previous framework period, two first line managers had been awarded Diploma level. Following on from this, two Development Management officers have also now been awarded Diploma level with two further officers currently undertaking the course.

Development Management Officers have all attended a workshop on the changes to the permitted development rights for householder planning applications which has helped ensure advice given on the new legislation is consistent. A list of householder permitted development interpretations is currently being developed to aid with this. Individual officers have also attended external training courses and reported back to colleagues at team meetings. These courses have covered a wide variety of topics such as the 'Design Skills Symposium Scotland' and 'Development Management - Exploring Best Practice'. Development Plan Officers attend a range of forums and training events to keep abreast of policy changes and best practice.

Lunch-time cross-service topic awareness training is also regularly held and past topics have included 'Biodiversity and Brownfield Sites', 'Climate Change Adaptation' and 'Trees and Development'. This has improved corporate working across services. For example case officers are now more aware of the level of information required where there are protected trees on sites. There will also shortly be a training session provided by Glasgow City Council on the Glasgow Urban Model.

The Development Management Unit was the subject of an internal audit review during the reporting period. The audit concluded that, in general, sound systems of control were in place, awarding substantial assurance to both Development Management and Enforcement. This established a number of points for further improvement and funding has been provided for an officer to implement the audit recommendations and make other associated process/procedure related improvements to the service. The whole Planning & Transportation Division is to undergo a Reflect (Public Service Improvement Framework) review in the next reporting year.

Councillors

Post election planning training for Members has been undertaken. Community Council training is held annually and through Planning Aid Scotland. This has continued as newly elected councillors become members of the Planning Committee.

3. Supporting Evidence and Links to Related Reports and Studies

Part 2 of this report was compiled, drawing on evidence from the following sources;

1. National Headline Indicators
2. Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service
3. [Corporate Plan](#)
4. [Strategic Community Plan](#)
5. [Single Outcome Agreement](#)
6. [Development Services Performance Plan 2013-16](#)
7. [Falkirk Council Structure Plan](#)
8. [Falkirk Council Local Plan](#)
9. [Development Plan Scheme](#)
10. [Proposed Local Development Plan](#)
11. Local Development Plan Project Plan
12. [Local Development Plan Action Programme](#)
13. Local Development Plan Progress Meeting Minutes
14. [Supplementary Planning Guidance Suite](#)
15. [Development Plan Update Newsletter](#)
16. [Tax Incremental Finance Initiative](#)
17. [Falkirk Greenspace Initiative](#)
18. Draft Falkirk Greenspace Strategy
19. [Royal Scottish National Hospital Site Development Framework](#)
20. [Banknock Special Initiative for Residential Led Regeneration Development Framework](#)
21. [Inner Forth Landscape Partnership](#)
22. [The Helix](#)
23. [Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans](#)
24. [Falkirk Town Centre Townscape Heritage Initiative](#)
25. Development Management Customer Survey
26. Development Management Guidance Suite
27. Contract Standing Orders
28. Scheme of Delegation
29. Development Management Internal Audit

4. Service Improvements and Timescales 2013-2014.

In the coming year we will...

Service Improvement	Timescale
Implement processing agreements	October 2013
Determine legacy cases	Ongoing
Bring down timescales for determination of major applications	December 2013
Amend the system to distinguish between pre-application enquiries and general enquiries to allow this to be reported in the next framework.	December 2013
Implement outcome of internal audit in Development Management	Ongoing
Carry out Reflect exercise in Planning and Transportation division to create Divisional Improvement Plan	August 2013
Implement findings of Divisional Improvement Plan above	As per timescales in Improvement Plan
Implement procedures and monitoring for developer contributions	March 2014
Publication and Consultation on Proposed Falkirk Local Development Plan	June 2013
Undertake LDP training for Community Councils	April 2013
Submission of Proposed Falkirk Local Development Plan to Scottish Government	February 2013
Final approval of latest round of SPGs (Affordable Housing, Wind Energy, Denny Eastern Access Road).	June 2013
Supplementary Guidance - Publish first batch of supplementary guidance for consultation as outlined in Proposed Plan	March 2014
Falkirk LDP Consultation Review - Review of the effectiveness of all engagement through the LDP process to learn lessons for next review	January 2014
Development Plan Customer Survey - survey of customers/stakeholders to assess satisfaction with our communication, processes, documents and service generally	January 2014
Final approval of Falkirk Greenspace Strategy	October 2013
Completion of Falkirk Town Centre Conservation Area Management Plan	August 2013
Submission of Stage 2 bid for Falkirk THI	May 2013
Submission of Stage 2 bid for Inner Forth Landscape Initiative.	October 2013
Approve Antonine Wall World Heritage Site Management Plan Review 2013-2018	October 2013
Approve Antonine Wall World Heritage Site Local Action Plan	March 2014

4. Service Improvements and Timescales 2013-2014.

Delivery of our service improvement actions in 2012-13

Committed Improvements and Actions	Complete?
Submit Tax Incremental Finance initiative bid	Yes - final approval given.
Approve Falkirk Local Development Plan - Proposed Plan	Approved by Committee March 2013. Published April 2013.
Approve Falkirk Green Network Strategy	Draft approved for consultation February 2013. Final approval scheduled for October 2013.
Approve Antonine Wall World Heritage Site Management Plan Review 2013-2018	Draft published and consultation carried out. Final approval scheduled for October 2013.
Approve Antonine Wall World Heritage Site Local Action Plan	On hold. Awaiting approval of wider AW WHS Management Plan.
Submit Falkirk Town Centre Townscape Heritage Initiative Stage 2	Submitted just outside review period in May 2013
Implement village Conservation Area enhancement plans	Dunmore and Letham complete. Muirhouses in progress.
Submit Inner Forth Landscape Partnership Heritage Lottery Fund Stage 2	Submission anticipated in October 2013.
Approve Wind Energy Spatial Framework Supplementary Planning Guidance	Consultation on draft Sept/Oct 2012. Final approval May 2013.
Complete delivery of Forth Valley Hospital Development Framework for wider estate	Works completed 2013. Ministerial launch just outside reporting period in September 2013.
Conduct Planning Aid Scotland training for Community Councils on Local Development Plan Proposed Plan process	Training delivered April 2013.
Continue cross service training / awareness programme on design, conservation, natural heritage, Health and Safety Executive, major hazards, travellers and use of Supplementary Planning Guidance	Yes.
Extend Developers Forum remit to cover transport, economic development and building standards	Yes.
Implement Professional time recording fully in Development Management	Partially Introduced.
Review Scheme of Delegation	New scheme of delegation agreed just outside reporting period in August 2013.
Employ Citizens Panel for customer feedback on planning issues	No. May be considered as part of Development Plan Customer Survey.
Implement Planning Website Review	Progress has been delayed pending corporate review of the Council website.
Introduce Document Management System in Development Planning	Yes.
Improve data capture on commercial floorspace take-up and delivery	No work carried out pending review of this indicator.
Adopt Investors in People standards	The Service continues to work towards the Investors in People standards.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Official Statistics

Decision Making Timescale (supplied by Scottish Government)
Local Reviews and Appeals (supplied by Scottish Government)
Enforcement Activity

Appendix 2: Workforce and Financial Information

Workforce
Financial Information

Appendix 3: Performance Markers

Summary of Performance Markers

Appendix 1

1. Official Statistics - Decision Making Timescales

Category	Total Number of Decisions	Average Timescale (Weeks)	
	(2012-2013)	2012-2013	2011-2012
Major Developments	2	184.4	122.3
Local Developments (non-householder)	253	18.4	14.6
Less than 2 months	43.5%	6.6	6.67
More than 2 months	56.5%	27.4	24.8
Householder Developments	257	7.3	7.6
Less than 2 months	87.2%	6.3	6.2
More than 2 months	12.8 %	14.6	18.0
Housing Developments			
Major	1	185.4	195.5
Local Housing Developments	76	26.7	16.6
Less than 2 months	19.7%	7	6.7
More than 2 months	80.3%	31.6	27.4
Business and Industry			
Major	0	-	-
Local Business and Industry	9	14.4	26.7
Less than 2 months	33.3%	7.6	6.6
More than 2 months	66.7%	17.9	43.4
EIA Developments	0	-	-
Other Consents *1	82	16.9	22.5
Planning/Legal Agreements *2	11	74.9	127.3

*1 Consents and certificates; Listed Buildings and Conservation area consents, Control of Advertisement consents, Hazardous Substances consents, Established Use Certificates, Certificates of Lawfulness of Existing Use or Development, Notification of overhead electricity lines, notifications and directions under GPDO Parts 6 and relating to agricultural and forestry development and applications for prior approval by Coal Authority or licensed operator under classes 60 and 62 of GPDO.

*2 Local obligations associated with a planning permission, concluded under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 or section 69 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Decision Making : Local Reviews and Appeals

Type	Total Number of Decisions (2012-2013)	Original Decision Upheld			
		2012-2013	2012-2013	2011-2012	2011-2012
		No.	%	No.	%
Local Reviews	7	5	71.4	2	50.0
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	7	1	14.3	5	55.5

Enforcement Activity

	2012-2013	2011-2012
Cases Taken Up	149	153
Breaches Identified	76	-
Cases Resolved	53	122
Notices Served***	6	0
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0	0
Prosecutions	0	0

*** Enforcement notices; breach of condition notices; planning contravention notices; stop notices; temporary stop notices; fixed penalty notices, and Section 33 notices.

Appendix 2

2. Workforce and Financial Management as at 31st March 2013.

Workforce

Head of Planning Service	Tier			
	1	2	3	4
			1	

	Managers		Main Grade Posts		Technician Posts		Office Support/Clerical		Total
	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	
Development Management	1	0	11	0	2	0	0	0	14
Development Planning	0.5	0	5.5	0	1	0	0.5	0	7.5
Enforcement Staff	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cross Service/Other Planning	0.5	0	8.5	0	1	0	9.5	0	19.5

Financial Management

Staffing Profile	Number
Under 30	2
30-39	9
40-49	14
50 and Over	18

Committees and Site Visits	No. Per Year
Full Council Committees	6
Planning Committees	36 (12 for Development Management and 24 for Planning and Environment)
Area Committees	Not relevant
Committee Site Visits	38*1
Local Review Body	10
Local Review Body Site Visits	10

Budgets - Planning Service	Budget £	Costs £		Income £
		Direct	Indirect	
Development Management and Enforcement	£946,490	£738,160	£772,038	£448,850
Development Planning	£469,860	£333,834	£136,026	
Cross Service/Other Planning *2	£671,228	£476,905	£194,323	

*1 This consisted of 11 meetings to visit 38 sites.

*2 This calculation does not include the budgetary information for the Office Support/Clerical Team associated with the Development Management and Enforcement Unit.

Appendix 3

3. Performance Markers

Driving Improved Performance

Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
Decision making : authorities demonstrating continuous evidence of reducing average timescales for all development types.	National Headline Indicators show improvement in timescale for dealing with householder developments, major housing developments, local business and industry developments, other consents and developments with planning/legal agreements.
Project management : offer of processing agreements (or other agreed project plan) made to prospective applicants in advance of all major applications and availability publicised on planning authority website.	Processing agreements have been offered to all applicants who have previously submitted PANs. The Service will be producing a procedure document on dealing with processing agreements and making further information available on the website in due course.
Early collaboration with applicants and consultees on planning applications : - availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all prospective applications - clear and proportionate requests for supporting information	Customers are strongly encouraged to enter in to discussions in advance of making a planning application. Information is provided on the website to add pre-application discussions. Responses provide detail of the type of information required at submission stage. When applications are received a risk management approach is taken with requests for additional information made as early as possible.
Legal agreements : conclude (or reconsider) applications within 6 months of 'resolving to grant'* * <i>this will require production of supporting guidance, following wider stakeholder input</i>	The Service is actively working to reduce the number of applications with incomplete legal agreements which are more than 6 months old.
Enforcement charter updated / re-published	The Enforcement Charter is up to date and is due for review by August 2014.
Continuous improvement : - show progress/improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators - progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report	The Service has made significant progress on delivering service improvement actions set out in the previous reporting period. New service improvements are set out in the current PPF. The Development Management Unit has been internally audited, while the Planning and Transportation Division will carry out Reflect exercise and create Divisional Improvement Plan.

Appendix 3

3. Performance Markers

Promoting the Plan-Led System

Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
LDP (or LP) less than 5 years since adoption.	The Local Plan is less than five years old having been adopted in 2010.
Development plan scheme demonstrates next LDP : - on course for adoption within 5-year cycle - project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale.	The proposed Local Development Plan was published in April 2013, 1 month's slippage from March 2013 date set out in 3rd Development Plan Scheme (DPS) (March 2012). This was due to the timing of committee dates which were not known at the time of preparation of the DPS. Forward timescales are dependent on the Council deciding not to promote notifiable modifications. Should this be necessary a further 3 month delay is anticipated. Projected date for adoption is February 2015 (May 2015 with notifiable modifications) which will allow the current Local Plan to be replaced well within its 5 year lifespan.
Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation.	Member seminars held and briefing notes issued at key stages of the plan process. LDP Member Working Group meets as required.
Cross-sector stakeholders, including industry, agencies and Scottish Government, engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation.	Key agencies engaged at pre-MIR stage through individual meetings and themed stakeholder workshops.
Production of regular and proportionate policy advice, for example through SPGs, on (i) information required to support applications and (ii) expected developer contributions.	SPGs are regularly reviewed and updated. These provide clear advice about expected developer contributions.

Simplifying and Streamlining

Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit (e.g. protocols; joined-up services; single contact; joint pre-application advice).	Customers are provided with a single point of contact when they access the service. This person co-ordinates responses from across the service.
Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities.	Staff attend forums and training events where best practice is shared.

Delivering Development

Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
Stalled sites/legacy cases : conclusion/withdrawal of planning applications more than one year old.	The Service is actively working to reduce the number of applications which are more than 6 months old.
Developer contributions : clear and proportionate expectations - set out in development plan (and/or emerging plan,) and - in pre-application discussions.	The Local Plan and emerging Local Development Plan advise where developer contributions are likely to be required and the associated SPGs provide a detailed breakdown of the contributions.

ANNUAL REPORT

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Development Services