

Planning Performance Framework



Annual Report

April 2014 - March 2015

Foreword

An efficient and well-functioning planning service plays an important role in facilitating sustainable economic growth and delivering high quality development in the right places. Falkirk Council recognises that regular monitoring of service performance and a commitment to improve are essential to achieving this. This Planning Performance Framework report captures the key elements of our planning service :

- Speed of decision-making
- Certainty of timescales, process and advice
- Delivery of good quality development
- Project management
- Clear communications and open engagement
- An overall 'open for business' attitude

The report reviews the overall quality of Falkirk Council's planning service and sets out our successes and achievements in the period from April 2014 to March 2015.

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Introduction

01. This is the fourth annual Planning Performance Framework report produced by Falkirk Council.
02. This document is divided into four distinct sections, each covering a different theme. The first section includes a review of the national headline indicators. This is followed by an assessment of performance across eight areas of activity, and then a consideration of the supporting evidence. The final section refers to proposed service improvements and timescales for delivery for the next reporting period.
03. Within this report period the Development Management Unit has maintained excellent customer service satisfaction with 89.6% of customers responding to our customer survey who consider the service to be good or excellent. Further progress has also been made with the new Local Development Plan, which has negotiated the Examination process during the reporting year, and has recently been adopted.



Feedback from Previous Report

04. The feedback given by Scottish Government on our 2013 - 2014 report was very encouraging. Scottish Government acknowledged that the Service has continued to demonstrate a strong customer focus, offering a variety of channels for contact and communication. The provision of customer surveys was recognised, with the results demonstrating a high level of customer satisfaction with the service provided. Scottish Government noted there were effective management and decision making structures in place and, a flexible team working approach to ensure work pressures are resolved by targeting appropriate staff resources. It was also noted there was good evidence of improved corporate working across services.
05. With reference to the National Headline Indicators, Scottish Government noted our Local Development Plan remains on track for adoption in 2015; our delegation rate has improved and is better than the national average; there have been improvements in average decision making timescales and; our continued commitment to conclude legacy cases and to encourage developers to get involved in processing agreements were all recognised.
06. Scottish Government were pleased to learn that the Council's revised green network strategy was approved in October 2013 and that approval had also been received for a Stage 2 joint bid for Heritage Lottery Funding for an Inner Forth Landscape Initiative in March 2014.
07. Overall, the Scottish Government feedback acknowledged the quality of the service we provide and recognised improvements in our performance. We received eight green ratings and five amber ratings. None of our performance markers received a red rating. The green ratings included improved decision making timescales, a reduction in the number of legacy cases, having an up to date enforcement charter, and a Local Development Plan on target for adoption within five years of Local Plan adoption. The Service's commitment to corporate working with other Council Services and our commitment to sharing good practice, skills and knowledge with other authorities were also recognised with green ratings. Where we received amber ratings it was because Scottish Government felt further evidence was needed to demonstrate improvements that have been made.



Part 1: National Headline Indicators

National Headline Indicators Table

Key Outcomes	2014-2015	2013-2014
Development Planning		
Age of local/strategic development plan(s) (years and months) at end of reporting period. Requirement: less than 5 years	First LDP in preparation ¹	First LDP in preparation
Will the local/strategic development plan(s) be replaced by their 5th anniversary according to the current development plan scheme? (Y/N)	First LDP in preparation ²	Not required
Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year? (Y-earlier/Y-later/N)	Yes - delay of 3 months due to delayed receipt of Examination Report ³	Not required
Were development plan scheme engagement/consultation commitments met during the year? (Y/N)	Yes ⁴	Not required
Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs		
Established housing land supply	9656 units	Not required
5 - year effective housing land supply	3112 units ⁵	2555 units
5 - year housing supply target	3375 units ⁶	Not required
5 - year effective housing land supply (to one decimal place)	4.6 years	4.5 years
Housing approvals	557 units	444 units
Housing completions over the last 5 years	2299 units	Not required
Marketable employment land supply	255.4 ha	255.4 ha
Employment land take-up during reporting year	0 ha	1.5 ha

¹ The current adopted Falkirk Council Local Plan was 4 years and 3 months old at the end of the reporting period.

² Falkirk Local Development Plan was adopted in July 2015, within the 5 year life of the current Local Plan which was adopted in December 2010.

³ The 2014 and 2015 Development Plan Schemes have been compared as providing the most up-to-date indication of progress, even though they were approved in April of the each year and therefore technically just beyond the start and end of the reporting year period. The submission to Scottish Ministers referred to is the **post-examination** submission to Ministers.

⁴ For almost the entire reporting year, the LDP was at Examination, therefore engagement commitments were limited to making Examination documents available. Notification and publicity of the 'intention to adopt' stage was delayed because of delay to the Examination Report.

⁵ Figure from draft Housing Land Audit 2015.

⁶ Target figure used in from the Falkirk Local Development Plan.

Part 1: National Headline Indicators

Key Outcomes	2014-2015	2013-2014
Development Planning - Project Planning		
Percentage of applications subject to pre- application advice	37.58%	Data not available
Number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan	0 ⁷	0
Percentage planned timescales met	N/A	N/A

Development Planning - Decision-making		
Application approval rate	96.3%	94.2%
Delegation rate	94.7%	93.8%

Decision-making Timescales Average number of weeks to decision:		
Major developments	132.4 ⁸	27.9
Local developments (non-householder)	11.2	11.2
Householder developments	6.9	6.5

Legacy Cases		
Number cleared during reporting period	20	Not required
Number remaining	28	Not required

Enforcement		
Time since Enforcement Charter Published/reviewed (months) Requirement : review every 2 years	8 months	18 months
Number of breaches identified/resolved	240/204	83/34

⁷ Despite offers to applicants by the Council (see paragraph 13 below).

⁸ Performance distorted by two legacy cases (see paragraph 15 below).

Part 1: National Headline Indicators

Consideration of National Headline Indicators

Development Planning

08. The Falkirk Local Development Plan (LDP) was at Examination for almost all of the reporting period (20 February 2014 to 4 March 2015). There was a delay of 3.5 months in the delivery of the Examination Report by the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA), which has led to a slippage of 3 months in the programme set out within the Development Plan Scheme for final submission to Scottish Ministers. The Examination delay was disappointing, but due to factors beyond the Council's control. Nonetheless, the Council has now adopted the LDP (July 2015) within the 5 year lifespan of the current Local Plan.
09. Project planning for LDP2 is well underway and a programme for the preparation of LDP2 is included within the Development Plan Scheme approved in April 2015.

Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs

10. The 2015 Housing Land Audit takes into account new sites allocated in the LDP. This has resulted in an increase in the effective land supply of 557 units. However, continued slippage in the programming of major housing sites in the area, and the introduction of the new housing land target from the LDP, mean that the housing supply in years has only increased marginally to 4.6 years. With an established supply of 9656, this is viewed as a short term issue which will be addressed when some of the larger impending sites come on stream. In the meantime, windfall and small sites will provide some mitigation. Numbers of housing approvals are up by 25%, and annual completions have been on an upward trend since 2011/12, giving some indication of improving market conditions.
11. There was no take up of allocated employment sites in the reporting year. However activity is expected to pick up in the next year and there is renewed market interest in key sites at the Falkirk Gateway, stimulated in part by the Council programming enabling works over the next few years through its Tax Increment Finance Initiative (TIF). Furthermore the Council will start construction of 4 advance industrial units in the summer of 2015 to kick start development at Abbotsford Business Park in Falkirk.



Part 1: National Headline Indicators

Development Management

Project Planning

12. The Council continues to actively encourage applicants to seek pre-application advice from the Development Management Unit, other Council Services, external statutory and non-statutory consultees. This was not evidenced in our last report. We have now put procedures in place to allow us to record the percentage of planning applications where applicants have sought pre-application advice and will continue to develop this.
13. There is a continuing reluctance from applicants to enter into processing agreements. However, we continue to take a proactive stance in offering them for some complex local developments as well as for major developments.

Decision-making and Decision-making Timescales

14. Regular caseload monitoring is an inherent part of our procedures in respect of performance management. This has resulted in our decision making timescales remaining reasonably consistent for local developments and householder developments.
15. It is acknowledged that the average number of weeks to decision for major developments has increased. This is because the figures have been skewed by 2 longstanding legacy cases that have now been determined. One was a complex application for a major housing development. There were protracted planning obligation discussions with the applicant which were delayed due to land ownership issues. This took 155 weeks to determine. The other was a Council application for restoration of a landfill site which involved lengthy negotiation between the applicant and statutory consultees to ensure a satisfactory scheme.

This took 110 weeks to determine. The figure has also been affected by the reluctance of developers to enter into processing agreements and the submission of applications without necessary supporting information contrary to pre-application advice. Our delegation rate has increased in the last year. This has been helped in part by communication between officers and Members to discuss concerns that may otherwise result in applications being referred to Planning Committee for determination.

16. Our endeavours to reduce the decision making timescales for applications subject to legal agreement and to determine legacy cases continues. Case officers are advised to set timescales for responses, seek general agreement of heads of terms of legal agreements during pre-application discussions and during consideration of applications, to continuously review minded to grant decisions and to report back to Planning Committee or seek withdrawal of applications if developers do not progress. In February 2015 a report was presented to the Planning Committee in respect of undetermined "legacy" cases. The Committee agreed it would reconsider minded to grant decisions if not withdrawn or progressed further by the applicants. Also, concerns about legacy cases and impacts on performance were noted.
17. Our enforcement charter is up to date. The number of planning breaches identified and resolved has significantly increased. This is because of procedural changes made to ensure the accuracy of recorded data. For example cases involving fly posting are now being recorded individually rather than by group.

Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Open for Business

Contact

18. The Council continues to provide a single point of contact for all applicants from pre-application through to determination. However on larger developments where project teams are formed within the Development Management Unit, applicants, agents, consultees and other interested parties are able to contact assisting officers in addition to the lead officer. Examples of where this has assisted are in the processing of a full application for a major housing development of 307 houses at Mydub, Denny and an application for planning permission in principle for a major residential development at Parkhall Farm, Maddiston.
19. The Development Management Unit remains open for business, in person, over the phone, by email and in writing. Customers can contact the Council in a way which suits them best, a part time Customer Liaison Officer was assisting with this function during the reporting period. Clear guidance is set out on our updated website and a Development Management Charter setting out guidance on our processes and standards will be completed in the next reporting period and will be available to read in conjunction with our existing Enforcement Charter which has been reviewed and is up to date.
20. We continue to set early dates for meetings, and phone calls are returned timeously. Officers endeavour to reply by email where available. This ensures issues are addressed quickly and customers do not have to wait for a postal response. This is particularly helpful where applications are invalid as it allows issues to be resolved quickly.

Pre-application

21. We have maintained our positive approach to pre-application advice and offer a free service for all types of applications, from small scale householder developments to major and national planning submissions. Advice and guidance can also be found on the Council's website which also includes links to the Scottish Government website.
22. A review of the Council wide website was completed during the reporting period. The web pages for the planning service have been refreshed to improve accessibility to information. Our pre-application advice provides clear guidance on the likely additional information required with submissions. This is reiterated during pre-application discussions and the use of processing agreements promoted to developers.

Contributions

23. The existing Structure Plan and Local Plan, and emerging Local Development Plan provide clear guidance on when developer contributions are likely to be required. This information is then clarified in our Supplementary Guidance documents which provide clear guidance on developer contributions. Further information about our Supplementary Guidance documents is provided later in this report. Contribution levels are regularly checked and updated as appropriate. In relation to education contributions for example, the school rolls and future predicted levels are assessed for each application. This ensures that requests for contributions are proportionate and only made where necessary.

Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Flexible Team Working

24. We continue to maintain two area teams in Development Management but officers work across team areas as and when work levels require. We promote staff development and expertise through team working, particularly on major and more complex planning applications. This allows sharing of information, discussion of issues and promotes staff development. In addition we have an officer mostly dedicated to dealing with householder applications across the Council area and this should help improve householder performance. This should ensure we continue to respond quickly to requests from users of the service. We will continue to review working practices to maintain and improve performance and development.

Assisting Development Delivery

25. The Council's Tax Increment Finance Initiative (TIF) is well underway, delivering major infrastructure and enabling works in the Falkirk-Grangemouth area, and removing constraints and financial burdens which would have otherwise fallen on developers in the area. The upgrading of M9 Junction 6 is complete, car parking improvements at the Falkirk Stadium/Helix are underway, and improvements to the A904 corridor are at the design stage. A Development Framework for the Falkirk Gateway/Stadium area has been commissioned this year to provide a context for site masterplans, and to help stimulate and steer development in this critical area.
26. The Council continues to work to progress strategic housing growth areas allocated in the development plan, with particular reference to Whitecross and Banknock/Dennyloanhead. An alteration to the Banknock Development Framework has been approved to take account of additional capacity at the adjacent motorway junction. The lead developer of the Whitecross new settlement went into administration in December 2014 and the Council has been working with the administrator and their appointed advisors to progress the current live planning applications.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

High Quality Development on the Ground

Policy

27. Design and placemaking topics figure prominently in the Council's ongoing programme of Supplementary Guidance (SG). A complete refresh of the SG on Residential Extensions and Alterations has been undertaken. For the first time, Supplementary Guidance has been prepared to ensure that our Landscape Character Assessments are integrated into the planning process, so that the sensitivities and issues associated with the different landscape types in our area are taken into account by planning officers and developers. The Scottish Government's Policy 'Designing Streets' was formally adopted by the Council in December 2014, backed up by Supplementary Guidance on Neighbourhood Design (see panel).

Case Study:

SG02 Neighbourhood Design

The Council's Neighbourhood Design guide was approved during the year and represents an innovative way of conveying the message of 'Designing Streets' in the local Falkirk context. Rather than repeating the content of 'Designing Streets', it shows how the national policy can be applied to our area by identifying successful examples of local places and streets, and why they work well. Guidance is provided by graphically driven pages with largely local examples of good practice. A helpful diagram showing how the design process should integrate with the planning and roads consenting processes is provided, along with a design principles checklist for applicants. The guide was produced through a series of collaborative workshops facilitated by Scottish Government staff, and involving planners, designers, and transport and roads professionals. Storyboarding techniques were used to build up the document. It was presented to local developers at the annual Developer's Forum in February 2015.

Neighbourhood Design

Supplementary Guidance SG02

July 2015



Falkirk Council
Development Services

Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Design and Landscape Expertise

28. The planning service continues to benefit from in-house expertise in urban design, conservation, landscape and biodiversity which can be drawn on in the processing of planning applications, and adds value to planning outcomes. During the course of the year, this resource has been augmented temporarily by an architecture graduate secured under the Council's graduate training programme. Our landscape architects continue to provide specialist support to development management staff, particularly on the assessment of the landscape and visual impacts of proposed wind turbine developments.

Design Training

29. A programme of training workshops involving policy, design and development management officers is ongoing to ensure shared understanding of the new Supplementary Guidance documents and how they are to be applied. These have been supplemented by informal lunchtime seminars on design and conservation topics such as natural slate and 3D digital scanning.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

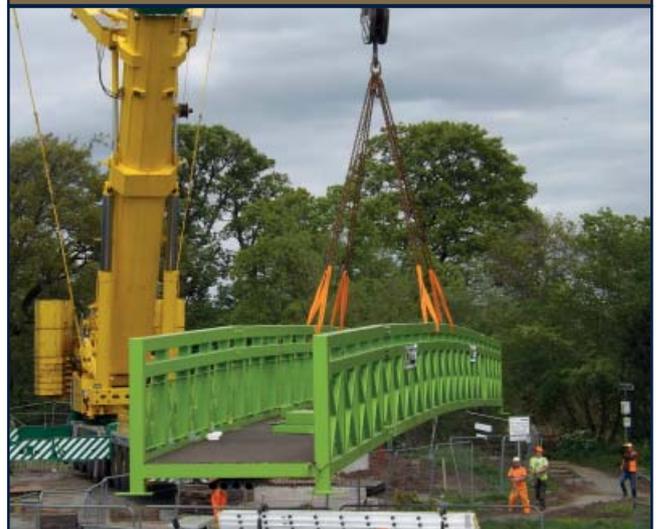
Greenspace and Placemaking

30. With the Council's refreshed Falkirk Greenspace Strategy approved in 2013, the Council continues to work on the long-term delivery of the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) in the area. The CSGN Trust and Falkirk Council continue to work in close partnership, with a new officer working group established focusing on the thematic priorities of vacant and derelict land, active travel, disadvantaged communities, and the emerging Woodlands In and Around Town funding opportunities. Progress over the year includes:

- Assessment of vacant and derelict land sites to assist in prioritising future partnership working with CSGNT.
- Preparation and approval of the Falkirk Forest and Woodland Strategy, which provides a framework for guiding woodland and forest management in the Falkirk area for the period 2015 to 2055.
- Advice to education colleagues on school and local community greenspace enhancement including the successful delivery of orchard projects in 5 local schools.
- Implementation of a number of path upgrades, the most significant of which are the Bo'ness to Blackness coastal route, a key part of the John Muir Trail, and the Dorrator Bridge, which connects the communities of Camelon and Larbert across the River Carron (see panel).
- Implementation of year one projects as part of the 4-year Inner Forth Landscape Initiative, a partnership project with wide ranging aims including improving access, improving the natural and built heritage, and providing education and training opportunities.
- Community capacity building and support for Local Nature Reserve groups and the Communities Along the Carron Association.

Case Study: Dorrator Bridge

The installation of a replacement Dorrator Bridge on the River Carron is the culmination of years of greenspace and access investment in the Green Belt between Falkirk and Larbert, which has been integrated with large scale residential development in North Falkirk and substantially funded by developer contributions. A link bridge was part of the original masterplan vision to strengthen strategic pedestrian and cycle links in a north-south direction from Larbert towards Falkirk Town Centre, and in an east west direction along the River Carron corridor, although the final location of the bridge has had to be moved upstream for technical and land ownership reasons.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Town Centres

31. The £5.5million Falkirk Town Centre Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is now well underway and Shopfront Improvement and Building Repair Schemes in place. A number of THI funded schemes are now starting to come through the planning system. To support this process, the Council is preparing Supplementary Guidance on Shopfronts which highlights the rich heritage of commercial frontages in our Town Centres and encourages sympathetic design of new shopfronts and signage.
32. The Denny Town Centre regeneration project continues to progress, with the remaining blocks demolished, temporary accommodation for retailers established, and the construction of Phase 1 to commence later in 2015. A marketing exercise for Phase 2 has been undertaken, and a charrette is being run to consider the future of the remaining land.
33. The Council has undertaken a review of its Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Certainty

Development Plan

34. The Falkirk Local Development Plan was adopted in July 2015, replacing the Falkirk Council Structure Plan and the Falkirk Council Local Plan. The Examination was successfully negotiated during the course of the reporting year, the Council responding timeously to a number of information requests. The Examination Report largely endorsed the key aspects of the Proposed Plan under scrutiny, but also gave the opportunity, through the Reporter's recommendations, to bring the Plan into line with the new SPP/NPF3, thereby making it more robust and up-to-date.
35. A key feature of the LDP, and the certainty it provides for developers, has been the Habitats Regulations Appraisal which has been completed and submitted to Scottish Ministers along with the plan (see panel).
36. The Council's annual Development Plan Monitoring Report was published in December 2014.

Case Study: Habitats Regulations Appraisal for the LDP

Adoption of the LDP is dependent on the Council demonstrating, through a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA), that the plan will not adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 site. This has been particularly complex and challenging on the Forth Estuary in our area given the potential impacts of national industrial and infrastructure projects in Grangemouth on the Firth of Forth SPA. The HRA has been successfully completed through a combination of in-house expertise, selective consultancy support and exhaustive consultation with SNH. This process has provided certainty to businesses about the efforts they will need to make to ensure that their projects meet obligations arising from the Habitats Directive. It paves the way for project-specific HRA and provides investors with increased confidence in an environmentally sensitive area.

FALKIRK Local Development Plan



HABITATS REGULATIONS APPRAISAL RECORD

Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Supplementary Guidance

37. During the course of the reporting year, the Council made significant progress on its programme of Supplementary Guidance which will support the Local Development Plan. Ten SG documents were consulted on and approved by the Council during the reporting period, and have subsequently been cleared for adoption by the Scottish Government in conjunction with the LDP. These are as follows:

SG01 Development in the Countryside

SG02 Neighbourhood Design

SG03 Residential Extensions and Alterations

SG05 Biodiversity and Development

SG06 Trees and Development

SG09 Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Designations

SG10 Education and New Housing Development

SG12 Affordable Housing

SG13 Open Space and New Development

SG14 Spatial Framework and Guidance for Wind Energy Development

38. These SG documents are aimed at providing greater clarity and detail on the application and interpretation of key policy areas. Important guidance on developer contributions is updated (SG10 (see panel), SG12, SG13), ensuring that requests for contributions are clear and proportionate; householder advice on extensions and alterations is streamlined and simplified (SG03); and the spatial framework for wind energy developments is brought into line with SPP 2014. New topics such as development in the countryside, neighbourhood design and landscape character assessment support the LDP's placemaking and design aspirations.

Case Study:

SG10 Education and New Housing Development

Population growth in the Council area over the last 15 years has put pressure on the capacity of schools in most parts of the Council area. Much of this is attributable to new housing development. To support its continuing strategy of growth, the Council first introduced guidance on developer contributions for education provision in April 2007. This has been revised twice since, most recently in SG10. SG10 sets out contribution rates to different types of schools from flats and houses, and the construction costs for school extensions and pupil/dwelling ratios on which these are based. The basis for the contribution rates is therefore clear and transparent. The SG, and its use in the planning application process, is supported by a school forward planning process where planners and education officers work closely together to project school rolls and capacity risks. The SG states that development viability will be a material consideration in applying contributions, and that staged payments and payback periods will be appropriate. The SG has supported the Council's strategy for growth in planning appeals. In November 2014 the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) dismissed an appeal and refused to modify a planning obligation to remove all reference to education payments (DPEA reference POA-240-2).

Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Development Management

39. We are looking at our processes to enable us to record percentage of applications decided contrary to the Development Plan.
40. During the reporting period, 98.1% of applications were determined in accordance with officer recommendation.

Processing Agreements

41. Staff actively encourage the use of agreements on major applications and also more complex local applications. Negotiations have been ongoing with prospective applicants to enter into processing agreements but to date applicants have shown reluctance with none as yet being signed. The use of processing agreements was encouraged and discussed at our annual developers' workshop in February 2015. Information is provided on our website.

Submission of Applications

42. The number of applications invalidly submitted remains constant at slightly over 54%. Reasons for consistently high invalidity at receipt include applications submitted online without a fee, and failure to submit appropriately scaled and dimensioned drawings. We have raised the issue of providing dimensions on drawings with our most prolific agents because of the increasing use of our online system by the public to view applications. We hope to be able to report a decrease in applications invalidated. Although we accept fee payment by most methods, many agents, although they submit applications online, rely on the applicant to submit the fee. This often results in the application being invalid on first receipt.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Communications, Engagement and Customer Service

Development Planning

43. With the Proposed LDP at Examination, there were no major consultation events in relation to the development plan during the year, although consultation on the SG documents was carried out at various stages. A development plan newsletter was issued at the end of March highlighting the outcome of the Examination.
44. The recommendations of the Communications and Engagement Review, which assessed the effectiveness of engagement through the LDP process, have been considered and are being integrated into project planning for LDP2. The Review was augmented by a further customer survey through the Council's 'Citizens' Panel' (see panel).

Case Study:

Assessing LDP Engagement - Citizens Panel

In June 2014, the Council surveyed its Citizen's Panel in relation to the LDP process. The Council has invested heavily in successive phases of consultation and publicity, and the objective was to establish awareness of the LDP, to gauge interest in being involved in future plans, to determine any obstacles to engagement, and to find out how people want to be involved in the future. Some 630 people responded to the survey, around a third of whom had some knowledge of the LDP. This was considered a relatively high level of awareness, but one which could be improved upon. The majority expressed an interest in participating in the next LDP and were added to the development plans customer database. The findings of the survey will help us to design more effective engagement in the future.

Charters

45. Work on producing a Development Management Charter is underway and will be finalised within the next reporting period. Our Enforcement Charter was reviewed and updated in August 2014. The Charter recognises the different needs of users and provides clear information on our processes and standards, and is due for review in the next reporting period. The Development Management Charter once finalised will be reviewed and updated as and when appropriate but within a minimum of every two years.

Plain English

46. All publications are checked for the use of plain English to ensure that information published is suitable for all readers. Information is published on our website in a number of different formats to meet the needs of users of the site. Staff in the Planning and Environment Unit benefited from Plain English training, with a particular emphasis on writing for the web.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

E-Planning

- 47. Electronic submissions continue to increase with 410 (51%) applications made online. This shows an 8% increase in online submissions since the last reporting period. This continues to reflect an increasing trend towards online submissions.
- 48. The Council's website has been refreshed during the reporting period.
- 49. The Development Plan team is now moving towards e-communication for mailings, with the latest mailing being issued by e-mail.

Complaints Process

- 50. The Council has implemented a new complaints process, the details of which are available on the Council website.
- 51. The new procedure has simplified the previous complaints process to a two stage, rather than three stage process. Following the adoption of the new complaints system a detailed breakdown of figures relating to the planning service is not readily available at this time. This issue will be considered during the next reporting period.

Customer Service

- 52. The Development Management Unit continues to run and review a customer survey. All users are able to access the survey online or respond by mail using a freepost card. There are direct links on all officer email signatures. During this reporting period 89.6% have found the customer service to be excellent or good with 95.1% finding the Development Management representatives to be helpful, courteous and polite.
- 53. We continue to provide a duty service during office hours and a part time Customer Liaison Officer assists in this role. We have also embarked on a 'cold-calling' random survey of customers and it is proposed this will continue and the outcomes considered in the next reporting period.

'I found [case officer] to be particularly efficient, helpful and polite' June 2014.

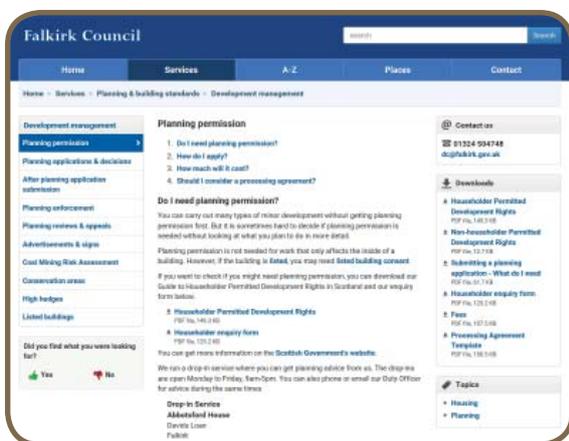
'I thought the service from the very first visit was excellent. Thanks' August 2014.

'Helpful and quick service linked to planning application and building warrant. Any queries were resolved quickly' August 2014.

'Found full service from start to finish very helpful indeed' October 2014.

'Helpful officer. Pragmatic approach. No problems' November 2014.

'Excellent upfront service provided by the team' May 2015.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

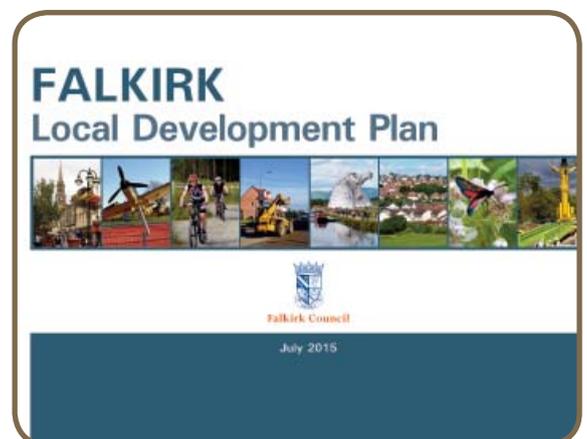
54. We continue to hold yearly developer workshops. We sought the views of attendees on topics to be discussed at our last workshop in February 2015. Topics discussed included presentations on current Development Management and Building Standards issues, progress of the Local Development Plan, new Roads Development guidelines, Designing Streets policy, education contributions required through the planning process and, awareness of major accident hazard pipeline constraints. These workshop events continue to be popular, and are well attended by a range of developers and agents who are involved in a wide variety of developments.
55. During the course of the reporting period the Council continued to be involved with the consideration of a controversial planning application for the extraction of coal bed methane. This included involvement in a public inquiry. The Service has continued to keep all interested parties informed of the progress via regular correspondence, press releases, Member briefing notes and updates on the Council website.
56. We have a major projects team which meets to discuss existing and potential developments to share knowledge and identify issues which will require to be addressed across the various parts of the Service.
57. We also have planning representation on the Flood Liaison and Advisory Group, the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Group and regular participation at the development planning and development management sub-groups of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS). There are regular liaison meetings with representatives from Scottish Water and SEPA, in addition to separate liaison meetings with the Council's Housing, Education and Roads Services.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Efficient and Effective Decision-making

58. The majority of planning applications (94.7%) are determined under the Council's Scheme of Delegation. The scheme allows applications for local and major developments that are in accordance with the Development Plan to be determined by officers unless called to Planning Committee following publication of the weekly recommendation list. Where Members call in an application for determination by the Planning Committee they are required to set out their reasons and the applicant/agent are advised. We encourage Members to discuss potential call in's with officers in advance to see if potential concerns or questions can be addressed.
59. Decision making on the local development plan is reserved to the full Council. This meets on a six weekly cycle, but special meetings are held to expedite progress and meet project timescales where necessary. Briefings for Members are typically held in advance of the Council meetings to explain processes and proposed policy direction. This aids debate and decision making at the meetings themselves. Other forward planning matters, including Supplementary Guidance are reported to the Council's Executive which meets on a four weekly cycle. There is also provision for Members to influence policy through policy development panels, and this is being used successfully in the emerging Open Space Strategy. The local development plan process continues to be subject to a project management approach, with project and stage plans, clear lines of reporting, and a hierarchy of project meetings.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Effective Management Structures

Workforce Management

60. The planning process is coordinated by a management team led by the Head of Service. A breakdown of the structure is provided in Part 6: Workforce and Financial Information.
61. The ability to have flexible team working continues to be 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 teams are set up to allow joint and shared working on applications and to promote staff development.
62. The planning function is located within Development Services in one building along with transport, economic development, environmental protection, architecture, roads and building standards. This helps to provide an integrated ‘one-stop shop’ to the benefit of users of the Service.
63. The Planning & Environment Unit continues to provide in-house expertise on landscape, biodiversity, urban design, conservation and outdoor access, which is utilised by other services, as well as providing easily accessible advice to the Development Management Unit.

Unit and Team Meetings

64. Development Management Unit and Planning & Environment Unit meetings occur on a monthly basis and are attended by all staff. There is a clear structure to the meetings which allows for work updates and the cascade of information and performance are also discussed. The minutes are recorded and circulated to management and staff. Weekly team briefings also occur to allow for circulation of urgent information and discussion of issues. Development Plan team meetings are held every three weeks as part of the LDP project management system.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Financial Management and Local Governance

65. 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.
66. 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 is regularly reviewed. It was last updated in August 2014 and will be reviewed again within 2 years.
67. Council procurement rules and procedures are followed. Regular monitoring of budgets is undertaken between unit managers and the service accountant.
68. The planning service is currently leading on a project to improve the process for recording and monitoring planning obligations. A multi disciplinary team comprising representatives from relevant Council Services (Planning Obligations Monitoring Group) has taken responsibility for updating and streamlining procedures to allow better access to information and improved transparency. It is anticipated that this work will be completed within the 2015/16 monitoring period.



Part 2: Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Culture of Continuous Improvement

Staff Development

69. Annual staff appraisals are mandatory and backed by Training Plans and budgets. Development Management officers have attended external training courses and reported back to colleagues at team meetings and by sharing information electronically. These courses have covered a wide variety of topics such as development viability, high hedges legislation and practice, place making, community planning, Antonine Wall planning and protection, current issues in planning enforcement, the Young Planners Annual Conference. Development Plan officers attend a range of forums and training events to keep abreast of policy changes and best practice.
70. Topic awareness training sessions presented by representatives of external organisations are held periodically and during the reporting period this included one on built environment capture (3D modelling). These sessions are attended by officers across Development Services as a whole.
71. A number of in house workshops have taken place in relation to new supplementary guidance. This has included sessions on development in the countryside, open space and new development, healthcare and new housing development.
72. Staff are signed up to receive regular electronic news updates from Scottish Government and are copied in to round robin emails from the Improvement Service, Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum (SPEF) and, Planning Aid for Scotland. Use of the Knowledge Hub is encouraged.

A list of planning related articles which may be of interest is regularly distributed to staff in Development Management. A culture of sharing continues to be encouraged and promoted within the Development Management and Planning & Environment Units.

'Lessons Learned' Exercise

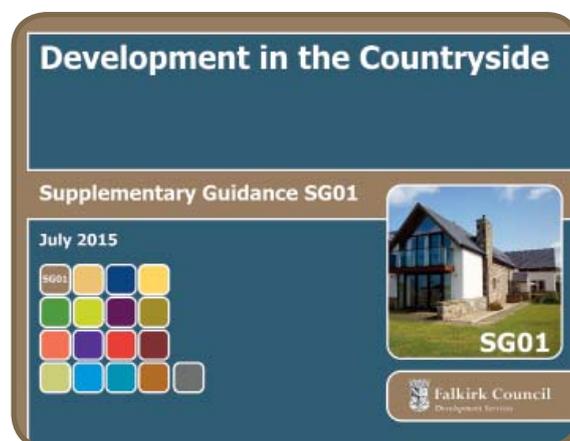
73. With our first Local Development Plan almost completed, the development plan team within the Planning & Environment Unit has undertaken a 'lessons learned' exercise in line with good project management practice. This has identified strengths and weaknesses in the way the Council handled the different stages of the process and recommendations for improvements which have helped inform the project plan for LDP2.
74. A similar exercise was undertaken involving the Planning & Environment Unit, Development Management Unit and external advisers in relation to the application and public inquiry for the DART (coal bed methane extraction) planning application. It is proposed to hold further sessions following determination of the application by Scottish Ministers.

Councillors

75. Training for new Members of the Planning Committee has taken place. Briefing/ training sessions have taken place for all Members on topics including unconventional gas extraction, open space audit and education provision and developer contributions.

Part 3: Supporting Evidence

1. [Development Plan Scheme \(5th and 6th Versions\)](#)
2. [Proposed Falkirk LDP as Modified](#)
3. [Falkirk LDP Action Programme](#)
4. [Falkirk LDP Habitats Regulations Appraisal](#)
5. LDP Project Plan, Progress and Team Meetings Notes
6. [Supplementary Guidance](#)
7. [Other Planning Guidance](#)
8. [Development Plan Monitoring Report 2014](#)
9. [Development Plan Update Newsletters](#)
10. Falkirk LDP Lessons Learned Report
11. Falkirk LDP Citizens Panel Survey
12. Draft Housing Land Audit 2015
13. Falkirk Forest and Woodland Strategy
14. [Development Services, Service Performance Plan 2014 - 2017](#)
15. [Tax Incremental Finance Initiative](#)
16. [Development Management Customer Survey](#)
17. [Falkirk Planning Enforcement Charter](#)
18. [High Hedges Guidance](#)
19. [Falkirk Council Scheme of Delegation](#)
20. Falkirk Council Developers Workshop February 2015
21. [Falkirk Council Complaints Process](#)



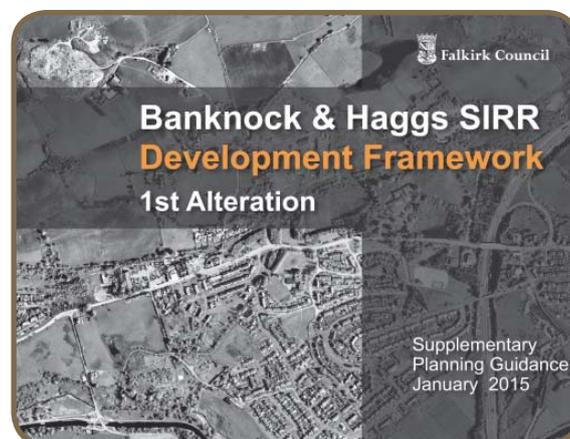
Part 4: Service Improvements

In the coming year we will:

Service Improvement	Timescale
Adopt Falkirk LDP	July 2015
Complete Supplementary Guidance	March 2016
Carry out pre-MIR Consultation for LDP2	January 2016
Prepare and consult on draft Open Space Strategy	January 2016
Revise SPG on Developer Contributions to Denny Eastern Access Road	March 2016
Complete Town Centre Health Checks	March 2016
Complete Development Management Planning Charter	December 2015
Arrange a developer/agent workshop on application validation requirements	December 2015
Review best practice procedures of benchmarking partners	April 2016
Continue to reduce the number of legacy planning applications	April 2016
Review how we continue to promote the use of processing agreements	October 2015
Increase public access to electronically stored planning application information	October 2015

April 2014 - March 2015

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK Annual Report



Part 4: Service Improvements

Delivery of our Service Improvement Actions from the 2013-2014 PPF:

Committed Improvements and Actions	Complete?
Adopt Falkirk LDP	No. Plan process delayed by 3 months due to delay in completion of Examination by DPEA. Adoption achieved in July 2015.
Supplementary Guidance - adopt majority of SGs along with LDP	No. 10 out of 17 approved by Council in reporting period but adoption delayed due to delay in LDP adoption.
Prepare project plan for LDP2 and incorporate programme into DPS5	Yes.
Incorporate recommendations of Communications & Engagement Review into participation statement in DPS5	Yes.
Prepare and consult on draft Open Space Strategy	No. Process now subject to a Council policy development panel which has delayed process.
Prepare Falkirk Gateway & Stadium Development Framework	Yes. Consultants commissioned and work underway.
Amend Banknock SIRR Development Framework	Yes.
Citizens Panel Development Plan Questionnaire	Yes.
Complete Town Centre Health Checks	No, although Town Centre Regeneration Strategy Review has been undertaken.
Update the Council Website in relation to planning matters	Yes, completed but will be reviewed as required.
Completion of Development Management Procedures Manual	No. Further review of procedures ongoing.
Update letters associated with validation and registration to accord with plain English	No.
Completion of Development Management Charter	No. Draft produced, publication of finalised version anticipated December 2015.
Set up a process for recording applications decided contrary to the Development Plan	Yes.
Produce High Hedges guidance on website	Yes.
Update letters associated with enforcement to accord with plain English	No. Partially completed, work ongoing.
Amend the system to allow more detailed breakdown of complaints received by and dealt with by respective units of the service.	Yes.
Allow greater access to information relating to live planning applications and extant decisions.	No. Review of procedures ongoing.
Update the Planning Enforcement Charter	Yes.
Consider amending the Enforcement/Pre-application system to allow more detailed breakdown of types of notice and enquiries	Yes.

Part 5: Official Statistics

A: Decision-making timescales (based on 'all applications' timescales)

Category	Total Number of Decisions	Average Timescale (weeks)	
	2014-2015	2014-2015	2013-2014
Major Developments	3	135.3	27.9
Local Developments			
(non- householder)	241	11.2	11.2
Local: less than 2 months	61.4%	7.0	6.7
Local: more than 2 months	38.6%	17.9	19.7
Householder Developments			
	271	6.9	6.5
Local: less than 2 months	93.0%	6.6	6.3
Local: more than 2 months	7.0%	11.0	9.4
Housing Developments			
Major	1	154.9	----
Local housing developments	66	13.6	15.7
Local: less than 2 months	37.9%	7.4	7.0
Local: more than 2 months	62.1%	17.4	26.1
Business and Industry			
Major	----	----	----
Local business and industry	4	10.3	7.7
Local: less than 2 months	25.0%	7.4	6.6
Local: more than 2 months	75.0%	11.2	10.1
EIA Developments			
Other Consents*	65	9.1	7.0
Planning/Legal Agreements**			
Major	1	154.9	{ Not split }
Local	7	27.4	{all = 38.2}
Local Reviews	8	25.2	17.6

* 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 on overhead electricity lines, notifications and directions under GPDO Parts 6 & 8 relating to agricultural and forestry development and applications for prior approval by Coal Authority or licensed operator under classes 60 & 62 of the GPDO.

** Legal 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.

Part 5: Official Statistics

B: Decision-making: Local Reviews and Appeals

Type	Total Number of Decisions	Original Decision Upheld			
		2014-2015		2013-2014	
Local Reviews	8	3	37.5	1	33.3
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	7	3	42.9	2	33.3

C: Enforcement Activity

	2014-2015	2013-2014
Cases Taken Up	240	159
Breaches Identified	155	83
Cases Resolved	204	34
Notices Served***	38	1
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	----	----
Prosecutions	----	----

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

D: Context

Comments regarding decision-making and decision-making timescales are set out in paragraphs 14-16. Comments regarding enforcement activity are set out in paragraph 17.



Part 6: Workforce and Financial Information

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Head of Planning Service			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			14
Enforcement	0	0	2	0	0	0			2
Development Planning	0.5	0	5.5	0	1	0			7
Other Planning	0.5	0	8.5	0	1	0			10
Cross Service (Office Support/ Clerical)							8	0	8

	Total Budget ¹	Costs		Income
		Direct	Indirect ²	
Development Management	£1,104,090	£675,265 ³	£894,110	£506,200
Enforcement		£70,684		
Development Planning	£1,589,210	£371,657	£1,015,524 ⁴	£228,796
Other Planning⁵		£475,710		
Total	£2,693,300	£1,593,316	£1,909,634	£734,996

Performance Markers

- ¹ Total budget can only be broken down by Unit, not by function.
- ² Indirect costs can only be broken down by Unit, not by function.
- ³ Development Management direct staff costs include proportion of landscape and urban design/conservation officers' time.
- ⁴ Indirect costs for Development Planning/Other Planning includes environmental/access project budgets.
- ⁵ Other planning comprises landscape, biodiversity, urban design/conservation, greenspace, environmental policy/projects, access and outdoor ranger service.



Performance Markers

Driving Improved Performance

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
1	<p>Decision Making: Authorities demonstrating continuous evidence of reducing average timescales for all development types.</p>	<p>National Headline Indicators show a slight reduction in timescales for Householder developments and timescales for local developments have been maintained. Both are better than the national average. The timescales for major developments are high but have been skewed by two legacy cases determined within the reporting period.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators, paragraphs 14-16 Part 5: Official Statistics</p>
2	<p>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.</p>	<p>We continue to take a proactive stance to promote the use of processing agreements. This was raised and discussed at our developers workshop event in February 2015 and is promoted on our website.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators, paragraph 13 Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Open for business, paragraph 41</p>
3	<p>Early collaboration with applicants and consultees on planning applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all prospective applications. ● Clear and proportionate requests for supporting information. 	<p>We continue to encourage early dialogue with applicants and offer a free pre-application service. Guidance is provided on our website.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Open for business, paragraphs 21-22; Certainty, paragraphs 37-38</p>
4	<p>Legal Agreements: Conclude (or reconsider) applications within 6 months of 'resolving to grant'.</p>	<p>Decision making timescales for local (non-householder) applications subject to legal agreements have improved from 41 to 27.4 weeks. There was one major application with a legal agreement determined within the reporting period. This legacy case took 155 weeks. Progress of applications subject to legal agreements continues to be closely monitored and applications reported back to Planning Committee for reconsideration if not determined within 6 months.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators, paragraph 16 Part 5: Official Statistics</p>
5	<p>Enforcement Charter updated/re-published.</p>	<p>The Charter remains up to date and will be reviewed before August 2016.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Communications, engagement and customer service, paragraph 45</p>
6	<p>Continuous Improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Show progress/improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators. ● Progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report. 	<p>Progress on PPF National Headline indicators and Service Improvements are set out in the relevant sections of the PPF.</p> <p>For development planning, a focus for the year has been reviewing the experience of LDP1, which is now almost adopted, to learn lessons for LDP2. A Lessons Learned report has been produced and recommendations are being considered as part of project planning for LDP2. This has been supported by a Citizens Panel survey on the LDP.</p> <p>PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Culture of continuous improvement, paragraphs 69-75; Communications, engagement and customer service, paragraph 4, Case Study: Citizens Panel Part 4: Service Improvements</p>

Performance Markers

Promoting the Plan-Led System

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
7	Local Development Plan less than 5 years since adoption	The Local Plan is less than 5 years old having been adopted in December 2010. PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators
8	Development Plan Scheme demonstrates next LDP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On course for adoption within 5 year cycle ● Project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale 	The Modified LDP was submitted to Scottish Ministers in May 2015, following receipt of the Examination Report in March 2015. It was adopted in July 2015, which is within the 5 year cycle. In the reporting period, the programme slipped by 3 months compared to that shown in DPS5 (April 2014). This is due to 3 months delay on the receipt of the Examination Report from DPEA (delivered in March 2015 compared to DPEA target of November 2014) and is therefore attributable to factors beyond the Council's control. PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators, paragraph 8 Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Certainty, paragraph 34
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation	Not relevant during the reporting year. Planning for pre-MIR member consultation in respect of LDP2 is in hand and has been built into DPS6 (April 2015).
10	Cross-sector stakeholders, including industry, agencies and Scottish Government, engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation	Not relevant during reporting year. Planning for pre-MIR engagement with key agencies in respect of LDP2 is in hand and has been built into DPS6 (April 2015).
11	Regular and proportionate policy advice, for example through SPGs produced on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information required to support applications; and ● Expected developer contributions 	The Council is revising and augmenting its supplementary guidance in conjunction with the LDP. 10 SG documents have been finalised and submitted to the Scottish Government in May 2015. The remaining 7 SGs will be prepared and consulted on during 2015. The SGs provide guidance on the detailed implementation of policy particularly in respect of design and placemaking, built and natural heritage, and infrastructure and developer contributions. Where relevant, the SGs provide guidance on the information required to support applications, and checklists for applicants to ensure that all the relevant issues have been considered and addressed pre-submission, to give the application the highest chance of prompt assessment and determination. Case Study in paragraph 27 highlights SG02 Neighbourhood Design which includes a diagram showing what information should be provided at each stage in the application process, as well as a checklist summarising all the design principles which should be addressed in quality audits of proposals. Those SGs which set out required developer contributions provide clear guidance on the circumstances in which contributions will be required, the scale of those contributions, and how the contributions are derived, thereby demonstrating proportionality. Case Study on SG10 Education and New Housing Development provides an example. Supplementary Planning Guidance/ SGs are available on the Council's website and are available to view in the Council offices. Staff refer to the documents in pre-application discussions and correspondence. PPF Reference: Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Certainty, paragraphs 37-38, Case Study: SG10 Education and New Housing Development; High quality development on the ground, paragraph 27, Case Study: SG02 Neighbourhood Design

Performance Markers

Simplifying and Streamlining

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
12	Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit	Regular liaison meetings between planning and other relevant services are held on housing, education, open space and cemeteries. These ensure the integration of plans and strategies, sharing of information, and liaison on day to day issues, including current planning applications. In parallel to this, the Planning Obligations Monitoring Group brings together colleagues from planning, finance, legal and the various delivery services to ensure that developer contributions are taken forward and applied timeously to relevant projects. PPF Reference: Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Communications, engagement and customer service, paragraph 57; Effective management structures, paragraphs 62-63; Financial management and local governance, paragraph 68.
13	Sharing Good Practice, skills and knowledge between authorities	Staff have continued to attend forums, conferences, training events, and RTPI chapter events. The Knowledge Hub is used to share information and approaches to different issues. The process of preparing SG02 Neighbourhood Design was opened up to interested colleagues in other authorities. PPF Reference: Part 2: Defining and measuring a high quality planning service - Culture of continuous improvement, paragraphs 69-72; High quality development on the ground, paragraph 27, Case Study: SG02 Neighbourhood Design

Delivering Development

	Performance Marker	Council Response/Evidence
14	Stalled Sites/Legacy Cases: conclusion/withdrawal of planning applications more than one year old	During the reporting period the number of legacy cases has reduced from 48 to 28. In February 2015 a report was presented to the Falkirk Council Planning Committee regarding stalled sites/legacy cases. The Committee agreed it would reconsider minded to grant decisions if not withdrawn or progressed further by the applicants. We are continuing to work with applicants to further reduce the number of remaining legacy cases. PPF Reference: Part 1: National Headline Indicators
15	Developer Contributions: clear and proportionate expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set out in development plan and ● In pre-application discussions 	As for 11 above.



Falkirk Council
Development Services