



**HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK**

**DRAFT (PENDING COMMITTEE APPROVAL ON 17 AUGUST  
2016)**

## Part 1: National Headline Indicators (NHIs)

| Key outcomes   | 2015-2016            | 2014-2015                |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Development Planning</b>  |                      |                          |
| <b>Age of local/strategic development plan(s) (full years)</b>   | 3                    | 2                        |
| <b>Development Plan Scheme: on track?</b>  | N                    | Y                        |
| <b>Will the local/ strategic development plan (s) be replaced by their 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary according to the current development plan scheme (Y/N)?</b>  | N                    | Y                        |
| <b>Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year?</b>  | Y                    | N                        |
| <b>Were development plan scheme engagement/consultation commitments met during the year (Y/N)?</b>   | Y                    | Y                        |
| <p>Highland-wide LDP was adopted in 2012 and the Inner Moray Firth LDP in 2015. There are 5 Local Plans that remain in force under the HwLDP through a Parliamentary Order. The average age of the old Local Plans is 9 years.</p> <p>A review of the work programme has been carried out as a result of changes to the staffing structure which proposes a focus on the two remaining Area LDPs before the HwLDP review is progressed further. The timescales for the HwLDP review from the 2016 DPS will therefore not be met, but other plans remain on target. These changes are reflected in an updated Development Plan Scheme to be considered by Committee in August 2016.</p> |                      |                          |
| <b>Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs</b>   |                      |                          |
| <b>Established housing land supply</b>   | 29310 units          | 30275 units              |
| <b>5-year effective housing land supply</b>  | 4524 units           | 13887 units <sup>1</sup> |
| <b>5-year housing supply target</b>  | 5714 units           | 8389 units               |
| <b>5-year effective housing land supply</b>  | 3.9 years            | 1.7 years                |
| <b>Housing approvals</b>   | 15135 units          | 8005 units <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b>Housing completions over the last 5 years</b>   | 4583 units           | 4950 units <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b>Marketable employment land supply</b>   | 2384 ha <sup>4</sup> | 3752 ha                  |
| <b>Employment land take-up during reporting period</b>   | NA                   | NA <sup>3</sup>          |
| <p><sup>1</sup> Our LDPs have an established 20 year land supply, with an effective supply for the first 5 years and beyond, supply and targets are calculated on this basis</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Figures calculated are for the period 2010-2014</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Data not available</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Business, Industrial and Retail allocations from adopted LDPs – excludes mixed-use allocations</p>   |                      |                          |
| <b>Development Management</b>  |                      |                          |
| <b>Project Planning</b>  |                      |                          |
| <b>percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice</b>  | 17%                  | 15.9%                    |
| <b>number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan</b>  | 13                   | 15                       |
| <b>percentage planned timescales met</b>   | 78.1%                | 100%                     |

|   |       |      |
|---|-------|------|
| <b>Decision - making application approval rate</b>      | 95.4% | 95%  |
| <b>delegation rate</b>                                  | 96.5% | 86%  |
| <b>Decision – making timescales</b>                     |       |      |
| <b>Average Number of weeks to decision:</b>             |       |      |
| <b>major developments</b>                               | 20.6  | 24.9 |
| <b>local developments (non-householder)</b>             | 11.9  | 12.3 |
| <b>householder developments</b>                         | 7.3   | 7.1  |
| <b>Legacy Cases</b>                                     |       |      |
| <b>Number cleared during reporting period</b>           | 61    | 21   |
| <b>Number remaining</b>                                 | 39    | 37   |
|   |       |      |
| <b>Enforcement</b>                                      |       |      |
| <b>time since enforcement charter reviewed (months)</b> | 13    | 1    |
| <b>number of breaches identified</b>                    | 136   | 251  |
| <b>number of breaches resolved</b>                      | 282   | 188  |

Further information on Adopted Local Development Plan / Local Plans

| Plan  | Status at 31 March 2016                    | Date adopted/ approved  | Number of full years passed |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>Adopted Local Development Plans/Local Plans</b>                  |  |   |                             |
| <b>Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan</b>                     | Adopted                                    | 31 July 2015  | 0                           |
| <b>Highland-wide Local Development Plan</b>                         | Adopted                                    | 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2012  | 3                           |
| <b>Sutherland Local Plan (as continued in force)</b>                | Adopted                                    | 24 <sup>th</sup> June 2010<br>(Retained in force 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2012)      | 5                           |
| <b>West Highland and Islands Local Plan (as continued in force)</b> | Adopted                                    | 9 <sup>th</sup> September 2010<br>(Retained in force 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2012)  | 5                           |
| <b>Wester Ross Local Plan (as continued in force)</b>               | Adopted                                    | 29 <sup>th</sup> June 2006<br>(Retained in force 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2012)      | 9                           |
| <b>Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan (as continued in force)</b>    | Adopted                                    | 8 <sup>th</sup> February 2007<br>(Retained in force 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2012)   | 9                           |
| <b>Caithness Local Plan (as continued in force)</b>                 | Adopted                                    | 12 <sup>th</sup> September 2002<br>(Retained in force 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2012) | 13                          |
| <b>Emerging Local Development Plans</b>                             |  |   |                             |
| <b>Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan</b>              | Proposed Local Development Plan            | January 2016  | -                           |
| <b>West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan</b>             | Main Issues Report – approved by Committee | February 2016   | -                           |
| <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Highland-wide Local Development Plan</b>          | Main Issues Report                         | 25 September 2015   | -                           |

## **Part 2: Defining and measuring a high-quality planning service**

### **1. QUALITY OF OUTCOMES**

Over the course of last year, our policy frameworks have helped deliver a wide range of developments throughout the Highland area. We continue to negotiate with developers to deliver better quality of development that reflects the Highland context, and we seize opportunities to encourage development that reflects our Development Plan policies and unique Highland character. The two examples given below demonstrate the quality of development we have sought in two of our more rural areas (case studies 1 and 2).

## Case Study 1 – Lochside Cottage

15/03562/FUL – Lochside Cottage Hope is located on the windswept western facing shore of Loch Hope on the north coast of Scotland within the shadow of the most northerly Munro, Ben Hope, between the small communities of Altnaharra and Hope.



The proposal, which forms part of an extensive modernisation programme currently being undertaken by the Estate to its properties to diversify further into up-market accommodation, was to sympathetically refurbish the traditional form estate cottage and add glazed links to access new contemporary extensions which are a modern interpretation of the proportion, scale and materials of period sheds, barns and byres.

These extensions will provide additional living accommodation and bedrooms, including an underground bedroom to the southwestern elevation. They will take full advantage of the uninterrupted vistas over the Loch and to the rugged and unspoilt wild mountains of northwest Sutherland beyond.

The developer was involved in extensive pre-application discussions with the Council on this development, all within the context of the wider and ongoing modernisation and redevelopment plans for the whole Estate by the new owners. During this pre-application stage, we were able to add value to the process in negotiation with the developer to ensure that the form and massing of the extension to the original cottage, and the proposed materials for such, were appropriate to the proposal, and to the wider landscape.

The successful and detailed pre-application discussion between the agent and the Council resulted in the application being processed quickly and unhindered.

The proposal was accompanied by supporting information including a Design Statement specifically for the Cottage; and a Masterplan setting the Cottage redevelopment within the wider context of various other projects for Hope, including extensive works to the Category B Listed Hope Lodge, a new boathouse and jetty, refurbishment and extension of five other estate houses, and re-alignment of the public road.

## Case Study 2 – Forsinard



13/04359/FUL – Forsinard Tower is located at Forsinard in the beautiful and ruggedly remote Flow Country of Sutherland in the north of Scotland, between Helmsdale and Melvich. It is one of the main focal points within the largest of the RSPB Reserves and is reached from the village by walking through the peatland landscape on a series of trails. The Flows Lookout Tower gives a unique perspective of the blanket bog and pool system on the Dubh Lochan Trail, which is a classic example of the type of pools that are found throughout the

Flow Country. There was close liaison with the applicant and agent throughout the planning process.

The RIAS awards 2016 named it as one of the eleven best buildings of the year at its prestigious awards ceremony.

[http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/details.aspx?id=421210&utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=News](http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/details.aspx?id=421210&utm_source=rss&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=News)

The tower now provides a modern, contemporary, striking and functional piece of public architecture within a unique setting which through its siting elevation gives an opportunity for visitors RSPB Forsinard to experience and appreciate the landscape, plants and animals within the Reserve. The building



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therefore adds public environmental value to and enhances the already high quality of the existing natural environment at the site, which is one of the top visitor attractions in Sutherland. The development also furthers the concepts of conserving peatland habitats to mitigate climate change and provides a destination for star gazing given its location within an area of Dark Skies.

Sources: Highland Council, Icosis Architects, RSPB, UrbanRealm

Major developments such as Inverness Campus and Tornagrain and new public infrastructure including the Inverness West Link and the new Inverness Royal Academy have been further progressed during this reporting period , assisted by the planning process. The overarching Highland wide Local Development Plan, which is supplemented by Area Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance, has provided a consistent basis for the delivery of effective pre-application advice and for consistent decision making.

[Supplementary Guidance](#) covers a wide range of different issues setting out the requirements clearly to developers as to what is required in submitting planning applications. The majority of these have remained fit for purpose over the course of the 2015-16 period, although minor changes have been made as required (**Performance Marker 11**).

Working with partners has proved valuable in establishing the quality we expect to see. As an example, the Council has worked closely with Abellio Scotrail and other stakeholders over the course of last year to prepare a detailed masterplan for the future development of the station and the surrounding areas. This is a key part of the Council's City Centre regeneration strategy (see case study 3) (**Performance Marker 11**).

### Case Study 3 – Inverness Station



In September 2015 the Council, Abellio Scotrail (AS) and HITRANS entered into a joint commission to develop design ideas for improvements to Inverness Railway Station. AS plans to invest up to £2m on station improvements as part of its franchise agreement with Transport Scotland.

Dundee based architects Nicol Russell Studios were commissioned to develop ideas and sketch

proposals for a wide range of station improvements, expanding the scope of work originally proposed in the AS franchise bid. Their brief included: improvements to all three entrances and Station Square, a refurbished concourse, expanded commercial and retail opportunities and an improved walking route between the Station, bus station and Rose Street car park.

A range of concept images for improving station entrances, including substantial re-modelling of the main frontage to Station Square has been prepared along with a supporting study. A funding package is now being discussed so as to allow the early delivery of this key regeneration project for Inverness.

The [Inverness Design Review Panel](#) has continued to operate well, resulting in a number of major schemes being subject to review and subsequent change prior to the submission of planning applications. Over the course of the reporting period seven schemes were considered, including a session on design considerations for city centre sites which has provided very useful feedback to the team responsible for preparing the Inverness City Centre Development Brief (**Performance Marker 3**).

A series of [town centre masterplans](#) for Nairn, Fort William and Tain were completed during the course of 2015/16. The plans focus on the key priorities to make town centres more active, attractive and accessible. These include environmental improvements, making better use of land and existing buildings, and improving access and movement networks. This has resulted in communities taking a more proactive approach to regeneration and investment, including a [Fort William Town Team](#) that has made several significant improvements to the condition and appearance of the Town Centre environment (**Performance Marker 11**).

## **2. QUALITY OF SERVICE AND ENGAGEMENT**

During the course of 2015/16 we issued 586 formal pre-application advice packs for local developments and 28 advice packs for major developments. This approach to pre-application advice is absolutely fundamental to our customer service. Our response times met the target of achieving 70% of local pre-application advice packs within 6 weeks and 100% of major pre-application advice packs within 4 weeks (Case Study 4 shows the information provided to applicants to ensure that clear and proportionate requests for supporting information are made). All of our local pre-application requests and enquiries relating to permitted development are now submitted electronically using an on-line form (See [here](#)). This is designed to make it easier for the correct information to be submitted and to ensure an efficient workflow through to the relevant case officers. Our aim is to achieve as close as possible to 100% of such requests being made electronically during 2016/17. In terms of success from pre-application processes and policy in practice the newly opened 3 Wise Monkeys climbing and bouldering centre is a great example (Case Study 5) (**Performance Marker 3, 11, 12, 15**). .

## Case Study 4 - Major Developments Pre-application Advice



During 2015/16 28 meetings were held with developers seeking pre-application advice for major developments. These meetings are held monthly and are attended by colleagues representing different teams within the Council (e.g transport planning, forestry, environmental health, contaminated land, education) and by colleagues from Key Agencies (e.g. SEPA, SNH). Feedback is provided at the meeting to the prospective applicant and this is followed up with a detailed response within 4 weeks. 100% of the pre-application packs were issued within this 4 week timescale, demonstrating our commitment to supporting growth.

The pre-application pack includes a specific section on **developer contributions**, which draws specific reference to the relevant Supplementary Guidance documents relating to contributions along with an overview of what the purpose of such contributions would be.

**15. Developer Contributions**

This assessment is made against the Highland Wide Local Development Plan Policy 31: Developer Contributions, the Highland Council's Developer Contribution Supplementary Guidance 2013 and the Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief 2013.

Developer contributions are a method to mitigate the impact of a development that cannot otherwise be mitigated through the planning application process and the use of planning conditions.

Please refer to the development brief which details the infrastructural requirements to support the development of the Torvean and Ness-side sites. Estimated costs per unit have been calculated (based on 100sqm unit). The contributions would be towards the provision of Education, West Link, Public Transport, Sports facilities and Public Art.

It is expected that a Section 75 Obligation would be entered into to secure the contributions.

**Planning Application Submission Checklist**

If there is a tick next to one of the following documents then we will require you to submit it along with your application for planning permission. If you choose not to follow our advice and do not submit one of the required documents then we will expect a justification for this. A form for this which should be submitted with your application is available to download from <http://www.highland.gov.uk/>

|                                |   |   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Natural Heritage               | Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment  | ✓ |
|                                | Landscape Plan (supported by design conceptual information)   | ✓ |
|                                | Landscape Maintenance/Management Plan (proposals & objectives)  | ✓ |
|                                | Contour Plans and Cross-sections  | ✓ |
|                                | Protected Habitat Survey  | ✓ |
| Design                         | Design Brief and/or Master Plan   | ✓ |
|                                | Design and Access Statement   | ✓ |
|                                | Sustainable Design Statement  | ✓ |
| Amenity                        | Contaminated Land Report  | ✓ |
|                                | Dust Survey   | ✓ |
|                                | Noise Impact Assessment (for construction phase)  | ✓ |
| Transport and Wider Access     | Waste Strategy  | ✓ |
|                                | Transport/Traffic Impact Assessment   | ✓ |
| Water                          | Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG)  | ✓ |
|                                | Flood Risk Assessment   | ✓ |
|                                | Drainage Impact Assessment  | ✓ |
| Built and Cultural Heritage    | Sustainable Urban Drainage System Plan  | ✓ |
|                                | Archaeological Evaluation   | ✓ |
| Public Consultations           | Conservation Statement  | ✓ |
|                                | Structural Survey   | ✓ |
| Miscellaneous                  | Pre-application Consultation Report   | ✓ |
|                                | Minerals (mitigation and restoration management plan)   | ✓ |
| Any other appropriate document | Retail Assessment   | ✓ |
|                                | Extent of any potential diversion to the Great Glen Way and core path(s). Need for Ministerial and Planning Authority approval. | ✓ |
|                                | Access management Plan submitted with application   | ✓ |

The guidance also gives a detailed response from each of the relevant services/key agencies along with an appraisal of the supporting studies that will be required with the planning application – giving certainty at an early stage as to the information requirements.

### Case Study 5 - Supporting sustainable economic growth - 3 Wise Monkeys, Fort William



The site was a disused church Category C(s) Listed Building. In 2012 a pre-application enquiry was submitted for the reuse of the building as a climbing centre. Supportive pre-application advice was given to the proposal and guidance provided on the how to take the proposal forward, covering heritage, amenity, design and operational issues.

In 2013 planning permission and listed building consent applications were submitted for the alterations and change of use from church to indoor climbing sports centre including changing rooms and café. These were granted in 2013. Further applications were submitted in 2015 for internal changes as the scheme advanced and developed.

The scheme is a very welcome example of benefits of early pre-application discussions, positive planning policy towards economic development, support town centres and reuse of listed buildings, the power of an enthusiastic, positive, and focussed developer.



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The planning teams in Highland have a positive working relationship with the teams responsible for the delivery of affordable housing. Planning officers attend regular meetings of the local housing development forums (involving Council Services, Scottish Government and other agencies) which inform Local Development Plan preparation and take an active part in working with the same colleagues on identifying new sites for development. A new Highland Housing Hub has recently been established which seeks to unblock site development problems in the area – our planners play a full and active role in the hub process. We are also heavily engaged with colleagues in Education on the preparation of annual School Roll Forecasts and a corporate Developer Contributions Working Group which ensures that spend of developer contributions is monitored and managed **(Performance Markers 3, 10, 12, 15)**.

Regular meetings are held with our key agency partners, including bi-annual meetings with SNH and SEPA. It has been very beneficial to build relationships and share expertise in an environment where there is more set guidance and less direct engagement **(Performance Marker 10, 12)**.

Processing agreements are offered for all major applications and availability is publicised on our web-site (see [here](#)), with the option of having these in place for local developments where appropriate. Take-up has been strong with 32 used last year **(Performance Marker 2)**.

Validation of planning applications remains an area where we are seeking to improve. We have a validation checklist (see [here](#)) that is used to maintain consistency across the area and set out clearly to developers the standards we expect – we use different standards for the various types of planning application to ensure that this is proportionate. This will be strengthened when the national guidelines are agreed in due course **(Performance Marker 3, 11)**.

Project management arrangements for development planning have now been in operation for over a year, allowing a much clearer programme of work to be delivered. A Project Board is held monthly to determine next stages and to identify any slippage against the Development Plan Scheme ([here](#)). This Board identifies and oversees risks to delivery and ensures that if changes to the Development Plan Scheme are required, these are reported to Members and publicised at regular intervals **(Performance Marker 8)**.

### Case Study 6 – Delivering Improvement to Project Management of Consents Required for Council Projects

A conditions tracker has been established for developments associated with the West Link Road project in Inverness, including the rugby pitches and canal parks. The conditions tracker sets the agenda for regular group working meetings involving all relevant parties. The overall aim is to deliver high quality and responsible development and sharing skills from a range of disciplines within the Council. A Specified Officer is responsible for taking the lead in ensuring that pre-commencement conditions are attended to, that the site is being monitored and that the other consultants as required are in place. It is a task the case officer or enforcement team (if necessary) would normally undertake, but this approach allows for a dedicated officer to take ownership of the project and monitor and discharge conditions providing a first class service to the developer.

This is also beneficial for staff development providing the opportunity to collaborate with other officers of differing specialisms and to gain understanding of the issues in delivering development from other perspectives. It also highlights time pressures attached to delivering development. An added benefit with this approach is that on site contractors are better informed of the terms of the conditions, particularly important where there are environmental issues.

Our Enforcement functions continue to operate well, with our enforcement charter being available on the Council web-site [here](#). A more pro-active approach has led to remedies being put in place without the need for formal enforcement action (**Performance Marker 5**).

As outlined in last years report we record all Section 75 Agreements that are concluded. During this financial year we monitored progress on **32** S75's being concluded. Seven of these related to major applications and 24 to local developments. A large proportion of these were to safeguard the delivery of affordable housing. This monitoring exercise has helped identify improvements to the way in which legal agreements are instructed, monitored and recorded (**Performance Marker 4**).

| Time to conclude S75 | Number | %   |
|----------------------|--------|-----|
| 0 – 3 months         | 8      | 26% |
| 3 – 6 months         | 5      | 16% |
| 6 – 9 months         | 5      | 16% |
| 9 -12 months         | 9      | 29% |
| 1 year +             | 4      | 13% |

### **3. GOVERNANCE**

Local Governance of development plans is a key commitment for the Council. Over the course of the last year, changes have been made to the Council's Scheme of Delegation which ensures that all decisions which relate to place or area specific Local Development Plans or Supplementary Guidance/masterplans are taken by the relevant Local Committees. Councillors representing Wards within the Plan area together with Key Agencies and community planning partners have played an integral role in the preparation of the West Highland & Islands Local Development Plan Main Issues Report (known as [West Plan](#) for short). Local Members have been involved from inception. The Council's fortnightly ward business meetings have been used to brief and seek ideas from local councillors on the Plan process, proposed consultation methods and timing, and the Plan content. They have shaped all of these matters in particular the Call for Sites phase publicity and methods and more obviously, the Plan's outcomes, spatial strategy and site preferences. Similarly, the Plan's outcomes form the vision for the plan, and, together with strategic priorities, have been debated and agreed with key agency and community planning partners through a mix of face to face meetings, phone calls and workshops. An effective Plan is one that is based on an informed local input and a broad consensus on outcomes in particular from those involved in that Plan's delivery. We believe that West Plan's initial stages methodology and practice has achieved these aims **(Performance Marker 9)**.

Two area planning committees ([North](#) and [South](#)) meet on a six weekly cycle, and a Planning Review Body meets every 6 weeks. Committee dealt with 123 applications during the reporting period, with 83% of these being approved. The Planning Review Body dealt with 44 cases. All of our committee meetings are webcast and [archived](#).

Decisions on Highland wide planning documents are made by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee, and as noted area specific planning policy issues are referred to the relevant local committee. During the reporting period the Service continued to operate successfully and efficiently within this committee structure. The Highland Council [Scheme of Delegation](#) provides the full list of powers and duties of Council committees and is kept up to date on the Council's website. During 2015/16 just over 96% of applications were determined under our scheme of delegation. This includes 110 delegated refusals. The consistency of approach provides confidence and certainty for applicants and developers alike.

We are encouraged by the performance figures for 2015-16, which have seen a reduction in the average times taken for major and local developments. The reduction in major development timescales has been greatly assisted by the previous (and ongoing) work on legacy cases – removing these older planning applications from the system. As noted elsewhere in this report, a total of 61 “legacy” cases were dealt with during this reporting period. We continue to take a proactive approach to tackling the issue of legacy cases to ensure applications are managed effectively and that developers are confident in our service. Legacy cases now amount to less than 5% (39 no) of all current live applications. Of these 39 applications, 12 are between 1- 2 years old. Processing agreements are a key tool to help the project management of large scale and major applications **(Performance Markers 1, 3)**.

As set out in last year's report, to further “front-load” the major planning application process, the Council now reports the basic details (Proposal of Application Notices) of major development pre-application proposals to the relevant Planning Application Committee. This allows the community and councillors as much advance warning as possible about significant developments and with their input helps to streamline the later stages of the decision making process. At each area committee an update is also provided of current major applications which are undetermined.

### **Case Study 7 – Outcome based approach - Development Plans and Community Planning**

Local Development Plans (LDPs) now have a much greater degree of integration with the objectives of the Council's community planning partners. We have adopted a unique outcome-based approach to the preparation of all our Local Development Plans which has been recognised with a commendation at last year's Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning. From the outset of preparing our plans, we work with partners to draw up shared outcomes based on the Single Outcomes Agreement, and each partner's priorities for the area. These outcomes are tailored to each Local Development Plan and are aimed at setting the framework for any development decision or investment activity within the plan area. Key stages of our LDPs, including the shared outcomes, are considered by the Community Planning Partnership to ensure there is a joint approach to implementing the LDP and addressing the shared outcomes identified. In terms of implementation, work continues to achieve co-ordination of community planning partner capital programmes via the LDP Action Programmes (**Performance Marker 9, 10**).

Our [developer contributions guidance](#) dates from 2013, and is regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with national policy and guidance such as Circular 3/2012. This guidance is used to inform the assessment of all of our planning applications and is always referred to within the pre-application advice we offer (see Case Study 4). This approach to developer contributions is supplemented where appropriate by site specific developer contribution guidance. The ongoing development of the West Link by the Council is opening up a major strategic area of land for the development of housing to the south of Inverness – an integral part of the delivery of this project was the preparation of the [Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief](#) which identified the specific developer contributions on a proportionate basis for the different sites within the area (**Performance Markers 11, 13**).

There has been a degree of rationalisation of staff over the course of the last year, in the face of wider Council savings proposals. This leaner structure will encourage the Service to concentrate on its core statutory functions. Opportunities have been and will continue to be taken provide much more functional linkages across the Council to ensure a joined up approach to the various consenting regimes. One of the most important of these will be the further integration of transport planning with both development planning work and fostering greater co-ordination between planning applications and Road Construction Consent. (**Performance Marker 12**).

We operate our Development Management service across seven Area Offices. Our team structures are shown in the appendix. We continue to maintain flexibility across our Area Offices, and ensure that when workload is high in one office, the burden is spread across other offices. This process is facilitated by our commitment to maintaining good communications and feedback within and between teams, with six-weekly Team Leader and Area Manager Meetings and fortnightly manager meetings. We strive to ensure the needs of our business are met through a flexible approach to work locations.

We meet regularly with neighbouring local authorities and share responsibility for hosting the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum (a collaboration of eight Local Authorities), where we exchange knowledge on emerging planning issues, our approaches to them, and deliver a programme of tailored training. Our Development Plans team have strong working relationships with both statutory and non-statutory consultees. Benchmarking meetings with our SOLACE partners have been held over the course of the year, including one in Broxburn and one in Inverness.

We also attend joint meetings with aquaculture authorities, and have representation on all of the Heads of Planning Scotland groups and sub-groups.

#### 4. CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We are constantly seeking to improve our customer service and have a Performance and Systems Support team based in Inverness, which liaises with the Corporate Improvement Team and area teams to carry out business process Improvement on an ongoing basis. Some examples of these are given below.

One of our service innovations over the course of last year was the implementation of a value added service to project manage the discharge of conditions for large scale developments, in the context of a Processing Agreement. This was implemented for two developments – a wind farm and a large scale mixed use development – and is seen as an important area for further development over the coming years to ensure full life-cycle service can be provided.

A simple but effective approach to business process improvement over the last year was a review of our neighbour notification process for both planning application and Development Plans consultations (Case Study 8 for Development Plans). As a consequence it has been redesigned on to one double side of A4, which is clearer for the public and helps reduce waste and save money. Through continual review of existing practices we are reducing the amount of paper generated unnecessarily for planning applications, development plans and Committee items by printing less and promoting electronic consultations with all consultees. We continue to review our flexible working arrangements and promote hot desking to make best use of existing fixed assets. We have also now introduced charging for the provision of local development pre-application advice. We continue to review measures to safeguard the cost of the delivery of our services.

##### **CASE STUDY 8 – Development Plans Consultation Portal**

Early on in the 2015/16 financial year we procured new 'Objective' consultation software for the preparation, publication and consultation of our Development Plan documents, creating a public facing [Development Plans consultation portal](#). The introduction of this system has enabled customers to more easily coordinate and submit their consultation comments, and has resulted in consistent improvements in the proportion of comments being submitted online. In our most recent consultation 90% of comments were made online through the new consultation portal. This has led to a corresponding reduction in the time spent on administrative tasks and the manual handling of comments, as well as introducing a consistent back office system to manage customer records. Regular team meetings and 1-2-1 sessions have also assisted with the delivery of plans.

A new electronic case process has been introduced to facilitate customer queries on permitted development resulting in consistency of advice and reduced response times and benefits of comprehensive planning property history integrated with existing IDOX and UNIFORM systems. Collaboration with building standards provides one combined response to the customer (Case Study 8). Our mobile solution remains a critical part of our improvement plan and we continue to seek Scottish Government support to highlight the potential at a national level.

### **CASE STUDY 9 – Development Enquiry Forms**

We have implemented web based forms for permitted development and building warrant enquires for householder, non-householder and utilities providers. This replaces a paper based form which only covered householder enquires. The web form is accessible from the Planning and Building Standards pages of our website. A collaborative project approach between Planning and Building Standards and the Councils Corporate Improvement Plan Team enabled this project to be successfully delivered in a short time scale. The form was tested extensively prior to implementation. The web form has many advantages:

- Submitted forms are received by our Electronic Processing Centre and registered on Uniform and Idox in a case file. Thereafter the response is also recorded in the case file associated with the site, providing a complete property history in Uniform and Idox.
- Faster processing of enquires as the submitted form is instantly received, improving customer service.
- The web form filters the questions relevant to the specific enquiry, which makes the form easier for the customer to complete.
- Increased efficiency in processing time as the web form requires each section of the form to be completed before moving on to the next section. This reduces officer time in requesting further information from customers.
- Reduction in printing/paper use
- Covers householder, non-householder and utilities

### **Case Study 10 – eDevelopment Mobile**

In order to improve the reduction of paper resources in the ePlanning process, and to eliminate the need for printing electronic documents when eBuilding Standards is launched on 24 August 2016, we are introducing a mobile working solution for Development Management and Building Standards staff.

At present all Planning and Building Standards officers undertake site visits and site inspections with paper copies of drawings and documents. It is proposed to reduce the reliance on paper documents through the introduction of tablets.

The introduction of the tablets will be on a two stage programme: stage 1 will be limited to 'read only' information while staff familiarise themselves with the new procedures, followed by stage 2 where on site information will be recorded and 'synced' back to update the casefile. At each stage, site notes can be recorded whilst on site. This will reduce duplication of workload and enable both planning and building standards staff to undertake site notes and details on a 'live' system. The tablets will also enable on site photographs and short videos to be produced, to aid discussion during assessment and for clarification for those cases which are subsequently the subject of a Review.

### **Part 3: Supporting evidence**

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

- Local and major pre-application advice service feedback questionnaire results
- A broad range of Council committee reports
- Results of both formal and informal monitoring, data and information gathering and internal auditing, primarily undertaken by our Performance and Systems team
- Various in-house reports, minutes, meeting agendas and briefing notes

The supporting evidence highlighted above are key information. The list is not exhaustive. Wherever supporting evidence used is publicly available it has been hyperlinked in the body of the report.

## Part 4: Service Improvements 2016-17

In the coming year we will:

- **Improve the project management of consents required for Council projects (including development of affordable housing) to assist with the delivery of the overall Capital Programme during 2016/17.**

A capital programme monitoring group meets regularly and raises issues about regulatory matters as part of this process. This continues and has expanded to include West Link road, Wick School Campus and Inverness Royal Academy school projects. A key part of this is aligning consents and collaboration between Services.

- **Fully implement Enterprise for Development Management by end 2016/2017.**

The full implementation of IDOX Enterprise (which assists with workflow and day to day management of tasks) has not taken place due to prioritising the introduction of eBuilding Standards which is due to go live in August 2016. The Enterprise system is currently available for limited use but will be fully implemented over the course of 2016/17. In the meantime we are working towards producing all reports of handling from Uniform which will enable better and more efficient use of resources across Area offices for both checking and signing decision notices.

- **Carry out further benchmarking exercises with our benchmark family authorities (and other local authorities) during 2016/17.**

Benchmarking meetings take place with our SOLACE Benchmarking family and other local authorities. This will include further discussion on Validation Checklists to improve the quality of submissions and subsequent determination.

- **Improve efficiency, quality, certainty and consistency in delivering Aquaculture and Listed Building permission and consents, and delivery of development on the ground through creation of specialist teams and project focussed training.**

We have established teams with particular specialisms and training is ongoing at present. This has the benefit of ensuring resources are used effectively with the capability to provide specialist advice to the industry throughout the planning process. Teams currently in place involve validation, aquaculture and listed buildings. This is carefully managed to ensure that resources are used effectively and to produce high quality results.

- **Establish cross boundary working on validation of all applications to maximise best use of specialist staff and to ensure consistency.**

This is specifically targeted and managed to broaden skills, ensure an even distribution of workload and minimise delays in processing of applications. Three specialist area teams have now been established to better co-ordinate validation processes and manage caseloads.

- **Introduce a formal process for handling of requests for Non Material Variations to manage customer expectations in terms of timescales and improve efficiency and recording.**

An application form for all proposals involving Non Material Variation requests will be developed and appropriate training provided for staff. This will ensure a full and comprehensive electronic casefile is retained and available for public inspection via the eplanning website. It is proposed to introduce an administration fee for processing Non Material Variation requests which will enable resources to be targeted towards the efficient processing of these requests.

- **Continue to support and provide opportunities for continuing professional development**

We have arranged a training day for all Planning staff for September. Training needs are identified through Employee Development Reviews. We support staff attending external training. We also work closely with the Highlands and Islands Chapter of the RTPI to provide relevant CPD opportunities and training and have arranged 'in house' training sessions for the coming year, for example on upgrading shopfronts in town centres.

Looking back at the Service Improvements we identified for 2014/15 we are proud of the progress made against the vast majority of these:

| <b>Service Improvements<br/>2015/16</b>  |  | <b>Complete?</b> |
|--|--|------------------|
| Implement new mobile working arrangements through the eDevelopment project.  | Progress has not been as fast as we would have liked this year to enable the roll-out of a mobile solution which is integrated into our back office UNIFORM system. We will continue to work with IDOX (our supplier), Scottish Government and other local authorities to seek the delivery of such a solution as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will be putting in place a tablet based solution which will reduce printing costs in the short term. | No – ongoing     |
| Review restoration bond arrangements for minerals and other developments and ensure that procedures are fit for purpose. | This work is underway with a survey of all active sites and bonds having been undertaken. The scale of the work involved has meant that this has not been completed as yet, but remains an important project moving forward.   | No – ongoing     |
| Deliver e-templates for delegated reports and decision notices.  | This has been completed and has delivered significant time savings in respect of the issue of decision notices   | Yes              |
| Put in place a Project Board for the delivery of Development Plans and associated documents.                             | This has been put in place and continues to operate well.  | Yes              |
| Deliver a programme of targeted training and career development events   | This was completed for 2015/16 and remains an important part of our service improvement.   | Yes – ongoing    |

## Part 5: Official Statistics

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

| Category                                    | Average timescale (weeks)           |           |           |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|   | Total number of decisions 2015-2016 | 2015-2016 | 2014-2015 |
| <b>Major developments</b>                   | 15                                  | 20.6      | 24.9      |
| <b>Local developments (non-householder)</b> | 1770                                | 11.9      | 12.3      |
| • Local: less than 2 months                 | 1092                                | 6.9       | 6.8       |
| • Local: more than 2 months                 | 678                                 | 20.0      | 21.7      |
| <b>Householder developments</b>             | 717                                 | 7.3       | 7.1       |
| • Local: less than 2 months                 | 614                                 | 6.1       | 5.8       |
| • Local: more than 2 months                 | 103                                 | 14.9      | 16.1      |
| <b>Housing developments</b>                 |                                     |           |           |
| <b>Major</b>                                | 2                                   | 46.1      | 23.4      |
| <b>Local housing developments</b>           | 925                                 | 13.2      | 13.3      |
| • Local: less than 2 months                 | 523                                 | 7.2       | 7.1       |
| • Local: more than 2 months                 | 402                                 | 21.2      | 23.3      |
| <b>Business and industry</b>                |                                     |           |           |
| <b>Major</b>                                | 2                                   | 13.9      | 18.9      |
| <b>Local business and industry</b>          | 293                                 | 10.7      | 9.9       |
| • Local: less than 2 months                 | 200                                 | 6.8       | 6.6       |
| • Local: more than 2 months                 | 93                                  | 19.0      | 17.7      |
| <b>EIA developments</b>                     | 1                                   | 59.7      |           |
| <b>Other consents*</b>                      | 274                                 | 10.1      | 14.0      |
| <b>Planning/legal agreements**</b>          | 53                                  | 29.3      |           |
| • Major: average time                       | 3                                   | 27.7      | 34.1      |
| • Local: average time                       | 50                                  | 29.4      | 16.3      |
| <b>Local reviews</b>                        | 44                                  | 8.6       | 16.3      |

\* 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

## B: Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

### Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

| Type                          | Total number of decisions | Original decision upheld |      |           |      |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------|-----------|------|
|                               |                           | 2015-2016                |      | 2014-2015 |      |
|                               |                           | No.                      | %    | No.       | %    |
| Local reviews                 | 44                        | 39                       | 88.6 | 9         | 26.5 |
| Appeals to Scottish Ministers | 25                        | 10                       | 40.0 | 24        | 33.3 |

\*Figure is calculated from dismissed and refused appeals to Scottish ministers

## C: Enforcement activity

|                              | 2015-2016 | 2014-2015 |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Cases taken up               | 136       | 251       |
| Breaches identified          | 136       | 251       |
| Cases resolved               | 282       | 188       |
| Notices served               | 33        | 73        |
| 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.

## D: Context

Performance has been maintained over the course of the year and we have seen year on year improvement in average timescales. We continue to identify improvements to the way in which consents are managed, with particular emphasis on aligning consents and ensuring legal agreements are completed timeously.