

Planning Performance Framework 2020/21

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report contains recent feedback from the Scottish Government in relation to our Planning Performance Framework (PPF). **Appendix A.**
- 1.2 Our PPF is the principal performance measure for Planning Services (*Development Management and Development Policy – within Planning and Regulatory Services*) and is submitted to the Scottish Government annually for scrutiny and scoring. The Council's 2020/21 PPF was submitted in July 2021 and was independently reviewed by the Scottish Government. A copy of the submitted document was submitted to the PPSL for noting at their meeting of 22nd September 2021.
- 1.3 Overall the feedback report is considered overall to be positive registering eight 'green', two 'amber' outcomes, and three 'red' outcomes across the thirteen performance indicators assessed. Whilst it is disappointing to have any 'red' markers it is noted that these relate to performance measures which have been directly impacted by the pandemic and its impact upon working arrangements, our ability to engage with the public, staff availability (absence and vacancies), and workflow. It is further noted that even where performance markers have fallen below the National average the deviation is marginal, and/or there is valid justification for that position.
- 1.4 The positive feedback response supports our 'open for business' ethos and is warmly welcomed in the current economic climate. Whilst the Scottish Government have not identified any improvement actions for ABC this year, the service must not be complacent with the focus being year on year continuous improvement. The PPF for 2021/22 is due to be submitted in July 2022.
- 1.5 It is recommended that the Committee:-
 - (a) Agree the content of the report and publicise (*press, Twitter, Facebook and website release*) the positive feedback from the Scottish Government.

Planning Performance Framework 2020/21

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report contains recent feedback from the Scottish Government in relation to our Planning Performance Framework (PPF). **Appendix A.** The Executive Summary (above) provides further background information.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (a) Agree the content of report and publicise (*press, Twitter, Facebook and website release*) the positive feedback from the Scottish Government.

4.0 DETAIL

What is the Planning Performance Framework?

4.1 This was Planning Services 10th Annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) and is our 'balance scorecard' of performance which all Local Authorities must submit to the Scottish Government for review and scrutiny.

4.2 The PPF aims to be a holistic and easy read document that encapsulates statistical performance indicators as well as more qualitative information and case studies of good practice for the previous financial year. The basic structure of the document is stipulated by the Scottish Government but the character, tone, style and content is all shaped by the individual Authority. The Scottish Government has suggested that Authorities use the PPF as more than a means of simply reporting performance but utilise the document as an opportunity to promote their service and local area, to incorporate customer feedback and to provide updated narrative on case study items from previous years. The PPF seeks to focus on the Council being 'open for business' and the positive economic contribution that Planning Services have made within Argyll and Bute. The PPF presents case studies and examples of good practice which demonstrates the ability of the Service to facilitate the delivery of high quality development on the ground, to provide certainty to developers and investors, to consult and engage with customers effectively and to ensure that appropriate management and service delivery structures are in place to work efficiently.

Review and Feedback

- 4.3 The review of the PPF was carried out by the Scottish Government and considered by the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth, Tom Arthur MSP.
- 4.4 Within our PPF We managed to showcase a variety of good quality projects and initiatives that demonstrate our 'open for business' and service improvement ethos.
- 4.5 The covering letter and feedback from Tom Arthur MSP is contained in full at **Appendix A**, however some pertinent points are highlighted below:-
- **PM 1 Decision Making (Red):** This marker was previously identified as Green in 2019/20. Performance in the determination of planning applications has been significantly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic during a reporting period where the effects of the initial March 2020 lockdown and subsequent service disruption/recovery have significantly impacted the time taken to determine applications. During the 2020/21 reporting period the time taken to determine all categories of application increased. This position was not unexpected and is reflective of a position where Scottish averages have also increased across the board. On a more positive note it is highlighted that Major applications were determined faster than the Scottish average (-0.9 weeks); and Local (non-householder) applications were only marginally (+0.1 weeks) slower than the Scottish average. The determination of householder applications was significantly slower (+1 week) slower than the Scottish average however this is indicative of the cautious approach taken to the resumption of site visit activity to domestic premises, and prioritisation of resources toward determination of applications that were required to respond to the pandemic, would deliver inward investment/employment, or were time critical in relation to grant funding or public health issues. It is further noted that whilst the effects of the pandemic have been less severe during 2021/22 there has been continued effects on from the pandemic that will be evident in performance for the next reporting period.
 - **PM 5 Enforcement Charter (Green):** This marker has been green for the previous three reporting periods and recognises that the Council's Planning Enforcement Charter has been subject to its statutory bi-annual review. It is noted that the Charter is due to be reviewed again by March 2022.
 - **PM 6 Continuous Improvement (Amber):** This marker was previously identified as Amber in the previous four reporting periods. The Planning Service received positive feedback for continuing to progress service improvements during 2020/21 despite the impact of the pandemic, these are detailed in Part 3 of the PPF and include retention of Customer Service Excellence status. The feedback acknowledges that a number of service improvements have been put on hold as a result of Covid-19. It was however highlighted that the current LDP is now more than 5 years old and that whilst there are clear timescales for adoption of the next LDP this will not be within the required 5 year period. It was also noted that decision making timescales for local and householder applications were slower than the Scottish average and the previous reporting period, and that the number of legacy cases increased.
 - **PM 7 Local Development Plan (Red):** This marker was previously identified as green but has moved to Red as the Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan 2015 has not been replaced within the required 5 year period. Despite the current

adopted LDP being more than 5 years old, this policy framework is still considered up to date and relevant, and a more than adequate housing land supply still exists as demonstrated in our annual Housing Land Audit (which has recently been cited by Scottish Government as an example of good practice).

- **PM 8 Development Plan Scheme (Amber):** This marker was previously identified as Amber in the previous two reporting periods. Whilst confirmation that the LDP will not be replaced within the 5 year cycle flags as Red, this is balanced against the fact that the Council had recognised that the project was behind time within an updated Development Plan Scheme and amended the project plan for delivery accordingly. Members will be aware that the PLDP2 process has taken longer than planned, partly due to Covid pressures, staff resourcing demands, the complexity of dealing with over 1000 representations, and extended periods taken for public and stakeholder consultation at various points during the Plan production. A revised Development Plan Scheme will be put to PPSL in March 2022. LDP2 is currently submitted to the DPEA for Examination. The timetable of the Examination is in the control of the DPEA not the Local Authority but we would estimate 9 months, and then a further 3 months is required to assess the Reporters Report and prepare any recommended modification to the PLD2 before adoption, currently anticipated early 2023. An identified risk in this process is the National Planning Framework 4, which is due to be approved by Scottish Government in summer 2022 and may cause delay in our PLDP2 Examination process.
- **PM 14 Stalled Sites / Legacy Cases (Red):** This marker was previously identified as Amber in the previous two reporting periods. The feedback commentary identifies that whilst 17 legacy cases were cleared during the reporting period 40 new cases reached legacy status during the same time period with a total of 57 undetermined applications as of 31st March 2021. The degradation in this measure is directly attributable to the matters identified in PM 1 above in relation to determination timescales, but also a reduction in availability of management resource available to actively progress determination of legacy cases whilst addressing the other significant challenges facing the DM Service during this period.

Focus on Performance / Resources / Impact of Covid-19

- 4.6 The cover letter from the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community wealth, Tom Arthur MSP recognises that this has been a challenging period “for people working in planning, in the development sector and across Scotland’s communities” and expresses that “we should all be very proud of how planning has responded to the coronavirus pandemic, adjusting as necessary to keep going and supporting recovery.”
- 4.7 It is highlighted that whilst the 2020-21 PPF reporting period has expectedly seen small changes overall in the markings and that the general stability is “testament to the hard work and flexibility of authorities during these very difficult times”.
- 4.8 The Minister also advises that whilst the Scottish Government’s own work programme was impacted by the pandemic they have recommenced their own planning performance and fee review and are in the process of finalising proposals with intent to lay regulations during 2021/22 for increased fees. It is also intended to commence the recruitment of a National Planning Improvement Co-ordinator early in 2022.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The 2020/21 PPF demonstrates comparable performance to National statistics and agreed PPF Performance Markers and showcases a number of our high quality projects and outcomes, and the manner in which we have responded to the challenges of operating within a pandemic.
- 5.2 Feedback from the Scottish Government is overall considered to be positive and has confirmed that the Planning Service has an 'open for business' approach to delivering sustainable economic growth throughout Argyll and Bute.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 **Policy:** None
- 6.2 **Financial:** None
- 6.3 **Legal:** None
- 6.4 **HR :** None
- 6.5 **Fairer Scotland Duty:**
 - 6.5.1 **Equalities Protected Characteristics:** None
 - 6.5.2 **Socio-Economic Duty:** None
 - 6.5.3 **Islands:** None
- 6.6 **Risk:** Reputational of being identified as a poor performing authority if next year's PPF performance is substandard.
- 6.7 **Customer Service:** The PPF report provides Customers with an overview of the statistical and qualitative performance of the Council as the planning authority in a format that can be benchmarked with other authorities.
- 6.8 **Climate Change:** None

**Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth:
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4th February 2022

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Planning Performance Framework 2020/21 Feedback