

**Development Management Performance Update – FQ3 2025/26**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the performance of the Development Management Service for the reporting period FQ3 2025/26.
- 1.2 The attached document Appendix 1 provides an overview of the current demands upon the Development Management Service, its output during this period, the handling of the current backlog of casework, and the average time taken to determine planning applications.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that PPSL:
- (a) Review and agree the content of the report.**

**3.0 DETAIL & BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The performance of the Council's Development Management Service has been significantly impacted by the legacy effect of the Covid Pandemic upon interruption to workflow and a subsequent increase in demand for regulatory activity relating to new development. This situation has been exacerbated by the Service having previously been down-sized in response to the longer-term wider financial pressures facing the Council combined with a number of long-term vacancies that proved extremely difficult to fill as a result of a national shortage of planning professionals. The determination of planning applications has also been impacted by the uncertainty created by a changing planning policy backdrop with the Scottish Government's adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) in February 2023 with minimal transition arrangements having had a noticeable adverse impact on FQ4 2022/23 output as a result of a significant volume of casework requiring to be reassessed prior to its determination. The cumulative effect of these extraordinary pressures has given rise to a significant backlog of planning casework that continues to impact upon the ability of the Council to deliver the Development Management Service in an efficient and effective manner at this time, and impacts upon customer service. At FQ4 2022/23 the backlog of applications amounted to approximately 375 formal applications and 175 pre-application enquiries.

- 3.2 An Improvement Action Plan (IAP) was prepared in early 2023 in response to the significant decrease in performance and wider issues impacting upon the resourcing of the service and its interactions with customers. The implementation of the IAP has ensured the delivery of additional capacity within the Development Management Service and along with this improvement initially in terms of output and more latterly improving trends are also now able to be identified in relation to the making of timely determinations. Building upon the foundation of the IAP, the Development Management Service Plan and Development Management Charter approved by PPSL on 18th September 2024 set out updated performance targets for the Service. These include a wider range of measures that seek to demonstrate the delivery of individual elements of the IAP and in addition to timeliness include measures which can be utilised to measure customer satisfaction, and staff welfare.
- 3.3 **DEMAND:** The Development Management Service receive approximately 2000 planning and related application case work items on an annual basis. The Development Management Service is resourced with the expectation that demand will be relatively constant and steady throughout the year. Whilst the volume of new submissions decreased by approximately 10% during 2020/21 they had returned to and exceeded pre-pandemic levels during 2021/22. Submission rates have subsequently been maintained at a high level and during 2022/23 were 5% up on pre-pandemic levels. Appendix 1, Sheet 1 shows that whilst submission rates continued to show an increase in demand during FQ3 2025/26 this has decreased slightly from the previous reporting period.
- 3.4 **CAPACITY:** During the majority of FQ3 2025/26 the DM Service has operated with 4 vacant posts in addition to impacts arising from planned and unplanned absence. One vacant post has been successfully recruited however the new member of staff was unable to take up post with the OLI team until January 2026 but has now joined the team and commenced training. Two vacant posts have arisen in the BCHL team during FQ3 through the departure of an Enforcement Officer, and a Planning Officer reducing their hours to part-time, both posts have been successfully recruited with new starts taking up post during January 2026. A further vacancy has arisen following the departure of the Area Team Leader for MAKI in early November; this post is currently being covered on an acting-up basis however this has caused some disruption across the wider service during November/December whilst caselists and other duties are re-assigned. To assist with capacity issues during this period an additional agency staff member has been recruited to augment the MAKI team.
- 3.5 Productivity during FQ3 has also been significantly impacted as a result of technical issues with backoffice systems maintained by the Council's Corporate IT Service. During October/November issues with both server and software stability resulted in extensive periods of unplanned downtime, a requirement to work with time consuming work arounds and slow system performance that effectively reduced the capacity of the DM Service to undertake casework within the IT environment provided. Whilst these issues were largely resolved from mid-November the reduced ability to issue decisions over a four-week period has impacted both on productivity and timeliness of performance during FQ3.

Concerns about the time taken to resolve issues, and the resources allocated to their resolution have been escalated with the IT Service collectively by the DM Service and other affected Services.

- 3.6 **OUTPUT:** Notwithstanding the reduced availability of professional officer resource within the DM Service during FQ3 excellent output during December by both professional and admin officers has largely caught up with the backlog of casework accrued as result of technical issues during FQ3. Whilst performance is slightly down from FQ2 it remains broadly comparable to previous reporting periods. (Appendix 1, Sheet 2). It is anticipated that productivity should improve as new recruits bed in during FQ4. It is however highlighted that recruitment issues which have already arisen during FQ4 will continue to cause some disruption to performance across the DM Service. These include recruitment to a vacant Planning Officer post and recruitment of a Team Leader, both of which are required to bring the MAKI team back up to full capacity.
- 3.7 Excellent output during December has brought this measure back on track and has seen output from the DM Service manage to keep pace with the number of applications validated during FQ 3 (Appendix 1, Sheet 3). The monitoring of 'live' casework has however continued to identify a slight increase in the number of 'legacy' cases which are older than 1 year from validation remain 'live' and it is noted that these have increased from 91 to 93 items during FQ3 (Appendix 1, Sheet 4). 16 legacy items were determined during FQ3 however in the same period 18 additional items became legacy cases. It is noted that the volume of 'legacy' cases has attracted negative media attention during early January 2026 however these reports failed to identify that the majority of undetermined 'legacy' cases are stalled whilst awaiting the submission of further information or amended details from the applicant which are necessary to progress the potential of a positive outcome. This position is both reflective of the Council's willingness to work with applicants and allow the opportunity for issues to be resolved within the statutory planning process but is also an indication that there are still issues in relation to the availability of professional officers to work more proactively to push for the resolution of stalled applications. The high volume of 'legacy' items does give some cause for concern not only in terms of immediate performance but also as an indication that the Service has not yet fully resolved issues in relation to its capacity and resilience which requires to be closely monitored moving forward.
- 3.8 **PRE-APPLICATION ENQUIRIES:** Demand for pre-application advice remains high however Pre-application turnover has fallen behind demand during FQ3 as available capacity has focused on recovery of performance on statutory workloads. FQ3 has also seen an increase in the submission of pre-application enquiries without payment of the required fees which has caused delays to progression of enquiries following their validation and which impacts adversely on performance reporting. A commitment has been provided to review and improve the pre-application process, this will include the provision of enhanced information on the Council website to allow a greater proportion of customers to 'self-serve'; development and roll out of a new pre-application service has been identified as a priority project.

- 3.9 **'HOUSEHOLDER' DEVELOPMENT:** The performance of the Development Management Service is also measured in terms of the time taken to determine applications as it is recognised that failure to provide timely decisions can create uncertainty and be detrimental to the delivery of development across the Council area. Overall 'time-taken' measures have been skewed for sometime by the determination of a high volume of older 'legacy' applications that have accrued as part of the planning backlog. The increasing proportion of older applications being determined from FQ3 2022/23 onwards is identified in the bar graphs that provide a breakdown of application age within the average time measures (Appendix 1, Sheet 5 and Sheet 6) and demonstrate that 'legacy' applications are successfully being targeted for determination. During FQ3, 1 'legacy' householder item was determined, this single item added almost 1 week to average time reporting measures.
- 3.10 The reported issues arising from disruption to staff availability and technical issues during FQ3 has also seen a reduction in performance to the underlying 'householder' average time measure (Appendix 1, Sheet 5) where delays preventing the issue of decisions headline KPI from 7.9 weeks in FQ2 2025/26 to 10.6 weeks in FQ3 2025/26. Removing the impact of 'legacy' cases the reduction in performance was from 7.9 weeks to 9.7 weeks. It is also highlighted that this position relates to 'raw' data and does not factor in delays which have arisen as a result of matters outwith the control of the Council, or applications that have been subject to processing agreements. Whilst the data sets are not directly comparable it is still helpful to reference the SG Returns as a benchmark. In this respect the latest available national average for householder applications at FQ4 2024/25 was 8.4 weeks.
- 3.11 **'LOCAL' DEVELOPMENT:** The determination of 'legacy' applications continued to have an adverse impact upon the average time taken measure applied to all other 'local' planning applications (Appendix 1, Sheet 6) where the determination of 15 'legacy' applications during FQ3 cumulatively added 11.5 weeks to an average time measure that reports on the determination of 118 applications in total. During FQ3 87% of all other 'local' applications determined were less than 1 year old at the time of their determination and were determined in an average of 15.2 weeks (previously 88% in 14.9 weeks at FQ2 2025/26). 72% of the total were less than 6 months old and determined in 11.2 weeks on average (previously 74% in 10.9 weeks in FQ2 2025/26). The average time taken to determine 'all other local applications' has increased slightly during FQ3 from 24.5 weeks to 26.7 weeks. It is again highlighted that this position relates to 'raw' data and does not factor in delays which have arisen as a result of matters outwith the control of the Council, or applications that have been subject to processing agreements. During FQ2 the Council determined a number of legacy applications which have impacted on the raw data relating to the average time period, including items that were delayed largely due to matters outwith the control of the Council. Whilst the data sets are not directly comparable it is still helpful to reference the SG Returns as a benchmark. In this respect the latest national average for local applications (excluding householder) at FQ4 2024/25 was 15.2 weeks.
- 3.12 **CONCLUSIONS:** FQ3 disappointingly has seen the timeliness of performance

dip although it has been identified that the DM Service have operated during this periods with significant IT constraints that have included periods of time where casework could not be progressed. Notwithstanding the abnormal IT constraints the DM Service have managed to keep pace with demand during FQ3 although this in part has been as a result of an extraordinary effort from both professional and admin staff to manage the backlog accrued during periods of unplanned downtime. The IT delays are however evident within the decrease in performance where timeliness of determination is measured. It is anticipated that these measures will show improvement through FQ4 following the restoration of a more stable backoffice IT environment.

- 3.13 The determination of extant 'legacy' items also continues to impact on 'local' application performance and will do so until such time as the remaining 93 items have been determined, and subject to appropriate intervention to prevent new 'legacy' items from accruing.

#### 4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Policy	None
4.2 Financial	None
4.3 Legal	None
4.4 HR	None
4.5 Customer Service	Requirement to manage customer expectations in the determination planning and related applications
4.6 Risk	Failure to determine planning and related applications in efficient and effective manner would have potential to adversely impact upon the local economy, delivery of housing, and health and wellbeing of individuals.
4.7 Climate Change	None
4.8 Fairer Scotland Duty	None
4.9 Equalities – Protected Characteristics	None
4.10 Consumer Duty	None
4.11 Island Communities	None
4.12 Children's Rights and Wellbeing	None

**Executive Director with responsibility for Development & Economic Growth  
Policy Lead: Cllr Gordon Blair**

28<sup>th</sup> January 2026

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#### APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – FQ3 2025/26 DM performance report