

Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 15 May 2019

Planning Improvement Plan – Progress Update

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee notes the progress being made on the implementation of the Planning Improvement Plan.

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Planning Improvement Plan – Progress Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress made on the Council's Planning Improvement Plan 2018/21.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Planning Improvement Plan 2018/21 was approved by Planning Committee in [December 2018](#). It sets out a series of key actions in relation to Leadership and Management, Customer, Continuous Improvement and Performance. In approving the Planning Improvement Plan, Committee requested that progress updates be provided at six monthly intervals.
- 3.2 In [February 2019](#), Committee considered a report setting out the Scottish Government's feedback on the Council's Planning Performance Framework 2017 - 2018. This highlighted the need to speed up the implementation of improvements on decision making timescales, timescales for legal agreements and clearing legacy cases, i.e. applications more than a year old.

4. Main report

- 4.1 Progress continues to be made on the implementation of the Planning Improvement Plan 2018/21. A detailed six month update is provided in appendix 1. This explains progress made over the last six months, sets out changes that have been made to the service and some of the improvements planned over the next six months. Information is also provided on changes to project governance and the setting up of a dedicated Planning Improvement team.
- 4.2 Section three of the update report explains in more detail the progress made and challenges faced in improving performance on decision making timescales. As requested by Committee in February, it also includes more detailed information on some of the applications decided in last six months.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Work will continue on implementing actions in the improvement plan with priority given to those relating to decision making timescales. The Council's Planning Performance Framework report 2018/19 will be submitted to Scottish Government by end of July. The next six month progress update will be prepared for Planning Committee on 11 December 2019.
- 5.2 Proposed changes arising from a review of the pre-application advice service are the subject of a separate report at this meeting of Committee. These proposals address an aim to improve customer service.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The costs associated with implementing the proposed improvements will be met from the Planning and Building Standards Service budget.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The Planning Improvement Plan includes actions suggested by the Customer Forum held in June 2018. A further meeting of the Forum will be held later this year. In addition, stakeholder engagement events were held to discuss changes to the pre-application service and community council training events have been arranged.
- 7.2 The proposals in this report will reduce carbon emissions because an efficient digital Planning Service will reduce the need to travel and use paper.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Planning Performance Framework 2017-2018](#), City of Edinburgh Council, July 2018
- 8.2 Report to Planning Committee 12 December 2018, [Planning and Building Standards Improvement Plans](#)
- 8.3 Report to Planning Committee 27 February 2019, [Scottish Government Feedback on Planning Performance Framework 2017 - 2018](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Planning Improvement Plan 2018 -2021 Progress Update, May 2019

Appendix 1

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is the first progress report on the Council's Planning Improvement Plan 2018/21. This report explains the progress made over the last six months, sets out changes that have been made to the service and some of the improvements planned over the next six months.
- 1.2 The Planning Improvement Programme identifies a series of key actions for the period 2018/21. These actions are structured around the Improvement Plan's core themes: Leadership and Management, Customer and Performance and Continuous Improvement. Section two of this report sets out the actions delivered since December 2018 and an indication of the actions planned over the next few months. Section three includes analysis of our performance in terms of reducing the time taken to determine applications. It also provides some narrative to explain the details behind the figures.
- 1.3 In February 2019, a dedicated Planning Improvement team was established to speed up progress on delivery of actions. This is comprised of three members of staff seconded from other Planning teams with support provided from the Building Standards Improvement team and other Council Services. Formal Governance for the Planning Improvement Project is now provided through an expansion of the Building Standards Project Board to include Planning in its remit. The new Building Standards and Planning Improvement Project Board met for the first time on 4 April 2019.

2 Progress on actions

- 2.1 The following table summarises the progress made under each of the three main improvement plan themes and sets out some of the actions to be implemented in the next six months.

Leadership / Management	
Delivered – First Six Months	Planned next six months
Engaging all staff in the Improvement Plan A series of briefings and workshops have been held to share and fully engage with all staff, to drive forward our improvement actions. Improvement Plan issues are discussed at team meetings. Staff Resources Staffing resources across the teams are being used in a more flexible and agile way. This allows a Service wide approach to addressing workload pressures in individual teams.	People Plan A Planning People Plan will be prepared to provide a clear framework for the identification and delivery of leadership and management actions including staff training and awareness. Staffing An ongoing assessment will be made to assess the service needs in relation to the resource and deployment of new staff. A Staff Survey and stress risk assessments will be undertaken to

<p>Managing performance and people skills</p> <p>The Planning Service has signed up to be an early adopter of the Council's new Leadership Framework. This will provide the tools and support to help our managers to become better leaders in their current role and in the future. Managers are working together on a consistent approach to performance management and goal setting.</p> <p>Mentoring</p> <p>A more structured mentoring system has been introduced for Assistant Planning Officers and others working towards membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute.</p> <p>Quality Assurance</p> <p>We have engaged with other Services to learn from their experiences with ISO 9001 to improve our practices and procedures.</p> <p>Recruitment</p> <p>We have successfully recruited to the following additional posts 2 x Senior Planning Officers (Enforcement) 1 x Senior Planning Officer (Design) 4 x Assistant Planning Officers 1 x Senior Administrator (Customer) We have moved quickly to fill permanent, secondment and maternity vacancies to minimise impact on performance.</p>	<p>better understand the views and needs of Planning staff.</p> <p>Team Manager Development</p> <p>The team managers' role will be developed to ensure that the needs of both the service and our customers are being delivered. This will include support from Human Resources (HR) colleagues as part of the new Leadership Framework and using external management expertise.</p> <p>Embedding new practices</p> <p>Team members will continue to expand their roles to include greater strategic involvement in service and performance improvements.</p> <p>Mentoring</p> <p>An induction and mentoring programme will be implemented for the new Assistant Planning Officers due to start in May.</p> <p>Quality Assurance</p> <p>We will work continue to work with other services to develop a consistent approach across the Place Directorate. The annual external ISO 9001 audit of Planning and Building Standards is scheduled for August/September.</p>
Performance and Continuous Improvement	
Delivered in first six months	Planned next six months
<p>Performance</p> <p>A Virtual Team has been set up for a temporary period whereby planning officers from the Major Development and Citywide teams are handling some local and householder planning applications to speed up decision making and reduce workload pressure on some parts of the service.</p>	<p>Performance</p> <p>Building on the short-term solutions currently in place, medium term arrangements will be introduced to speed up decision making timescales. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • re-alignment of staff resources across the service to improve the efficiency and quality of decisions; • detailed weekly monitoring reports

A short-term overtime team was introduced in March to help clear the backlog of applications awaiting determination.

A revised Scheme of Delegation was introduced in February which will reduce decision making timescales for some applications.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) Support and Development

Weekly meetings were held with the Council's internal ICT team and external partner CGI to resolve ongoing issues and identify development opportunities as part of improvement programme.

The problem with viewing plans and documents on the planning portal following the major IT upgrade in November has been resolved.

A group of staff are being trained to provide ongoing support and assistance to colleagues on minor every day issues.

Legal Agreements and Developer Contributions

We met with the Framework Solicitors who prepare legal agreements on behalf of the Council to review service requirements and the format of monitoring information.

Officers from Planning and Legal Services have been working together to prepare a pro forma for identifying developer contribution requirements in a consistent and efficient way.

Consultations from Other Services

Transport Officers are now using a standard template for consultation responses on planning applications to improve quality, consistency and speed.

A Liaison meeting with Environmental Protection officers was held in February

by team of applications received, being assessed and determined.;

- better use of the "stop the clock" protocol to provide more accurate measurement of the planning authority's own performance; and
- ongoing review of processes with regular staff training sessions

An enforcement workshop will be held to agree detailed service improvement actions.

ICT Support and Development

The roll out of new laptops for Planning staff as part of a Council ICT project will bring efficiency benefits to the service.

The weekly meetings will continue to ensure ongoing commitment to resolving the ICT issues that impact on performance.

A detailed schedule of ICT development actions including delivery timescales will be agreed with ICT partners.

Legal Agreements and Developer Contributions

The recommendations from an Internal Audit report on the developer contributions process will be implemented by Planning, Finance and Legal Services.

Committee Reports

Planned improvements to the format of reports to the Development Management Sub Committee will be implemented.

Training

A training workshop on economic viability appraisals will be held for members of the Planning Committee.

A new Planning Committee training and awareness programme 2019/20 will be presented in a report to the August Committee.

to discuss current issues relating to planning applications and enforcement.

A training workshop on economic viability appraisals was held for planning staff in March.

Business and Technical Support

A workshop was held in March involving business support teams and technicians to identify improvements in relation to intake and registration, validation and issuing decisions stages of the planning application process.

Training

A training workshop for members of the Planning Committee was held in March. This covered a range of improvement matters including scheme of delegation, handing of representations and pre-application service.

Design Quality

We introduced an internal review process to support cases officers in identifying key issues at an early stage in the application process with the aim of raising design quality.

In March we held a workshop with the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel and stakeholders to reflect on its first 10 years and consider opportunities for improvement.

An ongoing training programme for staff will be implemented including a training workshop on affordable housing.

Design Quality

Lessons learnt from the internal review process and the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel will be shared with case officers and changes introduced to strengthen the approach to raising design quality.

Customer Improvements	
Delivered last six months	Planned next six months
<p>Website</p> <p>Customer information on short term lets was updated on the Council website in March. This includes a best practice note for those interested in renting their property and advice on how to report a problem with a short-terms let to Planning Enforcement.</p> <p>Pre-Application Advice</p> <p>A consultation on the Council’s Pre-Application advice service was</p>	<p>Website</p> <p>Following a planned upgrade of the Council’s website, consideration will be given to opportunities to improve information available on planning pages.</p> <p>Pre-Application Advice</p> <p>A revised service with a structured and specified level of advice will be</p>

undertaken in March to seek views on the current service and potential changes including charging. This included two workshops – one with other Council Services and one with external customers.

Handling Complaints

Procedures introduced by the new Senior Administrator have resulted in better management and monitoring of customer complaints.

Working with Other Services

Planning has continued to work with other Services on a range of Council projects for example City Transformation, 21st Century Homes and Granton Waterfront.

In November/December 2018, the City Plan team worked with colleagues from Housing and Economic Development to organise seminars on housing and visitor accommodation to develop a shared understanding of development pressures and current issues/practice.

Working with External Partners

In March, we held a meeting of the Edinburgh Development Forum with representatives from the development industry and attended a meeting of the Edinburgh Civic Forum with community council representatives. Both meetings included discussion on the pre-application service and review of the Edinburgh Planning.

Sharing Information

We have used the Planning Edinburgh Blog to update customers on City Plan 2030, let people know about consultation events and procedural changes and share research and technical information.

introduced to address customer needs and streamline resources to support the efficient operation of the planning application process.

Handling Complaints

A comprehensive review of issues raised in complaints addressed in 2018/19 will be undertaken by Service Managers and actions from lessons learnt implemented through staff training and/or revised procedures.

Community Council Training

Arrangement are being made for community council training workshops. The agenda for these is being developed in consultation with the community councils.

Customer Engagement

The Planning and Building Standards Customer Forum event will take place in June.

Communicating with Customers

Protocols for handling customer enquiries by email and telephone will be developed and rolled out for use by all Planning staff.

3 Progress on Reducing Application Timescales

- 3.1 The following section provides information on applications received in the last year and some detailed analysis of application timescale statistics to better understand the Council's performance during the period October 2018 to March 2019.

Table 1: Number and Type of Applications Received

Application Type	2017/18	2018/19
Major Development	19	30
Non-Householder	1085	1081
Householder	1480	1484
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent	829	859
Other	371	226
Total	3784	3680

- 3.2 Over the past year, the Council handled 3680 applications at a rate of between 216 to 384 applications per month. The number of major applications received has increased from 19 in 2017/18 to 30 in 2018/19. The number of householder and non-householder applications received is similar to last year and there has been a slight increase in the number of listed building/conservation area consent applications. There was a reduction in the number of "other" applications which includes adverts, Council proposals, and Hazardous Substance Consents.
- 3.3 The Council receives a wide range of application types in the "non-householder" category. In the period 2018/19, these included:
- Approval of Matters Specified in Conditions for housing on greenfield sites in Queensferry and Gilmerton, and mixed-use regeneration proposals at Fountainbridge, Granton Harbour and Western Harbour.
 - Over 200 local housing proposals ranging from applications for a single dwelling to more complex applications e.g. conversion of a listed building (21 units) and 30 new build units at Royal Blind School, Craigmillar Park.
 - Around 150 change of use applications including three buildings on Princes Street, changes from residential use to short term lets, proposals for hotels and various new uses in former shop units.
 - Fifty local business applications including new office development at Haymarket, retail and leisure development at Newcraighall Road and the reconfiguration of Waverley Mall.
 - Nearly 200 applications relating to telecommunications infrastructure.

- 3.4 Table 2 set outs information on the time taken to determine applications in the last two quarters. The major planned upgrade of the ICT system in early November and the subsequent unplanned problems with the planning portal have had a detrimental impact on decision making timescales. These figures would have been much worse if it hadn't been for the considerable efforts put in by Planning, ICT and Business Support staff to maintain service levels.
- 3.5 The ongoing implementation of actions started in the last six months and those planned in the coming six months will improve performance. However, it will take time for these changes to be reflected in the timescale statistics. Consideration will also be given to how application timescales data is monitored and reported to provide a better understanding of the Council's performance.

Table 2: Performance - % of applications determined within target timescales*

Application Type	Oct – Dec 2018	Jan – March 2019	2017 - 2018 Comparator	Target
Major Development	14% (42%)	11% (33%)	13%	70%
Non-Householder	57%	51%	60%	70%
Householder	83%	65%	76%	90%
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent	60%	55%	56%	70%

*Four months or as agreed with applicant for major applications, two months or as agreed with applicant for others.

- 3.6 There were seven major applications determined in the period October – December 2018 and nine in the period January – March 2019. Two of these applications were determined within the statutory four-month period. This provides the 14% and 11% figures set out in the table above. In previous years, planning processing agreements (PPA) were the only tool used to agree revised timescales for major applications. There were no applications approved within the timescales set out in a PPA in this period. However, in the past six months, case officers have agreed extensions of time for some applications which has resulted in three out of seven (42%) applications between October and December 2018 and three out of nine (33%) applications between January and March being determined within target timescales. This is a tool previously only used for local and householder applications.
- 3.7 Over the next six months, further work will be undertaken on data recording and processing to ensure statistical returns more accurately reflect the Council's performance. Consideration will be given to the range of tools available (in the context of the Planning Performance Framework) to manage the various stages in the major application process including PPAs, Extensions of Time and Stop the Clock.
- 3.8 Ten of the 16 major applications determined in this six-month period did not meet agreed target timescales. There were various reasons for this including time taken to prepare legal agreement, delay and referral to Ministers due to objection from SEPA, complexity of issues to be resolved and a landownership dispute. Some of these matters are outwith the Council's control but could be better managed and recorded. There are also lessons learnt which can be used to improve future performance.

- 3.9 Two of the indicators monitored by Scottish Government are number of legacy cases i.e. applications over one year old and the average number of weeks taken to determine applications. We currently have 72 legacy cases which is down from 89 in March 2018. One of our objectives over the next six months is to clear the number of existing legacy applications and reduce the number of future applications reaching legacy status. The performance measures to be implemented over the next six months are aimed at reducing the average number of weeks taken to determine applications. However, it should be noted that the determination of legacy applications will have a detrimental impact on average timescale figures until these cases are cleared.
- 3.10 In the period Oct 2018 – March 2019, there were 374 enforcement cases received and 267 enforcement cases closed. The % of enforcement cases closed with three was 48.7% in the period October to December 2018 and 44.7% in the period January to March 2019 which is still well below our target of 80%. One area of significant growth in terms of enforcement cases is short term lets, 84 new cases received in the period 1 October 2018 – 31 March 2019.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 This update report sets out the progress that has been made in the past six months on implementing actions through the Planning Improvement Programme. The initial focus has been on management and leadership actions to ensure managers and staff are fully engaged in the improvement plan objectives. Staff resources have been increased and there is now a more efficient and agile use of staff resources across the whole service. Time has also been spent gaining a detailed understanding of the various processes and procedures which need to change to improve the speed and quality of service provided. Progress has been made on some planning processes, for example scheme of delegation, legal agreements and IT improvements, but there is still much to do.
- 4.2 The next steps are to build on the improvements introduced to date with priority being given to reducing decision making timescales. More detailed reporting and explanation of decision-making statistics are needed to provide a clearer understanding of the Council's performance at each stage in the process. This will include more accurate recording of time periods where the Council is unable to progress an application using the "stop the clock" protocol so these periods can be deducted from timescale statistics.
- 4.3 For each application type, efforts will be made to reduce the current backlog of applications which are beyond target decision dates. New processes and procedures will be introduced to reduce the number of new applications that reach backlog status. This will require tighter project management of the application process and operational changes for staff, applicants and other customers of the service.