# The Planning Performance Framework

## - September 2013

## Aberdeenshire
### COUNCIL

## Serving Aberdeenshire from mountain to sea – the very best of Scotland

### The best area

Helping to create and sustain the best quality of life for all through . . .

- happy, healthy and confident people
- safe, friendly and lively communities
- an enterprising and adaptable economy
- our special environment and diverse culture

### The best council

Aiming to provide excellent services for all by . . .

- involving, responding and enabling
- finding new and more efficient ways of doing things
- providing elected leadership for our area
- working with our partners in the North East and beyond
- always looking to the future

## 1. National Headline Indicators (NHIs)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Development Planning**:<br>• age of local/strategic development plan(s) (full years)<br>*Requirement: less than 5 years*<br><br>• development plan scheme: on track? (Y/N) | **One year three months – adopted June 2012.**<br><br><br><br><br><br>**Yes** | 4 months<br><br><br><br><br>Yes | |

| **Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs** | **Aberdeen Housing Market Area** | **Rural Housing Market Area** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • effective housing land: years supply | 5.7 yrs | 6.2 yrs | 4.4yrs/4.9yrs | **Note 1**<br><br>**Note 2** |
| • effective housing land supply | 4,823 units | 3,754 units | 8602units/3089units | |
| • housing approvals | 549 units | 744 units | 815units/347units | |
| | **Aberdeenshire** | | | |
| • effective employment land supply | Effective employment land supply | | 211ha | **Note 3** |
| | | 397 ha | | |
| • employment land take-up | Employment land take-up | | 8.8ha | |
| | | 16.8ha | | |
| • effective commercial floor space supply | Effective commercial floor space supply | 44,562 sq m | N/A | **Note 4** |
| • commercial floor space delivered | Commercial floor space delivered | | N/A | |
| | | N/A | | |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Development Management**<br>**Project Planning**<br>• percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice | 35%/1929 | 30%/1624 | **Note 5** |
| • number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan | 0 | 0 | **Note 6** |
| • percentage planned timescales met | N/A | N/A | |
| **Decision-making**<br>• application approval rate | 91% | 92% | |
| • delegation rate | 88% | 91% | **Note 7** |
| **Decision-making timescales**<br>Average number of weeks to decision:<br><br>• major developments | 132.9 weeks | 96.7 | **Note 8** |
| • local developments (non-householder) | 22.5 weeks | 34.4 | |
| • householder developments | 8.1 weeks | 17.9 | |
| **Enforcement**<br>• time since enforcement charter published / reviewed (months)<br>*Requirement: review every 2 years* | Reviewed, updated and published February 2013 | Under review 2012 | **Note 9** |
| • number of breaches identified / resolved | 304/280 | 907/812 | **Note 10** |

Reasons and Factors impacting on performance:
Refer to Notes 1 to 11 below

**Note 1**

Aberdeen HMA includes Aberdeen City - *Source: Housing Land Audit 2013*

Aberdeen HMA gives units in the Aberdeenshire part only - *Source:Housing Land Audit 2013*

Aberdeen HMA gives units in the Aberdeenshire part only - *Source: Planning consents 2012/13*

**Note 2**

As anticipated, the 2013 Housing Land Audit shows an effective land supply in excess of 5 yrs in both Housing Market Areas following adoption of the LDP in 2012.

We also have a considerable amount of land in the post 5 year effective supply, 3,351 units in the Aberdeen HMA and 3,222 units in the Rural HMA. This should ensure that a healthy land supply is maintained in the medium term. Annual monitoring through the Housing Land Audit and also the LDP Action Programme will highlight any emerging issues such as sites not coming forward as planned and indicate if this is likely to result in the effective supply falling below five years.

The feedback report noted that *"some of your information relates to the wider housing market area, beyond the Shire boundary, which prevents an accurate indicator"*. It is presumed this is referring to the fact that the Aberdeen HMA also includes Aberdeen City. The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan sets out a housing requirement for the whole of the Aberdeen HMA and not the individual Local Authority areas. It is, therefore, not possible or meaningful for us to assess the adequacy of the effective land supply just for the Aberdeenshire part of the Aberdeen HMA. It should also be noted that the Rural Housing Market Area excludes the part of the Cairngorms National Park that is within Aberdeenshire, again this is as specified in the Structure Plan.

For housing approvals, last year the totals given were for calendar rather than financial year and were only for sites of 5 units or more, this year they include < 5 units as well. As a result, the Rural HMA figure is much higher than last year because this is where most of the small sites are.

**Note 3**

| |
|---|
| Marketable land supply *Source: Employment Land Audit 2012* |
| Completions for financial year 2011/2012 *Source: Employment Land Audit 2012* |

**Note 4**

**Effective commercial floorspace supply 2012/2013: This** is an estimate based on planning consents granted for commercial developments (defined as use classes 1,2,3,7,8,10,11) in 2012/13.

(Commercial development includes Use Classes 1 (Shops), 2 (Financial, Professional and other services), 3 (Food and Drink), 7(Hotels and Hostels), 8 (Residential Institutions), 10 (Non-residential institutions) and 11 (Assembly and leisure). So it excludes use classes 4 (Business), 5 (General Industrial) and 6 (Storage and Distribution) which are covered by the Employment Land Audit.)

**Commercial floorspace delivered**: It is currently not practical for us to extract meaningful data for this indicator. This can be re-visited once HOPS/SG confirms exactly what the indicator(s) will be. In addition, we will soon be moving to new planning/ building standards software which may make it easier to extract the relevant information.

## Note 5

The data for percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice is an approximate % number. This is based on 35% of applicants who responded within the Customer Surveys sent out by the Planning Service (Development Management) who indicated that they had participated in the pre-application process prior to submitting their application. The figure 1929 is based on the Enquiry data base held by the Planning Service. This records the numbers of permitted development enquiries, pre application enquiries and pre major enquiries. Aberdeenshire Council have had a Major Application pre application service in place since 2007. We are currently in the process of updating and providing a more comprehensive and formalised pre application service for all other types of development.

## Note 6

The use of Processing Agreements has been actively promoted by Aberdeenshire Council since their onset. To date however developers have shown a distinct lack of enthusiasm to enter into Processing agreements. A more robust process is now in place. The Council have made some amendments to the Scottish Government processing agreement template and this along with guidance is now available for use on the website. Further promotional literature has been sent to all developers/agents currently on the Council's database and the introduction to the use of processing agreements as a standard part of both the masterplanning and major application process is in place. Further work in engaging developers will be carried out through the future agent/developer forum and Planning Focus Group.

## Note 7

The Review of the Scheme of Delegation has been incorporated within a Corporate Review of the Scheme. This will be complete by 2014. In 2011/12 664 planning applications were referred to local members, 17.2% of which were subsequently referred to Committee. In 2012/13, 752 applictions refered to Local Members of which 166 (22%) where subsequently referred to committees.

## Note 8

Aberdeenshire Council have not indentified any 'exceptional cases' in respect of applications with extenuating circumstances causing extreme delays in decision making. This facility cannot be accommodated within the Council's current planning package. A new Idox/Uniform system has been purchased and following its expected implementation in February 2014, exceptional case recording will then be facilitated. In 2012/13 Aberdeenshire Council received 3828 applications, determined 3709 and in that period 62.7% of all planning applications were determined in 2 months compared to 2011/12 where 4052 applications were received, 3807 determined and 60.4% of applications were determined in 2 months. In 2010/11 the figure was 3710 and 53%. Aberdeenshire continues to receive a proportionally high number of wind turbine applications.

2012/13 – determined 237 wind energy applications, slightly less than in 2011/12 when 257 applications were determined. The current figures constituted 18.9% of all wind turbine applications determined in Scotland, as opposed to 20.9% in 2011/12. In 2012/13, 7.6% of planning applications determined by Aberdeenshire Council were wind turbine applications in comparison to 4.3%% of all applications determined by Local Authorities being for wind turbines. The equivalent in 2011/12 was 6.9% and 3.1% respectively.

**Note 8 continued**

Performance has increased overall from 2011/12, although not by the targeted increase of 5%. The increase is undoubtedly a result of the implementation of the Improving Performance Strategy and the overall cultural shift in the approach to determining applications in respect of the streamlining of the process and procedures, more awareness by staff to the need for pre application work and the need to increase performance and output. The number of legacy/pending applications has dramatically fallen. The 1000 target has been achieved and the number now sits at 926 (as at 09/09/13), this from 1331 in the same period last year and 1556 in 2011. Dealing with legacy applications obviously has an impact on performance. Additional staff resource allocation has assisted, however it has also been recognised that a plateau in output has been reached within the current resource, in a time where Aberdeenshire remain buoyant and again in 2012/13 have received and determined amongst the highest numbers of planning applications. Although not recorded nationally a snapshot of applications received in Scotland in the quarter July to September 2012 was 11,050. The resulting average for 32 local authorities was 345 applications received in that quarter. In Aberdeenshire, 940 applications were receive in that particular quarter. The resulting performance still requires improving and 70%+ is an overall target. A review of Development Management is nearing completion and subsequent implementation. It was recognised that to further improve performance a Review was required to identify additional resources required to achieve the target performance and importantly to maintain that performance level thereafter.

**Note 9**

The Enforcement Charter has been recently reviewed and updated. It is recognised however that this document will require a further review following the restructuring of the enforcement function resulting from the Service Review. Also required will be an Enforcement Manual, to outline and highlight the current enforcement processes and procedures.

**Note 10**

The figure this year - 304 identified and 280 resolved differs quite significantly from 2011/12 – 907 identified and 812 resolved. From the detail previously provided last year, the figures reported previously relate to total complaints rather that breaches identified. This year it was emphasised to Planning Inspectors that the data required was "breaches identified and resolved".

The total amount of cases/complaints taken up during the reporting period was however in the region of 800, still a drop from last year, but perhaps not such a drop as that which is perceived.These anomalies within the data reflect the current inconsistencies within the recording system across the 6 areas.

It is the aim that the new Uniform Idox system will provide a more effective way to highlight and extract the relevant Information. This would obviously be dependent on the correct the information to be accurately input in the first case.

Other data that may have any relevance would be initial responses within 5 working days and responses to complainants, following investigation, within 20 working days, as per the statements contained within our Enforcement Charter.

**Note 11**

All performance is in line with the aims and Service priorities for 2013-14 within the Infrastructure Services Plan :

- *Continue to review and improve the performance of the Planning and Development Service to ensure that all planning applications are processed in an efficient and effective manner without sacrificing service quality.*

## 2. Defining and measuring a high-quality planning service

## *OPEN FOR BUSINESS*

### Development Planning

The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan was adopted on 1 June 2012 following a comprehensive engagement on the process and its contents. This pro-active document identifies areas for growth where it is expected that the majority of development will take place. Also identified are 'regeneration areas' where the Council and their Partners will develop a strategy to encourage economic growth and tackle disadvantage.

We have a holistic approach to economic development and investment opportunities in partnership with others, internal and external to the Authority. This is demonstrated by Policies within the Plan relating to the Energetica Framework area and regeneration in the Banff and Buchan areas of Aberdeenshire. In both areas the Development Plan supports initiatives promoted by others and provides a land use planning context for action. In general the development plan seeks to meet aspirations for business development at appropriate locations in line with demands.

We expect the proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (SDP) to be adopted in 2013. As we are expected to adopt a new LDP within two years of the publication of the SDP, we have been undergoing the process of creating a Main Issues Report to review the policies and proposed sites in the Plan and to inform the emerging draft LDP. We expect the MIR to be printed in October 2013 with a draft LDP to be published in the spring 2014.

In order to monitor the delivery of the sites, a Delivery Team has been created. The team will be responsible for the Action Programme and will work with the development industry to ensure that sites continue to come forward.

(Refer to Section 3 – Evidence & Outcomes)


### Energetica: Planning and Design Workstream Up-date

- Energetica is included in the current Structure Plan, and in the new Strategic Development Plan in preparation

- The National Planning Framework (NPF2) includes references to Energetica, and the new NPF3 will retain those

- Peterhead features in a number of significant matters
  - A Gateway Landscape Plan has been prepared
  - The Peterhead Gateway Framework is in preparation
  - Related, new infrastructure is imminent

- Local Development Plans for both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire designate the Energetica Corridor, and include Supplementary Guidance and Planning Advice specific to Energetica

- Main Issues Reports are in preparation in reviews of these Local Development Plans

- In Ellon, a 1,000 houses site is about to be developed

**Energetica - continued**

- At the Trump International Golf Course, a second course and clubhouse are about to be developed

- At Blackdog a mixed development including 1,000 houses plus commercial and employment uses – a Phase 2 site in the Local Development Plan - will be developed in conjunction with the AWPR

- Following up from the recent, successful Placemaking Conference, developers will be engaged in discussion on review and implementation of the Planning Advice for development within the Energetica Corridor.

**Built Heritage of Aberdeenshire – Regeneration and Investment**

An example of this is the Banff Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) and Banff Renaissance Project.

The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is the Heritage Lottery Fund's grant giving programme for the repair and regeneration of the historic environment in towns and cities throughout the UK. In May 2003, Banff was forwarded as a candidate for inclusion in the Townscape Heritage Initiative programme.

A project was delivered which assisted the rehabilitation and preservation of the historic core of the Banff Outstanding Conservation Area. This was to be achieved by the following means:

- The restoration of key historic properties which are in poor structural condition
- The infilling of two gap sites situated in prominent locations which were formerly occupied by Listed Buildings
- Providing a facelift scheme for shop fronts
- Developing a 'town scheme' grant fund to assist private property owners with the repair and maintenance of their properties
- Implementing a programme of upgrade of pedestrian areas in a manner sympathetic to the Town's historic fabric.

The Banff THI completed at 31st December 2012. A significant legacy of restored and refurbished built heritage was achieved by this Scheme. It has helped to conserve the historic environment of Banff and secure it for future generations. Major dereliction within the Banff Conservation Area has been tackled and its overall quality has been significantly enhanced. The investment delivered through the Banff THI has encouraged private owners to make their own separate contributions and there is now enthusiasm within the community for new initiatives to bring local prosperity by investing in our unique historic environment.

Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)
Aberdeenshire Council was one of the first authorities to deliver a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). To date a CARS Scheme has been completed and delivered in Peterhead and a joint THI/CARS has been delivered in Banff. A new CARS commenced in Portsoy in 2011. This will run until March 2016.

( Refer to Section 3 – Evidence & Outcomes)

## Masterplan Process

Following the adoption of the Local Development Plan in 2012, a formal Masterplan process was implemented.

Good progress has been made in the last year and while work on the current masterplans takes priority, a review of the process will be carried out to see where further efficiencies or improvements can be made. This will include engagement with consultees and the development industry.

As a new requirement and process, effective processes and procedures have been established, and, where developers have 'bought into' this it is clear that benefits can be reaped both in terms of the quality of the masterplan, early agreements, delivery of infrastructure and better placemaking. While some masterplans will be 'exemplars' and this is to be encouraged, the generality of masterplans will help improve development which is the overall aim. The process has been one of learning, however, feedback from the development industry is generally supportive.

## Masterplan Progress

There are 62 sites (combining more than one site/allocation in some cases) across Aberdeenshire requiring masterplans split across the six Areas. Twelve masterplans have now been approved. Of the 27 ongoing sites around 13 of these will either be going to a masterplan meeting in its draft form or will be reported to Committee in its finalised draft form in the next three months. It is anticipated that around 20 masterplans will have been approved by the end of 2013. This equates to an approximate rate of one masterplan per month. Extrapolated over the lifetime of a Development Plan it would appear that the number of sites requiring masterplans at 62 is reasonable if an approval rate of around 12 per year over the five years is achieved.

(Refer to Section 3 – Evidence & Outcomes)

## Delivery

In support of the Council's Vision, the main ethos of the adopted LDP is its intention to support and direct investment into and within the area. A large part of this is the continuation and improvement in our engagement with stakeholders to pursue the delivery of the LDP through the Action Programme, Development Frameworks, dedicated resources and other tools.

## The Delivery Team

Aberdeenshire Council have appointed a Delivery Team to work alongside the Planning Service to enable development. The team of 4 (1 co-ordinator and 3 Project Officers), are responsible for overseeing the Action Programme, as well as being the first (and single) point of contact for the development industry. The team aim to update the Action Programme on a continuous basis, and re-publish it every year.

The team have recently spent considerable time contacting developers, landowners and agents to request an update on the status of allocated sites, and offer assistance in bringing forward development. This has been the catalyst for a number of developers and agents to raise issues which the team have been able to assist with.

In one case, progress was stalled due to the need for a masterplan to cover two allocated sites, with three landowners involved. The Delivery Team have been able to pursue the final landowner who has now agreed to contribute to the masterplan and this process is now underway. A further outcome from this case was the need to resolve an issue of school capacity. The delivery team are co-ordinating meetings with the Education and Property Service, who otherwise may only have been alerted to this issue when the masterplan was finalised, or even when a planning application was submitted.

### The Delivery Team - continued

The Delivery Team are also organising project teams and regular project meetings for the larger allocations.

The Delivery Team will work closely with other Council services, and one of the pieces of work to be undertaken is to identify the financial implications of the development proposed in the LDP, in order to feed into the Capital Plan process. This will ensure the Council can co-ordinate resources to assist with infrastructure delivery.

It should be noted that at this stage the Delivery Team have only been in post for a few months and it is anticipated that it will take some time to fully bed in and make everyone aware of the role of the team.

### Wind Turbine Team

In 2012 in recognition of the scale of wind turbine development in Aberdeenshire and the resulting impact, a dedicated resource was given to process wind turbine/wind energy applications.  This has been established to ensure a fast, efficient and consistent approach to the determination of these applications.

The Wind Turbine Team has been operating for one year and was primarily set up with the aim of reducing the backlog of pending turbine applications but also to apply a consistent approach to dealing with these across Aberdeenshire.  While it was initially planned to operate for 7 months it is intended to continue until the end of October 2013, a total of 14 months.  Four planners (3.6 FTE) along with the support of the Planning Service Co-ordinator (0.4 FTE) dealt with the applications for the first 7 months until the end of March 2013, dropping to three planners (2.6 FTE) until the middle of July 2013 and has operated with two planners (operating in a Senior capacity) (1.6 FTE) since then.

### Wind Turbines Determined

The Planning Service has approved more than 600 wind turbine applications since 2004 and dealt with in excess of 1000 applications.  In terms of actual turbine numbers there are now approximately 1000 individual turbines approved with a large number of these operational.

### Wind Turbine Application Numbers Received

Although numbers of applications received have dropped from around between 20-30 new applications per month at the end of August last year, the submission of applications has remained constant at anywhere in the range of 10-20 received per month (approximately 5% of all applications received).  The need to reduce 'pending' applications remains.

### Wind Turbine Applications Pending

The number of pending applications at the end of August 2012 was 257 dropping consistently to 162 at the end of March 2013.  Numbers have continued to drop month on month and by the end of June 2013 had dropped to 138.  The more limited resources and the lack of Area Committees over the summer period has meant less applications have been processed over this period, however, the downward trend has continued with 133 applications pending by the end of August 2013, a reduction of just under 50%.

For the remaining two months of the Team, work will continue to get as many remaining pending applications within its control determined and those applications with the consultant concluded.  It is anticipated that on a best case scenario of pending applications per team the target number of pending turbine applications across the whole of Aberdeenshire will be somewhere around the 75 mark on a rolling basis towards the end of 2013.

Re allocation of resources (through fee increases) has enabled the services of a planning consultancy to deal with a number of the remaining pending applications.  This arrangement has worked well and has assisted in reducing the pending applications.

## Additional Planner Resource

These have been introduced since September 2012 to run until March 2013. This was to reflect the continuing business demand and the scale and type of applications being submitted to each of the 6 Development Management Teams within Aberdeenshire. Each team were assessed to ensure each was proportionally resourced to deal with the specific pressures and demands. The continuation of this demand and the associated increase in fees has enabled this arrangement to continue to the end of October 2013. This will tie in with the implementation of the Service Review and the associated new structure. An important outcome of this is not only an overall improvement in performance, but the service has now been able to train and progress graduate planners with a likelihood of them gaining further employment when the Review is implemented, thus ensuring consistency as the new structure beds in.

## Development Management Review

A Service Review has been undertaken to consider the modernisation of the processes and structure of the Development Management function with formal implementation from October 2013. The Review aims to implement a modern and effective Development Management Service which can deliver an efficient and effective service in line with Government aspirations and deliver improvements across the Planning Performance Framework indicators. The Main Outcomes are:

- Creation of a Strategic Development Delivery Team
- Establish a stand alone Planning Enforcement Team
- Merge the existing 6 Area Teams into three teams under the management of Team Managers
- Create a Single Address Point and E Planning Unit for all planning application, enquiries and submissions with a promotion of online submission
- Streamlined processes to support planning functions within the new Structure

With these changes should follow improved turnaround of applications due to lower average caseload per Officer and, therefore, greater ability to provide quality pre application advice to customers. Information should be available on the website in a shorter time allowing improved ability to interact with the planning system. The success of these changes will be measured through a Post Implementation Review and the use of Monitoring and Customer Surveys. Details of the changes are set out in the relevant sections below.

(Refer to Section 3 – Evidence & Outcomes)

## Major Application Pre Application Process/Processing Agreements

Aberdeenshire Council continue to operate its relatively long standing formal Major applications pre application process in light of the increasing and continuing need for early engagement on large economically important developments. Pre application should allow early delivery of important and significant sites through the planning process.

A robust system of encouraging developers to enter as standard a Processing Agreement associated with every major application has been rolled out. Although largely based on the Scottish Government template, Aberdeenshire Council now have a Processing Agreement template which appears on the Council's Planning webpage. An associated protocol has been drafted between the Planning and Legal Service to ensure effective and efficient handling of the Processing Agreements once submitted.

To date only one Processing Agreement is in place (for the new settlement of Elsick). Despite encouragement developers have been cautious to engage in this part of the pre application process.

We aim to work towards ensuring that all major applications have an associated Processing Agreement which, along with the Heads of Terms of any required Legal Agreement are agreed at the pre application stage. This is to instil confidence for all parties, and, through agreed timescales commitment for dealing with these important and often complex applications.

**Formal Pre Application Process for Local and Other Developments**
It has been recognised that although pre application advice is readily available
to all applicants for other/non-major applications, and is recorded as such, it has not been available as
a formal process on the Planning webpage. Although the pre application practice is well used, but it is
acknowledged that this should be on a more formal footing.

As part of the move to encourage online self service, a Pre Application Form for non
major/householder enquires has been produced which will be used to instigate a formal enquiry via
the Council's website as an editable PDF. This should help record and define pre application advice in
a standard manner which can then be responded to within a set timescale. The forms can also be
used to request advice on Building Warrant requirements. We hope to publish further forms for non
material variations, enforcement complaints and conditions approvals shortly to help us manage this
correspondence. Face to face contact will still be available with Planners and Technical Staff within
area offices.

**Agent and Developer Engagement**
Bi-annual Forums take place to update and advise Aberdeenshire Council's main stakeholders to
build good relationships with stakeholders through frequent and barrier free engagement. This year
due to Development Plan work an Agent/Developer Forum in addition to another community events
have taken place. As such a Forum for Development Management related issues will be held in the
latter part of the year.

**Officer/Application Engagement Process**
The process of direct and frequent contact continues. The continuous updating and monitoring of
Team Action Plans resulting from the Customer Survey responses ensure this method of engagement
and high quality service is retained:
- Same day return of telephone calls
- Encourage use of electronic communication
- Pre decision notification to applicants/agents; no surprises

**Customer Engagement**
The production of 2 yearly surveys has continued. The outcomes of the December 2012 survey are
outlined in Section 3. The most recent August 2013 Survey was extended in time and as such fully
formed results are not yet available.

(Refer to Section 3 – Evidence & Outcomes)

# High Quality Development on the Ground

## Development Planning

The Masterplanning and Layout, Siting and Design policies provide a policy context for place shaping and quality design.

Design context is set out in Strategic Development Frameworks, Masterplans, Design Briefs, Planning Advice Notices and Technical Advice. This is a key element of the approach required by the LDP and reflects the plan's aim to comply with Creating Places and Designing Streets to promote good architecture and place making. The review of these internal documents is an ongoing process undertaken by the Policy Team and others to reflect lessons learned and current thinking. The additional guidance not only provides advice in design and layout but also introduces associated components related to biodiversity, settlement and landscape characteristics and use of materials amongst others.

This results in a significant emphasis on layout, siting and design on the delivery of sites.

## Local Development Plan Anchor Policies – Siting, Design & Layout

The main thrust behind the LDP is the importance of high quality design. The LDP has adopted the vision and aims of the Structure Plan and among the key aims is :

*To promote sustainable mixed communities
with the highest standards of design*
*We need to achieve excellence in design across
all developments in Aberdeenshire with a design
process that makes sure planning takes place early
and over the long term.*

This is obviously carried through to Development Management in the effective use of the key Polices and Supplementary Guidance on siting layout and design. The success of these Polices can be measured in many ways (development on the ground, Design Awards etc) but initial measurement is through the monitoring of Polices and how they are used in the development management process.

Section 3 provides evidence of the use of the Polices pertaining to siting, layout and design in particular.

## Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Design Review Panel

In order to raise awareness of design in the North East, a Design Review Panel has been set up. The panel is a joint venture between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils. The Design Review Panel offers constructive and objective advice at an early stage in the process which should lead to a better output and a stronger working relationship between all those involved. The advice given will draw on professional knowledge and experience within a local context, offering the opportunity for comprehensive evaluation of development proposals. The Panel consider a range of schemes (including masterplans and major applications) that are significant because of size, impact, public interest, location or set new standards for the future.

## Bi Annual Aberdeenshire Design Awards

The Aberdeenshire Design Award Scheme is considered to be a cost effective means of obtaining a benchmark for the quality of recent development, the effectiveness of current policies and the Development Management process. This biennial event seeks to not only stimulate greater awareness of design issues but promote excellence and innovation in distinct categories. This has been refined for 2012 based on previous experience (see section 3 for further details).

## Development Frameworks/Masterplans/Development Briefs

As has been indicated previously these are promoted strongly through LDP Policy. A dedicated resource in co-ordinating this approach was put in place in 2012 to ensure high quality design and deliverability through pre application and the planning application process. Given the importance attached to deliverability as well as high quality design, further resources have been established in a newly formed Delivery Team (refer to *Open for Business* above).

Work on Development Frameworks has produced four out of the eight identified Development Frameworks which set the scene for detail design led master plans. Associated planning applications have been submitted and have either been approved or are being progressed within these four frameworks.



Of note is the approved Development Framework, subsequent approved masterplans and approved planning applications – for the new settlement of Chapleton of Elsick within the southern part of Aberdeenshire, the largest new town in Scotland. This development, allocated in the LDP of 2012 has followed a full project lead process up to the near conclusion of the Section 75 Agreement for the first phase.

Continuing delivery of the project, the Delivery Team has been responsible for monthly Project Meetings. Following the decision by Aberdeenshire Council to grant consent subject to a S75 Legal Agreement there has been a drive by both the Delivery Team and the Developer to ensure that there are regular meetings between Council Officers, their consultees and the Developer's team of consultants to ensure that high quality development moves onto site as efficiently as possible and in line with the programme but without loss of design consideration.

## Pre Application Collaboration - Roads Service

Aberdeenshire Council's Planning and Roads Development Teams now work so that Roads Construction Consent issues can be considered at a pre-planning stage in accordance with Designing Streets Planning Policy. The buy-in of the development industry is essential to the success of this process which needs to be seen as a benefit rather than a hindrance to obtaining planning permission. The Council has invested time and resources in setting up preplanning workshops for new developments with all the necessary discipline inputting to the scheme design. The advantage of this process is to identify and resolve potential problems before the design work advances too far. This results in a better quality of design which integrates Designing Streets principles so removing the potential need to retrofit design fixes to the streetscape when problems such as speeding or parking deficiencies are encountered at a later stage. The upshot of this is that the later stages of the project will run smoothly and both Council and Developer resources are saved in dealing with fewer problems.

## Pre Application Collaboration - Environment Surgeries

In order to discuss/consult on Built and Natural Heritage issues, the Planners from the Environment Team hold weekly surgeries at each of the Area team offices. This allows the Development Management Officer to have direct discussion on both Built and Natural Heritage matters in respect of applications and pre application enquiries.

## DM Review & New Business System

Changes should allow for a reduced back and front end process and fewer live cases giving more time to allow Planners to negotiate design improvements within statutory timescales.

# CERTAINTY

### Development Planning
The recently created Delivery Team actively communicates with key agencies and lead Officers on the development of the Action Programme and its ability to deliver. We measure and analyse reasons for departures as part of our LDP monitoring processes to assess whether the policies are fit for purpose. The timetable for the delivery of the Development Plan is issued on a yearly basis in the Development Plan Scheme. Thereafter requests for information and "working timescales" are developed on an ad hoc basis with other Services and agencies according to the work programme and the need to deliver the various products.

Robust project management processes are in place for development planning and are used effectively. The Development Plan Scheme has an appropriate level of up to date detail contained within it, programming the workload until September 2015 and listing circa 300 groups who will be consulted.

### Delivery of Sites
Aberdeenshire Council has dedicated resources engaging with the development industry and infrastructure providers which has been enhanced through the creation of a Delivery Team. Aligned to this is the provision of Action Programmes, the Masterplan process and Future Infrastructure Requirements for Services (FIRS group). This Group is concerned with informing the development industry of the infrastructure requirements and a fairer attribution of infrastructure costs amongst development partners. This demonstrates wide ranging partnership working throughout the development environment  It looks to provide up-front funding for certain infrastructure and apportion costs among all developers through the course of development on a pro rata basis, with the ultimate aim of providing more certainty of developers and Aberdeenshire Council.

This approach reflects the Council's Vision and the overall aims of the Development Plan to promote economic growth while leading the way in tackling the urgent challenges of sustainable development and climate change. The suite of effective tools to carry this forward are listed together as follows :

Strategic Development Delivery Team (to include existing Delivery Team post review)
Future Infrastructure Requirements for Services (FIRS) Group
Action Programme
Development Frameworks
Masterplan Process
Development Planning
Development Management

### Data Collection and Research
The Information and Research Team constantly collect and feed data into the LDP to ensure accurate and up to date information on Housing, Land and Employment supply in addition to population trends and forecasts.

### Development Management
The key to providing an effective and efficient service to our customers and ultimately ensuring good quality outcomes is to instil certainty as a recognisable part of dealing with the Planning Service. Certainty instils confidence.  Alongside the delivery approach the following demonstrates the existing and on-going processes in place focusing on the provision of certainty to all.

# *CERTAINTY*

## Major and Strategic Applications – Strategic Development Delivery

Aberdeenshire Council has had an application process for major applications for a number of years with a focus on pre application advice. Due to the additional requirements of master planning and the relatively poor performance in terms of timescales for the approval of major applications, the Review concluded that development subject to Masterplanning or requiring considerable infrastructure and resources should be dealt with central by a dedicated team called the Strategic Development Delivery Team incorporating the planning and delivery roles that currently exist.

Planners will work alongside Delivery Officers. Applications will be programmed and project managed with the use of processing agreements encouraged for every application. This approach should ensure consistency in decision making, information requests and process for large, complex and or economically significant applications. This should result in greater surety to developers as to process, timescales and contacts within the department. We aim to establish this team and the approached by the end of November 2013.

As part of this focus on front loading and increasing efficiency in major application output is the need to promote and pursue the use of Processing Agreements as it is fully recognised this tool although available, is not being used to its full potential. (Refer to Open for Business).

## Legal collaboration :

The Legal Service in liaison with the Planning Service has reviewed various procedural aspects of the Service with a view to continuing to improve performance. This is with particular acknowledgment to the poor performance and current decrease in performance in the average weeks it takes to conclude Legal/Planning Agreements. There needs to be confidence that Legal Agreements are going to be concluded efficiently.

A current action plan has been formulated to address the issues in relation to Section 75 legal agreements as follows :

- Introduction for all Heads of Terms for Legal Agreements to be agreed prior to an application being determined and in some cases issuing instructions prior to an application being determined. This is to preclude the often lengthy cycle of negotiations on contributions as this is the most significant delay in concluding these.

- Standard clauses for Section 75 Legal Agreements have been developed and are now in use within all new Agreements and work is continuing on refining and improving these.

- The Developer Obligations and Conveyancing teams are working with the Council's ICT service on the development of a system to instruct and track all Section 75 Legal Agreements to ensure that all required information is included within the instruction. This will allow monitoring of the progress of Legal Agreement preparation and what stage they are at. This allow tracking and monitoring of performance on specific aspects of the Section 75 from instruction to conclusion and allow pursuit of those where no detailed instructions are provided.

- Introduction of timescales for the conclusion of a Section 75 Legal Agreement or failing which it will be brought back to Committee for a decision to determine. This is to address those cases where the applicant is happy to 'sit on' a site or continually try to renegotiate where there is no impetus by the applicant to conclude the legal agreement. This will allow resources to be more effectively focused.

**Developer Obligations**

A rapid improvement project is on-going within the Developer Contributions Team. Regular collaboration between this Team and the Planning Service occurs and is an essential part of delivering development effectively and efficiently. Key challenges have been identified that require to be addressed to improve performance in feeding onto and enabling the planning process within the statutory timescales.

- Clear guidance on developer contributions is set out in the Local Development Plan which sets out what contributions are required for and the methodology for calculating these. There is, however, significant scope for further clarity. A review of the relevant Supplementary Guidance and production of advice is being undertaken to set out clearly how contributions are calculated and where the rates used are taken from. Specific webpages are being developed to include this information to link to the Planning pages.

- A further key area is closer engagement with Council Services to ensure that a corporate approach is provided in taking forward infrastructure solutions for sites that are both deliverable from the Council and developer perspective. This requires additional resource input. The DC Team are looking to be more proactive and put greater pressure and timescales on response times but will also require the same level of input from the applicants.

**Inter Service Collaboration/Protocols**

**FPU:** An internal protocol is now in place between Development Management and the Council's Flood Prevention Unit. This was done to ensure the correct consultation was carried out for applications subject to flood risk and associated charges. As a result only relevant consultations are carried out which has improved speed of consultation response and reduced charges for the Planning Service.

**Roads:** A protocol is in place between Development Management and the Council's Roads Service to ensure better advance collaboration and communication when road works are required in Conservation Areas. This involves advance notification of proposed works to Development Management to ascertain at an early stage what works would require planning permission.

**External Collaboration/Protocols**

**SEPA:** A protocol is in place between The Council and SEPA to ensure effective and efficient method of consultations in respect of proposed developments.

**Historic Scotland:** Protocol with Historic Scotland regarding the removal of notification procedures has now been on going since 2011.

**LRB**

The Local Review Body is made up of 6 Elected Members, one nominated from each Area Committee. There are also 2 nominated substitute Members from each Area to ensure that there is impartiality and that there can be a quorum of Members for consideration of each case. Planning advice is given to the LRB by a dedicated Planning Advisor.

The LRB meets on average once every 2 – 3 weeks, dependent on outcomes and site visits.

Given the 4 years the LRB have been in operation, cognisance has been given to specific elements that were felt needed to be reviewed with a view to improving efficiency in output. As such a Project based on the Kaizen principles, under the Silver Project banner has commenced. Like many other Aberdeenshire Council projects, this one is based on the Prince II principles of project management.

The business problem that this project should solve is to look at the Local Review Body process from receipt of application to decision notice being issued and identify areas where non-value added activity and waste can be eliminated from that process.

**LRB continued**

Problem Statement: Managing the quality and quantity of information within the timescales imposed within the legislative framework and tackling the challenges around issuing Decision Notices timeously.

The reason for undertaking the project arose initially from Support Services identifying aspects of waste in the current LRB process (volume of paperwork, time and money producing such paperwork etc.), while further aspects of the current LRB process were identified in a recent investigation into the handling of a previous LRB case as potentially requiring improvement. In effect to rationalise administration of information to improve service delivery i.e. length of time taken to issue a Decision Notice.

The project will support the Officers to provide planning advice, Legal advice, Committee Services and Support Services to the Local Review Body.
The Project continues and to date an LRB Improvement Project Action Plan has been produced and is currently being implemented.

**Partnership Working**

**Peterhead Gateway**

The need for the Development Framework has been identified in the Proposed Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (February 2013).  As such Aberdeenshire Council are working with partners, the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Authority and Scottish Enterprise to develop a coherent vision and framework for significant developments that are expected to be delivered adjacent to the southern entrance to Peterhead.
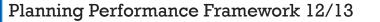
An appointed consultant will produce a Development Framework to co-ordinate the significant infrastructure projects anticipated in the area in a way which places a strong emphasis on design and landscape mitigation to give the area a real sense of place in line with the principles established in the Peterhead Southern Gateway Environmental Improvement Masterplan (2011) and the Energetica Placemaking SG (2012). The Development Framework will also assist in the coordination of significant infrastructure serving and linking the different local elements, this being co ordinated through associated planning applications.

**NHS – Masterplan Inverurie**

The redevelopment of the hospital site in Inverurie, although not identified as a masterplan site, following initial meetings with the agents and NHS, the Planning Service considered that given the complexities involved in developing the site (listed buildings, transportation, community facilities) that a masterplan should be prepared. Work with the NHS has produced a masterplan which will be used to inform any future applications for the site.

**Pre Application Advice**

The need for pre application advice at all levels is a key for certainty and feeds into successful delivery of development.  The pre application processes now available are outlined previously under *Open for Business.*

## Improving Performance Strategy Groups

Through the Improving Performance Strategy (IPS) the aim to provide not only certainty but consistency across the six planning areas was considered vital.

The following work has commenced with timetabled completions available in the IPS illustrated in Section 3 (Improving Performance Strategy Programme Chart) :

**Best Practise Group & Development Management Manual Group –** aims to provide consistency and certainty as a guide to all elements of best practice and procedures for staff within Development Management.

**Standard Conditions Group –** aims to refresh a list of standard conditions in order to prevent numerous formats of the same condition/overuse of conditions and informatives.

**Validation Group –** aims to provide an up to date validation checklist for internal use as well as a version to aide developers when submitting various types of applications**.**

## Standardisation of Report Templates & Report Writing

Following the principles of Kaizen Daily Improvement and the Silver Project stage – the group set up to follow this through have now produced new streamlined and standardised reports for both Reports of Handling and Committee Reports.  Templates are now on the current system and being used by all Planning Officers.  A further template dealing with wind turbine reporting has now also been added.

## Wind Turbine Standard Conditions

A standardised set of conditions appropriate to use with all wind turbine applications has been formulated by the wind turbine team.  This work continues the need to ensure consistency and improve efficiency and speed.

## *COMMUNICATION ENGAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE*

**Development Planning**

The Planning pages of the Council's website are continually being updated and added to. Currently all Planning advice and guidance is being revamped with a view to give easier access for all.

Aberdeenshire Council encourage all agents/developers/applicants to use the e-planning portal to submit applications. As part of the process to invite landowners to submit their sites for inclusion in the next Local Development Plan, agents were encouraged to do so electronically.

A Twitter account has been created to inform the public and other stakeholders of the current status of the Main Issues Report (MIR). All "followers" are notified as soon as up to date information on the progress of the MIR is put onto our website.

We are currently working on setting up a Main Issues webpage which can be accessed through the Planning pages of Aberdeenshire Council's website. We will be regularly updating this with information on the Main Issues Report, consultation events and providing the opportunity to submit feedback on the Main Issues Report.



The Online Development Plan is continuing to be developed, with an aim for the Draft Local Development Plan to be online some time in 2014.

All staff are encouraged to use electronic communication with the public/agents/developers.

A wide range of public meetings have been carried out during 2013 in order to establish what issues, if any, are arising with the current Local Development Plan and whether they should be incorporated into the MIR. These meetings included stakeholders such as Community Councils, Community Planning Groups, and internal and external consultees who were broadly grouped under the following headings, economic development, infrastructure, environment and rural development.

Following publication of the MIR and during the twelve week consultation process, over forty public meetings across Aberdeenshire will be held to debate the main issues and development bids. Copies of the MIR will be sent to external and internal stakeholder groups for assessment. The outcomes of these meetings and consultation responses will inform the Proposed Plan which we aim to publish during 2014.

**Development Management**

**Customer Surveys:** Since 2011 the Service has been conducting regular 6 monthly surveys with its customers and stake holders. The responses we have received have informed and enabled us to provide a more customer focused service and make the required changes to our service delivery that our customers wanted to see not only across Aberdeenshire but also at local area offices. As part of the process we have regularly informed the participants of the surveys of the actions we have taken as a result of their responses and concerns.

**Benchmarking:** We are currently actively engaged in benchmarking our services and internal processes to ensure that we continually improve the way we work and ensure that we learn from others. As part of this we are an active member in the newly formed Large Rural Authority Benchmarking Group and have a programme of benchmarking activity through to the end of 2013 / 2014 which in turn supports the Aberdeenshire Council programme of benchmarking activity.

**Charters:** A full Review of the **Enforcement Charter** has been undertaken and the updated version is on the Council's planning
webpage. This Charter will require further updating following implementation of the Review and the new staffing structure.

The **Development Management Charter** will be fully reviewed and updated following implementation of the Review and new staffing structure.

**Feedback/Complaints Process** –
Through the Council's complaint system 'Have your Say' and associated Feedback Team, the Planning Service is now better able to record, track and monitor the differing types of correspondence that is received specifically by the Planning Service. Through this system all complaint correspondence, including FOI requests can be responded to within set timescales. The complaints system has recently changed to two levels of correspondence before the SPSO route of complaint can be recommended and instigated by a complainant.

The aim of the complaint management system is to ensure consistency in advice, style and output and thus all complaints go
via the Service Manager for checking. The formal system ensures expedient acknowledgments, advice to complainants should they require and certainty in how to proceed and to ensure the best level and quality of response is given. Ultimately all correspondence should be responded to within set timescales and provide the recipient with either a full and satisfactory response and clarity of what next should they wish to pursue correspondence with the SPSO.

**Contact Centre**
The Council's Contact Centre is based in Fraserburgh to the north part of Aberdeenshire. The Contact Centre has multi-skilled staff who deliver multiple services at first point of contact for the benefit of customers.
Liaison with the Council's Contact Centre has taken place with a view to the Centre assisting with planning queries at first point of contact.

**New Planning Focus Group**
To further promote the Council's role as Planning Authority and as an enabler of the development process, a Planning Focus Group has been set up (due to meet on 3 October 2013). This is with an aim to further strengthen ties with those in the business community, developers and academics whose expectations and role it is to encourage, develop and invest within the north east. The role of the planning process is significant as an enabler in the future of the north east economy and engagement of this nature is considered essential.

**Agents Forums**
Agent/developer Forums are held bi-annually, although to date, given the important stages of the LDP, Forums engaging agents/developers on the LDP process have taken precedence and a Development Management Forum will not now take place until the latter stages of 2013.

**Agents Data Base**

Whilst Agents' Forums are held bi-annually, a comprehensive developer/agent data base is regularly used to share information and changes to legislation/procedures as they occur etc by e mail, thus keeping the developers and agents up to date with events.

**Community Council Engagement**

Whilst the attempt to engage with Community Council by way of development management focused group forums did not materialise, further work is underway to consider the best way of engaging with Community Councils outwith the daily planning application processes. Planning officials do attend individual Community Council meetings on occasions and there is potential for intervention into existing Community Council Forums run in each of the six areas by the respective Area Managers.

**Engagement and Electronic Communication**

Further, engagement and efficiency will result in increasing our use of Electronic communication through the purchase and implementation of Idox Uniform. This system due on stream in February 2014, will allow for full integration of e-planning applications with the business support system reducing time to acknowledge formal correspondence and issuing a decision to customers. We will encourage applications and representations to be submitted online by improving the quality of scanned images and the speed at which validated applications appear on the website for the purpose of public access. The need to strongly promote and subsequently increase the use of electronic on line submissions cannot be underestimated. The current figure of approximately 20% on line submissions is poor. Geographical challenges are present, but parallel improvement to rural broadband through Council projects will assist in the necessary promotion.



A corporate project to Improve Customer Services is currently underway and will aim to improve the customer experience with Planning and Building Standards. Key areas of improvement will be a move towards online self service forms (i.e. enforcement complaints etc), improved web resource and better access to planning information and contacts. This project is scheduled for April to August 2014.

## *Efficient and effective decision-making*

### Development Planning

A Steering Group has been established which has set the parameters of the work scope, the levels of tolerance and the programming for adoption of the next LDP. Management processes allow for early identification and resolutions when exceptions to the work programme occur. This results in delays being dealt with effectively. All development plan staff has been trained in the time management process used to develop the LDP, and a localised form of PRINCE II is adopted.

### Review of Tree Preservation Orders

The Planning Service is carrying out a review of the Council's Tree Preservation Orders (TPO). This is one of many on-going improvement activities associated with the update of environmental data. Phase 1 which involved the update of legal documents has been completed and Phase 2 which is to review and survey all the associated protected trees on the ground is about to commence. The target for completion is 2014. It is considered vital, that the Council's environmental data is sound to give the certainty and confidence required in informing the decision making process.
Progress is also being made through Kaizen Daily Improvement projects on Countryside Paths and Sites and a Review of Historic Assets – all essential to the decision making process.

### Development Management

### Scheme of Delegation

A Review of the Council's Scheme of Delegation is being carried out corporately. The Review of the Development Management part of the Scheme of Delegation has commenced, but not as yet complete and is now dependent on parallel working with the Corporate Review.
Consideration has to be given to the level of Member consultation, currently part of the Scheme of Delegation, and review of triggers (numbers of representations) which necessitates the direction of the decision making.

Changes to Legislation in respect of Council applications also require incorporation into the Scheme of Delegation.
 In 2012-13, 752 applications were referred to Local Members a part of the existing Scheme of Delegation. Of these 166 were referred to Committee (22% referred to Committee). This is an increase in the period of 2011/12 where 664 applications were referred to local members, 17.2 % of which were subsequently referred to committee.

### Improving Performance Strategy

In 2011 work commenced in creating an Improving Performance Strategy
We have continued to progress the Performance Strategy in relation to efficient decision making but with a view to the outcomes of the Development Management Review. An updated programme of work is set out in Appendix 1. Key focuses over 12/13 have been on:
1. Reduce 'work in progress'. As such the amount of pending applications has reduced (from 1400 in April 12 to 1044 in April 13 and is now below 1000 applications)
2. Limit Officer caseloads resulting in improved determination times for householder (average time reduced from 17.8 wks to 8.1 weeks) and local applications on householder (34.4 wks to 22.5 wks). Applications determined within 2 months have increased.
3. Determine applications as soon as possible rather than just within 2/4 months.
4. Kaizen on validation process reduced hands on time by 10% on average and cut out a step in the process.
5. Number of legacy cases has affected major application figures but there is still a significant level of work required in relation to major applications especially those with Legal Agreement.
6. Reports are now largely consistent with standard formats and templates in use.

**EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING**

## Development Management Review

New processes have been designed which aim to reduce the length of time to validate applications and the length of time taken to agree and issue a decision. Validation should be cut to a maximum of two working days before being received by a Planner. Changes will maximise the benefits of an increase in the use of e-planning and the in house digitisation of paper mail on reception which will remove time consuming administrative elements of the current process.

Development Management Team sizes will increase through the merging of the 6 areas. This provides more resources and a greater variety of experience to allow for improved allocation of work, better use of experience and a critical mass of cover during absences which did not exist in some of the smaller teams. Technical and administrative support roles will become more flexible to address pressures within different areas.

Local decisions which have no strategic or significant impact on the local or wider area will no longer be quality assured by mangers but rather by more senior planning staff. This should ensure that backlogs do not occur in the determination process.

Through an evidenced based approach, staffing levels for these teams have been set on the basis of a maximum of 30 applications per planner but with an average target of 25 live applications per planner in connection with work to reduce the amount of live applications pending at any one time. This should reduce working pressure on planning staff to manageable levels in order to attain the performance improvements set out in the Improving Performance Strategy and allow for time to be spent at the pre application stage. Performance will be reviewed continuously with a post implementation review occurring after 12 months.

## New Business System

The introduction of a new business system will provide opportunities for improved efficiency in decision making both through streamlined processes and the ability to move away from paper based application file systems. As the system allows for us to record delays beyond the control of the Planning Authority we will record 'stop the clock' situations throughout 2014-15. This will save time and hopefully reduce the average time for decision making across the board.
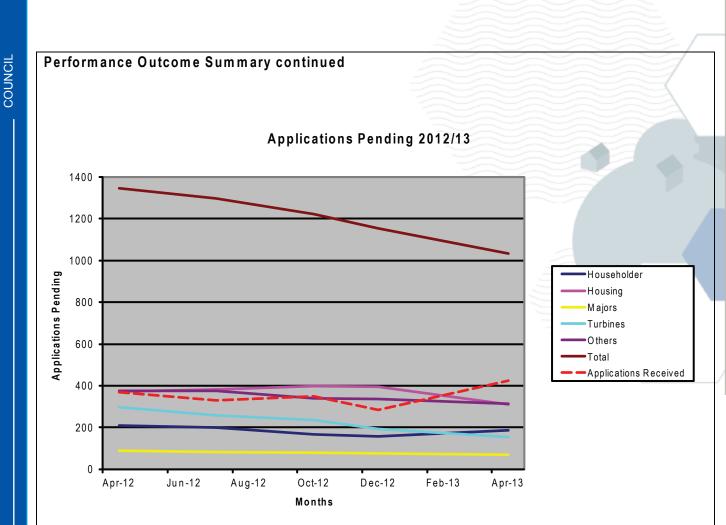
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**Performance Outcome Summary**

In 2012/13 Aberdeenshire Council received 3828 applications, determined 3709 and in that period 62.7% of all planning applications were determined in 2 months compared to 2011/12 where 4052 applications were received, 3807 determined and 60.4% of applications were determined in 2 months. In 2010/11 the figure was 3710 and 53%.

Aberdeenshire Council continues to receive a proportionally high number of wind turbine applications. In 2012/13 it determined 237 wind energy applications, slightly less than in 2011/12 when 257 applications were determined. The current figures constitute 18.9% of all wind turbine applications determined in Scotland, as opposed to 20.9% in 2011/12. In 2012/13, 7.6% of planning applications determined by Aberdeenshire Council were wind turbine applications in comparison to 4.3%% of all applications determined by Local Authorities being for wind turbines. The equivalent in 2011/12 was 6.9% and 3.1% respectively.

Performance has increased overall from 2011/12, although not by the targeted increase of 5%. The increase is undoubtedly a result of the implementation of the Improving Performance Strategy and the overall cultural shift in the approach to determining applications in respect of the streamlining of the process and procedures, more awareness by staff for the need to carry out pre application work and the need to increase performance and output. The number of legacy/ pending applications has dramatically fallen. The 1000 target has been achieved and the number now sits at 926 (as at 09/09//13), this from 1331 in the same period last year and 1556 in 2011.

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**Performance Outcome Summary continued**

### Applications Pending 2012/13



Reduction in pending applications 2012/13

Dealing with legacy applications obviously has an impact on performance. Additional staff resource allocation has assisted, however it has also been recognised that a plateau in output has been reached within the current resource. This is in a time where Aberdeenshire remains buoyant and again in 2012/13 have received amongst the highest numbers of planning applications. Although not recorded nationally a snapshot of applications received in Scotland in the quarter July to September 2012 was 11,050. The resulting average for 32 local authorities was 345 applications received in that quarter. In Aberdeenshire, 940 applications were received in that particular quarter.

The resulting performance still requires improving and 70%+ is an overall target. A Review of Development Management is nearing completion and subsequent implementation. It was recognised that to further performance a Review was required to identify further resources required to achieve the target performance and importantly to maintain that performance level thereafter.

## *Effective management structures*

### Development Planning

Management and team structures are capable of delivering planning/development priorities. Limited staff resources are prioritised on key tasks. Good support mechanism in place. When a fluid workforce has been needed then this has been made available with the co-opting in of staff from Development Management to assist the development plan process. Regular management meetings are used to identify and address staff resource issues. There are strong links between senior members of the Development Plan Team and other business areas, neighbouring authorities and other public bodies to deliver joint objectives.

### Development Management
### Structure

Aberdeenshire continues to be split into six administrative areas. Each administrative area operates an Area Office and each area has a dedicated Area Committee. These Area Committees deal with all the Council's area business, including planning applications, on a three weekly basis. Amongst other Committees which operate within the Council, decision making on planning matters can also be carried out at the Council's Infrastructure Services Committee or the Full Council.

Each area has had a dedicated Development Management Team. The various changes through a Service Review, nearing implementation, have been outlined throughout this document.

### Development Management Review

The Review concluded that a reorganisation of roles and responsibilities was required regarding the strategic and operational management of the DM function. These changes include considering specific functions through new teams focusing on Enforcement and the project management of strategically important sites throughout the development management planning process.

The reduction of the 6 area teams to 3 area teams each focused along a strategic growth area and managed by a single Manager is supported by a greater number of senior Officers who will have a focus on day to day decision making and Planning Committee support. Unfortunately there is little political appetite for reducing Planning Committees further and, therefore each team will serve two Area Committees. Team Managers will focus on management of the resources and workloads of the teams to ensure a more effective distribution of work.

As a result the structure will comprise of a single Service Manager and three Team Managers rather than two Service Managers and six Team Leaders. This is balanced by an increase in Senior Planner positions to nine from three providing better cover and support at the right operational level to ensure the throughput of applications.

The formal implementation date for the review is October 2013 with new job roles being in place by November 2013.

(Refer To Section 3 for existing and proposed Structures).

### Effective Communication and Feedback

There is a continuing focus on communication, feedback and collaboration through :

### Weekly/fortnightly Area Planning Team Meetings

Each team has weekly/fortnightly team meetings to feedback corporate issues, operational information and discuss casework.

**Monthly Area Planning Officer Meeting**
Each month the Service Manager meets with the 6 Team Leaders within Development Management (Area Planning Officers).  Senior Planners also attend if available. This meeting has a set agenda to feedback corporate matters, operational issues, procedural matters and any new or changing processes. The meeting is to enable consistency in all operational matters across Aberdeenshire and provides a forum to share ideas, resolve issues and set up new/improved processes, focussing on continuous improvement and performance.
To ensure inter service communication it is a regular occurrence that an officer from another service or part of the service will attend the meeting to discuss particular relevant topics, whether to resolve a particular issues, share information or as training.

**Fortnightly Management Team meetings**
The Head of Service has a fortnightly meeting with the Service Managers to impart corporate feedback, information, instruction, and to discuss current issues.

**One to One Meetings**
Regular One to one meetings with individuals take place at all levels.  These review case loads and workloads, where a monitoring system of target setting with all officers is set and outputs established.

**Inter service liaison**
Development Management have monthly Legal liaison meetings.
Development Management have regular Environmental Health liaison meetings.

## *Financial management and local governance*

### Development Planning

Robust project management processes are in place. Overall governance and financial management is by Programme Board. Project Boards manage different parts of the process.

### Development Management Review

The Development Management Review ran in parallel with the increase in planning fees. As a result of the anticipated extra revenue, the Council agreed to earmark any increase in revenue for improvements within the Service. This has largely been focused on staffing. The increase in revenue has enabled a further 8 posts in total including 4 dedicated posts dealing with significant applications and masterplanning which should be in place as of November 2013.
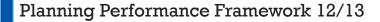
### Temporary Wind Turbine

Last year a temporary wind turbine team was put in place partly funded by additional Scottish Government funds.  Update on the progress of the team is included previously (refer to Open *for Business*). Due to further reallocation of resources, largely from increase of fees the team have been able to engage the help of a Planning Consultant to assist in the throughput of these applications, many of a complex nature. The Team are now due to run until the end of October 2013, to tie in with the implementation of the new Service structure.

### New business system

The Planning Authority are investing in a new business system (Idox Uniform) which will allow the Authority to link its current DMS, web interface and database business system. This will have significant benefits and allows for timely in house scanning via a single address point for paper submissions. The project is expected to deliver a solution for new applications by Feb 2014 with the system going fully live in April 2014. It is anticipated this will save the Council money through reduced contractual and administrative costs (circa 86K per annum from 2014).

## *Culture of continuous improvement*

### Development Planning

Surveys have been conducted as part of the lessons learnt after the adoption of the Plan. Some external evaluation of the methods to be used was carried out during the development of the Plan stages. Policy monitoring is carried out to establish whether policies are robust. Additional guidance is published when required. This includes the Planning Advice page on the Council's website which demonstrates the focus on continuous improvements undertaken and keeping the customer/stakeholder fully informed.

### Development Management

As part of our approach to continuous improvement we recently undertook a project examining the work flow in our receipt to validation process. Using Lean techniques, and supported by our Service Improvement Team considerable reductions were made in our processing times with a corresponding reduction in non value adding activity in our process. The work on this project ultimately resulted in the "one point of address validation team" to be formed.

### Development Management Review

This is nearing completion.  Refer to other sections throughout.

### Improving Performance Strategy

There has been good progress on the Performance Strategy and met a number of targets (local apps performance, business system and process and structure review etc) however there are a number of areas which need further work and will be progressed as part of the Review Implementation. These are set out in Section 3. Further work is required to ensure that communication with applications is improved and that certainty over decision making is improved further.

Key areas of activity for 13/14

- Build on emerging practice for Masterplanning and Delivery by forming new Strategic Development Delivery Team working on strategic applications from pre app to determination with use of processing agreements.
- Continue to strive to increase numbers of planning applications determined in two months and at the same time decrease the number of pending applications.
- Implement the proposals agreed by the DM Review and ensure performance management techniques including monitoring and target setting are maintained and become embedded in the new structure.
- Single Address point and E –Planning team created to ensure effective reception and data entry for enquiries and applications and related information.
- Complete implementation of new business support system (Idox Uniform) for DM.
- Implemented consistently and are monitored to ensure good value.

Ongoing

- Continue to address the areas of concern identified in the Customer Survey (in particular communication issues) and issue Customer Survey twice a year.
- Further develop the Applicants / Agent Forums to ensure that dialogue is maintained and improved especially in relation to Pre application advice
- Continue to work with both internal and external consultees to ensure consultation responses are both relevant and provided in time.
- Review Scheme of Delegation (as required by Scottish Government) and ensure that it takes into account the Area Committees comments.
- Ensure that the quality of decision taken and the outcomes reached remain the Council's priority.
- Finalise and continue to update a Performance Action Plan

CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

**Training: Individual Staff attainment/skills**
All staff are given an annual review through the Council's Employee Annual Review (EAR). Training plans through EAR is used to assess performance and training needs throughout the year. This is intended to be a meaningful job focused conversation between an employee and their manager or supervisor to:

• Review work performance over the last year

• Recognise and celebrate achievements

• Agree the work priorities for the year and plan how to achieve these
• Identify the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to do the job effectively.

As a whole Service training events are organised on average 2 – 4 times per year. This has involved a mix of internal and external training, from natural heritage training, LDP training, design training, to recent planning agreements and obligations training.

**PDS Scheme**
Development Management have a Professional Development Scheme that Planning Officers can apply to attain after a certain number of years experience. Successful completion of this, whereby the Officer requires to demonstrate the necessary experience through a written statement and presentation results in progression up the salary scale.

**Customer Engagement**
As outlined previously bi annual Customer Surveys are sent out and results fully analysed to ensure meaningful use of customer input. Customers involvement is expanded as the results of the survey outcomes are produced and accompanied by corresponding solutions. This is fed back to the customer to instil confidence that the results of the survey have been used to improve on the level of service delivery.

**Team Action Plans**
In order to analyse customer comment, all issues raised are incorporated within a team action plan. Each issue is assessed and addressed by an appropriate action.

**Elected Member Engagement**
Various events organised for Elected Member training involve the Planning Service. A training event on wind turbine applications, the processing system and the consultation procedures was carried out. Individual area events are organised on demand through the Area Committees and have involved presentations to members from Planning Managers (performance, enforcement) or Area Planning Officers (materiality, design). Working relationships and communication between Elected Members and planning managers/ area planning officers and planning officers is productive and frequent. The frequency of Area Committees calls for a dedicated committee planning resource, usually the Area Planning office and/or the Senior Planner. This allows consistency of advice to members and subsequent confidence of the members in their planning advisors.

**Agent/developer engagement & Business Engagement**
Bi annual forums, workshops on particular issues and regular e mail updates are used to ensure consistent communication and up updating. As outlined previously a Planning Focus Group has been set up to communicate with the business community, consider the modernisation of the planning system and how this impacts on delivery, investment and economic growth.

**Community Council**
As outlined previously the aim is to continue engagement and communication with the Community Councils, with a view to improving accessibility through improved electronic systems. A further aim is to bring more direct access and communication with the planning system through existing council forums.