

Planning Performance Framework 10



▶ The Needles Eye, Tarlair

North



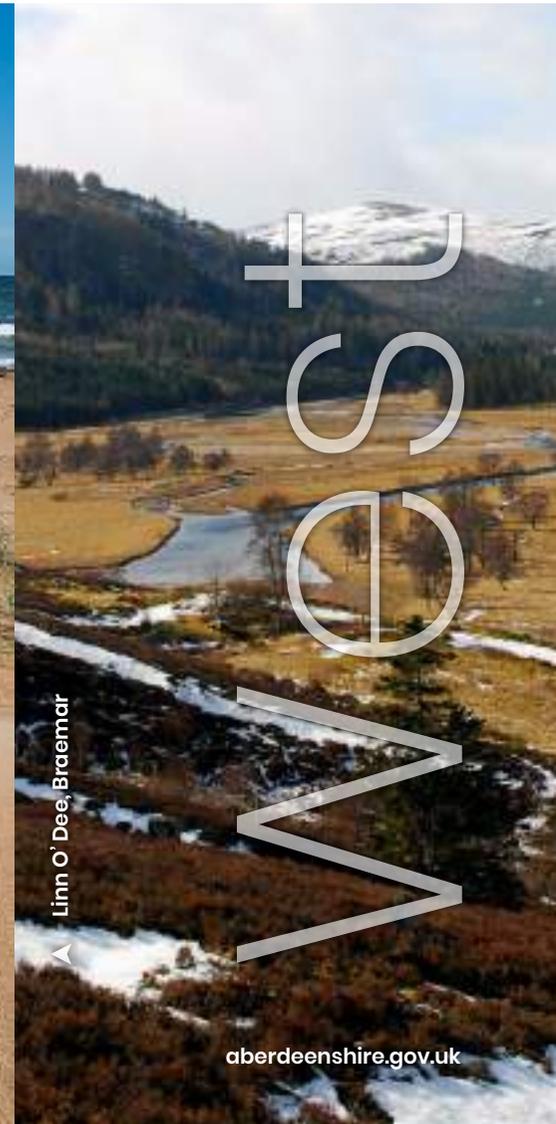
◀ Dunnotar Castle, Stonehaven

South



▶ Rattray Head, Peterhead

East



◀ Linn O' Dee, Braemar

West

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2020/21

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Aberdeenshire Council Vision.



From mountain to sea

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, 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

Tarlair Swimming Pool



Foreword.

I am pleased to introduce the 2020/21 Planning Performance Framework, the 10th in a series of annual reports which celebrates the work of the Planning and Environment Service across a number of national performance indicators.

The Planning and Environment Service has a critically important role in shaping better quality places across Aberdeenshire, protecting, and enhancing our built and natural environments, engaging with communities, and working with investors to deliver new development to meet the needs of Aberdeenshire's citizens and support our economy.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, our culture of continuous improvement and drive to enhance our quality of service has been unwavering. Significant progress has been made in adapting our working practices and streamlining our processes to transition from a digitally enabled to a digitally delivered planning system.

Understanding the needs and experiences of our customers has enabled the Service to forge strong collaborative relationships with our communities, the development industry and investors. This has allowed necessary changes to be made to the way we deliver the planning system in Aberdeenshire leading to the successful awarding of Customer Service Excellence status in March 2021.

In terms of service delivery, the opportunities presented by the Covid-19 pandemic extend beyond an enhanced customer service and transition to a fully digital planning system. The collaborative relationships between the Planning and Environment Service, communities, development industry and investors has facilitated the consenting and delivery of important access, regeneration and development programmes as well as progression of the proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2021 throughout this PPF period. This collaborative approach has been a key driver in the delivery of new homes,

business and employment opportunities with the necessary infrastructure to create successful sustainable places and achieve the outcomes set out in the Council Plan 2020-22.



Alan Wood
Director of Infrastructure Services

Introduction.

This Planning Performance Framework document continues to be read in conjunction with the suite of high-level documents that have been developed by Aberdeenshire Council and its partners.

The Covid-19 pandemic had clear implications for the Council and there was a range of factors which resulted in shifts in Aberdeenshire since the adoption of the previous Council Plan in 2017. As such, the [Council Plan](#) which gives strategic direction was updated in October 2020. The Plan is centred around three pillars – Our People, Our Environment and Our Economy. Under these sits the 6 [Strategic Priorities](#) of Education; Health and Well-being; Infrastructure; Resilient Communities; Economy and Enterprise; and Estate Modernisation. Planning has a significant role in helping to [deliver these priorities](#).

The Planning and Environment Service sits within the Infrastructure Services Directorate.

The [Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017](#) remains the adopted LDP and in August 2020 the [Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan](#) was approved. These are the significant planning tools which continue to aid the delivery of Aberdeenshire-wide and Planning and Environment Service objectives.



Peterhead Harbour and Power Station

Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Business Continuity

The Planning and Environment Service faced many challenges during this reporting year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, in a short period of time the Service was able to adapt its working practices with the aim of achieving business continuity in terms of service delivery, meeting on-going legislative and statutory requirements, providing customer care and communication, delivering projects, aiding the administration of health and safety objectives and contributing to areas of social and economic recovery.



Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Business Continuity

Working and Digital Practices

Within a matter of days, with all Council offices closing for everything but essential business critical activities that could not be delivered away from an office environment, all Planning and Environment Service staff moved to working from home. Flexible working patterns were already a key feature of how the service worked with digital systems and practices in place that allowed remote working. Processes were put in place to allow staff to obtain and take home digital and other equipment where necessary.

In this regard, of significance, were the challenges faced by the Embedded Administration and E-Planning Team who had not traditionally worked remotely. Staff were moving towards trialling working from home as a result of wider office space strategies and refurbishment projects but this was expedited by the Covid-19 restrictions. After a short period of time, staff were able to adapt to the delivery of this essential function, working mainly from home. It has been the case though there were and remain some essential activities, such as printing and issuing of neighbour

notifications for planning applications, large scale plan document and paper application scanning, and mail checking, that required office working. Very quickly, safe processes were put in place to allow for these activities to continue. In addition, there was more active encouragement to customers, through [Briefing Notes and website updates](#), for electronic planning and building warrant application submissions and electronic and Web payments of fees. Of note was the increase in the number of applications submitted through the planning portal to an average of 94% and the increase in the number of online payments.

Other digital tools were developed. All internal meetings graduated to online formats with use primarily of Microsoft Teams. The Council already operated its telephony system via Skype for Business. Importantly all [Council Committee](#) business was quickly transferred to online meetings with [webcasting and recording](#) available. In terms of planning matters and in particular the consideration and determination of planning applications this allowed efficient business continuity ([see Case Study 10 –](#)

[Governance](#)). In addition, there was the development and implementation of a [Virtual Site Visit](#) protocol and online tool through Microsoft Teams ([see Case Study 14 – Culture of Continuous Improvement](#)). This allowed, where appropriate, the progression of planning applications and resulted in efficiencies in terms of travel and cost.



Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Business Continuity

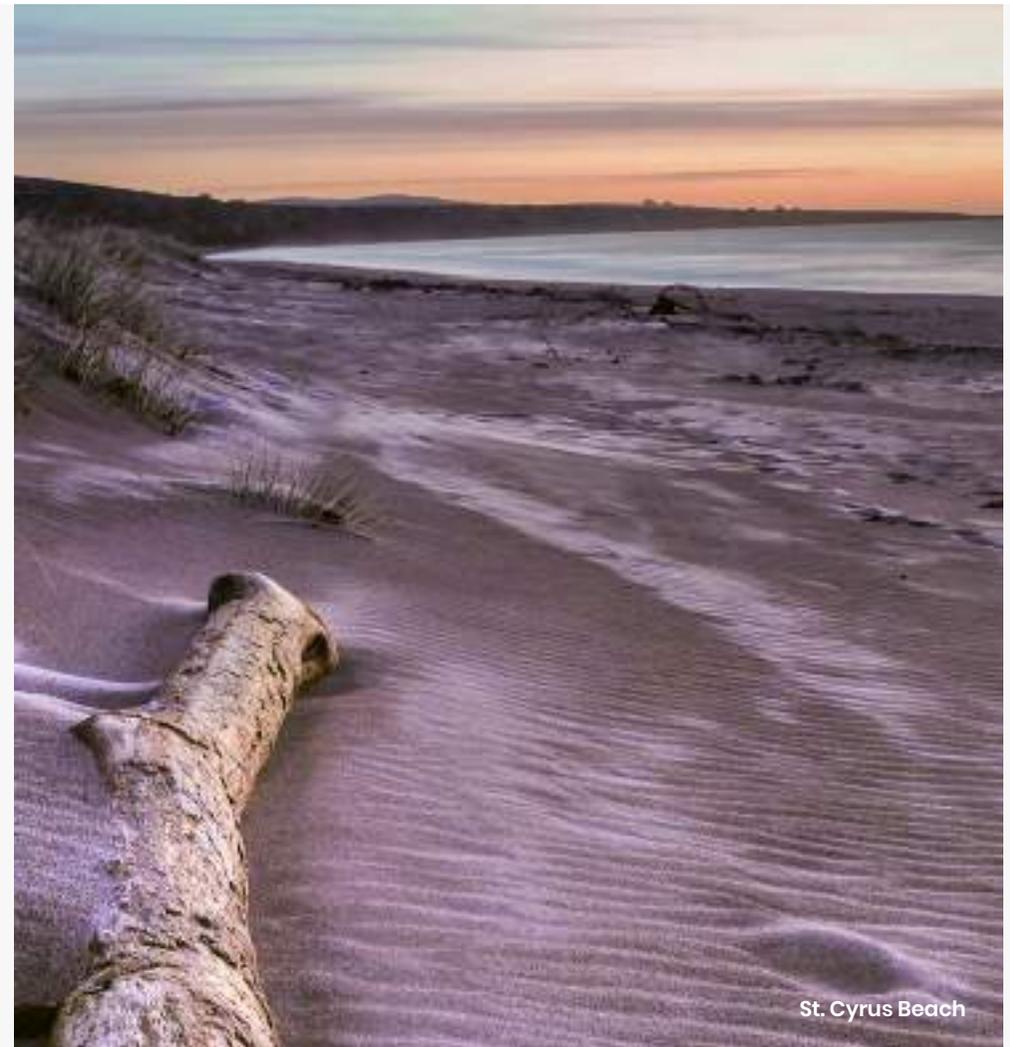
Customer Communication and Engagement

It was important to ensure that there was continuity in terms of engagement with customers of the service. A series of [Briefing Notes](#) were issued directly to all Agents on our database and uploaded to the website. These provided updates on changes to working practices and legislation across the various service functions in response to the Covid-19 situation. In November 2020 there was a Joint Development Management and Building Standards Agent Forum. This was held virtually and resulted in a higher level of attendance than in previous face-to-face meetings (see [Case Study 8 – Quality of Service and Engagement](#)).

The difficulties affecting businesses in Aberdeenshire was recognised early. This resulted in a co-ordinated cross service project – [Opening of Businesses](#) – which was instigated by the Planning and Environment Service in collaboration with other important services of the Council (see [Case Study 5 – Quality of Service and Engagement](#)). This

continues and is aimed at providing local support for restarting businesses across Aberdeenshire.

The [Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2020](#) was entering a critical stage of public consultation in the summer of 2020. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions there was a need to move to a quick alternative method of consultation. This was achieved through virtual means and was highly successful in gaining greater levels of input with more people and it allowed the continued progression and delivery of the Development Plan Scheme (see [Case Study 6 – Quality of Service and Engagement](#)).



St. Cyrus Beach

Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Business Continuity

Staffing and Resourcing

As mentioned above, all Planning and Environment Service staff moved to remote home working and this remains the default position. This brought challenges in terms of communication, team working, monitoring of workloads, and health and well-being.

Regular Team Meetings, 1-2-1 discussions and informal “catch-up sessions” have continued through the use of online platforms. Regular Team Talks by the Chief Executive, the Director of Infrastructure Services and the Head of Planning and Environment Service have taken place.

There are also corporate staffing bulletins that inform all staff on Covid-19 pandemic and corporate updates.

On the Council's Intranet there is a dedicated Council Staff Covid-19 site which provides information and support for employees. Throughout the reporting year there has also been specific staff questionnaires on health and well-being and online activities aimed at helping staff cope with the on-going Covid-19 pandemic situation. Specific Risk Assessments and Guidance

have been developed for staff undertaking physical site visits and meetings where these were permitted and required. There is also guidance and training on how to remain safe if there is an essential need to attend an office.

Staff development and training opportunities have continued to be available through appropriate and safe means. Indeed, a significant project that was developed and completed was the production of a live electronic Planning and Environment staff training database and protocol ([see Case Study 13 – Culture of Continuous Improvement](#)).

In relation to recruitment and resourcing, levels of staffing have remained reasonably constant although there have been some pressures in some areas of the Development Management Team. There has been some recruitment done across some of parts of the service, including in the Embedded Administration Team, the Planning Information and Delivery Team, the Environment Team and the Development Management Team. All recruitment processes were done electronically with

Microsoft Teams used for interviews.

In addition, there has been the creation of a new Senior Planner post in January 2021 with a specific role in acting as the Local Review Body Advisor but also focussing importantly on the field of continuous improvement. In this way, the measure of importance placed on continuous improvement as a key aspect of the ongoing work of the

Planning and Environment Service has been recognised. Initially the improvement work has centred on Development Management but potentially there is a wider service remit going forward. Over the coming year this officer will focus on leading some of the key commitments identified through this year's PPF including developing a framework for continuous improvement.



Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Business Continuity

Involvement in Public Health Support

Some members of the Planning and Environment Service have contributed significantly to the support of public health initiatives in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular staff within the Planning Information and Research Team were redeployed, early on, to the [Grampian Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) Assistance Hub](#) where they played a significant role in developing a system to monitor data performance and quality assurance to enhance the customer experience when they were seeking help via the Hub (see [Case Study 7 – Quality of Service and Engagement](#)).

In addition, Rangers employed within the Environment and Specialist Services Team were used to monitor visitor hotspots when these have developed during periods where there was easing of lockdown restrictions.



Duff House Banff

Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Business Continuity

Conclusion

Many of the working practices within the Planning and Environment Service that have evolved as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic are ones that can be considered for future ways of working. While there have been undoubted challenges, the Planning and Environment Service, alongside other Council colleagues, has been able to adapt quickly and efficiently and has demonstrated flexibility in ways of working. It has shown a desire to contribute to the on-going challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic but also play its part in ensuring recovery.



Performance Markers

Response from 2019–2020 Feedback

This section relates to the RAG ratings feedback received from the Scottish Government on the previous PPF 9 (2019–20). In relation to PPF 9, one out of the fifteen Key Performance Marker areas was awarded an amber rating with the rest awarded green ratings. The one amber rating was **Stalled Sites/Legacy Cases**. This is summarised below and reported back with a response for 2020–21 ([see also Part 3B Delivery of our Improvement Actions Committed in 2019–20](#)).

2019–20 Performance Marker	Feedback and RAG RATING from 2019–20 – Amber	2020–21 Response
<p>14. Stalled sites / legacy cases: Conclusion or withdrawal of old planning applications and reducing number of live applications more than one year old.</p>	<p>You have cleared 34 cases during the reporting year, with 30 cases still awaiting conclusion which is an increase since last year.</p>	<p>The reporting of these cases remains figures based rather than how such cases are project managed. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the focus on planning application decision making has centred around ensuring business continuity.</p> <p>Despite the challenges, there have been continued efforts across the Development Management Service and the Legacy Case Team to progress stalled/legacy cases to determination where possible. In this respect, a total of 58 stalled/legacy applications were cleared where 50 of these had a PPA in place. 38 of these were issued within the agreed PPA timescale. The number cleared through the reporting year therefore increased by 24 compared to 2019–20. However, with some new ones being created over the period, a total of 42 cases remain which is an overall increase of 3 from the end of March 2019. 20 of these have PPAs in place. The reasons for delays in progressing remain complex and many will have been created as a result of the challenges faced by the pandemic. However the focus remains on progressing these using project management tools where possible and appropriate.</p>

Part 1:

Qualitative Narrative Case Studies



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

Newburgh and River Ythan

Quality of Outcomes

Case Studies

1. **Aberdeenshire Council Planning Performance in Development Management 2020-21**
2. **Aberdeenshire Council Planning Performance – Major Applications – 2020-21**
3. **Aberdeenshire Architectural and Landscape Design Awards 2020**



Aberdeenshire Farming Museum Mintlaw

Case Study 1.

Aberdeenshire Council Planning Performance in Development Management 2020-21

Location and Dates:

Aberdeenshire Council,
April 2020 – March 2021

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of outcomes
- Quality of service and engagement
- Governance

Key Markers:

1 – Decision-Making

12 – Corporate working across Services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Planning Applications
- Interdisciplinary Working
- Collaborative Working
- Performance Monitoring
- Project Management

Stakeholders Involved:

- General Public
- Local Developers
- Key Agencies
- Planning Committee
- Authority Planning Staff
- Authority Other Staff

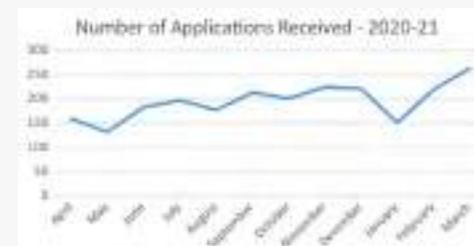
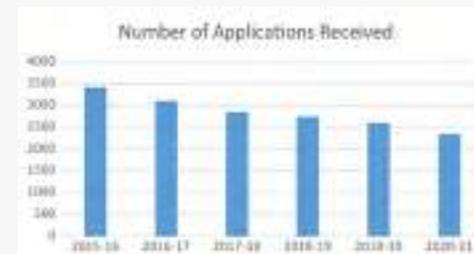
Overview:

Throughout the PPF reporting year, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus on development management performance was primarily related to ensuring business continuity. This was achieved quickly by adapting processes and ensuring that staff were able to continue to work as efficiently as possible primarily from home. Despite the circumstances, the overall performance levels in relation to planning application decision-making timescales in all categories of development have been maintained at a satisfactory level. Planning Processing Agreements (PPAs) were used to project manage cases where delays occurred due to lockdown restrictions and the inability of applicants, agents, consultants and consultees to respond and undertake normal working activities.

The feedback on last year's PPF provided an overall green rating in the decision-making key marker category. Major applications (23.1 average weeks) were faster than the previous year and were faster than the Scottish average of 33.5 weeks. As such a green rating was given. Local (non-householder) applications (9.3 average weeks) were marginally slower than the previous year but they were faster than the Scottish average of 10.9 weeks. An amber rating was given. Householder applications (7.3 average weeks) were marginally slower

than the previous year but were the same as the Scottish average. However, this was faster than the statutory timescales of 8 weeks. As such a green rating was given.

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the [number of planning applications received](#). The total number of applications received and made valid reduced to 2352 compared to the 2602 received and validated the previous year. The numbers per month fluctuated and broadly reflected the various stages of the Covid-19 pandemic with a drop in Spring 2020, greater numbers in Autumn/early Winter 2020 and then a dip again at the start of 2021. However, February and March 2021 showed signs of recovery and this continues.



Over the reporting year, including applications that used a PPA, 2036 planning applications were determined.

Performance in Major applications is reported in more detail in Case Study 2. Only 1 application was determined without the use of a PPA and this application took 10.9 weeks. Last year the overall average weeks (3 Major applications reported) was 23.1 weeks.

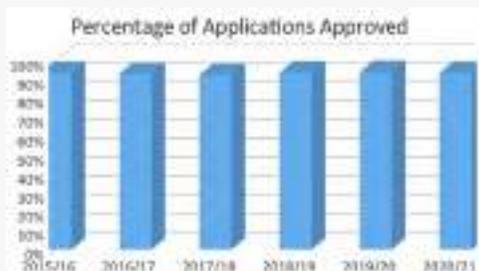
Performance in [Local \(non-householder\) application decision-making](#) has been maintained at a satisfactory level taking account of the circumstances. There has been a marginal percentage drop in performance from last year with 73% of applications determined in less than 2 months compared to 74.5%. This marginal drop is reflected in the average weeks timescales with an increase of 0.7 of a week to 10 weeks compared to last year where a figure of 9.3 weeks was recorded. This 10 weeks figure still remains within the national average weeks timescale of 10.9 weeks recorded for 2019-20.

Performance in [Householder application decision-making](#) has also been maintained at a satisfactory level taking account of the circumstances. Indeed 91% of applications were determined in less than 2 months which is the same percentage as last year. While there is a marginal increase of 0.5 of

a week in average weeks timescales from those recorded last year, this has not caused any significant fall in overall service delivery in the determination of this category of development. At 7.8 average weeks this is only marginally outwith the national average weeks timescale of 7.3 weeks reported in 2019-20 but it remains faster than the statutory timescales of 8 weeks.

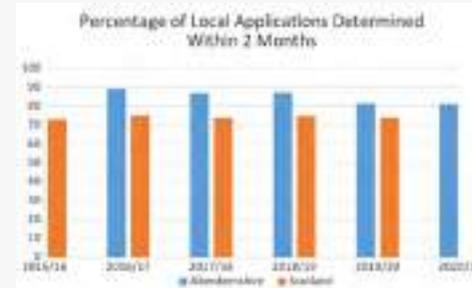
[Rates of approval and delegation](#) continue to remain consistent with 93.9% of applications approved and 91.3% of applications decided through delegated powers. Monitoring of these rates continues in order to provide the Planning and Environment Service with any indicators of change that may result in the need to identify any factors that need to be reviewed or improved. Overall, the effectiveness of processes and collaboration between the Planning and Environment Service and Elected Members continues to provide appropriate levels of outcomes. However, there is a review of the current Scheme of Governance underway to see if there are any improvements that could be made.

Despite the impact of the Covid-19



pandemic, due to the adaptability to working practices undertaken by the Development Management Service and the hard work of

staff under difficult circumstances, which also included some staffing resource issues in some teams, [overall performance](#) has shown a general degree of consistency with only some marginal falls in timescales. There have also been some improvements in various categories of development, for instance, in major developments; local business and industry developments; and other consents (Listed Building and Conservation Area Consents; Advertisements etc.). In terms of all local developments, (excluding those on PPAs) in 2019-20, 82% were decided in less than 2 months, equating to 8.4 average weeks timescales. In 2020-21, 81% of all local development applications (excluding those on PPAs) were decided in less than two months, with the average weeks timescales being 9 weeks.



Note: At the time of preparation – Scottish Government performance statistics for 2019-20 not published.

Goals:

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the main goal was to achieve business continuity but at the same time aim to maintain a satisfactory level of performance in relation to performance indicators

while still seeking quality outcomes and maintaining a quality customer service.

Outcomes:

The figures achieved in relation to the decision-making timescales key marker areas are regarded as positive, particularly taking into account the impact of and the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the circumstances, there has been a satisfactory and consistently high level of performance with only marginal differences from the previous year. As the impacts and challenges of the pandemic hopefully begin to ease over the next reporting year, the aim will be to build on the performance levels achieved with the objective of aiding overall recovery.

Name of key officer

Neil C Stewart – Team Manager



Council Housing Johnshaven

Case Study 2.

Aberdeenshire Council Planning Performance

– Major Applications 2020–21

Location and Dates:

Aberdeenshire Council,
April 2020 – March 2021

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of outcomes
- Quality of service and engagement
- Governance

Key Markers:

1 – Decision-Making
12 – Corporate working across Services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Planning Applications
- Interdisciplinary Working
- Collaborative Working
- Performance Monitoring
- Process Improvement
- Project Management

Stakeholders Involved:

- General Public
- Local Developers
- Key Agencies
- Planning Committee
- Authority Planning Staff
- Authority Other Staff

Overview:

Case Study 1 focusses on Aberdeenshire Council's overall performance primarily on local and other development types. Previous PPFs have reiterated a commitment to improve the timescales for determining Major planning applications. This included working with Legal colleagues on S75 Legal Agreement processes, use of Planning Processing Agreements to foster a more project management approach, and reviewing Pre-application (Majors) and Masterplan processes. Some of these projects remain on-going.

The Scottish Government Statistics (Part 5 of this PPF) provides details of the number of Major applications determined in the reporting year but excludes those that were the subject

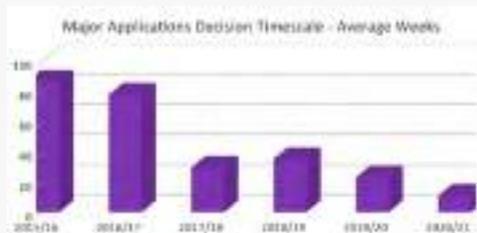
of Planning Processing Agreements (PPAs). PPAs are promoted for all Major applications. As such the figure shows that only 1 out of 7 Major applications was determined without the use of a PPA with the timescale for decision being recorded for that application being [10.9 weeks](#). While recognising that this is only one application, for the purposes of statistical recording, it nevertheless represents an improvement of 12.2 weeks compared to that achieved last year (23.1 average weeks for 3 Major applications). While the National figure for Major applications for this year is not available the 10.9 figure is quicker than the National figure of 33.5 average weeks reported last year.

As mentioned above, for the purposes of this Case Study it should be noted that a total

of 7 [Major applications](#) were determined in the reporting year with 6 the subject of PPAs. Of those that used a PPA, 5 applications were determined within their agreed PPA timescales. The 1 application which was not determined within the agreed PPA timescale was a complex legacy case for a golf course at Menie Estate, Balmedie ([APP/2015/2823](#)) which was also related to other complex development proposals at the location and where a PPA had been in place up until 2018. It was not possible to agree an extension of the PPA after that time.

Only 1 application that was not the subject of a PPA was determined ([APP/2020/1151](#)) and this was determined in 10.9 weeks well within the 16 week statutory timescale.

Area	Officer	Reference	App Type	SG Code	Valid	Decision	Issued	Stat Exp	PPA Date	PPA Met?
F	GS	APP/2015/2823	FPPM	10A	07/09/2015	APP	16/10/2020	06/01/2016	30/04/2018	No
KM	NMI	APP/2018/0829	FPPM	03A	17/04/2018	APP	15/09/2020	16/08/2018	18/09/2020	Yes
KM	JAI	APP/2019/2255	FPPM	03A	07/10/2019	APP	17/12/2020	06/02/2020	05/02/2021	Yes
G	IM	APP/2020/1673	FPPM	06A	04/09/2020	APP	24/02/2021	03/01/2021	26/02/2021	Yes
B	ETI	APP/2019/2723	FPPM	02A	29/11/2019	REF	19/05/2020	28/03/2020	18/06/2020	Yes
F	JTI	APP/2020/0171	FPPM	03A	10/02/2020	REF	02/07/2020	09/06/2020	31/10/2020	Yes
KM	JAI	APP/2020/1151	FPPM	04A	30/06/2020	APP	14/09/2020	29/10/2020		



The use of PPAs is promoted for all major applications and the use of these has proved useful as a project management tool in the 5 other applications, where they were all subsequently determined within their agreed PPA timescales.

Summary breakdown of all Major Applications is below:

- 7 – total number issued during the reporting period
- 6 – number project managed with use of a PPA
- 5 – number issued within the agreed PPA timescale
- 1 – number issued with no PPA (within 4 months statutory timescale)

Goals:

The Planning and Environment Service continues to try to demonstrate a commitment to maintaining and improving performance in the quantitative and qualitative elements of the assessment and determination of Major planning applications through the use of project management tools, collaborative working, and improving pre-application discussions.

Outcomes:

The use of PPAs, as a project management tool, for all major applications continues to be promoted. The evidence this year shows that 5 out of the 6 applications in this category, which had a PPA met their agreed PPA timescale. One other application that did not have a PPA was determined expeditiously (10.9 weeks) and well within the statutory 16 week period.

Name of key officer

Neil C Stewart - Team Manager



Carmelite Close Banff

Case Study 3.

Aberdeenshire Architectural and Landscape Design Awards 2020

Location and Dates:

Virtual. Launch of online showcase
31 March 2021

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of outcomes
- Quality of service and engagement
- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

12 – Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Design
- Conservation
- Regeneration
- Environment
- Project Management
- Collaborative Working

Stakeholders Involved:

- General Public
- Local Developers
- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

[The Awards](#) process has been significantly adapted in response to the Covid-19 restrictions, with the judging process and showcase of finalists and award winners all



taking place online, to enable the Awards to continue and the efforts of applicants to be recognised and celebrated.

Goals:

The biennial Awards Scheme is designed to be a cost-effective means of obtaining a benchmark for the quality of recent development, the effectiveness of policies and the development management process. It is an excellent means of stimulating greater awareness of good design and

promoting excellence and innovation. The aim was to continue with the scheme despite the Covid restrictions in place.

Outcomes:

The need to deliver online required creative thinking and an adaption by all involved. The resulting online showcase is an excellent resource for future customers and all those working in planning.

The move online allowed more time for input by the judges and the involvement of the HRH Prince Charles, The Duke of Rothesay in the launch of the awards, something which would have been highly unlikely in

a face-to-face ceremony event. This helped increase the profile of the awards.

The feedback from stakeholders and the lessons learned log from the delivery of the Scheme will be used to inform decisions about any future Awards scheme.

Name of key officer

Maureen Corley – Planning Manager

Quality of Service & Engagement Case Studies

4. Putting the Customer First - Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Accreditation – Commitment
5. Opening of Businesses – a Cross Service Approach
6. The Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2020 – Delivering Digital Engagement During the Pandemic
7. Redeployment of Information and Research Staff to Grampian Coronavirus (Covid-19) Assistance Hub
8. Joint Development Management and Building Standards Virtual Agents Forum
9. Planning Environment and Development Management Consultation Protocol



Wildflowers Inverurie

Case Study 4.

Putting the Customer first: Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Accreditation – Commitment

Location and Dates:

2018 – 2021. Gained Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Accreditation March 2021.

CSE pre assessment with Auditor: 18th March 2019, Viewmount, Stonehaven

CSE external Audit 18th – 19th March 2021: Virtual assessment

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of service and engagement
- Governance
- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

6 – Continuous improvement

Key Areas of Work:

- Collaborative Working
- Process Improvement
- Development Management Processes
- Community Engagement

Stakeholders Involved:

- General Public
- Hard to Reach Groups
- Local Developers
- Key Agencies
- Planning Committee
- Authority Planning Staff
- Authority Other Staff
- Private Sector Agents

Overview:

This case study follows on from case study 12 (Page 33) of [Planning Performance Framework 2019-2020](#). It relates to the development of the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) service improvement model that has been progressing since the pre audit for Development Management on 18th March 2019.

Development Management were awarded the [Cabinet Office Customer Service Excellence Standard](#) after a 2-day external virtual audit on the 18th and 19th March 2021. The CSE Standard tests the organisation against 57 components with a particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism, staff attitudes and customer insight. To achieve the award Development Management had to provide evidence against the criteria during an independent 2-day assessment. During this period the assessor not only considered the evidence provided, but also spoke with staff in different roles and levels, as well as a range of key customers and stakeholders. The result was to be awarded the standard with 7 out of a possible 11 partial compliances, 3 areas of improvement and 6 areas of good practice.

During the independent assessment key customers noted that, Development Management have improved consultation and engagement over the last year and the

increased interaction and opportunity to input into service improvements at an early stage was welcomed.



The Customer Service Excellence Standard is not only an independent validation of achievement, but also crucially a skills development tool and driver for continuous improvement and culture change – ensuring that the customer is always at the heart of the decision-making process when the Planning and Environment Service proposes change and improvements.

The following areas of good practice were highlighted at audit:

- We have developed good customer insight through conducting a market segmentation of our service and identifying key customer groups. We have involved groups using customer focus groups and other means.

- We have used customer journey mapping and made changes to our [pre-application process](#) as a result. We have involved stakeholders in the re-design of the process. The Assessor was given overall positive feedback about the changes from customers interviewed as part of the assessment.

- We are committed to putting the customer at the forefront of service delivery. This is evidenced by our ongoing commitment to developing Customer Service Excellence across the wider service.

- We showed strong evidence of using customer insight to prioritise service improvement. Examples of this being changes made to the pre-application and major application review processes.

- Stakeholders confirmed that staff were polite and friendly and understood their needs.

- We have made improvements to the information on our website. We have made significant information available about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; step-by-step guidance on the need for planning permission, how to apply for permission and the online payment of fees.

The 7 partial compliances and 3 areas of

Case Study 4.

Putting the Customer first: Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Accreditation – Commitment

improvement will form part of a continuous improvement plan and accreditation to the standard will now evolve into a 3-year period of re-accreditations to ensure that standards remain high and improvements to the service are continually being implemented.

The partial compliances noted that the Customer Satisfaction feedback survey was delayed due to Covid-19 therefore this resulted in less feedback information and data trend analysis compared to previous years. The auditor noted that Covid-19 had delayed the roll out of internal staff development and appraisals. In terms of digital information, the live chat function recently implemented on the corporate website, needs to be developed to fulfil its potential as an effective channel of communication. The auditor recommended further analysis on website usage to ensure any content changes are being accessed effectively. It was also noted that systems could be improved to log informal feedback and further narrative could be provided on performance statistics.

Goals:

To use the Customer Service Excellence Standard not only as an independent validation of achievement, but also as a skills development tool and driver for continuous improvement and culture change – ensuring that the customer is always at

the heart of the decision-making process when the Development Management Service considers changes and service improvements.

Outcomes:

The Customer Service Excellence Standard has led to the adoption of a continuous improvement plan which will be monitored and accredited each year along with the other set criteria within the assessment.

The adoption of an annual [Customer Consultation Strategy](#) has set out an annual framework as to who and when we consult and most importantly, how we use the feedback to drive customer focussed service improvements.

The CSE re-certification assessment has been scheduled for March 2022 therefore further work continues to ensure all the criteria will be met and re-accreditation achieved.

Name of key officer

Kathleen Fraser – Project Officer



Rothienorman

Case Study 5.

Opening of Businesses – a Cross Service Approach

Location and Dates:

Digital Platform – June 2020- to present

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of service and engagement

Key Markers:

3 – Early collaboration with applicants and consultees

12 – Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Economic Development
- Community Engagement
- Collaborative Working

Stakeholders Involved:

- Business Community
- General Public
- Authority Planning Staff
- Authority Other Staff

Overview:

As lockdown restrictions started to lift in May 2020, it was realised there was an urgency for businesses to get up and running again, especially those wishing to focus on outdoor facilities/adaptions of outdoor space to phase in their operations. There are various regulatory elements for these businesses to navigate, and as 'One Council' we wanted to make that process



as streamlined and stress-free as possible to assist those businesses in re-opening as soon as possible.

To enable this, a cross-service Infrastructure Strategic Group was set up with the Planning and Environment Service taking the initial lead and it is still in operation.

This was known as the Opening of Business Group. The remit of the Group is to enable businesses wishing to re-open within Aberdeenshire to seek assistance, find relevant information and direct their enquiries to one space in order to receive a 'One Council' response. The Group consists of all the necessary services within Infrastructure Services: (Economic Development, Licencing, Environmental Health and Trading Standards, Planning, Building Standards, Transportation, Roads & Landscape) and other relevant Council Services, including Legal Services, Property/ Estates and Area Managers where appropriate.

The mechanics of the group had to be set up; [terms of reference agreed](#), administrative support process maps created and staff guidance rolled out. [Elected members were briefed](#), and a wide range of promotion and communication was sent out. A dedicated e-mail address, webpage and online form were created:

- The 'One Stop' mailbox where all enquiries can be deposited easinglockdownsupport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
- [A dedicated Web page](#)
- An Online Form [Easing Lockdown Support form](#)

A (Microsoft Teams) digital platform is used to enable a virtual 'round table' meeting space. A digital log tracks each enquiry and invites to meetings are issued dependent on demand. Scope is given to populate templates in advance of the virtual discussion and information is collated into response templates facilitating the 'One Council' response.

Between June and September 2020, a series of 6 cross service [webinars](#) were offered to the business communities to promote the Group and the service on offer and give advice around many of the easing of lockdown requirements in place in addition to information on the various grants and financial assistance available. These webinars attracted a digital audience of around 200 delegates.

An [invite](#) to participate in a Scotland's Town's Partnership webinar – [STP Town Support Webinar: Opening Safely and Managing Shared Spaces](#) (15 July) was accepted and a [presentation](#) on the work of the Group was given.

Case Study 5.

Opening of Businesses – a Cross Service Approach

The creation of the Group and its work was shared in a number of nationwide blogs and also shared by the Scotland Town Partnership along with another 3 case studies on what constituted best practice during the pandemic, thus gaining national recognition.

The Group has been dealing with enquiries strategically, making the process of re-opening as streamlined as possible and reducing timescales on any necessary decision-making processes as far as possible taking into account the exemptions under the temporary Covid Regulations.

An Article appeared on the Council's website to announce the new process: [New streamlined process launched to provide business support](#)

Goals:

The aims of the Opening for Business Group encompass and expand the wider aims and goals of the Planning and Environment Service with regards to widening its role in engagement with its business communities and increasing collaborative and cross service working to achieve joint outcomes as a 'One Council' approach.

Overall the general aims of the Group incorporate the ethos of the Planning

and Environment Service as part of the 'One Council' approach and reflecting the relevant [Council Priorities](#) of Health & Wellbeing, Infrastructure, Resilient Communities and Economy & Enterprise.

Aims of the Group:

- Strategic Focus
- Collaborative Approach
- Multi Service Assessment
- One Submission – One Space – One Response
- Streamlined – quick decision-making – pragmatic – flexible

Outcomes:

Outcomes have enabled businesses within Aberdeenshire to:

- seek assistance
- get easy access to advice and information
- make contact and speak to relevant Council Officers
- direct enquiries to one single email address
- receive a 'One Council' response

As such this service has enabled businesses to re-open, adapt and prepare for the easing of lockdown conditions. In some instances, new businesses have been able to start up either as temporary ventures to address changes in behaviours (mobile businesses and home-based ventures),

while opportunities to diversify have also been enabled.

The proactive response by the Council to the business community needs coming out of lockdown, reflects the adaptive culture that has been quickly adopted by the Council and its Services to respond to new and challenging situations which have resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. The transition to a virtual platform to assist businesses is reflective of the digital advancements now embedded in Council ways of working and in particular the wholly digital approach that has already been embedded in the Planning and Environment Service for a considerable period of time. In addition, the collaborative approach already operated by the Planning and Environment Service through their pre-application process was instrumental in influencing the setting up and operation of the Group.

Going forward, the advantages of the collaborative and virtual approach to engaging with businesses in their time of need, the ability for them to seek advice, information and a quick and streamlined response have been recognised both by the business community and by the Council. Consistency and certainty in receiving a quick and comprehensive response benefits the businesses. A

collaborative and digital approach benefits the Services of the Council to provide a streamlined and valuable response.

It is the aim to retain and expand this type of engagement to serve other customer needs within other Services of the Council. Within the Planning and Environment Service the transition of its pre-application processes to this type of platform is a next step in enhancing the front loading of the planning process.

Councillor Peter Argyle, chair of Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee, said: *"We hope that in setting up this group we make this process as streamlined and as stress-free as possible to assist all businesses to open up as soon as possible."*

"Hopefully, the information detailed within the portal and through the webinars will be of direct benefit to the businesses seeking to re-open."

Case Study 5.

Opening of Businesses – a Cross Service Approach

Vice-chair, Councillor John Cox, added:

“This is an extremely difficult and traumatic time for businesses within the hospitality and tourism industries in particular.”

“This new joint way of working will speed up the decision-making process and will give businesses the opportunity to engage with council services and seek additional advice and information.”

[News Release – June 2020](#)

Name of key officer

Mairi Stewart – Planning Manager



Bennachie Centre

Case Study 6.

The Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2020 – Delivering Digital Engagement During a Pandemic

Location and Dates:

Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan Area
25 May to 31 July 2020

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of service and engagement
- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

7 – Local Development Plan – less than 5 years since adoption

8 – Development Plan Scheme next LDP – on course for adoption within 5-year cycle and project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale

13 – Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities

Key Areas of Work:

- Local Development Plan & Supplementary Guidance
- Community Engagement

Stakeholders Involved:

- General Public
- Hard to reach groups
- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

On 5 March 2020 Aberdeenshire Council agreed to approve the [Proposed Aberdeenshire Local development Plan](#)

(PLDP) as “the settled view of the Council”, and subsequently, on 12 March 2020, a [Development Plan Scheme \(DPS\)](#) was agreed that outlined the ways in which engagement on the PLDP would be undertaken. Following the UK entering into strict ‘lockdown’ on 23 March 2020 to control the transmission of Covid-19, on 3 April 2020 the Scottish Chief Planner issued a letter which stressed the importance of ensuring the planning system continued to function as far as reasonably practical during the pandemic.

This was interpreted as clear direction that Aberdeenshire Council should progress with the PLDP consultation, particularly given that the planning system would be at the forefront of supporting economic recovery post-pandemic. The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 came into effect on 7 April 2020 and provided a legislative framework by which the Council could pursue a consultation that would be primarily focused on digital means of engagement. The emergency legislation meant the PLDP would be available for inspection solely by electronic means. Officers presented a revised DPS to Elected Members on 14 May 2020 which promoted innovative ways of engaging online. The PLDP was subsequently published on 25 May 2020. Innovative provisions put in place resulted in publication of the PLDP being delayed by only 4-weeks.

A dedicated online webpage was created to act as a “one stop shop” for the consultation where the PLDP and all supporting documents were made available to view. The digital offering included:

- A virtual drop-in ‘room’, designed to look like a public hall, was created in lieu of face-to-face events. This interactive web-based tool was developed in partnership with AECOM and offered a like for like replacement for 9 drop-in events previously programmed.
- An interactive ‘story map’ version of the PLDP to enable users to view detailed boundaries of proposed allocations.

- Activities created for young people.
- Resources were provided for communities to share within their own local networks.
- Three short films on the Plan-making process were produced receiving over 3,300 views during the consultation period.

A number of non-digital means of engagement were also promoted such as issuing of neighbour notification letters, press releases and radio interviews undertaken by Officers. Hard copy materials were available and issued upon request with Officers also contactable via telephone.





This carefully selected package of engagement methods ensured there were several ways in which communities and stakeholders could become involved and make their views on the PLDP known.

Goals:

A key aim was to move from engagement traditionally reliant on face-to-face engagement to pursuing largely digital means of engagement, without compromising the level of service customers receive or lessening the quality of engagement undertaken. Ensuring those without access to the internet could continue to engage in the process was also a fundamental consideration. Continuation of the Plan-making process through the Covid-19 pandemic ensured commitment to delivery of a new LDP for the Aberdeenshire area, thus, maintaining our statutory obligation to replace the LDP by 2022.

Outcomes:

An important outcome was to enhance the digital experience of consultees by providing and facilitating opportunities to engage in the Plan-making process. Our online presence was available 24-hours, 7-days a week. Users could access and digest the information available at their leisure. A 'Live Chat' function was made available to allow users to speak directly with a Planning Officer.

The virtual drop-in room contained all the same information that would have been on display at a 'real' event. During the 10-week consultation period our virtual drop-in 'room' received 3,279 individual visitors. By way of comparison 427 people attended 13 drop-in events held for the PLDP consultation in 2015. The reach of our engagement is also seen positively in the number of representations received to the PLDP.

Promotion of online tools removed the need for people to travel, often by car, to be at a public hall at a particular time and date. In addition, feedback received was very positive with one commenting, *"I wish to note that the documentation and access to information for this stage of the LDP process has been excellent – including the 'Virtual Drop In' displays. Thank you for the significant effort you have made to engage the community in an accessible way despite the difficulties presented by Covid-19."*

Interactive tools were created to encourage participation from young people and enhance our digital engagement building upon previous engagement undertaken with schools earlier in the Plan-making process. These resources were distributed to all teachers and uploaded on our website.

Moving to an online consultation meant that hard copies of the PLDP were not required for inspection in public libraries. This saved 165,212 pages from needing to be printed. Going largely paperless also resulted in a significant reduction in waste, given the short life natures of the PLDP as well as other environmental benefits.

Aberdeenshire Council recognised and reacted efficiently and effectively to the challenges imposed as a consequence of Covid-19. The Council took a lead in ensuring provisions could be put in place that were intended to cause the least amount of disruption to the Plan-making process, whilst also providing continuity of service to stakeholders and communities.

The Scottish Government's Transforming Planning showcased the virtual drop-in for its use of innovative digital engagement methods. It has since been included as a case study in the Scottish Government's Digital Strategy published on 26 November 2020. Officers' experience engaging in this way has been shared with other authorities, as well as presentations given to Architecture and Design Scotland, students at the University of Dundee and RTP1 Grampian Chapter.

Name of key officer

Ailsa Anderson – Senior Policy Planner

Case Study 7.

Redeployment of Information and Research Staff to Grampian Coronavirus (Covid-19) Assistance Hub

Location and Dates:

Woodhill House, Aberdeen

May–Oct 2020 full time, Nov 2020 to date part time

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of service and engagement

Key Markers:

12 – Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Skills Sharing
- Other – Data Analysis and Support

Stakeholders Involved:

- Authority Planning Staff
- Authority Other Staff
- Other – External Stakeholders

Overview:

Officers from the Information and Research Team within the Planning and Environment Service were redeployed to urgently assist with the development and monitoring of the [Grampian Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) Assistance Hub \(GCAH\)](#). GCAH was set up in March 2020 involving Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Moray Councils as well as NHS Grampian, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other key agencies.

The purpose of GCAH is to provide information and assistance for residents affected by coronavirus within the Aberdeenshire and wider Grampian area. Specialist support was required from the outset to assist with the associated databases, data analysis and performance monitoring. The work included providing data and analysis on the numbers of people in Grampian added to the 'shielding' list, those requiring weekly food boxes to be delivered, and any other assistance requests such as help to pick up prescriptions, shopping and dog walking. This data was used to ensure that those in need were protected and received the necessary assistance during the coronavirus restrictions. Weekly data figures were also submitted to the Scottish Government as part of the national coronavirus response. The performance and quality assurance of the GCAH call centre was monitored and



a weekly report presented to managers to identify any potential problems.

Goals:

The Planning and Environment Service was able to demonstrate the capability and adaptability of officers to respond to a national emergency beyond the realm of the normal planning work, contributing to the successful Covid-19 pandemic response by Aberdeenshire Council and aligning with the principles of One Aberdeenshire.

Outcomes:

This work is an example of Covid-19 related collaborative working within the Council, linked to the One Aberdeenshire initiative by serving communities and supporting colleagues. Officers were able to both share examples of best practice and build on their strengths, particularly in the use of new software such as the presentation of data using Power Bi dashboards. The new skills that officers have acquired will be valuable to the future analysis and publication of data within the Planning and Environment Service.

Grampian Covid-19 Assistance Hub Civil Contingencies Adviser and Tactical Lead, Mhairi McCowan has stated: "The Aberdeenshire Council Information and Research Team have been pivotal to the success of the Council and the wider Grampian Local Resilience Partnerships

response to the COVID-19 pandemic response. The team were redeployed to assist with the development and monitoring of the Grampian COVID-19 Assistance Hub. The team developed a system to monitor performance and quality assurance, identifying opportunities to further enhance the customer service experience. Their findings helped to identify and monitor demand and need, with the performance reporting being used to assist the Chief Executives and expert advisers of the Grampian Local Resilience Partnership to make data led decisions on the humanitarian response to COVID-19. The Information and Research Team were patient, helpful, articulate and at all times understood the importance that the work they were doing would inform the help which would be delivered to the residents of Aberdeenshire and Grampian as a whole. Their input has been invaluable and I hope the team understand the significant positive impact that their work has had as part of the response – their work has contributed to the development of a model which will have a strong legacy in humanitarian assistance in Grampian and I'm very grateful for all of their support.'

Name of key officer

Sarah Shaw/Mel Greig – Senior Information and Research Officers (job share)

Case Study 8.

Joint Development Management and Building Standards Virtual Agents Forum

Location and Dates:

Virtual platform (Microsoft Teams)
17th November 2020

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of service and engagement
- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

3 - Early collaboration with applicants and consultees
6 - Continuous Improvement – progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments
12 – Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Collaborative Working
- Process Improvement
- Development Management Processes
- Community Engagement

Stakeholders Involved:

- Local Developers
- Agents
- Authority Planning Staff
- Building Standards Staff
- Environment Team Staff

Overview:

As a direct consequence of Covid-19 and as a means of engaging with our agent community we held our annual agents meeting virtually by Microsoft Teams. In previous years attendance at face-to-face meetings has varied and required time away from work for agents. As such, this year our Forum was held virtually allowing agents more freedom to attend and participate in the relevant sections therefore increasing time efficiencies and reducing our carbon footprint with no requirement to commute to a central location.

Goals:

The forum had 2 main goals. Firstly, to demonstrate a commitment to on-going engagement with our agents. This is especially relevant as the Forum was held 8 months into the Covid-19 pandemic where many of our customers had been affected and some business practices had changed. The second, was to seek feedback from our customers on maintaining and adapting our service to operate during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Engaging with our customers and seeking feedback through the virtual agent forum, was an essential element to obtaining the **Customer Service Excellence Standard Accreditation** (see Case Study 4 in Quality of Service and Engagement).

Outcomes:

The outcome of the Forum was a significantly higher attendance and greater level of engagement than in previous years (23 in 2019 compared to 49 in 2020). There was more participation in the engagement process and as customers of the Planning and Environment and Building Standards Services, the agents were asked in advance to contribute to the [agenda](#) and submit any questions. The session focussed on a combination of Planning and Building Standards updates and specific areas of interest to the agents where questions were

tabled in advance and answers were given on the day. There was also an informal discussion on working practices and service provision during Covid-19 and the opportunity to answer further questions from the floor.

Post Forum we followed up with copies of all [presentations](#) and post meeting notes to all agents on our database and sought feedback from those attending.

Name of key officer

Darren Ross – Team Manager



Cruden Bay Golf Course

Case Study 9.

Planning Environment and Development Management Consultation Protocol

Location and Dates:

May 2020 and launched February 2021
(subject to regular review)

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Quality of service and engagement
- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

6 – Continuous improvement – progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments

12 – Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Collaborative Working

Stakeholders Involved:

- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

A project team was set up to look specifically at the relationship between Development Management and the Environment Team (in their capacity as a consultee into the planning process). The project resulted in the production and implementation of a [Planning Environment and Development Management Protocol](#) including an on-going

review process. This Protocol effectively defines the relationship and service expectations between Development Management and the Environment Team across the six administrative areas of Aberdeenshire, to ensure a transparent, timeous, and consistent level of service delivery.

Goals:

The Protocol aims to improve and assist the Planning and Environment Service in the overall goals of delivering; certainty of timescales; process and advice; transparency of decision-making; clear communications; and open engagement (in this instance between teams within the Planning and Environment Service). It aims to ensure the service is able to provide a consistent and transparent level of service across Aberdeenshire. The Protocol is a resource to assist existing and new start staff by defining the relationships, processes, recording and communication expectations between the teams.

Outcomes:

The Protocol now forms part of the Development Management Best Practice Manual and clearly defines the relationship and service standards between Development Management and the Environment Team. This includes criteria for consultation, processes for formal and



Tullo Wind Farm Laurencekirk

surgery consultations, timescales, basis and format of recommendations, recording, general good practice guidance in regards communication and key document templates.

The process of developing the protocol identified variations in the delivery of the service across Aberdeenshire, and it also identified technical and procedural issues and anomalies. Open dialogue with the project team members (taken from all six geographical areas within Aberdeenshire) including Development Management, Environment Team, Administration Support, Team Leaders and Uniform Technical

Support, allowed all the issues to be identified and resolved. This resulted in a process being developed that was more aligned with other consultees, utilised the Uniform system more effectively and ensures consistency in service delivery across the six areas. The Protocol further results in a more transparent decision-making process, more effective monitoring and management of team workloads and provides a training aid to assist existing staff and new starts, within the respective teams. It also has a built-in mechanism for review.

Name of key officer

Craig Stewart – Environment Team Leader

Governance Case Studies

- 10. Corporate Implementation of Virtual Committee Meetings
- 11. Extension of Permitted Development Rights – Working Group

Westhill in Winter



Case Study 10.

Corporate Implementation of Virtual Committee Meetings

Location and Dates:

Corporate Implementation of Virtual Committee Meetings

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Governance
- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

1 – Decision-making – authorities demonstrating continuous evidence of reducing average timescales for all development types

6 – Continuous improvements – show progress on service improvement commitments

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Planning Applications
- Interdisciplinary Working
- Collaborative Working
- Process Improvement
- Online Systems

Stakeholders Involved:

- General Public
- Hard to Reach Groups
- Local Developers
- Planning Committee
- Authority Planning Staff
- Authority Other Staff

Overview:

The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions prevented physical face-to-face Committee meetings taking place as they did previously. This created a challenge for the Council, and for the Planning and Environment Service to find ways to adapt and to continue to determine planning applications and consider other planning matters, that required the decision of a Committee under the Council's Scheme of Governance whilst maintaining transparent processes and meeting appropriate timescales for determination.

The Council already had some processes in place to allow for online meetings with attendance for staff, and this was able to be adapted and implemented quickly to support all meetings, including moving over to electronic agendas.

Significant time was spent at the outset of the pandemic to develop robust procedures to run [virtual meetings](#), and guidance was developed for Councillors, Chairpersons, Committee Officers, and for the Officers running the live streaming to ensure that a standard and consistent approach was taken for all meetings across the Council.

Committees have been taking place virtually, with the presenting Planning Officer dialling in to present the content of planning applications (and any other planning report)

via a live stream PowerPoint presentation whilst discussing the key issues and answering any questions Members raise.

Requests to address the Committee, by applicants/agents/consultees and third party contributors such as objectors and Community Councils, were also developed and they can be invited to the live call and given the opportunity to speak and answer questions raised. Anyone external to the Council who has made a request to address the Committee is issued with [guidance](#) on how to participate in the meeting, as well as the procedures for hearing planning applications. Committee Officers always offer a run through of the process and short test prior to the meeting to minimise the risk of issues arising on the day.

Goals:

This adaptation to Virtual Committee meetings was to allow the Council as a whole, and the Planning and Environment Service, to continue to deliver their key services and functions.

The virtual presentations, including multiple photos of the development site, relevant details of supporting information and all key planning drawings, has allowed decisions to be made on the vast majority of applications, with only a small number being deferred for further information or indeed, on a rare occasion, a Committee site visit. The goal

was to allow the Planning and Environment Service to continue to deliver planning application and other planning matter decisions in a timely and transparent manner and avoid delays with potential knock-on effects to the wider construction industry.

Outcomes:

The development and implementation of the Virtual Committee Meeting format has provided a robust response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has allowed business continuity for the Council as a whole, and the Planning and Environment Service has been able to continue to operate a democratic decision-making process.

Minor occasional issues with technology, including some lag between sound and picture or some Members and other participants having weaker connections than others, have been encountered. Information Technology colleagues are on hand at every meeting to aid the resolution of any significant technical issues.

Virtual Committee Meetings although a direct response to the challenges of the pandemic, have identified the potential for different ways of working moving forward and has offered the opportunity to attend online meetings but still have access to the same level of information and involvement in the key decision-making processes. Members of the Council and staff consider

Case Study 10.

Corporate Implementation of Virtual Committee Meetings

that they have worked well in a technical sense and they have become accustomed to their operation and the necessary disciplines that go with remote working. It is though recognised that there are some drawbacks. They are considered to be efficient and generally effective but lacking a level of human interaction which in a Committee format is often essential to gauge reactions and views. Moving forward these “human negatives” need to be considered against the “electronic efficiencies”.

Councillor Peter Argyle, Deputy Leader of the Council and Chair of Aberdeenshire Council’s Infrastructure Services Committee and Member of the Marr Area Committee has said in relation to dealing with planning applications: *“On the positive side the technology has overwhelmingly been effective; there are occasional glitches and I know some individual members have had challenges from time to time but generally*

the technology has done what is expected and required of it. The presentations have been clear – it is perhaps easier seeing slides on a computer screen than in a village hall. Virtual meetings are working well and are an effective way of dealing with the business of the committee.”

“Presentations from planning colleagues have been good and of the usual high standard. The lack of a requirement to travel clearly adds to the efficiency of the process. We have had sufficient information and detail to not require committee site visits.”

Name of key officer

Neil Mair – Senior Planner



Aboyne

Case Study 11.

Extension of Permitted Development Rights – Working Group

Location and Dates:

Jan 2021 – present

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Governance

Key Markers:

12 – Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit

13 – Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Collaborative Working
- Project Management

Stakeholders Involved:

- Key Agencies
- Authority Planning Staff
- Other Authority Staff

Overview:

Following the publication of the amendments to the Town and Country Planning (GPDO and Use Classes) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020, the Planning and Environment Service established a working group to consider the implications of the Order and ensure that appropriate processes and procedures were in place for the introduction of the Order in April 2021. The project team used a project management approach to ensure



a system was operational and there was template compliance for the new classes requiring prior notification within Idox Uniform. There was also liaison with the Scottish Government in association with other Planning Authorities to ensure mechanisms for submission and appropriate guidance was in place prior to the 1st April date. The

Project Team worked with internal consultees and stakeholders to ensure appropriate consultation processes were in place and that staff had a general understanding of the new regulations. Briefing notes were issued to relevant stakeholders to make them aware of the changes introduced through the new Permitted Development Rights (PDR).

In anticipation of further forthcoming changes to PDR this group is now well placed to ensure any further changes can quickly be considered and implemented in respect of any new processes or procedures required.

Case Study 11.

Extension of Permitted Development Rights – Working Group

Goals:

Due to the permitted development rights introducing new types of development not normally associated with the prior notification process the Planning and Environment Service and its internal consultees needed to ensure that it was set up to process and appropriately assess prior notifications within the limited timescales available.

The goals of the project were:

- Adapt existing processes and procedures to the new regulations
- Ensure consultee awareness
- Liaise with other planning authorities to provide consistency of approach
- Engage with the Scottish Government
- Provide guidance and updates to key stakeholders.

Outcomes:

The Planning and Environment Service has now tested the Uniform set up with live cases and have produced draft [internal guidance](#) on the handling of new classes of development subject to prior notifications. There is a plan to introduce applicant's guidance in due course following the submission of further notifications. Key consultees are aware of the changes and scope of the PDR changes and were involved in establishing a proportionate process building on existing working groups.

"Due to the restrictive timescales and limited nature of considerations under the process we worked with the Planning Services project team to understand the scope of Environmental Health considerations and the need for timely responses, for instance where a proposal raised concerns regarding noise impact. As there was a consistency between the staff involved in the project team discussions and our general Environmental Health/Development Management Working Group we were able to quickly establish and agree a protocol for consultation and input which would work for both Development Management and Environmental Health before the implementation of the regulations."

Lyn Farmer – Senior Environmental Health Officer

By discussing matters resulting from the implementation of the legislation with other Planning Authorities and the Scottish Government we believe we will ensure greater consistency and clarity over how to deal with the new development types subject to Prior Notifications.

Name of key officer

James Wheater – Senior Planner



Inverurie Town Hall

Culture of Continuous Improvement

Case Studies

12. Pre-Application and Major Application Review – Commitment
13. Planning and Environment Service Staff Training Database
14. Virtual Site Visits
15. Understanding Built Heritage – Training for Members
16. Natural Heritage Update to Development Management Using Microsoft SWAY

Fields near Echt



Case Study 12.

Pre-Application and Major Application Review – Commitment

Location and Dates:

Aberdeenshire- throughout 2020-21 and ongoing

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Culture of continuous improvement
- Governance
- Quality of service and engagement
- Quality of outcomes

Key Markers:

3 - Early collaboration with applicants and consultees on planning applications etc.
 6 - Continuous improvement - show progress/improvements in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators
 12 - Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit
 15 - Developer contributions- clear expectations set out in development plan and in pre-application discussions

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Planning Applications
- Interdisciplinary Working
- Collaborative Working
- Performance Monitoring
- Process Improvement
- Project Management
- Online Systems

Stakeholders Involved:

- Authority Planning Staff
- Developers/Agents
- Authority Other Staff
- Key Agencies

Overview:

This Case Study relates back to Case Study 32 in [PPF 2019-20](#). The review of the pre-application process remains a committed service improvement and demonstrates the continuous approach to improvement the Council aims towards. The remit of the review includes all pre-application work and continues to be undertaken in conjunction with the review of the Master Planning process and the Design Review.

Having previously identified common issues and experiences with the current pre-application service delivery the group has completed the development of an updated and improved pre-application process on Householder and Local Developments that can be integrated with the Uniform system. At the same time, feedback on the new process was provided to agents, consultees and staff prior to the formal roll out of the new Householder and Local Development process in October 2020. Since the launch the process has been the subject of continual monitoring and review during the rest of this PPF reporting period.

A decision on the introduction of a charging structure, remains on hold until the outcome of the Planning (Scotland) Bill and any national revised fee structuring has been clarified.

Goals:

The aims of this project are to eliminate variation between Development Management teams in Aberdeenshire Council in the governance and processing of pre-application enquiries by streamlining the process and providing a clear and concise process map. In doing so, this will provide an improved service to the customer in terms of efficiency and achieve better outcomes on the ground. It also demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvements and quality of service provided.

Outcomes:

During this PPF reporting period, the group has completed and rolled out a new pre-application process (Householder and Local development) which integrates with the Uniform system. As part of the project work, online enquiry [forms of householder](#) and [local development enquiries](#) along with customer and staff guidance have been completed and published in conjunction with updates to the planning information section of the [Council website](#).

The group has continued to work with IT and

other Council Services as the process has been rolled out to continue to promote the implementation of the Uniform consultee module. To date, the Council Roads Development Service has registered as a user of the consultee module and the working group will use this opportunity as a pilot to monitor how the process is working during the next PPF reporting period. The group will continue to work with other Council Services to promote use of the consultation module and we are hopeful that evidence gathered from the Roads Development users will encourage other Council Services to register.

As part of the roll out of the new process, a monitoring and review period has been agreed to seek feedback from agents, consultees and staff, and as part of this review, customer surveys have been attached to each pre-application response issued thus far. In addition, further surveys will be issued to customers, consultees and staff seeking further feedback with comments received feeding into a formal review that the group will undertake in the next PPF reporting period. As part of this review the group will identify key trends/ issues and present a report with findings and recommendations to the Senior

Management team to facilitate discussion

Case Study 12.

Pre-Application and Major Application Review – Commitment

on the format of pre-application service delivery moving forward and how this may impact on potential fee structuring.

The focus during the PPF reporting year, and taking account of Covid-19 priority work, has been on the Householder and Local Development pre-application process. Work though now continues with the review and development of a revised major application enquiry process, in conjunction with the review of the Master Planning process. From initial review, and subject to the outcome of review into the updated Local Development process, it remains the view of the group that the general principles agreed under the remit of this Local Development process can be applied. It is anticipated that engagement with agents, consultees and staff will commence shortly with the expectation that this process and associated guidance will be completed and ready to be rolled out during the next PPF reporting period.

Name of key officer

Chris Ormiston- Team Manager

Neil Stewart- Team Manager



Fraserburgh Harbour

Case Study 13.

Planning and Environment Staff Training Database and Procedure

Location and Dates:

Held on Microsoft Teams.
Launched in November 2020
(subject to regular review)

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Culture of continuous improvement
- Quality of service and engagement

Key Markers:

6 – Continuous Improvement – progress ambitious and relevant service improvements

Key Areas of Work:

- Skills Sharing
- Staff Training

Stakeholders Involved:

- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

A live staff training database resource was developed and introduced to provide the opportunity for all Planning and Environment staff to have readily accessible, up to date and relevant training information to fulfil their role and develop personally. A process to promote, manage, record and share the training was also introduced.

Goals:

The creation of the Training Database aimed to ensure that there was a centralised

training resource accessible for all members of staff. The database aims to provide a one-stop and live training resource that staff can access at any time as part of their personal and professional development. The database aims to also maximise online training opportunities and resources at a time when Covid-19 restrictions have impacted on the ability of staff to travel for face-to-face training.

The development of the Training Database Procedure aimed to ensure that there were mechanisms for identifying and sharing new training opportunities, a process for managing and recording training attended, and a process for feeding back and sharing training information and material from attended training. The Procedure is also aimed at creating an opportunity for individuals to record their own personal training.

Outcomes:

The Training Database has provided a focus for supporting all Planning and Environment staff to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills as part of individual's continuous professional development. Access to training opportunities is now readily available and ensures that training is embedded within the culture of the service. The sharing of online training opportunities has proved to be an efficient model for training delivery

and creation of the associated training procedure has ensured that there is a clear and useable process to maintain, manage and expand training opportunities for all.

Name of key officer

Craig Stewart – Environment Team Leader



Haddo Country Park

Case Study 14.

Virtual Site Visits

Location and Dates:

May/June 2020 and continuing

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Culture of continuous improvement
- Quality of outcomes

Key Markers:

1- Decision Making – continuous reduction of average timescales for all development categories

6- Continuous improvement – progress ambitious and relevant service commitments

Key Areas of Work:

- Development Management Processes
- Planning Applications
- Online Systems
- Process Improvement
- Skills Sharing

Stakeholders Involved:

- Local Developers
- Consultees
- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

Following the introduction of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in early 2020 a process was established known as Virtual Site Visits (VSV's). This was to facilitate the arrangement to undertake site visits with applicants and agents where travel or the

nature of the site did not allow for a physical site visit to take place. Guidance was produced for [Planning Officers](#).

[Additional guidance](#) for applicants and agents on how to undertake a VSV was also produced.

This used a freely available platform which did not require to be downloaded by the third party (Microsoft Teams) and allowed for the recording of the video calls and attendance of consultees. The process has been used to determine over 200 planning applications which would have otherwise been significantly delayed due to an inability to visit a site physically. The process is being reviewed to see if any long-term benefits can be derived from greater use of technology for site visits as Covid-19 restrictions ease.

Goals:

The aim of using virtual site visits was to provide an additional tool during the Covid-19 pandemic which may, if sufficient in the resulting quality of information, allow for determination of simpler applications where a physical site visit could not be made or would have had to be significantly delayed. A live video meeting with the applicant or agent would allow the Planning Officer to view the site in real time with the ability to direct the applicant or agent in terms of what was viewed. In addition to providing



Peterhead Fishermans Memorial

verification of any photographs submitted by the applicant the aim was to allow other internal consultees to join the meeting or access the footage following the meeting. The process also aimed to reduce travel and person to person contact by promoting that applicants undertake the calls wherever possible, particularly where the site was a householder development or similar.

Outcomes:

Whilst it has not been possible to utilise Virtual Site Visits for all proposals (particularly complex or controversial applications) and in some cases technological barriers (poor signal quality, etc) limited its application, the process had been used in over 10% of determined applications (over 200) between the introduction of the process at the start of June 2020 and April 2021. An example of a [Virtual Site Visit is linked here](#).

Case Study 14. Virtual Site Visits

The use of VSV's provided the following benefits:

- ability to determine some applications which may have been significantly delayed due to the need for a physical site visit and Covid-19 restrictions without relying solely on photographs.
- ability to share videos with internal consultees or include consultees on the site visit call to reduce the need for multiple site visits by different consultees.

"I have personally found it helpful in assessing applications to have photographs or a video available via this process. This can often clear up any uncertainties when assessing applications. When assessing we often rely on google maps but the images can be very much outdated, prompting the need to make a reasonable assumption or pencil in a site visit to confirm. I used the video and photographs provided via the VSV for APP/2020/1548. The applicant was seeking to extend the existing building and I was looking to confirm they had fulfilled the parking and access conditions from the original planning application. The video gave me this information in 30 seconds and prevented what would have been a 30-40min round trip to confirm."

Nicola Caira – Roads Officer

- contribution towards reducing carbon emissions and staff time savings over conventional site visits (contributing towards total reduction in 2020/21 of 140,164.4 business miles and carbon footprint by 38.07t CO₂e)
- safeguarding option for any future restrictions which may limit ability to undertake site visits
- adaptive use of virtual site visits by other services (for instance Building Standards Inspections)

Name of key officer

James Wheater/Jane Weir – Senior Planners



Case Study 15.

Understanding Built Heritage – Training for Members

Location and Dates:

Virtual event via Microsoft Teams – 31st March 2021

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

6 - Continuous improvement – progress ambitious and relevant service improvements

Key Areas of Work:

- Conservation
- Other – Members Training
- Skills sharing

Stakeholders Involved:

- Planning Committee
- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

The Environment Team delivered a new Understanding Heritage training page on the Council's intranet. Videos were created covering a range of topics including: Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Historic Assets Management Project and Heritage Led Regeneration. The page also included videos on Climate Change and Retro-fitting provided by Historic Environment Scotland (HES). Councillors were able to view the videos and attend a virtual discussion event on 31st March 2021 where officers and

representatives from HES were available to answer questions. The videos remain available to view in the future.

Goals:

Training was originally identified as a need by Councillors through consultation on the built heritage strategy to engage Councillors on built heritage issues. It had been planned to hold this face to face during 2020, however the Covid-19 restrictions and consultation with Councillors led to an adapted training event online. The goal was to begin a conversation on built heritage issues outside the formal committee forum which could be continued, possibly on an ongoing basis and as new Councillors were elected.

Outcomes:

Around 50 people attended the event and a good discussion took place. The page can now be used as an ongoing resource for Councillors and has been designed to also be suitable for new starts in the Planning and Environment Service as well as other Council Services. We are considering other topics which we may wish to add and are also exploring the option of sharing elements of the page with the public.

Name of key officer

Deborah Conway – Environment Team Leader



Menie

Case Study 16.

Natural Heritage Update to Development Management using Microsoft SWAY

Location and Dates:

Online resource providing quarterly updates throughout 2020

Elements of a High Quality Planning Service this study relates to:

- Culture of continuous improvement

Key Markers:

6 - Continuous improvement – progress ambitious and relevant service improvements

Key Areas of Work:

- Environment
- Skills Sharing
- Online Systems

Stakeholders Involved:

- Authority Planning Staff

Overview:

The Environment Team now provides quarterly updates to Development Management Teams on Natural Heritage issues via [Microsoft SWAY](#). This format was adopted in March 2020 to replace face to face meetings. Following good feedback with the first edition, SWAY updates were then provided quarterly on current natural heritage issues and key topics.

The SWAY format allows for use of images and plans with short text explanations. Topics covered included:

- Consultations to Scottish Forestry
- Tree Surveys
- Swifts
- Hedgehogs
- Bat surveys
- Using data from the Local Records Centre
- Habitat Regulations Guidance
- Barn owls
- Housing layout in relation to existing woodland

Goals:

Sharing information between Development Management and Environment Team (Natural Heritage) was a goal identified in the [Natural Heritage Strategy](#) 2019-2022. This format has been adopted as a way of providing regular easily digestible updates on relevant key issues. The key focus is to ensure planning decisions meet Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan policy on Natural Environment, Enhancement of Biodiversity and Protection of Trees and Woodland whilst contributing to the Council meeting the Biodiversity Duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

Outcomes:

Review of the first SWAY provided in March 2020 suggested that Development Management found the format accessible and useful. In total there were 186 views of the 4 updates with on average 79% of viewers reading to the end of the update. We intend to continue to use this format to update on natural heritage issues.

Name of key officer

Craig Stewart – Environment Team Leader



Blackhall Forest and Clachnaben

Part 2: Supporting Evidence



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

Coastline at Tarlair



All supporting evidence for this Planning Performance Framework has been integrated within the body of the text by use of hyperlinks to relevant documents, website and information.

A variety of resources are at the heart of the work and include:

- Customer feedback and inputs from various events and engagement exercises;
- Testimonials;
- Evidence of collaborative partnership working with internal and external parties;
- Process improvement projects including customer based initiatives;
- Reviews of operational ways of working and supporting staff as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Suite of relevant Council and Service specific documents.

Checklist for Part 1

Qualitative Narrative Case Studies			
Case Study Topics	Issue covered by case study	Case Study Topics	Issue covered by case study
Design	3	Interdisciplinary Working	1, 2, 10, 12
Conservation	3, 15	Collaborative Working	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Regeneration	3	Community Engagement	4, 5, 6, 8
Environment	3, 16	Placemaking	
Greenspace		Charrettes	
Town Centres		Place Standards	
Masterplanning		Performance Monitoring	1, 2, 12
LDP & Supplementary Guidance	6	Process Improvement	2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 14
Housing Supply		Project Management	1, 2, 3, 11, 12
Affordable Housing		Skills Sharing	7, 13, 14, 15, 16
Economic Development	5	Staff Training	13
Enforcement		Online Systems	10, 12, 14, 16
Development Management Processes	1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14	Transport	
Planning Applications	1, 2, 10, 12, 14	Active Travel	
Other: Data Analysis and Support (7) Member Training (15)			

Part 3: Service Improvements 2021-22



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Macduff Harbour

3A. In the Coming Year

Local Development Plan Team

In the coming year we will:

- Respond as quickly as possible to any information requests deriving from the Proposed Local Development Plan (PLDP) examination process to furnish the reporter with accurate and relevant information.
- Review the recommendations arising from the Examination of the PLDP Examination and seek approval from Aberdeenshire Council to adopt the modified Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2022 accordingly.
- Complete the proposed review of Planning Advice in preparation for its adoption with the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2022, including targeted engagement with key stakeholders.
- Review and contribute to responses to be made by Aberdeenshire Council to the National Planning Framework 4 on its publication and passage through the Scottish Parliament.
- Scope the programme for the next Local Development Plan and start developing the process to be used in its preparation starting in 2022.



Rosehearty

In the Coming Year

Environment Planning/Specialist Services Team

In the coming year we will:

- Review and prepare new strategies for the following services – Built Heritage and Outdoor Access, for the period 2021-2024, and prepare the related annual Action Plans for 2021/22.
- Complete implementation of improved process for management of access cases.
- Complete implementation of use of CONFIRM asset management software to improve management and monitoring of Council owned/managed paths, bridges and associated infrastructure.
- Deliver at least 2 specialist training/information sessions to Development Management staff and/or elected members to help raise awareness of the natural and historic environment and access considerations and improve decision making.
- Engage Development Management staff in the preparation of a Conservation Area Appraisal or Management Plan.
- Provide a training session for staff on new approaches to public and community engagement to maximise use of online/virtual resources and social media platforms.



Gourdon Harbour

In the Coming Year

Development Management Team

In the coming year we will:

Local and Major Development Pre-Application Review – undertake monitoring of new Householder and Local Development pre-application process including customer and user group survey work and refine the process as required. In addition and depending on the Scottish Government approach to planning performance and fees, consider further the potential for introducing a fee charging structure for this process. Progress group work towards implementation of the review of the Major Development pre-application process and ensure that there is alignment with the review of the Masterplan process (see below). Benchmarking has been undertaken and initial review suggests that the implementation will follow the principles of the new Householder and Local Development process in terms of systems/Uniform etc. with the potential for additional meetings/workshop discussions with stakeholders.

Review of Masterplan Process – following delays to this project due to the challenges on staff time and resource due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the aim is to recommence work on the project towards implementation. Work that will be undertaken includes significant stakeholder engagement, alignment with the review of the Major Development process and the implementation of the process to coincide with the adoption of the new Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2022.

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) – review the CSE accreditation report and undertake actions to address the areas for improvement identified in line with the CSE criteria and within the timescales for scheduled re-certification assessment in March 2022.

Scheme of Governance Review – undertake a review of the current Scheme of Planning Delegations. This is to align with any changes in legislation but also to consider the potential for any streamlining of processes to improve the efficiency of decision-making timescales but still

maintain transparent and democratic processes.

Extension of Permitted Development Rights – having developed and implemented new processes to deal with the changes brought forward in permitted development rights (digital infrastructure; agricultural and forestry development; peatland restoration; and active travel development) – the group will monitor, review and implement changes if and where appropriate. In addition, the group will be in a position to undertake processes to implement any new amendments to the permitted development rights that come forward in this reporting year.

Review Retention/Publication of Documents Policy – taking account of GDPR, corporate objectives, and Heads of Planning Guidance, progress the review to implementation of changes to the administration of the retention and publication of planning documents policy.

Continuous Improvement Framework – following on from the appointment of a Senior Planner (Continuous Improvement) and the awarding of the CSE Accreditation in early 2021, we will develop a Continuous Improvement Framework during 2021-2022 which will be utilised to provide a structured approach for ongoing continuous improvement in future years. This framework will aim to provide a process, for bottom up and top down improvement suggestions and it will benefit analysis and delivery. It will also ensure alignment of continuous improvement activities with strategic priorities. It is hoped that this framework will help identify and inform our key priorities and commitments in future years.

Average timescales targets – Major applications – 35 weeks – maintain

Average timescales targets – Local applications – 11 weeks – maintain

Average timescales targets – Householder applications – 6 weeks – maintain

In the Coming Year

Development Management Team

Average timescales targets – Other applications – 8 weeks – maintain

E:Planning Online Submissions – target 95%
– increased from 2020-21

Percentage timescales within 2 months – all LD planning applications – 75% – maintain

Percentage timescales within 2 months – non-householder applications – 65% – maintain

Percentage timescales within 2 months – householder applications – 95% – maintain

Processing Agreements – 100% major applications – maintain

Legal Agreements – average weeks target – 32 weeks – maintain

Legacy applications – reduce pre-2015 cases to 0; reduce overall post 2015 cases by 25%; and endeavour to have a minimum of 75% of legacy cases progressing towards determination through the use of project management tools.



3B. Delivery of our Improvement Actions Committed in 2019-20

Local Development Plan Team

Committed Improvements and Actions	Complete?
<p>Seek innovative means of engagement (taking account of Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions) as part of the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2020 consultation. Our consultation methods identified within our Participation Statement will be tested against the principles of SP=EED.</p>	<p>An innovative digital engagement tool was adopted to assure digital consultation on the Proposed Local Development Plan. An analysis of engagement undertaken on the Proposed Local Development was submitted to Scottish Ministers as part of the PLDP examination document, recording success in the use of SP=EED principles throughout all stages of consultation on the formulation of the Proposed Local Development Plan.</p>
<p>Build upon work undertaken during the Pilot Youth Engagement Project and highlight ways in which young people (primary and secondary pupils) can participate in the Proposed LDP consultation.</p>	<p>As part of the digital engagement tool a specific section was developed to assist home learning within the context of land use planning. Both primary age and secondary age resources were provided, borrowing heavily from the RTPI's Agent Plan It! resources.</p>
<p>Submit the Proposed LDP for Examination following assessment of representations made in respect to the Proposed LDP and subsequent preparation of Schedule 4s.</p>	<p>The Proposed Local Development Plan was submitted for examination on 12 March 2021. Over 1300 submissions were reviewed, resulting in 4954 individual issues to be considered and resulting in 58 Main Issues Reports being presented to assist the Examination.</p>
<p>Undertake a review of planning advice required to support the next Local Development Plan and begin process of preparing these notes for public consultation upon receipt of the Proposed LDP Report of Examination (expected autumn 2021).</p>	<p>A work programme for a multi-disciplinary review of all Planning Advice was initiated and work packages for each of the document reviews produced. Staff have been assigned to complete this task to coincide with the adoption of the Proposed Local Development Plan.</p>

Delivery of our Improvement Actions Committed in 2019-20

Environment Planning/Specialist Services

Committed Improvements and Actions	Percentage Complete
Review and prepare new strategies for the following services – Archaeology, North East of Scotland Biological Records Centre, Rangers, for the period 2021-2024, and prepare the related annual Action Plans for 2021.	100%
Complete implementation of improved process for management of access cases.	50%
Complete implementation of use of CONFIRM asset management software to improve management and monitoring of Council owned/managed paths, bridges and associated infrastructure.	60%
Deliver at least 2 specialist training sessions to Development Management staff and/or elected members to help raise awareness of natural and built heritage and access considerations and improve decision making.	100%
Complete engagement of Development Management staff in the preparation of a Conservation Area Management Plan.	100%
Develop and implement a surgery and consultation protocol between the Environment Team and Development Management Teams to improve response times, quality of the final decision in relation to environment issues and, communication between the Teams.	100%
Provide a training session for staff on new approaches to public and community engagement to maximise use of online/virtual resources and social media platforms.	5%

Delivery of our Improvement Actions Committed in 2019-20

Development Management Team

Committed Improvements and Actions	Status
Implement Site Visit Technology	Complete – see Case Study 14 (Culture of Continuous Improvement) . As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and to ensure business continuity for planning applications, a Virtual Site Visit process using the Microsoft Teams platform was developed and implemented. The operation of this technology continues where appropriate and its benefits and use will be reviewed to see if improvements or adjustments are required.
Local and Major Application Pre-application Review – completion and implementation	Partial Completion – see Case Study 12 (Culture of Continuous Improvement) . During this reporting year there has been the implementation of a new pre-application process for Householder and Local Developments. This has been operating now since October 2020. Review and monitoring of its success continues. Focus has been on this aspect of the pre-application review. Work now though has moved onto the Major Development pre-application review and the general principles and processes developed and implemented for Householder and Local Developments can be applied.
Review of Masterplan Process – conclusion/ implementation	Not Complete – Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which placed added pressure on planning staff and other key stakeholders, work has not progressed as had been anticipated. It is the aim to recommence work on the project in the next reporting year with a view to undertaking significant stakeholder engagement and rolling out the process to coincide with the adoption of the new Aberdeenshire LDP 2022. Some key highlights for progress which have though been achieved are a draft Planning Advice Note which has been prepared and has been subject to an initial round of peer review by staff, and process mapping has been undertaken. The draft note – once finalised – will contain these maps. At the early stages of the project, the group reported an initial draft guidance note and a summary of actions to a Member Officer Working Group (MOWG). Some useful feedback was given by this group of Members which has further influenced the proposed direction of the project.
Customer Service Excellence Accreditation (CSE)	Complete – see Case Study 4 (Quality of Service and Engagement) . After a necessary postponement of the External Audit for this CSE accreditation in early 2020, work continued throughout the reporting year towards a new 2-day External Audit in March 2021. Following the Audit, CSE accreditation was awarded.

Committed Improvements and Actions	Status
Assess and further develop projects for new working practices and processes to address the challenges set by the Covid-19 pandemic and any new changes to legislation and guidance	<p>Complete – evidence of various workstreams that have been developed as a result of addressing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic on the ability to continue to deliver Development Management processes and customer care objectives are contained in various Case Studies throughout this PPF. In this respect, please refer to Case Studies 5 (Opening up Businesses – A Cross-Service Approach) and 8 (Joint Development Management and Building Standards Agents Forum) in Quality of Service and Engagement; Case Studies 10 (Corporate Implementation of Virtual Committee Meetings) and 11 (Extension of Permitted Development Rights- Working Group) in Governance; and Case Study 14 (Virtual Site Visits) in Culture of Continuous Improvement.</p> <p>In addition, there has been an enhancement in the regularity and nature of communications to agents through Agents Briefings that are sent out direct to all Agents on our database and these are also uploaded to the website.</p> <p>For general information about working practices in relation to Covid-19 please also refer to the Introduction and The Response to the Covid19 Pandemic and Business Continuity sections of this PPF.</p>
Average timescales targets – Major applications – 35 weeks	Yes – 10.9 weeks
Average timescales targets – Local applications – 11 weeks	Yes – 9 weeks
Average timescales targets – Householder applications – 6 weeks	No – 7.8 weeks
Average timescales targets – Other applications – 8 weeks	Yes – 7.6 weeks
E:planning Online Submissions – target 90%	Yes – 95% (up by 7.5% on last year)
Percentage timescales within 2 months – all LD planning applications – 75%	Yes – 81%
Percentage timescales within 2 months – householder applications – 95%	No – 91%
Percentage timescales within 2 months – non-householder applications – 65%	Yes – 72%
Processing Agreements – 100% major applications	No – 86% (100% were offered)
Legal Agreements – average weeks target – 32 weeks	Yes – majors – none; locals – 16.4 weeks

Committed Improvements and Actions	Status
<p>Legacy applications – reduce pre-2015 to 0 and overall post 2015 by 50%</p>	<p>No – Pre-2015 – 2; Overall post 2015 – 40</p> <p>We have a continued to focus on reducing the number of legacy applications and despite the difficulties of the last year, 58 legacy applications were cleared within the reporting period. The challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic which included the temporary closure of the land registry on the 24th March 2020 and delays outwith our control due to agents/solicitors being on furlough or uncontactable – have had an impact on our ability to conclude applications and, as a result, the number of legacy applications has increased marginally to 42, nearly half of which are on processing agreements. In relation to our commitment to reduce the number of pre-2015 legacy cases to zero and post 2015 by 50% (down to 19), this has unfortunately not been possible for the reasons set out above.</p>



Delivery of our Improvement Actions Committed in 2020-21

Enforcement Team

Committed Improvement and Actions	Complete
Review of Procedure and Best Practice Notes	<p>Yes</p> <p>All Notice templates have been reviewed and updated in February 2021 to ensure that these are standardised and reflect amendments in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. Together with work to develop the use of Uniform in early 2021 a suite of standard letters has been created to respond to complaints which are permitted development. These clearly explain the regulations and avoid unnecessary site visits and workload for officers.</p> <p>Internal guidance notes for common enforcement complaints have been produced which include “working at home” and “biomass installations”. These have been produced for officer’s use with informal guidance and examples to ensure consistency in approach across Aberdeenshire.</p>
Produce process map for direct action	<p>Yes</p> <p>A Process map was produced in late 2020 for internal use to identify the required stages prior to direct action being taken for cases where an Enforcement Notice has not been complied with. This will ensure a clear and consistent process is followed in the consideration of non-compliance and tendering processes.</p>
Enhance tools for gathering evidence	<p>Continued</p> <p>Site visits were severely restricted during this reporting period and the sharing of equipment and access to offices has not been permitted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Work on this task by the Working Group will recommence when Council offices are reopened for staff and Covid-19 restrictions relaxed.</p>

Committed Improvement and Actions	Complete
Develop use of Uniform System for Enforcement Team	<p>Continued</p> <p>Work to meet this task has been ongoing throughout 2020/2021 to allow implementation of the full use of Uniform for the Enforcement Team which is on target for completion summer 2021. This includes introducing new processes, creation of key tasks, simplified decision reports, introduction of performance indicators for non-breach investigations, and the ongoing reporting of case progress in Uniform.</p> <p>The new process will enable remote monitoring of cases and enhanced use of the Enforcement module. It will also assist officers in their workload management and allows the Service to focus on priorities.</p>
Develop the Planning Enforcement Content on Councils Website	<p>Continued</p> <p>The content of the website has been reviewed. As part of this review, it was decided not to upload guidance on frequently raised issues for public use but to provide the documents as officer guidance only to assist with training and aid consistency in investigating and handling cases. The majority of enforcement complaints are now submitted online. Improving the quality of submission of online complaints is a priority which has been delayed due to IT resources being focused elsewhere with the Covid-19 pandemic. The ability to upload photos and identify the location of the breach on an interactive map will be a new feature on the website to assist customers. The IT work is scheduled to be complete by the end of August 2021.</p>
Monitoring of Conditions on major developments	<p>Continued</p> <p>Developing a new process for monitoring planning conditions has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Advice is awaited from Scottish Government and thereafter the Council will implement the requirements in line with legislation and guidance.</p>
Develop a process for more collaborative working in relation to tackling unauthorised works in Town Centre Conservation Areas.	<p>New Commitment</p> <p>To work collaboratively with colleagues in the Environment and Development Management Teams to address the proliferation of unauthorised works in a number of Town Centre Conservation Areas. A working group will develop a process to enable proactive engagement and prevent further detriment to the Conservation Areas.</p>

Part 4:

National Headline Indicators (NHI)



Aberdeenshire
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Glen Tanar Estate

4A. NHI Key Outcomes

Development Planning

Development Planning	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Local and Strategic Development Planning			
Age of local/strategic development plan(s) at end of reporting period <i>Requirement: less than 5 years</i>	1 Year, 11 months	2 Years, 11 months	3 Years, 11 Months
Will the local/strategic development plan(s) be replaced by their 5th anniversary according to the current development plan scheme?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year?	No	Yes - the 2019 development plan scheme indicated that the Proposed LDP would be submitted for examination in September 2020. Due to delay in publishing the Report of Examination on the Aberdeen City and Shire Proposed Strategic Development Plan, it was anticipated that submission of the Proposed LDP for examination would have been in December 2020.	Yes - the 2020 development plan scheme indicated submission of the Proposed LDP for examination in December 2020. Due to delay in starting the formal consultation on the Proposed LDP, and the scale of submissions received the plan was not submitted for examination until 12 March 2021.
Were development plan scheme engagement / consultation commitments met during the year?	Yes	Yes - all commitments were met, however, due to delay in publishing the Report of Examination on the Aberdeen City and Shire Proposed Strategic Development Plan, publication and consultation on the Proposed LDP was delayed and was anticipated to fall into the 2020/21 period.	Yes - all commitments were met.

Key Outcomes	2019-20		2020-21		Notes
	AHMA	RHMA	AHMA	RHMA	
Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs					
Established Housing Land Supply	32,708 units	12,702 units	33,671 units	12,514 units	Note 1
5 Year Effective Housing Land Supply (units)	10,816 units	3,507 units	10,675 units	3,452 units	Note 1
5 Year Effective Land Supply Total Capacity	28,236 units	6,670 units	27,383 units	6,554 units	Note 1
5 Year Housing Supply Target	7,509 units	3,206 units	7,509 units	3,206 units	Note 1
5 Year Effective Land Supply	7.2 years	5.5 years	7.1 years	5.4 years	Note 1
Housing Approvals	3,219 units		930 units		Note 2
Housing Completions in last 5yrs	5,611 units		5,423 units		Note 3
Marketable Employment Land Supply	281 ha		281 ha		Note 4
Employment take-up during reporting year	3.39 ha		Unavailable		Note 4

Note 1

Housing land supply figures are not available for Aberdeenshire, only for Housing Market Areas (HMAs) as required by the Strategic Development Plan. The Aberdeen HMA includes Aberdeen City.

There is currently 7.1 years' worth of effective housing land in the Aberdeen HMA, demonstrating the generous supply provided by allocations in the Strategic Development Plan and Local Development Plan.

In the Rural HMA there is 5.4 years' worth of effective housing land. The extent of the effective supply in the Rural HMA is primarily limited by low demand in parts of the area which affects the number of units that can reasonably be expected to come forward within 5 years. As a result, only a limited amount of the total land available appears in the five year supply.

Source: Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Housing Land Audit 2020. Figures correct as at 1 January 2020.

Note 2

The number of housing approvals in Aberdeenshire has decreased by 71% since 2019/20. The 2019/20 total was actually higher than usual and included a number of large scale approvals. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected housing approvals this year due to restrictions on building, development projects being put on hold, staff in the development industry being placed on furlough and slower market

conditions. Notably there have been no approvals for housing sites above 100 units this year.

Source: Uniform Housing Approvals April 2020 – March 2021

Note 3

The last 5 year housing completions are for 2015-2019. There were 1,095 housing completions in Aberdeenshire in 2019. Over the last 5 years 53% of units built in Aberdeenshire were in the Aberdeen HMA, 46% in the Rural HMA and 1% in the Aberdeenshire part of the Cairngorms National Park.

Source: Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Housing Land Audit 2020. Figures correct as at 1 January 2020.

Note 4

The marketable employment land supply of 281 ha in Aberdeenshire remains generous with a wide selection of sites available. The Employment Land Audit 2018/19 is the latest currently available. An audit was not carried out for 2019/20 due to staff being redeployed to assist with the Covid-19 response and a figure for the take up of employment land over the past year is not available at present.

Source: Employment Land Audit 2018/19. Figures correct as at 1 April 2019.

4B. NHI Key Outcomes

Development Management

Development Management	2020-21	2019-20
Project Planning		
Percentage and number of applications subject to pre-application advice	353 – 17%	397 – 18%
Percentage and number of major applications subject to processing agreement	6 – 86%	8 – 73%
Decision Making		
Application approval rate	93.9%	94.3%
Delegation rate	91.3%	92.5%
Validation	24%	25%
Decision-making Timescales (weeks)		
Major Developments	10.9	23.1
Local developments (non-householder)	10	9.3
Householder developments	7.8	7.3
Legacy Cases		
Number cleared during reporting period	58*	34
Number remaining	42**	39

*50 cases had a PPA in place, 38 issued within the agreed timescale.

**20 cases have a PPA in place.

In relation to performance, the reasons, factors and influences of any increase or decrease are largely embodied in the

case studies and the information set out throughout this Planning Performance Framework document. In particular, reference should be made to the Case Studies 1 and 2 relating to Aberdeenshire Council Performance on Local and Major Developments (Quality of Outcomes).



4C. NHI Key Outcomes

Enforcement Activity

Development Management:	2020-21	2019-20
Time since enforcement charter published / reviewed <i>Requirement: review every 2 years</i>	June 2021	N/A
Complaints lodged	342	380
Breaches identified	238	193
Cases closed	258	332
Notices served	15	20
Direct Action	0	0
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0	0
Prosecutions	0	0

The figures reveal that the number of complaints lodged has dropped by 10% in the current period as compared to the number reported in 2019-2020. This is most likely as a result of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of the current reporting period and the associated restrictions on movement affecting many sectors of society. The decline may also

be in part attributable to the Planning and Environment Service exercising discretion, as per Scottish Government advice, to allow for temporary breaches of planning control that are reasonable, to allow businesses to operate and enable services to be provided as safely as possible during the easing of lockdown period.

Notwithstanding the overall decline in cases, the summer of 2020 saw a rise in domestic complaints as a result of Covid-19 pandemic related projects during the lockdown period. Many such complaints were permitted developments or involved low key business ventures operating from private residential addresses that did not warrant formal logging but still required officer time in handling and responding.

Due to officers being unable to undertake site visits, tighter screening of complaints was applied to all complaints received to ensure, where possible, that photographs and supporting information was submitted prior to cases being logged. This has assisted significantly in removing those complaints that are not planning breaches from the outset which again has had a resultant depreciating impact on cases lodged. Breaches identified have increased by 23% during this period and out of the total complaints lodged (342), 70% were recorded as breaches which is a rise of 20% compared to last year which again is a reflection on the tighter and more effective screening processes now in place.

The restrictions on site visits have led to cases taking longer to investigate and subsequently conclude and this has had a knock-on effect which is evidenced by less formal action being taken with a 10% reduction in Notices served during this period as compared to the previous year. Cases closed have also decreased by 22% compared to last year's figure which again is a result of officers being unable to conclude cases as readily as in previous years due to travel restrictions. It is expected that as a result of further easing of lockdown over the next year the taking of formal action and cases being concluded will significantly increase as this year has been very much exceptional.

Similar to last year, no prosecutions have been pursued because there have not been any cases that warranted such action and the fact that taking forward prosecutions does not resolve the breach. No cases have incurred direct action. However, the Planning Enforcement Team has compiled a direct-action process to ensure that the various steps involved with the taking of direct action are set out should the need arise.

Part 5: Scottish Government Official Statistics



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

aberdeenshire.gov.uk

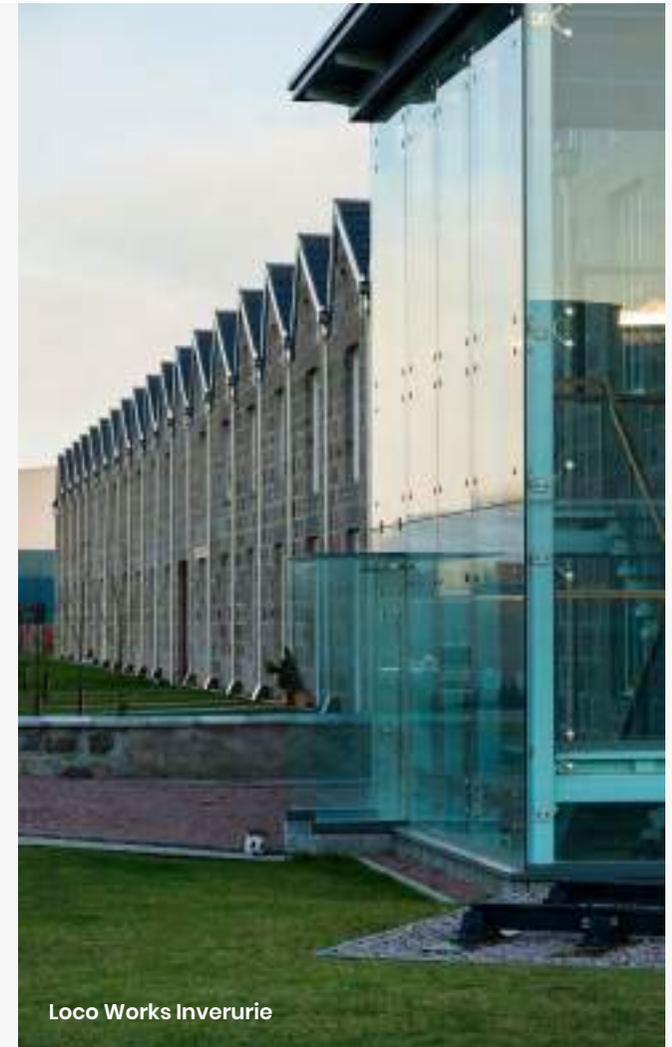


Banff and Macduff

5A. Official Statistics

Decision-making timescales

Timescales	2020-2021	2020-2021	2019-20
Overall			
Major developments	1	10.9 weeks	23.1 weeks
Local developments (non-householder)	677	10 weeks	9.3 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	73%	7.5 weeks	7.3 weeks
• Local: more than 2 months	27%	16.8 weeks	15.3 weeks
Householder developments	602	7.8 weeks	7.3 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	91%	7.2 weeks	6.8 weeks
• Local: more than 2 months	9%	13.9 weeks	12.3 weeks
Housing Developments			
Major	0	-	28.5 weeks
Local housing developments	253	10.7 weeks	9.8 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	67%	7.5 weeks	7.6 weeks
• Local: more than 2 months	33%	17.3 weeks	14.6 weeks
Business and Industry			
Major	1	10.9	-
Local business and industry developments	93	8.6 weeks	9.3 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	82%	7.2 weeks	7.3 weeks
• Local: more than 2 months	18%	14.6 weeks	14.5 weeks
EIA Developments	0	-	37.7 weeks
Other Consents	154	7.6 weeks	8.1 weeks
• Listed Building/Conservation Area Consents	62	7.7 weeks	9.1 weeks
• Advertisements	35	7.0 weeks	7.9 weeks
• Hazardous Substances Consents	0	-	-
• Other Consents and Certificates	57	7.7 weeks	6.3 weeks
Planning/legal agreements	23	16.4 weeks	14.5
• Major: average time	0	-	32.6 weeks
• Local: average time	23	16.4 weeks	14.1 weeks



Loco Works Inverurie

5B. Official Statistics

Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2020-21		2019-20	
		No.	%	No.	%
Local reviews	25	21	84%	25	67.6%
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	21	7	33.3%	7	46.7%



5C. Official Statistics

Context

In relation to these decision-making figures and performance generally, the reasons, factors and influences are embodied in relevant case studies and general text set out in the Planning Performance Framework. The primary influencing factor has been the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on operational working and the development industry as a whole. Despite the difficulties, business continuity has been achieved through developing different ways of working and it is considered that this is demonstrated in figures for decision-making which overall, are considered to be positive, despite the challenges. Any reductions in performance are considered to be marginal.

In relation to appeals it is noted that as a result of the number of planning applications received and therefore subsequently the number of planning application decisions made, there have been 12 less Local Review Body (LRB) decisions this year compared to 2019-20. However, there is a higher percentage rate this year of LRB decisions where the original officer decision has been upheld. Notably the number of appeal decisions from the Scottish Government has increased by 6 but the percentage of appeal decisions through this route which upheld

the original Council/Committee decision was lower by approximately 13%. Committees of the Council that consider and determine planning applications have been able to function in full and have therefore continued to exercise their democratic functions in making planning application decisions.



Loch Skene

Part 6:

Workforce Information



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Harbour Street Cruden Bay

Workforce Information

	Tier 1 Chief Executive	Tier 2 Director	Tier 3 Head of Service	Tier 4 Manager
Relating to the Planning and Environment Service which sits within the Infrastructure Services Directorate	1	1	1	11.8 (Planning Managers/Team Managers and Team Leaders)

Staff Age Profile	Headcount
Under 30	10
30-39	32
40-49	39
50 and over	60

RTPI Chartered Staff	Headcount
Chartered staff	51

NB. Collated information relates to the entire Planning and Environment Service which also includes the E:Planning and Embedded Administration Teams.

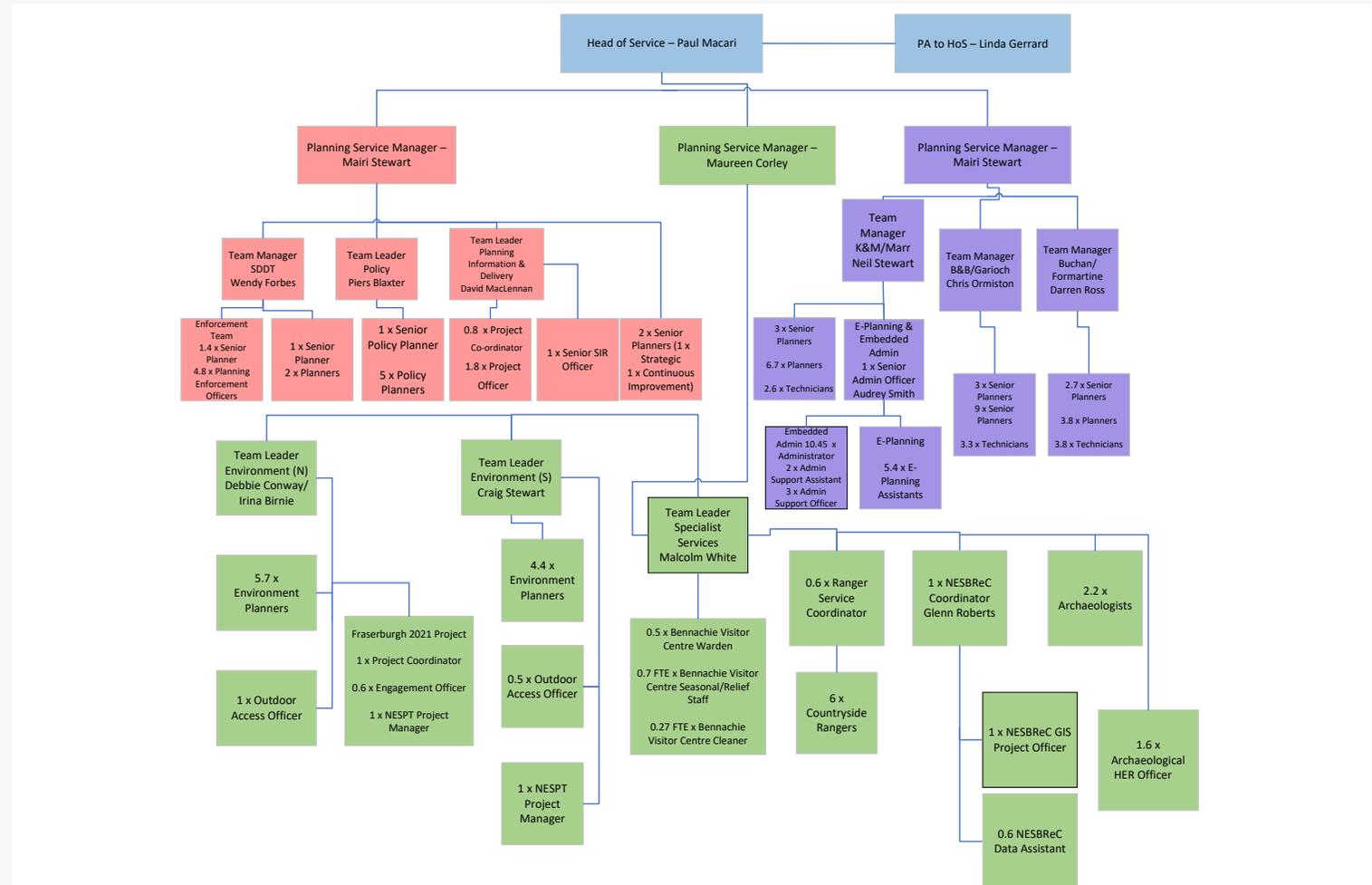


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Organograms

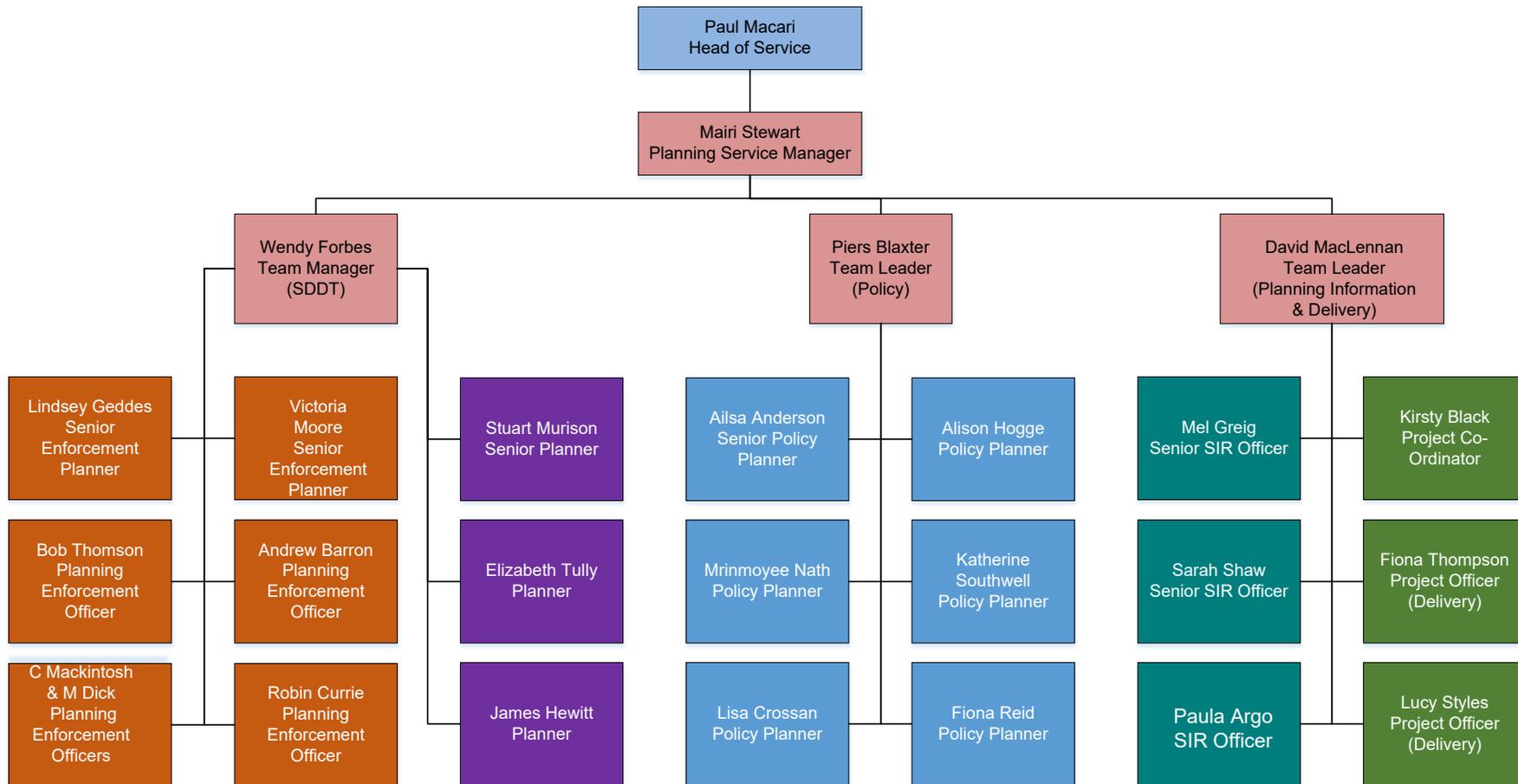
Planning and Environment Service

The staffing structure is as per the Organograms. This covers the Planning and Environment Service and all its constituent parts working under the Director of Infrastructure Services and the Head of Planning and Environment.



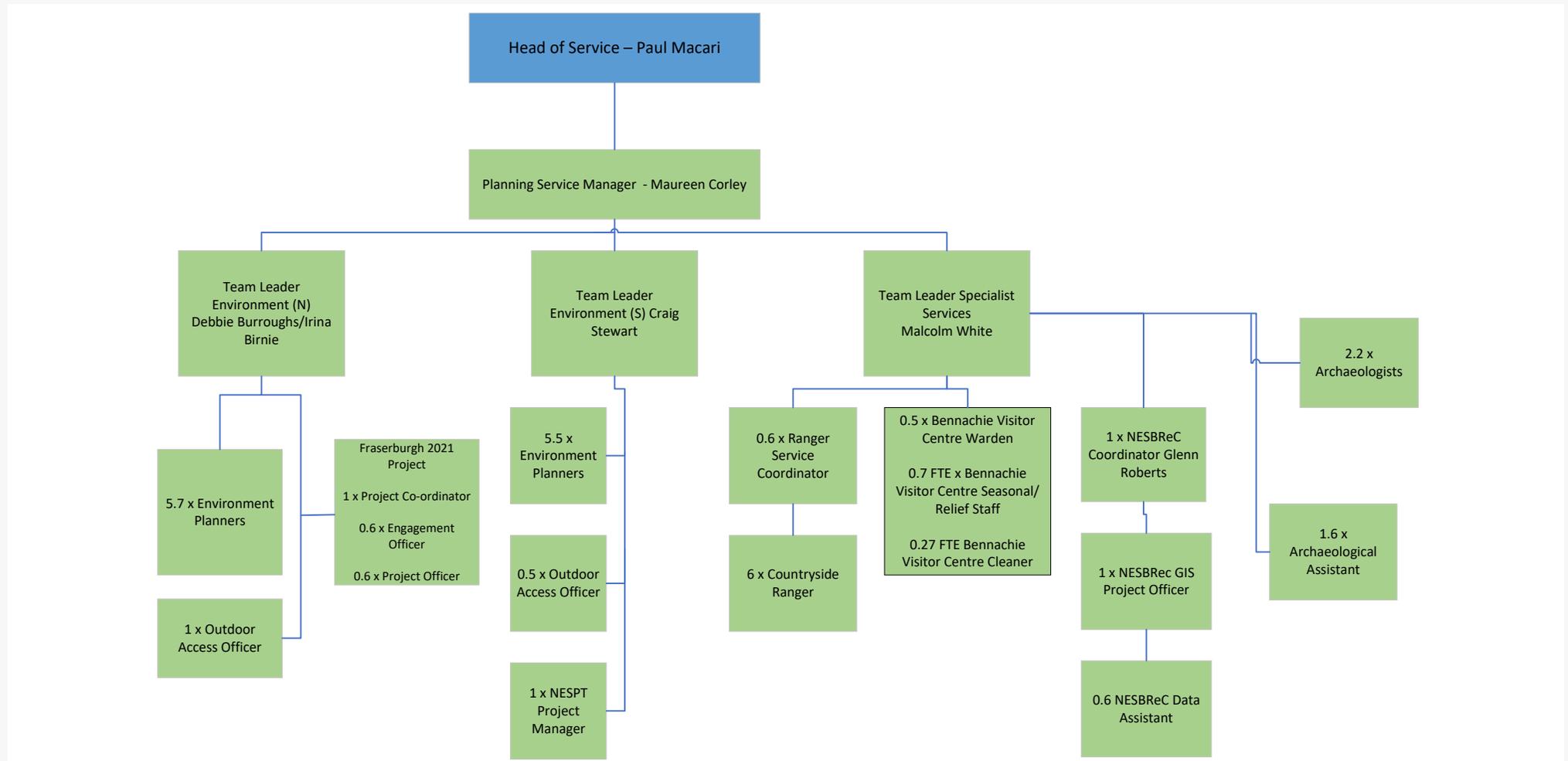
Organograms

SDDT/Enforcement/Policy/PI&D Team



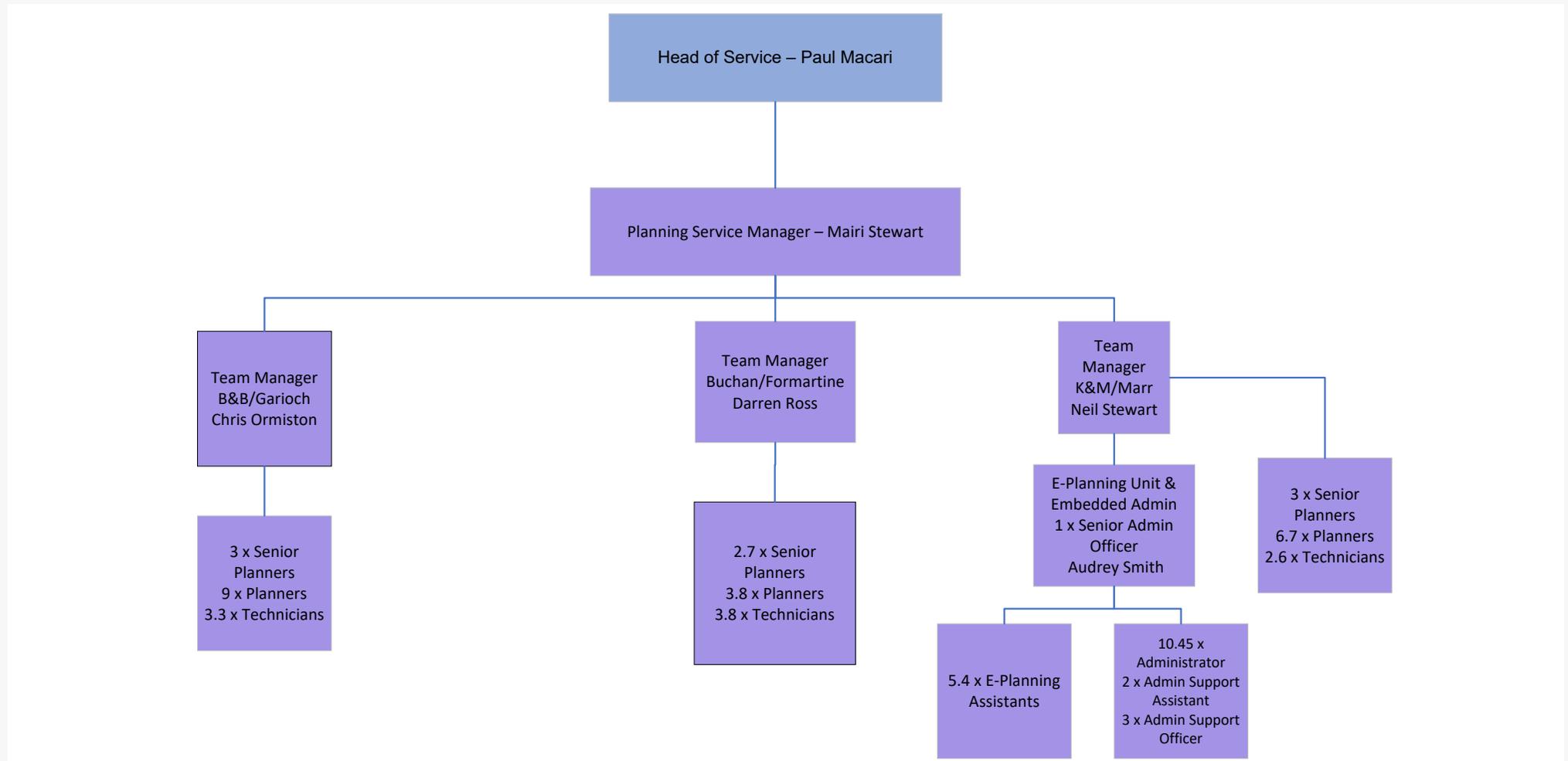
Organograms

Environment Planning – Specialist Services Team



Organograms

Development Management Team



Part 7: Planning Committee Information



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Dunnottar Castle and Coastal Path

Planning Committee Information

Committee & Site Visits	Number per Year
Full Council Meetings*	6
Infrastructure Services Committee**	6
Area Committees***	80
Committee Site Visits****	0
Pre-Determination Hearings (PDH)	0
Local Review Body (LRB)*****	11
LRB Site Visits	0

*Aberdeenshire’s Full Council considers a limited number of planning applications in line with its Scheme of Governance. In the reporting year 3 planning applications were reported to and decided by Full Council.

**Aberdeenshire Council have an Infrastructure Services Committee which deals with matters of policy. Some planning applications considered to be of significance under the Scheme of Governance are considered at this Committee. In the reporting year 11 planning applications were reported to and decided by this Committee.

***Aberdeenshire Council has 6 Area Committees. These deal with area business, including the majority of planning applications that are required to be reported to Committee under the Scheme of Governance.

****Site visits include visits associated with Committee planning applications and Pre-Determination Hearing site visits by Area Committees.

*****This relates to the number of meetings of the LRB. The numbers of applications that were reported to the LRB are reported in Part 5B of this PPF.



Kintore Primary School

Part 8:

Feedback from Customers



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Battle of Harlaw Monument

Feedback from Customers

Complaints & Service Requests

This additional section provides information about the number and type of feedback requests the Planning and Environment Service has received over the reporting year. It also provides information about timescales for responding with the majority responded to within the original prescribed periods. It should be noted that the number of frontline complaints (41) increased from 2019-2020 (38). The number of Service Requests has also increased (342) from 2019-20 (272). Service Requests are not considered to be formal complaints.

In addition, during the reporting period there were 4 complainants who took their cases to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). None of these complaints were upheld by the SPSO.

It is considered that on the basis of the number of planning applications dealt with and the number of workstreams and projects delivered by the Planning and Environment Service, and with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the information provided continues to demonstrate a high level of service to our customers.

	2020-21	2019-21
Complaints	41	38
Service Request	342	272
Compliments	30	30

Complaint Response Times	Responded to Within 20 Days	Responded to Outwith 20 Days
2020-21	32 (78%)	9 (22%)
2019-20	34 (88%)	4 (12%)



Kintore Town Hall

Feedback from Customers

Selection of Compliments

“Just a quick thank you to you and your team for the tremendous work in keeping applications moving forward and communications at this very difficult time.”

“Super-efficient.”

“People often only complain to Councillors. I’d like to say what a fantastic response I had from two outdoor access officers X and Y when I had a query today. Very prompt response and extremely helpful. I know that’s what is expected, but absolutely first-class service especially when most of us are working from home in what aren’t ideal circumstances. Very grateful.”

“I would like to express my thanks for the support given to me during the recent planning application made for the X Hotel. The application came about due to the recent Covid situation. As an unqualified person I made the application myself and was impressed with the level of support given during this process. Although the outcome was not ideal this does not detract from the effort and support shown to me during process. I would particularly like to thank Y for the part she played.”

“Wow, this is so helpful, thank you so much for getting back to me. I will forward this onto the young person I am working with and will catch up with him next week to get his thoughts. I’ll also keep this email for me as a fantastic local resource! I really appreciate your time and all your suggestions.”



From mountain to sea



▶ The Needles Eye, Tarlair

North



◀ Dunnotar Castle, Stonehaven

South



▶ Rattray Head, Peterhead

East



◀ Linn O' Dee, Braemar

West