



Delivering Planning Reform

IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2010/11

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scottish Government Directorate for the Built Environment has requested each of Scotland's Planning Authorities submit an Improvement Plan for service delivery by Spring 2009.
- 1.2 The Highland Council developed a comprehensive Improvement Plan following a Best Value Review of Development Control (now Management) and Building Standards. This is a comprehensive document and a number of the initiatives have been implemented since it was drawn up in August 2006. It was acknowledged that the Best Value Improvement Plan was too lengthy and contained too many initiatives to be successfully implemented in a short period time.
- 1.3 It was therefore agreed that the Working Group distil from this parent plan a limited number of priorities which could be addressed in 2009/10. The further series of initiatives would be identified for implementation in 2010/11 and Improvement Plan would then be developed as a rolling programmed of initiatives and review. A priority of the annual plan is that it is realistic and achievable.
- 1.4 Scottish Government in February 2010, having reviewed Scottish Planning Authorities Improvement Plans offered advice on the direction and presentation of future plans. The Highland Council Plan 2010/11 is based on that advice.

2. The Role of the Organisation in Delivering the Planning Service

- 2.1 The Planning service has a statutory duty to provide a planning policy framework to determine applications for all development to encourage the sustainable growth of our communities providing employment and homes while protecting the distinctive quality environment of the Highlands.
- 2.2 In order to deliver this the Planning Service has four primary statutory functions:
 1. The preparation of Local Plans specifying the Councils planning policies.
 2. The determination of planning applications within that policy framework to ensure the sustainable growth and prosperity of our communities.
 3. To work with partners including community organisations, outside agencies and other Council services in delivering growth and prosperity.
 4. The enforcement of planning controls to protect amenity.
- 2.3 In doing so the Planning service must prioritise its business priorities to focus on this service delivery. These are:
 - a) A more efficient service able to review its local plan base on a consistent and regular five year basis with an improvement in performance in determining planning applications within statutory time limits.
 - b) A more corporate approach with Council services and external agencies to assist the development industry and maximise community benefits through the development process.
 - c) A greater customer focus of openness and honesty to understand the needs

of our communities in delivering growth and prosperity.

- d) The creation of best value in delivering the planning service within an ever-challenging budget.

2.4 It is critical that the Improvement Plan links to the 12 goals in the Service Plan which in turn follows the 6 themes of the Council's Corporate Plan.

They are:

1. To promote an understanding of spatial economic, social and environmental change affecting the Highlands as a basis for effective policy formulation across the Council.
2. To provide an up to date, integrated and sustainable land use (and coastal) planning policy framework for the Highlands at the strategic and area level.
3. To promote the creation of a prosperous, diverse and sustainable economy, giving rise to a range of employment opportunities within national and European frameworks.
4. To work jointly and co-operatively with our public and private sector partners to deliver for the public, the Council and Service.
5. To promote awareness, involvement and action by communities in shaping their future.
6. To promote the development of sustainable policy and practice within both the Service and wider community.
7. To work with others to support and promote sustainable fisheries, forestry, agriculture and tourism industries.
8. To ensure that the design and quality of built development is enhanced over time to fully reflect the wider public interest.
9. To increase awareness, protection and enjoyment of the built and natural heritage.
10. To deliver a programme of environmental improvement and urban regeneration projects that will help sustain our communities.
11. To ensure that services are delivered in a manner which meets the needs and exceeds the expectations of our customers.
12. To value and make best use of our staff and other resources.

2.5 The 2009/10 Improvement Plan was formulated to be implemented by a cross-service team representing all aspects and locations of the service and consisting of senior officers. These officer's priorities have had to be adjusted to accommodate the varying workload and elements of the plan have not been implemented. After consultation with staff it has been decided that the Improvement Plan will be driven by the graduate planners, with advice and guidance from senior staff. This will give

a fresh impetus and ownership of these projects.

3. Performance in Delivering the Improvement Plan 2009/10

- 3.1 It should be acknowledged that the Improvement Plan requires to be a rolling programme and Improvement Projects will be added to it as appropriate, without waiting for formal review or annual update. Similarly, there will be a change in priority for initiatives as new tasks are imposed or as staff leave the Council.
- 3.2 This has proved to be the case with the Plan for 2009/10 and indeed some projects have been dropped. Although there have been a number of projects completed successfully, slow progress has been made on others and they will be given fresh impetus and priority. It should be recognised that significant resources were deflected to the implementation of the secondary legislation to the Planning (etc) Scotland Act 2006 which was introduced in August 2009. Similarly significant staff time and commitment was required for e-planning going live on 23 February 2010. Once the Highland Wide Local Plan has been reported to Committee in August 2010, priority will be give to these elements of the Improvement Plan.
- 3.3 Policies have been approved and implemented on Public Open Space Provision and Housing in the Countryside. Indeed the Policy on Public Open Space was recognised in the Scottish Government/Royal Town Planning Institute Awards 2009/10. Significant work has been done on the Developer Contributions Protocol. The Inverness City Vision has been updated with a report to the City Committee and the Council has sponsored the Inverness Architectural Association Design Awards 2010.
- 3.4 Work on customer survey with focus groups and publishing a half yearly newsletter has not progressed well and this is to be given priority with new owners/authors in Summer 2010. Much work has been done with our Community Councils, briefing them on the new legislation and its procedures and on e-planning.
- 3.5 Excellent work has been done in developing and implementing the Protocol for the Pre-Application Advice for major Development. This was recognised in the Council's Award Scheme and has been short-listed for an award by Homes for Scotland, with an announcement expected in mid-May. Work continues in developing the Major Development Application Monitoring Scheme.
- 3.6 E-planning was introduced in late February and inevitably the e-centre is experiencing challenges as the system beds in staff and customers become familiar with it and it is "rolled" out to all customers. However the number of applications submitted electronically (currently 59.92%) has exceeded all expectations. The Council has been highly complemented by Scottish Government in its development of e-planning as being the only Scottish Council to re-engineer its business processes with a view to efficiency and long term budget saving.
- 3.7 Stakeholder consultations, i.e. those with our technical partners e.g. Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection agency, TECS, Education Culture and Sport and Housing and Property Services, have progressed well.
- 3.8 The Development Plans Team has established a mechanism for sharing supplementary Guidance between North of Scotland Planning Authorities. This allows local authorities to consider commissioning work on joint authority basis thus

rationalising resources and achieving budget savings.

- 3.9 Lastly it is pleasing given the commitment to Secondary Legislation and e-planning that the performance indicators for processing planning applications within the statutory two month period have improved by 6.8% from 53.12% to 59.92%.

4. Areas for Improvement Identified through Customer Feedback

- 4.1 The actions to generate and gather feedback from customers and stakeholders have not been driven or coordinated as was originally scheduled, explained in 3.1-3.8 above.
- 4.2 These are to be prioritised and implemented in the summer of 2010. There is information available from the Highland Council Customer Survey and the Building Standards Balanced Scorecard and the results of these, where relevant, will be integrated to the other customer survey projects.

5. Improvements to be made in the Coming Year

- 5.1 The Improvement Plan for 2010/11 is attached as Appendix 1. It identifies the Theme / Action / Link to Service Plan / Owner / Completion Date / Output or Outcome for each project.

6. Statement on Monitoring

- 6.1 The progress of the Service's Improvement Plan 2009/10 was reported to the Planning Environment and Development (PED) Committee, who in turn approved the Plan for 2010/11. Progress on this Plan will be reported to Committee in May 2011.
- 6.2 Statements on the monitoring of performance in association with our customers, stakeholders and Scottish Government will be reported to the Chief Executive and the Planning Environment and Development committee on a regular basis.
- 6.3 Territorial liaison will be recorded in the Quarterly Review to PED and in the Quarterly Customer Newsletter. These will be forwarded to Scottish Government.