

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE

13 August 2008

Agenda Item	
Report No	

AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
FIRST QUARTERLY REVIEW 2008/09

Report by Director of Planning and Development

SUMMARY

This report advises Members on the delivery of the Development Management, the Building Standards and the Development Plan services for the First quarter of 2008/09 with comparative figures for previous years. The Development Management and Development Plan figures are statutory performance returns to Audit Scotland. The Building Standards returns are no longer statutory but they have proved to be a useful management tool to assess the services' performance.

There has been 5% improvement in performance over the 4th Quarter 2007/08 in Development Management with a 5.5% improvement in responding to applications for building warrant. The "credit crunch" is having an impact on the number of applications submitted with a 17% drop in planning and 21% in building warrants. This has resulted in a fall in income but this remains marginally above budget target.

The report links to the Administration's Corporate Objectives for the Highland Council contained in the Programme for Administration.

"We will continue to pursue best value for our residents and service users, seeking efficiencies in the way we work and we will undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's spending priorities by 2009".

1. Introduction

1.1 Key performance indicator information is reported to Committee every quarter and the out-turn figures for the first quarter of 2008/09 are now available. The figures for the first quarter for the previous three financial years are reproduced for comparison purposes in respect of Development Management and Building Standards.

2. Development Management

- 2.1 The actual number of applications handled and fees received is shown as contextual information. The other tables summarise the results for Development Management in terms of householder applications (proposals to alter or extend existing houses) and for all other types of planning application and give a comparison with the last 3 quarters. The performance for 2008/09 to date is given in comparison to performance for previous years. The Quarter 1 figures for 2008/09 are compared with earlier years.

Development Management Performance: Contextual Information – First Quarter

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Applications	1356	1349	1449	1204
Income (£,000)	512	621	671	656

Percentage of cases dealt with within 2 months (First quarter, last 4 years)

	Target	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Householder	90	76.77	80.54	79.75	70.77
Non-householder	80	41.90	45.65	52.10	43.42
All cases	80	54.51	56.62	60.68	51.86

- 2.2 The number of Planning applications for first quarter 2008/09 has reduced by 245 from first quarter 2007/08, a drop of 16.9%. This is indicative of the impact of the “credit crunch”.
- 2.3 Income from planning applications for the quarter has reduced by £15k, a fall of 5%. It remains above budget over first quarter 2007/08 target however.
- 2.4 The drop in performance in the first quarter compared to previous years is regrettable. However, it is pleasing to note that the performance for the quarter compared to the last quarter has improved by 5%. This is to be welcomed. It is suggested that this appears to be as a result of:
- A continued bulge in workload from late 2007 and early 2008
 - Continual vacancies in certain offices.
 - The impact of staff holidays

It should be noted however, that development management performance tends to fluctuate and further interpretation of this is required.

- 2.5 Committee should be aware that the “credit crunch” is beginning to have an impact on the number of planning applications submitted and the drop in fee income of 15%. This will be monitored carefully during the course of 2008/09.

Percentage of cases dealt with within 2 months (Last 4 quarters)

	Target	Q2 2007/08	Q3 2007/08	Q4 2007/08	Q1 2008/09
Householder	90	82.35	83.61	75.10	70.77
Non-Householder	80	51.96	47.63	37.03	43.42
All cases	80	61.02	59.96	46.84	51.86

Percentage of cases dealt with within 2 months

	Target	Annual 2005/06	Annual 2006/07	Annual 2007/08	Annual 2008/09
Householder	90	76.79	76.31	80.20	70.77
Non-Householder	80	45.30	43.60	47.18	43.42
All cases	80	55.86	54.42	57.12	51.86

3 Building Standards

- 3.1 Contextual information of the number of applications for building warrant and completion certificates and of fee income in the second quarter over the last four years is given in the table below. The second table shows the general improvement in the building standards teams' performance over the last four years while the third compares the performance for the second quarter over the last four years.

Building Standards Performance: contextual information – First quarter figures

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Applications	1327	1171	1234	926
Completion Certs	850	953	941	797
Income (£000)	621	551	833	725

Building Standards Performance Indicators – Annual Performance – Contextual Information

Year	% Warrants responded to in 15 days	% Warrants determined in 6 days	Average days to respond to Completion Certificate (CC)	% CC issued in 3 days
2007/08	35.28	78.88	8.67	92.31
2006/07	57.72	87.58	5.72	94.04
2005/06	49.34	84.43	9.62	91.67
2004/05	40.22	83.89	7.04	91.86
Target	80.00	80.00	n/a	80.00

Performance against targets – First Quarter

	Target	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
%Warrants responded to in 15 days	80	41.89	59.56	47.30	34.85
%Warrants determined within 6 days	80	83.68	88.34	81.83	78.43
Average days to respond to completion cert.	N/A	9.85	9.64	5.13	6.09
% of completion certs issued within 3 days	80	92.11	91.72	91.25	87.93

Performance against targets – Last Four Quarters

	Target	Q2 2007/08	Q3 2007/08	Q4 2007/08	Q1 2008/09
% Warrants responded to in 15 days	80	33.09	32.05	29.74	34.95
% Warrants determined within 6 days	80	78.12	81.70	73.94	78.43
Average days to completion cert.	N/A	7.65	5.72	14.20	6.09
% of completion certs issued within 3 days	80	93.61	94.0	91.52	87.93

- 3.2 There has been a reduction of 21% of applications for building warrant submitted in the first quarter (258) of 2008/09. It is suggested this is a result of the “credit crunch”. It will be interesting to see if this fall continues through the summer and autumn months. The percentage drop in statistical terms may not necessarily reflect changes in the construction industry as in previous recessions people have tended to extend their properties rather than buy new houses.
- 3.3 Income from building warrants has reduced by £108k from the first quarter of 2007/08, a fall of 15%. Again income remains marginally above budget target
- 3.4 It is very pleasing to report a 5.5% improvement in performance in processing building warrants from the previous quarter. Indeed this suggests that performance which was at its lowest in January 2008 has indeed bottomed out and is continually improving.
- 3.5 Further analysis of this shows that the processing time for building warrants has been maintained at five weeks. While this is not what we aspire to, the committee must acknowledge that the effective use of the consultants and the efforts of building standards staff in the circumstances of significant vacancies.

- 3.6 The Building Standards team has responded to the Scottish Building Standards Agency Audit and is currently implementing its Action Plan as its response. A review of the management arrangements for the Building Standards Service has been approved by the Council and is currently being implemented. The Agency are due to visit the Council for a further Audit on 15 August and the results of this will be reported to committee in due course.
- 3.7 In the meantime the team are continuing its to recruit staff to fill vacancies with advertisement of the Fort William Posts in July/August and the Drummie/Dingwall posts in August/September.

4. Development Plans

- 4.1 Work has continued on a number of projects/plans, including the Development Plans scheme, The West Highlands and Islands Local Plan, The Sutherland Local Plan, Drumnadrochit Futures and the Affordable Housing Development Plan Policy Guideline.
- 4.2 Progress has been made with an external consultancy on an assessment of the Council's approach to the generation and management of Developer Contributors. The Development Plans team has also led on the preparation of supplementary planning guidance on the provision, management and maintenance of public open space and this will be reported to committee in due course.
- 4.3 The Information and Research team undertook a major consultation exercise on the Housing Land Audit to allow an analysis of future house building in the current uncertain economic climate. The team provided critical information to allow the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund to be targeted to areas of need. In partnership with Education Culture and Sport, there has been a significant amount of work on school rolls and pupils.
- 4.4 Briefing note 28 on Council Area Population Projections has been published and work has been commissioned from Heriot Watt University into future housing needs in Highland. This will be reported to committee in due course.

5 Vacancies

- 5.1 The Planning, Environment & Development Committee on 19 March 2008 instructed that the Quarterly Review of Planning & Building Standards performance include a record of staff vacancies for that quarter. This is shown in the table below and it can be seen that the service is carrying a significant number of vacancies. This inevitably impacts on the performance and service delivery to our customers. Staff have absorbed this as well as they can and again their efforts must be acknowledged.

Vacancies during 2007/08, by quarter

	2007/08 Q3		2007/08 Q4		2008/09 Q1	
	BS	PL	BS	PL	BS	PL
Professional	6	7	6	6	6	4
Technical				1	2	2
Clerical/Admin	3		4		4.5	
Chief Officer			1		1	
Total	16		18		19.5	

- 5.2 There were a total of 19.5 FTE Vacant Posts in first quarter compared with 18 vacancies in 4th Quarter 2007/08 and 16 vacancies in that years 3rd Quarter. A breakdown of these is shown in the table above. It should be noted that these vacancies occurred during each quarter and did not necessarily extend throughout the quarter.
- 5.3 The Service is currently recruiting to fill the vacancies. This includes Building Standards vacancies in Fort William. The two Building Standards posts in Dingwall/Drummuie will be advertised after the appointment of the Team Leader for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to note the current position in respect of the performance of the Planning and Building Standards functions and to note the improvements in performance but acknowledge the impact of the "credit crunch" on the workload of the service. The output and the efforts of the Policy Team must also be recognised.

Signature:

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Date: 31 July 2008

Reference: RH/EG

Background Papers:

1. Audit Commission Performance indicators Returns for the last 3 years