

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
12 AUGUST 2009**

Agenda Item	
Report No	

**AUDIT SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS  
FIRST QUARTERLY REVIEW 2009/10**

**Report by Director of Planning and Development**

**SUMMARY**

This report advises Members on the delivery of the Development Management, Building Standards and the Development Plan services for the first quarter of 2009/10 with comparative figures for previous years. The Development Management 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.

The number of planning applications and building warrants submitted continues to decline as a result of the national recession. More significantly the fee submissions over the quarter has declined and this must threaten the balance to the budget.

As a result of the continued decline of applications, the backlog of applications has been reduced and performance in development management has improved significantly and steadily in building standards.

The report links to the Administrations corporate objectives of Improving the Highlands.

**1.0 Development Plans**

- 1.1 Local Plan work has concentrated on preparing for the Examination into the West Highland and Islands Local Plan and Sutherland Local Plan. The Reporter for the examination has been appointed and staff have been working closely with the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals to ensure smooth progress across a wide range of outstanding objections.
- 1.2 Work on the Highland wide Local Development Plan and Main Issues Report has continued. A large number of meetings have taken place with Members, our key agency partners, developers and community groups. A Development Plans "Blog" has been set up to detail the work that we have undertaken and this is available to the public through the Council web-site. Staff have also been working closely with Architecture and Design Scotland, and colleagues across the Council on an updated Inverness City Vision. A joint consultation is planned for August of this year

- 1.3 Work has continued on a number of supplementary planning guides on open space provision (approved at the May 2009 PED Committee), housing in the countryside, onshore wind energy and developer contributions for education provision.
- 1.4 Work with Transport Scotland on the A96 Corridor has also been a major piece of work, in collaboration with TEC Services. A number of key questions remain outstanding and we have a project programme for work with Transport Scotland. In particular, issues over phasing and developer contributions remain critical.
- 1.5 Further to an action from the last QPR, we have been working closely with Finance on clarifying the Council's obligations in relation to Developer Contributions. A further report to the Weekly Business Meeting will be tabled at the end of August.
- 1.6 Work has commenced on the online Local Plans part of the e-Planning project and it is anticipated that the system will be operational by June 2010. This project will realise minor savings.
- 1.7 The Information and Research function has continued to contribute to wider corporate and Service evidence base. Staffing has been an issue with the secondment of a post, and two staff being on maternity leave. A great deal of effort has continued on working with Housing and Property on the Housing Demand Assessment, working with ECS on various strategic projects and the monitoring report for the Highland wide Local Development Plan.

## 2.0 Development Management

- 2.1 The 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 2009/10 to date is given in comparison to performance for previous years. The quarter 1 figures for 2009/10 are compared with earlier years.

### Development Management Volumes and Income (Q1)

	2006/07 Q1	2007/08 Q1	2008/09 Q1	2009/10 Q1
Applications	1349	1449	1204	1065
Income (£000)	621	671	655	505

### Percentage of Cases Dealt with Within 2 Months (First Quarter, last 4 years):-

	Target	2006/07 Q1	2007/08 Q1	2008/09 Q1	2009/10 Q1
Householder	90	80.54	79.75	70.77	81.97
Non-householder	80	45.65	52.10	43.42	50.75
All cases	80	56.62	60.68	51.86	61.00

### Percentage of Cases Dealt with Within 2 Months (last 4 Quarters):-

	Target	2008/09 Q2	2008/09 Q3	2008/09 Q4	2009/10 Q1
Householder	90	79.13	71.67	76.98	81.97
Non-householder	80	44.68	45.62	42.50	50.75
All cases	80	54.64	53.71	52.24	61.00

**Percentage of Cases Dealt with Within 2 Months (Annual):-**

	<b>Target</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10 YTD</b>
Householder	90	76.31	80.20	74.41	81.97
Non-householder	80	43.60	47.18	44.08	50.75
All cases	80	54.42	57.12	53.12	61.00

The number of applications submitted in the Quarter was 11.5% fewer than Quarter 1 2008/09 (1065 – 1204). This follows a reduction of 16.9% in applications from 2007/08. Income from planning applications in the first Quarter 2009/10 was £505k compared to £655k for the same period 2008/09, a reduction of £150k i.e. 23%. This follows a 5% fall in income from Quarter 1 in 2007/08. Obviously the recession continues.

- 2.2 It is pleasing to report a distinct improvement in Development Management performance. The Service dealt with 61% of applications within the two month period in the first Quarter of 2009/10 compared with 51.86% in the same Quarter of 2008/09 and 52.24% in Quarter 4 last year. Again this is an improvement on the 53.12% annual return for 2008/09. While this improvement must inevitably be a result of the reduction in the number of applications, staff have worked hard to ease the outstanding bulge in the workload. They have also worked “cross-boundary” to resolve these difficulties particularly in the Inverness/Dingwall offices and credit goes to them for this improvement. Again Skye and Lochaber have improved. The other offices have maintained good performance,
- 2.3 The e-Planning posts have been evaluated and approved through the Vacancy Monitoring Group. Recruitment is about to take place. The site has received a number of applications and payments online with a high number of inquiries or “hits” on the site.
- 2.4 Planning and Legal staff have been focused on the implementation of the secondary legislation to the 2006 Planning Act. Guidance notes, procedure notes and standard letters have all had to be prepared and this has been made more difficult by the Scottish Government concluding Regulations and Circulars at a late stage in the process. The Council’s Scheme of Delegation was approved by Scottish Ministers on 2 July 2009. The Highland Council Local Review Body is to be established and training for its Members is currently being arranged. Staff had three training/awareness days in late July in preparation for the introduction of the Regulations on 3 August. Credit must go to all who have contributed.

### **3.0 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 tables below. The second table shows the 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 quarters.

**Building Standards Volumes and Income (Q1 last 4 years)**

	2006/07 Q1	2007/08 Q1	2008/09 Q1	2009/10 Q1
Warrants Decided	1171	1234	976	801
Compl. Certs	953	941	797	928
Income (£000)	551	833	725	415

**Performance against targets, first quarter**

	Target	2006/07 Q1	2007/08 Q1	2008/09 Q1	2009/10 Q1
% Warrants responded to within 15 days (now 20 days)	80	59.56	47.30	34.85	72.00
% of Warrants determined within 6 days	80	88.34	81.83	78.43	80.39
% Completion Certificates responded to within 10 days	n/a	-	-	-	76.40
% of Completion Certificates issued within 3 days	80	91.72	91.25	87.93	84.30

**Performance against targets, last four quarters**

	Target	2008/09 Q2	2008/09 Q3	2008/09 Q4	2009/10 Q1
% Warrants responded to within 15 days (now 20)	80	32.23	37.76	37.52	72.00
% of Warrants determined within 6 days	80	75.70	81.38	80.97	80.39
Average days to respond to Completion Certificate	n/a	-	-	-	76.40
% of Completion Certificates issued within 3 days	80	86.25	93.57	78.28	84.30

- 3.2 The number of applications determined in the first Quarter 2009/10 has reduced by 17.9% (976 – 891) from the same period 2008/09. This follows a 21% reduction from 2007/08 to 2008/09. The number of completion certificates granted has risen by 16% from Quarter 1 in 2008/09 (797–928). It is suggested that this is because a number of householders/businesses are improving or extending property rather than purchasing new property at a time of difficulty with property sales or mortgage funding. Fee income from building warrants in the first Quarter 2009/10 has reduced by 48.7% i.e. by £310k (from £725k to £415k) from first Quarter 2008/09. Management are continuing to monitor the situation and take action to address this issue including vacancy management.

3.3 Building Standards performance has varied but has generally improved over previous Quarters and years. The performance indicator for responding to warrants has been amended on the recommendation of the Building Standards Division of the Scottish Government to responses to warrant applications in 20 days rather than 15 days. The new indicator reveals that 72% of applications are responded to in 20 days. This will be developed in time. In the meantime it is pleasing to report that in comparison with the previous 15 day indicator there has been an improvement from 34.85% to 50.27%. This reflects the Building Standards general improvement in performance from the difficult times of 2008/09. There is now a much more rigorous assessment of performance indicators as part of the Balanced Scorecard. These will be presented as part of the Quarterly Review as they are developed and meaningful comparisons can be made.

3.4 There have been staffing difficulties in the Dingwall office but these have been addressed with cross-boundary working by Inverness staff. Consultants have been appointed to address workload in respect of vacancies in Fort William (where we have had distinct difficulties in the past) and long-term sick leave in the Drummie office. The Building Standards Manager has also reallocated warrant work around the office network.

#### **4.0 Vacancies**

4.1 There are currently the equivalent of 9.5 FTE vacant posts in Planning and Building Standards. This is a reduction from the peak of vacancies in first quarter 2008/09 when there were 19.5 vacancies. There has been successful recruitment in a number of offices and the development plans team are currently recruiting to ensure it is suitably resourced to meet the challenge of the new raft of local plans.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That Members note the continued impact of the recession with a further decline in planning applications, building warrants and fee income.
2. That Members note the improved performance in determining planning applications and building warrants.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 4 August 2009

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Background Papers: Audit Commission Performance Indicators Returns for the last 3 years