Development and
Infrastructure
Service

Seirbheis an
Leasachaidh agus
a' Bhun-structair

**The Highland
Council**
**Comhairle na
Gàidhealtachd**

The Highland Council
Planning Performace Framework
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd
Frèam Dèanadas Dealbhaidh

July 2015

www.highland.gov.uk

Foreword

As Chair of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee I am very pleased to submit the 2014/15 Planning Performance Framework (PPF).

We are continually working hard to address issues brought about by challenging economic circumstances and to deliver positive change that bolsters the Highland economy and enhances our unique built and natural environment. Planning has a central role to play in this, and is a fantastic way for the people of Highland to take a lead role in creating the kind of place they want to live, work and grow in.

Our ambition at the Highland Council is to be the best planning service in the country and the PPF highlights that we are on track to achieving this ambition. Our core Council values that centre on listening, being open, valuing, improving, supporting, partnering and delivering are reflected in the good work the Planning Service deliver.

I am proud to report the success stories of the service for the last year, but recognise that the PPF also provides an important vehicle to identify where service improvements are needed. I am confident that the improvements identified in this document will be delivered, and look forward to reporting these in next year's PPF.

Councillor Audrey Sinclair

Chair of the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee
The Highland Council

National Headline Indicators

Key Outcome	2014-2015	2013-2014
Development Planning		
● Age of local/strategic development plan(s) (full years)	2	1
● Development Plan Scheme: on track?	Y	Y
● Will the local/ strategic development plan (s) be replace by their 5th Anniversary according to the current development plan scheme (Y/N)?	Y	NA
● Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year?	N	NA
● Were development plan scheme engagement/ consultation commitments met during the year (Y/N)?	Y	Y

Highland-wide LDP was adopted 2012. Before that 8 Local Plans were in force, some being relatively recent and some being over 10 years old, elements of these plans remain in force through a Parliamentary Order. The average age of the old Local Plans was 9 years.

Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs		
● Established housing land supply	30275 units	NA[4]
● 5-year effective housing land supply	13887 units[1]	NA
● 5-year housing supply target	8389 units	NA
● 5-year effective housing land supply	8.5 years	NA
● Housing approvals	8005 units[2]	NA
● Housing completions over the last 5 years	4950 units[2]	NA
● Marketable employment land supply	3752 ha	3752 ha
● Employment land take-up during reporting period	NA[3]	NA

[1] Our LDPs have an established 20 year land supply, with an effective supply for the first 5 years and beyond, supply and targets are calculated on this basis.

[2] Figures calculated are for the period 2010-2014.

[3] Data not available.

[4] Data not collected.

Development Management		
Project Planning		
● percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice	15.9%	27.1%
● number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan	15	18
● percentage planned timescales met	100%	95.5%

Decision-Making		
● application approval rate	95%	96.7%
● delegation rate	86%	95.5%
Decision-Making Timescales		
● Average Number of weeks to decision:		
○ Major Developments	24.9	31.6
○ Local Developments (non-householder)	12.3	12.2
○ Householder Developments	7.1	7

Legacy Cases		
● Number cleared during reporting period	21	*
● Number remaining	37	58

*Data for this figure was not previously collated

Enforcement		
● Time since enforcement charter reviewed (months)	1[1]	10
● Number of breaches identified/resolved	251/188	249/120

[1] During the reporting period we undertook a review of our Enforcement Charter. This review was reported to committee in July 2015.

Further information on Adopted Local Development Plan/ Local Plans

Plan	Status at 31 March 2015	Date adopted/ approved	Number of full years passed
Adopted Local Development Plans/Local Plans			
Highland-wide Local Development Plan	Adopted	5th April 2012	2
Sutherland Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	24th June 2010 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	4
West Highland and Islands Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	9th September 2010 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	4
Wester Ross Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	29th June 2006 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	8
Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	8th February 2007(Retained in force 5th April 2012)	8

Plan	Status at 31 March 2015	Date adopted/ approved	Number of full years passed
Inverness Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	2nd March 2006 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	9
Caithness Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	12th September 2002 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	12
Nairnshire Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	21st December 2000 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	14
Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan (as continued in force)	Adopted	11th September 1997 (Retained in force 5th April 2012)	17
Emerging Local Development Plans			
Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan	Proposed Local Development Plan- Examination	27th June 2014	NA
Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan	Main Issues Report	30th October 2014	NA
West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan	Pre MIR publication - Call for sites & ideas	30th January 2015	NA
2nd Highland-wide Local Development Plan	Pre-MIR stakeholder engagement	18th February 2015 - as approved through Development Plan Scheme	NA

Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

Open for Business

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), adopted in April 2012, provides us with an up to date policy framework for assessing planning applications. We have delivered a number of the key aims from the Action Programme that we keep up to date, including the adoption of 18 Supplementary Guidance documents that cover a range of policy topics and area/site-specific briefs. Work began at the end of 2014 on the preparation of a second Highland-wide Local Development Plan and the team are on track to deliver a Main Issues Report to the Council's Planning, Development and Infrastructure committee in August 2015.

Preparation of our three area Local Development Plans is progressing. The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan Examination Report was returned on 20th March 2015 and the Plan will be formally adopted later in the summer of 2015. The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan Main Issues Report (CaSPlan MIR) consultation ran during winter 2014/15 and the Proposed Plan will be subject to consultation later this year. The West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan Call for Sites and Ideas consultation ran from January to March 2015. Our Development Plan Scheme provides an up to date timetable for preparing all Plans covering the Highland Council area and for the first time is presented in an informative newsletter style.

Development in Highland's three Enterprise Areas (Inverness Campus, Nigg and Scrabster) continues to be supported by Planning Protocols. These protocols provide a structure for the delivery of consents in these areas. Completion of the first part of Inverness Campus provides us with an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned from implementing Planning Protocols in Highland.

We place huge emphasis on early dialogue with developers. Our major developments pre-application advice service provides opportunity for this engagement and the process enables a structured response from the Council and external stakeholders. Over the reporting period 29 pre-application packs were issued – all within the specified four week period. Feedback on our process has been very positive:

> *The pre-application meeting ensured stakeholders had a clear, collective understanding of the proposal. The pre-application process helped focus in on the key issues and spurs constructive dialogue with the Council.*
> Jack Farnham, RES Offshore.

In order to support this work, Processing Agreements are offered as standard for all new major planning applications and we actively seek their use as an effective way of managing developments throughout the planning process.

We formalised our pre-application advice service for local developments in 2011 in order to enhance customer service and to facilitate management and recording of advice issued. During the reporting period we issued 772 local pre-application advice packs. In 2015 we implemented a charge for this service (we already charge for our major pre-application advice service).

1 - Strategic Development

We are continuing to support the delivery of strategic major development and high quality development on the ground. We have in house processes in place for the efficient handling of proposals from pre to post application stages.

We granted planning permission for the erection of a building to house an archive for the UK's civil nuclear industry in early 2015, accessible to the public and the nuclear community. It is anticipated that the completed development will create 30 new permanent jobs in the area. The design of the building is bold and contemporary, utilising a triangular geometric footprint and high quality materials. The proposal was subject to pre-application discussions involving all relevant consultees, co-ordinated by the Council through our major pre-application advice service. The pre-application stage added value to the process, identifying all issues that were required to be addressed for the planning application. The application was subject to a processing agreement that set the parameters for processing the application and key dates. The application was determined in accordance with the processing agreement timescale of 6 weeks from validation. Pre-application support and the project management approach facilitated by the processing agreement were pivotal to the speedy determination of the application. We have continued to support the development post-determination to ensure timeous discharge of conditions. This has been achieved through a co-ordinated approach by the Service liaising with consultees and maintaining regular contact with the agent. Development is commencing on site in July 2015.

2 - Supporting Development Through the Planning Process
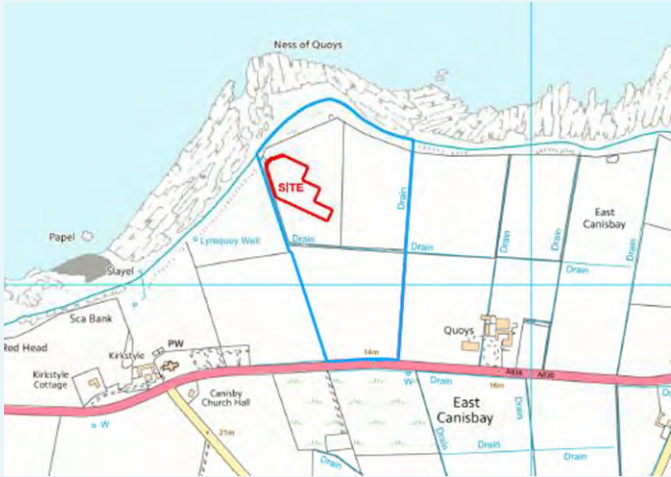
Planning permission was granted in 2012 for onshore development to serve to MeyGen tidal turbines energy project including the construction of 3 power conversion unit buildings, a control building and the installation of temporary horizontal directional drilling. In 2014 the developer submitted a planning application for amended scale and design of the power conversion unit buildings due to changes in technology. The application for amended design was approved by the North Planning Applications in November 2014 following negotiation with the agent regarding design and external appearance. Subsequently we have approved two applications for non-material variations and have been in regular discussions with the applicant in order to discharge conditions. We took a pragmatic approach to dealing with the minor changes as non-material variations. In dealing with the amended design application, variations and discharge of conditions, we have ensured a timeous turnaround to facilitate delivery of development on the ground, mindful of the developer's programme for development.   This has been aided by a co-ordinated approach with consultees.
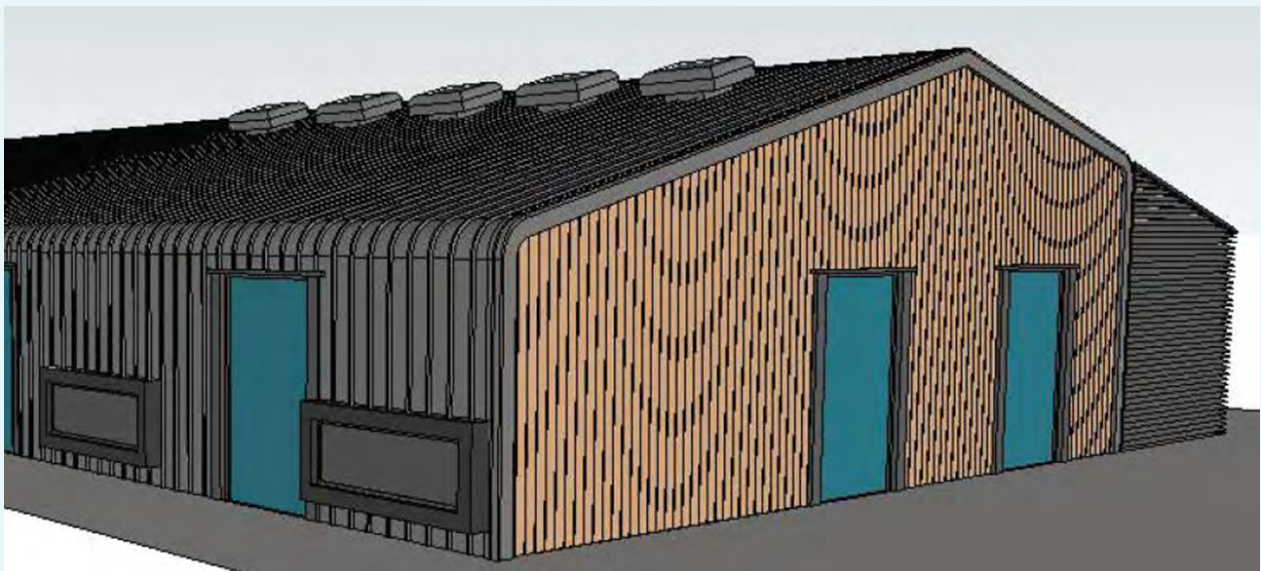
High Quality Development on the Ground

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan provides us with a policy framework that ensures the delivery of well designed, sustainable, high quality development that makes a positive contribution to place-making. Work began at the end of 2014 on the review of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

Work continues on delivering objectives set out in the Inverness City Centre Development Brief (ICCDB). During the reporting period the Development Plans Team consulted with the local business community and the public to develop an action plan for development priorities in the city centre for the revised ICCDB. Already proposals are coming forward which reflect the aspirations identified. A key priority for Inverness City Centre is to deliver high quality development through townscape and pedestrian movement enhancements. This includes the redevelopment of Academy Street that has received a Highland Council pledge of £750K, and is set to attract external funding of £2.6M from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland. In addition:

- we secured a £12,000 grant for pedestrian improvements to develop ideas from the Scottish Government's draft Masterplanning Toolkit for town centres;
- briefs for the River Ness Flood Alleviation Scheme Public Art Project are agreed and funding in place (£750,000); and
- Listed Building Consent has been granted for new viewing platforms in Inverness Castle (Case Study 3).

Residential Design and Layout Supplementary Guidance is currently in preparation and will be subject to consultation alongside the second Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

Throughout the planning process we negotiate to achieve a design standard that reflects our unique Highland character. We continually strive to ensure staff are equipped to manage the range of planning challenges they are presented with. A number of our staff attended this year's Scottish Government/Princes Foundation "Drawing Places" course to equip them with the design skills and knowledge to negotiate effectively with developers and a bespoke training course on design skills in the rural context was held in Inverness.

We continue to negotiate with developers to deliver better quality of development that reflects the Highland context, and we seize opportunities to encourage development that reflects our HwLDP policies and unique Highland character. We continue to recognise this by setting out clear design criteria in development briefs, frameworks and masterplans, and work with developers on master plans and material palates. Case Study 4 shows an example of a relevant and up to date Development Brief that sets the design and development context for the Inshes and Raigmore areas of Inverness.

During the reporting period we reconstituted the Inverness Design Review Panel, which has now met three times to consider two specific development proposals and to consider design issues for general city centre developments. Feedback has been very positive from members of the panel (including Inverness Architects Association, Inverness Civic trust, Landscape Institute, Police Scotland and Inverness City Heritage Trust) and the developers themselves. One of the schemes has now been submitted as a planning application.

The new Inverness Campus has been a significant development in the area, and it is pleasing that it has been shortlisted for a Scottish Award for Quality in Planning.

3 - Ensuring High Quality Development on the Ground

Carefully planned demolition and sensitive restoration of existing Council offices, part of which is Listed. This project rationalises previous offices and ensures high quality development and footfall in Wick town centre.

Design changes through negotiation

BEFORE

AFTER

High quality, contemporary design achieved for a new affordable housing development in Ullapool through pre-application discussions, and negotiation.

4 - Providing Clarity for Development: Inshes and Raigmore Development Brief

The Inshes and Raigmore areas of Inverness have been critical to the strategic expansion of the city in recent years where housing, major retail facilities and a new public park combine with major local and strategic transport routes. The area also continues to support major employment including Raigmore Hospital, Lifescan and the adjacent new Inverness Campus due to open in 2016. The area will continue to play a vital role in enabling future growth and moving people around.
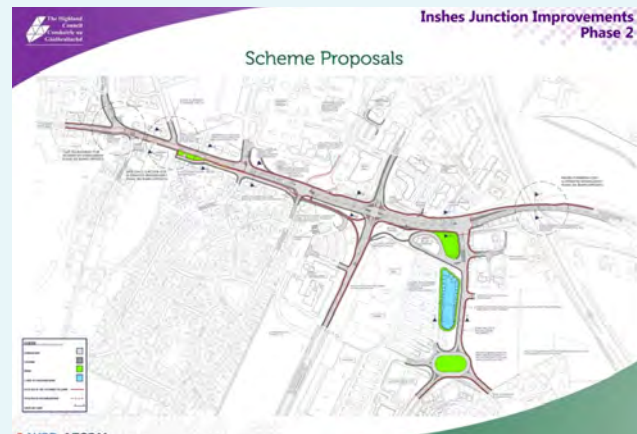
In view of the need for careful planning for this important area, the Council has worked in collaboration with Transport Scotland and local communities and businesses to prepare the Inshes and Raigmore Development Brief. This was prepared to influence how future development opportunities in the area could be delivered alongside improvements to the local and strategic transport network.
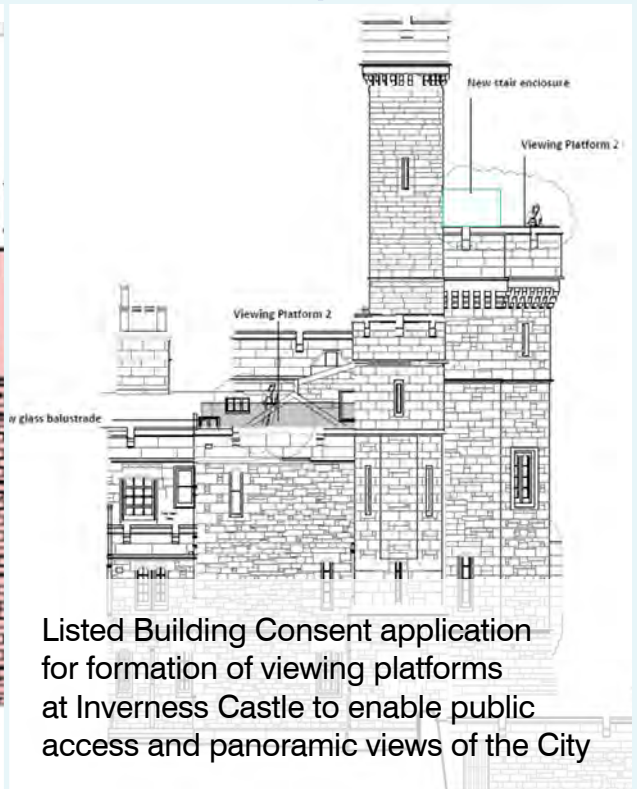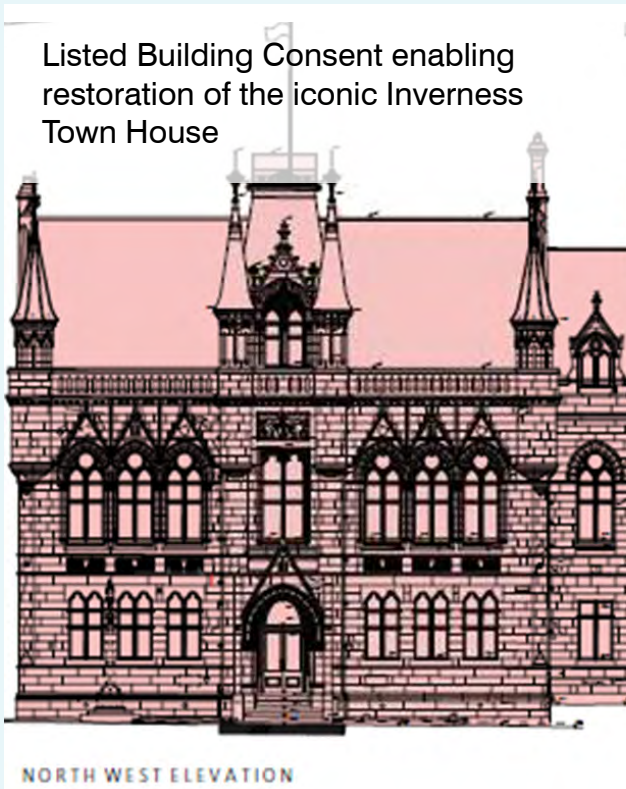
The brief provides clarity about commercial development in the area and sets out how the Council want to achieve well connected spaces and deliver high quality places.

Opportunities for green network enhancements and extensions, strategic active travel routes and key development opportunity sites were investigated and included in the Brief.

Alongside identifying and consulting on these specific aspects, the Council partnered with Transport Scotland to ensure the brief clearly addressed wider transport issues. Transport Scotland's strategic proposals for improvements to the A9/A96 corridor, and the connecting East Link road, and for Inshes Junction Improvements were coordinated with the brief and joint public consultation events held. The results of these actions are a well-connected Development Brief set in the context of wider transport infrastructure issues and which sets out clear objectives and opportunities for the future of the area.

5 - Protecting and Enhancing our Built Heritage

Enhancements to shop fronts

MACKINTOSH BROTHERS NEWSAGENTS

Sensitive restoration of Isleornsay Lighthouse buildings

West gable of keepers' building showing generator shed, for demolition in application 14/02203/LBC

Listed Building Consent enabling restoration of the iconic Inverness Town House

NORTH WEST ELEVATION

New stair enclosure

Viewing Platform 2

Viewing Platform 2

glass balustrade

Listed Building Consent application for formation of viewing platforms at Inverness Castle to enable public access and panoramic views of the City

Delivering Certainty

In 2014/15, committee dealt with 122 applications, approving 84.6% of them, none contrary to the development plan.

We meet regularly with key agencies throughout the year to identify issues affecting Development Plans and Development Management. We also work closely with them on delivering joint pieces of work arising from the Action programmes – including Transport Scotland on A9/A96 improvements and Scottish Canals on the Muirtown and South Kessock Development Brief.

As detailed earlier in this document we have a very clear approach to project management of development proposals and have regular case reviews for new planning applications. In addition both the Planning Applications Committees are given an update on progress with major planning applications at every meeting, along with a clear estimate of the likely determination date.

One of our service improvements this year was to ensure that elected Members were made aware of Proposal of Application Notices submitted for major planning applications, and given the opportunity to comment on any material considerations that they feel should be considered in the preparation of the application. We now report PANs to our committees. This has closely followed the City of Edinburgh Council approach, and has been a welcome addition to committee agendas.

During the reporting period, our enforcement team were busy reviewing our Enforcement Charter that was recently approved at committee and is available online. This work was shortlisted for the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning.

We have continued to take an active approach to tackle the issue of legacy cases to ensure applications are managed effectively and that developers are confident in our service. As mentioned earlier in the report, we use processing agreements to offer effective project management of applications. During the reporting period, systems were put in place to monitor our performance of managing applications. We now record how many major and local-scale S75 agreements were concluded in each financial quarter, and the timescales involved. Collecting this data enables us to closely monitor and manage our legacy cases and identify appropriate actions. We will report on the results of this in the next framework.

Communications, engagement and customer service

Our Customer Service Charter is available online. First-time contact with the Service continues to be processed by the Council's central service centre which currently serves all of our area Development Management offices and Headquarters Development Plans team. In 2014/15 the service centre answered 16,490 calls for Planning and Building Standards and offered basic advice, forms and guidance notes directly to the customer. More detailed development management enquiries are passed to a duty Planning Officer. 6,432 call cases were handled by duty Planning Officers during the reporting period, which were managed using our corporate customer service system, Lagan. This approach helps us to target resources effectively and efficiently, and ensures a consistent level of service is offered to our customers. We will continue to improve and develop this service by working with colleagues in Customer Services to enhance customer experience.

Our efforts to deliver an efficient, open and transparent Planning Service underpin our approach to public engagement. Through extensive customer surveying, we have been able to measure the effectiveness of the service. A bespoke survey assessing the service experience of our Community Councils is set out in Case Study 6.

The Council's new website, launched in May 2014, is a key outlet for all planning information and one that we capitalise on in all aspects of our work. Through an accessible, informative set of webpages we ensure all important information is publicly available. Staff from across the service have received training in the Jadu software used to manage our website. This helps us to ensure our webpages remain informative, relevant and up to date.

We continue to increase our online presence by growing social networking capacity in the Service, regularly updating our pages at Facebook and Twitter. During the reporting period we increased our reach. The number of people liking our Facebook page increased over 100%, and we now have more than 800 Twitter. We have capitalised on the use of Promoted Posts in social networking as a cost effective way to reach a greater number and range of people. For example, we reached 1,187 people on Facebook when promoting a consultation paper on Onshore Wind at a cost of £10, and reached 2,417 people for £6 for a Town Centre Action Plan event in Nairn.

Our commitment to increasing efficiency through the use of online resources also extends into Development Management. During the reporting period the proportion of applications submitted electronically has continued to increase, this year to 74%, higher than the Scottish average of around 60%. We continue to actively encourage the Highland ePlanning portal as the easiest way to submit and comment on planning applications.

The service has continued to deliver an ambitious programme of public engagement, in line with the commitments made in the development plan scheme. As the three area Plans continue to progress, the focus of our engagement has been on the CaSPlan Main Issues Report (MIR) and West Highland & Islands Plan Call for Sites and Ideas. An innovatibe outcome-based approach has been taken in preparing the CaSPlan MIR, where the vision and strategy for the emerging plan have been based around 4 key outcomes for delivering the Single Outcome Agreement. This will soon be taken to the Highland Community Planning Partnership for their sign-off prior to publication for consultation. This unique approach has led to the CaSPlan MIR being shortlisted for a Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning. This approach will be replicated for future Local Development Plans to better align them with community planning priorities.

A range of other engagement work has been undertaken for Development Briefs, Action Plans and various Supplementary Guidance documents. Our efforts have included

charrette-style workshops, including with school pupils (Case Study 7); exhibitions; drop-in sessions; forums and meetings including joint Ward Forums to target Community Councils. We have also continued to engage key stakeholders, particularly in workshops reviewing the HwLDP.

We continue to actively engage with our elected members at Ward Business Meetings. To ensure early engagement with our Members We used Ward Business Meetings during the preparation of CaSPlan MIR, and held thematic policy workshops on the review of HwLDP. This enabled us to keep our Members up to date and provide them with opportunity to engage early in the Development Plan process, fulfilling one of our key commitments set out in last year's Service Improvement Plan.

During our consultation for CaSPlan MIR the internet was central to our engagement efforts, combined with drop-in sessions and charrette-style workshops. We promoted the use of a bespoke online consultation form as the main way to comment on the MIR. The form enabled Officers to rapidly analyse results through a combination of multiple choice and text box responses and provide feedback to consultees. This helped us to address a previous criticism that there was a lack of news on Plan progress between MIR consultation and Proposed Plan stages. Our efforts to promote the CaSPlan consultation resulted in over 1,000 downloads of the MIR online, nearly 300 people attending our events, 70% of respondents submitting their comments online, and over 14,500 reached through our promoted posts on social media. The CaSPlan MIR work was shortlisted for the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning.

Our Service continues to be supported by a dedicated Customer Services Officer that manages our two-stage corporate complaints procedure. During the reporting period, we managed to decrease to total number of complaints to the service to 103, a continuing downward trend, 22% less that the 2013/14 reporting period. Where complaints are upheld the Customer Services Officer, in conjunction with senior managers, discusses lessons learned and communicates them to relevant officers. Dependant on the nature of the complaint, policy or procedure may be changed and/or additional training given to officers. Examples of this are detailed in Case Study 8.

6 - Customer Feedback Shaping our Service

During 2014/15, we invited all of our Community Councils to take part in a survey to assess the quality of the Service and their experience. An online survey was prepared and Community Councils were asked to share their views. 30% of Community Councils responded, and many gave an overall positive view of the Service, as well as constructive feedback that provides us with essential information to help continue to improve our service:

It was encouraging to find that nearly 80% of respondents use ePlanning to obtain information on planning applications and found it easy to contact the Council using a variety of methods.

As well as receiving feedback about the customer service experience, the survey also gave us opportunity to assess some of the specific functions of our Service:
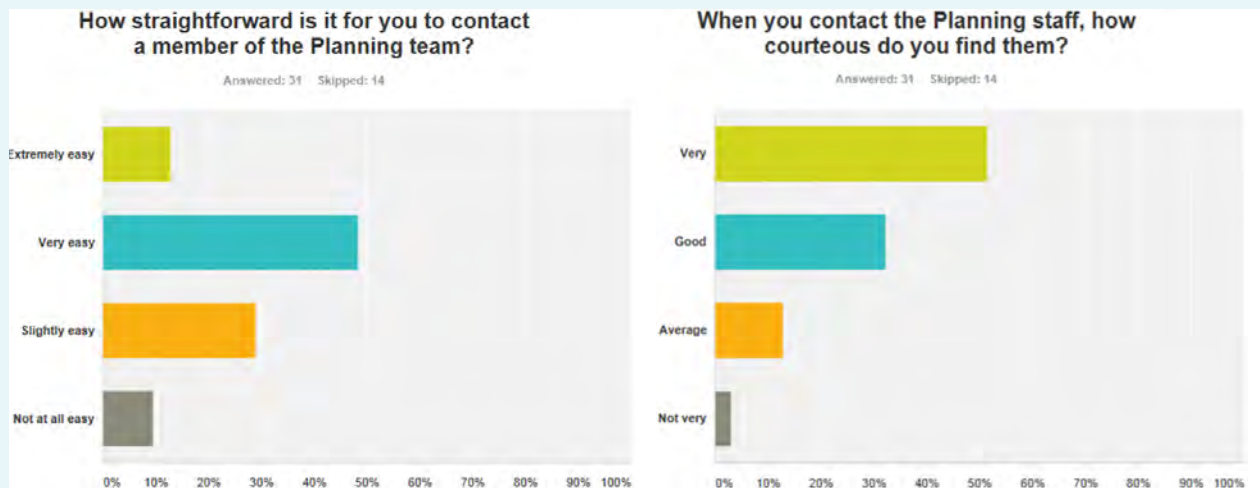
It was encouraging to note that 80% of respondents found it was straightforward to contact a member of the team, and around 80% found staff courteous and helpful:

"This Community Council … [has] … a good relationship with HC Planning … and we are very pleased with the service we get."

The survey identified that training requirements for Community Councils varied. Further work will be undertaken to analyse the results of the survey, in particular to identify opportunities for Community Councils to actively participate in the planning process.

7 - West Highland and Islands School Mini-Charrettes

Building on our experience of providing mini-charrette events within schools for the CaSPlan MIR, the Development Plans team ran workshops within secondary schools in the West Highland & Islands Plan area. Visiting each school in turn, we delivered lessons to school pupils from 3rd to 6th year, and gained valuable insight into a range of views from the different age groups we reached out to. We took advantage of the opportunity to educate and inform pupils of the role of planning in their area and sought to engage this hard to reach group in the early stages of the Development Plan process.

Discussions held with teachers ahead of the lessons meant they were able to be integrated with the school curriculum. The lessons were structured to give pupils a basic introduction to planning and an understanding of the wider Plan area. The aim was to enthuse young people about Planning and gain suggestions for how they would like to the see their area grow in the future. This was key to addressing a major challenge of losing young people from the area.

Uniquely, the responses received were used as formal submissions to the Call for Sites and Ideas and have therefore helped shape the emerging Main Issues Report. Submissions highlighted a range of issues felt to be important for young people including economic, social and geographical challenges. They also raised a number of key aspirations young people have for their community and the wider Plan area and these are currently being considered and addressed in preparation of the Main Issues Report.

This work has since been shortlisted for the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning.
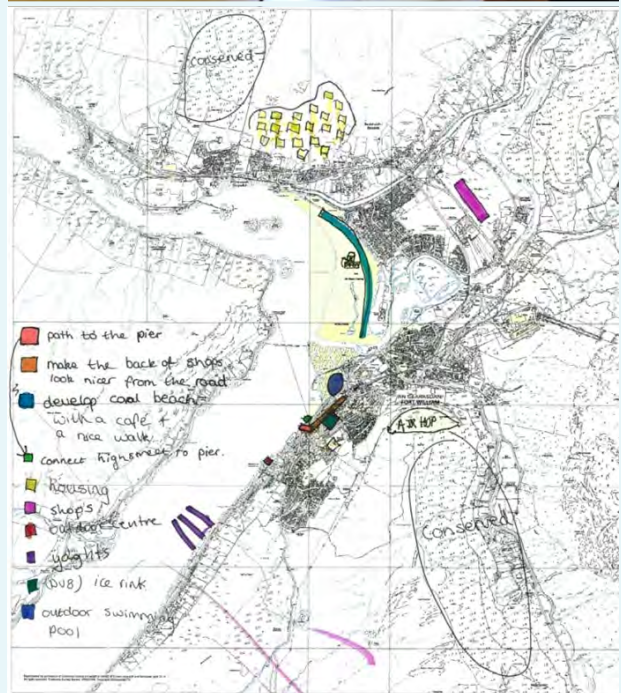
8 - Customer Complaints and Lessons Learned

A customer complained information they had previously asked to be removed from the ePlanning portal had appeared on the DPEA website amongst appeal documentation. In upholding this complaint Senior Management agreed that the customer's information was marked as sensitive and therefore not available for public viewing, and that it should have been clearly marked that it had been the subject of previous discussions. The Director apologised to the customer for the error and advised that in the future this would be clearly marked on the case file.

A customer was unhappy that on phoning the Council they were given incorrect information about the publication of the agenda and papers for a meeting of the South Planning applications committee.   Senior Managers agreed the customer had been given incorrect information and the Customer Services Officer liaised with colleagues to remind them of the terms of the Council's standing orders regards publishing agendas and papers online. An apology was provided to the customer.

A customer advised of difficulties in accessing the Council's ePlanning system; that it was slow, and was taking too long to refresh or move onto the next page.   In the Council's response, Senior Managers acknowledged there was an issue at that time and that the customer's contact had assisted us in our discussions with our service provider. Ongoing dialogue with officers ensured a satisfactory outcome for the customer.

Efficient and Effective Decision Making

Two area planning committees (North and South) meet once a month, and a Planning Review Body meets every 6 weeks. Committee dealt with 122 applications during the reporting period. The Planning Review Body dealt with 34 applications. All of our committee meetings are webcast and archived.

Decisions on Development Plans and associated documents are made by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee, and certain decisions can be referred to the relevant area committee. During the reporting period the Service continued to operate successfully and efficiently within this committee structure. The Highland Council Scheme of Delegation provides the full list of powers and duties of Council committees and is kept up to date on the Council's website.

Legacy cases have continued to be a focus for action in the Service and during the reporting period we managed to reduce the number of cases that were more than one year old from 58 to 37. Clear actions are in place to manage those outstanding cases which represent only a small number of applications relative to the overall number dealt with by the Council. The legacy cases that are still current have been delayed for a number of reasons, including Section 75 Agreements being processed, awaiting Local Development Plan outcomes and awaiting information from applicants. We now have a centrally held list of legacy cases which is discussed with the responsible managers on a fortnightly basis.

Our Development Plans work continues to progress successfully. The team work hard to deliver an ambitious programme of consultation, including a new series of Town Centre Action Plans. Although this work resulted in slight delays to the Development Plan Scheme timescales, we are confident that we will deliver the new deadlines, as set out in our up to date Development Plan Scheme. We are finalising the procurement of new software for managing and delivering Development Plan consultations which aims to make the plan making process more efficient.

We continue to liaise regularly with the various agencies that help us to deliver a high quality planning service. Throughout the reporting period we have engaged with these important stakeholders in our day-to-day work and in ensuring staff in the Service receive quality CPD. For example, Officers from our Development Management and Development Plans teams attended a SNH Sharing Good Practice event on Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Energy in October, 2014. These events not only equip the team with the knowledge and tools necessary to deliver a high quality Service, but facilitate partnership and networking with other agencies. This has been an important element of our continuing work progressing new Supplementary Guidance for Onshore Wind.

We continue to ensure our staff work efficiently and manage their workload effectively, we encourage all staff to attend the Council's Time Management training course.

Average time taken to determine major planning applications was 24.9 weeks, a reduction on the previous year. It should also be recognised that a further 18 major planning applications were dealt with by Processing Agreement and do not therefore appear in the overall average time total. Of these 18 applications, 100% met the target date in the Processing Agreements.

The average time taken to deal with local planning applications was 10.7 weeks and this reflects well in relation to the Scottish average.

Effective Management Structures

We operate our Development Management service across eight Highland Offices, including The Council Headquarters in Inverness, and seven Area Offices. Our Development Plans and Enforcement teams are based at Headquarters. Our team structures are shown in the appendix. We continue to maintain flexibility across our Area Offices, and ensure that when workload is high in one office, the burden is spread across other offices. This process is facilitated by our commitment to maintaining good communications and feedback within and between teams, with six-weekly Team Leader and Area Manager Meetings. We strive to ensure the needs of our business are met through a flexible approach to work locations. Staff are able to work in the location that best suits the needs of the service in hand, and this is supported by our bank of 'hot desks'.

In last year's Planning Performance Framework we reported on the creation of our central Enforcement Team. During the reporting period the team have continued to maintain a pro-active approach to enforcement and dealt with 281 cases, resolving 67% of them.

We undertake a comprehensive review of staff training needs through our Employee Review and Development (ERD). Each member of the team produces an annual review of their work objectives and training needs, these are reviewed with their 1-2-1 mentor every six months. The results of ERDs are used by the Service to deliver tailored training and CPD.

A major change to our service this year was the transition of our case management applications (UNIFORM and Document Management System) to a hosted system. This change was achieved through a programme of work with other Council services, external service providers and our staff. The result is a streamlined, efficient, and well managed hosted system. All staff involved have been trained in the use of the new system, and the details of the project are described in Case Study 9.

We continue to collaborate closely with other business areas within The Council, with neighbouring authorities, and with other public bodies. Regular cross-service liaison meetings are held within The Council. In particular we work closely with our housing colleagues and other social housing providers on the local housing strategy and attend regular housing development forum meetings. The Council also has an established Developer Contributions Working Group where staff from all services discuss the policy relating to developer contributions and monitor the associated spend.

In sharing the responsibility for determining planning applications, our close partnership with the Cairngorms National Park Authority continues. We also continue to engage with our neighbouring authorities on the preparation of their Local Development Plans.

We meet regularly with neighbouring local authorities and share responsibility for hosting the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum (a collaboration of eight Local Authorities), where we exchange knowledge on emerging planning issues, our approaches to them, and deliver a programme of tailored training. Our Development Plans team have strong working relationships with both statutory and non-statutory consultees. This enables early dialogue with important stakeholders and achieves consensus. An example of this partnership was preparing the CaSPlan MIR Strategic Environmental Assessment. This was the subject of a pilot site assessment matrix.

9 - IDOX Hosted Environment

We successfully migrated our system applications - Uniform and Document Management System (DMS) - across to a managed/hosted service with IDOX plc in March 2015. A collaborative project management approach between ICT Services, Fujitsu, IDOX and the Service enabled the project to be successfully delivered in 9 months. This not only meant that capacity on our servers increased, but also improved operational efficiency by providing Officers with the most up to date software. We recognised and acted accordingly when the lack of capacity meant that we could not adequately develop our software in line with Service needs.
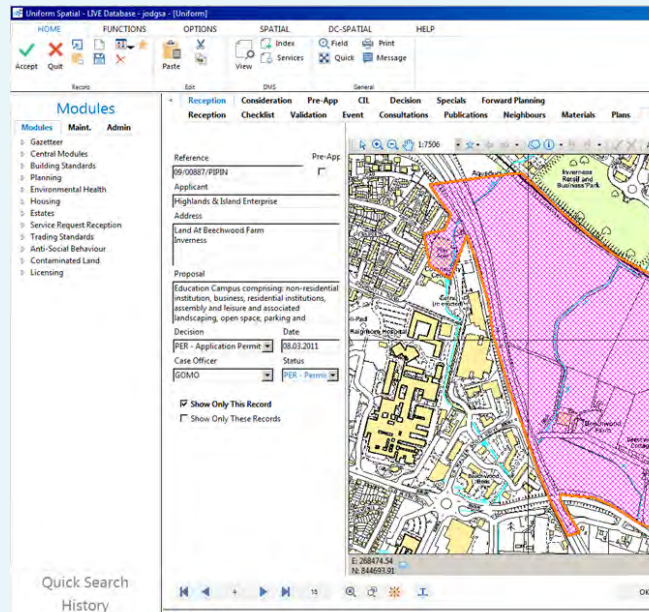
A number of key pieces of work contributed to the success of the project. A data migration plan and a robust user acceptance test plan meant that downtime for staff and the public was kept to a minimum. 18 intensive training sessions were also delivered by IDOX prior to our 'go live' date. We are committed to ensuring staff are fully trained to sustain and increase productivity and performance.

In April our Contaminated Land colleagues in Community Services joined us in using Uniform and the DMS. They now not only use the software to inspect and monitor sites but have direct access to planning and building standards data and plans. In our continued vision of software development, we are also considering integrating the transport planning section into Uniform as a way of streamlining the internal consultee process. These strong collaborative relationships demonstrate our commitment to offering the best service in partnership with other teams at the Highland Council.

The hosting project means that we can now develop our software in line with our plans to deliver a high quality planning service. Initial plans are now in place to develop the following: Decision Notices and Delegated Reports/Building standards KPO's/Enterprise Tasks for Development Management, Enforcement and Appeals/ Consultee Access/Phase 2 of Enforcement module/Implementation of High Hedges module. We are also committed to maintaining performance for our public facing ePlanning webpage. The webpage is one of the most popular pages and very well utilised by both the public and consultees. Stability of the planning webpages is closely monitored to ensure we are maintaining performance, and as part of the hosting project this was also upgraded and improved.
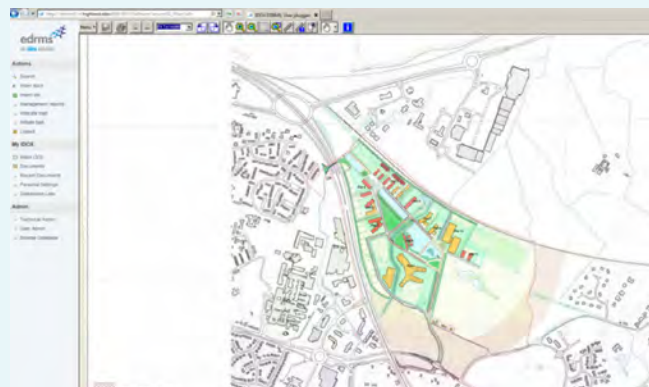
The team worked closely with Consultation Authorities SEPA, SNH and Historic Scotland to develop and pilot the matrix. This gained early support for the Environmental Report from the Consultation Authorities. Our West Highland and Islands Plan has developed the assessment matrix further for its MIR. Our Development Management teams continue to liaise with SEPA and SNH through both the pre-application advice service and informally. This enables Officers to gain better understanding of policies and procedures used in delivering an effective development management system.

We have taken a lead role in supporting benchmarking with our SOLACE benchmarking family group. As well as round-robin e-mail requests for information, we also meet on an annual basis – most recently in Inverness.

Our commitments to address issues in Inverness City Centre continue, as described above, and we work in partnership with Inverness BID to identify solutions. The partnership working described in last year's report on the Inshes and Raigmore Development Brief with Transport Scotland continued this year, resulting an a well connected, contextualised Brief, this is set out in Case Study 4.

Financial Management and Local Governance

The Development & Infrastructure Service Plan identifies they key actions required to meet the Council's corporate objectives as set out in our Corporate Plan and the Council Programme. Savings have been made through more efficient processes being put in place, vacancy management as well as income generation opportunities being taken.

Our performance and financial position is reported quarterly to the Planning Development and Infrastructure Committee. In addition, we have officer level Quarterly Performance reviews with the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive and the Director of Finance.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

We are fully committed to improving the Service and this is evidenced in our 2015/16 Service Improvement Plan.

As mentioned throughout this report, we recognise that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of our staff, elected members and Community Councils is a central element in the delivery of a high quality Planning Service. We continue to ensure the provision of effective CPD for our staff, and this is achieved through our Service Training Plan, described in Case Study 10.

We continue to host an annual planning training day where planners from across the Service are invited to a day of bespoke and tailored training. This year's training included workshops on Site Layout & Planning for Daylight; Flooding and Floodrisk Mapping by SEPA and our Flood Team; Legal issues training, and updates on the Service priorities as a whole.

Our Development Plans Team have monthly CPD training events after their team meetings and this year's training has involved a range of workshops, including Marine Spatial Planning; Population Change in Highland; FCS Native Woodland Survey; Albyn Housing Society- Delivering Development; and Freedom of Information & Data Protection.

10 - Supporting Staff CPD: Service Training Plan

One of our key Service Improvements was to ensure that all staff were put through the Employee Review and Development Plan (ERDP) process, and that a Service specific training plan be developed and delivered over the course of the year.

When the ERDP process was completed, managers developed a training plan which was tailored around the broad areas of professional training that people had identified a need for. Over the course of the year, courses were run on:

- Appeal Submission for LA Planners
- Conditions, Section 75s and Advertisement Control
- Collaborative Coaching (mentoring of colleagues)
- Geographical Information Systems (GIS) training
- UNIFORM Training
- Economic Viability
- Discovery Insights (Transport Planning)
- Rural Design
- Drawing Places (at Dumfries House)
- Crofting and Planning

In addition to the above, an annual planners training day is held where we cover a wide range of topics, allowing for discussion and debate with the whole of the planning team from across the Highlands. This year's session included presentations on ICT changes, Private Ways Prior Notification, Sunlight/Daylight issues, Flooding Issues (with SEPA), Legal Issues and Lessons learned from PRB Decisions. Feedback from the day was positive and it met a number of the training gaps identified through ERDs.
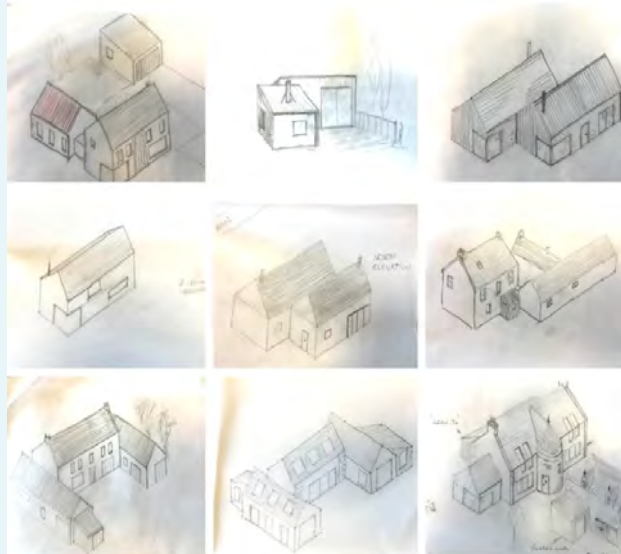
We fully support our staff to seek external training through workshops, courses and conferences. We are proud that members of our team attended EIA, SEA and HRA forums provided by Scottish Government, and that members of Development Plans team delivered a training workshop on HRA jointly with SNH. We continue to support the RTPI Highlands and Islands Chapter and several of our officers are active committee members working hard to deliver free CPD training to RTPI Members.

We continue to support a number of Graduate Planners that are at various stages of their RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence, supported by mentors through our 1-2-1 scheme. All of our committee members received training, and where required new members received additional training.

Looking back at the Service Improvements we identified for 2014/15 we are proud of the progress made against these.

High Quality Development on the Ground

● **We will prepare and publicise a presentation of high quality developments supported by the Service by March 2015.**
These examples have been used to illustrate this Planning Performance Framework.

Financial Management and Local Governance

● **We will put in place a process for involving Members in providing input to pre-application advice for major developments by September 2014.**
The process has been completed – all Proposal of Application Notices for major developments are reported to the relevant Planning Applications Committee. Members have welcomed the opportunity for early engagement in the process.

We have engaged members early on in the pre-MIR stages of our emerging Plans, for example.

Communications, Engagement and Customer Services

● **We will deliver Focus Groups for Planning and Building Standards across the Highland area during 2014/15.**
Focus Groups have been held to outline forthcoming changes.

● **We will implement improvements to our means of engagement with Community Councils during 2014/15.**
A Community Council newsletter is complete and has been issued. It is available online.

● **We will put in place a refreshed social media presence covering all aspects of planning and building standards and provide more engaging ways to communicate through our website during 2014/15.**
Our social media presence has been refreshed with more pro-active use of Facebook and Twitter.

● **We will carry out a range of comprehensive customer surveys during 2014/15 and prepare an action plan from the results.**
Community Council survey issued – see case study 6.

Effective Management Structures

● **We will ensure that all staff have Employee Review and Development Plans delivered and the Service Training Plan produced by end August 2014.**

ERDs and Service Training plan complete. See case study 10.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

● **We will put in place a managed hosted service for UNIFORM and the Document Management System during 2014/15.**

This project was successfully delivered. See case study 9.

● **We will deliver improvement to the project management of consents required for Council projects to assist with the delivery of the overall Capital Programme during 2014/15.**

A capital programme monitoring group now meets regularly and raises issues about regulatory matters as part of this process.

● **We will put in place new arrangements for the handling and storage of planning application documents during 2014/15.**

A number of measures were put in place over the course of the year, to ensure that paper files were not being retained after the decisions were issued – in line with the Council's retention policy.

● **We will fully implement Development Management for Enterprise by March 2015 .**

The full implementation of Enterprise has not taken place due to a number of ICT issues. However, the system is installed and awaiting implementation over the course of 2015/16.

● **We will carry out further benchmarking exercises with our benchmark family authorities during 2014/15.**

Benchmarking meetings took place with our SOLACE Benchmarking family.

● **We will introduce performance management measures to monitor the delivery of Development Plans and associated audits and projects against timescales in the Development Plan Scheme and report progress through its annual review.**

A number of changes have been made to improve performance management in Development Planning including the use of shared files for monitoring workloads and performance/timescales through the Microsoft Onenote. We are finalising the procurement of new 'Objective' software for managing and delivering Development Plan consultations which aims to enhance our consultation methods, and ensure that there is a consistent back office system to manage customer records. Regular team meetings and 1-2-1 sessions have also assisted with the delivery of plans.

● **We will put in place new project management arrangements for Development Plans to ensure delivery against timescales set out in the Development Plan Scheme.**

A formal project board has been set up which forms an important part of our improvement activity. The role of the Board is to ensure that sufficient resources are available and are appropriately allocated to help ensure the timely delivery of projects and plan stages as set out in the Development Plan Scheme. It also provides a forum for managing and responding to new and unforeseen items of work. The Board is considering the use of a Project Management spreadsheet from the Improvement Service to better manage priorities and resources across the team.

Supporting Evidence

In the preparation of this report we drew on a wide range of sources of information to review the performance of our Service. We utilised the following:

● Planning Service Customer and Community Council Survey

● Local and major pre-application advice service feedback questionnaire results

● A broad range of Council committee reports

● Results of both formal and informal monitoring, data and information gathering and internal auditing, primarily undertaken by our Performance and Systems team

● Various in-house reports, minutes, meeting agendas and briefing notes

The supporting evidence highlighted above are key information. The list is not exhaustive. Wherever supporting evidence used is publicly available it has been hyperlinked in the body of the report.

Service Improvements 2015-2016

The Service Improvement Plan for 2015/16 sets out our commitment to continuous improvement in service delivery. These commitments have arisen from discussions with customers, Scottish Government and with the input of Highland Council members.

● implement new mobile working arrangements through the eDevelopment project;

● review restoration bond arrangements for minerals and other developments and ensure that procedures are fit for purpose;

● deliver e-templates for delegated reports and decision notices;

● put in place a Project Board for the delivery of Development Plans and associated documents; and

● deliver a programme of targeted training and career development events.

Official Statistics

Decision-making Timescales

Category	Total number of decisions 2014-2015	Average timescale (weeks)	
		2014-2015	2013-20114
Major developments	8	24.9*	31.6*
Local developments (non-householder)	1645	12.3	12.2
● less than 2 months	1040	6.8	7.1
● more than 2 months	605	21.7	20.8
Local developments (householder)	738	7.1	7.0
● less than 2 months	649	5.8	5.9
● more than 2 months	89	16.1	15.7
Major housing developments	1	23.4	80.3
Local housing developments	876	13.3	13.0
● less than 2 months	540	7.1	7.3
● more than 2 months	336	23.3	21.4
Major business and industry	1	18.9	16.1
Local business and industry	256	9.9	10.2
● less than 2 months	181	6.6	6.6
● more than 2 months	75	17.7	18.7
EIA developments			1 (MSC)
● Local developments subject to EIA	0	0	0
● AMSCs (subject to EIA)	0	0	7.4
Other consents	130	14.0	See PPF 13-14 breakdown
Planning/legal agreements			
● Major (average time)	33	34.1	32.5 (total)
● Local (average time)	34	16.3	
Local reviews	34	16.3	14.8

Decision-making: Local Reviews and Appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2014-2015		2013-2014	
		No.	%	No.	%
Local reviews	34	9	26.5	9.9	35.7
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	24	24	33.3*	12.0	63.2

*Figure is calculated from dismissed and refused appeals to Scottish ministers

Enforcement Activity

Activity	2014-15	2013-14
Cases taken up	251	249
Breaches identified	251	249
Cases resolved	188	120
Notices served	73	16
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	None	None
Prosecutions	None	None

Workforce and Financial Information

Heads of Planning Service

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Head of Planning Service			X	

Staff Levels

Post/position		DM	DP	Enforce-ment	Other
Managers	Number of posts	7	1	0	5
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
Main grade posts	Number of posts	22	14	2	13
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
Technician	Number of posts	16	4	0	3
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
Office support/ clerical	Number of posts	0	0	0	0
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		45	19	2	21

Note: Office Support/Clerical provided through central business support.

Staffing Profile

Staffing age profile	Number
Under 30	12
30-39	17
40-49	32
50 and over	26

Committees

Committees and site visits		Number per year
Full Council committees		8
Planning committees	Planning, Environment and Development Committee	4
	Planning Applications Committee (North)	10
	Planning Applications Committee (South)	12
Area committees	City of Inverness and Area Committee	4
	Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee	4
	Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey	4
	Lochaber	4
	Skye, Ross and Cromarty	5
Committee site visits		9
LRB		11
LRB site visits		2

Budget Information for 2014/15

Department	Total budget	Costs		Income
		Direct	**Indirect**	
Development Management	2.173m	1.957m	0.216m	2.311m
Development Planning	0.870m	0.848m	0.022m	
Enforcement	0.064m	0.064m		
Other				
TOTAL	3.107m	2.869m	0.238m	2.311m

Team Structures

Head of Planning & Business Standards

Development Plans Manager
- 3 Principal Planners
- 5 Planners
- 1 Graduate Planner
- 3 Coastal Planning Officers
- 2 Research Officers
- 1 Senior Planning Technician
- 1 Information Technician

HQ Major Applications and Enforcement Team Leader
- 3 Planners
- 2 Enforcement Officers

Area Planning Manager SOUTH

Fort William Team Leader
- 1 Principal Planner
- 1 Planner
- 2 PSOs

Kingussie Team Leader
- 1 Planner
- 1 PSOs

Inverness Team Leader
- 2 Principal Planners
- 3 Planners
- 4 PSOs

Area Planning Manager NORTH

Sutherland Team Leader
- 1 Principal Planner
- 1 Planner
- 1 Graduate Planner
- 1.5 PSOs

Skye Team Leader
- 2 Planners
- 1 PSO

Dingwall Team Leader
- 2 Principal Planners
- 2 Planners
- 2 PSOs

Caithness Team Leader
- 2 Planners
- 2 Professional Support Officers (PSO)