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Mr Steve Barron
Chief Executive
Highland Council

25 November 2016

Dear Mr Barron

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK 2015-16

Thank you for submitting your authority's annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) report covering the period April 2015 to March 2016. Please find enclosed your feedback report, which is based on the evidence provided within your PPF.

I am very pleased that the quality of PPF reporting has again improved with many authorities setting out a very clear story of how the service is operating and detailing their priority actions for improvement. There have been general improvements across most of the categories however, there still remains high levels of inconsistency in planning authority decision making timescales across the country. This was also reflected through the recent publication of the statistics for the first quarter of 2016-17 which shows that certain authorities, and certain cases, are dragging the statistics down considerably. I asked officials to look into the reasons for delay in some of the lengthiest cases and will report on that to the High Level Group on Performance.

Planning performance improvement has come a long way in recent years and the PPF framework provides an excellent opportunity for authorities to set out the details behind their performance and showcase good practice and innovative ideas. I hope we can continue to work positively with authorities to improve monitoring processes and continue our collective commitment to improving services.

This is an exciting time for planning – the momentum of the independent planning review is continuing and we will be publishing a consultation outlining options for change in the winter, to inform the future Planning Bill. The consultation will cover a variety of options to enhance community involvement in planning; help deliver homes and infrastructure; simplify development planning and management processes; and focus on improving the service and reputation of planning. It is a challenging timetable but a fantastic opportunity to deliver real change.

Although there are some things that we need legislation to change, many of the panel's recommendations don't need legislation, they need a change in working practices, a recognition that planning creates the places where people work, live, learn and play. To achieve the outcomes we all want to see, authorities need to reposition planning to ensure that it sits at the very heart of the authority and has the resources available to it to make sure it provides the best service possible to developers, stakeholders and the authority in which it sits. To help achieve this we will shortly be launching a consultation on raising the planning fee maximum in an effort to move towards cost recovery. Following the planning bill we will consult further on potential reform of the fee regime.

I hope that you and your authority will actively participate as we progress, ensuring that we see real change throughout the planning community.



KEVIN STEWART

CC: Malcolm MacLeod, Head of Planning and Building Standards

PERFORMANCE MARKERS REPORT 2015-16

Name of planning authority: **Highland Council**

The High Level Group on Performance agreed a set of performance markers. We have assessed your report against those markers to give an indication of priority areas for improvement action. The high level group will monitor and evaluate how the key markers have been reported and the value which they have added.

The Red, Amber, Green ratings are based on the evidence provided within the PPF reports. Where no information or insufficient evidence has been provided, a 'red' marking has been allocated.

No.	Performance Marker	RAG rating	Comments
1	Decision-making: continuous reduction of average timescales for all development categories [Q1 - Q4]	Green	<p>Major applications At 20.6 weeks you were over 4 weeks quicker than 2014/15 and remain better than the average of 38.8 weeks. RAG = Green</p> <p>Local Non-Householder You have continued to reduce your decision making timescales from 12.3 weeks to 11.9 weeks, quicker than the national average of 12.3 weeks. RAG = Green</p> <p>Householder applications A slight increase to 7.3 weeks from 7.1 weeks in decision making means timescales have increased but you are still quicker than the national average and within the statutory timescale. RAG = Amber</p> <p>TOTAL RAG = Green</p>
2	<p>Processing agreements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer to all prospective applicants for major development planning applications; and availability publicised on website 	Green	<p>There has been a slight drop in the number of processing agreements which have been entered into. Agreements are offered to all prospective applicants for major developments and they are used for more complex local applications. RAG = Green</p> <p>Information relating to processing agreements is provided on your website. RAG = Green</p>
3	<p>Early collaboration with applicants and consultees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all prospective applications; and clear and proportionate requests for supporting information 	Green	<p>17% of applications are subject to formal pre-application discussions. You have demonstrated your commitment to entering into pre-app discussions and the benefit these have to ensure the efficient processing of an application. RAG = Green</p> <p>You provide pre-application packs to all prospective applicants which contain information about what supporting information is required. You also hold monthly meetings to discuss prospective applications and the information required to support them. RAG = Green</p>

4	<p>Legal agreements: conclude (or reconsider) applications after resolving to grant permission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing number of live applications more than 6 months after resolution to grant (from last reporting period) 	Green	You have monitored all legal agreements throughout the year to ensure they do not become drawn out. This monitoring has also helped to identify improvement actions for the year ahead.
5	Enforcement charter updated / re-published within last 2 years	Green	Your enforcement charter is 13 months old.
6	<p>Continuous improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> progress/improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators; and progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report 	Green	<p>Most of your NHIs are moving in the right direction with reductions in timescales for major and non-householder developments although there has been a slight increase in the time taken to decide householder applications. Your LDP and enforcement charter are up to date and you have a good record with regards to pre-application discussions and processing agreements.</p> <p>RAG = Green</p> <p>You have made progress with all your commitments with 2 reaching completion during the reporting period with those incomplete carried over to next year. You have also committed to a good range of improvements for the year ahead.</p> <p>RAG = Green</p>
7	Local development plan less than 5 years since adoption	Green	<p>Your LDP was adopted in 2012 and is 4 years old.</p> <p>We note you have a number of other area specific plans some of which are more than 5 years old.</p>
8	<p>Development plan scheme – next LDP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> on course for adoption within 5 years of current plan(s) adoption; and project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale 	Amber	<p>You have stated that there has been a delay to replacing your LDP due to a change in staffing structures and placing priority on replacing two remaining area LDPs.</p> <p>RAG = Amber</p> <p>You do have a project plan in place however due to the change in priorities this will now need to be updated along with your DPS.</p> <p>RAG = Amber</p>
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i>	Green	You have outlined how you ensure elected members are engaged effectively in the preparation of Main Issues Reports through the use of fortnightly meetings which are used to update members and provide them with a chance to inform the content of the MIR.
10	<p>Cross sector stakeholders* engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i></p> <p><i>*including industry, agencies and Scottish Government</i></p>	Green	You take a similar approach to involving stakeholders in the preparation of your LDP MIRs and ensuring that links with community planning are maintained.

11	Regular and proportionate policy advice produced on information required to support applications	Green	You have a range of supplementary guidance in place which sets out clearly what is required to support applications in specific circumstances. This guidance is also supported by the town centre masterplans you have produced.
12	Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit (for example: protocols; joined-up services; single contact arrangements; joint pre-application advice)	Green	You engage a range of services within your pre-application discussions and will be further integrating the planning and transportation services to provide greater co-ordination with roads construction consent.
13	Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities	Green	You regularly meet with other Local Authorities and share hosting responsibilities for the North of Scotland Development Plan Forum. One of the roles of the forum is to help identify and deliver tailored training for constituent authorities. You also participate in benchmarking and have representatives on all of HOPS committees.
14	Stalled sites / legacy cases: conclusion or withdrawal of old planning applications and reducing number of live applications more than one year old	Amber	You have cleared a large number of cases during the year however you have more cases remaining than you did last year. It is noted that these account for less than 5% of all cases dealt with by yourselves and that you are taking a proactive approach to reducing these cases.
15	Developer contributions: clear and proportionate expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out in development plan (and/or emerging plan); and • in pre-application discussions 	Green	You have supplementary guidance in place which is regularly reviewed and updated if required. RAG = Green Your pre-application pack outlines your developer contribution policy and this is supplemented by case specific advice. RAG = Green

HIGHLAND COUNCIL
Performance against Key Markers

Marker		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
1	Decision making timescales				
2	Processing agreements				
3	Early collaboration				
4	Legal agreements				
5	Enforcement charter				
6	Continuous improvement				
7	Local development plan				
8	Development plan scheme				
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR)	N/A	N/A		
10	Stakeholders engaged early (pre-MIR)	N/A	N/A		
11	Regular and proportionate advice to support applications				
12	Corporate working across services				
13	Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge				
14	Stalled sites/legacy cases				
15	Developer contributions				

Overall Markings (total numbers for red, amber and green)

2012-13	0	4	9
2013-14	1	1	11
2014-15	1	2	12
2015-16	0	2	13

Decision Making Timescales (weeks)

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2015-16 Scottish Average
Major Development	29.4	31.6	24.9	20.6	38.8
Local Householder Development (Non-)	15.0	12.2	12.3	11.9	12.3
Householder Development	7.4	7.0	7.1	7.3	7.5