

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Planning Committee: 14 August 2013

Subject: Planning Performance Framework

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To inform the Committee of the recent comments received from the Scottish Government regarding the Planning Performance Framework submitted by this Council for 2011/12.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Committee notes the content of this report.

3. Background

- 3.1** A new planning performance framework was introduced in 2012. It was developed by the Heads of Planning Scotland and supported by the Scottish Government. The purpose of the framework was to capture the key elements of a high performing planning. Previously all planning authorities had been assessed solely on speed of decision making, and other measures which reflect a good quality service were not measured. This rigid measurement was seen as an unfair performance measurement tool to assess the performance of a planning authority as a good planning service was recognised to be more than how quickly a decision can be issued. The framework was introduced as a balanced measurement of the overall quality of the planning service and will be used to drive continuous improvement. This approach was strongly supported by the Scottish Government and a range of stakeholder groups including CBI Scotland, Scottish Property Federation, Federation of Small Businesses and Homes for Scotland.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The first Planning Performance Frameworks were submitted at the end of September 2012 by all planning authorities. The Council's submission outlined our performance and demonstrated our achievements, actions and improvements in 2011/12. It also outlines service improvements for 2012/13. The Planning Performance Framework is contained in Appendix A. The Framework has been centred around key themes such as national headline indicators, defining and measuring a high quality Planning Service, identifying high quality development on the ground, certainty and communications, engagement and customer service, efficient and effective decision making, effective management structures, financial management and local governance and a culture of continuous improvement.

- 4.2** The National Headline Indicators addressed the age of the local development plan, and whether the development plan scheme was on track; an effective housing and employment land supply; the percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice; the number of major applications subject to processing agreements; and the delegation and application approval rates. Timescales for decisions are now measured on average number of weeks to decision. Previously it was within 2 months or 4 months. In terms of the other themes these were centred on identifying outcomes for each measure of a high quality service as an assessment of their effectiveness. Key initiatives and projects were identified to demonstrate a quality planning service such as the developers protocol, the Main Issues Report which focused on our key Regeneration sites, the Customer Charter, updated website and the Planning and Building Standards Forum. The Lomondgate development, Three Queens Square and Dalquhurn in Renton were given as examples of high quality development on the ground. This was supported by customer feedback from developers and other parties involved in the process.
- 4.3** The Scottish Government's feedback indicated that a very positive report was produced which showed a shift towards a planning reform and performance culture supported by evidence provided by customers. It welcomed the commitment made to continuous assessment and improvement. The format of the report was seen to allow for a very clear read of how changing behaviours are influencing outcomes and service quality. It was encouraged to see working with an up-to date local plan with the likelihood of replacing it within the 5 year cycle. The average timescales for deciding major applications were favourable compared to Scottish figures, although the delegation rate was below the national average. It indicated that the Council might consider amending the arrangements for handling these cases following legislative changes on scheme of delegation. Some wide gaps in average timescale between local applications decided within and outwith the 2 month period were identified, which was due to a small number of applications being delayed over long periods particularly at the request of applicants. They have indicated that we should work with applicants to avoid this.
- 4.4** The Scottish Government stated that the section of the report on defining and measuring a high quality planning service was very well structured, setting out key examples of actions taken with a focus on outcomes and supported in places with quotes obtained through feedback. The report demonstrated activity in the Authority that is recognised as being helpful to those looking to invest and being 'open for business'. The development achieved on the ground gave 3 good examples of how the planning service has played an important role in facilitating the delivery of development, regeneration and enhancement of the local environment. It also welcomed the Council's involvement in a benchmarking group with neighbouring Councils. This was seen as a very good example of Planning Authorities taking the initiative enabling them to learn from and challenge each other on improved delivery of the service. It suggests using the themes from the Planning Performance framework for future benchmarking discussions.

- 4.5** Overall, the feedback from the Scottish government was very favourable. Where areas have been suggested for further improvement – such as revising our scheme of delegation and wider information on overall customer satisfaction levels – these will be developed and taken forward in the Planning Performance Framework for 2012/13 (which is due to be submitted by the end of September 2013) and progressed in 2013/14.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no personnel issues associated with this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** None

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** There are no risks associated with this report.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** It is not considered that the report or recommendations raise any equalities issues.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** No consultation was necessary for the preparation of this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The content of this report supports the Council strategic priorities.

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and Economic Development
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Appendices: Planning Performance Framework 2011/12 and
Feedback Report from the Scottish Government

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All