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Ms Joyce White
Chief Executive
West Dunbartonshire Council



11 December 2013

Dear Ms White

COUNCIL PERFORMANCE: THE PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Thank you for your authority's second annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) report. Please find enclosed a feedback report for your authority, which I hope you will find useful.

I am delighted to see the progress that has been made across Scotland over the past year. I am particularly pleased to see the increasing use of processing agreements and authorities working hard to remove 'legacy cases' from the system as this can have a detrimental impact on average timescales. It is also pleasing to see that authorities are taking a corporate approach to service delivery with some authorities drawing closer links between planning and roads sections to align planning permission and roads construction consent, which is influencing better designed places. Authorities are also engaging with each other in bench marking groups enabling them to compare services and learn from each other.

Councillor Stephen Hagan, COSLA Spokesperson for Development, Economy & Sustainability and I wrote to authorities in August, to ask that information was provided within PPF reports on an agreed set of markers. You will note that we have incorporated an additional element to the feedback report this year which gives a rating for each indicator based on the information provided within your report.

We hope the format is useful in highlighting priority areas for improvement action. The High Level Group on Planning Performance, which I co-chair with Councillor Hagan, will next meet in January 2014. At this meeting we will discuss the reports and feedback style and will consider how the key markers have been reported. We are happy to take comments and views on any aspect of the performance feedback reporting, that can inform the group's discussion.

I was disappointed that a number of authorities missed the deadline for submission this year, some fairly significantly, and some for the second year running. It really is important that the process of producing PPF reports are appropriately managed to ensure submission is on time and reports are complete and in their final form. We are discussing with HOPS and COSLA the feasibility of bringing forward the deadline for submission of the reports to early summer and we will keep you up to date with discussions and dates for submission. I know that my own officials are already working on our

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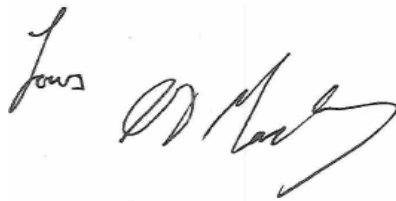


PPF for the current reporting year to ease pressure closer to the year end. Setting up appropriate monitoring arrangements now will ensure the task of drafting our PPF is easier.

Turning to your authority's performance report, I was pleased with your informative and positive report which provided a strong emphasis on collaborative working, customer service and efficiency. It is important that your Local Development Plan is project managed and remains on course for adoption within the statutory 5-year timescale. I was also pleased to hear that your benchmarking with planning authorities is contributing to the sharing of good practice and the improved exchange of information.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank your staff for participating in the performance events that I held over the summer, which allowed me to speak directly to staff to outline my vision for a highly performing planning service. I found it really informative to hear directly from those at the frontline and I was really pleased with the productive discussions and positive feedback from the delegates.

I was particularly impressed with the dedication of the planners and their willingness to play a role in the improvement of the services they provide. Many of the challenges for planners are not new but what we need are new approaches and renewed determination. This is where I think the PPFs can add the most value, identifying good practice and areas for improvement. I look forward to working with you to deliver a high performing planning system.



DEREK MACKAY

cc. Pamela Clifford, Manager of Planning

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK: 2012-13

FEEDBACK REPORT: West Dunbartonshire Council



Date performance report due: 30 September 2013

Date of receipt of report: 27 September 2013

National Headline Indicators

- You have an up to date local plan and we note that your Local Development Plan (LDP) remains on track with your development plan scheme for adoption in 2014, within the statutory 5-year timescale. We note there has been some slippage in timescales due to the collaborative approach you have taken to engage on key sites prior to the publication of your Proposed LDP.
- There remain some issues around a standard definition for consistently measuring employment and commercial land supply, which we are working with HOPS to address. In the meantime, the data you have provided is noted.
- Your decision-making timescales were again favourable when compared to national figures and you have continued to make good progress by reducing the average timescales for major developments, local developments (non-householder) and householder developments.
- We are pleased to see that you have delivered your previous commitment to record the number of major/significant proposals subject to pre-application advice. The figure provided is encouraging and provides evidence of the progress you have made. It was not clear whether you also offer and monitor the uptake of pre-application advice for all development types. Future reports should aim to cover this in more detail.
- We note that none of your 3 major developments were subject to a processing agreement, with some developers agreeing timelines as an alternative. You should continue to offer processing agreements and future reports need to describe the methods used to promote them. Some authorities have found that awareness and take-up has increased following the publication of guidance. In light of recent legislative changes you may wish to consider using processing agreements for more substantial local developments.
- Whilst your average decision making timescales are very positive, it was not clear whether any legacy cases for applications more than one year old remain. If this is the case, future reports should provide a description of how you are tackling these applications and the improvements you have introduced.
- We note that it has been over 3 years since your enforcement charter was updated, with a revised version currently awaiting committee approval. You should ensure that future updates are completed within the required 2-year cycle.

- Your high approval rate provides evidence of a service that is committed to working with applicants to negotiate improvements and secure better outcomes. Do you monitor the value added to planning applications as this may further demonstrate your approach to encouraging economic growth?
- Your delegation rate remains below the national figure. We note your commentary on Council interest cases and that you intend to update your scheme of delegation. We look forward to hearing about the results of this in your next report.

Defining and measuring a high-quality planning service

- Your report is very well structured and provides a clear indication under each of the headings to support your commitment to a service culture and continuous improvement. The inclusion of informative descriptions of progress made during the reporting year and feedback from customers helps to demonstrate how this has been put into practice.
- Working with an up-to-date development plan along with your statistics on approval rates and early engagement all appear to be contributing to a level of certainty and confidence that benefits customers and enables consistent decision-making.
- You have provided good evidence of a service that is committed to collaborative working with internal council services through regular internal meetings, protocols and pre-application engagement. Future reports should include details of how your developers protocol and pre-application discussions help ensure that supporting information requests are clear and proportionate.
- We note that you are in the process of developing a protocol with your roads service to improve coordination and the efficiency of responses and we look forward to hearing about the progress in your next report. Some authorities have also developed protocols with key agencies to set out information requirements and improve the quality of responses. This may be something that you may wish to consider.
- Your example of a development that reassessed planning obligation requirements in light of changing economic circumstances provided evidence of a service that is taking a proportionate and reasonable approach to infrastructure requirements. As it was not clear whether such approaches are applied to new developments, future reports should describe how proportionate approaches to developer contributions are achieved through pre-application discussions and set out in your LDP.
- You have provided a range of positive examples and feedback which demonstrates your commitment to delivering high quality development. This is clearly benefiting from well-established collaborative working and partnership approaches with a range of internal and external stakeholders. One such example is your sustainable placemaking exercise in Dumbarton and we look forward to hearing about progress in future reports.
- You appear to have effective arrangements in place for efficient decision making and this is supported by a close working relationship with your elected members. The provision of training is also welcomed, along with the development of a protocol for elected member involvement in pre-application

discussions. We are interested to hear more about this approach from an elected member and developer perspective as this could be shared more widely for the benefit of other authorities.

- We are pleased to see that you are continuing to use forums to engage with agents and users on a variety of matters. It is also encouraging to note that you have been responsive to feedback by implementing a number of specific improvements to your service.
- You have provided a good indication that effective management structures enable you to respond to priorities and adopt flexible approaches to workload, supported by regular management meetings at various levels.
- You have provided evidence of a range of activities that contribute to an open for business approach and a positive customer experience. This includes your customer charter, pre-application advice service and provision of updated information on your website.
- You appear committed to the ongoing development and training of staff through personal development and training. It was useful to get an indication of the training that has been delivered to staff and management during the reporting period.
- We are encouraged to note that benchmarking with other authorities has enabled you to share good practice and regularly exchange information on planning issues. We look forward to hearing about progress in your next report.
- It would be helpful if future reports included hyperlinks or web addresses to your online publications, either within the body of the text or in your supporting evidence section.

Service improvements 2012-13: delivery

- You have made good progress on delivering previously identified service improvements, with outstanding actions being carried forward.
- For clarity and ease of reference, future reports ought to incorporate the table format from the HOPS Planning Performance Framework document, which displays improvements committed in the previous year and a clear record of actions/completion.

Service improvement commitments 2013-14

- You have again committed to a good range of activities that should help contribute towards your continuing delivery of good performance, collaborative working and customer service. However, some of your improvement commitments would have benefited from being more specific, time-based and measurable.
- We would have expected your intention to continue to promote processing agreements would have led to a specific service improvement commitment. Nevertheless, we look forward to hearing about the progress you have made in your next report.

Conclusion

- You have produced a positive, informative and well-written report that supports your strong commitment to decision making timescales and the provision of an open for business culture envisaged through planning reform and the Planning Performance Framework.
- The inclusion of feedback from customers was particularly welcomed, alongside useful examples and a thorough description of the actions and initiatives that you have taken forward in the reporting year.
- It is important that your LDP is project managed to remain on course for adoption within the statutory 5-year timescale.

The feedback in this report is based solely on the information provided to us within your Planning Performance Framework Report covering the period April 2012 to March 2013.

If you need to clarify any aspect of the report please contact us on 0131 244 7148 or email sgplanning@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

We hope that this feedback will be of use to you in the preparation of your next report which covers the period April 2013 to March 2014. Please note that we are in discussions with HOPS and COSLA about the potential benefits of bringing the submission date forward, closer to the end of the reporting period. We will let you know as soon as a decision has been made.

PERFORMANCE MARKERS REPORT 2012-13

Name of planning authority: **West Dunbartonshire 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	Continuous reduction of timescales for major developments, local developments (non-householder) and householder developments, which continue to remain below the Scottish average.
2	Processing agreements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer to all prospective applicants for major development planning applications; and availability publicised on website 	Amber	Processing agreements offered for all major developments, but none were taken up in the reporting period. No description provided on how they are publicised. Future reports need to describe this in more detail.
3	Early collaboration with applicants and consultees <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 	Amber	Pre-application discussions used for major/significant developments. Report not clear whether this service is available for all prospective applications. Development protocol and development management charter in place to facilitate development, also covers pre-application advice. Report would benefit from more details of how early collaboration ensures information requests are reasonable and proportionate.
4	Legal agreements: conclude (or reconsider) applications after resolving to grant permission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing number of live applications more than 6 months after resolution to grant (from last reporting period) 	Amber	Timescale for applications subject to legal agreements (38.4 weeks) is well below the Scottish average (75.1 weeks). Report lacked information on legacy cases and didn't include the average timescale for applications for legal/planning agreements in 2011-12.

5	Enforcement charter updated / re-published within last 2 years	Red	Enforcement charter over 3 years old at end of reporting period. Has recently been revised, but not published.
6	Continuous improvement: <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 	Amber	<p>Further progress made on reducing decision making timescales for major, local and householder applications. Applications subject to legal agreements well below national figure.</p> <p>Good activity on improvement actions through the year and Local Development Plan on track with development plan scheme.</p> <p>Enforcement Charter not updated within 2-year requirement.</p>
7	Local development plan less than 5 years since adoption	Green	Local Plan adopted 2010.
8	Development plan scheme – next LDP: <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 	Green	LDP remains on course for adoption in 2014. Future reports would benefit from description of how LDP is project managed.
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i>	NA	
10	Cross sector stakeholders* engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i> <i>*including industry, agencies and Scottish Government</i>	NA	
11	Regular and proportionate policy advice produced on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information required to support applications; and • expected developer contributions 	Green	<p>Development protocol and development management charter in place to facilitate development, also covers pre-application advice.</p> <p>Good example provided in report of how a proportionate approach to developer contributions was delivered. Future reports need to describe how this is applied to all developments and supported by guidance/advice.</p>

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	Good evidence of corporate working and collaborative working between Council departments on service provision and variety of projects. Clear management structures, in place and this is supported by protocols. Report provides a number of clear examples supported by customer feedback.
13	Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities	Green	Benchmarking with other planning authorities. Clear description of how good practice is shared, including examples and benefits of collaborative working.
14	Stalled sites / legacy cases: conclusion or withdrawal of old planning applications and reducing number of live applications more than one year old	Amber	<p>No details provided, so it is not clear whether stalled sites and legacy cases remain in the system and whether this is an issue. Future reports would benefit from more commentary to describe approach in more detail.</p> <p>Decision making timescales for all development categories well below the national average.</p>
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 	Amber	<p>Good example provided of how a proportionate approach to developer contributions was delivered, supported by feedback.</p> <p>Future reports need to describe how such approaches are delivered and set out through pre-application and the LDP.</p>