

29 August 2024
Agenda Item No. 6

PLANNING SERVICES – ANNUAL SERVICE REVIEW REPORT 2023/2024

Report by: Pam Ewen, Head of Planning & Chief Planner

Wards Affected: N/A

Purpose

To present an overview of the Service, detail the service planning, change and improvement work undertaken in 2023/24 and to provide an assessment of performance to inform scrutiny and future service planning.

This report focuses on the planning functions of the Service; the Climate Change functions will be reported to the Environment, Transport and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee in November.

Recommendation(s)

The scrutiny committee is asked to:

- review the progress and performance of Planning Services for 2023/24 and the activity undertaken in 2024/25 to date;
- note the assessment and improvements identified through the National Planning Improvement Framework assessment (June 2024);
- note the Service planning objectives for 2024/25 and the three-year direction of travel; and,
- consider and comment on the remodelled 'annual service review' report format.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Legal & Risk Implications

There are risks in not meeting Best Value requirements that can lead to additional monitoring/audit, external intervention and/or loss of public confidence.

Impact Assessment

An EqIA is not required as this report does not propose any changes to policies or services.

Consultation

Consultation is not required as the report does not propose a change to existing policies and practices.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This is the Planning Services Annual Review for 2023-24. It looks back over the previous year and assesses how the service has performed in relation to its priorities and challenges and looks forward to the changes and improvements that need considered next and the Service's priorities for the next 12 months.
- 1.2 In addition, this report summarises the Planning Service's performance and improvement assessment through the new National Planning Improvement Framework.
- 1.3 In the report you will find:
- An overview of the Service's roles and responsibilities;
 - Budget and workforce information to put service delivery into context;
 - The key priorities the Service has been working to and how these relate to the Plan for Fife and council reforms;
 - An assessment of how the service has performed in relation to these priorities;
 - Objectives and themes for service delivery, change, and/or improvement going forward;
 - An overview of the Service's assessment and identified improvements through the National Planning Improvement Framework (June 2024); and,
 - Case studies showing examples of best practice and Service improvement.

This information is then used to inform annual service planning and the strategic direction of the service over the next three years.

- 1.4 This approach to annual review and reporting is part of the Council's updated public performance reporting and scrutiny arrangements. More information on that and how the Council performs and compares with other local authorities can be found online here www.fife.gov.uk/performance

2.0 Service Overview

Key role and responsibilities 2023/24

- 2.1 Planning Services is part of the Place Directorate and is established to:
- Deliver a wide range of statutory planning functions including the Local Development Plan, assessing applications for new development, and facilitating place change.
 - Enable economic growth, further community wealth building, and protecting and enhancing Fife's built and natural environment.
 - Deliver some non-statutory planning functions, including planning enforcement.

- 2.2 The Service's strategic approach supports the Plan for Fife and the Council's reform agenda by facilitating new sustainable development to grow Fife's economy, address climate change, and further community wealth building.
- 2.3 The planning function of the Service is responsible for:
- Deliver statutory planning functions, including:
 - Leading the Council's place-based policy and strategy, including the Local Development Plan (the Fife Place Plan), and the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
 - Providing key statutory functions facilitating new development to grow Fife's economy, address climate change, and further community wealth building.
 - Facilitating transformational place-based change, particularly through the 9 strategic development areas.
 - Assessing 3,800+ p.a. applications (statutory and non-statutory) relating to new developments ranging from small householder changes to major expansions. Dealing with some of Scotland's largest and most complex planning applications, listed buildings, and others.
 - Protecting and enhancing the built and natural heritage across Fife is at the core of the Service's work, with 3% of Fife's domestic stock Listed Buildings and 8% in Conservation Areas.
 - Deliver non-statutory functions, including:
 - Planning enforcement
- 2.4 Overall, the planning functions of the Service largely deliver statutory functions.

Budget breakdown 2023/24

- 2.5 The Planning Service's budget overview is set out in Table One below. The substantial expenditure is on staffing. Income is essentially through planning and related applications both statutory and non-statutory. Application income is monitored monthly and can be subject to volatility, for example where there is an economic downturn particularly related to housebuilding.
- 2.6 Budget savings achieved over the past decade have mainly been through staffing reductions particularly over the period 2010 to 2019, as well as an introduction/increase in some discretionary fees to achieve permanent savings.
- 2.7 Budget pressures remain and are mitigated where possible. Pressures relate to new and unfunded duties placed on the Planning Authority through the Scottish Government, in addition to costs of preparing the Local Development Plan. Increasing non-statutory income through our pre-application service assists, to an extent with overall funding. The LGBF report (2021/22) identified that there has been a 26.1% reduction in planning spending in real terms nationally since 2010/11; one of the highest reductions in Council service areas. Further details are provided in para's 3.34/5 below.

Table One: Planning Services Budget

	Net Expenditure by Business Area	Provisional Outturn	Variance	Budgeted FTE by Business Area
	23/24	23/24	23/24	23/24
	£m	£m	£m	FTE
Development Management	0.206	0.152	-0.055	53.16
Planning Administration	0.145	0.153	0.008	1.00
Climate Change & Zero Waste	0.688	0.584	-0.104	11.00
Policy & Place	1.104	1.148	0.044	17.48
Total Net Expenditure	2.143	2.035	-0.107	82.64

	Gross Expenditure	Provisional Outturn	Variance
	23/24	23/24	23/24
	£m	£m	£m
Employee Costs	4.745	4.534	-0.210
Premises Related Expenditure	0.000	0.001	0.001
Transport Related Expenditure	0.030	0.021	-0.009
Supplies and Services	0.460	0.533	0.074
Third Party Payments	0.202	0.000	-0.202
Transfer Payments	0.000	0.061	0.061
	5.436	5.150	-0.286

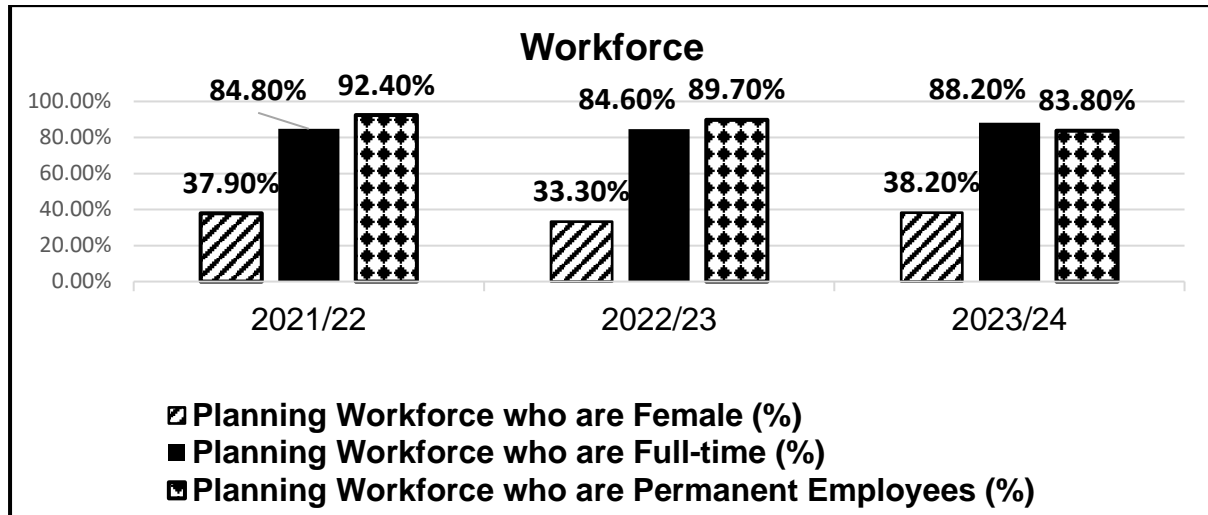
	Gross Income	Provisional Outturn	Variance
	23/24	23/24	23/24
	£m	£m	£m
Internal Income	-0.183	-0.179	0.004
External Income	-3.110	-2.936	0.174
	-3.293	-3.115	0.179

Note – Table One shows the 2023/24 Financial Performance for the whole Planning Service which is reported to 2 scrutiny committees. The financial monitoring of Planning Activities comes under the remit of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee. The financial monitoring of the Climate Change and Zero Waste team comes under the remit of the Environment, Transportation & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee.

Workforce profile 2023/24

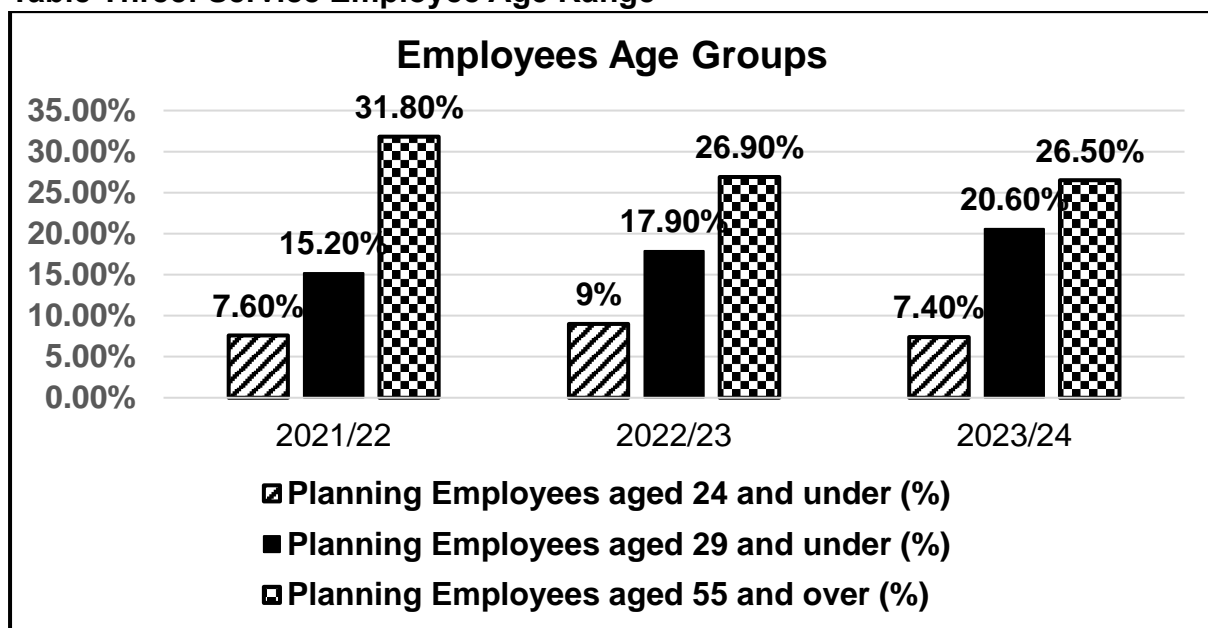
2.8 The workforce comprises 82 full-time equivalent (FTE) roles – employing 87 people in total. Table Two below details some of the key measures of the Service's workforce.

Table Two: Workforce Details



2.9 Over the past decade the Service has had a focus on growing staff at an early stage of their career, including students. One of the outcomes from this is a more diverse workforce in respect of age. Table Three below demonstrates that the workforce has a positive age profile, which is the outcome of a decade of workforce strategy.

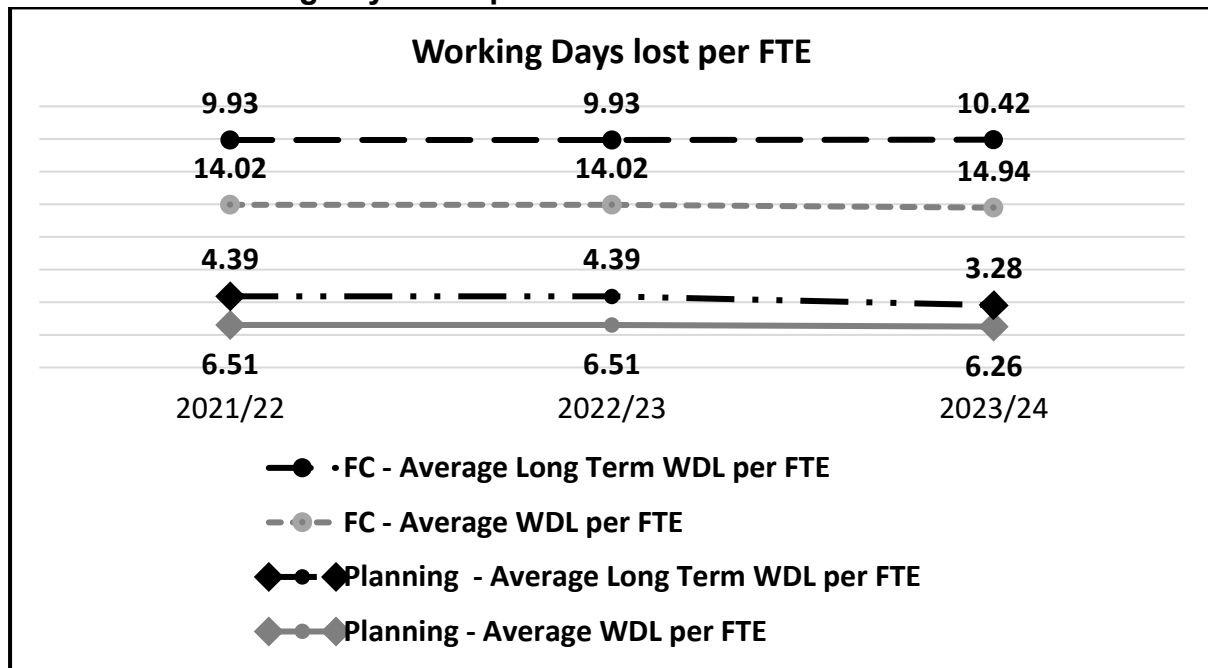
Table Three: Service Employee Age Range



* Note - 29 and under data includes 24 and under

- 2.10 The Service People Plan/Workforce Strategy has created opportunities for a younger workforce, achieved through several routes, in particular the University of Dundee and Fife College. The placements created are a mix of full and part-time; aimed to support students engaged in a course of planning and related study to gain valuable experience, and full-time graduate posts. The Service culture is one where people feel supported. The Service annual staff survey in Sept 2023 showed that 90% of staff were happy at work, and 90% felt supported to develop their skills and knowledge.
- 2.11 Attracting and retaining talented Planners and other professionals into local government is increasingly challenging. The Service is successful in attracting and retaining talented staff. Through recruitment stages promotion of the Service through short videos to convey the values, opportunities and why Fife Council is a great place to work are utilised. The Service's approach to workforce strategy was recognised in a national award in early 2024.
- 2.12 Working days lost in the Service is significantly less than the Councils averages. The Service has a Mental Health First Aider and managers across the Service seek to identify any support that is required for staff at an early stage. Table Four below shows that the average working days lost has reduced. The service will seek to learn from early lessons from the attendance management pilot being led by Human Resources Service.
- 2.13 Priority Four, as set out below, provides more detail on the approach taken and results.

Table Four: Working Days Lost per FTE



3.0 Priorities and Performance

3.1 Service Priorities 2023/24

The Service had four strategic priorities in 2023/24, to:

1. Progress the review of the Local Development Plan through approval and submission of the Evidence Report.
2. Reduce the time taken to determine planning applications to the national averages.
3. Implement digital changes to enhance customer experiences.
4. Further develop the workforce through regular training, and wider opportunities for early career/student posts.

3.2 How we delivered

3.2.1

Priority 1: Progressing the Local Development Plan review

What we said

We set out to:

Ensure that the Local Development Plan 2, currently being developed, is the Council's corporate place strategy reflecting the Plan4Fife and providing a spatial strategy across the 7 local areas in Fife. A Plan that gains ownership across the Council's Leadership team and across political parties.

What we achieved

The first stage, the [Evidence Report](#) was approved by Fife Council on 21 March 2024 for submission to the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) the Gate Check which is a formal process to essentially check that the Council has all the information required to prepare the proposed Plan, the next stage. Council Services, Fife Partnership partners, Government Key Agencies, such as SEPA, NHS Fife and many other organisations were involved in providing data and information. A range of research was undertaken including Play Sufficiency Assessment, as well as engagement across different community groups.

How we know

The Evidence Report was formally submitted the week beginning 29th April 2024; the first Evidence Report to be submitted nationally. The Service is currently responding to the DPEA's request for further information.

3.2.2

Priority 2: Reduce the time taken to determine planning applications

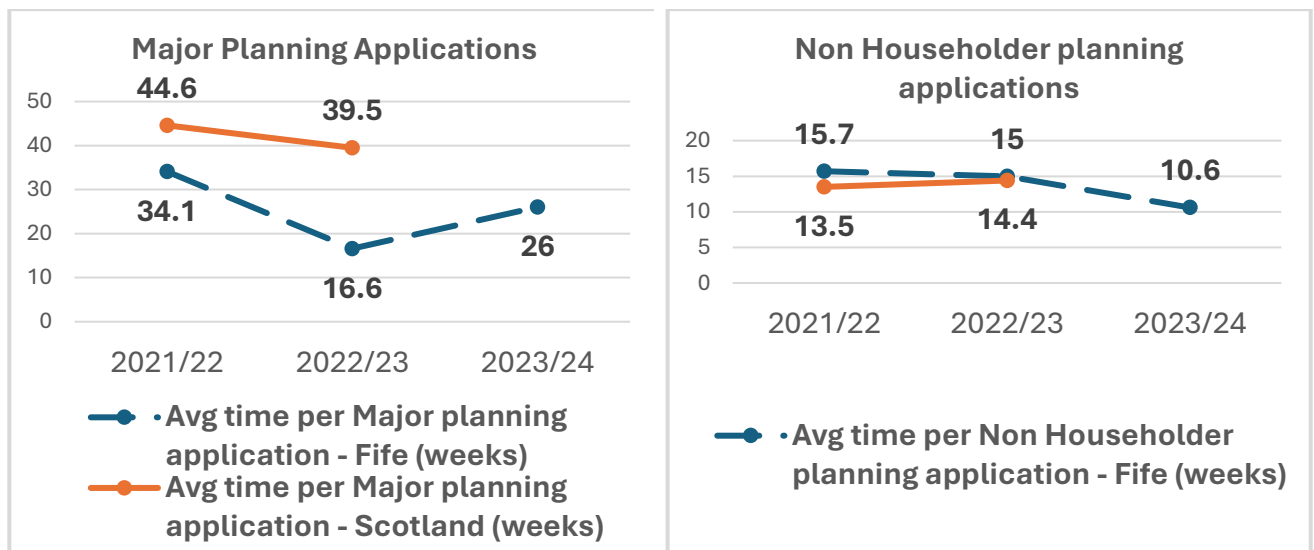
What we said

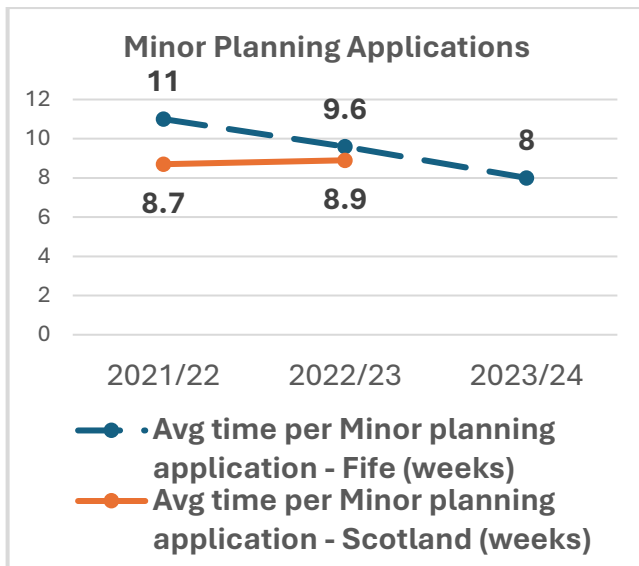
In terms of the average number of weeks taken to determine planning applications Fife Council Planning Services is meeting the timescales it set itself within the previous 2022/23 reporting period. On the back of an increase in planning applications during and on the back of the pandemic, the Service has targeted reducing the time taken to around the national average. In doing so, the service recognises and indeed focuses on achieving a good quality outcome in respect of new development, and often that can take longer to achieve through changes to the development as first proposed.

What we achieved

Within the Local and Householder categories of applications, the average time taken to determine the applications was reduced. For Major applications, the statistics can vary due to the small number of applications. The service now works to maintain these timescales, with a recognition that the assessment of planning applications is more complex than it has ever been.

How we know





* note – Scottish average data for 2023/24 is not yet available from the Scottish Government

3.2.3

Priority 3: Implement digital changes to enhance customer experience

What we said

The Service for many years has been focused on continuous improvement utilising digital tools. The focus for 2023/24 was to continue to make greater use of digital tools and implement improvements based on customer and other feedback.

What we achieved

The Service has implemented a range of digital improvements to improve the customer experience as well as more efficient processes. This has been achieved through, for example, increased automation and utilising Power BI. These changes have implemented more detailed monitoring including performance. In some areas of the Service this is from individual level through to team and type of application. This detailed monitoring allows for better informed decisions in areas such as where to focus resources. Sharing this good practice across Planning Authorities is being undertaken. The Service will continue to implement improvements and will require further support from Fife Council BTS colleagues. The focus will be on exploring the potential for AI, further developing automation where possible, and continuously improving the digital customer experience.

Examples of Digital Technology Used by the Planning Service are set out below.

Microsoft Teams

Meetings/Delivering Training using hybrid approaches.

Power BI

Report dashboard software (weekly list, planning timeline and various reports).

Power Automate

Used to automate repetitive tasks (used in our complaints process, weekly list and self-build housing list).

Microsoft Forms

Used to gather feedback from customers, used for online engagement for evidence report and in our self-build housing list.

X (Formally Twitter) Planning Services account.

Uniform Enterprise

Used to automate email updates to customers.

Planning Contact Us forms

Now capturing new data on customer contact through Power BI and Power Automate.

How we know

Customer feedback has been positive, for example through the Peer review discussion as part of the national performance assessment. Changes to the committee report template for both Planning Committees has been received positively, and was an improvement identified through a LEAN. The Planning Application Timeline Tool which was implemented (see Appendix One) is a further example of improvement for customers, and our customer satisfaction (see Appendix Two) demonstrates a high satisfaction with the service provided; 85% in 2023/24.

3.2.4

Priority 4: Further develop the workforce through regular training and wider opportunities for early career/student posts

What we said

Planning Services would create several routes into the planning profession in Fife by working with the University of Dundee and Fife College.

What we achieved

A new route was achieved through Fife College into both opportunity within planning Service and also into the undergraduate degree in planning at University of Dundee. These routes include a mix of full and part-time positions, the part-time position is aimed at students engaged in a course of study leading to a planning qualification. The Service has also entered into our third year of programme of internships with students from the University of Dundee gaining 30 hours of work experience.

Attracting and retaining talented Planners, environmental and other professionals into local government is increasingly challenging. The Service is successful in attracting and retaining talented staff. Through the recruitment stages, the Service is promoted through short videos to convey the values, opportunities, and why Fife Council is a great place to work. Planning as a career is also featured on the Council's recruitment [webpage](#).

The Service organises and delivers a wide range of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions throughout the year. The CPD series has gained traction over the past 5 years and delivers regular short training sessions on a wide range of topics, and these are open to other Services where relevant. Each team

within the Service has an identified training budget. Colleagues are actively encouraged to attend relevant work-related events and provide feedback to colleagues who did not attend. The Service aims for all staff to receive two personal development appraisals each year. Regular 121 and team meetings also take place to ensure open communication. A no blame culture is also fostered so maximum opportunities are gained to reflect on how well services are delivered and to shape future service improvements through reflecting on and learning from issues that arise.

How we know

The Service has created several graduate planner placements to support individuals to gain the experience they need to become a chartered member of the RTPI. This is further supported by the service's lead on an extensive CPD programme which benefits staff across the Place Directorate through which a wide range of subjects were covered including climate change, energy, biodiversity, design over 28 CPD sessions which 1, 645 staff attended (online).

This area of work has also upskilled the Service's workforce in areas such as mentoring and coaching.





The Service was recently successful in obtaining an award at the Scottish Government's Scottish Planning Innovation Awards (SPIA)

3.3 Wider operational performance

3.3.1 The Service monitors several indicators throughout the year, and this has focused on a national performance framework for planning. Section 4 below sets out an overview of the recent assessment undertaken within the new national planning improvement framework.

3.3.2 Planning is also responsible for 2 Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) indicators, as shown in Table 5 below.

Table Five: LGBF Indicators

LGBF Performance Indicators	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Status	Long Trend
Cost per planning application (LGBF)	£3,985.32	£4,511.67	£4,653.40	£5,698.23		
Avg Time Per Commercial Planning Application (LGBF)	8.4	11.1	16.9	16.5		

3.3.3 The latest set of LGBF data published covers 2022/23. These two indicators whilst can be helpful to undertake some benchmarking, are not as detailed as the indicators which the Service uses for measuring application processing.

[Explore the data | Benchmarking \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://improvementservice.org.uk)

3.3.4 The LGBF report (2022/23) identified that there has been a 26.1% reduction in planning spending in real terms nationally since 2010/11; one of the highest reductions in Council service areas. Nationally there has been a slight growth from 2021/22 to 2022/23 of 2.7%, which reflects the increase in statutory planning fees across Scotland.

3.3.5 In Fife however the reduction in Planning expenditure has been greater than the Scottish average with a reduction of 42.5% of expenditure since 2012 (Scottish average –26.1%). However, there has been an increase in expenditure of 7.2% for the year from 2021/22 to 2022/23, which is greater than the Scottish average growth for the year (2.7%). This reflects the increase in national planning fees being in part invested into staffing budget to assist with delivering against additional planning duties and managing more complex planning matters.

4.0 National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF)

- 4.1 A new national assessment of every Planning Authorities' performance and improvement is being implemented, replacing the Planning Performance Frameworks which were in place for 13+ years. The Service was one of ten authorities in the first cohort to implement the new framework. The new approach is one of self-assessment, focused on improvements, and reviewed by a peer review group (which consisted of a range of customers, and Councillors – Planning convenors). The assessment [report](#) provides a comprehensive overview against and sets out improvements which were identified.
- 4.2 The assessment was submitted to the National Planning Improvement Champion, who has since endorsed the report and associated [action plan](#). The improvement actions, together with other identified actions, provide the focus for service improvement in 2024/25.
- 4.3 Case studies have been used within the NPIF report to demonstrate areas of best practice and improvements within the Service during 2023/2024.
- 4.4 Overall, the Service's performance is good and improving in some areas, such as timescales to determine planning applications as set out above. This is against many changes nationally through new planning duties and a much more complex planning system. The focus of the assessment was on identifying improvements to ensure continuous improvement. Some of the key areas include the speed of internal consultations where other Council Services have recruitment challenges in particular professional advisor areas, such as flooding and environmental health. Application validation at point of submission remains about 50% which results in an ongoing cost to the service to manage and work with customers to resolve the issues with their submission. An improvement will look again at further improvements through a LEAN. The detail is set out in para 5.2 below.

5.0 Priorities ahead

- 5.1 The Service will continue to work to implement improvements across all core performance indicators. However, in 2024/25 resources will be focussed on the main change and improvement goals outlined below.

- To ensure that the Local Development Plan², the Fife Place Plan provides a spatial strategy across the 7 local areas. A Plan that gains ownership across the Council's Leadership team and across political parties. Working with Community Services, develop a new model for community engagement, and align with Community Planning.
- Provide further leadership and management training across the Service management team over the next 1-2 years, whilst maintaining our regular training opportunities for all.
- Mandatory training for Councillors involved in planning decisions will soon be enacted. The service will deliver the training programme to support Councillors, along with Legal Services.
- To drive greater productivity, increase automation, and improve customer experiences further we need to be more digitally enabled. Maximising the use of PowerBI will continue and will require further support from BTS. Exploring the potential for AI, further developing automation where possible, and continuously improving the digital customer experience.
- Moving from data management to deriving intelligence from information is key to both improving services and changing how we work. There is a strong requirement for spatial analysis using geographic information systems. To accomplish this, upskilling of the workforce in the use of GIS analysis and data management is required.
- Maintaining time taken to determine planning applications at or better than national averages.
- A Service review to ensure the service is structured to meet the need over the medium term. This will include a skills survey. A staged approach over Year 1 (2024/25): Consider options for the re-design to align with the corporate Place approach; Year 2: Consult on draft re-design and finalise; and Year 2/3: Implement re-design.
- Learn from early lessons from the attendance management pilot being led by Human Resources Service.

5.2 The Service will also deliver on the improvement actions as identified through the National Planning Improvement Framework assessment, which are:

- Working corporately to ensure that systems and processes are in place to reduce the impact of recruitment difficulties into specialist services who are critical to determining planning applications.
- Develop and implement a staff skills survey to identify transferable skills to meet aspirations and objectives of a place-based agenda (NPF4).
- Review and prioritise the actions identified in the existing Planning Services' Service Improvement Plan.
- Developing a suite of e-learning modules for local elected members.
- Developing spatial analysis further to inform decision making.
- Training for staff on the use of GIS.
- Horizon scanning of digital solutions which could enhance delivery of the planning service.

- Continue to develop Planning Services' website to include more simplified guidance including video and visual demonstrations to help to reduce the number of invalid submissions.
- New invalid process being scoped out through rapid process improvement event (LEAN) with agents to improve validation rates.
- Continue to develop and improve upon the Planning timeline tool.
- Further develop the Planning Services' customer survey to include selectable key areas (themes) where customers feel their experience fell short.
- Training programme to be developed to improve on how staff communicates more effectively with customers.
- Delivery of training and project work relating to the identification of how Planning Services will meet the Wellbeing and Sustainability objectives set out in NPF4.
- Regularly review new development schemes built on the ground and embed learning and training opportunities.
- Work with Legal Services and associated services to identify opportunities to streamline the Section 75 legal process.

5.3 The service management team recognise that there is a number of improvements to be actioned. This reflects the continuous improvement, which is embedded in the Service, together with the work undertaken to capture and assess feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, as well as decisions and other outputs.

Report contacts

Pam Ewen, Head of Planning & Chief Planner

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Case Study: Planning Application Timeline Tool

Appendix 2 - Case Study: Working with and Learning from Our Customers

Appendix 3 - Case Study: Delivering Sustainable Living and Wellbeing

Background papers:

1. [Fife planning authority National Planning Improvement Framework assessment \(June, 2024\).](#)
2. [Fife Local Development Plan 2 - Evidence Report](#)

Appendix 1

Case Study: Planning Application Timeline Tool

Context

As part of Fife's continuous improvement work, the Planning Authority found that communication should be key within the Planning System. This does not always seem to be the case throughout the Service and by analysing customer feedback, Planning has identified there are some areas where communication could be improved. During the COVID pandemic and the inability to have a telephone service, this also impacted communication with customers. The Service collated all customer inquiries to find that the majority of these related to getting an update on their planning application. Combined with this, the Service found that most customers found initial communication was good during the validation process of an application, but contact was lost until an application proceeded toward a decision.

Using this data and with the help of digital technology, the Improvement Team in 2021 had an idea of using Power BI to create [a tool](#) that could be used by customers to show exactly where an application is within the Planning system. In addition, the Service could show what has been completed and what is still to be completed. This would help with communication but would enable customers to find out more information on their planning application without the need to contact the Planning Authority directly.

[Fife Council's online planning system](#) has limitations. Although this will show some progress of cases and has recently implemented a simple timeline before the Service could implement anything similar, it does not provide a complete picture. To assist customers and to give them an updated position on their application which can be used in conjunction with the online planning system, the Improvement Team started to map out the stages of an application. From an application that is received, whether it is invalid, any site visits, consultation dates, how the decision will be made (committee/delegated), and the report being started, to a recommendation and the final decision being made.

What happened

At the time this project was scoped out the Service employed two Planning Improvement Technicians within the Planning Service. One of them has experience in computer programming and the other has extensive experience working within planning and dealing with complex applications for validation. Both members of staff have experience with dealing with customers daily. This together with customer feedback provided a good base to scope out what was required. During this project, the Improvement Team was expanded with another member of staff who had some planning experience but also some proven ability in using the systems within the Planning Authority. The Service has structured the team to include a Planning Improvement Officer who oversees all improvement projects and allocates work to two Planning Improvement Technicians.

Using Power BI dataflows, the team was able to create a data warehouse to collate some of the Service's data from a case management system – Uniform. This allows

the use of this data to create several visualisations and can be coded to provide different data fields and outputs.

Initially, the team had to create a baseline of the main stages of a planning application. As highlighted above, there are many stages that planning applications go through but using some of the fields in our casework system, it is possible to analyse where an application is within the planning process and what else is required to be completed before a decision can be made. By comparing these fields, each stage was scoped within the process as well as a text description which would also be displayed to the customer.

Using each of these stages, custom text was created to give customers details on their application when they enter either an application reference number or an application address using a custom-built user interface. As part of this, a graphical timeline that shows which stages have been completed and what stages are still to be completed is shown below:

Areas of collaboration

The idea of this project came directly from within the Improvement Team. One of the staff had recently completed training in Power BI while analysing the many comments received from our customers who completed the Customer Survey and emails that were received through a central mailbox during the COVID pandemic. The idea was to provide customers with more communication and as much information about their planning application as possible while adhering to Data Protection principles. Using Power BI previously for a new Weekly Update of Development Applications, invaluable feedback was received from a representative of Disabilities Fife regarding accessibility. A User Interface was designed with this knowledge and information in mind. The Tool is also due to be presented at the next Agents Forum to gather more feedback and how it can be improved. A link has also been included to acknowledgement letters for planning applications which are sent when every application is validated.

What was the overall result

[The Timeline tool](#) was published in March and it is hoped that this will help to provide the Service's customers with more information about their planning application while reducing the need to contact the Service and Case Officers directly. The tool also includes a link so customers can contact Planning Services directly using an online form which is also used for customer enquiries. This allows the Service to collate all enquiries together but also to monitor its responses. In the next year, feedback will also be gathered on this while monitoring enquiries to quantify the effectiveness of this piece of work.

Using agile principles and as part of the Service's commitment to continuous improvements, the Improvement Team has already gathered some ideas to expand the Timeline Tool further and upgrade this function by including target dates, the monitoring of extensions of time, amendments received, draft and final sign off dates, and to add a feedback form so customers can also suggest improvements.

Lessons Learned

The Planning Service in Fife invested in the workforce and identified an Improvement Team to be vital so that it is possible to deliver this type of project work. Although staff have knowledge of Planning, the Service has found it to be invaluable to have people who can expand the use of digital tools and systems to help within the Planning process. While Planning Services still relies on the Council's IT Service for some aspects of this, the Service has found that Planning staff who can combine their planning knowledge with various digital skills are crucial to delivering improvements.

Although this was identified early as an improvement, it took a bit of time to design and implement the project. It also involved working closely with colleagues within the IT Service to produce a working prototype that could be published online. At the time Planning Service's workload was high, and this project was delayed for various reasons. On reflection, this could have been completed sooner. Delaying the project meant the team had to keep going back to it and the complexity meant that some of the steps had to be duplicated.

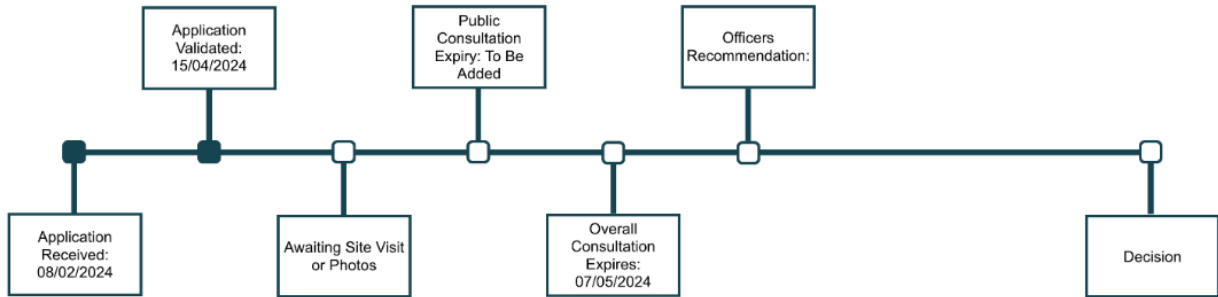
Within this time, the software company that provides the online planning system also delivered a timeline within their Public Access system. Although it is helpful, it does not show as many stages as the Planning Service's Timeline Tool can now display for our customers but there was a risk that this work might have become superfluous.

Application: 24/00321/PPP - Cupar North Cupar Fife

[View Application Details for 24/00321/PPP at planning.fife.gov.uk](#)

Application Status

Your application has been allocated to Steve Iannarelli. You can track your application online by clicking the button above.



Appendix 2

Case Study: Working with and Learning from Our Customers

Context

Analysis of customer survey feedback 01 April 2023 – 31 March 2024 and comparison to the previous financial year.

What happened

From the 1st of April 2023 to the 31st of March 2024 Fife Council Planning Service's Development Management team issued 2606 invitations to its customers, encouraging them to take part in the online survey. The survey includes 13 questions, encompassing a variety of formats including open-ended, multiple-choice, and equality monitoring queries. This approach allows the Service to continually improve its services based on the valuable insights provided by customers.

Areas of collaboration

Key Officer: Steven Traynor, Planning Improvement Technician

Stakeholders: Applicants/Agents, Developers & Authority Other Staff

What was the overall result



- 287 Surveys Completed
- 12% Return Rate
- 69% Completed by Agents

Overall Customer Satisfaction 2023/24



When comparing the survey results from the previous financial year there is an increase in the number of satisfied customers and a decrease in the number of dissatisfied customers. As can be seen in the tables below representing each of the quantitative questions within the survey.

Question - Setting aside whether you were happy with the final decision, please indicate how satisfied you were with the overall service you received

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
40% Increase	22% Decrease	14% Decrease	32% Decrease	33% Decrease

Question - How Satisfied were you that staff listened and responded to your needs

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
25% Increase	13% Decrease	3% Decrease	29% Decrease	35% Decrease

Question - How satisfied were you with the time taken to deal with your application

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
43% Increase	16% Decrease	58% Decrease	6% Decrease	11% Increase

Question - How satisfied were you with the updates on the progress of your application

Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
52% Increase	22% Decrease	35% Decrease	38% Decrease	17% Increase

What do the results tell the Service

The data shows that majority of customers have a positive experience when submitting a Planning application to Fife Council and that the Service has seen an improvement from the previous financial year, however, while the infographic paints a positive picture; customers are still highlighting the same issues as previous years suggesting that more work is required to improve in the following areas:

Communication

Clearer guidance

Application processing timescales

Communication

Many customers expressed a desire for better communication, including more updates throughout the planning process, faster responses, and the ability to speak directly with Planning Officers.

Clearer guidance

Customers felt that samples of applications would help with determining what information to submit, while another suggested online video tutorials to assist with the submission process.

Application processing times

Some customers highlighted that the process could be faster and more streamlined. Delays in validation and decision-making being the focus of these comments.

Lessons Learned

The survey is well established and is effective in gathering feedback from customers of Planning Services to highlight key improvements that are required, but the survey needs to be improved upon by implementing ways for customers to select key themes where issues lie to allow better analysis of the data. The feedback shows that the Service is improving each year and that excellent customer care is provided, but more work is needed to fully understand the issues that are impacting the customer's experience.

The specific actions and outcomes from the survey have helped to inform specific improvements for the year ahead and these are set out under the improvements related to Attribute 9.

Appendix 3

Case Study: Delivering Sustainable Living and Wellbeing

Context

This site located at the edge of the small traditional fishing town of St Monans in the East Neuk of Fife was allocated in the Local Development Plan for residential development. As well as mainstream housing the development required the delivery of affordable housing and the provision of an area for allotments. The provision of allotments within St Monans had been a community asset that had been much sought after for a considerable period of time by the local community.

The scheme includes the provision of multi-use paths to connect with the existing community and the provision of a SUDs basin, landscaping with additional tree planting, and wildflower meadows.

The development integrates 40 affordable houses into the layout of 86 dwellings in a mix of sizes and styles of accommodation ranging from smaller single-storey properties up to 4-bedroom family houses.

In addition to the allocation in the development plan, the provision of affordable housing and the allotments were secured through planning permission through a Section 75 legal agreement.

The negotiations with the developer and close working between Planning Services and the Community Projects Team of Fife Council resulted in the delivery of fully serviced allotments provided with a water supply and wide accessible footpaths. The Council and the community were then able to take forward the detailed layout and delivery of the allotments.

The allotments have been very popular with all plots taken up and there is now a waiting list. The overall development has provided a mixed tenure development that integrates well with the existing community and provides new opportunities for sustainable living both in terms of the allotments themselves but also the wider opportunities provided by a mix of affordable housing provided on the site.



© Fife Council



© Fife Council