

The Moray Council
Environmental Services Department

Planning Improvement Plan

The Environmental Services Department carries out the statutory planning functions on behalf of The Moray Council. This includes the activities required by Scottish Government legislation, and further discretionary activities as appropriate. These activities are grouped into two sections, namely Development Management and Development Plans, jointly part of the Planning and Economic Development Section. The main activities of these two areas are described in Appendix 1.

Corporate Framework 2009/10

In 2009/10 The Moray Council, along with other Scottish Councils, introduced ePlanning (March 2009) and the Planning Act 2006 (August 2009); implementation of ePlanning and the Act has been reviewed, and some procedures and practices require amendment or further work. The Council began a programme of Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF) reviews in 2009, and for Planning it identified a number of issues to be addressed related to management, customer service, procedures, communications and staff development. The Council has embarked on a Designing Better Services programme, which aims to achieve improvements in customer services, efficiencies in operational practices, best use of resources, and budget savings. The Council and the Moray Community Planning Partnership agreed a Single Outcome Agreement and Local Delivery Action Plans, which give strategic guidance to the whole of the Council.

Priorities for Planning in 2010/11

The sections above outlining the Corporate and Planning Frameworks will influence the priorities for the Development Management and Development Plans activities in 2010/11, these are also closely linked to the Council's economic development priorities, and encompassed in the remit of the Planning and Economic Development Section.

Aims arising from the Corporate Framework and Departmental objectives are:-

- 1) To increase the speed of decision making.
- 2) To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of processing and determining planning applications, from pre application to post-decision implementation and enforcement.
- 3) To improve the quality of decisions in terms of land use, design, environment, infrastructure, benefit to the local economy and corporate objectives.
- 4) To prepare and use the Development Plan to guide and achieve development which supports Corporate, Community Plan and community objectives.
- 5) To provide good leadership to Planning Services and support for the work and development of Planning staff.
- 6) To improve customer service and access to information.

The above aims will be achieved by the following actions:-

- 1) To increase the speed of decision making we will:-
 - Review the processing and determination of planning applications to streamline procedures and improve speed of decisions.
 - Benchmark planning application processes and performance with councils in the top quartile of Scottish Councils for 2008/9.
 - Achieve the local performance targets of 80% of householder applications and 60% of all applications determined in 2 months, for 2010/2011.
 - Move out of the lowest quartile of performance, for householder applications and all applications, for councils for 2010/11.
 - Have regular monitoring of the progress of applications against target dates.
 - Introduce stricter time limits for responses from consultees, and others involved in the planning application process.
 - Focus specific team approaches and resources towards Major, Householder and other Local applications.

- 2) To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of processing and determining planning applications from pre application to post-decision implementation and enforcement we will:-
 - Ensure that major applications are processed and determined by nominated officers from Development Management and Development Plans Teams.
 - Have clear and effective processes for major applications, including pre application discussions, involvement of key consultees, early identification of information required, and advice on how to progress major applications effectively.
 - Use project management by nominated officers to regularly monitor and manage the processing of major applications.
 - Review and improve consultations with key agencies, and agree respective roles and working arrangements of agencies and the Council.
 - Review staff and other resources to help achieve targets for speed and effectiveness of processing applications.
 - Be proportionate in requests for information, to avoid unnecessary delays in determining applications.
 - Support the requirements of the Local Review Bodies timeously and review the effectiveness of the Bodies at 6 monthly intervals.
 - Prepare an Enforcement Charter, which will clearly set out priorities, scope of enforcement and co-ordination with other Planning or Corporate activities.

- 3) To improve the quality of decisions in terms of land use, design, environment, infrastructure, benefit to the local economy and corporate objectives we will:-
 - Agree and implement a service level agreement with Aberdeenshire Council to deliver Developer Contributions in Moray.
 - Provide staff with training to maintain and improve their skills, particularly related to achieving the objectives of this Plan and the Council's priorities.
 - Obtain specialist skills where appropriate to improve the quality of planning decisions or policies, especially for design, regeneration and environmental matters.
 - Prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance to improve the quality of Planning Advice and outcomes from development.
 - Meet with Councillors, community groups, consultees, agents and applicants where relevant, to improve involvement in, and outcomes from, the Planning process.

- 4) To prepare and use the Development Plan to guide and achieve development which supports Corporate, Community Plan and community objectives we will:-
 - Review the Development Plan in accordance with the Development Plan Scheme.
 - Involve Development Management and Development Plans officers in joint review and preparation of policies and projects.
 - Prepare Plans, Policies and Projects that are designed to support and achieve Community Plan and Corporate objectives.

- 5) To provide good leadership to Planning Services and support for the work and development of Planning staff we will:-
 - Provide strategic and operational management through the posts of Manager and Principal Officers.
 - Have annual staff appraisals.
 - Support Planning staff in training and career development.
 - Have monthly Team meetings which address matters included in this Plan.
 - Involve staff in strategies, service planning and setting service standards.
 - Discuss setting and achievement of performance and targets with Teams and individual officers.
 - Increase joint working between Teams and individual officers.
 - Review the specification and effectiveness of IT equipment and systems, and document management, which are used in the planning processes.

- 6) To improve customer service and access to information we will:-
 - Have regular customer research to inform the Service of customer needs and opinions, including assessing the relevance of speed of decision making and quality of service and planning outcomes.
 - Have regular seminars with Agents, at least annually, to exchange information and advice and obtain feedback on the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the Service.
 - Review the Council's Website, printed or other Planning advice, or documents to have clear, concise and helpful information.
 - Respond to emails, telephone calls, or other correspondence in line with corporate standards and targets.
 - Analyse any complaints and act on issues identified.
 - Involve communities in any local planning guidance.
 - Maximise the use of technology to make determination of applications, and access to information as efficient as possible.
 - Participate in Designing Better Services.
 - Publicise the achievements of the Planning Service.

Appendix 1

Planning Activities

Development Management

- Determination of planning applications, including formal and informal pre application procedures, validation and registration, neighbour notification, consultation, assessment of material considerations, recommendations and decisions (delegated to officers or at Committee).
- Enforcement of planning permissions or breaches of planning legislation.
- Provision of informal advice on Development Management procedures, including advice on the need for planning permission and opinions on planning proposals.
- Implementation of Listed Building, Conservation Area, and associated legislation and procedures.
- Implementation of ePlanning.

Development Plans

- Preparation, implementation, monitoring and review of the Development Plan.
- Preparation and implementation of Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- Research and development of planning and corporate information.
- Climate Change and Carbon Management Programme Projects
- Assisting with economic development and community planning activities.

Joint Development Management and Development Plans

- Preparation and implementation of planning projects.
- Tree Preservation Orders.
- Implementation of the Planning Act 2006.
- Assisting with Local Review Bodies.
- Determining major planning applications.