

Development Management Service Plan 2024 - 2026

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the endorsement of the Development Management Service Plan 2024 – 2026 that is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 1.2 The Service Plan provides an overview of the Development Management Service and its main duties and seeks to outline how the Service can operate to underpin the corporate objectives of the Council.
- 1.3 The Service Plan includes an updated Development Management Improvement Action Plan which seeks not only to recover performance but which is intended to facilitate continuous improvement of the Service in the medium to longer term.
- 1.4 The Service Plan also identifies the key objectives of the Development Management Service and sets out a range of Key Performance Indicators and the reporting mechanisms that will be utilised to monitor performance and the delivery of improvement measures.
- 1.5 It is recommended that the Committee approve and endorse the Development Management Service Plan 2024 - 2026 (Appendix A)

Development Management Service Plan 2024 - 2026

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report seeks the endorsement of the Development Management Service Plan which is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 The Service Plan seeks to provide an overview of the Development Management Service and its main duties and sets out how the Service can operate in a manner that will underpin the wider corporate objectives of the Council.
- 2.3 The Development Management Service Plan has been prepared at a time where the Service is acknowledged to be under-performing as it recovers from the significant disruption to workflow which is not only a legacy of the Covid pandemic but more recently as a direct impact of the Scottish Government's introduction of National Planning Framework 4. It is also noted that the output of the Service has also been significantly impacted by a requirement to operate for extended periods of time with reduced staffing levels and vacancies in key posts which are in part attributed Covid, but more specifically to an identified National shortage of planning professionals.
- 2.4 The Service Plan seeks to identify that there has been significant progress in recovering the regulatory activity and performance of the Development Management Service following the introduction of an Improvement Action Plan in FQ4 2022/23.
- 2.5 The Improvement Action Plan has previously been subject to review, approval and progress reporting via the Council's Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The Improvement Action Plan sets out 38 specific improvement actions which are based around 4 key areas aligned with i) improvement of performance, ii) review and improvement of processes, iii) recruitment and staff wellbeing, and iv) communication and engagement. 13 actions have been delivered to date and work has commenced and remains ongoing in relation to a further 18 items. The Improvement Action Plan is appended to the Service Plan and will remain as a 'live' document that will continue to be updated as individual actions are delivered/completed.
- 2.6 The Service Plan also seeks to identify the achievements of the Development Management Service during 2023/24 and highlights the successful recruitment activity and the creation of an additional 4.5 fte posts to directly support Service delivery in addition to 1 fte additional post to support the complementary activity within the separate Development Policy Team. During 2023/24 the improved resource within the Development Management Service allowed it to exceed 100% turnover of both planning applications and pre-application enquiries, and

enforcement turnover was maintained at 96% for the same period. The allocation of additional resource has been achieved by utilising additional fee income that has arisen following the Scottish Government's review of statutory planning fees; the cost of additional agency staff and a one off saving of £340k toward the Council's wider budget was also able to be delivered as a result of a short-term increase in the volume of 'major' applications.

- 2.7 The Service Plan identifies that the key challenges in the upcoming period are to improve the timeliness and efficiency of decision making; to ensure that staff are provided appropriate support and opportunity for development; and to improve communications and engagement with customers, and the management of their expectations.
- 2.8 The Development Management Service is already subject to a wide range of reporting and monitoring mechanisms which include the annual National Planning Improvement Framework and bi-annual statistical returns to the Scottish Government in addition to quarterly performance reports to PPSL/ELT, monthly reports to the PRS Policy Lead, and internal reporting that informs day to day operation of the service and performance of teams/individuals. Appendix 1 of the Service Plan seeks to identify a range of Key Performance Indicators that are relevant and can be utilised to monitor performance of the Service and whether has managed to deliver against the outcomes identified.
- 2.9 Benchmarking has been undertaken against the most recent available Scottish Government data set which is for 2022/23. This indicates that the Council's performance in relation to average time measures is largely within its pre-Covid targets which were set to be within 10% of the National Average. The exception to this is performance on 'householder' application times which are 3.8 weeks slower for the latest available data covering the 2022/23 reporting period.
- 2.10 The comparability of statistics which look at the percentage of determinations within statutory timescales are less favourable. It is however observed that Nationally nearly 20% of all 'local non-householder' applications and over 10% of all 'householder' applications have been removed from these data sets as a number of other local authorities have employed a tactic of recording time extensions as processing agreements for reporting purposes. This has the effect of removing long-running applications from both average time and statutory timescale measures. Whilst the data for 2023/24 is not yet available it is expected that the use of processing agreements by other local authorities will have increased as they also deal with their own backlogs of casework and staffing issues and that this will further skew the comparability of performance between local authorities, and the usefulness of the National Average as a benchmarking measure when statistics for 2023/24 are published. Moving forward it is proposed that from 2024/25 forwards, Argyll and Bute should recognise agreed time extensions as 'processing agreements' for the purpose of statistical reporting as a means of ensuring that the National Average remains a relevant benchmark for performance of Argyll and Bute Council in comparison to other authorities.
- 2.11 At this time it is proposed that the Council continue to set performance targets as being within 10% of the National Average but that targets continue to be reviewed annually against the most recent available National data set.
- 2.12 It is recommended that the Committee:- approve and endorse the Development Management Service Plan 2024 – 2026 (Appendix A)

3.0 IMPLICATIONS

3.1 **Policy:** None

3.2 **Financial:** None

3.3 **Legal:** None

3.4 **HR :** None

3.5 **Fairer Scotland Duty:**

3.5.1 **Equalities – Protected Characteristics:** None

3.5.2 **Socio-economic Duty:** A consistent and proportionate approach to planning enforcement is essential for natural justice.

3.5.3 **Islands:** None

3.6 **Climate Change:** None

3.7 **Risk:** None.

3.8 **Customer Service:** Service Plan sets out key performance indicators for measuring the performance of the DM Service, and in doing so, setting customer expectations on the service level to be provided.

3.9 **The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) -** None

Executive Director with responsibility for Development & Economic Growth:-

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10th September 2024

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Development Management Service Plan 2024 - 2026