

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE UPDATE

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides the Area Committee with an update on the performance of the MAKI Development Management for the period April 2012 – March 2013.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 Members are requested to note the content of this report.

3.0 STAFF CHANGES

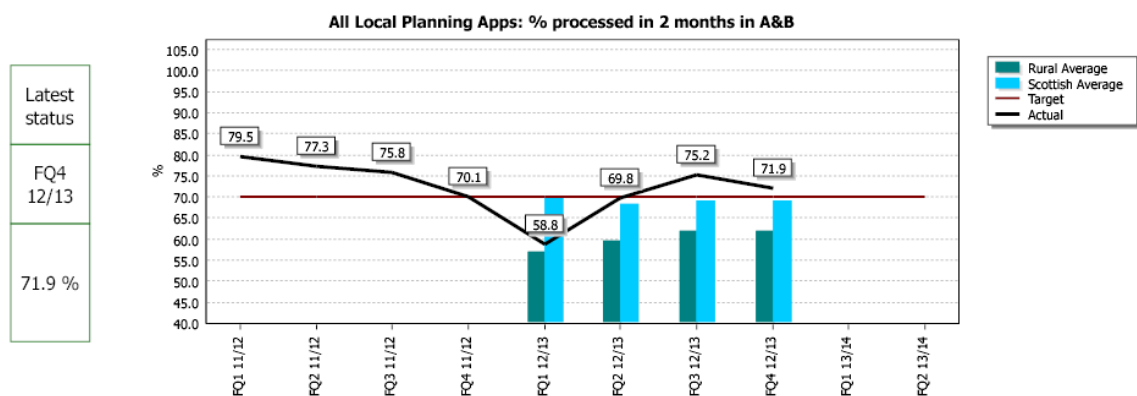
3.1 There has been some turn-over of staff within the MAKI office within the past 12 months. Rory MacDonald was promoted internally in October 2012 from an admin post to fill the Planning Technician post which had been vacant since March 2011. Marie Higgins was appointed in January 2013 to fill the resultant Admin Officer vacancy.

3.2 In other respects the MAKI Development Management Team remains unchanged with Derek Hay and Tim Williams as Planning Officers for Mid Argyll, and Kintyre & the Islands respectively. Planning Enforcement remains in the hands of Kim MacKay. David Love, Senior Planner for Oban, Lorn and the Isles is regularly utilised to make up for any shortfall in professional officer cover – his time has to date primarily been targeted toward renewable energy and minerals developments.

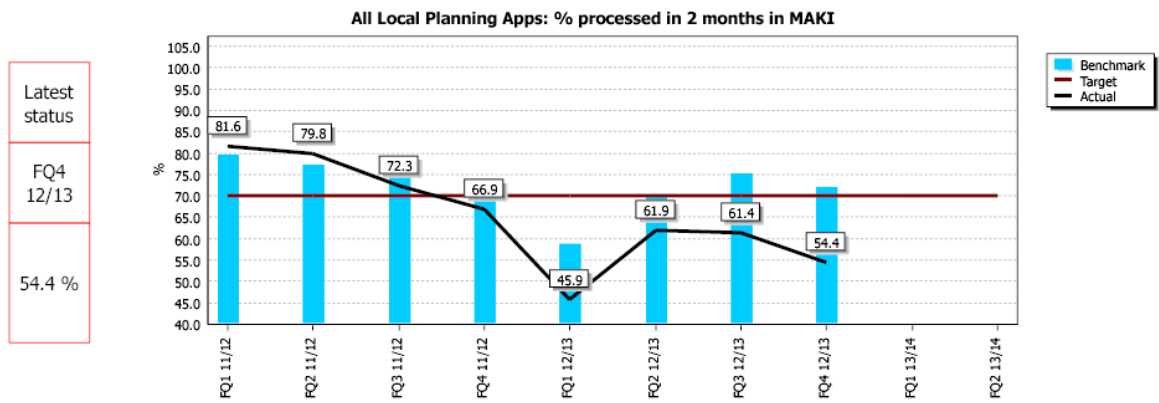
4.0 PERFORMANCE

4.1 The volume of planning applications processed within the MAKI office remains high. From April 2012 – March 2013 in total 358 new planning applications were received and 379 applications determined. This represents almost 30% of the applications within the Council area with 1254 new applications being received and 1373 being determined across Argyll and Bute during the same period.

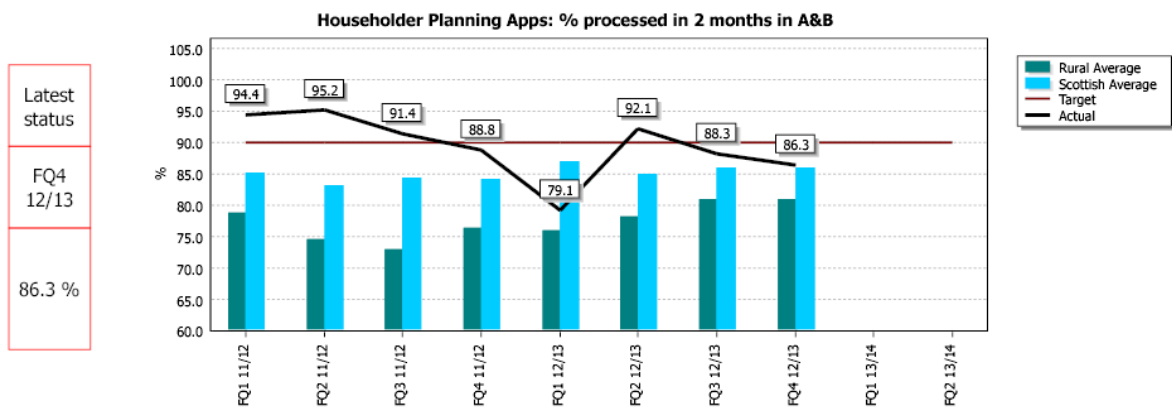
4.2 The statutory time period for determination of the majority of local planning applications is 2 months from receipt of a valid application – this time period is reflected within the Government’s Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs). The Service Plan currently sets a performance target for determination of 70% of all planning applications within 2 months which is regularly being achieved across the Council Area as a whole. The Scottish Government have introduced additional SPIs which now look to reflect the average time taken to process applications, however benchmarks and targets for these new SPIs are still in the process of being determined.



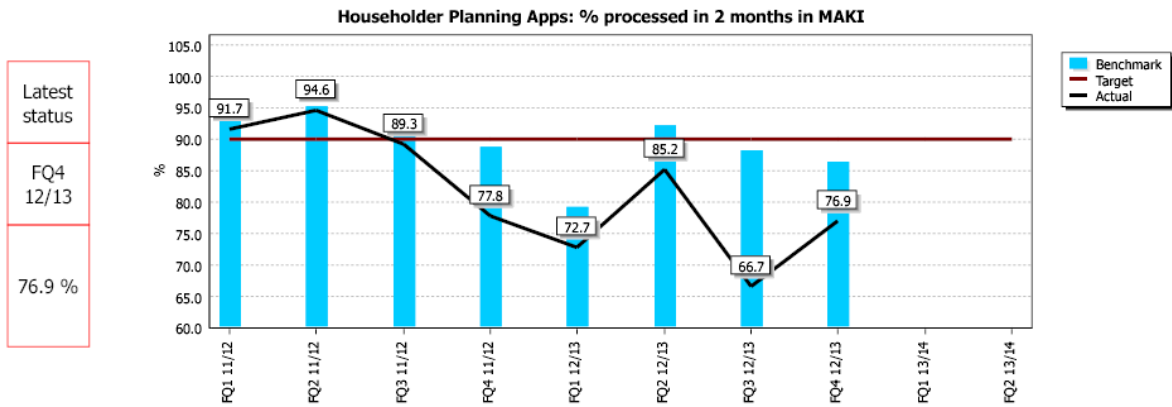
4.3 The MAKI team’s performance has over the last financial year been below the 70% target set within the Service Plan. However, during this period the volume of applications determined has continued to keep pace with the volume of new applications received. In particular it is worth noting that significant dips within FQ1 and FQ4 relate to a high volume of longstanding, more complex applications being targeted for determination. MAKI performance has also tailed off significantly during a period where the office has been short staffed with the planning technician post remaining vacant between March 2011 and October 2012 and resultant additional workload pressures being placed upon the remaining Planning Officers. During this period there has also been a significant rise in the volume of small scale wind turbine and hydro development, these applications are in general significantly more complex and likely to be more controversial than the majority local developments and consequently require a disproportionate amount of officer time in their assessment.



4.4 Almost 27% of the overall volume of planning applications are householder developments. In recognition that these applications generally relate to minor, less complex developments, the Service Plan sets out a performance target for determination of 90% of householder applications within 2 months.



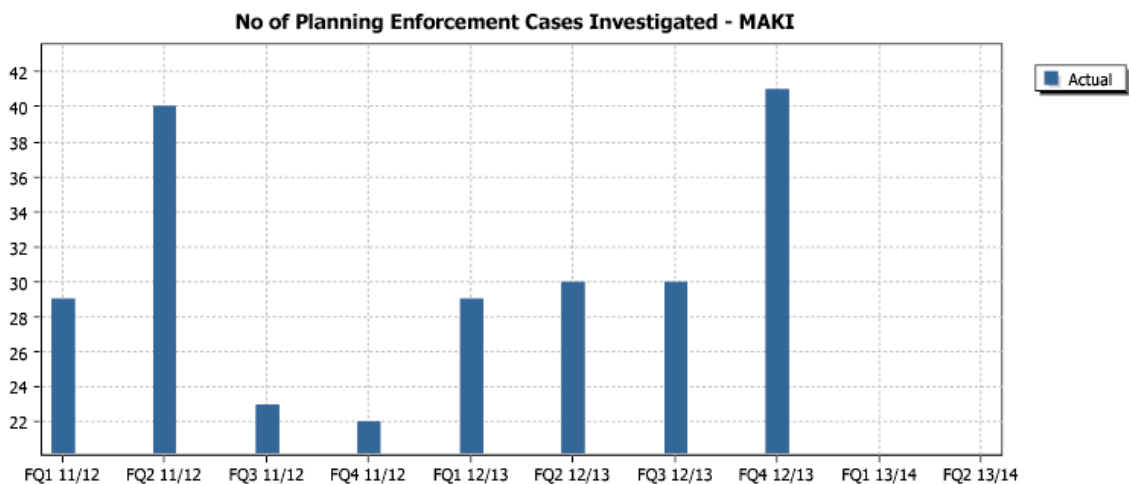
4.5 Within MAKI, householder applications represent some 26% of the overall volume of applications determined. The MAKI team have been unable to meet the 90% performance target during the last financial year and whilst this is disappointing it is highlighted that in each financial quarter this has been as a result of a relatively small number (between 4 and 8 applications) being determined outwith the 2 month period. It is again noted that performance on householder applications has fallen off during periods where the team has been short staffed with the additional work pressures resulting from the vacant planning technician post being most evident in this respect – ordinarily the planning technician would be expected to process a significant portion of these less complex applications and pre-application enquiries. With a return to a full complement of staff in the MAKI office it is now possible to once again target householder applications for early determination and it is expected that performance will return to pre-March 2011 standards over the coming period.



4.6 A pre-application service is also provided by Officers to assist applicants with the development of their proposals. During the period April 2012 – March 2013 over 750 pre-application enquiries were received across the Council Area, 170 of these processed by the MAKI team. Within MAKI, 61% of these enquiries were responded to within the target period of 20 working days.

4.7 In addition to the above, MAKI officers have also made contributions over the last 12 months to strategic projects and officer working groups with Machrihanish Airbase, Campbeltown CARS/THI/CHORD, Local Authority Aquaculture Group, Craobh Haven/Lunga highway issues, and a review of Standard Planning Conditions being some of the more notable items.

4.8 Planning Enforcement continues to be a significant role within MAKI with 130 new cases investigated during the period April 2012 – March 2013. Following initial investigation, 107 of these cases were found to involve a breach of planning control and have been taken up formally; 88 formal enforcement cases have been satisfactorily resolved and closed within the same time period.



5.0 MOVING FORWARD

- 5.1 Whilst 2012-13 has in many respects been a disappointing year when viewed purely in a statistical context it has also been relatively successful in so far as the two main shortcomings in recent MAKI service provision have been addressed toward the end of this period. Firstly with staffing levels returning to their pre-March 2011 level, and secondly, a significant backlog of complicated, longstanding applications being removed from the list of outstanding applications. In this respect it is considered that the MAKI office is now in a position where it can aim to determine less complex applications as close as possible to their 'earliest determination date' rather than simply attempting to keep pace with the volume of new applications as has been the case for some time. It is expected that this will enable the MAKI team to perform well when benchmarks and targets for the new average time SPIs are finalised although a small number of longstanding applications remain on the outstanding applications list and will have some negative impact on overall performance as and when these are able to be determined.
- 5.2 A number of measures are currently in place with a view to improving the performance of the MAKI team over the coming period, these include the targeting of straightforward applications for earliest possible determination, taking a more proactive approach to concluding problematic applications – including seeking to issue an early refusal of planning permission where an applicant is unwilling or unable to affect a satisfactory solution, and making full use of professional cover available from other Area Teams in effectively managing workloads and reducing the impact of planned and unplanned absences. Service wide measures seeking to improve internal processes, the efficiency of working practices and management of staff resources are also on going.
- 5.3 The return to pre-March 2011 staffing levels also provides the opportunity for a greater degree of pro-active monitoring of consented development to be undertaken by the Planning Enforcement Officer and Technician. In addition to undertaking the monitoring of strategic consents (e.g. quarries and waste disposal sites) it is intended to monitor Major Housing Developments and more contentious developments whilst construction works are on-going and, where possible, to schedule monitoring of identified 'bad neighbour' developments to ensure compliance with planning conditions intended to secure amenity. Over and above this it is also intended to be more pro-active in addressing unauthorised change within the historic environment, in particular to undertake a detailed enforcement survey of the each of the 12 Conservation Areas within MAKI although this is envisaged to be a longer term project undertaken over the course of 3-4 years as staff resources allow.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy: None
- 6.2 Financial: None
- 6.3 Legal: None
- 6.4 HR: None
- 6.5 Equalities None
- 6.6 Risk: None
- 6.7 Customer Service: None

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Date: 14th May 2013