

PLANNING AND ACCESS COMMITTEE

MEETING: NPAPC/02/2014

DATE: 31ST March 2014

REPORT No.	NPA/PC/02/2014/04
SUBMITTED BY:	Executive Director of Planning
TOPIC:	Planning Service Charter Update

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1 SUMMARY AND REASON FOR PRESENTATION

- 1.1 This report continues our monitoring and sets out the results of our performance for Quarter 2 (01 July 2013 – 30 September 2013) & Quarter 3 (01 October 2013 – 31 December 2013)

2 RECOMMENDATION

That Members:

1. Accept this report as an update on how we have been performing against our Planning Service Charter Standards.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Planning Service Charter (attached as **Appendix 1**) sets out our commitment to provide the highest possible standard of service for our customers. Our aim is to deliver an excellent service and be one of Scotland's top planning authorities.
- 3.2 The targets we have set ourselves for the individual standards can be found in **Appendix 2**.

4 OUR PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 The results, which can be found in **Appendix 3**, for this quarter, show unusual results for Q3.

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Development Management

- 4.2 Quarter 2 saw a consistent level of service against our standards – however Q3 shows a downturn in our performance against a number of our service charter standards. This is a result of prioritising our workload during a period where we had a high number of hydro planning applications, the majority of which were EIA. These required decisions to be issued by the end of December in order for the applicants to obtain the higher feed-in tariff for the applicants. The main focus for the team during this quarter was to meet this deadline.
- 4.3 As a consequence of these workload demands on the team it was expected that our Statutory reporting figures would take a hit in Quarter 3 but it appears, from initial results we have managed to remain on par with past performance. Although at this time we do not have the rest of Scotland's results in order to compare ourselves with the Scottish average, based on previous reporting we appear to have surpassed our own expectations.
- 4.4 Toward the latter part of Q3 there was also the added pressure of sick absence within the team. This has had a detrimental effect on the results for *Standard 2: "We will check all applications for sufficient information within 5 working days of receipt and either: request further information to validate the application or write to confirm the application is valid"*. The standards regularly scores +95% but unfortunately has taken a hit with a score of only 59% for Q3. The initially adhoc cover for the validation of applications has now been addressed with a more consistent focus on this task from one of our planning assistants.

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- 4.5 Unfortunately some results for Q2 are not available at this time due to current staff absence within the Governance team and previous absences during Q3. The lower score for *Standard 9: We will write to anyone who has made a written representation about an application 7 working days before the date of each meeting"* was due to the aforementioned workload pressures within the development management team resulting in committee reports not being available early enough to meet this standard. Fortunately this task was completed just one day later resulting in those who had provided an e-mail address with their representations receiving their notification in time.

Local Review Body

- 4.6 The Local Review Body did not have any Local Reviews received or decisions made during Q2. Q3 has seen the receipt of a new review which remains undetermined to date. Issues with preparation for all possible review processes have led to a focus on reviewing the procedures and templates by the committee clerk which will hopefully clarify and speed up the process in the future and allow us to make more decisions within the target 2 month timeframe.

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Monitoring

- 4.7 Once again the targets for the monitoring section has a high performance rate, this identifies a focus from the monitoring officer to meet the standards and could allow for changes in the targets set when reviewing the standards. We will also be looking to possibly provide more service standards for this function but only if we can ensure compliance during periods of absence.

Enforcement

- 4.8 The enforcement officer has continued to provide an excellent customer service and has agreed to reduce some timeframes for the standards in the review of the service charter. We have completed our review of the Enforcement Charter which has now been published in line with the 2 year target set by Scottish Government (and is attached here as Appendix 4).

Development Planning

- 4.9 The Development Planning team have no news to report and are currently focusing on the review of the standards. It has become apparent that Development Planning may benefit from more service 'promises' rather than 'standards'. Service promises will be commitments for customer service but will not involve measurable targets that can be objectively reported. Further details on this approach will follow, at a later date, with the Service Charter Review report – see below.

5 SERVICE CHARTER REVIEW

- 5.1 The service charter review is underway and is progressing well. We will hopefully be looking to bring the revised Customer Service Charter to the Planning and Access Committee in May.
- 5.2 Our performance relating to the service standards will continue to be monitored and reported in the same manner as the current planning service charter.
- 5.3 As mentioned above at 4.9 we have determined it may be appropriate to include 'service promises' in some instances, as opposed to 'service standards'. This allows for commitments to be made to our customers regarding our behaviours and actions. These cannot be measured or quantified in numbers but will form our dedication to providing excellent customer care.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Our performance for Quarter 3 dropped below our average level in many areas. However this was in part as a consequence of the drive by our development management team to carefully assess and issue decisions for the large quantity of hydro applications thus helping support the renewable energy sector in Scotland. This in itself evidenced dedicated support to customer service. This downturn in results also highlights the vulnerability of a small team to the impacts of sick absence on performance.

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6.2 This will be the last report to planning committee based on the current charter as the document is under review. The next report before Committee will be regarding the proposed changes to the service charter, with a view to reporting our performance against the new service charter thereafter.

6.3 **NEXT STEPS**

We will:

1. Continue to work hard in order to achieve the highest possible standard for our customer services.
2. Report to Planning Committee with our review of the Service Charter and the revised standards and new service promises.
3. Publish the results of this review on our website.

***List of Appendices: Appendix 1 Planning Service Charter
Appendix 2 Performance Targets
Appendix 3 The Results
Appendix 4 Enforcement Charter***