

<b>Report on</b>	Planning Department Service Improvement Plan 2021-2022
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
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<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide members with a copy of the Planning Departments Service Improvement Plan (SIP) for the period 2021-2022.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	The attached SIP shows how the service provided by the Planning Department will contribute to the Council's corporate objectives.
2.2	A SIP was in place for the period 2020-2021 and a section of the attached SIP sets out the performance overview and end of year progress status for that period. Also included in the SIP is a Service Work Plan for the same period, outlining the key performance measures and actions to be taken by us over the reporting period.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	Covid 19 presents a major challenge for every Department and Service. Members will recall that in the Spring of 2020 following the Prime Ministers broadcasts people were required to stay at home and efforts focused on the delivery of essential services from the office. This meant we could only provide a skeletal office based staff to receive applications. However, through a mixture of ingenuity and investment in ICT equipment it soon became possible to process planning applications remotely and to continue to provide services, albeit at a slower rate than normal. This coupled with a surge in application numbers meant that we finished the year with a backlog.
3.2	The first lock down also meant the public consultation on the development plan was suspended. However, an easing in the Covid Regulations meant that the consultation was able to resume in the summer of 2020 and by the end of the year the consultation process was completed and representations were under consideration.

<p>3.3</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>3.4</p>	<p>For the coming year, the key aim must be to get services back on track. Ongoing Covid restrictions make it difficult to achieve our statutory targets in the short term. However, by the end of the financial year clearing the backlog and returning to pre-Covid performance levels in Development Management and Enforcement is a realistic goal. The Local Development Plan Strategy will be ready for submission in accordance with Regulations to the Department of Infrastructure in the early part of the financial year. It is envisaged that the Public Examination will occur in the first part of 2022.</p> <p>Over the coming year staff will be working on the largest and most wide ranging service improvement project undertaken to date with the introduction of a replacement portal. We will be the only council operating an independent computer system, which will not only offer financial savings but the ability to mould the service better to our customers. This will be introduced in two stages with the first stage allowing for applications to be submitted on line and the second stage allowing for all other parts of the process to also occur electronically. This will not only bring efficiency savings but also allow for greater transparency and a move to a paperless office.</p> <p>The system will also provide monitoring tools providing a finger on the pulse in terms of development in the planning pipeline and allow for gauging the impacts of policy and a better evidence based review of those policies. I anticipate that the first part of this project will be operational by Spring 2022.</p>
<p><b>4.0</b></p>	<p><b>Other Considerations</b></p>
<p><b>4.1</b></p>	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial: Our new Planning Portal represents a major investment and the system purchased represented best value. A dedicated in house team is working with the suppliers to ensure the project is a success.</p> <p>Human:</p> <p>Working practice has adapted in response to the pandemic. Home working is now a common feature, which coupled with career breaks, parental leave and term time, means Mid Ulster can offer life-long employment in keeping with the demands of modern living.</p> <p>Risk Management:</p> <p>Covid 19 remains a risk as does putting a new computer system. However, the last year has shown how adaptable the services are to changing circumstances.</p>
<p><b>4.2</b></p>	<p><b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b></p> <p>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications:</p>

	None identified
	Rural Needs Implications: None identified
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	Members agree the Planning Department Service Improvement Plan 2021-2022.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	- Planning Department Service Improvement Plan 2021-2022.



Comhairle Ceantair  
**Lár Uladh**  
**Mid Ulster**  
District Council

# ***Planning Department***

**SERVICE PLAN - 2021 / 22**

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## **Foreword**

At the start of 2020, Northern Ireland faced the spread of the global Covid-19 pandemic, which in turn has impacted on the way, Mid Ulster District Council delivers its services to communities. The Council's initial response was to protect frontline services, support the vulnerable in the community and ensure continuity of services.

On the Council's road to recovery and reinstatement of services, we have established 'Recovery Activities' that will enable the Council to learn from the impacts that Covid 19 caused, i.e. the new and emerging challenges that services face and the opportunities that have emerged from new ways of working. These 'Recovery Activities' will support the Council's Corporate Plan and this Service Plan will also support the delivery of these higher level objectives and associated outcomes for the residents of the District.

To make sure that we are transparent in what we are aiming to achieve, there is a series of activities outlined within the Service Plan. It should be noted, that it is proposed, that this will be a dynamic service plan, in light of Council's ongoing response to the Pandemic, reflecting the changing context within which it has been developed. Any changes that need to be made to the service plan (i.e. new actions added, or actions removed) will be reported to the Director of the Department as well as being reported as part of our 'business as usual' performance monitoring activity through committee papers during 2021/22.

## **1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE SERVICE**

### **1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Service**

The purpose of Planning Services is to secure the sustainable development of Mid Ulster in a manner that provides for the social and economic well being of the District , whilst enhancing Mid Ulster's environment for the enjoyment of the present and future generations. The Planning Department is led by the Planning Manager, who is responsible for delivering its functions which are designed to:

- Lead Sustainable development through the creation of the Local Development Plan
- Manage Development in accordance with that Development Plan when making decisions on planning applications:
- Enforce planning controls taking appropriate, proportional and measure action where necessary to remedy breaches.
- Preserving and Enhancing Areas of historic, architectural or environmental importance and protecting trees of special amenity value.

### **1.2 Responsibilities**

In order to deliver these services the Planning Department has been divided into 3, however over the year this structure will be reviewed as part of the corporate review. As of April 2021, responsibilities were divided as follows:

#### 1. *The Planning Manager*

The Planning Manager takes overall responsibility for decision making (as delegated to him), reporting to Committees, and the daily running of the Planning Department. The Head of Development Management and Head of Development Plan report to him, as the:

- Major Applications team – handling with large proposals for retail, industry, civic and housing developments, both at pre application discussions and following submission of an application.
- Business support team – dealing with finances, correspondence and administration of planning applications.
- A Planning Portal team, charged with bringing forward the new computer system
- Planning Enforcement

## 2. Local Development Management

This function led by the Head of Development Management is primarily concerned with dealing with local applications. These make up 99% of all planning applications. It comprises, two area based teams. One is located at the Magherafelt Councils offices on the Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt, and the other at the Dungannon Council Offices at Circular Road Dungannon. The respective teams deal with applications in the following Electoral Areas:-

1. Cookstown, Magherafelt, Carntogher and Mayola
2. Dungannon, Clogher and Torrent

In addition to researching and reporting on applications to the Committee on local planning applications, the teams also handle submissions for listed building and conservation area consents, Non-material changes, Certificates of lawful development and other consents under the Planning Act. They are also the front line for providing planning advice on a range of planning matters to all of our customers.

In addition, the Head of Development Management also has a shared responsibility for the Enforcement team – investigating alleged breaches in planning control, serving notices and providing witness for prosecutions. This is dependent upon where the Plan is in its process.

## 3. Development Plan

The Head of Development Plan post is currently vacant and the team has been overseen by the Planning Manager. The Development Plan Section and the primary responsibility is the preparation of the Local Development Plan for Mid Ulster District. The section is also responsible for preparing supplementary planning advice, working and liaising with stakeholders on Planning Policy matters. The section also undertakes the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment and deals with other environmental matters such as tree preservation and conservation. Traditionally Enforcement has fallen under the Head of development Plan

### **1.3 Customers & Stakeholders**

<b>Customers &amp; Stakeholders</b>
• applicants
• agent / architects
• objectors
• complainants in relation to breaches of planning control
• Planning Committee
• Council officers and elected representatives
• Statutory Consultees
• Local Development Plan Consultation Bodies



- Mid Ulster residents, businesses and interested parties

#### 1.4 Performance Overview in 2020/21

The Covid-19 pandemic has been one of the most significant challenges that Mid Ulster District Council has ever faced. It has required sudden and dramatic changes to the way we work, as Councillors and officers. The previous year has saw Council hold fast with front line service delivery and the section below outlines; our response during 2020 to 2021 i.e. what we achieved, the remaining challenges, and how our service made a difference. It should be noted that as the Planning Statistics have not been finalised for 2020/21 an estimate has been provided based on best available figures up to March 2021

2020/21 Performance Overview	End of Year Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To determine 50% of all local applications within 15 weeks</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Comment &amp; Analysis:</b>  <b>What does this mean:</b> This provides an indication of efficiency. Mid Ulster is achieving higher than the regional average of 44.9% of applications decided in 15 weeks and was as of December 2020 the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest of all the Councils.</p> <p><b>Comparison with last year same reporting period:</b> Last year 54.1% of applications were decided within 15 weeks, therefore there has been a decline in performance as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic.</p>	<p>Ongoing: The statutory target has not been met with average processing times of 16.2 weeks.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To determine 50% of all Major applications within 30 weeks</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Comment &amp; Analysis:</b> Over the past year, no major applications were determined in target with average processing times of 74.1 weeks.</p> <p><b>What does this mean:</b> This is a statutory indicator for measuring efficiency in resolving major applications. However, the indicator is poor in that major applications tend to be complex and with a need for further submissions from applicants in order to determine the application.</p> <p><b>Comparison with last year same reporting period:</b> a slight dip in performance in that the average processing time was 64.7 weeks last year. Most Councils fail to achieve this target</p>	<p>Ongoing: No cases were decided within 30 weeks and the average time was 74.1 weeks.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To process 70% of all enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Comment an Analysis</b> This is an indicator of efficiency and shows the efficiency of the Enforcement Section. The target was met with 88.6% of cases concluded within the time frame.</p> <p><b>Comparison with last year</b> – This is broadly in line with last year’s performance..</p>	<p>Ongoing: This target has been surpassed with 88.6% of cases concluded within 39. 70% of cases were concluded within 30.3 weeks.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To re-consult on the Local Development Plan Draft Plan Strategy, consider all representations received and submit the Draft Plan to the Department to order a public examination</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Comment and Analysis.</b> Over the period work on the development plan was hampered by lock downs as a result of the pandemic and need to reallocate staff to Development Control.</p>	<p>Ongoing: Consultation on the Local Development Plan was undertaken and all consultation responses have been received, analyzed and considered . The plan is yet to go to full council for agreement to submit to full council.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>To start on the implementation of a new computer system and planning portal for Mid Ulster.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Comment and Analysis</b></p> <p>The new computer system is on track and will be a great improvement to the Planning Service Over the year</p> <p>Mid Ulster Council resolved to put in an IT system independent of the Department. It has been procured and a team has been set up to oversee the transfer of records and review all standard letters, conditions and reasons for refusal, in line with prevailing legislation</p>	<p>Ongoing: Now that the system has been procured it is envisaged it will become operational by January 2022</p>

## 2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICE AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2021/22

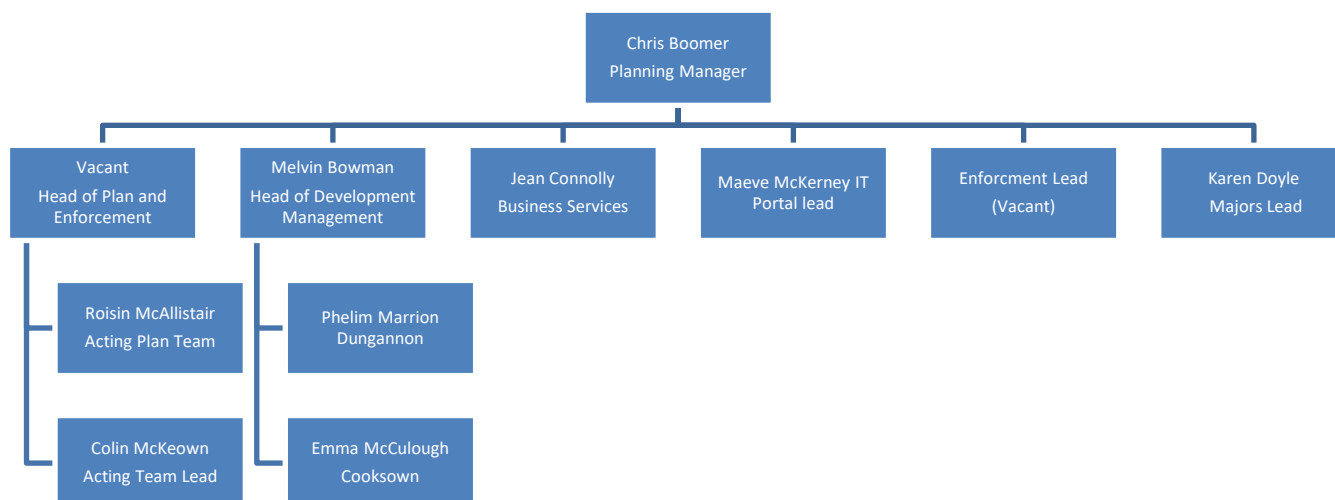
The following tables confirm the resources, financial and people, which the Service has access to throughout 2021-22 to deliver its actions, activities and core business.

### 2.1 Budget 2021/22

The Planning Budget for 2021/22: -

Service Budget Headings	£
Planning Manager and Administration	465370
Development Management	684618
Development Plan	696218
Enforcement	194794
Total Gross costs	2041000
Property Certificate Income	97000
Planning Fees Income	1560000
Net Budget cost for 2021-22	384,000

### 2.2 Staffing Complement - 2021/22



It should be noted that of the staff compliment there are significant vacancies due to staff leaving or career breaks.

<b>Staffing</b>	<b>No. of Staff</b>
Planning Manager	1
Head of Service	2
Team Leads/Managers	6.6
P&T Officers	19.6
Remaining Team	8.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.6</b>

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### **2.3 Service Work Plan - 2021/22**

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which will form your Service Work Plan for 2021-22. The targets for Development Management are set out in statute. COVID 19 places a risk at our ability to meet targets and restrictions over the past year has left a backlog of casework. In addition, we have diverted staff resources to putting in a new computer. Thus, achieving the targets will be challenging, and is more likely to occur on a monthly basis, assuming a return to normal working practices resumes towards the end of the year it should be possible to have cleared the backlog and start to meet the target on a monthly basis. Indeed, by the end of the year a new computer system should be in place representing a major service improvement by allowing for online submission and better electronic communications.

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## SERVICE WORK PLAN 2021/22

<b>Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):</b>	<b>Timely decision making</b>			
<b>Link to Community Plan Theme:</b>	<b>Align to Corporate Plan Theme</b>			
<i>CMP 2.2 Infrastructure - We increasingly value our environment &amp; enhance it for our children</i>	<i>Leadership: 1.1 We will use our Influence to shape &amp; facilitate: infrastructure schemes, roads, drainage/sewage, energy/broadband connectivity, health provision, direction of policy impacting economic growth</i>			
<b>What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):</b>	<b>By When (Date?)</b>	<b>Lead Officers(s)</b>	<b>What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)</b>	<b>How Will we Know? (Measures)</b>
<b>To process planning applications in a timely manner in accordance with the development plan.</b>	Ongoing	Planning Manager, Head of Development Management, and area team leads	Deliver sustainable development and prevent holding up investment	<b>To Determine 50% of Major applications within 30 weeks</b>  <b>To be determining 50% of local planning applications within 15 weeks.</b>  <b>To be determining 50% of local planning applications within 15 weeks</b>
<b>To effectively enforce against breaches in planning control</b>	Ongoing	Enforcement Team lead	Discourage unregulated and unsustainable development	<b>To conclude 70% enforcement investigations within 39 week of receipt of complaint.</b>

<b>What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):</b>	<b>By When (Date?)</b>	<b>Lead Officers(s)</b>	<b>What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)</b>	<b>How Will we Know? (Measures)</b>
<b>To implement a new computer system and planning portal for mid Ulster.</b>	March 2022	Planning Manager & Project team lead	Allow for greater transparency and a better service for customers	<b>An operational system that provides for on line submissions of planning applications and on line submission of objections.</b>

<b>Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):</b>	<b>To provide a framework for sustainable development in Mid Ulster.</b>			
<b>Link to Community Plan Theme:</b>	<b>Align to Corporate Plan Theme</b>			
<i>CMP 1.1 Economic Growth - We prosper in a stronger &amp; more competitive economy</i>	<i>Leadership: 1.2 We will continue progress towards the adoption of our Local Development Plan 2030 &amp; delivery against the plan objectives</i>			
<b>What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):</b>	<b>By When (Date?)</b>	<b>Lead Officers(s)</b>	<b>What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)</b>	<b>How Will we Know? (Measures)</b>
<b>To progress work on the Local Development Plan in line with the Plan timetable</b>	<b>Submission of Plan Strategy to Department In Spring/summer 2021</b>	<b>Head of Development Plan</b>	<b>It will encourage sustainable development and provide a degree of certainty for investors</b>	<b>This project will be ongoing for several years. The key milestone in our control is the submission of the Plan. It will then move towards a public examination over the year.</b>

<b>What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2021/22? (actions):</b>	<b>By When (Date?)</b>	<b>Lead Officers(s)</b>	<b>What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)</b>	<b>How Will we Know? (Measures)</b>
<b>To provide a development monitoring framework linked in to the new Computer system and Planning Portal for Mid Ulster</b>	<b>March 2022</b>	<b>Head of Development Plan and Project Team Lead</b>	<b>To provide a better mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of the development plan in delivering sustainable development</b>	<b>There will be an ability to produce an annual monitoring report.</b>

## **2.4 RISK MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE**

The purpose of risk management is to manage the barriers, which prevents the Council from achieving its objectives. This section of the service plan includes space for the Service to input their key risks (in summary form), which have been identified during the business planning process. The Council uses risk management to maximize opportunities and minimize risks. This improves its ability to deliver priorities and improve outcomes. This is why the Council deems it important to link business planning and risk management. Risk Management aims to:

- Help the Council achieve its overall aims and objectives
- Manage the significant risks the Council faces to an acceptable level
- Assist with the decision making process
- Implement the most effective measures to avoid, reduce and control those risks
- Balance risk with opportunity
- Manage risk and internal controls in the most effective way.

In considering risk for the coming years it should be born in mind that COVID means there is an inherent risk that all objectives will not be achieved. Although nor reflected in the below assessment this risk is managed in accordance with the Business Continuity Plan with homeworking facilitated. This said, it is recognised that it may be necessary to change the way the service is operated in accordance with the risk caused by the pandemic. The service will operate in accordance with the Planning Departments Business recovery pan and over the year it is hoped all normal office based service will be delivered in the normal or near normal manner.

It is equally worth considering that the objectives for development management during Covid remain challenging and the risk of not successfully meeting the statutory targets will remain high. It is therefore, perhaps, a more laudable aim to have the service return to meeting the statutory target on a monthly basis over the course of the year, rather than expect the statutory target will be met for the year. The implementation of the new computer system could also result in operational delays, however, providing it is delivered any temporary decline in service will be more than compensated by the better service the new system will operate for future years.



This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Services business in 2021-22

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
1.	<i>Failure to determine major applications in a timely manner</i>	12	<i>This is a statutory objective however, given Covid it is unlikely this will be achieved this year.</i>
2.	<i>Failure to determine the local applications in a timely manner</i>	10	<i>Provide additional staff resources from the Development Plan team to help clear backlog</i>
3.	<i>Failure to conclude enforcement cases in a timely manner</i>	10	<i>Provide a temporary team lead to oversee the enforcement team</i>
4.	<i>Failure to progress the development plan in a timely manner</i>	8	<i>Monitor progress in line with the LDP timetable</i>
5.	<i>Failure to deliver the new computer system and portal</i>	9	<i>Set up a project team and monitor progress in line with the agreed timetable</i>
6.			
7.			
8.			

Rating	Descriptor
16 - 25	<b>Extreme Risk (immediate action required)</b>
10 - 15	<b>High Risk (urgent action required)</b>
7 - 9	<b>Moderate Risk (action required)</b>
1 – 6	<b>Low Risk (keep under review)</b>

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### **3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

In carrying out our responsibilities, Planning Services is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst Planning Services operates, under various obligations it is however mindful of the changing context in which it operates and endeavours to mainstream the equality and rural needs duties in the design and delivery of our functions.

#### **3.1 EQUALITY DUTY**

The council and by consequence Planning Services are committed to contributing towards its part in working towards fulfilling obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure adequate time, staff and resources to fulfil our duties.

The Service will also work towards adherence to the council's Equality Scheme ensuring equality duties, together with promoting positive attitudes towards persons with a disability and the participation of people with a disability in public life when carrying out our functions.

For this reason, an Equality Screening has been carried out to accompany the Draft Plan which may need updating upon adoption. The Service is also working with the Department of Infrastructure and Equality Commission to explore where in exercising other duties a screening may be appropriate.

#### **3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY**

Planning Services are mindful of the rural needs of its customers when carrying out its functions and subsequent responsibilities, particularly in developing any new policies, plans or strategies throughout the year. In line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 we will give due regard to rurality in terms of needs in carrying out the activities within our Service. A Rural needs assessment also accompanies the Draft Local Development Plan Strategy.