

Report on	Planning Service Plan 2023-2024
Date of Meeting	12 th June 2023
Reporting Officer	Chris Boomer
Contact Officer	Chris Boomer

Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide members with a copy of the Planning Departments Service Plan for the period 2019-2020.
2.0	Background
2.1	The attached Plan shows how the service provided by the Planning Department will contribute to the Council's corporate objectives.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	There are a number of actions and outcomes within the Plan which the Planning Department will report on over the course of the period 2023-2024.
3.2	Also included are a number of risks for the Planning Department and details of mitigation in place to control these in the most effective way. A key risk continues to relate to staff retention and the ability to maintain a full complement of staff needed to deliver an effective service.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: None identified
	Human: None identified
	Risk Management: None identified

4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: None identified
	Rural Needs Implications: None identified
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	Members are requested to note the contents of this report and agree the attached Planning Department Service Plan 2023-2024.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	- Planning Department Service Plan 2023-2024.



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Planning Department

**DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE
PLAN - 2023 / 2024**

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1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE DEPARTMENT

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Department

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 Service Director leads Planning Department with responsibility for delivering functions 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 measured 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

The Planning Department is led by the Service Director who takes overall operational responsibility for formulating preparing planning policy for the Local Development Plan and for enabling make sound planning decisions on development management and enforcement decisions. The Service Director also takes responsibility for making planning decisions as delegated to him by the Council as well as instructing solicitors. The Service director also takes responsibility for ensuring the planning Department is fit for purpose ensuring the right people are undertaking the right jobs with adequate tools and training to meet business needs within the resources available. The functions of the Department have been grouped in relation to: -

- *Strategic Planning*

This function is led by the Head of Strategic Planning who is responsible for 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.

In addition, the Head of Strategic Planning is also responsible for major applications teams which deal with larger public, employment, or infrastructural developments as well as housing developments (over 50 units) which are due to be determined by Mid Ulster

Council. This team also provides Mid Ulster Council’s input into regionally significant applications. This is in order to synergise the development plan process with major investment opportunities.

- *Local Planning*

This function led by the Head of Local Planning, who is responsible for processing local applications, which make up 99% of all submissions. 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 Local Planning is also responsible for Enforcement team – investigating alleged breaches in planning control, serving notices and providing witness for prosecutions.

- *Business and Technical Support*

The business support team is led by the business support Manager who reports directly to the Service Director. This team is responsible for administration of planning applications, managing files, receiving fees and financial accounting. The team also oversees correspondence tracking, dealing with most Environmental Information Requests under the EIR/FOI regulations. The team is also responsible for the administration of the Property Certificate system.

1.3 Customers & Stakeholders

Customers & Stakeholders
• 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 2022/23 (Retrospective Review)

2022/2023 Performance Response/Overview (What we achieved- Measured Activities)	End of Year Progress Status: Activity was - Completed /Commenced/ Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make quality, timely decisions on major planning applications Over the year 20 major applications were received and fourteen decisions were made with an average processing time of 68 weeks with 28.8% determined in 30 weeks, the target being 50%. 	On Going Normal Business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make quality timely decisions on local applications Over the year 1914 major applications were received and 1248 decisions made with an average processing time of 21.6 weeks with 29.4 % made within 15 weeks, the target being 50% 	On Going Normal Business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To efficiently enforce against breaches in planning control and protect our environs and amenities 171 Enforcement cases were opened over the year with 124 being brought to concluded. 61.9% were concluded in 39 weeks the target being 70%. 	On Going/Normal Business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To progress the Local Development Plan towards adoption The local Development Plan has been submitted to the Department. After seven months the Department responded with questions which we provided a lengthy response. After a further four months the Department responded with further issues. The team is currently working with barristers to prepare our final response. 	On Going/Normal Business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To install a new computer system and Planning Portal for Mid Ulster The New computer system is operational and providing improved access and online for our customers. 	Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To introduce a Mid Ulster Property Certificate system The New Property Certificate system is up and running and providing a successful service to solicitors 	Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a Service Review of staffing The first stage of the Service Review has been successfully implemented with 4 trainee planners posted to fill vacancies. 	On Going

2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICES AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2023/24

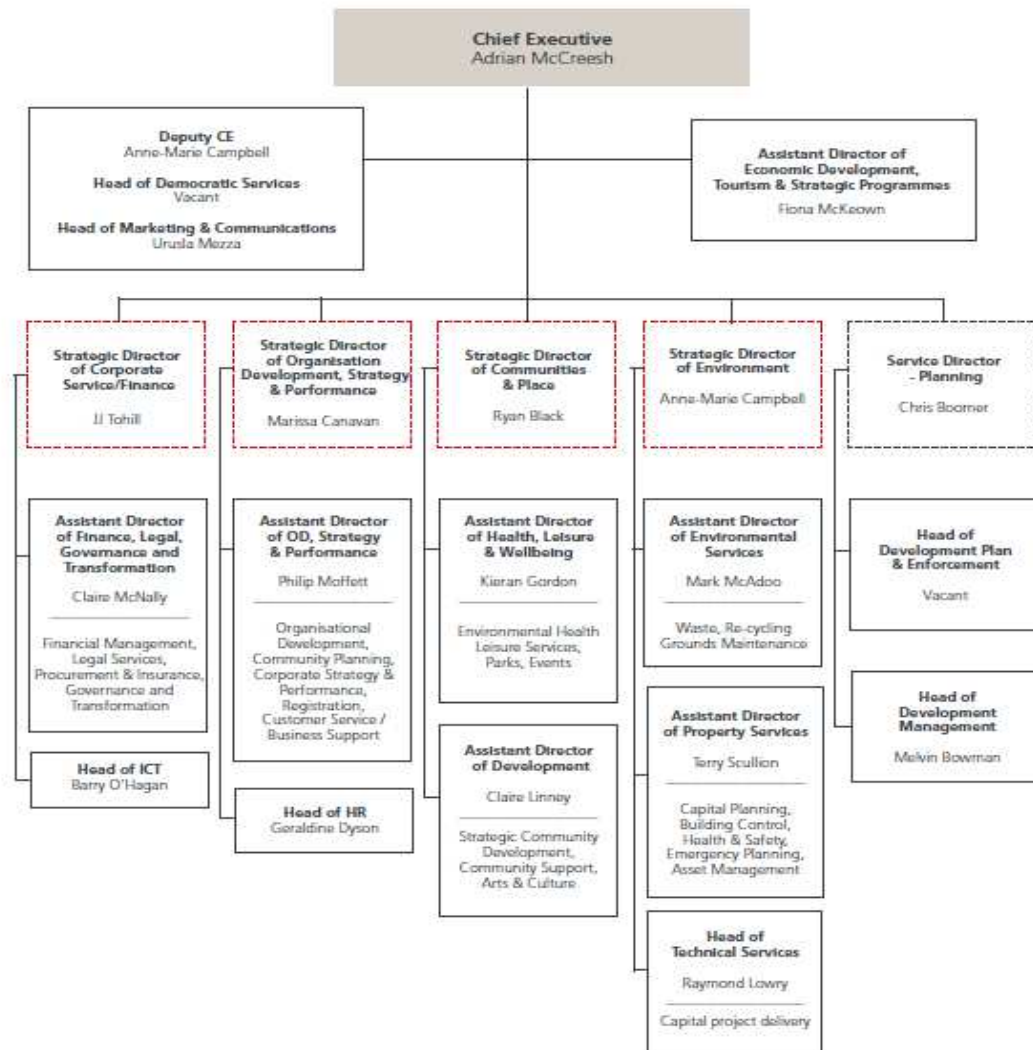
The following table provides an estimate of resources, financial and people, which the Department has access to throughout 2023-24 to deliver its actions, activities and core business. The actual budget is still to be finalised. Accounts for last year show suggest Planning Services cost around £14,000 more than initial budgeting, which is remarkable given the financial situation.

2.1 Budget 2023/24

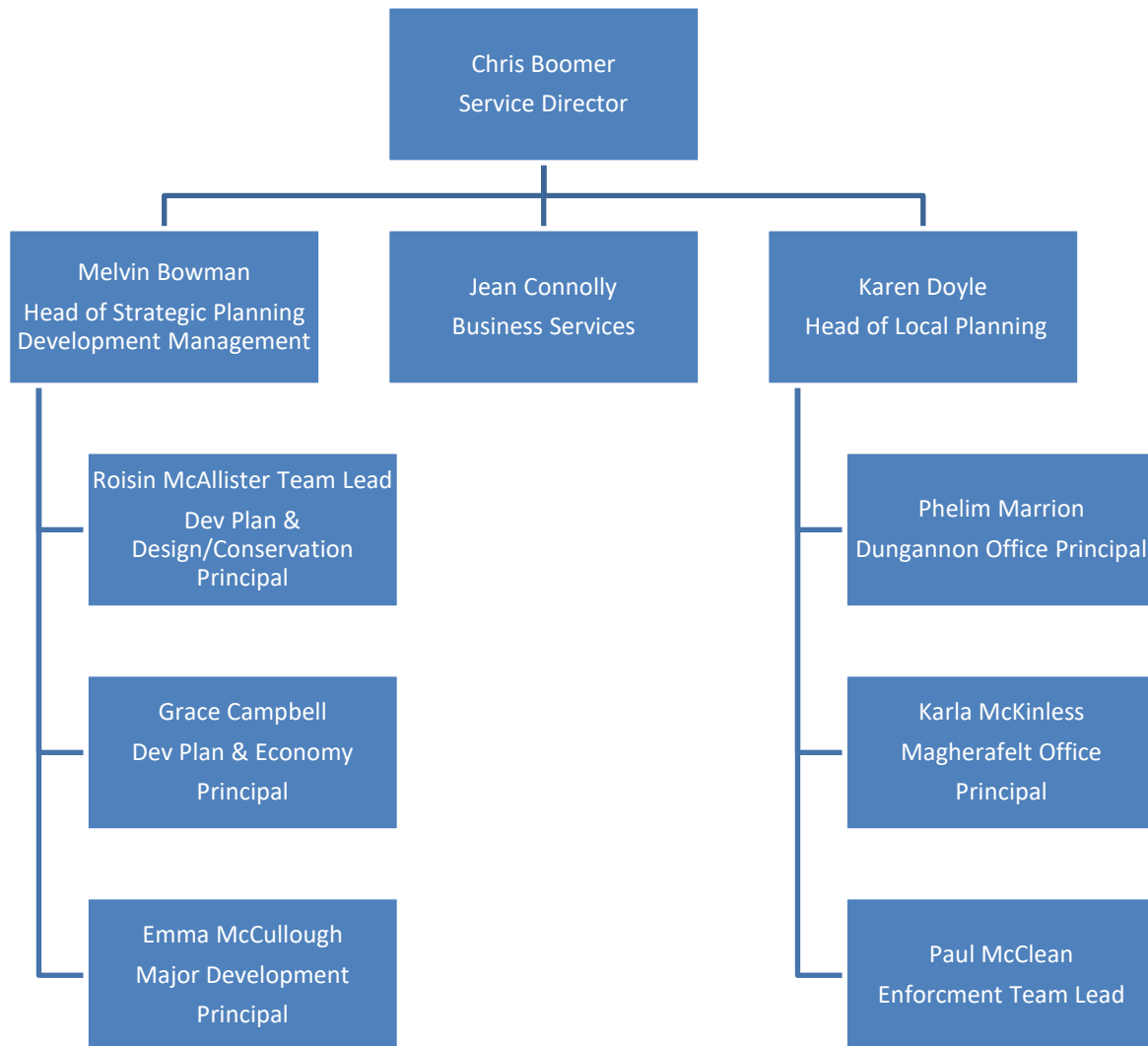
Budget Headings	£,000
Service Director and Business Support	1000
Strategic Planning	300
Local Planning	900
Total Expenditure	2200
Application fees	1700
Property Certificate income	100
Total Income	1800
Net Budget for 2023-24	500

Note: The budget across Departments has not yet been finalised and therefore the figures are estimates

2.2 Departmental Services - Council Structure - 2022/23



Planning Department Management Structure 2023-24



Staffing	No. of Staff
Service Director	1
Head of Service	2
Managers	7
Officers	27
Remaining Team	10
Total	47 (inc. part time)

3 Service Work Plan - 2023/24

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which form the Departmental Service Work Plan for 2023-24.

This is a high-level capture of the Department and the Service activities/measures as well as some improvement undertakings which the services will focus on throughout 2023-2024.

The Plan links to the Council's:

1. 2020-2024 Corporate Plan priorities,
2. Annual Corporate Performance Improvement (PIP plan)
3. Corporate Improvement Project Plans (CIP's)
4. Statutory Indicators,
5. Corporate Health Indicators and
6. Mid Ulster Sustainable Community Plan themes & outcomes (aligned to the Programme for Government):

Mid Ulster District Council's Improvement Objectives for 2023 to 2025 are:

1. Mid Ulster District Council will seek to reduce the environmental impacts of our own activities and will contribute to the improvement of the wider environment through local action
2. We will ensure a more connected Mid Ulster where new technologies and ways of working, empower citizens to get the best services that matter to them
3. To create cleaner neighbourhoods, where everyone takes responsibility for their waste and environment
4. We will contribute to the on-going regeneration of our district by delivering a capital investment programme, enhancing facilities and opportunities for local people

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which will form the Planning Department Service Work Plan for 2023-24. The targets for processing major and local applications and enforcement are set out in statute. COVID 19 placed a risk at our ability to meet statutory targets and restrictions over the past two years has left a backlog of casework. In addition, we diverted staff resources to putting in a new computer. Thus, we are starting the year with a backlog of cases.

For the coming year it is aimed that we will clear the backlog and return to our past high-performance levels. We have already had a recruitment drive to fill vacancies which have occurred over the last couple of years by investing in the future and bringing in trainee planners. This has been done as part of our structural review which commenced last year and should conclude this business year. It will bring the service in line with other Departments and leaving the service fit for the coming years.

Key to addressing the back log will be the utilisation of newly installed computer system which has proven to be a success and over the year we will be looking at ways to maximise its usage and better tailor it to meeting our customer's needs, such as bringing forward an online system for submitting and paying for property certificates. This is part of our desire to become more customer focused. We will carry out a customer survey to help us identify what our customers think and inform a future service improvement plan for local planning. We will also continue working with the Department and our neighbouring authorities to explore how better performance can be achieved for the major applications.

The Local Development Plan Strategy has been submitted to the Department and the Council are no longer in control of what happens next. The Department may choose to allow the development plan to proceed to public examination, direct the Council to reconsider certain policies or amend them itself. Given the plan has been with the Department for a year we will soon be liaising with members to seek a view on how best to break this deadlock. What is clear is that we are no longer inside our timetable and early in the year a new time-table will need to be agreed.

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Service Name:					
Link to Community Plan Theme:			Align to Corporate Plan Theme		
<i>CMP 1.1 Economic Growth - We prosper in a stronger & more competitive economy</i>			<i>Leadership: 1.2 We will continue progress towards the adoption of our Local Development Plan 2030 & delivery against the plan objectives</i>		
Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Service Name /Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
To make quality, timely decisions on major planning applications	Providing pre-application advice, and validating, consulting, processing and recommending on planning application	Ongoing	Melvin Bowman Emma McCullough	Facilitate investment in those decisions most important the economy and provide homes	To Determine 50% of Major applications within 30 weeks
To make quality timely decisions on local applications	Validating, consulting, processing and recommending on planning application	On going	Karen Doyle Karla McKinless Phelim Marrion	Facilitate development investment in improving the economy and providing homes	To be determining 50% of local planning applications within 15 weeks.
To efficiently enforce against breaches in planning control and protect our environs and amenities	Inspecting negotiating and where necessary ordering and prosecuting those who cause harm to our environment and others by refusing to abide by planning controls	On going	Karen Doyle Paul McClean	It will improve the lives of our citizens by regulating or removing harmful unauthorised development.	To conclude 70% enforcement investigations within 39 week of receipt of complaint.

Service Name:					
Link to Community Plan Theme:			Align to Corporate Plan Theme		
<i>CMP 1.1 Economic Growth - We prosper in a stronger & more competitive economy</i>			<i>Leadership: 1.2 We will continue progress towards the adoption of our Local Development Plan 2030 & delivery against the plan objectives</i>		
Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Service Name /Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
To progress the Local Development Plan towards adoption	To revise the plan timetable in accordance with the outcome of consideration of the submitted plan strategy to the Department and any set dates for public examination	31 /12/23	Melvin Bowman Roisin McAllister and Grace Herron	To provide a sustainable framework for the future development of the Mid Ulster	By progressing the Plan in line with the revised timetable.

2.4 Service Improvements for 2023 to 2024

What Service Development/Improvement will we undertake in 2023/2024? (Actions):	By When (Date?)	Service Name/ Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
To work with the Department and other councils to improve the legislative and operational basis by implementing an action plan to improve how major planning applications are processed		Melvin Bowman	It will aid with economic development by focussing on major development	Faster processing times for major applications
To conduct a customer survey to gauge customer satisfaction with development management services in Mid Ulster produce an action plan to see what improvement can be made to operational practice	Dec 2023	Roisin McAllister	Greater Customer focus	By responses provided
To development an action plan to improve development management services taking into account customer views	March 2024	Karen Doyle	Improved service	Better processing times.
To improve the property certificate service by providing a full on-line submission system including fee payment	Sept 2023	Jean Connolly/Karla McKinless	It will offer the best service in Northern Ireland	By seeking the views of the law society
To complete and implement the Service Review of staffing	March 2024	Chris Boomer in liaison with HR	To ensure we have the right people in the right grade with the right training	To complete the review by the autumn

2.5 RISK MANAGEMENT OF DEPARTMENT/SERVICES

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 Department 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.

This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Department's/Services business as outlined in service plan for 2023-24.)

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
1.	<i>That legislation, statutory consultees and current practice is creating undue delays in the planning system</i>	9	<i>To work with the Department, consultees and other Councils to bring forward a regional action plan and to identify local reasons for delay and devise an action plan to improve performance.</i>
2.	<i>That the Department of Infrastructure causes further delay in progressing the Local Development Plan</i>	8	<i>Consult members on the options for enabling the plan to be progressed and action accordingly</i>
3	Failure to retain and attract staff with the right experience and training	7	Complete the staff review
4.	Failure to adequately manage our IT resource	7	Train additional staff to administer and service the system

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

3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

In carrying out our responsibilities, the Service is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst the Service 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 our Service is 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. This is particularly relevant in relation to the Local Development Plan where an EQIA has been prepared to accompany the plan

3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY

The Service will be 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. It is intended that our new Local Development Plan will provide a stronger focus on the needs of our rural communities in terms of facilitating sustainable housing and employment.