

Report on	Planning Performance
Date of Meeting	2nd November 2021
Reporting Officer	Dr Chris Boomer, Service Director
Contact Officer	Dr Chris Boomer, Service Director

Is this report restricted for confidential business?		Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon		No	x
	Information relates to financial or business affairs of a person (including the council)		

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To inform members of planning performance and progress against national statistics and in comparison to other Councils
2.0	Background –
2.1	Planning Statistics in relation to the number of applications received and the number of applications received and times taken to reach decisions are extracted from the planning portal and are provide to me on a monthly basis, normally one month behind by NISRA. These need further verification, but provide a useful management tool.
2.2	Regional statistics published by the Department of Infrastructure on a quarterly and annual basis provide a useful comparison across Councils. However, these are usually 3-4 months in arrears. The last available figures are up to 30 th June 2021
3.0	Main Report – Implications for Mid Ulster Council
	Current Position on applications
3.1	The preliminary figures for 1 st April to September 30 th show that the total number of applications received were 767 and 773 decisions have been determined. Ten of these decisions were major applications with an average processing time of 92.6 weeks. Over the same period 768 local applications were determined with an average processing time of 14.8 weeks, meeting the target 50% within 15 weeks
3.2	Comparative figures for April to June 2021 show 3980 applications were submitted across Northern Ireland, of which 390 (10%) were in Mid Ulster. This

	<p>makes mid ulster the 4th busiest Council area receiving far greater numbers than its neighbours, for example Antrim and Newtownabbey received 267, Derry and Strabane received 278 and Mid and East Antrim received 297. Over the same period, Mid Ulster determined 393 applications, and maintained the highest approval rate at 99.2%.</p>
3.3	<p>Five of the decisions issued were major applications (16% of NI total), the second highest number of any of the Councils and all approved. The processing times averaged at 63 weeks below the Northern Ireland average and 5th best out of the Councils. The remaining 388 were local applications and average processing time was 14.2 weeks, within the target and above the 15.8 average of all councils. Mid Ulster provided the 4th quickest decision times. Residential development represents over three quarters of our applications. Our industrial base is stronger than our neighbouring Council's and Mid Ulster received 26% of Northern Ireland's industrial applications.</p>
3.4	<p>The relative slow turn around for major applications is a concern, particularly as these represent significant investments into the District. A key reason for our delay has been slow consultee response times by DfI Road Service. I wrote to the Divisional Roads Manager expressing my concerns and asking him to prioritize a number of applications. In a response dated 14th October 2021, he attributing the poor performance to the Voluntary Redundancies in 2015-2016.</p>
3.8	<p>Whilst we have kept pace with the number of applications received over the past six months, the pandemic has left us with a backlog. Some 42% of applications have been in the system over six months and 22% remain undetermined after a year. Given I have staff from development management working on the replacement planning portal, in order to compensate and help address the back log I have redeployed development plan staff to development management, whilst we await a date for a public examination..</p> <p>Progress of Local Development Plan</p>
3.9	<p>At the end of May, the Draft Local Development Plan Strategy was submitted to DfI, in line with this year's business Plan objective. We are still awaiting word on whether the plan is to be passed to the Planning Appeals Commission for public examination. The Department has advised this is a result of the number of plans coming to them and they should be in discussions with us in due course. If I do not heard from; word that the Plan is being progressed to the Planning Appeals Commission for Public Examination, I will write to the Department seeking a full explanation.</p>
3.10	<p>We have started initial work on our Local Policies Plan by holding workshops with members on a DEA basis. The purpose of these was to identify expansion and rounding off opportunities in the villages and smaller settlements, The Local policies Plan will provide an opportunity to promote our village community plans and our capital projects and can be included in the draft plan. Therefore, it is important that our Assistant Directors link into this process as it will be an integral part of the transformation project. Unfortunately, I do not envisage the local policies plan being finalised until 2023 at the earliest.</p>

3.11	<p>Planning Portal</p> <p>The installation of our new portal and application management system is being progressed in line with the project program. The challenge should not be underestimated as this is the most complex system the council operates marrying a Geographic Information System with a record management system and providing public access via the internet. Staff are currently defining data fields, configuring the system, devising templates for standard letters and conditions and import historical data for testing. We are working towards the new system being operational for the new financial year ahead of the other regional system. When achieved this will assist in protecting us from the rising costs faced by other Councils and offer the public a better service.</p>
	<p>Other Considerations</p>
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: We have been working in budget and have taken opportunity to make significant savings by temporarily leaving vacant the Head of Development Plan and Enforcement</p> <p>Human: Social distancing and remote working on the basis of office rotas is still in operation and is likely to be for some time yet.</p> <p>Risk Management: There is a significant risks targets will not be met this year, however, by diverting staff to where most needed it is anticipated that the risks remain under control and will not have significant consequence.</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>None for the Council</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: None for the Council. N/A</p>
5.0	<p>Recommendation(s)</p>
5.1	<p>That the Planning notes the Service Directors report.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
6.1	<p>Regional statistics published by the Department of Infrastructure are available on the DfI website.</p>

