Belfast Planning Service
Planning Performance Framework
March 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 This planning performance framework has been prepared by Belfast Planning Service to provide greater transparency and accountability in the council's delivery of its planning functions. It sets out how the council will report on delivery, making use of meaningful qualitative and quantitative indicators for planning activity during each annual reporting period.

Planning performance in Northern Ireland is measured by three statutory indicators that generally relate to the speed of decision-making for planning applications (major scale and local scale) and the resolution of enforcement complaints. There are no statutory targets relating to the preparation of Local Development Plans.

1.2 The statutory targets for processing planning applications can be impacted by matters that are outside the control of the City Council and the published statutory figures do not adequately reflect the planning application process, its purpose or outcomes. Similarly, the absence of statutory indicators for the development planning process means that this critical element of planning is largely unmeasured.

1.3 This framework sets out additional indicators that will provide greater meaning and transparency and accountability that assist in measuring the performance of the Belfast Planning Service across its key functions. It also better demonstrates and measure the value of the planning process through reporting outcomes that help to deliver corporate priorities and societal/environmental benefits for the city.

1.4 A **Planning Performance Report** (PPR) will be prepared on an annual basis (using the financial year) in line with this Framework and will be submitted to Planning Committee as soon as possible following financial year end. Following Members' approval, the report will be published on the council's planning webpage.

This framework identifies the following key aims of the annual PPR:

- To provide transparency and accountability in terms of performance of the planning system in Belfast and to help drive improvements in the system at both a local and regional level;
- To recognise and evidence the contribution that the Belfast Planning Service makes to the economy, society and the environment; and
- To build political and public understanding of the importance and achievements of the Council's planning functions.

1.5 As other NI planning authorities bring forward their own planning performance reports, this will facilitate comparison and benchmarking between authorities and help identify common challenges and opportunities for improvement. The PPR will set out how a planning authority is achieving a high-quality planning service and helps to identify where improvements can be made. In relation to Belfast City Council, this aligns with the council's priorities in service delivery, including the objectives of the Belfast Agenda, our Corporate Plan and our Council and Service Improvement Plans.

PART 1 – The services we provide

2.0 Service Overview

Belfast City Council's Planning Service sits within the Place and Economy Department which is responsible for driving the future growth and regeneration of the city, creating a sustainable, attractive, vibrant, unique and dynamic place to live, work, visit and invest.

The Planning Service sits within the Planning and Building Control directorate and includes the development of the statutory Local Development Plan and its implementation through the processing of planning applications and managing enforcement complaints.

[Additional narrative may be included in any annual report as appropriate.]

2.1 People and resources:

[Any significant resourcing constraints or impacts will be reported here annually.]

2.1.1 Skills and Training: Input structure in line with Training Plan

Through the Planning Performance Framework a training plan will be brought forward as a parallel process. This will be a management tool to support improvements to the service as a whole.

2.2 Development Planning and Policy Team Indicators.

The principal role of the Development Planning and Policy Team is to prepare and monitor the planning policy framework for Belfast. This includes the preparation of a new Local Development Plan for Belfast, ensuring all local planning policies, allocations and designations are based on sound evidence and satisfactorily reflect the city's needs and priorities. The Team is also responsible for the preparation of any Supplementary Planning Guidelines (SPG), technical advice notes (TANs) and other guidance.

In addition to the planning policy responsibilities, the Team also determines applications for works to protected trees and requests for new Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). The Team also provides advice, guidance and training on a wide range of policy implementation and detailed technical matters, including trees & landscaping, built heritage and urban design. It is also an internal consultee as part of the development management process.

There are no existing statutory performance indicators for development planning. Reporting of performance to date has generally referenced the progression of the new LDP and any supplementary documents through the preparation and adoption process.

This framework sets out the following new indicators and targets (where appropriate) to demonstrate performance in the Development Planning and Policy Team:

- Stage of Local Development Plan preparation, including date of PS adoption, current status of LPP preparation, key milestones passed and anticipated future timetable.*

- Status of statutory Timetable; e.g.: under review, consulting PAC/DfI, adopted.

- Next milestone, e.g.: Members' agreement, public consultation, intention to submit, etc.

- Compliance with SCI and commentary of any engagement/consultation completed, ongoing or planned.

*Commentary will be added as appropriate to contextualise performance, highlight key learning points or areas for performance improvement

- Details on the production of any Supplementary Planning Guidance or other non-statutory guidance and monitoring information.
- Annual Housing Monitor – target publication autumn annually.
- Annual Employment Land Monitor – target publication autumn annually.
- Annual Monitoring Report (post-LDP adoption) – target autumn annually.
- S76 Monitoring Report – target autumn annually.*
- Tree works applications – number and average time (target <6 weeks).
- TPO Request decisions - number and average time (target <6 weeks).
- Statement on number of TPOs.
- Policy advice and other internal DM consultations – number and average time (target 21 calendar days). Reporting to be consistent with all other consultee reporting*.

2.3 Development Management - Application and Enforcement Indicators

2.3.1 Development Management Comprises the planning application process, including Pre-Application Discussions (PADs), determination of planning applications, handling of post planning permission matters such as discharges of conditions, planning appeals and enforcement of planning control. It is the mechanism by which objectives at city and local area plan level are implemented on the ground.

There are existing statutory performance indicators for development management that relate to the speed of decision-making for planning applications (major and local). These indicators are published quarterly and annually by DfI for all councils. Additional reporting of DM performance to date has generally referenced the implementation of the Service Improvement Plan, including the implementation of new processes and guidance for applicants.

This framework establishes the following new indicators and targets (where appropriate) to demonstrate performance of the Development Management process;

- Statutory KPI's – the current measures for local (15 weeks) and major (30 weeks) applications recorded by local authorities and reported to the DfI, alongside a commentary.*
- The number of applications received and decided (local, major and other) by BCC

    The application approval rate (%) of all applications determined during the year.
- Number and percentage of Major applications determined within 30 weeks
- Number and percentage of Local applications determined within 15 weeks
- Number and percentage of Householder and advertisement applications determined within 12-weeks
- The number of pre-application discussions received and by category
- The delegation rate – the number and percentage of applications that have been determined under delegated authority.

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- The number of elected member referral application requests to committee, and the percentage agreed. *
- The number of decisions made by the Planning Committee and the number of those decisions (as a percentage) that were contrary to the officer recommendation. *
- The number of applications which were subject to an appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC)
- % of appeal decisions that upheld the decision of the Council*

2.3.2 The Development Management Team is also responsible for the **enforcement** of planning, investigating alleged breaches of planning control and determining what action should be taken

KPI's – the current measure for enforcement is % of cases closed within 39 weeks.

- Details of any enforcement strategy / charter (date of publication and proposals for review) Published Quarterly/Yearly Updates
- Annual Figures on the number of complaints lodged and investigated.
- Percentage of Priority 1 complaints received.*
- The number of "live" enforcement cases at the start and end of the year.
- The number of enforcement cases closed.
- Number of enforcement notices serviced / and any direct action taken.
- The number of successful enforcement prosecutions
- Number of enforcement appeal cases & outcomes
- Report on court outcomes

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PART 2

3.0 Our Contribution to outcomes

3.1 In 2017 Belfast Published its first Community plan, the *Belfast Agenda*, updated in 2024 it sets out the joint vision and long-term ambitions for Belfast's future, as well as outlining Belfast City Council's priorities for action over the next four years. The five strategic themes of the Belfast Agenda:

- Our people and communities
- Our economy
- Our place
- Our planet
- Compassionate

3.2 The four strategic aims of the LDP below closely reflect these Belfast Agenda priorities. These aims are supported by a series of strategic objectives designed to help achieve the delivery of this vision.
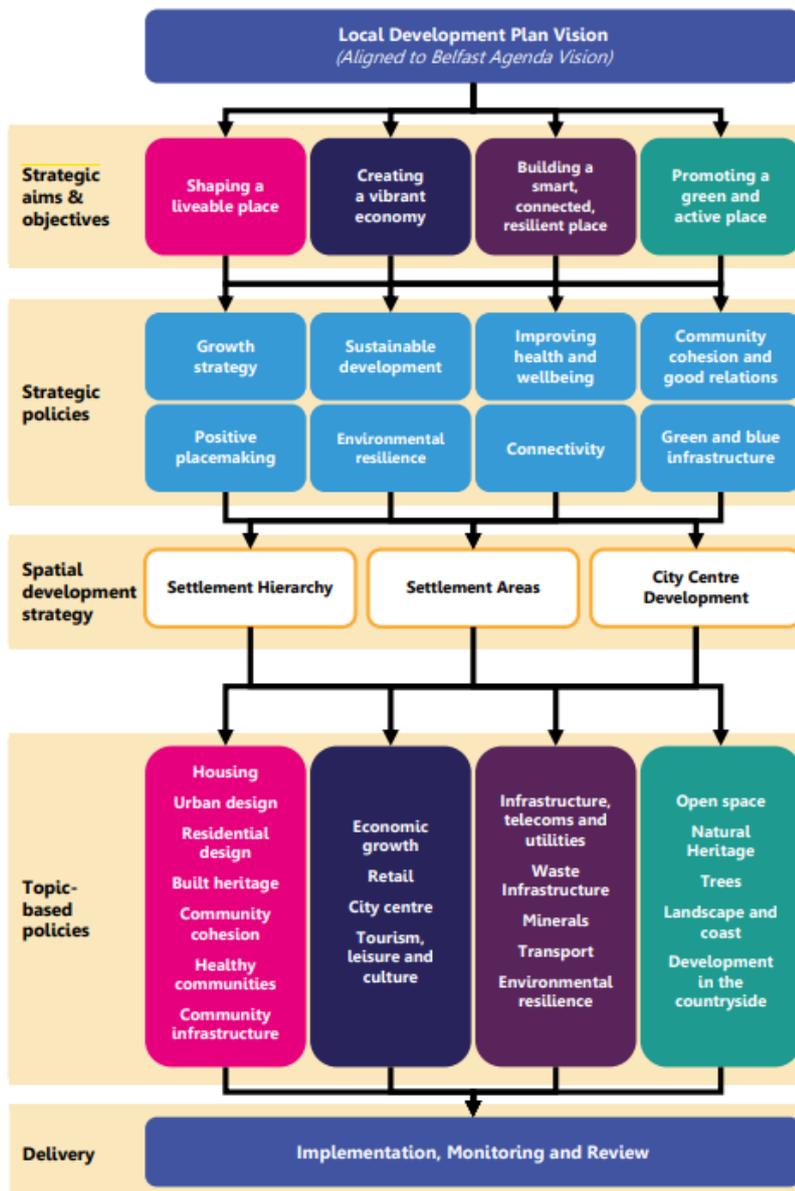
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3.3 Our Outcomes in performance year*

The below is a sample of potential annual outcomes we can report on. It is likely that only one or two from each theme will appear in the annual performance report, which can be agreed in advance and continuously reviewed throughout the reporting year. Whilst some can be measured quantitatively, other outcomes may be better reported through case studies and narrative.

1. **Shaping a liveable Place**
-   No of housing units permitted
-   No. affordable housing units (social and intermediate) permitted broken down by tenure
-   Percentage of affordable homes granted permission as a proportion of all dwelling units approved [or just for schemes of 5 units or more where Policy HOU5 applies]
-   No of householder applications permitted
-   No of Listed building consent applications approved
-   Sq metres of community facilities approved
-   Urban Design impacts – improved schemes, no of consultations issued?
-   No of PADs where scheme is improved – qualitative measure could form basis of case study?

2. **Creating a Vibrant Economy**
-   Sqm New employment floorspace, split by use class
-   Supporting tourism, hotel bed approved, STLs approved
-   No of retail approvals
-   Development Opportunity Areas, Sites approved within and if guidance produced on.
-   Bar restaurant approvals

3. **Building a Smart, connected Resilient Place**
-   No of telecoms permitted
-   No of infrastructure related approvals
-   Renewable energy approvals
-   No of majors apps Section 76s on active travel/ green travel fund / cycle infrastructure measures
-   Mitigating climate change, refusals on env2,
-   No of applications permitted with suds

4. **Promoting a green and active place.**
-   No of applications with new public open space
-   No of applications for new sports facilities
-   No of applications for works to protected trees approved
-   Greenway/ Landscape approvals
-   Countryside refusals
-   Environmental improvement schemes

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Planning in Motion

(Summary of up to 5 approvals in past year in line with strategic aims, and where value was added Eg significant housing or employment schemes, green roof schemes, listed/ heritage buildings back onto use, any refusals based on environmental impacts.

Planning in Action

(Summary of on the ground schemes completed or award winning in the last year in line with strategic aims, previous years planning in motion schemes) link to training plan for officer and committee site visits.

PART 3

4.0 Our Continuous Improvement

4.1 **The Council's Improvement Plan Objectives for Planning has one agreed action:**

That Management will:

Update of the Planning Service Improvement Plan to include actions relating to the service as a whole: the ongoing development of the additional performance measures (i.e. both qualitative and quantitative) that management would require in managing and monitoring the aspects of the planning process that are within the control of BCC; demonstrating the value of the planning process, for example customer satisfaction, large developments completed, social housing; and previously agreed audit actions regarding internal informal targets for major applications and monitoring and reporting on the timeliness of internal consultee responses.

4.2 To ensure we continuously improve and to assist in consistency in measuring performance across the Planning Service, the following steps will act as a guide in the first year of this framework, and will allow each area of the service to consider their own performance and how measured improvement can be made to enhance performance. These steps will also inform the updated Planning Service Improvement Plan. These 12 steps should be considered against the objectives of each work area and a local work plan put in place, for reporting on in line with audit requirements.

    a. Having the right information
    b. The right people having access to relevant up-to-date information
    c. Everyone understands their role and responsibility in their work area.
    d. Make dynamic changes but only when needed
    e. Praise good performance, challenge poor performance
    f. Monitor workloads
    g. Importance of the recording of decision making
    h. Communicate with the Customer
    i. Involve members in performance conversations
    j. Learn from Experience
    k. Learn from Others.

4.3 This should focus on improvements and changes for the incoming year.

- Demonstrating a culture of continuous improvement focusing on the last 12 months.
- Evidence ongoing training of staff, management and members in priority areas.
- Act as clear vision and programme as basis for service improvement.

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- Keep the focus on improvement activity rather than carrying out core / routine work or tasks.
- Be clear about Service Improvement actions and their purpose – there should be a flow of information through the report from problem to solution.
- Aim to ensure that Service Improvement commitments are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-related).
- Take appropriate action in response to complaints and ombudsman cases to address any process or performance issues.

4.4 After the first year, there will be a review of the delivery of service improvement key actions committed in the previous year. This should report on the commitment made and the specific actions carried out in relation to each commitment, including any evidence of those actions and their impact.

PART 4

5.0   Accountability to Improve the System

5.1 Belfast City Council continues to collaborate and build relations with other councils and DfI and customers, including through attendance at the following levels.

5.1.1   SOLACE, HOP and PIP programme*
5.1.2   Officer cross authority working groups
5.1.3   Belfast Planning Partnership*

5.2   Strategic issues raised by Belfast in the above groups have directly inputted into the ongoing Regional Improvement work.*
5.2.1   Validation checklist
5.2.2   DCA pilot scheme

5.3   Review and highlight key factors which contribute to delays outside council's control and any steps taken to improve performance.
5.3.1   EG Performance of consultees

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