
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: PLANNING SERVICE PERFORMANCE UPDATE

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Purpose

To update and inform the Committee on Scottish Government feedback to the CNPA's Planning Performance Framework report for 2014/15 and the statistical performance of the CNPA Planning Service and highlight changes or improvements in its delivery.

Recommendation

That the Committee:

- i. **Note the generally improving performance of the CNPA Planning Service demonstrated by the 2014/15 Planning Performance Framework feedback from Scottish Government and the internal planning service monitoring results outlined in this report.**

Background

1. The CNPA Planning Service and Management Team use quarterly performance reports to examine Planning Service performance more closely and implement improvements and changes to the service. For the last 18 months, officers have brought performance updates to the Planning Committee for information and as a way of supplementing annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) report.

Scottish Government PPF report feedback 2014/15

2. The Planning Performance Framework (PPF) was developed between Scottish Government and Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) as a way of stimulating improvements in planning services across Scotland and assessing statistical performance and the quality of the service.
3. The Planning Committee discussed the CNPA's 2014/15 PPF report in September 2015. It was submitted to Scottish Government on 31 July 2015 and the CNPA received feedback from Scottish Government on 5 October 2015. That feedback is included as Appendix I.

4. The format of feedback has changed in different years. In 2012/13 Scottish Government attempted to provide detailed feedback on many elements of service delivery for each planning authority. In 2013/14 parts of the feedback were contracted out to a consultancy. For the 2014/15 the Scottish Government feedback has been limited to a brief assessment against performance markers.
5. HoPS are now leading a more in-depth and qualitative benchmarking review of PPF reports between planning authorities. That process is in its early stages with the CNPA in a benchmarking group that includes Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Highland, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles Councils. We are paired for direct feedback with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. We will update the Planning Committee on any relevant issues or lessons from the benchmarking exercise.
6. The Scottish Government's feedback report shows steady improvement in many areas of planning service delivery. The final page of Appendix I has a summary table that shows how the CNPA's planning service has improved over the past three years against the PPF performance markers. The more detailed commentary of the feedback reflects issues that the Planning Committee are already aware of and that the planning service are addressing as far as is possible in the unique planning system of the National Park. For example, we are given credit for determining legacy cases during the year, for introducing procedures to speed up conclusion of legal agreements and for working to improve pre-application processes with local authorities, but are also criticised for the length of time it took to determine many decisions, including legacy cases.
7. Much of the feedback for application determination timescales is based on comparisons with national averages. Although the CNPA planning service has been tightening up procedures for application determinations for the past two years, the nature of the applications called in and determination process by Planning Committee means that we are not directly comparable with other planning authorities in all areas. To compare the timescales for the very few, more significant, local applications called in by the CNPA (all of which are determined by the Planning Committee) to national averages that include hundreds of small applications determined by officers under delegated powers is crude and does not compare like with like. A similar comparison is made on timescales for householder developments based on the 7.5 week average of 14,000+ decisions in Scotland against the CNPA's average of 11.5 weeks for three applications that year.

Planning Service Performance Update for Q1 and Q2 2015/16

8. The Planning Committee's last planning service performance update was in May 2015. That report highlighted the conclusion of the CNPA's legacy cases, the impact of them on average determination timescales and the success of use of processing agreements.

9. The significant points from this report are:
- A. A significant reduction in average determination timescales, particularly in the first quarter of 2015/16;
 - B. Continued uptake of processing agreements and a continued link with faster determinations;
 - C. Fast production of decision notices following Committee determinations;
 - D. Steady progress in delivering service priorities

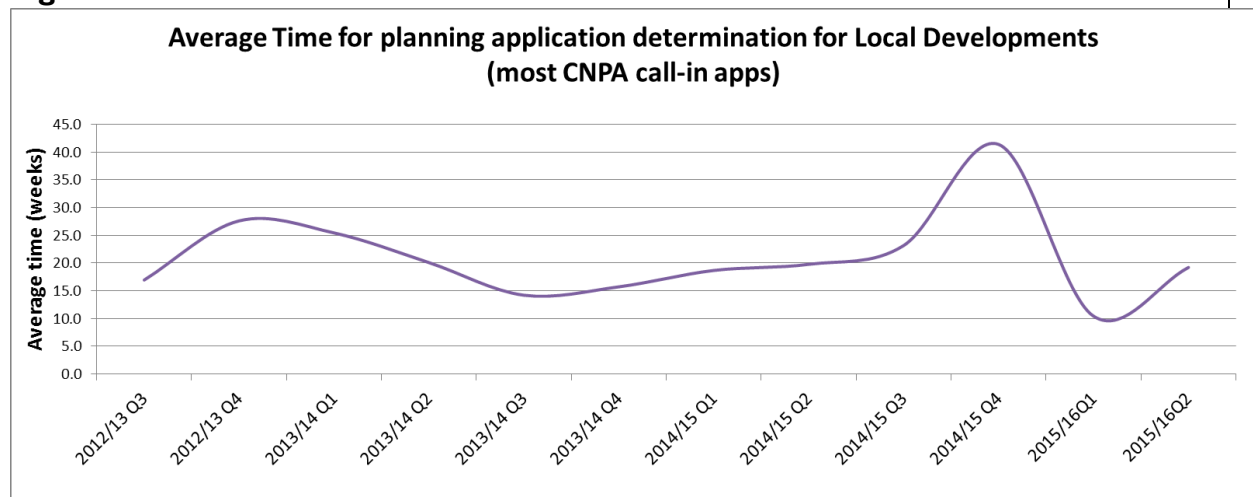
Planning Application Call-in

10. In 2014/15, the CNPA called in 44 planning applications. In the first half of 2015/16 the CNPA called in 15 planning applications. This is partly a reflection of the planning applications being submitted in the National Park during that period and partly because the call-in criteria have provided clearer thresholds for what will or will not be called in by the CNPA.

Determination timescales

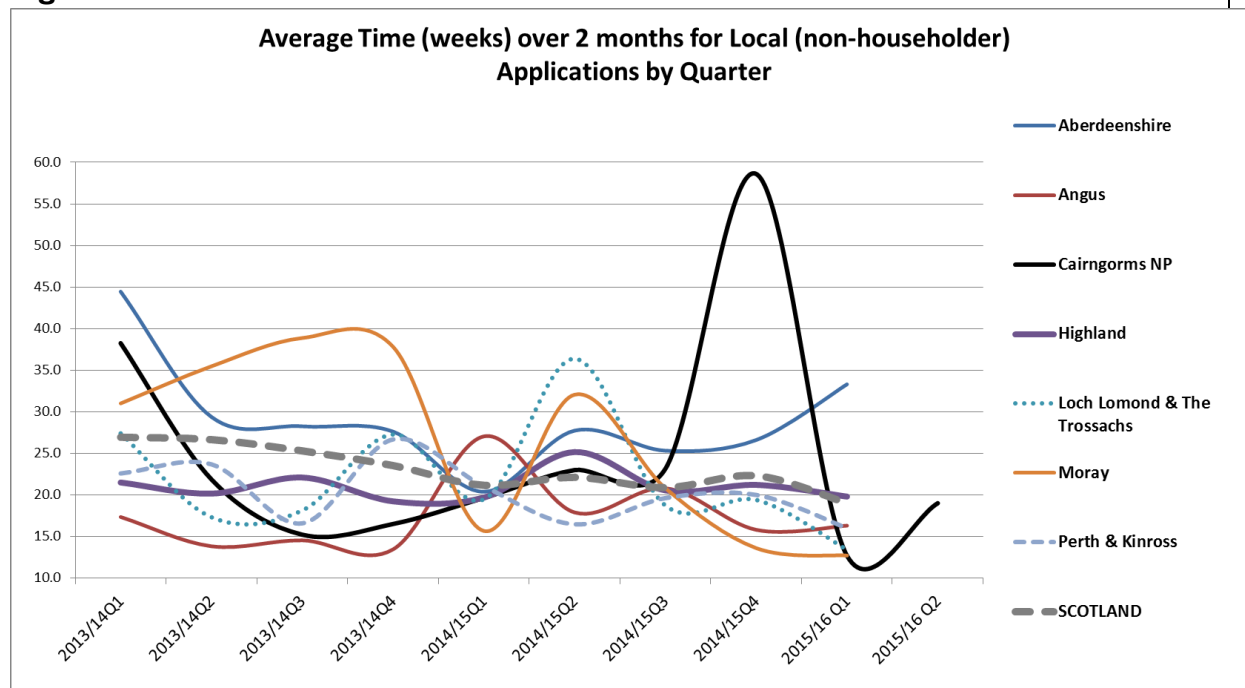
11. The first quarter of 2015/16 saw the had the fastest average determination timescale in the last three years, with an average of 10.4 weeks for the two applications that did not have processing agreements and 11.7 weeks for the five applications determined. Timescales increased during the second quarter to 19.2 weeks for applications that did not have processing agreements and 19 weeks for all six applications determined. The average determination timescale for the first six months of 2015/16 was 15.6 weeks for all applications.

Figure 1



12. Figure one shows the average determination time in each quarter for local developments over the past three years. Figure 2 shows data for applications that take planning authorities more than two months to determine compared to a range of other planning authorities and Scotland. This shows how decision making timescales change over time in most planning authorities, and particularly in smaller planning authorities, where there are fewer applications.

Figure 2



13. The audit of the planning service recommended that the CNPA use a rolling annual average indicator in service monitoring. Figures 3 and 4 show the CNPA's quarterly average against a rolling annual average figure in a bar and line chart forms. They illustrate the disproportionate effect of the final quarter of 2014/15 on any average figures that include it.

Figure 3

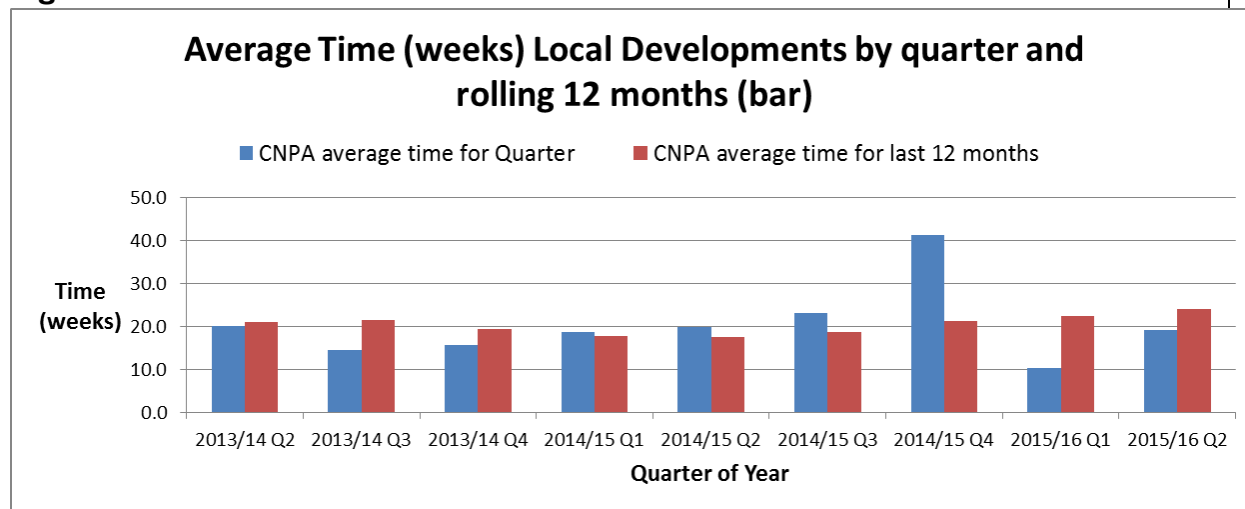
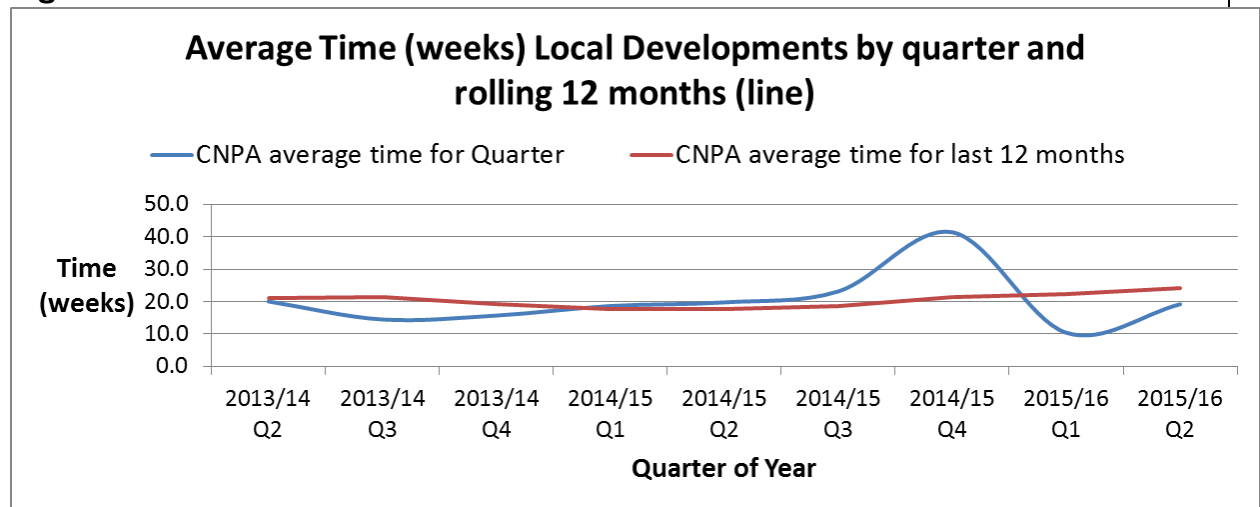


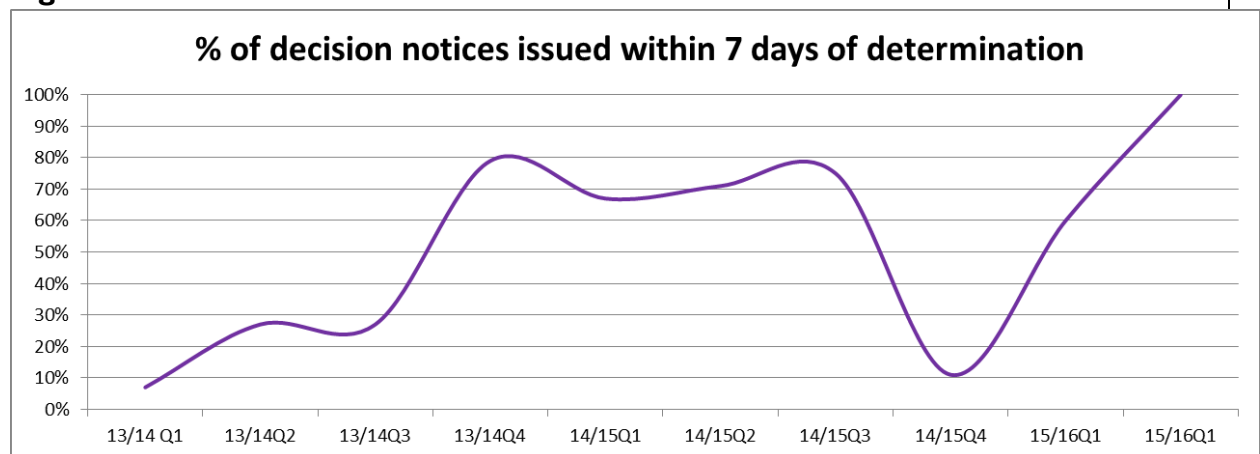
Figure 4



Issuing decision notices

14. During the first half of 2015/16 the CNPA has returned to its former pattern of swift decision notice issue following planning committee (where there are not legal agreements to be concluded). In quarter one of the year we processed 60% within a week of the committee's decision and in quarter two we processed all decision notices within a week of the committee decision. Two applications determined in September 2015 require legal agreements to be concluded before a decision notice can be issued.

Figure 5



Use of Processing Agreements

15. The CNPA continues to offer processing agreements on all applications we call in. They provide certainty for the applicant and for the CNPA and we have found they encourage good communication and lead to quicker planning decisions. The planning service will continue to offer processing agreements and sell the benefits of certainty and reliable decision-making timescales to applicants.

Planning Service Priorities

16. The Planning Committee approved 10 improvement priorities for the planning service during 2015/16 in the April. We have added the commitment to introduce a new customer feedback survey to make 11 key priorities for the year. The planning team are making good progress with that work. A number of actions completed, many are underway and we expect to have completed all within the year.

Table 1 Planning Service Priority		Progress
1.	Undertake feedback exercise with Community Council/Association Planning Representatives Network (PRN) on recent LDP process to improve ease of engagement for next LDP.	To be undertaken March 2016
2.	Establish plan for Enforcement Officer role from July 2015.	Completed
3.	Undertake skills audit of planning team and establish a prioritised training/enhancement plan, including training activities on natural heritage skills and advice, delivery of the new LDP for the Park, and planning support team training on Uni-form administration and template modification.	Underway
4.	Put in place procedure for CNPA member involvement in pre-application discussions.	Proposals for Committee programmed December 2015
5.	Enter Scottish Government/RTPI Awards for Quality in Planning.	Completed
6.	Investigate establishment of Design Panel for the Park.	Completed
7.	Review internal consultation procedures for specialist advice.	Programmed for Jan-March 2016
8.	Plan for Cairngorms Design Awards competition in 2016 to coincide with the themed year on Innovation, Architecture and Design.	Underway
9.	Add to series of Cairngorms Planning Advice Notes to provide easy to read customer-focussed advice.	Ongoing
10.	Implementation of a Scottish Government Pilot Project to use a new Town Centre Toolkit to improve the town centre vitality and viability.	Underway
11.	Introduce new customer feedback survey(s)	Underway

Next report

17. The next planning service monitoring report will be in May 2016.

Gavin Miles

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