

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: **Planning Service Improvement Priorities for 2014/15**

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Purpose:

For members to agree the planning service improvement priorities for 2014/15.

Recommendation:

That the Committee agree the CNPA planning service priorities for 2014/15

Executive Summary

The CNPA is required to identify planning service improvements in our Planning Performance Framework (PPF) reports for Scottish Government. The PPF reporting timescale is currently mismatched from the financial year so we will be well into next year by the time we must prepare it. In order to provide certainty for the planning service for the year ahead, the planning committee are asked to agree the service improvement priorities for 2014/15.

A set of 14 priorities are proposed to cover the core functions of the planning service and to give the team a clear focus for the year ahead. The proposed priorities build on the priorities from 2013/14 and the changes in the planning team over the past 6 months or so.

Background

1. The CNPA has produced Planning Service Improvement Plans (SIPs) to outline the measures we will make to improve planning service delivery each year since 2010/11. In 2011/12 the Scottish Government introduced the Planning Performance Framework (PPF) for planning authorities.
2. The PPF reports that we must now prepare each year incorporate statistics and other evidence of planning service performance, progress in delivery of service improvement priorities over the year and the new service improvement priorities for the year ahead. The PPF reports incorporate and replace SIPs.

3. The Scottish Government will not ask us to submit our PPF report for 2013/14 till later in 2014. However, our current reporting period has ended and with 2014/15 starting, we now need to agree the service priorities for the year ahead.

Review of Service Priorities from 2013/14

4. Table I has a reminder of the 6 service priorities we set out in the CNPA's PPF report last year as well as a brief summary of delivery. We will update the committee with the content of a comprehensive PPF report once all the statistics and information needed is available later this summer and before the formal PPF report is sent to Scottish Government.
5. We have implemented, or will have implemented within the next few months, most of the priorities we set out for 2013/14. There is clearly still a bedding-in period for the effects of some changes to be reflected in statistics and service performance. As members know, there have been significant changes in staff and the location of staff and this inevitably leads to some disruption. Similarly, the introduction of new processes and procedures take time to learn and become automatic. However, we are confident that the measures being introduced are leading to improvements in the quality and speed of application processing as well as improving certainty for applicants over timescales and the information they need to provide for a timely decision.

Table 1		
	2013/14 Planning Service Priorities	Summary of progress
1	Restructure and strengthen the CNPA planning team as part of wider CNPA staff restructure with emphasis on coordination of planning process under one Director of Planning and Rural Development, recruitment of new posts to the Grantown-on-Spey office (closer to the majority of planning applications) and a renewed focus on delivery of an effective and efficient service delivery.	Implemented. New posts and structure bedding in.
2	Review the location of planning team (historically based in Ballater office) to establish the most effective service for the National Park.	Implemented. Decision to move planning team to Grantown-on-Spey taken. Planning support and development management functions now working from Grantown-on-Spey. Remaining Ballater-based planning posts in transition to Grantown-on-Spey.
3	Review and implement new processes for our Development Management service , including the offering the use of processing agreements and making more use of project plans.	Implemented. Processing agreements trialled during 2013/14 and to be offered on all called-in applications from April 2014. Project plans introduced for major application processing.
4	Work to improve decision-making timescales through enhanced management supervision, staff restructure and process improvements related to S75 Planning Obligations.	Implemented. Routine reviews of S75 agreements in place; legacy cases being processed and concluded; post determination procedures and timescales being shortened; processing agreements managing timescales for applicant and CNPA.
5	Work with local authority partners to redesign the pre-application process including review of internal systems and development of a protocol that makes clear which categories of development will be automatically be “called in” (or not) by the CNPA. This will improve the clarity of process for all interested parties and reduce potential time delays.	Soon to be completed. Call in categories being clarified with councils, pre application processing procedure being reviewed.
6	Introduce more rigorous up-front information and survey requirements for applicants to support efficient planning application validation and subsequent determination. The provision of adequate information with planning applications will allow us to determine applications efficiently and substantially reduces the risk of delays in determination or subsequent challenges.	Partially completed. CNPA providing consistent advice on up-front information and survey requirements and keeping Developers Forum and other stakeholders informed. Processing agreements will be used to help applicants and CNPA identify requirements and time implications.

Service Priorities for 2014/15

6. Table 2 below shows our proposed service priorities for 2014/15. Advice from Scottish Government and Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) is that the planning service priorities identified should be a relatively short list of new and essential work priorities. Through planning team and management discussions we are proposing 14 priorities to build on the priorities and changes of the past year and to focus the planning team's efforts on key areas of work. The 14 priorities cover each of the 3 core parts of our planning service of development planning, development management and enforcement as well as the wider issues that apply to the entire planning service.

Table 2	
Proposed 2014/15 Planning Service Priorities	
1	Complete move of Planning Staff to Grantown on Spey.
2	Undertake feedback exercise with Community Council/Association Planning Representatives Network (PRN) on recent LDP process to improve ease of engagement for next LDP.
3	Establish partner coordination group to deliver LDP Action Programme and use the monitoring reports to highlight importance and value of consented/delivered development.
4	Establish procedure advice notes across planning service to help customers understand key Local Development Plan implementation topics and development management procedure issues.
5	Implement new call-in categories across Park and deliver a more consistent pre-application service with 5 councils.
6	Offer processing agreements on all applications likely to be called in or called in by the CNPA.
7	Establish Customer Service Charter for Planning Service focussing on development management and day to day service provision that is not covered by the Enforcement Charter and Development Plan Schemes already in place.
8	Review the delivery of planning gain service for the CNPA.
9	Review internal procedures and processes to improve efficiency and speed of decisions and introduce internal determination timescale targets to reduce overall determination timescales.
10	Simplify and improve the customer focus of the CNPA planning web pages and provide quicker routes to applications and open consultations.
11	Review Enforcement Charter and investigate greater integration of enforcement between CNPA and 5 Councils.
12	Establish plan for Enforcement Officer role from July 2015.
13	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 LPD for the Park, and planning support team training on Uniform administration and template modification.
14	Review options for CNPA member involvement in pre-application discussions.

7. All our normal activities and duties will continue to be delivered so the proposed priorities are those that are in addition or are significant new work for the CNPA. We report much of the wider work in our PPF report, so members will see a list of the highlights in our draft PPF report later this year before we submit it the Scottish Government.
8. Examples of work that will continue but is not highlighted here includes:
 - the running and evolution of our Developers Forum and Community Council/Association Planning Representatives Network;
 - the consolidation of the significant improvements and changes in planning service from last year's priorities;
 - ongoing work with councils to improve clarity and service delivery between planning authorities in the Park.
 - The enhanced resource being given to major projects and housing.

Next steps

9. Once the service priorities are agreed by the planning committee, staff will incorporate them into the planning service unit plan for the year and into individual's work plans and targets. The committee will receive a comprehensive PPF report covering planning service performance and last year's improvement priorities once all the statistics and information needed is available later this summer and before the formal PPF report is sent to Scottish Government. We expect to be asked to submit this report in late summer or early autumn but are already collating the evidence to support it.

Recommendation:

That the Committee agree the CNPA planning service priorities for 2014/15 proposed in Table 2.

**Gavin Miles
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April 2014**