

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

13 January 2016

Report by Director of Environment

PLANNING SERVICE PERFORMANCE AND CUSTOMER SURVEY 2015

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report considers the Planning Performance Framework (PPF) that was submitted to the Scottish Government in 2015. The report also looks at the results of the customer survey that was conducted into the Planning Service in 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Committee is asked to note the content of this report, welcome the positive feedback to the PPF from the Scottish Government and welcome the generally positive feedback from the public to the Council's Planning Service.

BACKGROUND

3. All Planning Authorities in Scotland submit a **Planning Performance Framework** to the Scottish Government every year. This year's document had to be submitted by the end of July. Every Council uses a similar format including the reporting of comparable performance statistics. As well as statistics, the document summarises positive actions undertaken in 2014-15 and improvement actions planned for 2015-16.

4. These Planning Performance Frameworks will form the basis for the Government to compare planning services' performance on a reasonably consistent basis across the country. COSLA has agreed with the Scottish Government that the performance statistics will be used to assess which authorities have poor performance, and have agreed that measures will be put in place whereby poorly performing authorities may be penalised by having their planning fees reduced [only the speed of processing planning applications will be used to assess the need for a penalty, not the broader range of performance measures].

5. A **Customer Survey** was carried out in the Spring of 2015 in order to gauge the customers' views of the Planning Service that they receive from us. The survey was carried out by telephone with a range of randomly chosen customers in each of the categories of: applicants; agents; and representees.

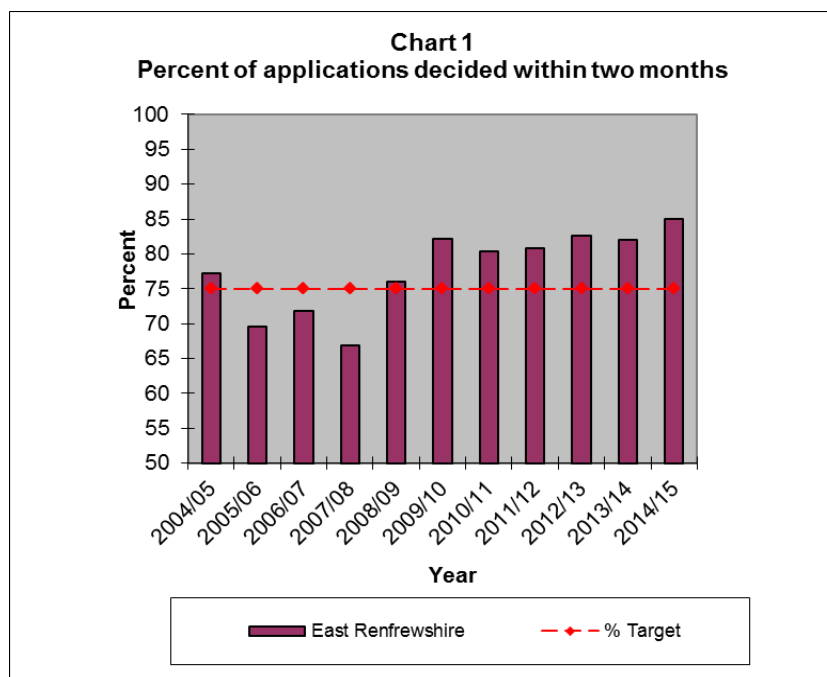
REPORT

6. Planning Performance Framework (PPF)

7. The whole PPF is available online at <http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/service-standards>. It is split into a number of sections, the structure of which is set by the Government. Sections 1 and 5 contain performance statistics. Sections 2 (which is the main body of the PPF) and 3 discuss under eight headings what the Council has done throughout the year to deliver a high-quality planning service. Section 4 discusses how we have fulfilled our action programme from 2014-15 and what our actions are planned for 2015-16. There are a number of appendices to illustrate examples of good practice.

8. Some of the key performance figures are as follows:

- 85.1% of all applications were decided within 2 months, improved from 82.1% last year (despite a 5.6% increase in planning applications decided).
- The average time taken to deal with a local planning application in East Renfrewshire was 7 weeks, improved from 7.3 weeks last year. The Scottish average was 10.3 weeks, which placed ERC in 3rd equal place in Scotland.
- 91% of householder applications were decided within their 2 month decision target (very similar to the 91.2 % achieved last year, despite an increase in householder application numbers of nearly 9% - therefore showing improved performance per officer). The average time taken to deal with a householder application was 6.4 weeks (improved from 6.6 weeks last year). The Scottish average was 7.5 weeks, and for this measure ERC was in 7th place Scotland.



9. The figures show good continuous improvement and places East Renfrewshire Council in the top quartile of the authorities in Scotland across most of the key performance measures. There should therefore be no risk of any penalty clause being applied. Additionally it demonstrates that we have up-to-date development plans including a generous housing land supply.

10. The Scottish Government have given feedback on our PPF. They use 15 markers, of which only 13 are applicable to East Renfrewshire Council this year (the other two relate to Development Plan preparation – and we are not at that stage currently). For each marker we are rated red, amber or green (based on the evidence provided within the PPF) with “green” being good and “red” indicating a fail or performance below acceptable levels. This year we scored 12 green and 1 amber (no reds). We actually think that even the amber rating has been marked very harshly. The amber rating is for our ‘developer contributions’ policy, despite having an approved supplementary guidance, explaining this over two pages of the PPF and it subsequently winning an SAQP award. It seems to have been rated amber simply because it does not explain much about procedures at the pre-application stage (despite us saying that we do so in our pre-application processing agreements policy). We shall pick up on this further next year. The feedback from the Scottish Government is attached as Appendix 1 below.

11. Planning Customer Survey 2015

12. The customers of the Development Management section of the Planning Service were surveyed in February-March 2015.

13. A summary of the results show:-

- a. 80% were either ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the time taken to speak to someone on the telephone (none were dissatisfied).
- b. 78% were either ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the time taken to get a response to a written enquiry (again, none were dissatisfied).
- c. 77% had used our online planning services. Of those who didn’t use it, 70% of them answered simply that they “prefer not to”, while two people said that they were unaware of the service and one didn’t have access to the internet.
- d. 74% were either ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the quality of information that they received from the Council (three people expressed dissatisfaction – see further discussion on this issue below).
- e. 67% were ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with how well staff did their jobs (only one person expressed any dissatisfaction).
- f. 86% were ‘very’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ overall with the service that they received from the Planning Service (with two people expressing some dissatisfaction).

14. A more detailed breakdown of the statistics are contained in Appendix 2 below. The individual comments that people made are included in the Planning Performance Framework (following the hyperlink in paragraph 7 above, appendix 2 on page 42). Overall the results are generally positive and it is not considered that specific follow-up actions are necessary.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

15. There are no financial or efficiency implications of the recommendations.

CONSULTATION

16. No consultations were undertaken.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

17. There are no partnership working implications..

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

18. There are no direct implications for the Council within this Report.

CONCLUSIONS

19. The Planning Performance Framework (PPF) is a significant document which shows the wide range of customer service that the Council is delivering and the numerous improvement actions being implemented. The Scottish Government continue to promote *continuous improvement* and *modernisation* and it is considered that the PPF clearly demonstrates the Council's commitment to and achievement of these aims. The generally positive feedback to our customer surveys is to be welcomed which demonstrates that we are generally providing a good service to our customers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. The Committee is asked to note the content of this report, welcome the positive feedback to the PPF from the Scottish Government and welcome the generally positive feedback from the public to our Planning Service.

Director of Environment

Further details can be obtained from Gillian McCarney, Planning and Building Standards Manager, 0141 577 3116 gillian.mccarney@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

November 2015

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning Performance Framework – July 2015

KEY WORDS

Planning; Customer Survey; Planning Performance Framework

APPENDIX 1

Name of planning authority: **East Renfrewshire Council**

The High Level Group on Performance agreed a set of performance markers. We have assessed your report against those markers to give an indication of priority areas for improvement action. The high level group will monitor and evaluate how the key markers have been reported and the value which they have added.

The Red, Amber, Green ratings are based on the evidence provided within the PPF reports. Where no information or insufficient evidence has been provided, a 'red' marking has been allocated.

No.	Performance Marker	RAG rating	Comments
1	Decision-making: continuous reduction of average timescales for all development categories [Q1 - Q4]	Green	<p>Major applications</p> <p>Major application timescales have lengthened to 19.6 weeks, however this remains much better than the national average of 46.4 weeks.</p> <p>RAG = Amber</p> <p>Local (Non-Householder) Applications</p> <p>At 9.0 weeks you have slightly improved on last year's average timescales and remain quicker than the national average of 12.9 weeks.</p> <p>RAG rating = Green</p> <p>Householder Applications</p> <p>At 6.4 weeks you average decision making remains better than the national average of 7.5 weeks. You have also managed to improve from 6.6 weeks last year.</p> <p>RAG rating = Green</p> <p>TOTAL RAG = Green</p>
2	<p>Processing agreements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer to all prospective applicants for major development planning applications; and availability publicised on 	Green	<p>The availability of processing agreements is advertised clearly on the website along with an example processing agreement.</p> <p>We note that a number of agreements have been entered into this year but these have either not been progressed or have yet to be</p>

	website		determined.
3	<p>Early collaboration with applicants and consultees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> availability and promotion of pre-application discussions for all prospective applications; and clear and proportionate requests for supporting information 	Green	<p>Good evidence of a strong pre-application discussion service with a high proportion of applicants using the service.</p> <p>Supporting information requests appear to be clear and the link to the major development team and their role is well made.</p>
4	<p>Legal agreements: conclude (or reconsider) applications after resolving to grant permission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing number of live applications more than 6 months after resolution to grant (from last reporting period) 	Green	<p>Whilst timescales for legal agreements attached to major applications have increased a little to 25 weeks, they remain much quicker than the national average. Although you have only 2 local applications with legal agreements attached the timescales have doubled to 50.1 weeks, slightly higher than the national average.</p> <p>We note that you have a protocol in place on the use of planning obligations/developer contributions and that these have a 3 month deadline put in place to prevent new legacy cases coming through. We look forward to seeing its impact.</p>
5	Enforcement charter updated / re-published within last 2 years	Green	Charter was 1 year old as at end of reporting period and we note that it has been updated again in July 2015.
6	<p>Continuous improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> progress/improvement in relation to PPF National Headline Indicators; and progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through PPF report 	Green	<p>LDP is up-to-date as is the enforcement charter.</p> <p>You have continued to make good progress around decision making timescales. As noted there are some concerns about increased timescales around legal agreements but you have put steps in place to keep these to a minimum.</p> <p>You have made some progress on the commitments from 2013/14. You have a high number of SIP commitments coming through for 2015/16. Some of these are quite general and relate to daily business. We recommend that you reduce these in future years and focus on ones that are more ambitious.</p>
7	Local development plan less than 5 years since adoption	Green	LDP is 4 years old and we note that the proposed LDP had since been adopted in June 2015.
8	Development plan scheme – next	Green	We note that there was some slippage within

	<p>LDP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> on course for adoption within 5 years of current plan(s) adoption; and project planned and expected to be delivered to planned timescale 		<p>the DPS but that this was outwith your control – we note that the LDP has since been adopted within the 5 year period.</p> <p>We look forward to your next report setting out progress on the new DPS you will have underway.</p>
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i>	N/A	
10	<p>Cross sector stakeholders* engaged early (pre-MIR) in development plan preparation – <i>if plan has been at pre-MIR stage during reporting year</i></p> <p><i>*including industry, agencies and Scottish Government</i></p>	N/A	
11	<p>Regular and proportionate policy advice produced on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> information required to support applications; and expected developer contributions 	Green	<p>Report is strong on the information required to support applications with clear requirements set out at an early stage in the process.</p> <p>RAG = Green</p> <p>The recently adopted SPG (June 2015) on developer contributions provides strong evidence as do the 2 case studies provided on how these are flexible enough to be adjusted/commuted in certain circumstance.</p> <p>RAG = Green</p>
12	Corporate working across services to improve outputs and services for customer benefit (for example: protocols; joined-up services; single contact arrangements; joint pre-application advice)	Green	We note that the team now contains a number of services which have been brought together under planning to provide a single point of service. There is also evidence of further links across the council and regular agency meetings.
13	Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities	Green	You undertake benchmarking and sharing good practice across the group. You also note your attendance at the Clyde Valley Forum and HOPS committees.
14	Stalled sites / legacy cases: conclusion or withdrawal of old planning applications and reducing number of live applications more than one year old	Green	You have only a small number of cases which are kept under review. You have provided details of why some of these cannot be determined and this has been noted.
15	<p>Developer contributions: clear and proportionate expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> set out in development plan (and/or emerging plan); and 	Amber	<p>SPG on contributions provides certainty for developers and you have a protocol on obligations to set out expectations.</p> <p>RAG = Green</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in pre-application discussions 	<p>Whilst the report is strong on pre-application generally, it lacks detail on how developer contributions are set out at pre-application stage. The report notes that a senior project officer will check the application at validation stage – however this is beyond the pre-application stage.</p> <p>We note you have a policy to discuss legal agreements early in the processing agreements process but there is little else in the report that details early discussions for those applications where there is no processing agreement involved.</p> <p>RAG = Amber</p>
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EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL
Performance against Key Markers

Marker		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
1	Decision making timescales	Amber	Green	Green
2	Processing agreements	Red	Green	Green
3	Early collaboration	Amber	Green	Green
4	Legal agreements	Amber	Green	Green
5	Enforcement charter	Green	Green	Green
6	Continuous improvement	Amber	Green	Green
7	Local development plan	Green	Green	Green
8	Development plan scheme	Green	Green	Green
9	Elected members engaged early (pre-MIR)	N/A	N/A	N/A
10	Stakeholders engaged early (pre-MIR)	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	Regular and proportionate advice to support applications	Red	Amber	Green
12	Corporate working across services	Green	Green	Green
13	Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge	Green	Green	Green
14	Stalled sites/legacy cases	Amber	Amber	Green
15	Developer contributions	Amber	Amber	Amber

Overall Markings (total numbers for red, amber and green)

	Red	Amber	Green
2012-13	2	6	5
2013-14	0	3	10
2014-15	0	1	12

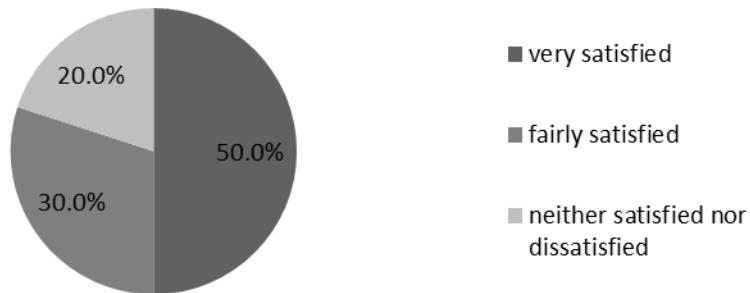
Decision Making Timescales (weeks)

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	<i>2014-15 Scottish Average</i>
Major Development	39.9	16.7	19.6	46.4
Local (Non-Householder) Development	14.2	9.2	9.0	12.9
Householder Development	6.7	6.6	6.4	7.5

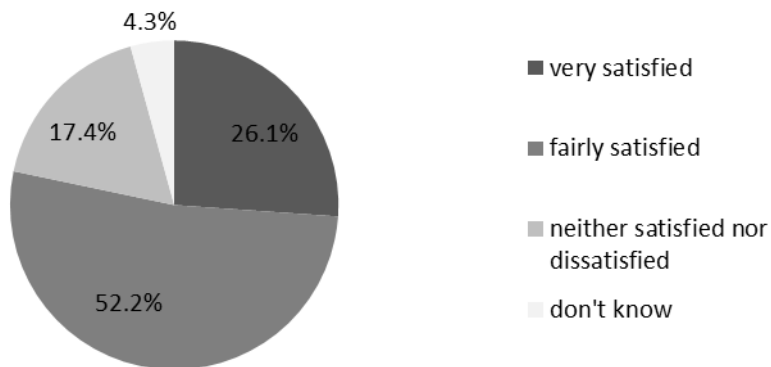
APPENDIX 2

Customer Survey 2014/15 Summary of Findings - Charts

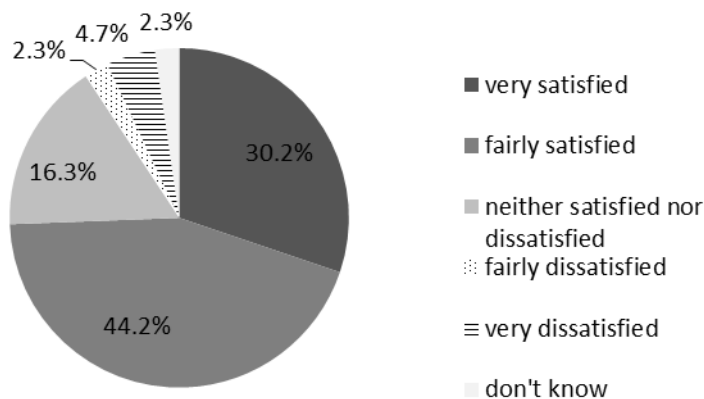
If the respondent contacted us in person or by telephone, please rate how satisfied you were with the time taken to speak to someone who could help you.



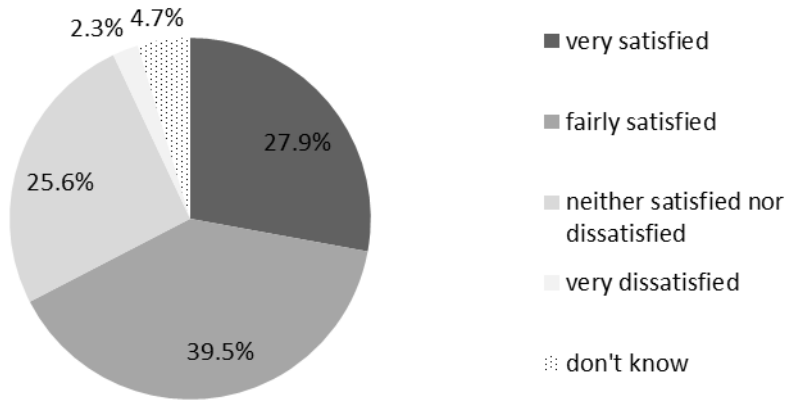
If the respondent contacted us by writing, email or via our website, please rate how satisfied you were with the time taken to get a reply from us.



How satisfied were you with the quality of information you received from East Renfrewshire Planning service?



How satisfied were you with how well the staff did their jobs?



How satisfied were you with the overall service you received from East Renfrewshire Council Planning Service?

