



National Planning Improvement Framework

Attribute 1: The Planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity

Planning Structure

A Review of the Council Management Structure took place in 2021, whereby Development Planning sits within the Economic Growth Service and Development Management and Enforcement sit with Governance Services, together with Building Standards and Administration and Technical Support functions which is managed by the Chief Planning Officer. Whilst the Strategic Manager – Development Planning and Regeneration reports to the Head of Economic Growth. The post reports to the Chief Planning Officer on strategic Planning Policy matters.

The following provides additional detail in respect of the activities undertaken.

Development Management is responsible for processing planning applications and other permissions such as Listed Building Consents and Conservation area Consents etc. It provides advice on the need for planning and other related permissions through pre-application advice service. It also considers Section 36 applications for wind farms, battery storage facilities as well as other energy applications. The team also monitor and resolve planning enforcement issues and in the case of major and environmental projects such as housing developments, wind farms, battery storage facilities, open cast coal mines, quarries and landfill sites, carries out all compliance monitoring arrangements to verify compliance with planning conditions and legal obligations.

Technical Support has responsibilities for the technical and administration support to Development Management including maintaining planning registers, the validation and registration of planning and other applications, issuing of decisions, Planning Committee support and dealing with general planning enquiries. Additionally, it provides support for the development and management of IT

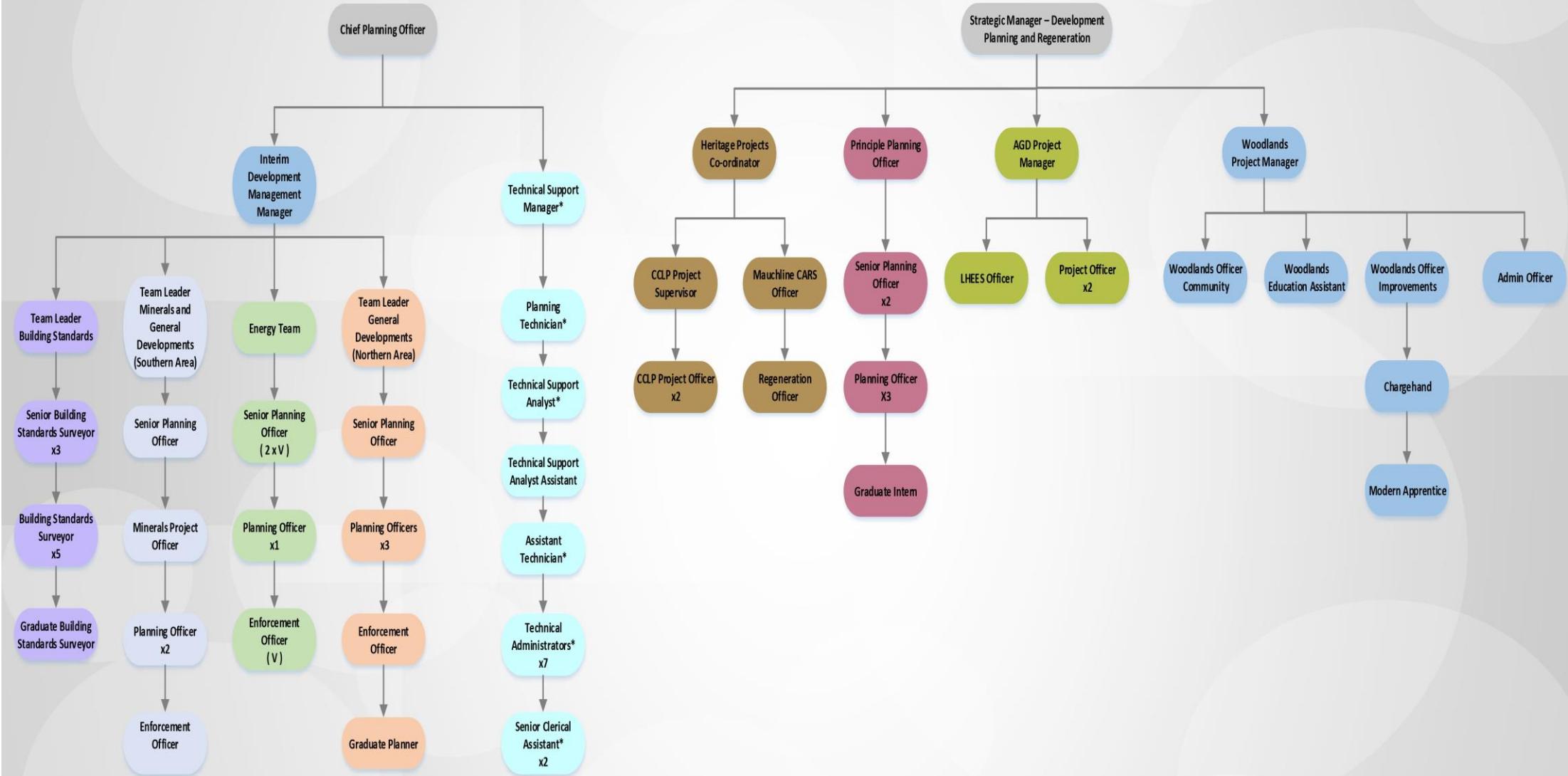
systems, for corporate web GIS and the Council's Ordnance Survey mapping requirements. It also supports the Building Standards Service and Development Planning Service.

Development Planning has responsibilities for producing the Local Development Plan, Supplementary and Non-Statutory Planning Guidance, Land Audits, Local Place Plans, Regional Spatial Strategies, the collection and administration of Developer Contributions, Tree Preservation Orders, stopping up orders and Local Review Body.

Staffing Resources

Structure Charts are provided below for Development Management, Technical Support and Development Planning.

Development Management & Development Planning & Regeneration Staff Structure



Notes:

* Technical Support staff also support Development Planning and Regeneration

** Admin officers also support Building Standards

V = Vacant Post

The Development Management Team

Our Development Management Team is divided into three teams with two of the teams each managed by a Team Leader and the Energy Team managed by Interim Development Management Manager who also has responsibility for the management of the Development Management service.

The Energy Team

This team includes three Senior Planning Officers, one Planning Officer and one Enforcement Officer. This team deals with all wind, battery storage, hydrogen and other energy applications including section 36 applications. The team also monitor, and discharge conditions associated with these developments and deal with unauthorised works. One Senior Planning Officer and Enforcement Officer Posts are presently vacant in the team.

Minerals & General Southern Team

This team includes one Senior Planning Officer, two Planning Officers, one Minerals Project Officer and one Enforcement Officer. This team deals with planning and other applications in the Southern area of East Ayrshire which is more rural in nature and includes small villages and settlements. Most of the mineral sites have been restored with the exception of Chalmerston site which is presently being restored and monitored, although there are number of operational quarry sites in the area.

Northern Team

This team includes one Senior Planning Officer, three Planning Officers, one Graduate Planning Officer and one Enforcement Officer. This team deals with planning and other applications for more urban developments including housing, commercial, industrial and heritage developments. The Graduate Planning Officer post is presently vacant.

Technical Support

Our Technical support team includes one Technical Support Manager, one Planning Technician, one Assistant Technician, 0.5 Technical Support Analyst, one Assistant Technical Support Analyst, four technical administrators and one Senior Clerical Assistant. The team register, validate and issue decisions, develop and implement digital strategies, as well as managing the corporate GIS system. This team also supports the Building Standards Team.

Development Planning

The Team is managed by the Strategic Manager – Development Planning and Regeneration which includes one Principal Planning Officer, two Senior Planning Officers, three Planning Officers and one graduate interim.

The Planning and Building Standards Service directly support the priorities and objectives set out within the Council's Community Plan and Strategic Plan, including supporting economic growth and development, safeguarding the environment, ensuring safety and Compliance and enhancing the overall quality of life in our communities.

The service continues to work within a challenging and changing environment required as a result of new planning legislation, NPF4 and the financial constraints of the Council. However good progress has been made in relation to taking forward previously identified improvement actions and this is addressed in Attribute 3 – Embedding Continuous Improvement.

Outcomes of Best Value Review

A Best Value Service Review process was undertaken in 2023 by the Chief Governance Officer and it recognised the value of the Planning Service working with communities, partners and voluntary sector organisations to achieve service objectives.

It looked ahead to understand how stakeholder needs and expectations may change in the future due to demography, environmental and economic factors. Meetings were held with other service leads to review services, consider internal and external factors impacting on the service and to highlight areas for improvement or change.



Several similar issues were highlighted throughout the review:

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|----|--|----|---|
| 01 | Difficulties in recruitment and retention | 05 | Continuing Challenges as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic; |
| 02 | Temporary posts and vacancies impact on the services; | 06 | Changes in Legislation and additional duties on services without the additional resources |
| 03 | There is a need to build on career profession opportunities; | 07 | Continued focus on maintaining and improving performance |
| 04 | Need to ensure appropriate succession planning arrangements due to an ageing workforce | | |

In the past few years there has been some significant turnover in the development management team and there has also been a need to manage vacancies as a result of staff leaving the Council. Officers have taken on interim roles, including the Operations Manager and Energy Team Leader. Following consideration of the outcomes of the Best Value Service Review which was reported to Council in October 2023 more permanent arrangements were put in place within the team which included beginning the recruitment of the Chief Planning Officer role in October 2023.

The service has also previously introduced trainee/graduate posts to assist with career opportunities and succession planning. However, there continues to be issues in respect of recruitment and this is reflected nationally, with RTPI, HOPS and the Scottish Government progressing work on future planners report.

Development Management

The Development Management Manager post is an interim post and is currently filled by the Team Leader from the Energy Team on a temporary basis. It is intended that this post has a new job profile, it undergoes Job Evaluation and be advertised internally before the end of 2024. This post requires managing a team as well as management duties in terms of overall Development Management Team. As a result a Team Leader post would be deleted following the appointment of a permanent Development Management Manager.

There are three vacancies in Development Management - one Senior Planning Officer, one Graduate Planning Officer and one Enforcement Officer. Both the Senior Planning Officer and Enforcement Officer Posts have been previously advertised with no suitable applicants. The Development Planning Service is fully staffed.

A review of these vacant posts will take place shortly to determine if it is necessary to fill the posts in a like for like basis or the posts could be used to finance more specialists' posts to support the delivery of NPF4 and Local Development Plan 2 and 3.

Also, it has been identified that the pay grades for Planning Officers and Team Leaders is less than competitor councils and job evaluation work is currently underway led by the Interim Development Management Manager with Human Resources.

In 2023-24 the Development Management Team received a total of 669 applications. Attribute 8- Effective and Efficient Decision Making Processes provides further details of the number and categories of applications received and the performance levels.

Planning Officers who deal with the householder and the less complex applications tend to have a caseload of between 25-30 applications. Whilst Senior Planning Officers who are principally dealing with major and the more complex local applications have a caseload of between 10-15 applications as well as dealing with general enquiries and the discharge of conditions. Team Leaders usually do not have a caseload but are responsible for managing the team and giving advice and signing off delegated decisions and Committee items.

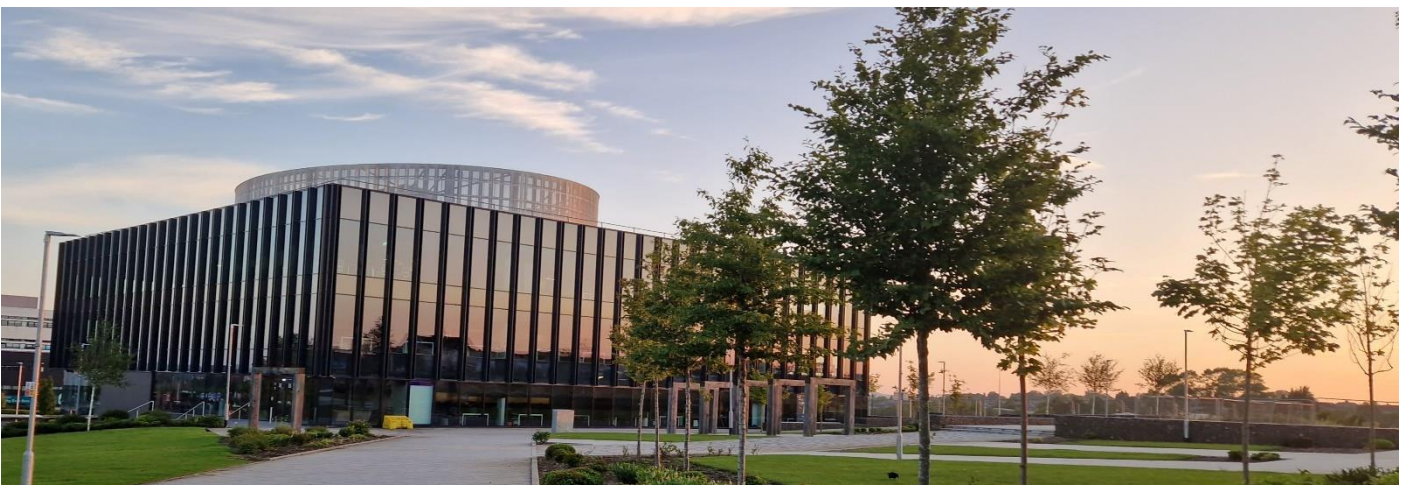
Enforcement

There are 3 Enforcement Officers with individuals allocated across the different Development Management teams. Officers have highlighted a lack of any opportunities for progression in these roles. There is a requirement as part of the Best Value Review that there is a review of current arrangements in order to strengthen current enforcement provision and this will be progressed before the end of 2024.

This review will also be aligned with the work identified in Attribute 7 to increase the digital presence of Enforcement by providing an online Enforcement Form. In 2023-24 there were 303 cases which were largely divided between 3 Enforcement Officers with support from the Team Leaders. In July 2023 one of the Enforcement Officers retired and that post remains vacant and this will be part of the current review.

Development Planning

The Strategic Manager for Development Planning and Regeneration provides strategic management and co-ordination for the delivery of Development Planning and the Regeneration Service. The post also manages the Ayrshire Growth Deal, Environmental Projects and East Ayrshire Woodlands and leading an integrated approach to the Service. The Principal Planning Officer provides leadership for the development and management of planning policy and manages the four Planning Officers. Planning Officers have specialist areas with the more complex areas of policy such as housing land and developer contributions sitting with senior planning officers. Consideration of rotation of topic areas takes place annually to ensure upskilling and succession planning.



Professional and Financial Resources

The table below provides a summary of the staffing complement in the Planning service area together with the budget between both services for 2023-24. There are 16.5 Planning Officers and 3 Enforcement Officers in Development Management and 7.5 Support Officers. In Development Planning there is a total of 7.5 Planning Officers. The table above shows the number of officer's members of Royal Town Planning Institute from both service areas and whether they are Chartered, Licentiate or Affiliate members.

Royal Town Planning Institute Membership	
Chartered Members	12
Licentiate Members	7
Affiliate Members	1

The service budgets are monitored on a monthly basis by the Chief Planning Officer and the Strategic Manager, Development Planning and Regeneration and the respective Service Accountants. Planning Fee income for 2023-24 was £945,663 which was an increase from the previous year. A substantial contribution to these fees came through the Section 36 Energy applications. The Council has sought to increase planning income through the introduction of fees for an enhanced pre-application process and charges for the discharge of conditions and non-material variations.

The main payments continue to be employee costs with West of Scotland Archaeology Service, Ordnance Survey, Computer software, Software Licences, Landscape and Noise Consultants.

The Development Planning budget is separate from the Development Management Service budget and it is essentially employee costs with money to support the Local Development Plan process being sought through a capital bid to the Central Council budget. On 1 May 2024 Cabinet agreed a £0.100 allocation be made towards the production of LDP3.

Development Management 27 FTE	Budget £0.992m
Development Planning 7.5 FTE	Budget £0.594m

Specialist Professional Advice

Consultees play a key role in the local development plan process and in terms of planning applications. Given the broad range of applications received in the East Ayrshire Council area a large number of consultees are consulted both within the Council and external.

The broad approach and ambition of NPF4 and new Local Development Plan requirements has placed additional demands on all consultees for example Nature Scot and SEPA. These stakeholders together with internal consultees such as the Roads and Traffic Service, Environmental Health, Greener Communities have been affected by financial constraints and are also experiencing the difficulty to recruit for vacant posts for the specialist knowledge. This has resulted in delays in response rates for planning applications and the additional demands brought by the new development plan process. A priority system is often implemented with key consultees to allow key developments to be dealt with quickly such as those which bring economic growth and jobs or are linked to tight funding requirements.

Given the nature of planning applications and the high number of section 36 applications received in East Ayrshire, external specialist advice is often sought in terms of noise and visual and landscape assessment and the monitoring of open cast sites and this has an impact on the Council's financial resources.

Whilst the Planning Service is fairly well resourced with planning officers at present, more specialist skills in biodiversity, ecologist, placemaking, climate adaption, flooding, heritage, contaminated land, noise, landscape and visual assessment are not readily available. A skills review is being undertaken to determine what skills are required to deliver on NPF4 and LDP3, however this will require to be undertaken within the financial constraints of the Council and those of external stakeholders.