



# National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF)

North Ayrshire Council

Performance Assessment 2025 to 2026

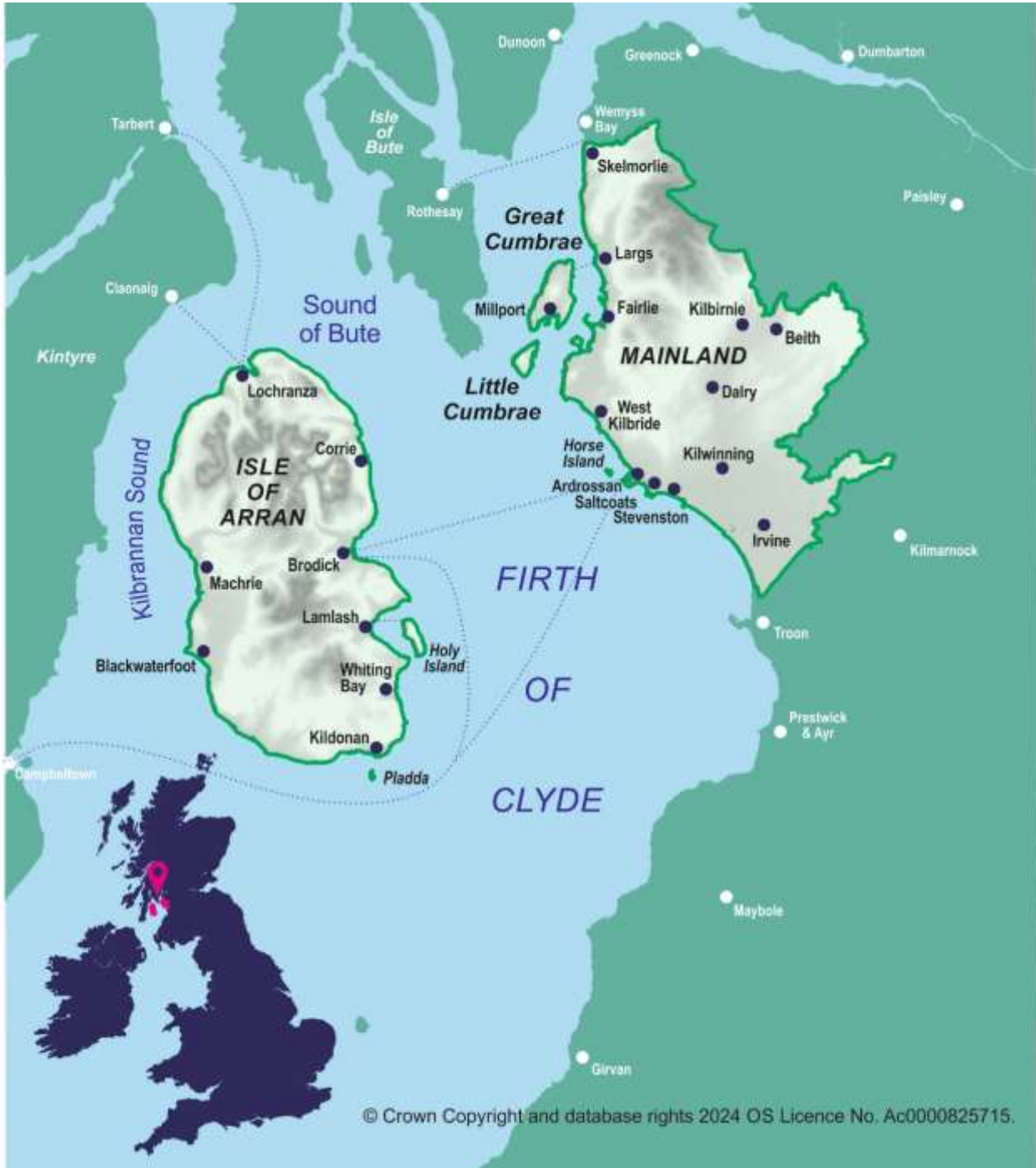
March 2026



North Ayrshire Council  
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath



North Ayrshire Council  
Comhairle Siorrachd Air a Tuath



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## North Ayrshire Planning Service

The Planning Service in North Ayrshire, from January 2024, sits within the Housing and Public Protection Service within the Communities and Housing Directorate. The Chief Planning Officer heads a team of ten professional planners and four support staff split between two teams: Development Management and Strategic Planning.

Our Development Management team continue to deliver sector-leading determination timescales for planning applications while handling a high number of cases per officer. The Strategic Planning Team is at a progressed stage and on track in the preparation of North Ayrshire’s third Local Development Plan, undertaking early engagement with communities and stakeholders.

### Introduction

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities and made it mandatory for authorities to prepare a report on their performance after the end of each financial year.

The National Planning Improvement Framework has been developed by the National Planning Improvement Champion and aims to support a planning authority to assess their performance, identify areas of improvement and ascertain how best to action these to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency.

The National Planning Improvement Framework aims to support the purpose of planning to manage the development and use of land in the long-term public interest through ensuring that:

- The planning system enables the delivery of sustainable, liveable, and productive places.
- Planning services are equipped to work effectively and efficiently, embedding continuous improvement.
- Users are able to engage constructively with the planning system and planning service. A self-assessment tool has been developed and focuses on the attributes of a high performing planning authority. The attributes are grouped into five themes as detailed below.

This National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) for North Ayrshire fulfils regulatory requirements detailed above. The NPIF has also been the subject of peer review and consultation with all community councils within North Ayrshire including detailed discussion at community council meetings and evaluation of feedback received from all engagement.



## NPIF Scoring Matrix

 <b>PRIORITISE</b>	 <b>REVIEW</b>	 <b>DEVELOP</b>	 <b>BUILD UPON</b>	 <b>CONSOLIDATE</b>
<b>No progress</b>	<b>Making limited progress</b>	<b>Making fair progress</b>	<b>Making good progress</b>	<b>Making excellent progress</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken.  Engage with NPI  Learn from others	Review ambition Review approach taken  Inform NPI  Learn from others	Increase ambition in targets  Review and improve implementation	Increase ambition in targets  Share learning with others	Share learning with others

A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the right skills set. It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future. It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.



## Attribute 1: This planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
- Does the planning authority receive responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence, and data it requires?

### Narrative

The **Development Management Team** is one of the smallest pro-rata of all Scottish Planning Authorities at only 5.75 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts comprising of 1.75 FTE Senior Planning Officers, 2 Planning Officers and 2 Assistant Planning Officers. The team has 2 FTE support staff with no enforcement or specialist officers.

The team has experienced significant resource issues in the last year with business case justification required for the recruitment of a Planning Officer vacancy and difficulties thereafter in recruiting an Assistant Planning Officer position following internal promotion. The Planning Officer position was vacant for four months and the Assistant planning officer post was vacant for one year but has recently been filled.

Informal peer review of comparable Planning service resourcing has confirmed that the team is as little as one third of the size of comparable authorities and with as much as twice the caseload per officer.

Consultees play a significant role in the processing of planning applications. Internal consultation responses are generally received within the requested timescale. However, there are regulatory pressures on our internal consultees and therefore limited resources available to direct to planning application consultations. External consultation responses have been noticeably delayed as a result of pressure by additional demands arising from the implementation of National Planning Framework (NPF4), enhanced Local Development Plan (LDP) requirements and resourcing pressures generally. Delay in the consultation process impacts on planning application determination timescales and is out with the control of the Planning service.

**The Strategic Planning Team** is comprised of a Strategic Planning Manager, 2 Planning Officers, 1 Assistant Planning Officer and a Technician. The team is currently operating at a reduced resource following the loss of the Assistant Planning Officer to a promoted post in a neighbouring authority. As with the Development Management team the Strategic Planning team is small when compared to comparable Planning Authorities and has no specialist officer resource in areas such as historic buildings or landscape.

The team is responsible primarily for all aspects of the preparation of the Council's Local Development Plan and providing support to community bodies in the preparation of Local Place Plans.

The Strategic Planning Team has recently finalised an Evidence Report and submitted this to Scottish Government as part of the “Gatecheck” process. The breadth of topics to be covered and the data collection, analysis and engagement that is necessary to pass the Gate Check stage provided a significant workload challenge for the team. Identified risks related to the capacity for engagement with Key Agencies and the impact that an Evidence Report being returned following Gate Check would have on the planning authority being able to meet the Scottish Government expectation of having a new style LDP in place within around five years of the Regulations coming into force that is by May 2028. To date these risks have been managed and the LDP is on track for adoption by May 2028.

Budget provision has been made to support the preparation of the LDP, including the procurement of specialists to provide appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data, specifically in relation to Transport Appraisal; Play Sufficiency Assessment and landscape assessment.

Informal review of the Planning service over the past year has identified the following issues.

- Difficulties in recruitment
- Career progression only possible where a vacancy becomes available
- Ageing workforce in senior positions
- Succession planning limitations

- Increasing legislative complexity without additional resource
- Pressure of maintaining service excellence in the face of additional pressures

A formal review of the Planning service to examine these issues in more detail is planned in the coming year.

### **Action 1**

**Formal review of the Planning service will examine existing resource suitability for current and future workload, identify potential gaps in service provision, provide risk management and a pathway to ensure appropriate future service provision.**

## Professional and Financial Resources

The establishment resource of the Planning service is;

### Head Count:

Chief Planning Officer	1	
Development Management	5.75	
Development Planning	4	(currently 3 as a result of vacancy)
Technical Support	4	
Total	14.75	(currently 13.75 as a result of vacancy)

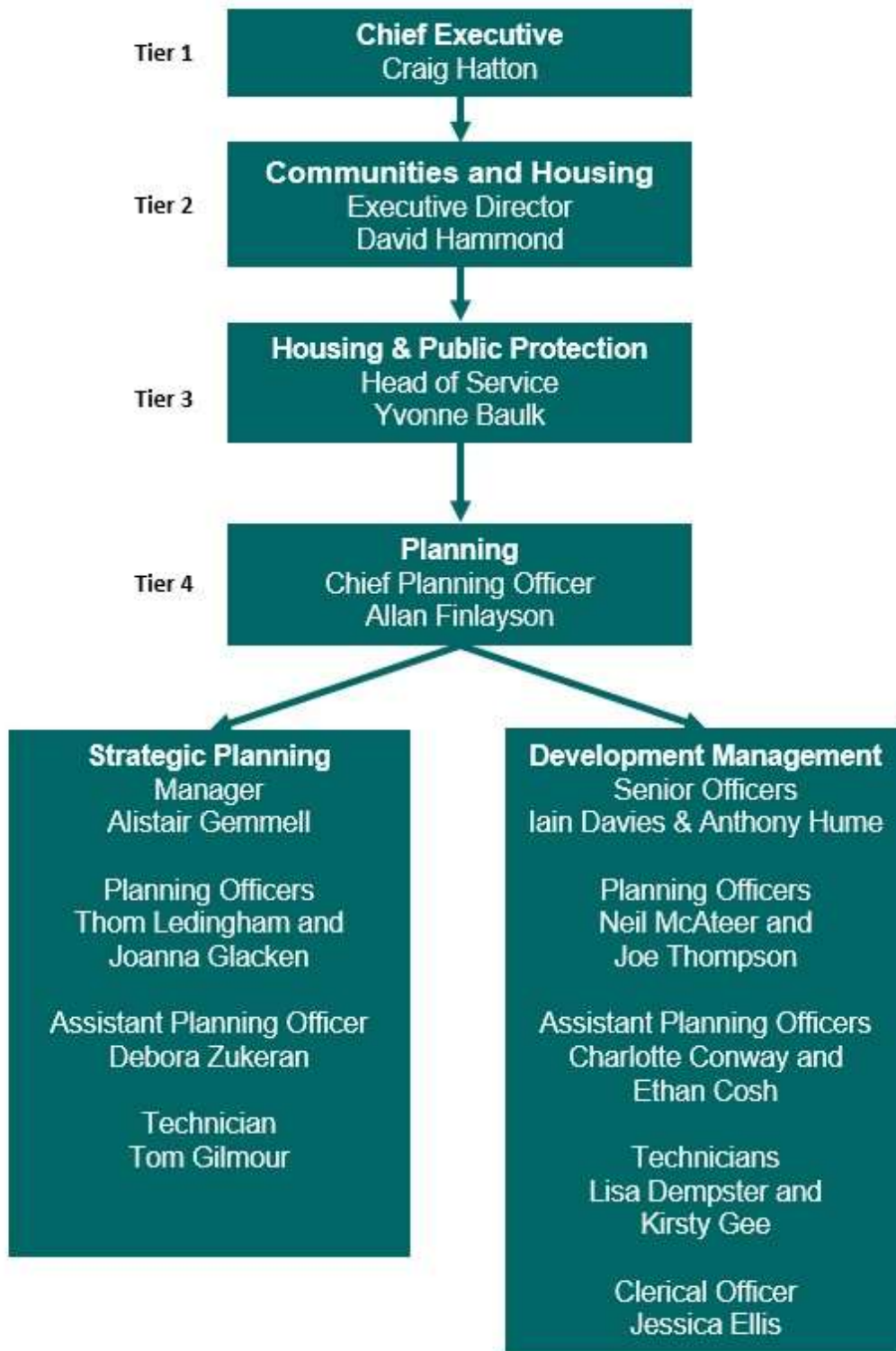
**RTPI Chartered Staff:** 6

### Age Profile:

Under 30	2
30-39	5
40-49	5
50 and over	3

The Chief Planning Officer monitors the service budget on a monthly basis with the respective service Accountant.

Planning fee income for 2025 to 2026 was similar to that of previous years at approximately £750,000. With outgoings of considerably less than this, the Planning service has historically “over recovered” in respect of income against expenditure without a resulting increase in resources.



## Attribute 2: The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a workforce planning strategy in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?
- Does the planning authority have a deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?

### Narrative

North Ayrshire Council's [Performance Management Strategy](#) and [fair-work-first-statement](#) aim to create a flexible, skilled, and motivated workforce that supports the Council's vision of a "Fair for All" North Ayrshire. The Council also has a Wellbeing at Work policy [Corporate Health, Safety & Wellbeing](#) and is committed to excellence in health, safety and wellbeing by preventing or minimising any adverse impact on our activities and services, and by ensuring that its employees and communities are safe and protected.

Beyond the identified Council policies there is no Planning workforce strategy however, as previously noted, a review of the Planning service is programmed for the next year which will establish service capacities, needs, and strategy for delivery. This work will build on the informal review previously noted and inform in areas such as workforce direction, recruitment strategy and financial opportunities/constraints. **Action**

The recruitment of Town Planners and associated staff is a national challenge as recognised in work such as the Royal Town Planning Institute/Heads of Planning Scotland and Scottish Government Future Planners Project. A historic reduction in the number of undergraduate Town Planning courses has been addressed with potential geographic significance to North Ayrshire with the initiation of an accredited course at the University of West of Scotland bolstering the only other undergraduate course at Dundee University and the postgraduate course at Glasgow University. The North Ayrshire Planning service does not currently have budget for intern or graduate placements however this will be considered in the programmed Planning service review.

North Ayrshire has confirmed the offer of student placement to Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) for the student workplace shadowing initiative.

In terms of existing staff, there is a limited resource that can be dedicated to the investigation into and enforcement of planning breaches. This is an ongoing difficulty in meeting the expectations of customers concerned with enforcement matters. The Planning service has no dedicated enforcement officer with this obligation shared between Development Management Officers who already have a higher than nationally average workload in respect of application caseload. Therefore, the investigation of additional staff resources will be assessed in respect of **Action 1**.

An additional resource concern is the absence of a managerial position in the Development Management team to reflect the existence of such in the Strategic Planning team. This is a staffing resourcing issue that will also be assessed in **Action 1**.

Opportunities to support Planning staff by means of training and upskilling are constantly reviewed and a limited training budget exists for this. The Planning service is also committed to enhancing the skills, talents, and confidence of staff through attendance at relevant and suitable training and development courses which include those hosted by the RTPI, relevant chapter events, HOPS and the Improvement Service and other providers.

### Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	3
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/Medium/Low) and by when (short/medium/long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
<b>1. Resourcing service review assessing;</b>	Allan Finlayson	High	Short	Internal
<b>-Workforce Planning strategy</b>	Allan Finlayson	High	Short	Internal/peer review
<b>-Enforcement resourcing improvement</b>	Allan Finlayson	High	Short	Internal
<b>-Development Manager resourcing improvement</b>	Allan Finlayson	Medium	Medium	Internal

A high performing planning authority has a positive culture through ensuring it has sound governance, effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. The authority has an identified chief planner, who is supported by a strong leadership group to advise on decision-making, policy and operational management.



### Attribute 3: This planning authority has embedded continuous improvement.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
- Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
- Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
- Has the planning authority addressed any complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and have evidence of this and that it has learned from valid cases?

#### Narrative

Continuous improvement of the Planning service is always the subject of ongoing review and focusses on **Development Management** and **Local Development Planning** obligations.

Development Management performance had decreased temporarily in 2024 to 2025 as a result of resourcing difficulties but has recovered to being within the top performing Planning Authorities and significantly higher than national averages.

The Local Development Plan (LDP) is currently on track for adoption by the May 2028 Scottish Government target and the LDP Development Plan scheme is up to date.

National award recognition of the high standards of performance and achievements of the Planning service has been achieved previously. Most notably awards have been given in the Scottish Awards for Planning (2019) and Royal Town Planning Institute's Awards for

Planning Excellence (2016 and 2017). Regrettably, given resourcing pressures, the focus of the Planning service is now on maintaining performance rather than seeking award recognition to promote the service excellence being maintained.

### **Development Management Performance**

Our **decision-making** demonstrates continuous evidence of nationally leading timescales in the determination of all type of planning applications to assist the development and meet customer expectations.

The offer of **processing agreements** or other agreed project plan is made to prospective applicants in advance of all major applications and availability publicised on planning authority website.

**Early collaboration** with applicants and consultees on planning applications providing clear and proportionate development advice is usually available in the promotion of free of charge pre-application discussions for all prospective applications. There are no plans to introduce charging for pre-application discussions or other discretionary services despite the recent introduction of powers to do so. The value of providing free services to customers within existing budgets is considered to be important in respect of customer service, community engagement and sustainable economic development promotion.

**Legal agreements** are avoided where possible and all have been concluded within six months of 'resolving to grant' planning permission.

The Planning service **Enforcement charter** was last updated in March 2024 and is therefore now due for further updating. This is an action for progression in the short term as improvement **Action 2**. This improvement action will examine customer needs, resourcing needs to respond to enforcement cases, response times to enforcement enquiries and development monitoring.

### **Development Plan Progress**

North Ayrshire's **Local development plan** is on track for adoption in advance of the Scottish Government 2028 target for all Planning Authorities.

The **Development plan scheme** was last adopted in November 2024 [Development Plan Scheme](#) as required annually. The adoption of an updated Development Plan Scheme is currently on hold pending outcome of the Council's submission of its Local Development Plan Evidence Report to Scottish Ministers in respect of Gatecheck procedures.

**Engagement** with stakeholders including Elected Members, industry, agencies, the public and Scottish Government is undertaken appropriately through all key stages of development plan preparation.

**Continuous improvement:** progress ambitious and relevant service improvement commitments identified through NPIF report.

## Delivery of 2024/25 Service Improvement Actions

### Repositioning the Planning Service to promote Placemaking:

- **Ayrshire Growth Deal:** Contribute to the implementation of the Ayrshire Growth Deal in North Ayrshire and the wider growth and investment opportunities.

In addition to supporting the delivery of major investment planned for Hunterston, the Planning Service has supported the preparation of masterplans for Ayrshire Growth Deal projects at i3 and the Great Harbour, both in Irvine.

- Support economic recovery and renewal by contributing to a cross service/Council approach to economic development, centred on placemaking and Community Wealth Building. Exploring the alignment of planning and community wealth building, including in context of NPF4.

The Planning Service continues to collaborate with Economic Development and Community Wealth Building to input into the preparation of a Regional Economic Strategy for Ayrshire and the Council's Community Wealth Building initiatives to support sustainable economic development within the Ayrshire region and North Ayrshire communities.

### Driving Improved Performance:

- **Development Management:** Continue to provide an efficient and effective Development Management Service.

The Planning service continues to maintain sector-leading performance in comparison with nationwide peers despite recent resourcing difficulties.

- **Service Delivery:** review service delivery to identify potential opportunities to improve.

The Planning service has been operating under an extended period of resource constraint since August 2024. This has been the result of a small Planning team and a

number of staff vacancies. There has therefore been limited opportunity to review potential service improvements.

Notwithstanding the above position, the Local Development team has continued to develop community engagement. The team has significantly supported the preparation of Local Plan Plans (LPPs) by local communities to engage, inform and support the preparation of the emerging Local Development Plan (LDP3). Evidence of the success of this engagement is the achievement of 70 percent LPP coverage by community council area within North Ayrshire. This coverage of communities with registered LPPs is understood to be unrivalled in any other Planning Authority in Scotland.

Collaboration with Community Wellbeing colleagues in community engagement has been further developed to deliver “one-stop” community consultation involving the Planning service and the preparation of interdependent information resources such as Place Profiles [North Ayrshire Place Profiles](#) that collate information from cross Council services.

Modifications to the Development Management processes continue to be made to ensure planning applications can be determined as efficiently as possible. Limited staff resource requires that case officers have responsibility for enforcement, the validation process, sending acknowledgement letters, consultations, posting site notices and ensuring the Uniform database is maintained to support service standards being upheld.

### Promoting the plan-led system:

- **Development Planning:** Following the timetable set out in the Development Plan Scheme, develop Evidence Base to inform LDP3.

The Development Plan Scheme was last adopted in November 2024, the Evidence Reporting stage of LDP3 preparation has been completed and the Council is currently awaiting the outcome of Gatecheck review by Scottish Ministers.

A strong emphasis is placed within the Strategic Planning Team service on sharing good practice, skills, and knowledge, including via HOPS sub-forums, the Knowledge Hub resource, informal groups, including the Fife LDP Peer Review Group and regular meetings with South and East Ayrshire.

The Chief Planning Officer has “reached out” to peers in East and South Ayrshire to further develop regional understanding of Planning and related matters and inform collaborative

working, for example, in respect of regional economic and spatial strategy, and housing, climate and nature crises.

The outcome of this approach is an evolving focus on regional spatial planning in Ayrshire with neighbouring Planning Authorities. To date a number of participatory meetings and workshops have been arranged to discuss regional planning in Ayrshire and associated economic, infrastructure, housing, climate and nature considerations.

## 2025 to 2026 Service Improvement Actions

The Planning service has been operating under an extended period of resource constraints since August 2025. Therefore, there has been limited opportunity to identify improvement actions for the Planning Service during this time. Excellence in Development Management and an “on track” LDP are considered to demonstrate limited need for service improvement actions at this time and no risk to service delivery arising from this position being confirmed.

The Service is continuing to focus on the early stages of preparing Local Development Plan 3 and is on track for adoption in accordance with Scottish Government targets.

Delivering an efficient and effective Development Management service is being maintained with the highest level of performance being demonstrated in national comparison.

Notwithstanding the above, the Chief Planning Officer intends to continue regional collaboration by developing greater discussion with neighbouring authorities in Ayrshire over the coming year as **Action 3**.

## Attribute 4: The planning authority has sound governance.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an effective scheme of delegation in place?
- Have all councillors who exercise a planning function undergone statutory training and is there evidence of ongoing training for members?
- What percentage of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

### Narrative

The Planning service is incorporated within North Ayrshire Council's Communities and Housing directorate. This directorate was newly formed in 2024 to respond to the Council's commitments in these service areas.

The decision-making ability of the Planning service is established in the Council's adopted **Scheme of Delegation**, and this details the circumstances whereby planning applications are required to be considered and determined by the Planning Committee. The scheme of delegation provides decision making powers to the Chief Planning Officer on an extended basis in the interests of efficiency in dealing with local planning applications however major and sensitive applications are commonly determined by the Council's Planning Committee. The Scheme of Delegation was most recently adopted in October 2025 and is regularly reviewed.

The **Local Review Body** is the method of appealing decisions made by the Chief Planning Officer under the Scheme of Delegation. The Local Review Body conducts reviews in respect of the refusal of planning permission, failure to determine applications and the imposition of conditions.

In the last year, the **Local Review Body (LRB) determined only four applications for review**. This is considered to demonstrate both general satisfaction with the decision making of the Chief Planning Officer under the Scheme of Delegation and the appropriateness of decisions made. The Local Review Body overturned only one officer decision in this period.

The Council's **Planning Committee** is the decision-making board which determines planning applications where delegation authority is not provided to officers. The Planning

Committee meets monthly to consider recommendations on planning applications and Local Development matters as appropriate. In the past 12 months, **96 percent of applications considered by the Planning Committee were decided in accordance with officer recommendation**. This equates to only one officer recommendation being overturned in that period.

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 requires that mandatory training is implemented for all elected members who are involved in any decisions involving planning matters. It should be noted that, as a commitment to effective decision making, North Ayrshire Council has historically undertaken elected member training significantly in advance of this legislative requirement. Training is undertaken on a six-monthly basis most recently in December 2024, June 2025 and December 2025. Interim and individual training can be provided at any time for example for new Planning Committee members as and when required.

In the last year **only two appeals to Scottish Ministers** for planning decisions have been made. One further planning appeal was submitted but was rejected as being out with the remit of the DPEA. As noted above in respect of delegated decisions, the low level of appeals to Scottish Ministers is considered to demonstrate general satisfaction with and the appropriateness of decisions made.

Guidance to applicants on how to appeal either to Scottish Ministers or the Local Review Body is available on the Council's website [Planning reviews and appeals](#).

## Attribute 5: The planning authority has effective leadership.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an identified Chief Planning Officer in place?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise on corporate decision making and policy within the broader organisation?
- Is the planning authority's Chief Planning Officer a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise and support external bodies through engagement in organisations' committees, advisory groups or working groups?
- Does the planning authority have a strong leadership team that supports a culture of continuous improvement?

### Narrative

A **Chief Planning Officer** was appointed in 2021, in advance of the statutory requirement being put in place by the Scottish Government in 2024. The officer in question is a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and is the head of the profession within the Council. The Chief Planning Officer provides advice throughout the Council to other departments and services, other Senior Managers, Elected Members, and members of the public in relation to planning matters.

Guidance on the role of the Chief Planning Officer advises that the position should strengthen leadership on planning and corporate recognition of the importance and positive influence of planning within a Council. The duties and responsibilities of the Chief Planning Officer are positioned around 5 main attributes:

- Professional Advisor
- Delivering National Planning Priorities
- Champion of place
- Head of Profession
- Performance Improvement

The role of the Chief Planning Officer as a **Professional Advisor** is to direct on the vision and implementation of the National Planning framework (NPF4) and Local Development plan for North Ayrshire spatial and associated development priorities.

The Chief Planning Officer is a member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and advises the Council's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and elected members in the development and delivery of corporate objectives to promote and achieve the Strategic Plan priorities in a spatial and place-based approach.

The role of the Chief Planning Officer includes **Delivering National Planning Priorities** in the alignment and delivery of national planning objectives within North Ayrshire.

As a **Champion of Place**, the Chief Planning Officer directs and delivers place making ambitions within the Council, is the Council's place making champion and ensures a collaborative approach to place making with other Council officers, elected members and developers.

The Chief Planning Officer is the **Head of the Planning Profession** in North Ayrshire and the most senior responsible qualified officer for the Council's Planning Service. The Chief Planning Officer is the main contact for key stakeholders on planning and place and represents the Council internally and externally on several groups requiring or benefitting from input from the planning function.

The Chief Planning Officer is ultimately responsible for the **Performance and Improvement** of the planning service in North Ayrshire and the embedding of an ethos of continuous improvement.

The Chief Planning Officer in North Ayrshire participates and advises a number of internal and external bodies to provide spatial and development planning advice. These include.

- Ayrshire Economic Partnership Board
- Ayrshire Economic Joint Committee
- Arran Housing Taskforce
- B714 Project Delivery Board
- Clyde Marine Planning Partnership
- North Ayrshire Inward Investment Group
- Irvine Town Board (Long Term Plan for Towns)
- Islands Group Board
- Ayrshire Planning Regional discussion group

Reporting to the Chief Planning Officer are two Senior Planning Officers responsible for the Council's Development Management regulatory service and the Strategic Planning Manager responsible for the Council's Development Planning regulatory service.

The Planning service benefits from a direct relationship to and strong support from the Council's Chief Executive, Executive Director of Communities and Housing and Head of Housing and Public Protection.

A culture of continuous improvement is expected, supported, and delivered in North Ayrshire Council generally and specifically within the Planning service.

### Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	1
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	1
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	1

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/Medium/Low) and by when (short/medium/long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
<b>2. Enforcement Charter review</b>	Allan Finlayson	Medium	Short	Internal
<b>3. Regional discussions. Further develop and undertake meetings with neighbouring Councils to understand and develop competing/co-operative regional challenges/opportunities.</b>	Allan Finlayson/Alistair Gemmell	Medium	Short	Internal/external

A high performing planning authority needs to have an effective local development plan and other strategies in place to provide a vision for the future of the area. It needs to be able to set and deliver on policy ambitions and priorities by clearly informing decision making and providing certainty and predictability for communities, developers and investment. The authority's development management systems need to be effective in making the right decisions about development and be efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.



## Attribute 6: The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an up to date Local Development Plan in place and/or is on track to adoption?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/or on track to adoption?
- Has the planning authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report been approved by the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals and/or on track for approval?
- Has the application of the Local Development Plan's policies been found to be deficient at appeal or judicial review?

### Narrative

North Ayrshire Council's development plan consists of Local Development Plan (LDP2), which was adopted in November 2019 [Adopted Local Development Plan](#) and the Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), adopted in February 2023 [National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](#). Together these provide an up-to-date development plan covering North Ayrshire. The local development plan is supplemented by non-statutory planning guidance documents [Non-statutory planning guidance](#).

Preparation of a new local development plan (LDP3) is well underway and on track for adoption in mid-2027 before Scottish Government's May 2028 deadline. Submission of the

Evidence Report to the Directorate of Planning and Environmental Appeals is scheduled for end 2025.

Following approval by the appropriate committees of North, South and East Ayrshire Councils, an **indicative Regional Spatial Strategy for Ayrshire** was submitted to the Scottish Government on 15 September 2020. Guidance from the Scottish Government remains to be progressed significantly. Notwithstanding this position, officers of all Ayrshire Councils are considering how there can become a spatial iteration of the Regional Economic Strategy for Ayrshire (Ayrshire Regional Economic Strategy [Ayrshire regional economic strategy](#)).

To advance regional working and collaboration in the period until guidance from Scottish Government is prepared the Chief Planning Officer 'reached out' to other Ayrshire Planning Authorities in early 2025 to initiate discussions to further develop regional understanding of Planning and related matters and inform collaborative working, for example, in respect of regional economic and spatial strategy, and housing, climate and nature crises. Further developing regional discussion with neighbouring authorities in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire Councils will be progressed in late 2025.

## Attribute 7: The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Does the planning authority have a data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use interactive web-mapping, GIS, and spatial data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use digital approaches to engagement, including website, social media, and other platforms?

### Narrative

The North Ayrshire Council website has a number of pages dedicated to various aspects of planning. The Council website has recently been updated to a new, clearer, and more interactive platform, and officers of the Planning service have contributed to this process to take the opportunity to update information and links as appropriate. In addition, updating of the Planning pages is undertaken 'in house' as and when required. [Planning and Building Standards](#)

In respect of **Development Management**, during 2024-25 **92.57 percent** of planning applications received were submitted through the Planning Portal, accounting for **511** of all **552** applications received. Use of the Portal is actively encouraged and clear advice with links is provided on the Planning pages of the Council's website [Make a planning application](#)

This approach minimises our handling of documents and ensures greater efficiency in application receipt, validation, and assessment. Our processes are now fully electronic, with any hard copy information quickly digitised and we have operated in this manner for many years.

The Planning service has developed an interactive Local Development Plan [interactive version of the LDP](#) for the benefit of customer service to aid customer engagement in the LDP process and also to provide direct digital access to detailed policies and additional related information that provides more detail about how we will consider proposals for

specific uses or developments. A [storymap presentation](#) of the LDP is also available online.

The **Strategic Planning Team** also utilises interactive web-mapping and GIS – specifically ArcGIS’s StoryMaps – to present a wide range of spatial data. This includes [housing and employment land audits](#). StoryMaps have been used to create [Profiles](#) for North Ayrshire’s six localities. These have been produced to inform the preparation of our third Local Development Plan LDP3 and support other placemaking activity. The profiles summarise key social, cultural, environmental, and economic features of the areas.

The Service has invested in a three-year Commonplace licence to support engagement on the Local Development Plan through the creation of an online hub: [Have Your Say Today - North Ayrshire’s Third Local Development Plan - Commonplace](#).

ArcGIS Survey123 has been deployed for the current ‘Call for Ideas’ exercise, allowing submitted information in support of promoted sites, including mapped boundaries, to be digitised more easily: [Call for Ideas](#)

The Planning Service makes spatial data available via the Corporate [Open Data Portal](#) under the Open Government Licence for public sector information and in accordance with North Ayrshire’s [Open Data Strategy](#) and [Publication Plan](#).

## Attribute 8: The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes?
- What percentage of planning decisions were overturned at appeal or judicial review?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Enforcement Charter in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to resolve enforcement cases?

### Narrative

North Ayrshire Council's **Development Management performance** has historically demonstrated nationally leading excellence in decision making timescales notwithstanding a small team size and limited resources. Over the past 10 years, the service has regularly been the highest performing Planning Authority across all planning application determination categories (householder, local, major and national) measured by Scottish Government [Supporting documents - Planning Application Statistics 2024/25 \(April 2024 to September 2024\) - gov.scot](#)

Development management performance has reduced slightly in the last year as a result of staff resourcing issues. However, performance remains in the top three Planning Authorities in all measured categories and the top performing in more categories than any other Authority.

Development Management performance in North Ayrshire is significantly above national average performance levels monitored by Scottish Government [Planning statistics - gov.scot](#).

The exceptional performance of the Planning service in North Ayrshire is a cornerstone in serving the individual, community, and business needs of all our customers. Commendably, this is achieved whilst providing a free of charge pre-application enquiry service with no discretionary charging beyond statutory requirements.

In the last year, the **Local Review Body (LRB)** determined only four applications for review. This is considered to demonstrate both general satisfaction with the decision making of

the Chief Planning Officer under the Scheme of Delegation and the appropriateness of decisions made. The Local Review Body overturned only one officer decision in this period.

In the last year only two **appeals to Scottish Ministers** for planning decisions have been made and both remain under consideration. One further planning appeal was submitted but was rejected as being out with the remit of the DPEA. As noted previously, the low level of appeals to Scottish Ministers is considered to demonstrate general satisfaction with and the appropriateness of decisions made.

Further evidence demonstrating general satisfaction with decision making is the very low number of complaints received by the Planning service. Less than ten complaints have been received in the last year and none have been upheld. Furthermore, only one complaint was referred to SPSO and was not upheld. No applications for Judicial Review have been received. The Planning service has also received a level of communication expressing thanks for good service received that is commensurate with the number of complaints received.

The Planning service **Enforcement charter** was last updated in March 2023 and is therefore due for further updating. This is an action for progression in the short term.

#### **Action**

A more pressing concern, however, is the limited staff resource that can be dedicated to the investigation into and enforcement of planning breaches. This is an ongoing difficulty in meeting the expectations of customers concerned with enforcement matters. The Planning service has no dedicated enforcement officer, and this obligation is shared between Development Management Officers who already have a higher than any national workload in respect of application caseload. Therefore, the investigation of additional staff resource for the service is also an **action**.

An additional resource concern is the absence of a managerial position in the Development Management team to reflect the existence of such in the Strategic Planning team. This is a staffing resourcing issue that will also be investigated as an **action**.

**Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)</b>
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	1
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	1
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes	1

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/Medium/Low) and by when (short/medium/long term).

<b>Improvement Action</b> What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Importance</b> High Medium Low	<b>Timescale</b> Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	<b>Resources</b>
Enforcement charter review	Allan Finlayson/ Iain Davies	High	Short	Internal
Enforcement resourcing improvement	Allan Finlayson	High	Short	Internal
Development Manager resourcing improvement	Allan Finlayson	Medium	Medium	Internal

A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.



## Attribute 9: The planning authority has good customer care.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to offer pre-application advice where it is requested?
- Has the planning authority held regular engagement events with developers and communities?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that customers are satisfied with the service offer by the planning authority?

### Narrative

The **ethos of the Planning service** is to be directly contactable with customers, wherever possible, by all forms of communication. The service maintains a direct telephone service and excellent links with the Council's general Contact Centre telephone service. Telephone calls are invariably either answered directly or returned the same day. Officers at all levels can be contacted directly by telephone or email. Email responses are invariably returned within 1-2 working days.

In respect of **Development Management**, the Planning service welcomes early engagement with all applicants and developers prior to the submission of any application. The service is strongly of the view that submission of informed, detailed, and comprehensive applications results in quicker decision making and better quality of developments. The Council offers a free of charge pre-application advice service intended to guide and inform the formulation of all development proposals. Maintaining a free of charge service for pre-application advice is becoming less common in Planning Authorities

nationally however North Ayrshire is committed to the continuation of this given the customer care and development quality benefits that result.

The Planning service also offers Processing Agreements for all National or Major applications and for complex local developments. Details of the Processing Agreements process is available on the Planning Website [Make a planning application](#). A Processing Agreement is used to set out the key processes in determining the application, identifying what information is required and from whom and sets the timescales for the delivery of various stages of the process. It is recognised that there are several benefits of Processing Agreements including greater transparency in decision making, increased predictability and certainty over the timing of key stages.

The **Strategic Planning Team** has developed a positive working relationship with Homes for Scotland, going back to the preparation of the adopted Local Development Plan, the annual Housing Land Audit, and the early stages of preparing LDP3.

The Service has engaged proactively with the majority of active Community Councils in North Ayrshire over the past two years, providing advice on how they can best engage with the Planning system.

## Attribute 10: The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
- Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes? Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Has the planning authority engaged with a good representation of the community including young people, gypsies and travellers, people with protected characteristics, including disability, race, age, sex and sexual orientation, and including people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds?
- Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

### Narrative

The **Planning service** is strongly committed to collaboration with local communities, public bodies, and other stakeholders at all relevant stages of the planning process.

In respect of **Development Management**, engagement is undertaken daily in often challenging circumstances of polarized opinions. Notwithstanding this, the service is committed to a 'listen first' approach to development assessment and to the clear demonstration of appropriate assessment in reports of handling and decision-making accountability.

The **Strategic Planning Team** has ensured that the current [Development Plan Scheme](#) includes a Participation Statement setting out when consultation is likely to take place, with whom and its likely form, including the steps to be taken to involve the public in the preparation of the local development plan.

Early engagement to inform the Evidence Report/LDP3 was focused around the use of the Place Standard Tool, to gather information on what local people think about the places

they live, work and visit in North Ayrshire: [Have Your Say Today - Your Place Survey - North Ayrshire's Third Local Development Plan](#). This builds upon previous use of the Tool to identify Community Planning locality priorities and evidences the strong links between community planning and spatial planning in North Ayrshire.

Specific engagement has been undertaken with children, young people and gypsy/travellers. A commitment has been made via the Council's emerging equality outcomes to ensure new places, spaces and buildings will be inclusive and designed to take account of the needs of people with disabilities and other protected characteristics, including through their engagement in the preparation of LDP3.

The Strategic Planning Team has supported four community bodies to prepare a Local Place Plan with all four plans now registered. One further Local Place Plan has been submitted, with a further plan expected soon. We have prepared a 'Handbook' to guide community bodies preparing Local Place Plans and engaged positively to support the preparation of these plans, providing advice and technical support where required. This has been welcomed by a number of the community bodies we have supported.

**Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)</b>
9. This planning authority has good customer care	1
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	1

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/Medium/Low) and by when (short/medium/long term).

<b>Improvement Action</b> What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Importance</b> High Medium Low	<b>Timescale</b> Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	<b>Resources</b>
No identified improvements required.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

A high performing planning authority should demonstrate place leadership by taking a collaborative place-based approach in line with the Place Principle. It should use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making processes, to achieve the three spatial principles outlined in NPF4: Sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; Liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and Productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The planning authority should seek to ensure that there are no impediments to delivering agreed development.



## Attribute 11: The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Is the planning authority aware of the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#), the evidence that sits behind them and is it using them in decision-making processes?
- Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable, and productive places and is implementing them?

### Narrative

In 2024 North Ayrshire Council established a new **Communities and Housing Directorate** to provide greater focus on community delivery outcomes. This has ensured a wider understanding of Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in the Directorate composition.

Within the **Planning service** there is a high awareness of Place and Wellbeing Outcomes by officers and how these should be used in decision-making processes.

A cornerstone policy in the extant LDP2 is SP1 (Placemaking) and this is an important foundation on which all decisions are made and the criteria of policy SP1 are consistent with both NPF4 and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes.

LDP, NPF4 (combined being the Council's statutory Development Plan) policies and non-statutory Supplementary Guidance Place and Wellbeing Outcomes are all used to deliver sustainable, liveable, and productive places in North Ayrshire.

The **Strategic Planning Team** represents North Ayrshire Council as one of three authorities working in partnership with Public Health Scotland (PHS), the Institute of Health Equity (IHE) and local NHS health board to form the 'Collaboration for Health Equity in Scotland' (CHES). This partnership aims to help local areas and community planning partners to strengthen local plans – including LDPs – to reduce health inequalities and improve wellbeing in their communities. It intends to support local partners to bridge the gap between national policies and local implementation and understand the actions which will have the greatest impact on health inequalities locally and help to overcome the barriers to implementing these. The ultimate goal is to enable people to live longer, healthier lives by addressing the root causes of health inequalities and preventing illness before it starts.

Working alongside colleagues in South Lanarkshire and Aberdeen City, supported by the Place & Wellbeing Partnership Lead at the Improvement Service & Public Health Scotland, we are exploring how the associated 'Marmot 8' principles along with the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes can be embedded into both the evidence report and then LDP3.

## Attribute 12: The planning authority supports the delivery of consented development.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority provided clear and proportionate expectations of Section 75 agreements and set these out in the LDP and pre-application discussions and they are concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
- Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
- Does the planning authority have an ambitious local housing land requirement that exceeds the Minimum All Tenure Housing land requirements in NPF4 and is it on track to support delivery?
- Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
- Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

### Narrative

To support development and regeneration in North Ayrshire the **Planning service** does not routinely require developer contributions. The Local Development Plan expects the majority of new development to be directed towards sites that have infrastructure or services in place. Where further provision is required, the Supporting Development Objective: Infrastructure and Services policy within the Adopted Local Development Plan (p.16) sets out clear and proportionate expectations and the need for relevant assessments is highlighted alongside each development site where potential infrastructure deficiencies are known.

As noted, the Council is in the process of preparing its Evidence Report. In December 2024, a draft Housing Evidence Paper was shared with Homes for Scotland; Registered Social Landlords operating in North Ayrshire; developers and agents included on the LDP mailing list; and parties who have approached the Strategic Planning team with an interest in having housing sites allocated in LDP3. In March, the Housing Evidence Paper was reissued (without substantive changes) more widely for comment via the LDP Online Hub and emails to community councils and the remainder of the LDP mailing list.

The Paper proposes an indicative Local Housing Land Requirement figure of 4,500 homes, which exceeds the MATHLR by 52.5 percent. A 'Call for Ideas' has been launched which

will assist in the allocation of deliverable land by LDP3 to meet the 10-year Local Housing Land Requirement

A Draft Delivery Programme was submitted to Scottish Government on 8 April 2025, which takes account of the views of the key agencies and other stakeholders. At this point, we do not intend to publish the Delivery Programme rather we will seek approval alongside the Evidence Report later in the year, following the finalisation of the 2024/25 Housing Land Audit.

In respect of **Development Management**, the free pre-application service supports the submission of planning applications with necessary information provided to aid decision making outcomes.

A general presumption against the use of legal agreements minimises decision making complication and delay.

The number of processing agreements being used is not increasing but continues to be promoted on the Council's website and offered where appropriate during the assessment of planning applications. Limited uptake from applicants is considered to be another indication of general satisfaction with decision making and the timescales for this as evidence by demonstrated excellence in decision making performance.

**Improvement Action Plan (Place theme)**

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	1
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	1

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/Medium/Low) and by when (short/medium/long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
No identified improvements required.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a