



National Planning Improvement

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025

North Lanarkshire Council



North Lanarkshire NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

Milestones and Challenges in the NPIF Action Plan 2024 - 25

The 2024–25 NPIF Action Plan marks a transformative year for our service, driven by strategic restructuring, digital innovation, and the creation of the Invest team. The team's inception directly responds to a corporate priority to strengthen early-stage project support and improve coordination across services.

Alongside core actions, the service achieved national recognition for its pioneering Open Space Strategy audit methodology, highlighting a commitment to excellence and innovation.

Key Milestones

A major milestone was the successful staff restructure, which realigned team structures to optimise resource use and improve consistency. The new Development Management team structure enables a more fluid and responsive approach to work allocation and enhancing staff development. Staff workshops and topic-focused sessions continue to embed a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. These forums empower frontline staff to shape working practices and lead change, with plans to further enhance engagement by inviting officers to lead topic-specific discussions.

Workforce planning progressed significantly with the recruitment of graduate trainees, bringing three new members into the team. This initiative supports succession planning and injects fresh perspectives into service delivery.

Additional upskilling in GIS and Power BI, along with the appointment of an Enforcement Officer, has further strengthened the team's capabilities.

The creation of the Invest team, led by a newly appointed manager, represents a strategic leap in pre-application support. This multidisciplinary team integrates planning, roads, new supply, environmental health, education, business support, and land ownership advice, aiming to improve quality of submissions that will streamline consents and reduce processing times for key projects.

Digital innovation has been a consistent theme. Power BI dashboards now enhance performance management, reporting and increase administrative efficiency. The team is actively exploring future technologies, including AI for document analysis and mobile apps for survey work, positioning the service to embrace emerging digital solutions. Digital innovation has been a focus for several years and this year we have received national recognition from Brightly for the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of our innovative approach to using digital technology to support the Open Space Rangers carry out our open space audit.



In terms of stakeholder engagement, the Tell Us About Your Place survey and associated community outreach efforts gathered valuable insights to inform the next Local Development Plan. Engagement with diverse groups such as the Youth Parliament and NL Access Panel ensured inclusive participation.

Challenges and Adaptive Responses

Despite these successes, several challenges required adaptive responses.

The Agents Forum, intended to foster dialogue with frequent users of the Development Management service, was cancelled due to limited interest. Plans are now in place to gather feedback and tailor future sessions to better meet agent needs.

The proposed planning officer working group was not feasible due to shifting priorities. Instead, service improvement actions were integrated into existing staff workshops, maintaining momentum while continuing to focus on operational efficiency. The Performance Review and Development (PRD) process is currently incomplete, but meetings have been scheduled following the restructure. Completing PRDs will be essential to align training needs with organisational goals.

Efforts to review and enhance the complaints system are ongoing at a corporate level. Clarifying the definition of complaints, particularly in relation to planning objections, is a key step toward consistent handling and improved analysis. Digital transformation continues to evolve.

The conditions monitoring module was reviewed but not adopted, prompting exploration of alternative solutions within existing systems. This reflects a pragmatic approach to technology adoption.

Finally, the Planning Processing Agreement (PPA) process and legacy case reviews are underway. These initiatives aim to improve decision-making timelines and resolve stalled developments.

Introduction

The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) was piloted incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/25 financial year. This was to test a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities. The pilot aimed to test the new framework, to explore what works and what doesn't. This resulted in each planning authority producing an improvement action plan and performance assessment.

Each improvement action plan sets out:

- What the planning authority has agreed as its priority activities
- Whether these have short-, medium- or long-term timescales
- The owner of the actions
- The resources needed



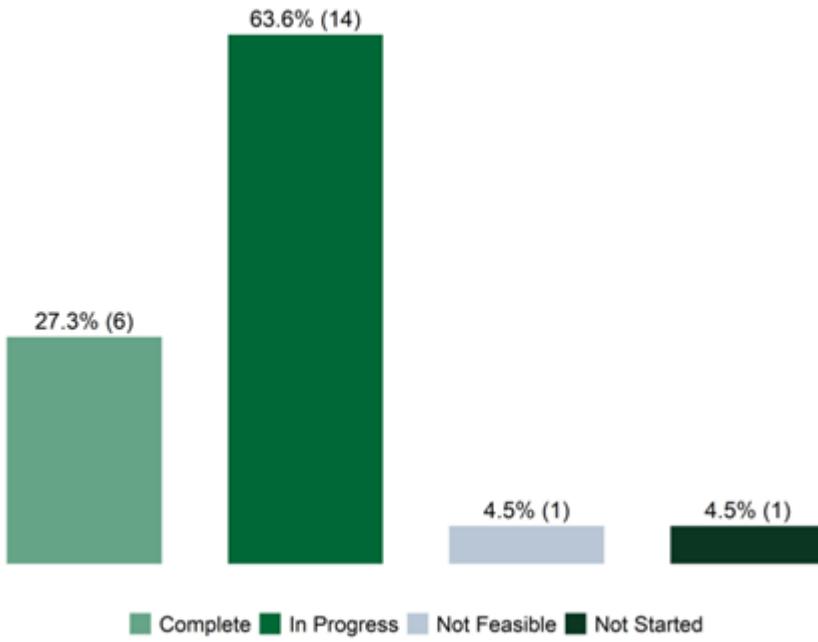
[Link to action plan for 2023/24.](#)

In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress North Lanarkshire has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

This section details each of the improvement actions and the progress the planning authority has made.

North Lanarkshire has 22 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Review staff structure to ensure we can continue to meet our statutory duty and corporate priorities

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The review of the staff structure has now been successfully completed. Through this process, key areas for improvement were identified, enabling a strategic realignment of team structures. This realignment is designed to optimise the use of staff resources, enhance consistency in service delivery, and support ongoing staff development. As part of this change the teams work across North Lanarkshire with major and significant local



projects now managed through the Invest team and all other applications, including enforcement activity, through the development management team. This facilitates a more fluid and responsive approach to work allocation. These changes are now fully implemented, marking the completion of this action and positioning the team to better meet statutory duties and corporate priorities.

Action 2: Seek feedback directly from staff via our fortnightly staff workshops, and where appropriate topic focused workshops to ensure frontline staff continue to have the opportunity to shape working practice, process, highlight areas for improvement and lead the delivery of change

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

This action is now complete. Fortnightly staff workshops, along with topic-focused sessions where appropriate, have been successfully implemented to provide frontline staff with regular opportunities to contribute to shaping working practices and processes. These workshops have proven effective in identifying areas for improvement and empowering staff to lead on the delivery of change. Feedback gathered through these sessions is valuable and continues to support a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. To further embed these sessions, we will invite officers to lead topic specific workshops.

Action 3: Introduce structured team meetings, regular case officer 1-1s and peer review on stagnant cases to establish solutions that could enable decision making

In Progress

Progress against this action: As part of our commitment to fostering a valued and supported workforce, we have made significant progress on the action to introduce structured team meetings, regular case officer 1-1s, and peer review of stagnant cases. With the implementation of the new team structure, groupings within teams have been established, ensuring that each case officer and assistant is supported by a dedicated senior officer. This has enabled the rollout of regular case officer 1-1s, which are already enhancing staff development and support.

The following next steps are proposed: We have developed a process for reviewing stagnant cases, and the next step will be to form a working group to carry out peer reviews. This will provide a broader perspective and help identify solutions that could enable decision-making on complex or delayed cases. Overall, we have partially achieved this action, with structured support now in place and a clear pathway for collaborative case review underway.



Action 4: Continue with our workforce planning by continuing to create opportunities for staff development and progression that will strengthen the team and prepare for future challenges, including the introduction of a graduate trainee planning post

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

As part of our ongoing workforce planning, we have successfully created and implemented opportunities for staff development and progression aimed at strengthening the team and preparing for future challenges. A key milestone in this process was the introduction of three graduate trainee planning posts, which supports succession planning and brings fresh perspectives into the team. In addition, our technical support team is undertaking further training in GIS and Power BI. This investment in upskilling enhances our analytical capabilities and supports more efficient data-driven decision-making across the service. We have also appointed an Enforcement Officer within the team, further strengthening our capacity to respond to planning breaches and uphold regulatory standards. This dedicated role enhances our ability to manage enforcement cases effectively and contributes to maintaining public confidence in the planning system. These efforts have reinforced our commitment to building a resilient and skilled workforce capable of meeting evolving service demands.

Action 5: Strengthen PRD process by setting deadlines that will ensure all staff/managers undertake PRD meetings in time to allow annual training to be scheduled

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: We have not had the time given other priorities.

The following next steps are proposed: Following the recent team restructure, Performance Review and Development (PRD) meetings have been scheduled to support staff development and training planning. To fully meet this action, we will continue to prioritise the completion of PRD meetings across all teams. This will ensure that annual training needs are identified in time and aligned with organisational goals.



Action 6: Create opportunity for skill sharing across Local Authorities by linking Continued Professional Development training and learning to increase opportunities for staff development

In Progress

Progress against this action: To support collaborative learning and cost efficiency, we opened up Unimap web training to other local authorities, enabling shared access to training resources and reducing costs. These efforts reflect our commitment to continuous improvement and strengthening professional capacity across the planning teams.

The following next steps are proposed: We continue to create opportunities for skill sharing across local authorities by linking Continued Professional Development (CPD) training and learning to staff development. This includes active participation in the Improvement Service's ongoing online sessions, which provide a valuable platform for sharing best practice, exploring new approaches, and building professional networks.

Action 7: Recruit a new management post and realign existing staff structure to resource a new Invest team that will take a multidisciplinary and phased approach to providing preapplication planning, roads, environmental health, business support and council land ownership advice and support for key projects

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

A new management post has been successfully recruited to lead the newly established 'Invest' team, which was created in response to a corporate priority to enhance early-stage project support. The team has been resourced through a realignment of the existing staff structure and is now operational, taking a multidisciplinary and phased approach to pre-application support. The service integrates planning, roads, environmental health, business support, and council land ownership advice to provide comprehensive guidance for key projects. The Invest team manager is now in post and leading the delivery of this enhanced pre-application service. The approach is designed to improve the quality and coordination of submissions for planning applications, roads construction consents, and building warrants. By aligning these consents, the service aims to reduce processing times and support more efficient project delivery for key projects. This proactive approach will also play a critical role in addressing the housing emergency by supporting efficient delivery for housing developments.



Action 8: Create planning officer working group to support the implementation of service improvement actions and the delivery of the National Planning Improvement Framework

Not feasible

This action was not feasible for the following reason: Rather than establishing a separate planning officer working group, we have integrated service improvement actions into our existing fortnightly staff workshops and topic-focused sessions. These workshops provide frontline staff with regular opportunities to contribute to shaping working practices and processes and have proven effective in identifying areas for improvement and empowering staff to lead on change. Feedback gathered through these sessions continues to support a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. To further embed this approach, officers will be invited to lead topic-specific workshops that are aligned with the delivery of service improvement actions.

In response, the following changes to the action are proposed: Action to be removed.

Action 9: Review and further develop our complaints system and process to enable better analysis of complaints

In Progress

Progress against this action: Work to review and further develop our complaints system and process is being progressed at a corporate level through a working group, which is currently focused on improving process design and reporting capabilities. Rather than establishing a separate planning-specific group, we are contributing to this wider corporate effort to ensure consistent handling and recording.

The following next steps are proposed: This approach will support better analysis of complaints and align with broader service improvement objectives.

Action 10: Implement Elected Members training in accordance with new legislation

In Progress

Progress against this action: While we await formal implementation by the Scottish Government of the mandatory training requirements introduced in the new Planning Act, we remain committed to supporting Elected Members through ongoing training. We continue to deliver sessions on key planning topics such as the Local Development Plan and Evidence Report to ensure Elected Members are well-informed and prepared on planning topics.

The following next steps are proposed: We will await formal implementation by the Scottish Government of the mandatory training requirements introduced in the new Planning Act.



Action 11: We will continue to look for opportunities to enhance our service delivery through sharing good practice, skills and knowledge with our partners and stakeholders

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

We continue to seek opportunities to enhance our service delivery through sharing good practice, skills, and knowledge with partners and stakeholders. Peer review over the years has been extremely positive, and we look forward to continuing this collaborative approach. Having updated our processes around core business, we can demonstrate a positive impact on performance timescales. We have shared our experience of using workflow tools and Power BI with colleagues across several authorities, including South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire. In addition, we developed a survey in collaboration with Homes for Scotland focused on allocated sites, aimed at gathering insights to support future planning work. The survey questions were shared via the Knowledge Hub to encourage wider engagement and knowledge exchange supporting wider improvement across the planning sector.

Action 12: Work with partners peer and national groupings to identify best practice to achieve best value in the efficient sharing and use of evidence for development implementation of NLLDP2

In Progress

Progress against this action: To date, we have consulted on a topic-by-topic basis and held a key stakeholder workshop, helping us build a robust evidence base to inform the forthcoming Evidence Report.

The following next steps are proposed: We continue to work with key partners, infrastructure providers, and peer authorities to identify best practice and ensure efficient sharing and use of evidence to support the development and implementation of the next North Lanarkshire Local Development Plan (NLLDP2).



Action 13: We will continue to share best practice with peer authorities and learn from others around implementation of digital solutions that lead to improvement, while horizon scanning on future advances on digital technology that can support the planning service

In Progress

Progress against this action: We continue to share best practice with peer authorities around our performance management approaches using Power BI dashboards. Knowledge sharing has highlighted alternative solutions to conditions monitoring, which we will explore as potential options for implementation in North Lanarkshire.

The following next steps are proposed: We are actively horizon scanning for future digital advances, including the use of AI tools for efficient document analysis, the development of mobile apps to support survey work, and the application of the Esri GIS platform to enhance consultation and support the preparation of the next Local Development Plan (LDP2).

Action 14: We will share best practice with peer authorities and learn from others around implementation of processes, digital solutions and methods of communication that lead to improvement

In Progress

Progress against this action: Ongoing collaboration includes work with South Lanarkshire Council around health and development management, and engagement with MECOPP to support inclusive planning approaches.

The following next steps are proposed: We continue to actively seek opportunities to learn and grow with others around best practice around process implementation that can contribute to improved outcomes in North Lanarkshire.

Action 15: We will host an Agents forum to allow us to have an open discussion around new legislation and policy, and of how that impacts planning applications in North Lanarkshire. We will ask developers to guide the topics to be covered in future forums

In Progress

Progress against this action: Invitations to the Agents Forum were sent to those who most frequently use our Development Management service. However, due to limited interest, the event was cancelled.



The following next steps are proposed: We will review approaches used by other authorities to identify and adopt good practice and gather feedback from agents to ensure future sessions are better tailored to their needs and priorities.

Action 16: We will participate in the national customer survey and analyse the results to allow us to prepare an improvement action plan

In Progress

Progress against this action: We successfully promoted the national customer survey, conducted by the National Planning Improvement Team from 18 November to 9 December 2024, and received a positive response rate. The survey gathered customer and stakeholder views on our planning service and the results are being analysed to help us understand our strengths and identify areas for improvement.

The following next steps are proposed: As the second annual survey approaches, we will adopt the same promotional methodology to encourage strong participation again this year.

Action 17: Looking at feedback given through peer collaborative review, we will engage further with applicants, consultees and community organisations to develop an engagement strategy that will help us ensure we can share information, advice and feedback in a way that is tailored to suit customer and stakeholder needs and expectations

In Progress

Progress against this action: In response to feedback received through peer collaborative review, we have begun engaging directly with individual groups to understand how best to communicate and share information with them. We successfully promoted and participated in the national customer survey, and the feedback gathered will help guide our understanding of current performance and customer expectations.

The following next steps are proposed: This insight, along with ongoing engagement, will support the development of an engagement strategy tailored to the needs of applicants, consultees, and community organisations. Our aim is to ensure communication is clear, accessible, and responsive to stakeholder needs.



Action 18: Assess the scope of current policies, projects and strategies, with place-based outcomes and outputs, and the associated place-based consultations supporting them with a view to identifying gaps that will guide us in carrying out focused place-based discussions or, where required, surveys with our communities

In Progress

Progress against this action: The Tell Us About Your Place survey ran from 4 December 2024 to 7 March 2025, gathering valuable insights from communities across North Lanarkshire. In addition to the survey, we engaged with various groups including the NL Access Panel, Voice of Experience, Youth Council and Parliament, and North Lanarkshire tenants through a dedicated Food for Thought session. Drop-in sessions were also held in local libraries across each Community Board area from 3 to 14 February 2025. We are currently analysing the data collected, which will inform our Evidence Report and the next Local Development Plan.

The following next steps are proposed: As a next step, we will further consult with communities through a comparison exercise to assess whether the survey results resonate with specific groups, helping to identify any gaps and guide future place-based discussions or surveys. We also welcome support and collaboration from the Improvement Service in developing and delivering our place-based approach, ensuring it reflects best practice and meets local needs.

Action 19: Review and test the conditions monitoring module and establish a process around use to better support the management of a risk assessment approach to discharging planning conditions

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

After reviewing the Idox Uniform conditions monitoring module, we have decided not to progress with its implementation. Instead, we will explore alternative solutions within the Uniform system to support the development of a risk-based process for discharging planning conditions.



Action 20: We will undertake a Planning Processing Agreement (PPA) process review specifically around the extension to PPA where dates are not fulfilled

In Progress

Progress against this action: We have completed the review of the Planning Processing Agreement (PPA) process, specifically focusing on extensions where dates are not fulfilled.

The following next steps are proposed: The updated process will be cascaded to the Development Management teams via the fortnightly workshop and will then be fully implemented.

Action 21: We will undertake a process review around stalled sites and legacy cases to establish a methodology to progress cases

In Progress

Progress against this action: We have commenced the process review around stalled sites and legacy cases, with initial work underway to resolve legacy cases.

The following next steps are proposed: The next phase of this work will be progressed following a further prioritisation exercise to help establish a clear plan for moving these cases forward. In doing so, we will ensure that this approach contributes to the broader ambition of addressing the housing emergency by identifying stalled sites that could enable the delivery of new homes.

Action 22: We will review our Section 75 model agreements to ensure they are accessible and easy to use

In Progress

Progress against this action: We have successfully reviewed and updated our Section 75 model agreement form to ensure a standardised, accessible, and user-friendly format. These agreements play a vital role in securing necessary infrastructure and community benefits from new developments, particularly where planning conditions alone are insufficient to mitigate development impacts. The revised model supports a more consistent approach and helps ensure that developments contribute positively to the local area. For example, Section 75 agreements may be used to secure affordable housing or fund improvements to local infrastructure in large housing developments. This update strengthens our ability to manage growth effectively and deliver sustainable outcomes for communities.

The following next steps are proposed: We will monitor the impact of the revised form to ensure it is delivering the intended outcomes and continues to support a consistent, transparent approach. We will monitor timescales relating to applications subject to S.75 as part of this review.



New Proposed Planning Improvement Actions

The table below details further improvement actions added.

| Improvement action | Owner | Importance | Timescale | Resources |
|---|----------------|-----------------------|---|-----------|
| What action will you take? What will the outcome be? | | High Medium Low | Short term- 1 year Medium term – 3 year Long term 3+ year | |
| Monitor and evaluate Invest team multi-disciplinary workflow processes, performance and track statutory consents linked to Invest pre-applications to assess their impact on project delivery timescales. | Gwen McCracken | High | Short term – 1 Year | |
| Design and pilot a proposal for implementing the Uniform Development Management module to support effective monitoring of planning conditions. | Gwen McCracken | Medium | Medium term – 3 years | |
| Create a collaborative Local Development Plan (LDP) hub to enhance engagement and coordination between services and stakeholders throughout the LDP lifecycle. | Gwen McCracken | High | Short term – 1 Year | |
| The Business Development team will work in partnership with Transportation colleagues to refine Road Construction Consent processes, aligning them more closely with | Gwen McCracken | High | Short term – 1 Year | |



planning application workflows. This will include utilising the Uniform Development Management module to support more streamlined and efficient decision making.



Peer Collaborative Review Follow Up

As part of the pilot, each planning authority held a peer collaborative review workshop. This brought together key stakeholders and customers to discuss and provide constructive feedback on the improvement action plan.

Status of the peer review follow-up meeting: We have sent an email out updating on progress.

Additional information: On 28 April 2025, we circulated an email update to those who participated in our peer review workshop.

