



# Agenda Item Introduction

## ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Committee	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND REGENERATION</b>
Date	<b>2 MAY 2024</b>
Topic	<b>LGA PEER REVIEW ACTION PLAN</b>

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### **Background**

1. The Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 committed to holding a review of Planning Services. This was independently undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) in May 2022.
2. The Peer Review report made six recommendations and identified a wide range of actions and outcomes linked to those recommendations, totalling 57 individual interventions.
3. The committee wish to review the progress that took place in 2023-24 on the peer review action plan and to be informed of the priorities for 2024-25.

### **Focus for Scrutiny**

- What activities on the action plan were completed in 2023-24?
- What were the issues and challenges, were any activities not completed?
- What are the priorities for 2024-25 and beyond?
- Are these activities on track or are there any foreseen issues that need to be mitigated?
- Is there anything the committee can support with moving forward?

### **Document(s) Attached**

4. Appendix 1 - Action Tracker

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# Scrutiny Report

## ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Meeting	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND REGENERATION</b>
Date	<b>2 MAY 2024</b>
Title	<b>PLANNING LGA PEER REVIEW REPORT AND PROGRESS UPDATE</b>
Report of	<b>CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING, COASTAL PROTECTION AND FLOODING</b>

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### Executive Summary

1. The LGA Peer review was undertaken in May 2022, and the subsequent report contained a number of recommendations to support the improvement of the council's Planning Service. A Steering Group was established with representation from an Officer, Councillors and external bodies.
2. The LGA Peer review report identified a total of 56 recommendations, actions and outcomes. An action tracker (see appendix 1) expanded the original outcomes of the LGA Peer Review report and currently lists 76 actions. To date 39 per cent of the 76 actions in the tracker have been completed and 53 per cent are in progress. Other project management documents such as a RAID (risks, assumptions, issues, decisions) log and a Benefits Realisation Plan are also being put in place.
3. The delivery of these actions has been progressed by Planning Services, whilst also delivering business as usual. It has been recognised that in order to deliver the desired outcomes further support and improved governance arrangements are required. It has been agreed with the Service Director and Strategic Director that stronger project governance will be wrapped around the delivery of the peer review outcomes to drive actions forward.
4. To support the delivery and completion of the Peer Review actions, budget within the service area has been identified to fund a 1-year, fixed term Project Delivery Officer post. It is intended to advertise for this post and recruit by the summer of 2024. This has been agreed by the Service Director and Strategic Director.

### Recommendation

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| 5. To receive the report and consider the progress update. |
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## Background

6. The Corporate Plan 2021 – 2025, under aspiration 29, committed to ‘complete a peer review of the service by April 2022 identifying areas of best practice and for improvement against comparator authorities. Implement an action plan in response to the recommendations of any review’.
7. The LGA Peer review was undertaken in May 2022, with a report being received by the Council on 21 June 2022. It contained a number of recommendations to support the improvement of the council’s Planning Service. A Steering Group was established with representation from an Officer, Councillors and external bodies, which has been meeting regularly since October 2022.
8. The Steering Group took the Peer Review report and grouped the recommendations, actions and outcomes within it into four key workstream areas. These are:
  - Progress the local plan (Island Planning Strategy)
  - Improve our enforcement function
  - Improve our planning application advice offer
  - Improve our development management function (how we determine planning applications).
9. There is also an overarching core principle of Improving Trust, Learning and Customer Service. The workstreams are interlinked, however, they are packaged into distinct workstreams and the work program set by the Steering Group reflects this.
10. As agreed by the Steering Group, the improving enforcement workstream has been prioritised and now the focus is on the pre-application advice workstream, which needs to be substantively completed before the improving the DM function workstream is tackled.
11. The delivery of these actions has been progressed by Planning Services, whilst also delivering business as usual. With all the pressures that delivering business as usual entails, it has meant that progress on the delivery of the Peer Review changes has been challenging. Delivery of the change programme has been impacted by unplanned absences of critical members of staff within Planning Services.
12. To date Planning Services have had some additional support from Organisational Intelligence to assist in progressing these recommendations, although this support has been reduced since Easter 2024.
13. Work is being undertaken to launch a simple, user-friendly customer (applicant) experience survey, to be issued alongside planning application decision notices. It is intended that this model will also be rolled in relation to pre-application advice. The responses will give us measurable and “live” information regarding customer experience of our service on an ongoing basis.
14. It has been recognised that in order to deliver the desired outcomes further support and improved governance arrangements are required. It has been agreed with the

Service Director and Strategic Director that stronger project governance will be wrapped around the delivery of the peer review outcomes to drive actions forward.

15. Organisational Intelligence has created an action tracker (see appendix 1), which is a live document, to record progress on the recommendations that have arisen from the peer review, which will also highlight resource requirements. This will inform and support the regular reporting of progress to both CMT and this committee. The action tracker expanded the original outcomes of the LGA Peer Review report and currently lists 76 actions. Other project management documents such as a RAID (risks, assumptions, issues, decisions) log and a Benefits Realisation Plan are also being put in place.
16. It is also to be noted that whilst the majority of actions sit within Planning Service, there are some actions that are attributed to Council colleagues outside of Planning Services. To move forward the activities required to deliver the specific, the future project structure will include a monthly working group of action owners to check progress and needs.
17. Teams has been utilised by the project team to collate evidence and track progress. This has also enabled actions to be progressed collaboratively with internal teams. Completed activities are now recorded with the caveat that evidence has not been fully collated to support the numbers above.
18. To support the delivery and completion of the Peer Review actions, budget within the service area has been identified to fund a 1-year, fixed term Project Delivery Officer post. It is intended to advertise for this post and recruit by the summer of 2024. This has been agreed by the Service Director and Strategic Director.
19. It is also proposed that moving forward the Steering Group be supported by this new post with progress also being reported through the Climate & Environment Officers & Members Board and a delivery group being established.
20. 39 per cent of the 76 actions in the tracker have been completed and 53 per cent are in progress. The status of the actions by workstreams are set out in the following table.

	Completed	In-progress*	Not started
Core Principle	14	19	3
Local Plan	2	4	0
Pre-app Offer	5	6	1
DM Function	1	9	2
Enforcement function	8	2	0
	<b>30</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>6</b>

21. A number of headline actions have been undertaken in 23/24 Q4 including:

- Agent's pre-app round table meeting (action tracker reference 3.05)

A meeting was held on 29/01/24 to provide agents and architects with an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of the pre-application service.

- Duty Officer service or 'walk-in Wednesdays' (3.02)

This service, which started on 31/01/24 allows members of the public to come in to have informal discussions with a planning service officer one afternoon a week at Seaclose. Over seven sessions since its introduction 38 people have attended (33 members of the public and 5 planning professionals).

- Planning Agents and Architects Forum (PAAF) (1.29)

The inaugural meeting of the PAAF was held on 09/02/24, with highlights from the meeting, along with ToRs and future meeting dates (every quarter).

- Implementing Power BI for internal and external reporting of performance (3.08)  
A workshop was held on 26/02/24 with senior members of the planning team and Org Intel to progress this. Data has been extracted from Planning Services systems and Power BI connected to the data. Draft outputs have been shared and data checked.

22. As well as these, other changes include:

- Regular 'Wednesday Workshops' have been introduced for senior planning staff and planning committee members, which has helped to improve understanding of issues and improve relationships (action tracker reference 1.09).
- Re-introduce the annual site visit tour (known as the Good, the Bad and the Ugly tour) to reflect on decisions and what went well and not so well, so Officers and Councillors on the Planning Committee can all take learning outcomes (1.12).
- Changed the way the weekly list of planning applications is structured to make it easier for parish councils (1.18).
- Delegated authority has been extended so Principal Officers can sign off certain types of applications, which reduces bottlenecks and frees up capacity for the Managers to undertake other tasks (3.01 & 3.03).
- Published a refreshed Statement of Community Involvement, which was consulted upon even though there wasn't a statutory requirement to do so, because of the message it would send (1.26).
- Officers joined a number of Planning Advisory Service instigated peer support networks and being part of the officer group involved in helping PAS update their pre-app guidance (3.04, 3.06, 3.07).
- Consulted on and published a new Enforcement Strategy, which helped to manage reset expectations and be clear about when we will take action and how. It also introduced the approach of parish council funded capacity in enforcement, and there are now have three local councils signed up and funding additional officer posts/capacity (5.03, 5.04, 5.07, 5.09, 5.10).
- Introduced a Duty Officer on Wednesday afternoons in January this year. These 'Wednesday Walk-in sessions' provide direct access to a planning officer to the public, to help with any enquiries. This is to help reduce the number of incoming

calls/emails (to enable officers to determine applications) and to be more accessible to the public.

- Re-introduced the Planning Agents & Architects Forum, as a knowledge share with practitioners on the Island. Again, this is to help reduce the number of incoming calls/emails and to be more accessible. The meetings are quarterly, with the next one to be held on Friday 3 May (1.29).

23. Further work is also in the pipeline, including;

- Making enforcement information online and publicly accessible (this is dependent on the 3rd party software provider building the changes in to the next planned upgrade this spring).
- A customer charter.
- An accredited agent scheme.

24. The service bid for and secured an additional £100k of Government funding, which has funded a fixed term part-time Senior Planning Officer post and a Senior Lawyer (fixed term, full-time) to help clear the backlog of planning applications (see action 1.36 of the Action Tracker, Appendix 1). The planning post has been filled since February 2024 and the legal post is due to be filled from early June.

25. A key action was to reduce the 'backlog' of planning applications with the local planning authority. Following the introduction of a programme of review and action, as of Monday 22 April, the number of undetermined planning applications with the local planning authority stood at 405, which is the lowest figure since recording started (October 2021) and is down 32 per cent from the highest recorded figure of 596.

26. Officers have also worked to give greater visibility of work undertaken and progress made, with improvements to the information available online and taking opportunities to promote new and improved services with positive good news stories in the form of press releases.

## **Appendices Attached**

27. Appendix 1: Action Tracker

## **Background Papers**

28. [LGA peer review report](#)

Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration agenda and minutes 5 May 2022

Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration agenda and minutes 7 July 2022

Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration agenda and minutes 5 January 2023

Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration agenda and minutes 6 July 2024

[Decision review and monitoring and Appeals Performance Report](#) to Planning Committee 16 April 2024

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