

<b>PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE</b>	
<b>Executive Summary</b>	This report provides an update on the progress of the Planning Service Improvement Plan, an analysis of response times for consultees and initial feedback on customer service responses.
<b>Options considered</b>	This report does not consider options
<b>Consultation(s)</b>	This report does contain feedback from customers.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>a) That the content of this report is noted, and</p> <p>b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decide whether - or not - they would like a further report on progress / completion of the Planning Service Improvement Plan – along with yearend data for 2023/24 to be added to their 2024/25 work plan (e.g. during ‘Quarter 2’)</p>
<b>Reasons for recommendations</b>	Prepared at the request of the Committee
<b>Background papers</b>	N/A

<b>Wards affected</b>	All
<b>Cabinet member(s)</b>	Cllr Andrew Brown
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Russell Williams

<b>Links to key documents:</b>	
Corporate Plan:	Customer Focus
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	No direct links to the MTFS
Council Policies & Strategies	Not applicable

<b>Corporate Governance:</b>	
Is this a key decision	No
Has the public interest test been applied	N/A
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	O&S meeting 15.02.23

## **1. Purpose of the report**

- 1.1 To provide an update on the Planning Service Improvement Plan (PSIP) and provide further information regarding consultation responses.

## **2. Introduction & Background**

- 2.1. During 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered that the Planning Service should be subject to a performance review, following perceived concerns over the speed of decision making, communications between stakeholders and Members and difficulties in obtaining information in relation to planning obligations (S106 contributions). It was also suggested that insufficient focus and/or cross-service priority has been attached to business related proposals.
- 2.2. Following this, at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in March 2022 it was agreed that the Director for Place and Climate Change should undertake the formation of a Planning Service Improvement Plan (PSIP).
- 2.3. A Draft PSIP Strategy was subsequently presented to this Committee on 28th September 2022 and following further public and Town & Parish Council consultation, a completed PSIP Strategy was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2023.
- 2.4. The resolution of the February 2023 Committee (item 137) states:

Resolved

1. *That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee supports the Planning Service Improvement Action Plan.*

Actions

1. *Update on action plan to be added to 23-24 Work Programme, to include breakdown of performance as impacted by delays with statutory consultees.*

### **3. Current Position**

- 3.1. The PSIP is a key priority for the Planning Service and monthly project meetings are held to review progress. As of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023, the Director for Place and Climate Change has tasked the Council's new Assistant Director – Planning to lead on ensuring that the PSIP process is completed successfully.
- 3.2. The Action Plan agreed in February 2023 had three headline 'areas' under which sat 13 delivery components. The areas are:
  - People;
  - Process; and
  - Performance.
- 3.3. The 13 components are:
  - Undertake a comprehensive training and support programme for Members
  - Improving engagement and support for Town & Parish Councils
  - Engaging the public effectively
  - Improving Communication through website functionality and accessibility
  - Improving communication and strengthening links with key stakeholders
  - Providing exemplary customer service to planning service users
  - Ensure that North Norfolk District Council provides a positive work environment for planning staff
  - Improve accessibility and transparency of Development Committee (DC) and planning processes

- Planning Service Process Improvements
  - Using performance to measure success
  - Managing S106 payments & processes
  - Managing and responding to complaints and compliments
  - Performance enabling
- 3.2. At this point in time, approximately 50% of the plan has been progressed. As stated above, the remaining tasks will now be the responsibility of the new Assistant Director – Planning, who has been tasked with completing the PSIP process in accordance with the new Draft Corporate Plan Key Action.
- 3.3. Overall progress relating to improved customer service aspects is being prioritised.

#### 4. Forthcoming tasks

- 4.1. The next six months will see a continuation of the PSIP work with the focus being on completion of;
- A new local validation list
  - Review of appeals, pre-application processes and decision notices
  - Improved performance monitoring
  - Improved planning web pages
  - Ongoing training for Development Committee Members
- 4.2. In addition, September will hopefully see successful recruitment to current vacancies, thus bringing teams to full capacity and thereby enabling staff to better engage with the new ways of working and future work streams.

#### 5. Customer Feedback questionnaire responses

- 5.1 Since early May we have been including a feedback questionnaire link to the applicant /agent when decision notices are issued. Unlike earlier consultations this was aimed specifically at those using the planning service.
- 5.2 The questionnaire seeks to determine the level of satisfaction in various aspects of the planning process and asks 'what could we do better'.
- 5.3 At this stage we have received less than one feedback response per week (average 2% response rate). On one hand this is a little disappointing and means it is difficult to quantify exactly where we need to seek improvements. On the other, it may indicate that customers have no comments to make and that service generally is as expected. However, we can share the following feedback responses for information.
- 5.4 Responses to what we '**did well**' included:
- All queries answered,
  - Everyone was polite and helpful,
  - Telephone contact initiated by officer cut out delays
  - Initial advice was helpful, and
  - The decision came quicker than expected.
- 5.5 Responses to 'what we '*could do better*' included:

- Make quicker decisions, and
- Provide progress updates.

## 6. Consultation information

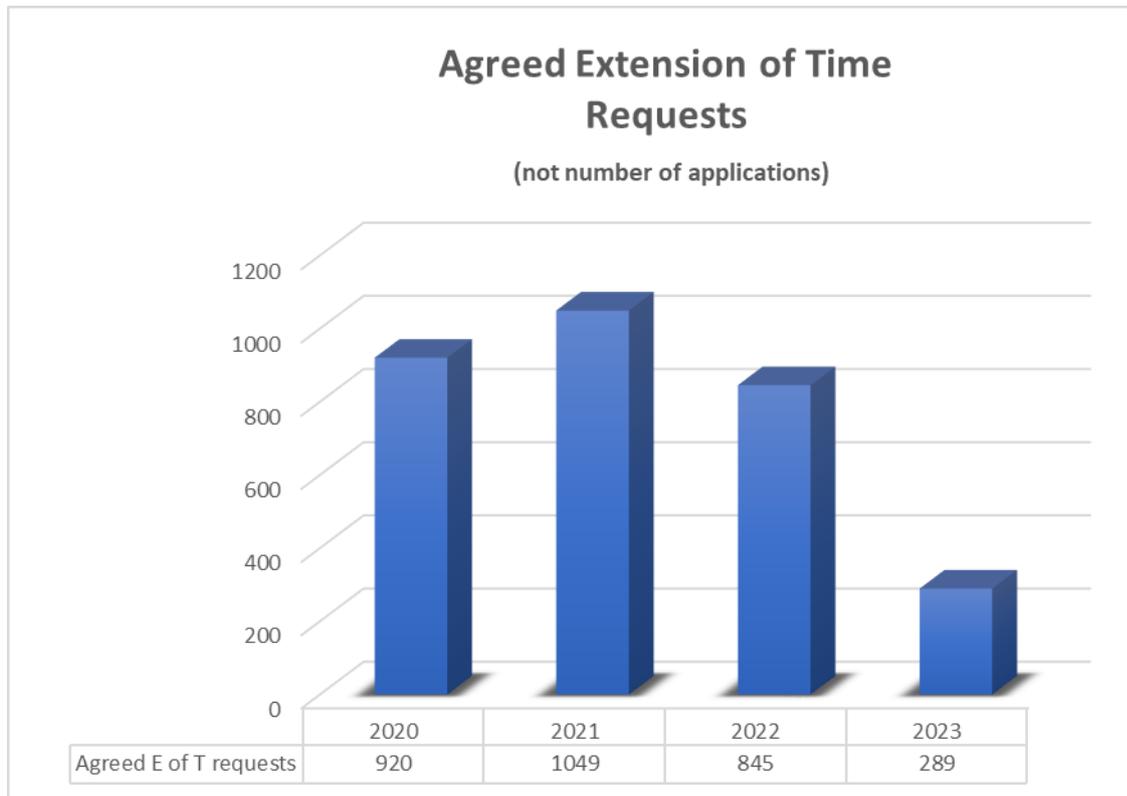
6.1 One aspect specifically asked for at the February O&S meeting was further information on planning application consultee responses, given that a lack of response can lead to delays in determining applications and an increased number of 'extensions of time' requests.

6.2 A review of data from 1 January 2023 to end of 31 July 2023 is displayed below and indicates that less than half of all consultee responses are returned within the requested 21 days, which is recognised as a major contributor to application delays and sources of customer frustration:

<b>External Consultee Requests</b>			
1 Jan 23 to 31 July 23			
<b>Based on total no. of requests issued</b>		<b>3158</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>%age</b>	<b>Notes</b>
No. of requests issued to external consultees (excluding Town and Parish Councils)	920		
No. of responses received	637	69%	<i>of external consultees responded</i>
<b>No. of responses received within 21 days</b>	<b>422*</b>	<b>46%</b>	<i>of responses sought</i>
No. of responses received late or not at all (to date)	498*	54%	<i>of responses sought</i>
No of requests issued to Town & Parish Councils	880		
No. where no response received	445*	51%	<i>of responses sought</i>
<b>No. responses within 21 days</b>	<b>290*</b>	<b>33%</b>	<i>of responses sought</i>
* NB some July requests may still be completed in time - data extracted 04.08.23			

## 7. Extensions of Time

7.1 The 2023 data provided below is for 1 January 2023 until 31 July 2023.



7.2 Extension of time requests have been used in relation to approximately 135 applications affected by the Nutrient Neutrality 'rules' imposed in March 2022 by Natural England. This issue remains an on-going challenge for the Planning Service, agents, developers and landowners and is resulting in significant delays to the consideration of proposals across Norfolk.

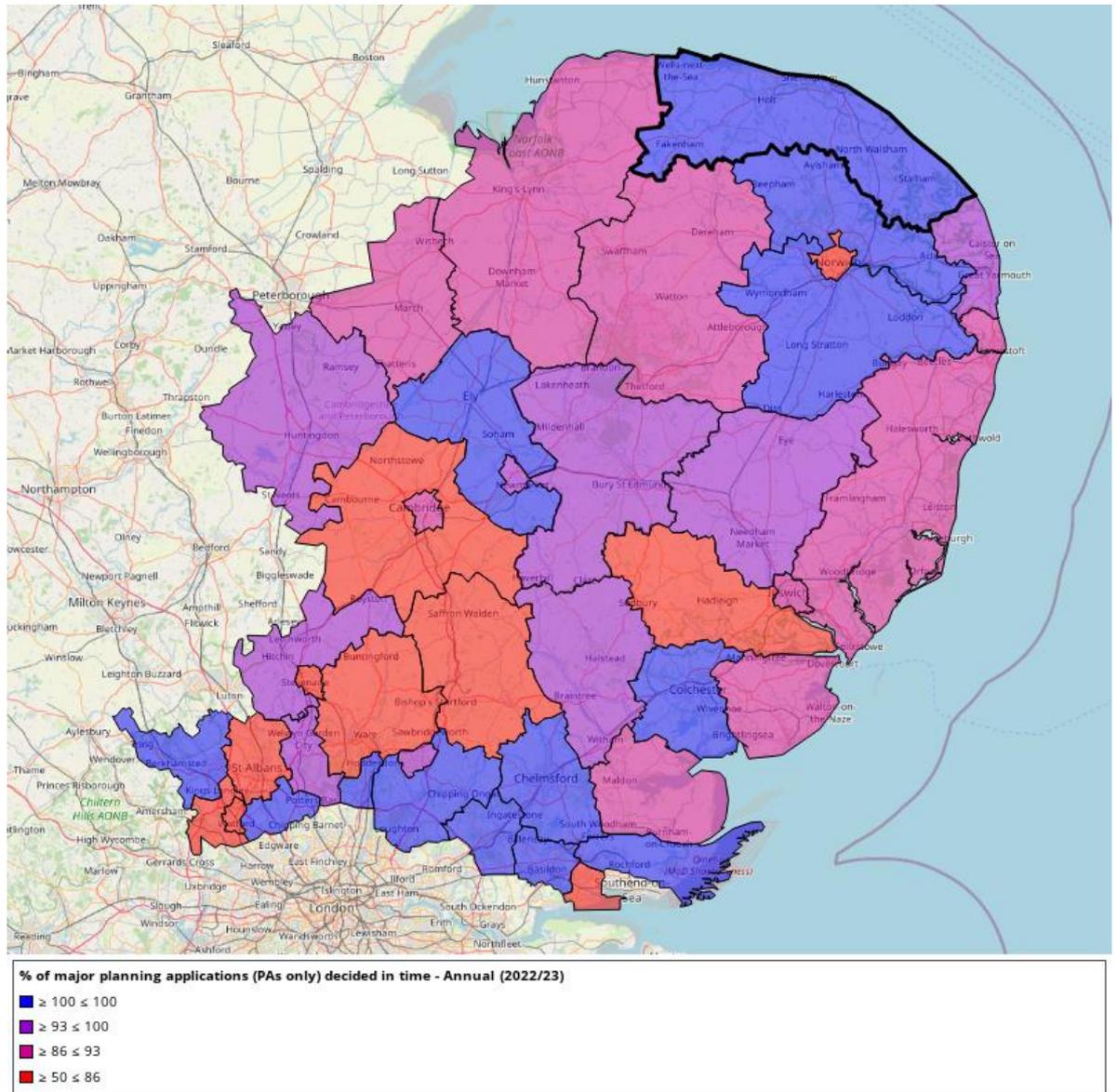
## 8. Council Planning performance

8.1 All of the PSIP elements of improving practices and quality of delivery are against the backdrop of the national picture and the requirement to perform to national indicators for decision making.

8.2 To set the Council's headlines against the rest of the East of England (in map form) and our neighbouring authorities (in graph form), the data below has been extracted from the LG Inform web-site for 2022/23.

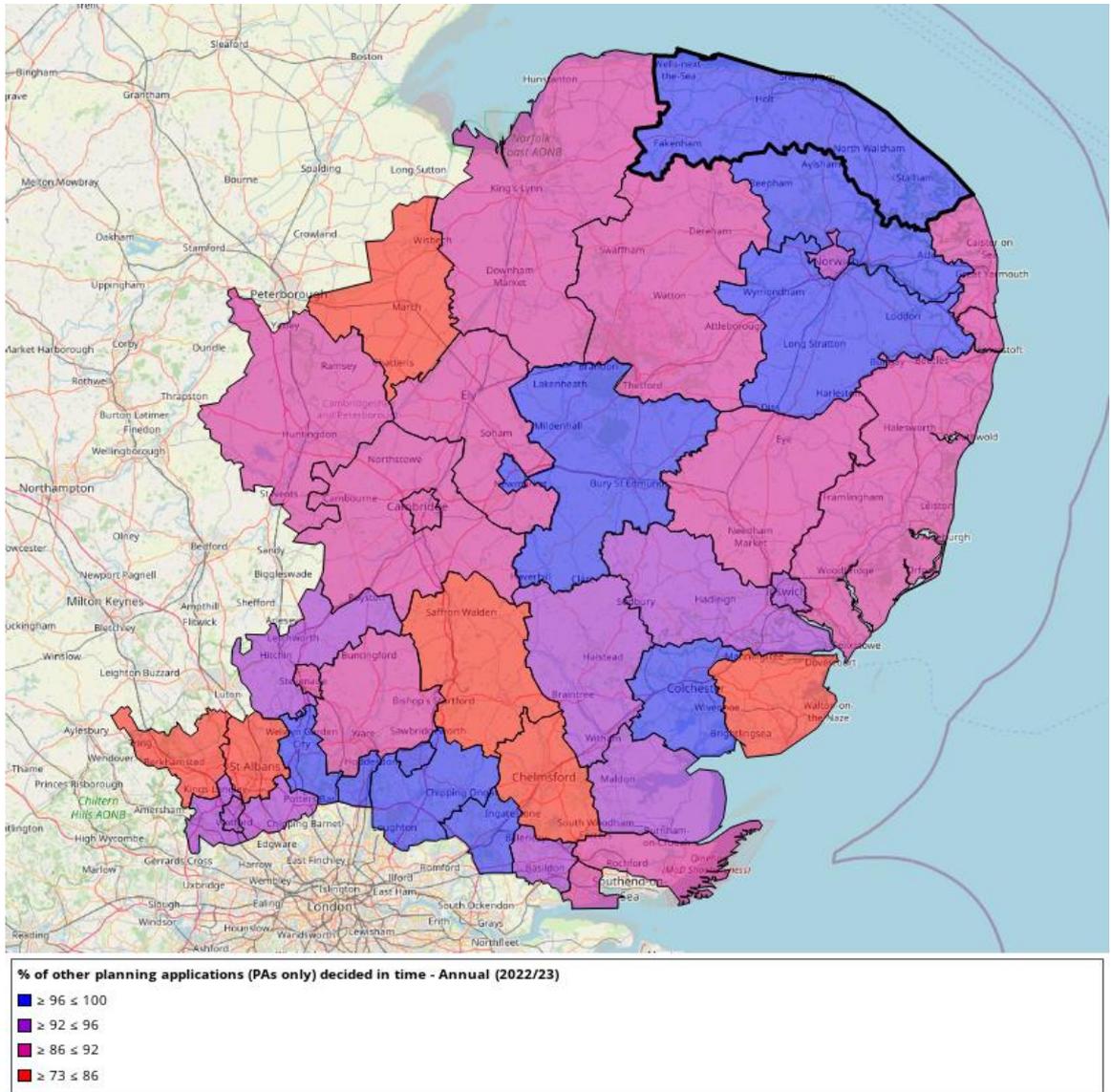
## Major Planning Applications 2022/23

(NNDC - 100% decided in time)

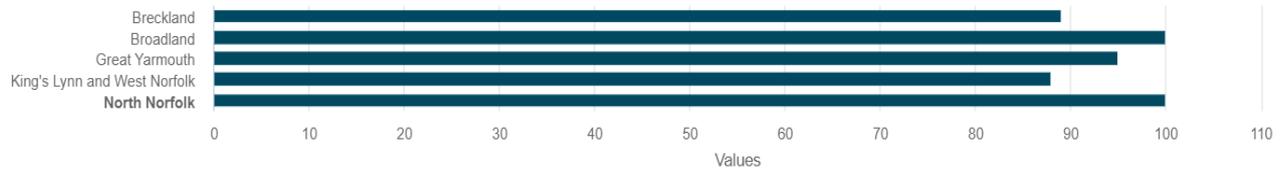


Data and Graphics provided by LGInform.

**Other Planning Applications 2022/23**  
 (NNDC 96% of decided in time)

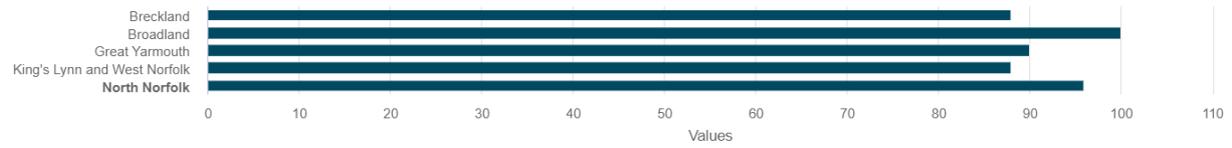


% of major planning applications (PAs only) decided in time - Annual 2022/23 for North Norfolk and All district authority geographies



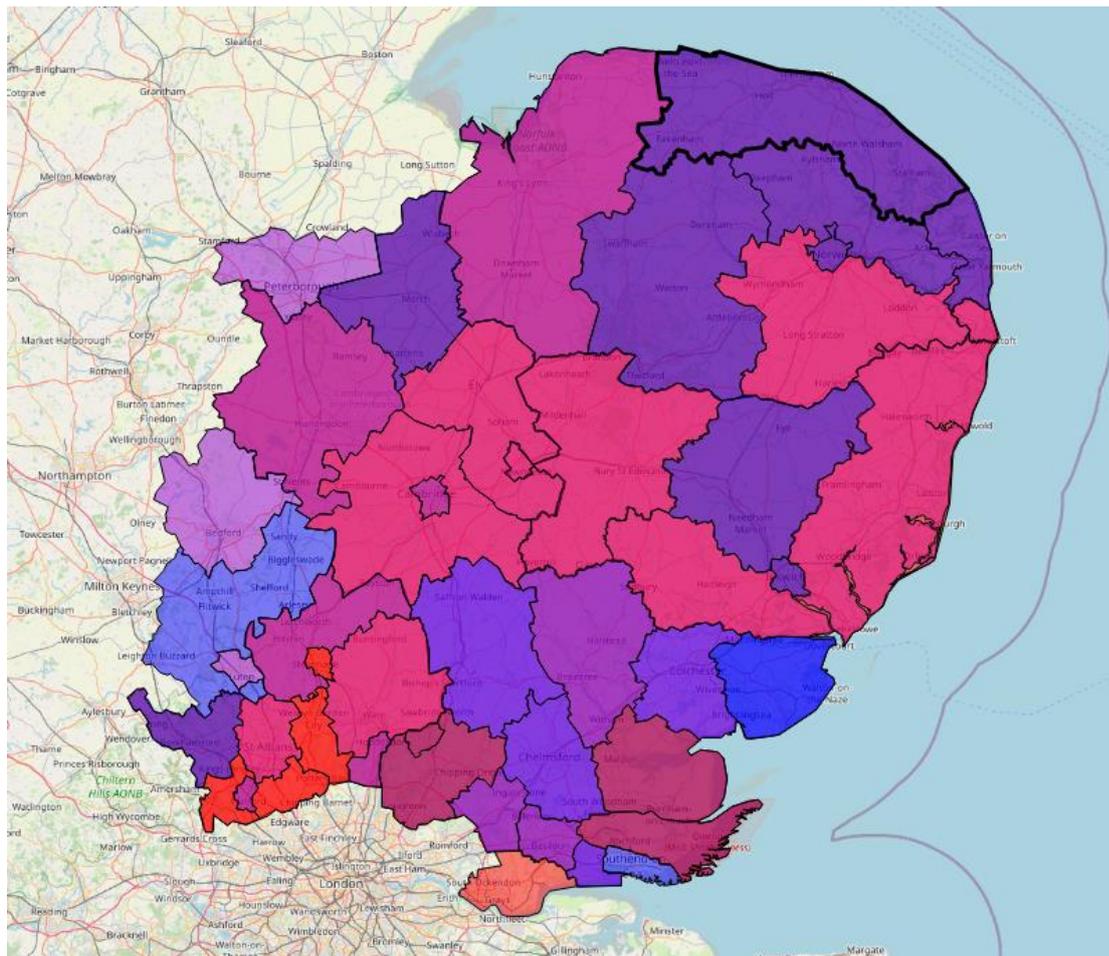
Percentage of major development planning applications with Planning Performance Agreements, Extension of Time or Environmental Impact Assessments decided in ...  
Powered by LG Inform Plus

% of other planning applications (PAs only) decided in time - Annual 2022/23 for North Norfolk and All district authority geographies



Percentage of other development planning applications with Planning Performance Agreements, Extension of Time or Environmental Impact Assessments decided in ...  
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### No. of Planning Appeal Decisions Dismissed 2022/23 (NNDC 86.4% of appeals dismissed)



% of planning appeals dismissed - Annual (2022/23)

- $\geq 79.4 \leq 100.0$
- $\geq 71.4 \leq 79.4$
- $\geq 58.7 \leq 71.4$
- $\geq 0.0 \leq 58.7$

## **9. Corporate Priorities**

- 9.1. This report will support the 'Quality Customer Service' and 'Effective and Efficient delivery of service' elements of the Draft Corporate Plan 2023-2027.
- 9.2. The Assistant Director – Planning has been tasked with ensuring the PSIP work is completed by the end of 2023/24 – in keeping with the new Corporate Plan Key Action(s).

## **10. Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this update report.

## **11. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications relating to this update report.

## **12. Risks**

The key risk that might affect the remaining elements of the PSIP is balancing the time needed to make progress on the individual elements of the PSIP versus the day-to-day needs associated with processing planning applications and progressing on the Local Plan.

## **13. Net Zero Target**

No implications for this update report.

## **14. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**

No impact identified with this update report.

## **15. Community Safety issues**

No impact on community safety issues with this update.

## **16. Conclusion**

- 16.1 The Development Management service is in a noticeably better place than it was this time last year, with a clear direction laid out to support further progress. The PSIP process has placed the customer at the heart of the process and focused on the need for effective and timely communications, while providing a mechanism for improvement. These improvements need to be maintained for longer term effect and good performance sustainability, to ensure that the planning service is effective, transparent and evolving.
- 16.2 Feedback provided by customers is a fundamental and valued element of improving the customer experience. Officers will continue to seek feedback, as appropriate, in identifying and carrying out continuous service level improvements.

16.3 Performance monitoring and management is also a key tool with the ambition being to make meaningful data available to Members, senior management and staff alike, to not only raise awareness but to use as a positive management tool to bring about improvements. Regular performance reports will continue to be presented to the Development Committee.

## **17. Recommendations**

- 17.1 a) That the content of this report is noted, and
- b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decide whether - or not - they would like a further report on progress / completion of the Planning Service Improvement Plan – along with year end data for 2023/24 to be added to their 2024/25 work plan (e.g. during 'Quarter 2')