



The Planning Service

Business Plan

2009 - 2010

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Foreword

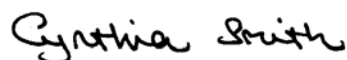
I am pleased to present the Planning Service's Business Plan for 2009/2010.

Within the context of the Executive's aim to grow the economy and the Department of the Environment's Programme for Government targets, we have been working over the course of the past year to formulate proposals for the reform of the planning system. The current global economic difficulties have particularly highlighted the need to make the system more responsive to all users, so that it enables appropriate development and manages it in the public interest to achieve sustainable economic growth. The Agency will also have to manage the financial implications of a significant downturn in the demand for its services due to the current economic conditions.

The reform agenda is fundamental and wide-ranging, and is expected to impact on every aspect of the planning system. It has been developed against the backdrop of the intended transfer of planning functions to the new 11 councils in 2011 under the Review of Public Administration. The key proposals envisage a new, streamlined development plan system, and more effective processing of applications through the introduction of proportionate decision-making processes. 2009/10 will see a period of public consultation and stakeholder engagement before the detail is finalised and we move towards implementation, which for much of the reform programme will require legislation.

We will also be continuing to take forward and consolidate a range of process improvement projects and organisational changes aimed at enhancing performance. The streamlined council consultation process will come into operation across all councils to help speed up the determination of more straightforward applications. Our Strategic Projects Team, which has responsibility for processing economically significant applications, will be further enhanced through the use of multi-disciplinary teams to ensure that the potential for delay is minimised. We will be continuing to deploy a Divisional Support Team as necessary in areas where there are significant operational pressures. This business year will also see the implementation of our new electronic planning system - ePIC - across the Agency which will improve accessibility to the planning system.

This is a time of significant change for the Planning Service. I am grateful for the dedication and professionalism with which our staff are embracing these new challenges, while at the same time continuing to deliver the day-to-day service to our customers.



CYNTHIA SMITH
Chief Executive

1. Introduction

The Northern Ireland Executive's priorities and associated spending plans are set out in the Programme for Government (PfG) 2008-2011. The PfG also contains a framework of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) drawn up by Departments. This incorporates the Department of the Environment's targets and objectives for the strategic period, including those of the Planning Service.

The Planning Service's Corporate Plan 2008-11 - closely linked to the Department of the Environment's Corporate Plan for the same period - provides further details of the strategic context and outlines how the Agency plans to work towards delivery of its PfG commitments.

This Business Plan sets out detailed targets for 2009-10, many of which feed directly into the Department's PSA. The Plan also reflects a number of targets which are not driven directly by the overarching Executive priorities, but which will contribute to the achievement of the Agency's strategic objectives.

2. Planning Reform, including Implementation of the Review of Public Administration

It is widely recognised that an effective and efficient planning system plays an important part in supporting the economy. Reform is therefore particularly important given the key aim of the Executive to grow the economy and in light of the current global economic difficulties and the challenging outlook facing Northern Ireland. As such, the proposals for reform aim to contribute to and support the economy by delivering a more streamlined planning system which will enable more timely decision-making and deliver better quality development decisions.

The reform programme encompasses changes over the short, medium and long term. The short term reform measures, started during the 2007/08 business year, have been focusing on helping to tackle current workload pressures and producing early improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in the handling of planning applications. These measures, which include the recommendations of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery review, are due to be concluded by the early part of the 2009/10 business year. In many cases they will become integrated into normal operational procedures or into the medium to longer term reform programme.

Proposals for the reform of the planning system over the medium to longer term will be detailed in a public consultation paper. The public consultation period will take place during 2009/10 and will include a series of stakeholder events to enable focused engagement on the proposals. All responses to the consultation paper will be analysed and final policy proposals will be agreed by the Minister. Those measures which can be implemented without the need for legislation will be taken forward on an ongoing basis, while legislation required to support the remaining changes will be brought forward by 2011.

The consultation paper proposals take account of the implementation of the Executive's decisions in relation to the RPA which will see the creation of a two-tier system of planning, with responsibility for the majority of planning functions transferring from Planning Service to the new 11 district councils in 2011. Planning officials will continue to engage in and contribute to the overarching RPA implementation structures during this business year in order to put in place the necessary arrangements for the transfer of planning functions in 2011.

3. Agency Management and Staff Resources

The Planning Service Management Board comprises:

Cynthia Smith - Chief Executive
Marianne Fleming - Director of Corporate Services
Anne Garvey - Director of Operations
Tom Clarke - Director of Strategic Planning

An Independent Board Member has also been recently appointed. In addition, Jim Mackinnon, Chief Planner for Scotland, acts as critical adviser to the Management Board on a range of strategic issues.

The Management Board is responsible for ensuring the effective stewardship and corporate governance of the Agency within the strategic policy and resources framework set by Ministers.

The Agency has a staff complement of 844. It currently has a significant number of vacancies across both the professional and administrative grades. Due to the financial situation it is unknown how many of these vacancies, if any, the Agency will be in a position to fill. The economic downturn, combined with the reduction in baseline budgets, has serious implications for the affordability of staff. Consideration is being given to a range of options to address this shortfall in staffing levels.

4. Financial Resources and Risk Management

4.1 Financial Resources

The Planning Service is funded jointly by income from fees and monies voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Parliament. Income from fees relates to charges for planning applications and property certificates.

The Agency has been significantly affected by the economic downturn during 2008/09. Volumes of both planning applications and property certificates have declined considerably, with the associated income down by around £4.75m. This shortfall has been addressed by a combination of additional funding secured from the Department of Finance and Personnel, easements within other business areas in the Department of the Environment and internally generated savings within the Agency. In addition, in line with other business areas across the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Planning Service's administration and programme baselines have been

reduced in certain areas over the budget period as our contribution to the 3% cumulative cash efficiency savings required by the Department of Finance and Personnel. The economic outlook remains uncertain for 2009/10 and the Agency is exploring options on how to respond to potential future resource pressures arising from the downturn.

Our initial budget allocation for this year is set out below. Last year's figures are also shown for comparative purposes.

2008/09	2009/10
13.1 M	10.85 M

4.2. Risk Management

In line with corporate governance requirements the Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer for the Agency, has to be in a position to sign a Statement of Internal Control at the end of each financial year in relation to the Planning Service Annual Report and Accounts. We are committed to improving the way in which we work and manage our business, and part of this improvement is in ensuring that we have effective risk management arrangements in place.

We fulfil this role by implementing effective risk management arrangements, which are detailed in our Risk Management Policy Statement. These include developing, monitoring and reviewing an Agency Risk Register which identifies the key risks, those responsible for ensuring that the risks are managed, and the action that will be taken to manage them. This process is also cascaded down through the three Directorates and the relevant business areas. Risk management is taken forward as an integral part of the business planning process and, like the Agency Business Plan, is monitored on a quarterly basis.

5. Our Targets and Objectives

5.1 Public Service Agreement Targets

The PSA objective and associated actions and targets for the Planning Service as reflected in the Department of the Environment's Public Service Agreement (PSA) are as follows:

PSA Objective	Actions	Targets
<p>Deliver a modern effective planning system which meets the needs of the whole community and the economy while protecting the environment.</p>	<p>Ensure draft or adopted development plans are in place for the whole of Northern Ireland by March 2011</p> <p>Bring forward legislation to further reform the planning system by March 2011 and further streamline administrative processes and improve customer service by March 2011</p>	<p>Ensure a fit for purpose suite of draft or adopted development plans is in place by March 2011</p> <p>A fit for purpose legislative framework to be in place by March 2011</p> <p>By March 2011 ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 60% of major applications processed in 23 weeks - 70% of intermediate applications processed in 31 weeks - 80% of minor applications processed in 18 weeks.

The Agency is also committed through the Programme for Government to determining all large scale investment planning proposals within 6 months provided there has been pre-application consultation.

5.2 The Agency’s Strategic Objectives

The Planning Service follows the balanced scorecard approach to corporate and business planning. Its strategic objectives are set out in the quadrants below:

<p>RESULTS</p> <p>To make good, timely planning decisions within a fit for purpose Area Plans, policy and legislative framework which supports the key priorities in the Executive’s Programme for Government.</p>	<p>CUSTOMERS/STAKEHOLDERS</p> <p>To deliver good quality service to our customers and stakeholders.</p>
<p>PROCESSES</p> <p>To review, streamline, improve and monitor the Planning Service’s key systems and processes.</p>	<p>RESOURCES</p> <p>To have the necessary financial, human and other resources to deliver the Agency’s aims and objectives.</p>

A number of business year objectives have been agreed and are set out in the business plan. They set out how the Agency intends to implement its strategic objectives and progress towards achievement of its PSA targets.

6. Planning Service Business Plan 2009/10

The Agency's business year objectives and associated target timescales to enable us to deliver on our strategic objectives are reflected in the following sections. The business plan is a working document and may change during the course of the year in response to changing political, social or economic circumstances.

6.1 Results

Strategic Objective: To make good, timely planning decisions within a fit for purpose Area Plans, policy and legislative framework which supports the key priorities in the Executive's Programme for Government.

Business Critical Area	Target	Date for completion
1. Produce development plans for Northern Ireland	1. Prepare for and participate in independent examinations in respect of the draft Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 and the draft Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015.	31 March 2010
2. Deliver prompt planning decisions	2. To process to decision or withdrawal: 50% of major applications within 23 weeks; 70% of intermediate applications within 31 weeks*; and 75% of minor applications within 18 weeks. 85% of applications validated within 6 working days, 95% of applications validated within 10 working days. 85% of decisions issued within 2 weeks of Council meeting, 95% of decisions issued within 4 weeks of Council meeting.	31 March 2010
3. Support major economic development in Northern Ireland	3. Decide all large scale investment planning proposals within 6 months, provided there has been pre-application consultation.	31 March 2010
4. Deliver planning reform (including Review of Public Administration in line with Ministerial direction)	4. Produce policy proposals for Minister's consideration.	Within 12 weeks of end of public consultation
	5. Provide all necessary instructions	Within 6 weeks of

	and feedback to OLC to enable production of draft Bill	Executive approval of Policy Memorandum
	6. Complete drafting of Statutory Rules to enable DSO clearance	31 March 2010
	7. Engage with RPA implementation structures to prepare and provide for the transfer of planning functions	31 March 2010
	*target excludes applications deferred as a consequence of draft PPS 14/ 21.	

6.2 Customers/Stakeholders

Strategic Objective: To deliver good quality service to our customers and stakeholders.

Business Critical Area	Target	Date for completion
5. Engage with customers/ stakeholders on improving the service	8. Monitor and report progress achieved on the implementation of actions targeted for 2009/10 in the Agency's Customer Service Action Plan.	31 March 2010

6.3 Processes

Strategic Objective: To review, streamline, improve and monitor the Planning Service's key systems and processes.

Business Critical Area	Target	Date for completion
6. Secure process improvements	9. Implement actions targeted for 2009/10 arising from the NIAO Value for Money Scrutiny and the PEDU Review.	31 March 2010
	10. Oversee and contribute to delivery of Action Plan on handling of housing applications	31 March 2010
7. Improve planning system through use of technology	11. Complete software development and integration, User Acceptance Testing and roll-out of the e-PIC system.	31 March 2010

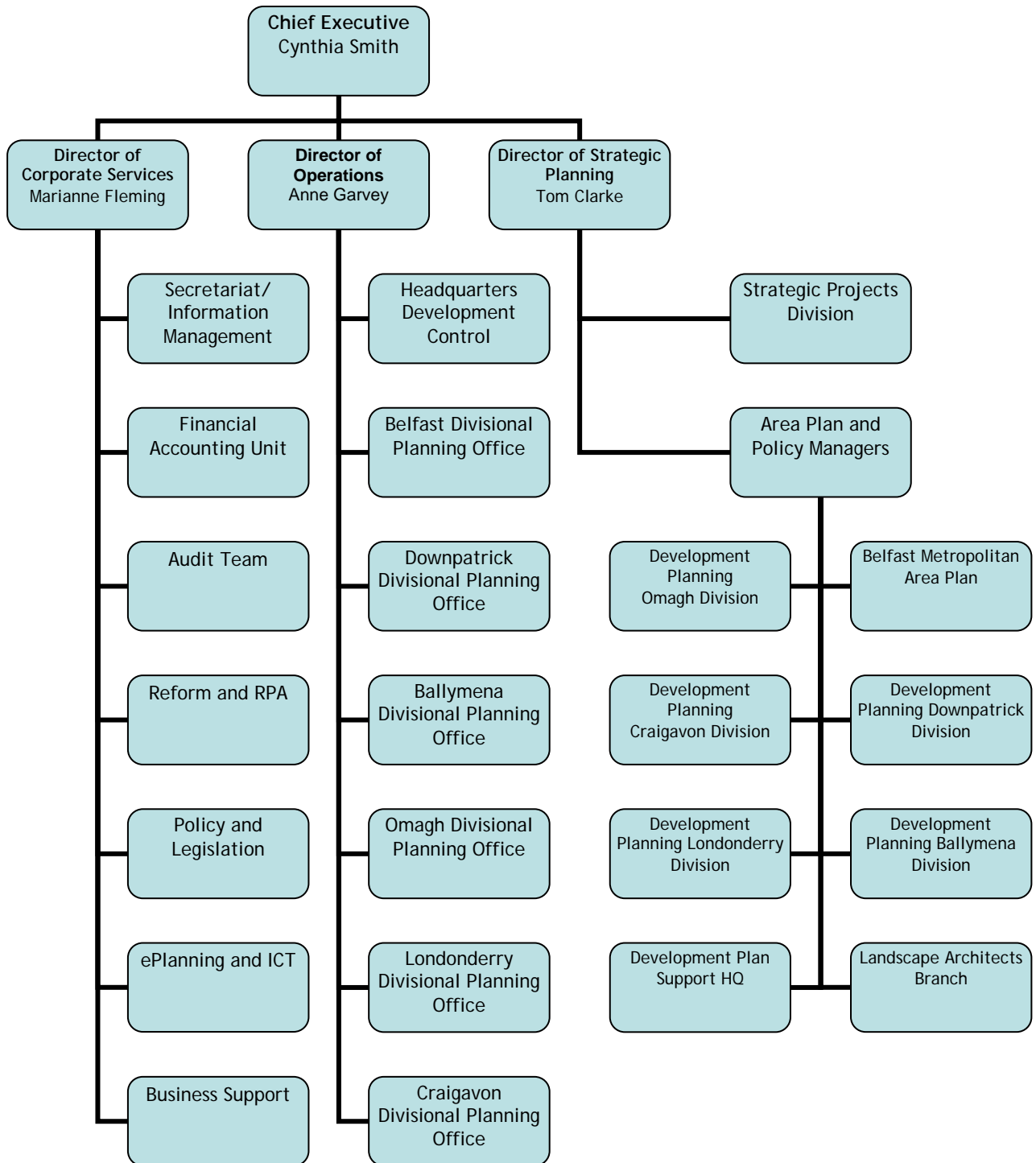
6.4 Resources

Strategic Objective: To have the necessary financial, human and other resources to deliver the Agency's aims and objectives.

Business Critical Area	Target	Date for completion
8. Ensure that the Agency's resources are managed efficiently and effectively and with propriety in delivering the Agency's objectives	12. Review, agree and complete implementation of year 2 of the Agency's Efficiency Delivery Plan	31 March 2010
	13. Identify and submit to DOE/DFP timely bids for financial resources	Quarterly
9. Maintain an adequate level of appropriately skilled staff	14. Deliver year 1 of the Development Programme for specialist staff	31 March 2010
	15. Communicate pro-actively with staff to prepare them for changes which affect them (Planning Reform, RPA, Process Changes, ePIC).	31 March 2010

Appendix 1

Organisation Chart



Appendix Two

Map of Divisional Planning Offices



Appendix 3

PLANNING SERVICE RESOURCES 2009/10

	2009/10
	£m
Admin/DRC	27.4
Other Resource/Programme	5.9
Capital	0.1
Receipts	-22.6
TOTAL	10.8