

The Planning Service

Business Plan

2007/08

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the Planning Service's Business Plan for 2007/08.

The next few years will be a period of very significant change for the Agency if the transfer of most of our responsibilities to the new local authorities under the Review of Public Administration is to go ahead. In addition to taking forward the extensive programme of work required to ensure a smooth transition to any new planning arrangements, our key priorities will continue to be service delivery and further reform of the planning process. We will also be taking forward a challenging Area Plans work programme.

Our *Planning to Deliver* modernisation initiative has produced a number of improvements in terms of streamlining the development plan and development control processes. However, several key projects remain to be completed. A central pillar of the overall programme will be the first stages of implementation during this business year of a comprehensive new e-planning solution - ePIC - which will enable customers to submit and track the progress of planning applications on-line, and facilitate the electronic delivery of the consultation process.

The focus of our work to date on the Review of Public Administration has been the detailed formulation of the proposed legislative and policy framework needed to underpin the new planning regime. A proposed service delivery model has been agreed through the Department's Local Government Taskforce, providing a platform upon which we can progress the work necessary for transition to new structures. Subject to further consideration by Ministers, the next stage will be to take forward the legislation necessary to give effect to the transfer of planning functions.

In parallel with this, we are committed to ensuring that the planning system is up-to-date and operating as efficiently and effectively as it can. In this context, we will be giving consideration over the course of the year to the scope for making further improvements to the process over both the medium and the longer term. We will also be assessing recent proposals that have emerged in England, Scotland and Wales and whether they might potentially benefit Northern Ireland.

There are huge challenges ahead for the Planning Service over the next few years. I have every confidence that our staff will respond positively to ensure the delivery of an effective planning process that meets the needs of the local community and the economy.

DAVID FERGUSON
Chief Executive

1. The Business Planning Context

1.1 Priorities and Budget 2006-2008

The Government's priorities and associated budget allocations are set out in *Priorities and Budget 2006-2008*, which was published in December 2005. At the heart of these priorities lies a commitment to reform and modernise public services. In the Planning Service, our commitment to modernising our service and the overall system continues to be addressed through the *Planning to Deliver* programme, which includes the process changes detailed in the *Modernising Planning Processes* Implementation Plan.

Priorities and Budget 2006-08 also contains Public Service Agreements (PSAs) drawn up by Departments. The Department of the Environment's PSA sets out the Department's targets and objectives for the 2007/08 business year and includes those of the Planning Service.

1.2 Department of the Environment Business Plan

To support the Government's *Priorities and Budget*, each Department prepares its own Business Plan. The DoE Business Plan sets out the actions to be taken to ensure delivery of the Department's targets and objectives for the 2007/08 business year as well as the reforms that will be undertaken during that time.

1.3 Review of Public Administration (RPA)

If implementation of the recommendations of the RPA proceeds it will see the transfer of responsibility for the bulk of work currently carried out by the Agency to the new local authorities. This will signify the most radical restructuring of the planning system in over thirty years. A significant raft of preparatory policy and legislative work to deliver the new planning model has already been completed.

1.4 The UK dimension

The planning system is facing pressure for change not only at local level but also within the wider UK context. Specifically, the recommendations of the Eddington Transport Study and the Barker Review of Land Use Planning will require consideration. Any review of the Northern Ireland planning system against this backdrop could represent a significant policy agenda with far-reaching implications.

2. The Planning Service

The Planning Service is an agency of the Department of the Environment and is responsible for providing a planning system designed to regulate development and land use in the public interest. The agency's planning functions are set out in the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (as amended). The three key business areas are:

- the development control process (the system for dealing with individual planning applications), including enforcement;
- planning legislation and reform;
- preparation of development plans.

Through the delivery of these Planning Service aims to improve the quality of life of the people of Northern Ireland by planning and managing development in ways which are sustainable and which contribute to creating a better environment.

2.1 Agency Management

The Planning Service Management Board comprises:

David Ferguson - Chief Executive
Marianne Fleming - Director of Corporate Services
Anne Garvey - Director of Operations
Pat McBride - Director of Strategic Planning

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 currently has a staff complement of 878. It is structured to reflect the demography of Northern Ireland and services are provided through a network of 6 Divisional Planning Offices and 2 sub-Divisional Planning Offices located throughout Northern Ireland, as well as Planning Service headquarters, which is based in Belfast. These structures help to promote effective local consultation and to encourage local participation in the planning process.

2.2 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 is currently inputting to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007 process. CSR 2007 is a zero based review of all Departmental objectives, policies and spending plans and fixes spending plans for the three years 2008-09 to 2010-11. Over this period Planning Service will be expected to contribute to the 3% cumulative cash efficiency savings, including a 2.8% reduction in administration costs, imposed on the Department of the Environment. Planning Service has also submitted bids for additional funding for the 2007/08 financial year, mainly for consultancy support for the Agency's development plan programme and additional resources to deliver our input to the RPA.

The outcome of the RPA will mean not only the redistribution of planning functions but the creation of a new planning system for Northern Ireland. The main focus from a finance point of view will be to ensure that the new planning system is adequately funded and fit for purpose. Work is currently ongoing to identify and obtain the necessary funding.

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

2006/07	2007/08
12.5 M	11.5 M

3. Planning Service Business Plan 2007/08

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.

3.1 Public Service Agreement Targets

The key Ministerial target for the Planning Service, as reflected in the Department of the Environment's Public Service Agreement (PSA), is:

By 31 March 2008, to support sustainable development and the provision of major infrastructure through:

- increasing the proportion of Northern Ireland covered by adopted or draft area plans to 78% of the land area by 31 March 2008 from 47% at 31 March 2005.
- bringing forward by 31 March 2008 a further 9 Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), including a number of revisions to existing PPSs, in draft or final form from the position at 31 March 2005.
- by 31 March 2008 improving the time taken to process planning applications to decision or withdrawal against 2004/05 performance, as follows:
 - 60% of Major Applications processed in 23 weeks (25 weeks 2004/05) - an 8% improvement
 - 70% of Intermediate Applications processed in 31 Weeks (33 weeks 2004/05) - a 6% improvement
 - 80 % of Minor Applications processed in 18 Weeks (21 Weeks 2004/05) - a 14% improvement.
- By 31 March 2008 completing implementation of the Planning Service Reform and Modernisation programme, including the actions flowing from the Modernising Planning Processes Implementation Plan and delivery of ePIC, the Service's e-Planning system.

In the PSA Technical Notes we have reflected the fact that the PSA target is similar to that set by the Department for Communities and Local Government but tailored to reflect the Northern Ireland circumstances. The actions to be taken forward to ensure achievement of the target link closely to two of the four Ministerial priorities for the 2006-2008 period, namely infrastructure development and efficiency reform.

3.2 Strategic Objectives

The Planning Service strategic objectives are:

<p>RESULTS</p> <p>To make good, timely planning decisions within a fit for purpose Area Plans, policy and legislative framework and in line with the Department's sustainable development principles.</p>	<p>CLIENTS/STAKEHOLDERS</p> <p>To promote a mutual understanding of expectations and the capacity to meet them between Planning Service and its clients/stakeholders.</p>
<p>PROCESSES</p> <p>To review, streamline, improve and monitor the Planning Service's key systems and processes and to prepare for the implementation of the Review of Public Administration*.</p> <p><i>*Dependent on the outcome of the review of RPA decisions in relation to local government.</i></p>	<p>PEOPLE</p> <p>To have well-motivated people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.</p>

3.3 The Business Plan

3.31 Results

Strategic Objective: To make good, timely planning decisions within a fit for purpose Area Plans, policy and legislative framework and in line with the Department's sustainable development principles.

Business Year Objective	Target date
<p>To meet the following targets for processing planning applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to our PSA target, other targets include ensuring 75% of all applications are validated within 6 working days of receipt and 95% validated within 10 working days of receipt; 75% of decisions should issue within 2 weeks of last Council consultation and 95% within 4 weeks of last Council consultation; 15% reduction in the number of applications in the system for longer than 12 months. 	<p>31 March 2008</p>

To implement a number of short-term actions to further improve procedures for handling planning applications.	31 March 2008
To publish the draft Antrim, Ballymena and Larne Development Plan.	31 March 2008
To complete the in-year element of Phase 1 of the agreed programme to further reform the planning system.	31 March 2008

3.32 Clients/Stakeholders

Strategic Objective: To promote a mutual understanding of expectations and the capacity to meet them between Planning Service and its clients/ stakeholders.

Business Year Objective	Target date
To implement the Agency's 2007/08 Communications Action Plan.	31 March 2008
To implement the 2007/08 elements of the Agency's NICS Customer Service Principles Action Plan.	31 March 2008

3.33 Processes

Strategic Objective: To review, streamline, improve and monitor the Planning Service's key systems and processes and to prepare for the implementation of the Review of Public Administration. *[dependent on the outcome of the review of RPA decisions in relation to local government].*

Business Year Objective	Target date
To revise the current RPA implementation programme in light of decisions arising from the Executive sub-committee review in relation to local government.	31 March 2008
To begin the User Acceptance Testing of Phase 1 of ePIC.	31 March 2008

To complete the following projects from the P2D programme:	
- implement agreed recommendations from the review of the Council consultation arrangements	31 March 2008
- complete and review SLAs with key consultees	31 March 2008
- pilot arrangements to improve customer service.	31 March 2008

3.34 People

Strategic Objective: To have well-motivated people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

Business Year Objective	Target date
To implement the 2007/08 elements of the Human Resources Strategy.	31 March 2008
To develop a revised training and development strategy.	31 March 2008

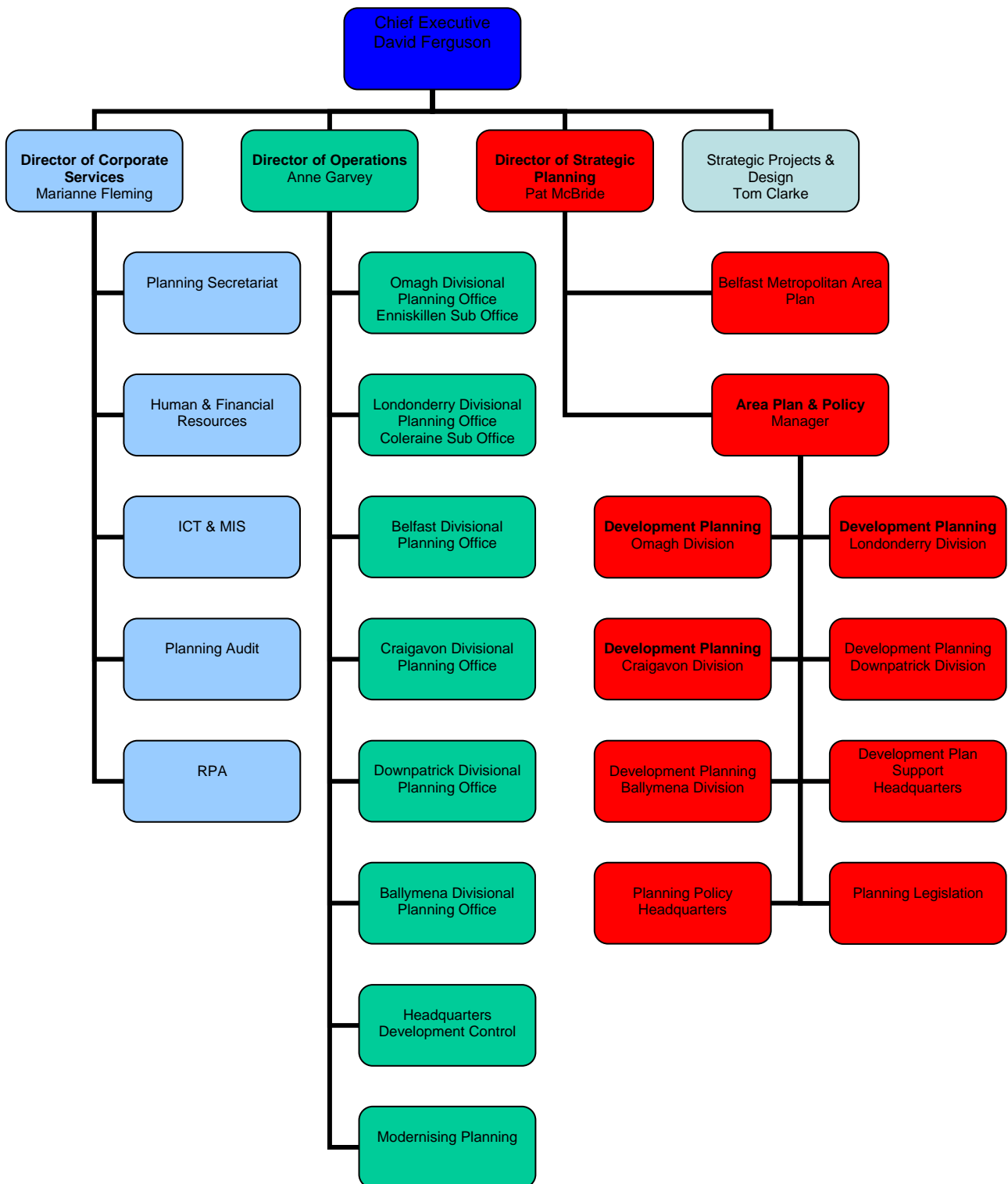
3.35 Implementation, Monitoring and Review

The Planning Service Management Board will monitor performance and review progress against key objectives and targets on a regular basis.

Following the end of the financial year, the Chief Executive will publish an Annual Report and Accounts. The Report will review the Agency's activities during the year and will comment specifically on progress in relation to our strategic objectives and achievements against our performance targets.

Appendix 1

Organisational Chart



Appendix Two

Map of Divisional Planning Offices



Appendix 3

PLANNING SERVICE RESOURCES 2007/08

	2007/08
	£m
Admin/DRC	18.9
Other Resource/Programme	5.7
Capital	0.6
Receipts	-13.7
TOTAL	11.5