

# The Planning Service

## Corporate and Business Plans

2008/09 -  
2010/11

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## Foreword

I am pleased to present the Planning Service's Corporate and Business Plans for 2008/2011.

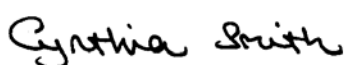
The key aim of the Executive is to build a prosperous society supported by a vibrant and dynamic economy and a rich and sustainable environmental heritage. This goal must be underpinned by a modern, responsive planning system. We have set ourselves an ambitious reform agenda to enable us to achieve this.

Specifically, we want to see a change of emphasis and a change of organisational culture within the planning system, as well as a range of substantive administrative, policy and legislative reform. We will be aiming to deliver a quicker, more accessible and responsive development plan process which provides more clarity and certainty for developers, the public and other stakeholders about the future development of local communities. As regards development control, we want to encourage stronger collaborative working with our stakeholders, with a better match of resources and processes to priorities. This would ensure that most resources are channelled towards those applications with the greatest economic, social and environmental impact. At the same time, we want to implement more streamlined procedures for smaller scale developments.

We will also be building on a range of improvement measures which we have already introduced in certain areas. For example, we want to make greater use of pre-application discussions on strategically significant applications to improve the quality and speed of the decision-making process. The determination of more straightforward applications will also be speeded up through the rolling out of the streamlined council consultation arrangements which have already been implemented successfully with Derry City Council. In addition, we will be looking at ways of improving accessibility to the planning system through better use of technology and specifically the development of our Electronic Planning Information for the Citizen (e-PIC) project which will enable the electronic submission of planning applications.

Our change programme will, of course, reflect the Executive's decisions on the Review of Public Administration and the new relationships between central and local government. In taking it forward, we will be working closely with a range of stakeholders including councils, developers, businesses and local communities, with the aim of achieving a planning system in which we can all participate and have confidence.

We have a unique opportunity over the next few years to re-configure the planning system to ensure that it delivers for our economy and for our communities. I know that our staff will respond positively to meet the significant challenges that lie ahead.



CYNTHIA SMITH  
Chief Executive

## **The Planning Context**

### **The Programme for Government 2008-2011**

The Northern Ireland Executive's priorities and associated spending plans are set out in the Programme for Government 2008-2011 which was published in October 2007. Among the priority areas is a commitment to high quality public services which meet the needs of the economy and wider society. In this context, the Planning Service is committed to delivering a fundamental overhaul of the planning system by 2011 to ensure that it supports both economic and social development and environmental sustainability.

The Programme for Government 2008-2011 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.

### **Department of the Environment Corporate & Business Plan**

To support the Programme for Government, each Department prepares its own Corporate and Business Plan. The DoE Corporate and Business Plan sets out the actions to be taken to ensure delivery of the Department's targets and objectives for the 2008/09 business year as well as the reforms that will be undertaken during that time.

### **Planning Reform, including Implementation of Review of Public Administration**

A comprehensive programme of reform for the planning system in Northern Ireland was announced by the Minister, Arlene Foster, in November 2007. In addition, in March 2008, the Minister announced the outcome of the review of the local government aspects of the Review of Public Administration (RPA), which will lead to a radical restructuring of the planning system.

The reform programme currently underway encompasses changes over the short, medium and long term. The short term reform measures, which started during 2007/08 business year and are continuing, as appropriate, into 2008/09 and beyond are focused on helping to tackle current workload pressures and producing early improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in the handling of planning applications.

The medium to long-term reforms are expected to result in more fundamental changes, addressing all the key elements of the planning system including development plans, policy and development control. They will also take account of and enable the implementation of the Executive's decision in relation to the Review of Public Administration, with responsibility for the majority of planning functions transferring to local government in 2011.

A Consultation Paper on the proposals for reform is to be published during 2008/09. Revisions that can be implemented without the need for legislation will be taken

forward on an ongoing basis thereafter, while legislation required to support the remaining changes will be brought forward by 2011.

# The Planning Service

## Corporate Plan

2008/09 -  
2010/11

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Our Aim, Vision and Values

The aim of the Planning Service is to deliver a modern, effective planning system which meets the needs of the whole community and the economy while protecting the environment.

The Agency's vision is a better living and working environment for the people of Northern Ireland.

### 1.2. 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.

## 2. Agency Management

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

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 849. 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.

### 3. Financial Resources and Risk Management

#### 3.1 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 received its budget allocation for the 2007 budget period, which covers the spending plans for the years 2008/09 - 2010/11. The Agency has secured additional resources (£2.15M in 2008/09, £150K in 2009/10 and £250K in 2010/11) to take forward the wide-ranging reform of the planning system announced by our Minister in November 2007. However, 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.

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

2007/08	2008/09
11.9 M	13.1 M

#### 3.2 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.

## 4. Our Targets and Objectives

In support of its aim, the Agency has set a number of key medium term strategic objectives which are reflected in the corporate plan. The business plan provides additional detail on the actions that will be taken to deliver on these commitments.

### 4.1 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
Deliver a modern effective planning system which meets the needs of the whole community and the economy while protecting the environment.	<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"> <li>- 60% of major applications processed in 23 weeks</li> <li>- 70% of intermediate applications processed in 31 weeks</li> <li>- 80% of minor applications processed in 18 weeks.</li> </ul>

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.

### 4.2 Other Key Targets

In addition to the PSA targets, we have reflected a number of commitments in the DOE Corporate and Business Plan as follows:

- Year on year from 2008-11 decide all large-scale investment planning proposals within 6 months, provided there has been pre-application consultation.
- To implement the agreed programme for transferring planning functions to councils under the Review of Public Administration by March 2011.

#### 4.3 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><b>RESULTS</b></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><b>CUSTOMERS/STAKEHOLDERS</b></p> <p>To deliver good quality service to our customers and stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>PROCESSES</b></p> <p>To review, streamline, improve and monitor the Planning Service's key systems and processes.</p>	<p><b>RESOURCES</b></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. They set out how the Agency intends to implement its strategic objectives. Information on these objectives and the associated target timescales is contained in the business plan.

#### 5. Cross-Cutting Issues

We are committed to focusing not only on the objectives outlined in our business plan but also on wider issues that have significant implications for our work. These include:

- Sustainable Development Strategy
- Equality of Opportunity, Human Rights and Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Better Regulation and Enforcement
- NICS Reform

## 5.1 Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development refers to development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. There is growing realisation by all that the present nature and pace of development, with the associated consumption of finite natural resources and negative impacts, cannot be continued indefinitely. If we do not take decisive steps to reduce our impact on the natural world, we shall be faced with ever-growing problems in relation to pollution, scarcity of resources and a deterioration of the quality of life. This means that both short and long term environmental and social considerations need to be much more closely integrated with economic issues to bring about development that is sustainable for the future.

The planning system is a key mechanism for delivering sustainable development on the ground. All development plans are required by law to be in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy (RDS), which has embedded the need to accommodate development in a sustainable manner within its guiding principles.

In order to help implement the policy directions set out in the RDS, Planning Service has an ambitious programme for the preparation of a fit-for-purpose suite of development plans across the region and is committed to making progress despite the impact of recent judicial challenges. Within the past five and a half years, Planning Service has published three adopted plans and five draft plans, including the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 and, most recently, the Banbridge Newry and Mourne Area Plan 2015. Collectively, these cover 18 of the 26 Council areas in Northern Ireland. Planning Service has also been preparing three draft plans which include the West Tyrone Area Plan 2018, the Antrim/Ballymena/Larne Area Plan 2016 and the Armagh Area Plan 2018. These plans cover a further 6 council areas. Of the two remaining council areas, Derry is covered by an up to date adopted area plan. Although the Fermanagh Area Plan passed its notional 'end by' date at the end of December 2007, Planning Service is satisfied that it continues to provide a relevant planning framework for the district.

A fundamental review of the development plan process is already underway as part of the wider reform of the planning system announced by the Minister, Arlene Foster, in November 2007.

## 5.2 Equality of Opportunity, Human Rights and Anti-Poverty Strategy

The Planning Service is committed to ensuring that equality of opportunity and good relations is at the forefront of all its policies and programmes. It also strives to ensure that human rights implications of proposed policies and legislation are reviewed to ensure that proposals are compatible with the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

We will again contribute to the Department's progress report on commitments contained within the Department's Equality Scheme and to actions to be taken forward under the Departmental Anti-Poverty Strategy. In line with the rest of the Department, we will also continue to comply with the requirements set out in the European Charter for Minority Languages.

### 5.3 Better Regulation and Enforcement

Since 2001, Northern Ireland Departments have been operating under the Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy. The Strategy introduced an Enforcement Concordat which sets out the principles of good enforcement policy and practice. The Planning Service continues to adhere to the terms of this Concordat in pursuit of its enforcement duties.

The Agency is also contributing, through the Department, to an Action Plan in response to the Criminal Justice Inspection (NI) Report on Enforcement by DOE, published in October 2007. Planning Service welcomed the publication of the report, which reaffirmed that planning enforcement is an integral part of the planning system. The Report detailed twelve recommendations and stressed the need for more co-ordination within and between the agencies of the Department, particularly between the Planning Service and Environment and Heritage Service. The Planning Service recognises that an effective enforcement service is founded on effective partnerships and communication between a range of clients and stakeholders. The Agency will be working with Environment and Heritage Service to develop a structured framework for improved joint working and collaboration.

### 5.4 NICS Reform

The Planning Service will continue to support and implement the major programme of NICS reforms aimed at delivering higher quality public services.

The Agency will become integrated with the Account NI system, a financial shared service centre, in 2009.

HR Connect is the human resources service for Northern Ireland departments and the Northern Ireland Office. Implementation has begun with completion due late in 2008.

Records NI aims to provide information and records management within the NICS through the introduction of an electronic document and records management (EDRM) system. The new system has been rolled out to Planning Service Headquarters and all Divisional offices, although further work will be undertaken to optimise usage.

NI Direct is aimed at delivering much improved public access to central government information and services. The Planning Service has agreed to participate in the first phase of the project.

# The Planning Service

## Business Plan

2008/09

## 6. Planning Service Business Plan 2008/09

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. To adopt three Development Plans as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ards and Down Area Plan</li> <li>• Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Designations Plan 2010</li> <li>• Belfast Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) Subject Plan</li> </ul>	31 March 2009
2. Deliver prompt planning decisions	2. To improve overall processing times of planning applications to decision or withdrawal by 5% or 1 week reduction towards the 2011 PSA major, intermediate and minor targets against 2007/08 performance. <p>15% reduction in number of applications over 12 months old on 31 March 2008 baseline.</p> <p>75% of applications validated within 6 working days, 95% of applications validated within 10 working days.</p> <p>75% of decisions issued within 2 weeks of Council meeting, 95% of decisions issued within 4 weeks of Council meeting.</p>	31 March 2009
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 2009

4. Deliver planning reform (including Review of Public Administration in line with Ministerial direction)	4. Produce policy proposals on planning system reform	30 June 2008
	5. Seek Ministerial agreement to final policy	31 March 2009
	6. Engage with RPA implementation structures to provide for transfer of Planning functions	31 March 2009

## 6.2 Customers/Stakeholders

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

Business Critical Area	Target	Date for completion
1. Engage with customers/ stakeholders on improving the service and Planning Reform	7. Communicate and engage with stakeholders on Planning Reform and RPA decision planning	31 March 2009

## 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
1. Secure process improvements	<p>8. Implement the following process improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review overall development control processes and procedures</li> <li>Review procedure for handling housing applications</li> <li>Continue review of validation procedures</li> <li>Introduce a 'development management' work practice</li> <li>Implement agreed recommendations on council consultation</li> </ul>	31 March 2009

	<p>Roll out streamlined council consultation procedures to all councils with their agreement</p> <p>Review funding arrangements (particularly planning fees element)</p> <p>9. Implement the first 3 elements of ePIC</p>	31 March 2009
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## 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
1. Ensure that the Agency's resources are managed efficiently and effectively and with propriety in delivering the Agency's objectives	10. Implement year one of the 3 year Efficiency Delivery Plan	30 June 2008
2. Maintain an adequate level of appropriately skilled staff	11. Commence implementation of the Development Programme for specialist staff	31 March 2009
3. Maintain effective corporate governance	12. Implement all agreed audit recommendations within agreed timescales	31 March 2009

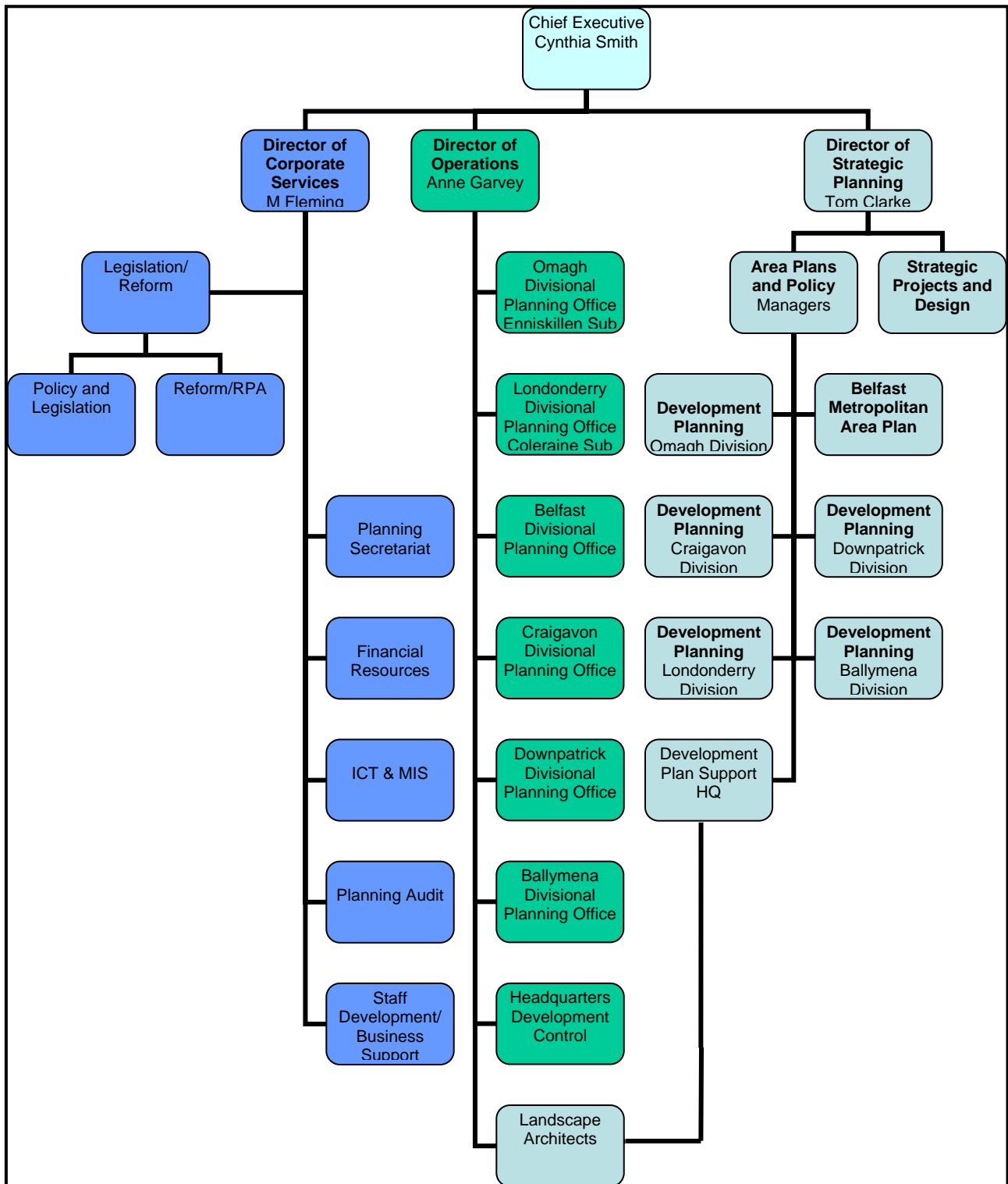
## 6.5 Implementation, Monitoring and Review

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 2008/09

	2008/09
	£m
Admin/DRC	27.8
Other Resource/Programme	7.8
Capital	0.1
Receipts	-22.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13.1</b>