



Review of Planning Services (2023)

MAY 2023



Introduction

There is a lot of background noise in politics, but one of the clearest messages to emerge from the last election was a desire for a government that focused on delivery, particularly delivery of new homes. This requires a planning system that works efficiently for the whole island. That is why in my ministerial priorities I identified the importance of a planning system that is responsive to the government's key priorities, including the delivery of new homes, responding to the climate emergency and protecting the natural and built environment.

There are always tensions between the need for more housing and policies designed to protect the environment. However, quite separate from these normal tensions, the island has the right to expect a planning service that is efficient, consistent and delivering high standards of customer service.

Currently we are falling short. There are a variety of reasons for this, but rather than focus on the past, I want to focus on the future. In order to drive change fast and effectively, I decided that an outside review - conducted by someone with considerable knowledge and experience of planning services - would offer a quick route to improvement.

Mr MacKinnon has produced a report with a clear-eyed analysis and practical, easily understood recommendations. I am happy to accept the recommendations in full.

It is important to note that the report highlights significant positives. The process of determining applications, the desire from within the department to support improvements, the open and transparent Planning Committee process, and the ambitious and rigorous Bridging Island Plan, all contribute to reasonable decision making which in turn we can see for ourselves as we live, work and play on our beautiful Island.

However, there is much work to do. I have set out my initial response to the report in an action plan, but more detail will follow. I will be setting an ambitious timescale for the transformation of planning services, in order to deliver real change for Islanders.



Deputy Jonathan Renouf
Minister for the Environment

The review of Planning services

In January of this year, I commissioned a review of the Government of Jersey's Planning services in accordance with my Ministerial Priorities for 2023:

4. Promoting flexibility, responsiveness, and efficiencies in the way that we work to best meet the needs of our customers by ensuring the planning system is responsive to key priorities; and developing a new Island Plan review process that is agile, efficient and easily accessible

The review analysed the functions of planning in Jersey (the way in which planning applications are dealt with, from start to finish) and made recommendations about how to deliver a better public service. It included issues such as customer experience, performance measures, resources, consistency, pre-application advice, post-decision services, and digital services.

Former Chief Planner to the Scottish Government, Jim Mackinnon CBE, was appointed to lead the review, which sought the views of stakeholders who interact with Planning services. Mr Mackinnon previously led a significant review of planning legislation in Scotland. Post retirement, his knowledge, experience and approach has been much in demand, both in the review of planning services in Northern Ireland, and conducting reviews to speed up decision-making on applications for forestry planting in Scotland and Ireland.

The service in Jersey has a history of evolution arising from external reviews. The Planning Officer Society Enterprises carried out analysis in 2010, 2013 and 2019, and subsequently we've seen changes including protocols for ministerial decision-making, the introduction of an independent appeals system, and greater transparency in the planning process. The Government restructure in 2019 saw the creation of the Regulation directorate, within which the planning function now sits. A new Group Director of Regulation was appointed in 2022 and the recruitment of a new Head of Development and Land is currently underway. This report offers an opportunity for new leadership to drive significant improvements in the delivery of planning services in the Island.

The Review of the Planning Service Action Plan

The recommendations from Mr Mackinnon's report and the Minister's Action Plan are as follows:

Title	Recommendation	Timescale for delivery	Minister's Action Plan
Improving the application process	Top priority is to introduce efficient, effective, and sustainable processes for validating and registering planning applications. The new process must be supported by robust IT systems, intensive staff training and clear communication with stakeholders.	Q3-2023	<p>The Minister agrees that this is a top priority, and the team will focus immediate efforts in this regard</p> <p>Recruitment for the new Head of Development and Land is underway, and a new Senior officer to lead the team in registration and validation with targets to improve customer experience, takes up their new role in June 2023. A replacement supervisor for the team is also currently advertised. These key staff replacements are crucial to the management of an effective service in the long term.</p> <p>In the interim, the technical support team will be enlarged with temporary agency staff for 6 months to clear the current backlog and re-establish normal workloads.</p> <p>A review of processes and the team structure will also be undertaken to maximise efficiency of processing applications, including support from the planning officers in the validation of applications.</p> <p>Software system, staff training and customer communication are addressed in other recommendations.</p>
Evaluating the application process	Developing new processes must reflect a rigorous evaluation of the information requirements in the draft validation matrix.	Q3-2023	<p>The Minister accepts the need for a validation checklist or matrix to be published which provides the public with clear guidelines on what level of information is required to be submitted for each type of application.</p> <p>This will be developed over the next few months, with the aim of publishing by the end of Q3.</p>
Monitoring Performance	An integrated set of data to monitor the performance of the planning service should be introduced.	Q1-2024	<p>The existing legacy computer system is unsupported and over 20 years old. This significantly limits the ability to extract performance monitoring data. Project RIDA is an investment in new technology to support a stable, effective and efficient platform for improvements to the planning service.</p> <p>This new system will be designed to report on service</p>

			<p>performance statistics and well as key information about housing units and land use, critical to inform key decision-making policies.</p> <p>The Minister will publish a list of Key Performance Indicators that will be monitored by the end of Q3, although monitoring these KPI's will only become fully possible with the deployment of RIDA in Q1 2024.</p> <p>The report highlights that the current investment for Project RIDA is aimed at stabilising the existing system. To develop a fully integrated system that can produce the efficiencies described in the report, an additional investment is required which has been put forward as a proposed bid for consideration in the draft Government Plan 2024-2027.</p>
Pre-Application Advice	For a trial period the Planning Applications Team should offer pre-application advice in the form of a meeting(s) with senior staff as an alternative to written advice.	Q2-2023	As part of the recommendation to re-introduce a duty officer service at Customer and Local Services, La Motte Street, customers will be able to book appointments with officers for pre-application advice. The officer will record the verbal advice given at the meeting in writing, which is given without prejudice to any formal decision.
Planning Processing Agreements	Planning Processing Agreements should be offered for all applications falling within Policy GD2 of the Bridging Island Plan and other applications which contribute to the Common Strategic Policy 2023 to 2026 with particular priority to proposals which will address the housing needs of Jersey.	Q4-2023	<p>Planning Processing Agreements (PPA) improve transparency in the process through a project management tool for major and complex applications. PPAs are widely used in other jurisdictions and are fully supported by the Minister in bringing a more effective planning service.</p> <p>Bringing PPAs to the Jersey system will require research into best practice and what kind of PPA is most appropriate in the context of Jersey. Consultation with stakeholders and industry will be required before implementation.</p>
Concordat with Industry	Consideration should be given to drawing up a concordat with the development industry to support sustainable economic development on the island.	Q4-2023	The Minister's priority is to align business, community and planning interests through a responsive and effective planning service. The creation of a concordat will define what the Minister is seeking to achieve and how this can be achieved through priorities, performance management and reporting. This will need to be achieved through consultation with customers, industry and other States Members.

Customer Service Charter	A Customer Service Charter should be introduced to include, inter alia, performance targets for registering and validating planning applications and responding to inquiries, for example returning phone calls.	Q4-2023	The Minister is keen to introduce a Customer Service Charter which includes performance targets and service level agreements across all aspects of the planning service. This Customer Service Charter should include feedback from customers and industry on expected levels of services and as such will need consultation prior to publication. This engagement on a Charter will couple with the recommendations of industry engagement sessions and the development of the concordat.
Customer Reception	An important element of making the Planning Service more visible, accessible and customer focused should include the re-opening of a front office and reception area.	Q2-2023	<p>The Government of Jersey's 'One Front Door' is the Customer and Local Services building at La Motte Street. Prior to Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, planning and building officers maintained a duty officer service for pre-application advice and queries to customers. Since then, officers have been meeting customers on a 'by appointment' basis.</p> <p>In the future, customers will be able to meet with planning officers in the new Government Office Headquarters from 2024.</p> <p>In the interim until the move to the new HQ, the planning and building duty officer service will be reinstated at the CLS building in La Motte Street.</p>
Customer Experience	A system of customer feedback should be introduced to obtain balanced feedback on customer service.	Q2-2023	<p>The Minister fully supports the need for obtaining customer feedback and taking action as a result of that feedback. Promoting customer experience feedback is crucial and will be actioned as a priority.</p> <p>By using the Government of Jersey Customer Feedback Policy and management system, feedback will be recorded and managed, reported quarterly to managers and an action plan put in place for implementation of learning.</p> <p>There will also be staff training to recognise and record customer feedback, leadership meetings will review all feedback and actions, and this will be reported in the industry forums established under the below recommendations.</p>
Industry Engagement	A step change in the quality of engagement with the development industry is required to ensure planners are better known.	Q3-2023	The Minister is keen to establish an Industry Partnership Board, which would meet quarterly with the new Head of Development and Land, and others as appropriate, to improve relationships with

			industry and planners and create a forum for discussion of key issues and changes.
Industry Forums	Regular short forums with the industry, involving consultees where appropriate, for explaining and receiving feedback on key issues and planned changes should be introduced.	Q3-2023	Engagement with the industry and consultees on key issues and planned changes will be introduced through a series of forums, breakfast bites, and online seminars. First topics for discussion will be a customer feedback agreement, concordat, training opportunities, linking the other recommendations together. This would couple with the recommendation for an Industry Partnership Board.
Training & Professional Development	There should be a more focused training programme with priority given to subjects which will provide planners with the knowledge and skills to discharge their duties and responsibilities more effectively. Consultees have indicated their willingness to assist with delivering an on-island training programme.	Q3-2023	A training programme for planners will be prepared which will include opportunities for job related training, formal education, conferences and seminars, and consultee lunch and learns, all of which will aim to address subjects in which planners feel their understanding is lacking. The programme will combine offers from on-island consultees, industry professionals, as well as professional bodies such as the Royal Town Planning Institute.
Celebrating Success	A system of Planning Awards should be introduced to celebrate successes, for example in pre-application discussion, design statements and place making.	Q1-2024	The Jersey Architectural Design Awards are a celebration of excellence in architecture and design in Jersey. The Awards are a collaboration between the Association of Jersey Architects (AJA) and the Government of Jersey. The Minister supports this celebration and working with the AJA, will explore the expansion of award categories to include place making, design statement and community consultation.
Compliance Strategy	An Enforcement/Compliance Strategy should be drawn up to explain the approach to compliance.	Q4-2023	The Comptroller and Auditor General Report of 2019 into the Use of Enforcement Powers recommended the publication of a compliance strategy across regulation, which aligns with this recommendation. A Regulator's Code and a Compliance Strategy will be prepared with publication by the end of the year. This is an important step towards a more transparent and accessible service and is supported by the Minister.

Early intervention	A potential role for Building Control in the early stages of construction should be explored.	Q1-2024	The Minister is keen to explore how a joined-up planning and building service can support each other. Improved technology through Project RIDA will assist with information sharing between the teams, enabling more effective collaboration in the service. Working together as a team will be a priority for the new Head of Development and Land.
Improvement Plan	An ambitious but deliverable Improvement Plan - supported by a Communications Strategy - should be drawn up based on the Minister for the Environment's conclusions on the Recommendations of the Review	Q2-2023	The Minister accepts all recommendations in full and has outlined his high level action plan in this document. Some of the recommendations require consultation with internal teams, customers, the industry and other States Members before a detailed Implementation Plan (IP) is agreed with actions, responsibilities, measures and review dates. This detailed IP which will be updated regularly and shared across Government, industry and the public will be in place within 3 months.