

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) – 28 June 2022

COUNCILLOR	PORTFOLIO	DATE
Daren Veidman	Cabinet Member Planning	28 June 2022

Introduction

1.1 The Planning Service is set up to operate the Council's regulatory functions in relation to the development and use of land.

1.2 It comprises the following functions:

- Development Management
- Building Control
- Local Plans
- Heritage and Conservation

These are supported by the Technical Support team.

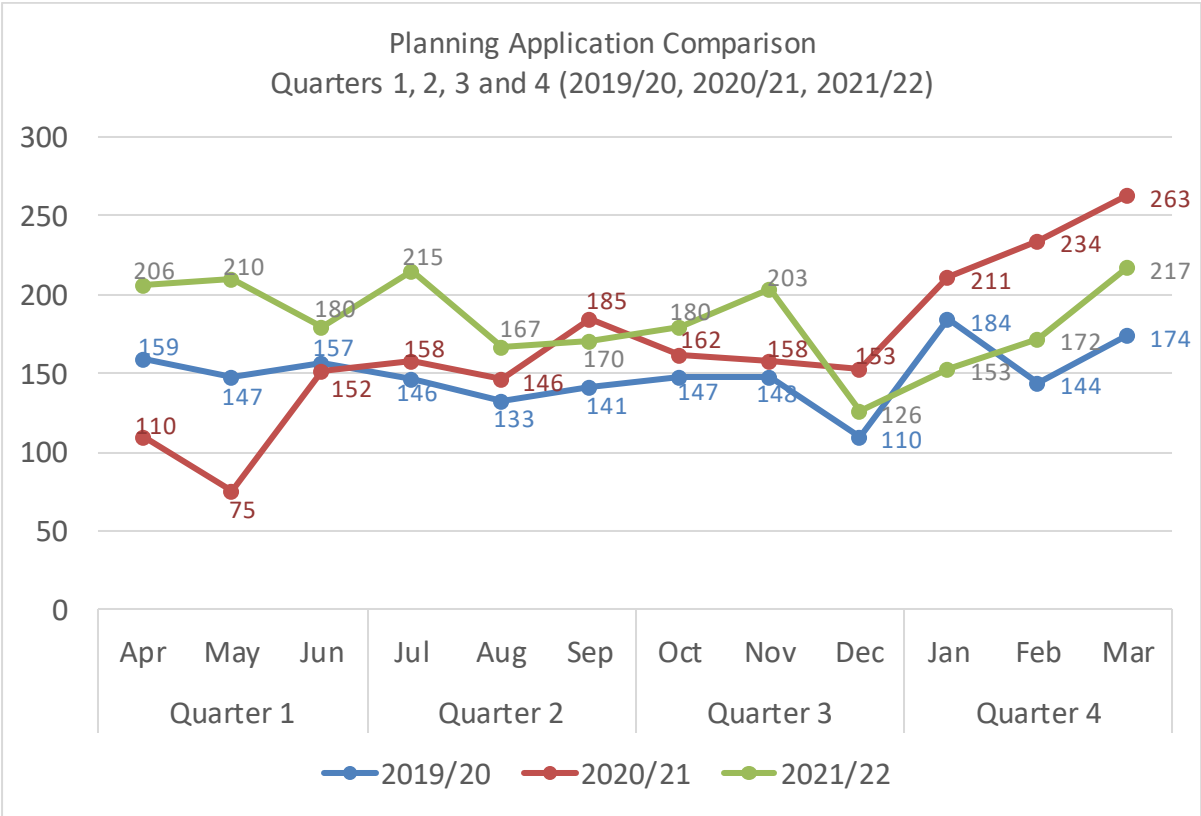
1.4 The graphs in this report compare Quarters 1 - 4 from the past three years, providing a comparison of activity pre-COVID, in the early days of COVID and more recently as we have begun to emerge from COVID.

1.5 A key focus as we have worked from home has been looking after staff mental health. We have carried out two surveys and devised an action plan. These have been received positively and sickness absence is at its lowest level ever.

1.6 We recognise the importance of customer satisfaction and the need to understand how our customers feel about the service they receive. We are currently addressing this with a survey of agents who submit planning applications to us.

2. Development Management

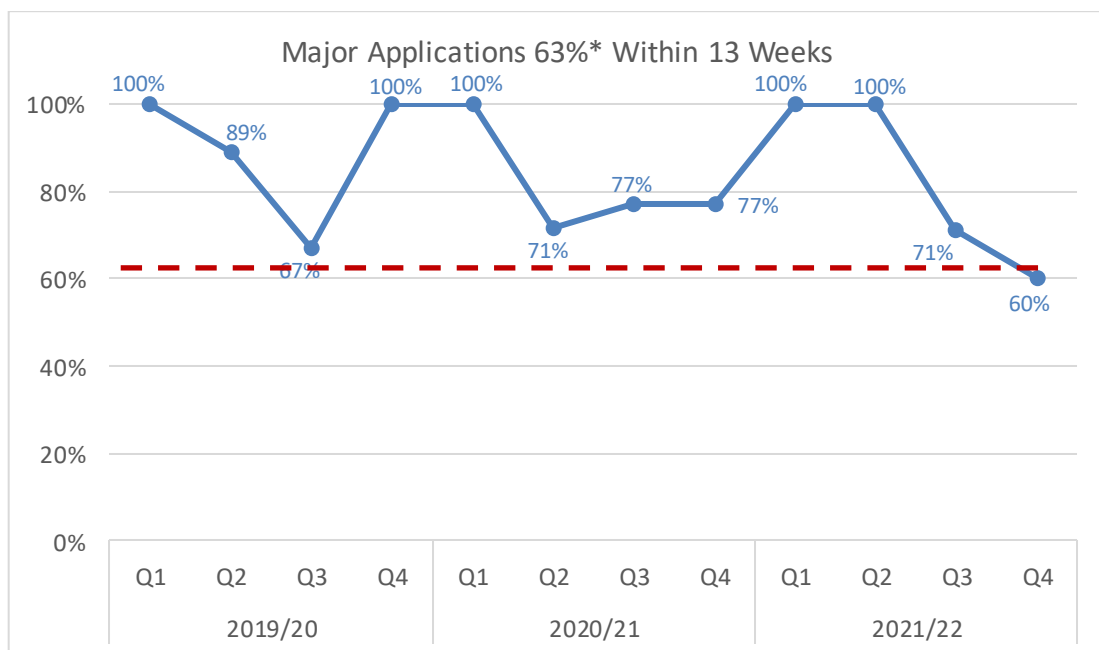
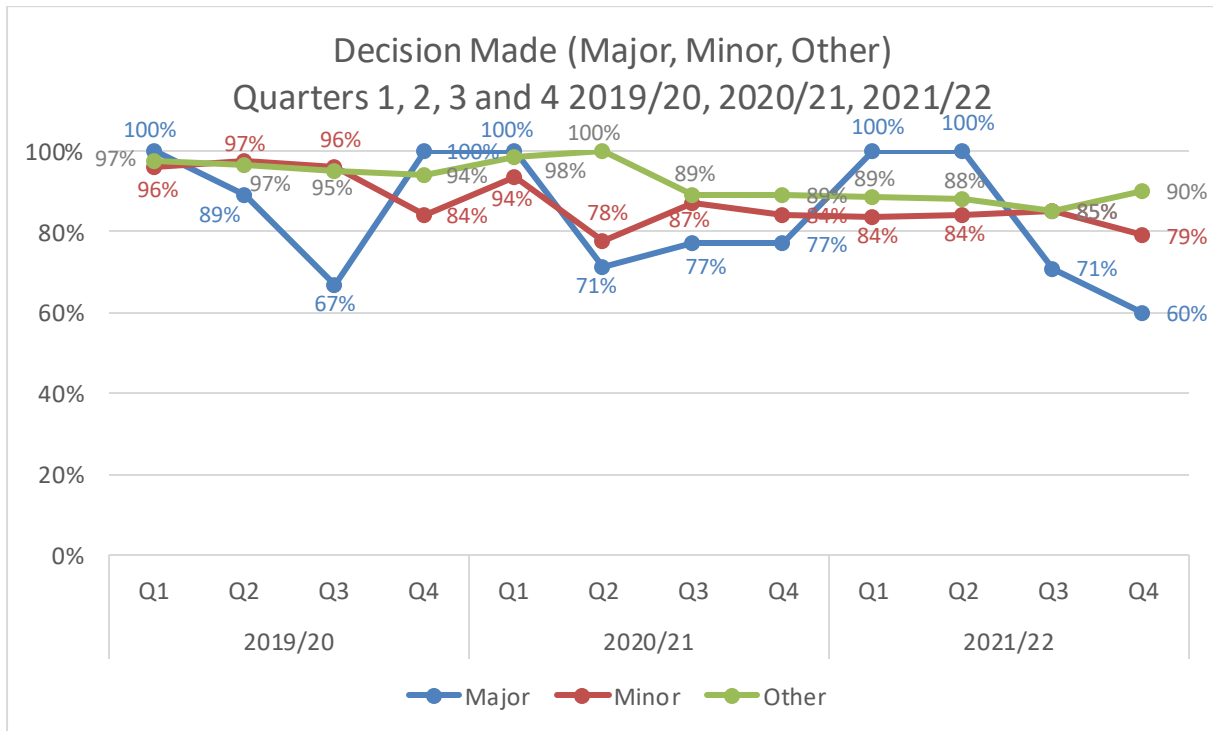
2.1 The graph below shows the number of planning applications received during Quarters 1 - 4 in the years 2019, 2020 and 2021. It demonstrates that though there was a significant dip in applications following the onset of COVID 19, activity has picked up since then and the number of applications received in 2021-22 was just under 30% higher than the number for the same period in both 2019-20 and 2020-21.



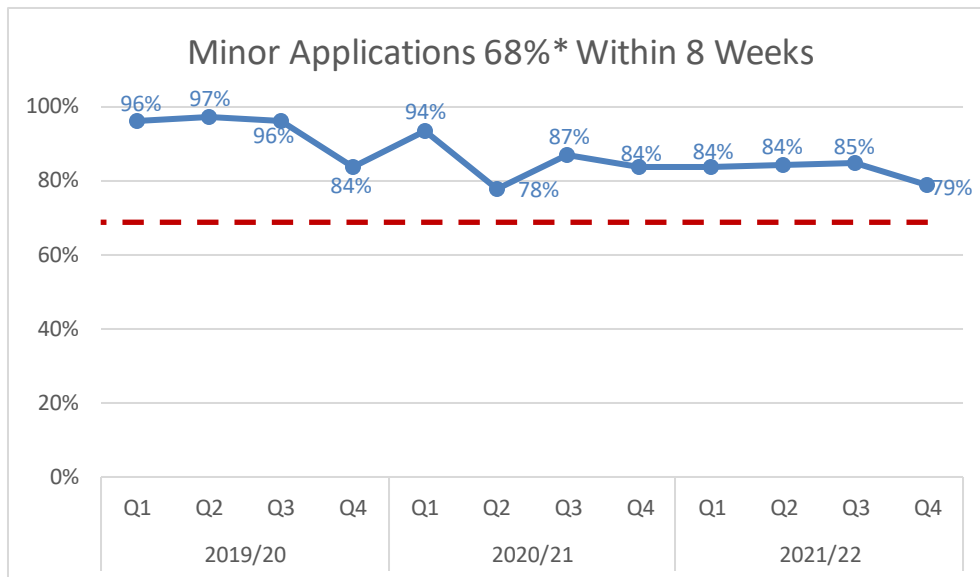
2.2 The chart below shows the performance of the Service over the same time periods. The rate of determining applications ‘minor’ and ‘other’ applications (this comprises the vast majority of all applications) has slowed down a little in 2021 - 22. This is only to be expected given the high numbers of applications received during 2020. The determination rate still significantly exceeds national and local targets.

2.3 This is a major achievement but has depended on the ability to agree ‘Extensions of Time’ with the applicant. This gives us more time to determine applications and still meet Government targets. The case for more resources has been accepted and we have been able to recruit to a number of posts with new staff coming into post in March / April 2022.

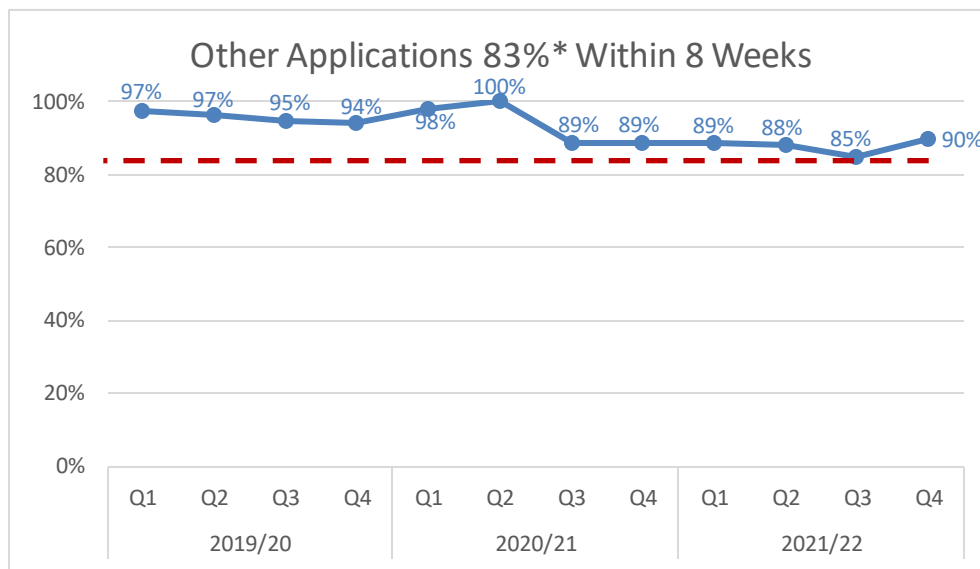
Key performance against national targets for speed and quality of decision making:
Quarters 1 - 4 (April – December): 2019 - 2021



*Local Target



*Local Target



*Local Targets

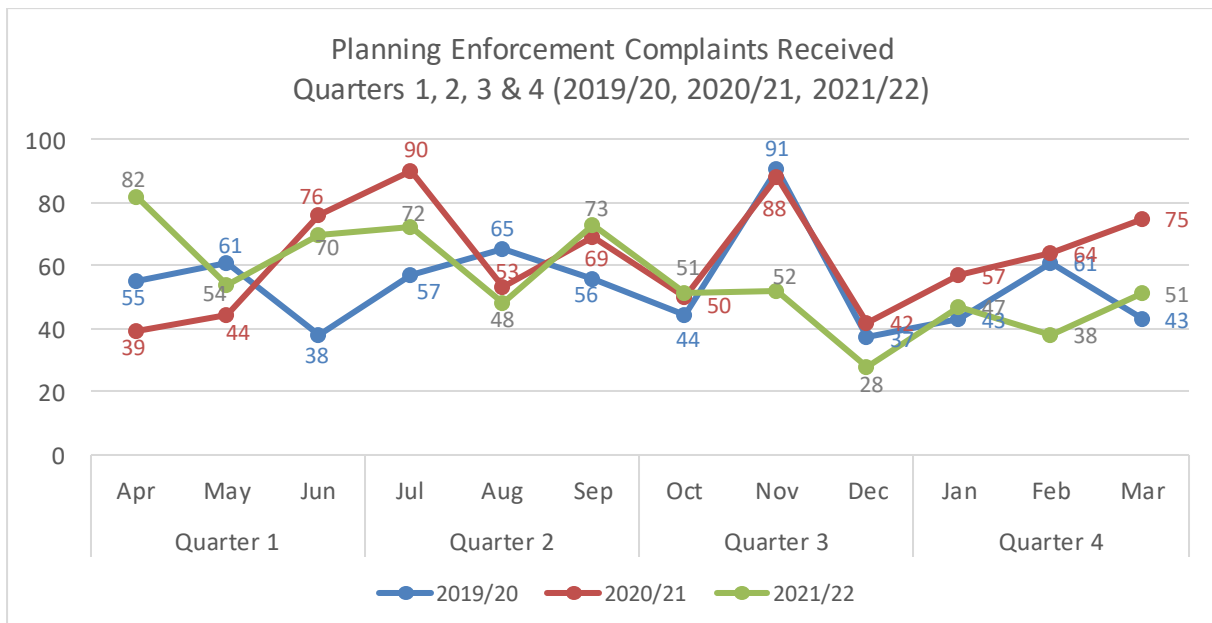
- 2.4 The pressure on this part of the Service continues with planning applications having been received for 31 of the 47 housing sites allocated in the Local Plan (approximately 5,400 homes (as at 30 November 2021). This equates to 73% of the homes allocated in the Local Plan.
- 2.5 The capacity of the Service is stretched by the increased pressure relating to dealing with many complex and contentious applications. Whilst working from home has not presented any major issues it does however have some implications for performance. It is a significant team effort across the Service to assess and determine applications expediently and in line with Government targets.

Planning Committee

- 2.6 Planning Committee deal with major applications and those which are subject to a petition or have been 'called in'.
- 2.7 We are now regularly livestreaming committees due to the limited capacity for members of the public in Bootle Town Hall.

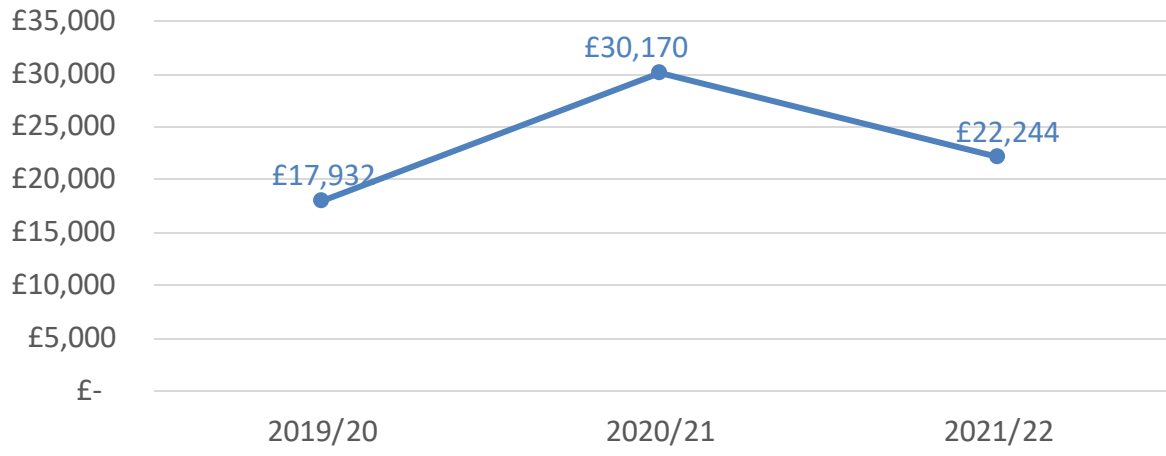
Enforcement

- 2.8 At the start of lockdown there was a significant dip in the number of enforcement complaints. However within a few weeks this began to rise again and the number of complaints significantly exceeded those in the same period the previous year. There was another peak in complaints in late 2020 when there was a further lockdown. These might be explained by more people working from home and deciding to carry out development to their home, and more people noticing what is happening as they are also based at home. Complaints in 2021 show lower levels than just after the onset of COVID, but higher than pre-COVID numbers.



- 2.9 The chart below shows the income generated from following up complaints which has resulted in planning applications being submitted, with a steady rise from 2019 to 2020 and then a drop back in 2021.

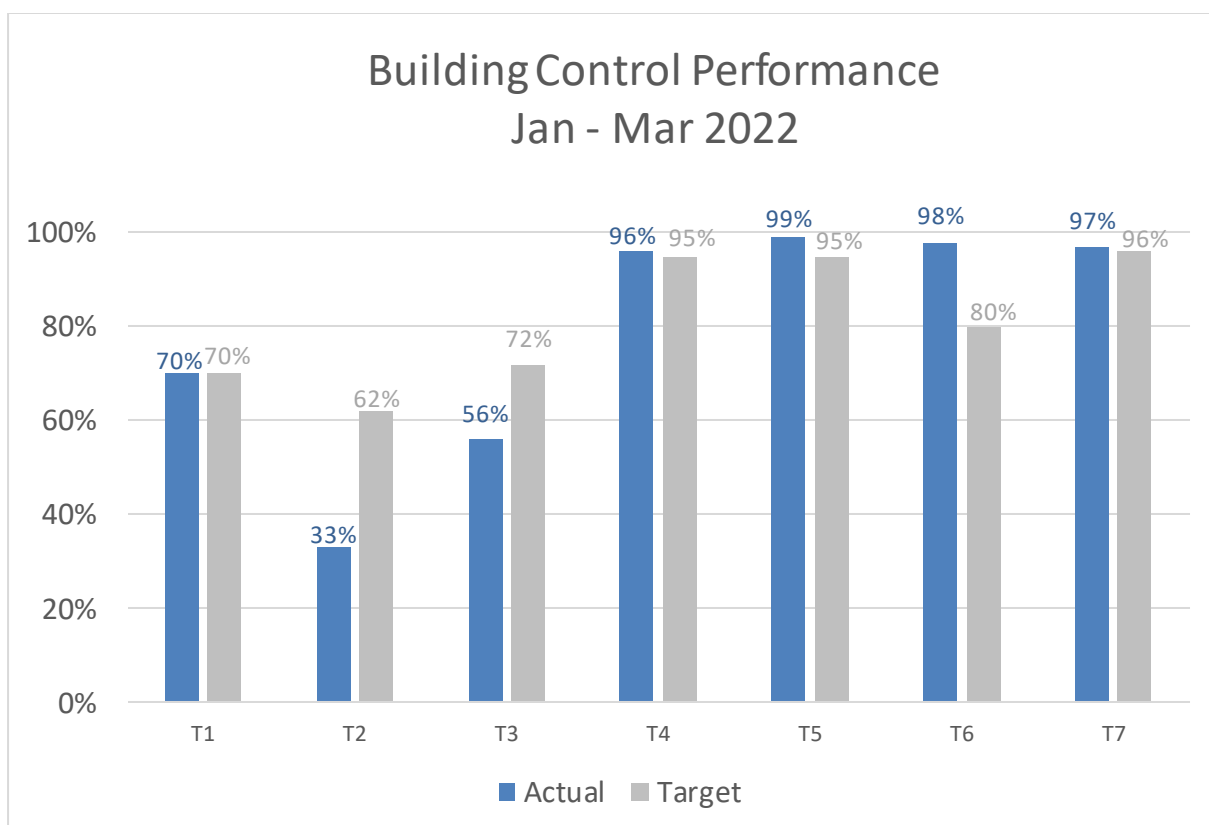
Enforcement - Income Generated from Retrospective
Applications (Q1 - Q4)
(2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22)



3. Building Control

Performance targets

3.1 The number of building regulation applications received compared to earlier years is shown elsewhere in this report. This section focuses on the Building Control Team's performance over that last quarter (Quarter 4 Jan-Mar 2022), as shown in the tables below:



	Detail	Target	Actual	Remarks
T1	Market share	70%	70%	Target being met
T2	Full Plans app decision / schedule within 3 weeks	62%	33%	Target not being met – increased workload, covering site work, staffing
T3	Full Plans app decision / schedule within 5 weeks	72%	56%	Target not being met – increased workload, covering site work, staffing
T4	Full Plans app conditionally or fully approved	95%	96%	Target being exceeded
T5	Site insp's carried out on day they were arranged for	95%	99%	Target being exceeded
T6	Customer satisfaction rating (from March 2019)	80%	98%	Target being exceeded - from 2019 ISO customer questionnaire
T7	Sickness absence – attendance levels	96%	98%	Target being exceeded

3.2 The Building Control Team continues to meet its key statutory targets in relation to plan-checking and the carrying out of site inspections. It is also meeting the majority of the locally set performance targets. Results for year 2021/22 show that the Team's market share was 70% - which is equal to or better than that of neighbouring authorities and is significantly above the average for English Councils, which stands at 65%. However, results from 2021/22 show that the Teams market share has reduced slightly to that of the previous financial year. This is mainly due to the loss of two Building Control Team Leaders to private sector Building Control, who will have taken some key clients with them. The Team's performance in respect of timely decision making on deposited applications shows that all statutory targets are being met. However, due to an increased number of Building Regulation applications being received and staffing shortages, the performance against some of the locally set targets (including market share) has shown a slight reduction in 2021/22 compared to the previous year.

Income and financial performance

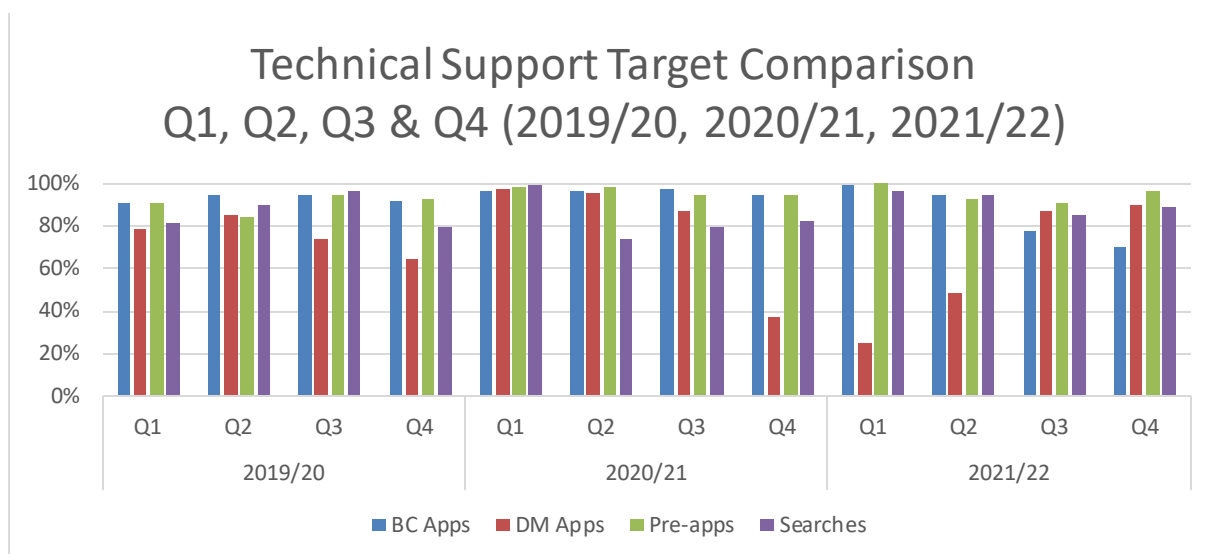
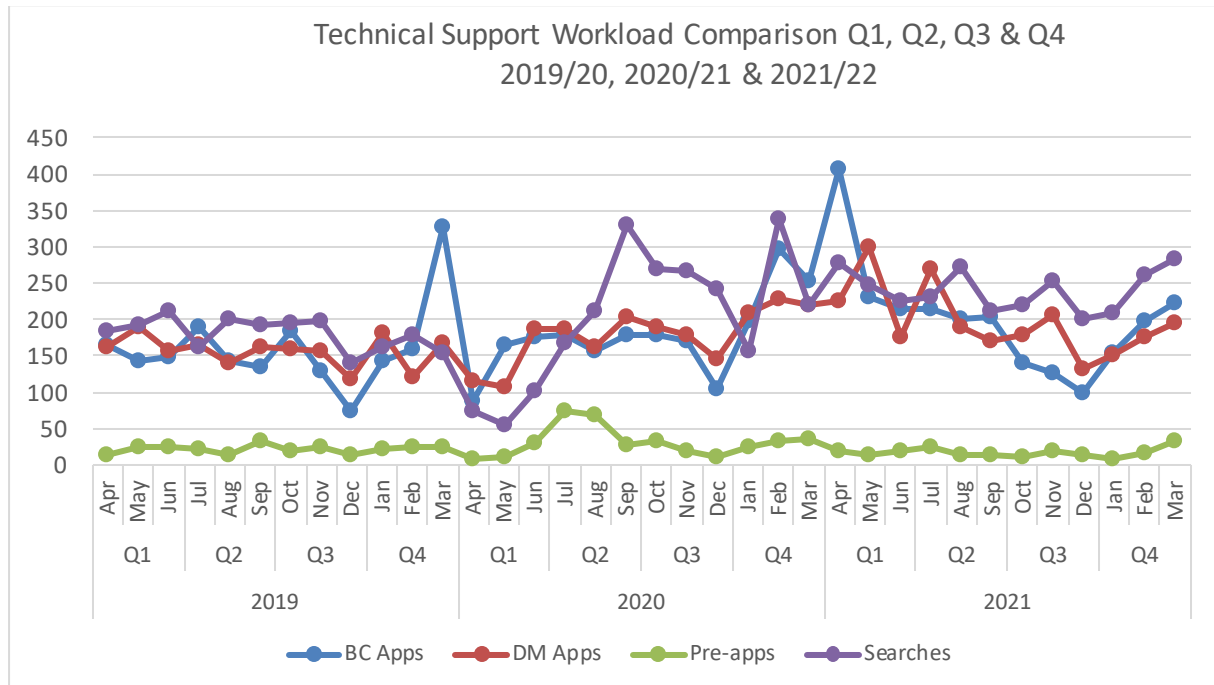
3.3 Building Regulation income for 2020/21 delivered an operating surplus - which will be used to off-set the cost of providing the statutory elements of the service, such as dealing with dangerous structures and safety at sports grounds. As of month 11 of 2021/22, income remains on course to deliver another operating surplus.

Safety at sports grounds

3.4 As part of conditions of the Safety Certificates held by Southport FC, Marine FC and Aintree Racecourse, the Building Control Team undertakes annual inspections in order to check the grandstands are properly maintained.

4. Technical Support

4.1 The chart below shows performance over the financial year compared with the same periods for 2019 and 2020.



Detail	Target	Actual	Remarks
Planning Apps validated within 5 days	84%	90%	Target being exceeded
Pre Apps validated within 3 days	93%	96%	Target being exceeded
BC Applications registered within 3 days	96%	70%	Target not met. The average number of days remains at 3 days overall but the percentage is lower when assessing all information
Searches completed within 7 days	80%	89%	

- 4.2 As can be seen from the graphs above, the number of applications and service requests across the Service appears to be stabilising. Quarter 4 has seen an improvement in performance over Quarter 3 in respect of the validation of planning applications. Performance is good, and over target in most areas. One key member of the team has left the team this quarter and another remains on maternity leave. This will have an impact on the performance of the team until additional resources are in place. Two apprentices have been recruited who are due to start work in early May.
- 4.3 The team is multi-functional, and resources are allocated to the most urgent priorities daily. Whilst there has been an increase in performance on the planning application and land charges functions this has led to a slight reduction in performance against the targets for building control registration.
- 4.5 The new Monitoring Officer is now in place and will be focussing on the monitoring of S106 legal agreements.
- 4.6 An improvement in performance across all areas is anticipated once the new recruits are in place and have received the requisite training.

4.7 **Service Development**

Work is progressing the transfer of the Local Land Charges Register to HM Land Registry. The project is now in the data extraction and data cleansing phases and completion is anticipated at the end of 2022. Data extraction time has been longer than anticipated due to technical and scheduling issues across Technical Support, Agilisys, iDox and HM Land Registry. However, confidence remains high that the project will be delivered by the end of the year.

- 4.8 In house training for the validation team has been taking place to ensure continued improvement in performance and quality of validation.

5. Local Planning

The Sefton Local Plan

- 5.1 Planning applications continue to be submitted on allocated sites. Of the 47 housing sites allocated in the Local Plan (policy MN2) planning applications have been received for 31, equating to approximately 5,400 homes (as at 30 November 2021). This equates to 73% of the homes allocated in the Local Plan.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and other policy documents

- 5.2 The Planning Policy Team are currently working on a number of Supplementary Planning Documents to support the Local Plan. These include:
- Affordable Housing
 - Conversions to Flats and HMOs
 - New Housing
 - House Extensions
 - Sustainable Travel
 - Social Value in development
- 5.3 Whilst these have been delayed a little due to staff being temporary used for other projects, it is anticipated these will be made available for public consultation in the 2022.

Liverpool City Region work

- 5.4 The Combined Authority undertook early engagement with the public on the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the Liverpool City Region concluding January 2020 to which the Council submitted comments. The next stage of consultation on the SDS is expected in Summer 2022 and the Council will fully engage with this, and the supporting evidence.

Bootle Area Action Plan

- 5.5 To help support the regeneration and transformation of the wider Bootle area it has been decided to produce a Bootle Area Action Plan (AAP). This will set out a vision, objectives, projects, policies and priorities for the area. This will be led by the Planning Policy Team. In order to assist with this work, the Council has been successful in securing funding from a range of sources for various aspects of the Bootle AAP. These are:
- £138,000 from the Combined Authority to secure consultants to help with the AAP document preparation, background evidence and community engagement

- £50,000 from the MHCLG for the Council to test the Draft Model Design Toolkit in Bootle as a pilot scheme. Sefton was one of 14 Local Planning Authorities that were successful (out of over 70 applicants)
- £14,000 from the Local Government Association to procure guidance on a range of project delivery methods.

5.6 The first draft iteration of the Bootle AAP was approved by Cabinet on 7 October for consultation. Public consultation on the Bootle AAP Issues and Options paper was undertaken from November to 31 January 2022. The engagement included a 12-page newsletter delivered to all 22,000 homes and businesses in the Bootle AAP area, a number of drop-in events and a number of targeted online discussions will be undertaken in the New Year. The Council are currently considering all the comments made.

5.7 The Design Pilot work is now completed, and the report has been submitted to the MHCLG. The Design Pilot focussed on canal side sites in Bootle. Public engagement was undertaken on this over the summer. The Design Pilot will help to inform the strategy and policies in the emerging Bootle AAP. The report received exceptionally positive feedback from the MHCLG (now DLUHC - Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities).

Other work

5.8 The Planning Policy team continues to provide policy advice on all relevant planning applications and pre-application inquiries, including large housing developments on the Local Plan allocations.

5.9 Following recent applications and appeal hearings for traveller accommodation sites, it has been decided that the Council's evidence base for gypsy and traveller accommodation needs to be updated.

5.10 The Council is also undertaking a replacement Playing Pitch Strategy so that we have the evidence to deal with applications on existing playing pitches or can help secure contributions for improvements to existing pitches from large development proposals. The new strategy will also help support the Council's applications for funding for improvements to its playing pitches. This will be a complicated and multidisciplinary piece of work and will be managed and led by the Local Planning team. KKP consultants have been appointed to undertake this work and are currently undertaking the site assessments.

5.11 To inform a future Sefton Local Plan review, and the emerging Bootle AAP, the Council wish to commission an Employment Land and Premises Study. This will look at the need for employment land and premises in Sefton and assess the Council's current supply and make a recommendation on whether a shortfall, or over-supply, exists or not. .

6. Heritage and Conservation

Heritage at Risk

- 6.1 We are continuing to work towards the removal of the 6 Conservation Areas from the National Heritage at Risk Register. This includes a number of different work areas including raising their profile through Twitter and Facebook, regeneration funding bids, working with the local community, Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, taking enforcement and other legal action in relation to a number of derelict sites and listed buildings in these areas.
- 6.3 Progress has been made on a number of Heritage at Risk sites including working with colleagues and partners on a number of Council owned Listed Buildings to secure their improvement and long term use and sustainability.

Regeneration

- 6.4 The capital build part of the Southport Townscape Heritage project is progressing, and discussions continue with targeted building and discussions with interested property owners.
- 6.5 The learning and skills part of the Southport Townscape Heritage project has made significant progress in developing complementary training and education initiatives. This includes Southport's Victorians is a ninety minute interactive play aimed at school children aged 9-14yrs. Excerpts of the script have been filmed and have been uploaded to Youtube. We are looking to find ways of introducing this into the curriculum and host live performances of the play at The Atkinson for Southport based Primary Schools in the autumn. A successful and comprehensive week of Heritage Open Days was undertaken in the town centre last September 10-19th Sept with a repeat being planned for this autumn. This will again include town trails and a special children's heritage treasure trail. Volunteers have been recruited for a variety of events programmed over the next three years including "Built on Sand – 200 Years of Southport's Changing Street Scene" an interactive exhibition which the Atkinson will host from 25th June. We are also working closely with the CVS, Southport Civic Society and other local organisations.
- 6.6 Discussions have taken place on a number of Heritage at Risk sites which are considered to be key strategic sites to find new uses or upgrade them to modern facilities so that they continue to be or find their optimum viable use and save them from further deterioration.
- 6.7 Design work is being finalised on the public realm improvements of Scarisbrick Avenue. This public realm project is integral to the Southport Townscape Heritage project and is within the main cluster of target properties in order to complement the buildings themselves. The public realm will focus on high quality paving and new street lighting.

Other Projects

- 6.8 After a successful joint bid from Sefton, Knowsley and Wirral Councils the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government awarded a grant to develop both the supporting documentation (selection criteria) and to establish a system for members of the public to propose heritage assets for local listing. The Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS), a joint environmental service, are leading on the project which has appointed a project officer and set up a website <http://local-heritage-list.org.uk/merseyside> which is inviting nominations of buildings to be included. Nominations to be received by 31st March 2023.

Advice to Development Management team

- 6.9 The pressure on this part of the Service has increased significantly over the past year for consultation requests on planning applications and pre-applications relating to a number of Listed Buildings and developments within a number of our Conservation Areas and non-designated heritage assets. The number of consultation requests in Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec 21) is 167 and 148 for Quarter 4 (Jan – Mar 22).
- 6.10 This is a significant rise in workload in this area. Back in Quarter 3 of last year this number was up on the figures for the previous two quarters, mainly in response to the rise in pre-applications as a result of the fee being waived. However this number has been exceeded in Quarter 1 this year despite the fee no longer being waived. In addition, this part of the Service continues to assist in various appeals, on-site monitoring and enforcement cases.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The past two years have been unprecedented for the Council. The Service has strived to maintain high levels of performance, but sustained increases in the numbers of applications and staffing issues have begun to impact on performance and a number of key targets are unlikely to be met this year.
- 7.2 Appropriate technology has been put in place to support staff and services, and staff have performed to the best of their ability. Staff surveys show the service has been able to respond to key issues in order to maintain essential services whilst maintaining staff morale.
- 7.3 The service has risen to the challenge posed by Covid with an innovative package of measures to promote and encourage economic activity by incentivising development, and the Council has been recognised nationally for this exceptional approach. We are seeing the results of this now with numbers of applications for planning permission and building approval restored to, and

exceeding, pre-Covid levels which is maintaining inward investment into the Borough.

- 7.4 A new measure aimed at making the planning process more transparent and participants more accountable in the form of publishing comments online has taken a short while to embed. This has now been successfully embedded and enhances the service we provide to the public.