

**CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)**  
**8 November 2022**

COUNCILLOR	PORTFOLIO	DATE
Daren Veidman	Cabinet Member Planning	08 November 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
- Enforcement
- Building Control
- Local Plans
- Heritage and Conservation
- Trees

These are supported by the Technical Support team.

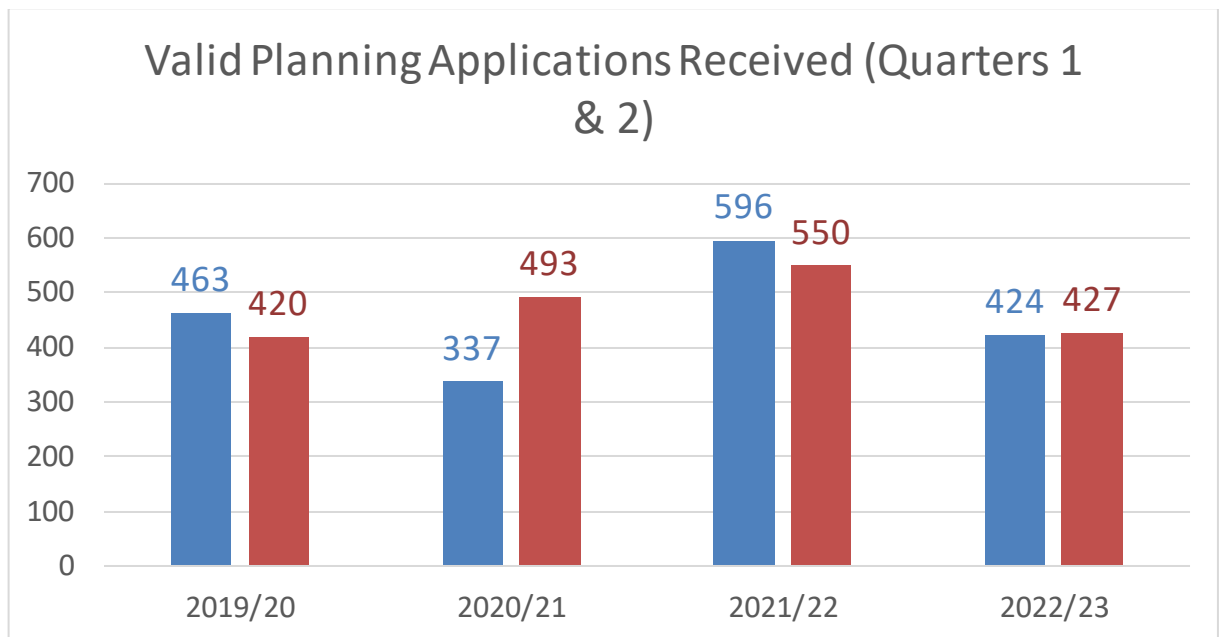
1.3 A key focus as we have worked from home has been looking after staff wellbeing. We have carried out two surveys and devised an action plan. These have been received positively and sickness absence is at its lowest level ever.

1.4 We recognise the importance of customer satisfaction and the need to understand how our customers feel about the service they receive. We have addressed this with a survey of agents who submit planning applications to us and the overall response is they consider us to be the most efficient planning authority in the Liverpool City Region. We held a staff away day in May 2022 and the focus was on customer care.

1.5 We also know how importance it is to look after staff given most are still working from home most of the time and this is likely to continue. The Management Team have completed Mental Health First Aid training over the past quarter. We have organised various events to promote staff wellbeing including two walks during the summer and regular opportunities for staff to come together for a chat on Teams called 'Time to Talk'.

## 2. Development Management

2.1 The graph below shows the number of planning applications received during Quarters 1 & 2 in the years 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. It demonstrates that though there was a significant dip in applications following the onset of COVID 19, activity picked up significantly since then and has since settled back to a similar level to pre-Covid. Looking at the only the first half of the year only gives a partial picture so it will be important to review successive quarters to identify any longer term trends.

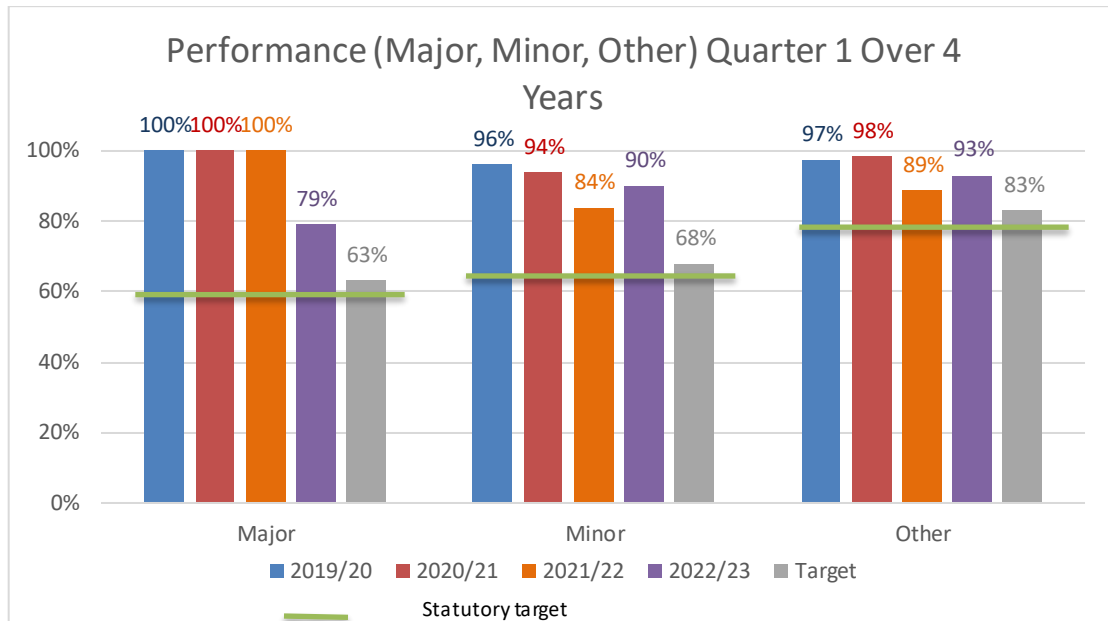


2.2 The charts below show the performance of the Service over the same time periods. The rate of determining 'minor' and 'other' applications (this comprises the vast majority of all applications) has continued to pick up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2022 after a fall in 2021. The lower rate of determining these kinds of applications in 2021 was only to be expected given the high numbers received during that period. The determination rate this year significantly exceeds national and local targets.

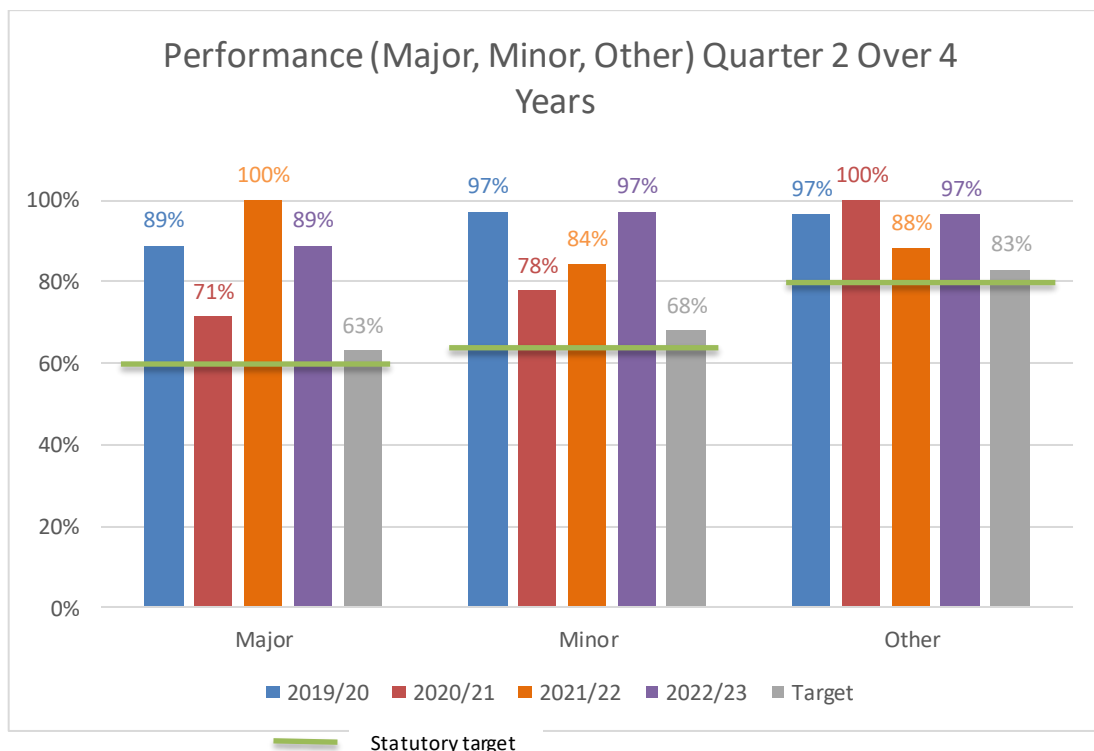
2.3 There was dip in the number of 'major' applications determined in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2022-23 though this rose in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. However, there are comparatively few applications in this category so even one application not meeting its target can result in a reduction of 10 percentage points.

2.4 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. We are reviewing our approach to extensions of time.

Key performance against national targets for speed and quality of decision making:  
Quarter 1 (April – June): 2019 - 2022



Key performance against national targets for speed and quality of decision making:  
Quarter 2 (July - September): 2019 - 2022

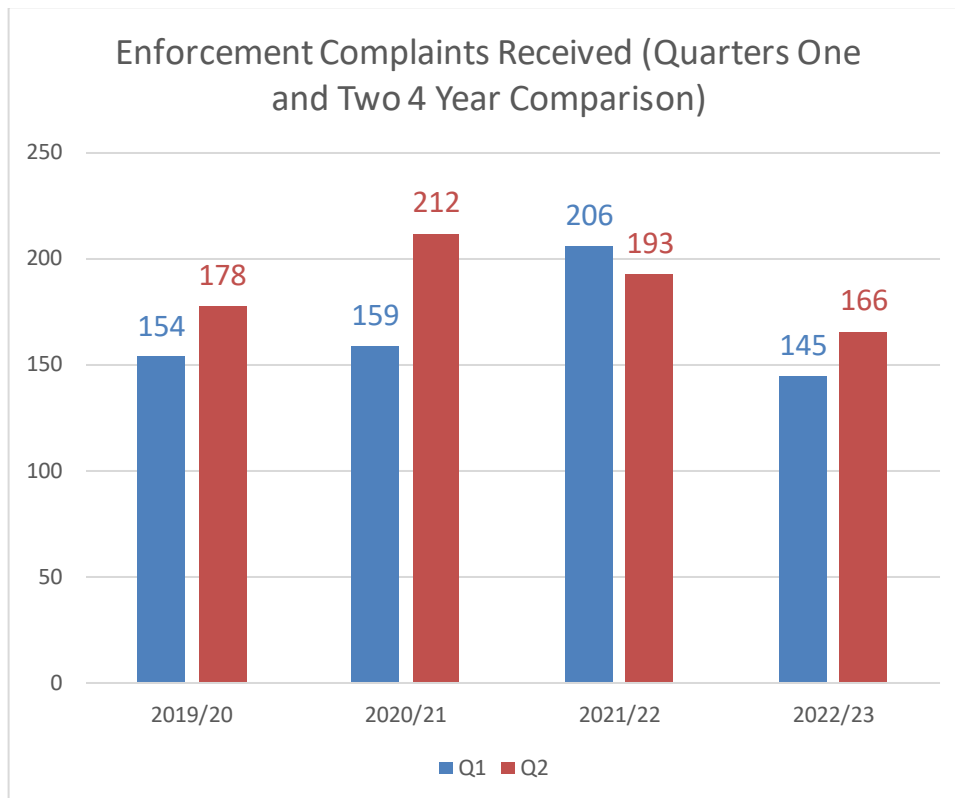


2.5 The pressure on this part of the Service continues with planning applications having been received for 31 of the 47 housing sites allocated in the Local Plan, approximately 5,416 homes as at 30 September 2022.

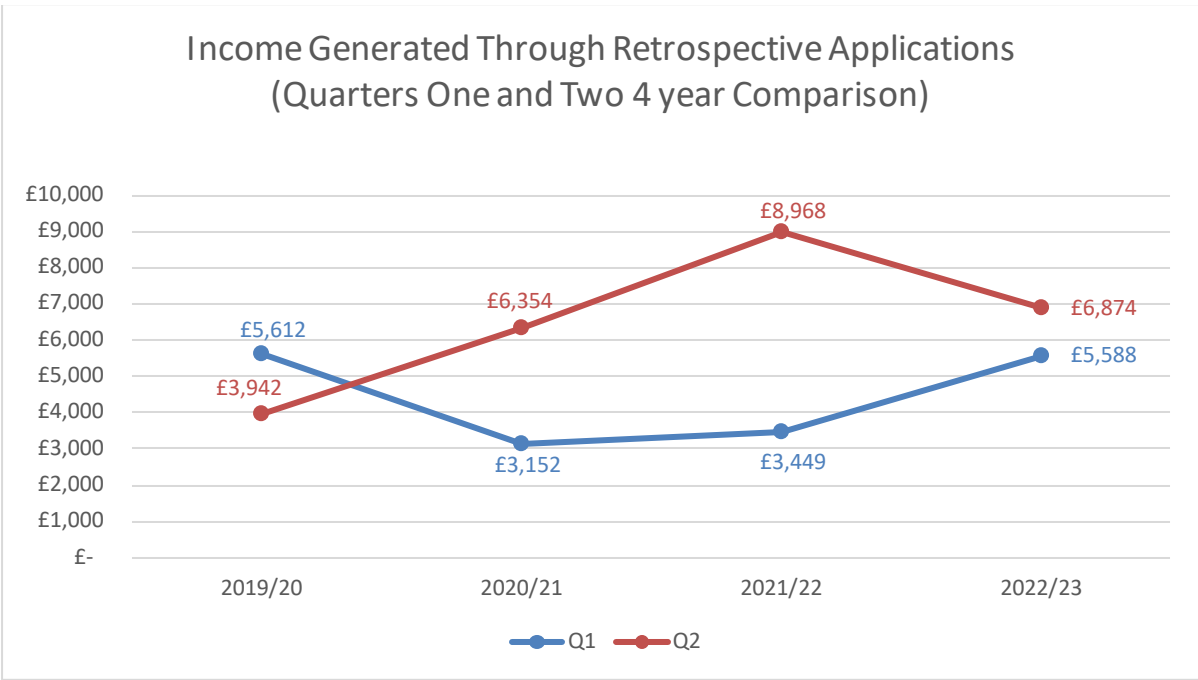
2.6 The capacity of the Service is stretched by the increased pressure relating to dealing with many complex and contentious applications. We have increased the size of our team which is helping us deal with an increased workload. It is a significant team effort across the Service to assess and determine applications expediently and in line with Government targets.

### Enforcement

2.7 As we emerge from Covid the number of complaints received in the first two quarters of 2022 is less than in the previous two years during Covid and lockdown. The rise in complaints during lockdown might have been 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. Similarly the reduction in complaints might be due to people returning to places of work and not spending as much time at home. The cost of living crisis could also have impacted on people's ability to carry out developments to their homes.



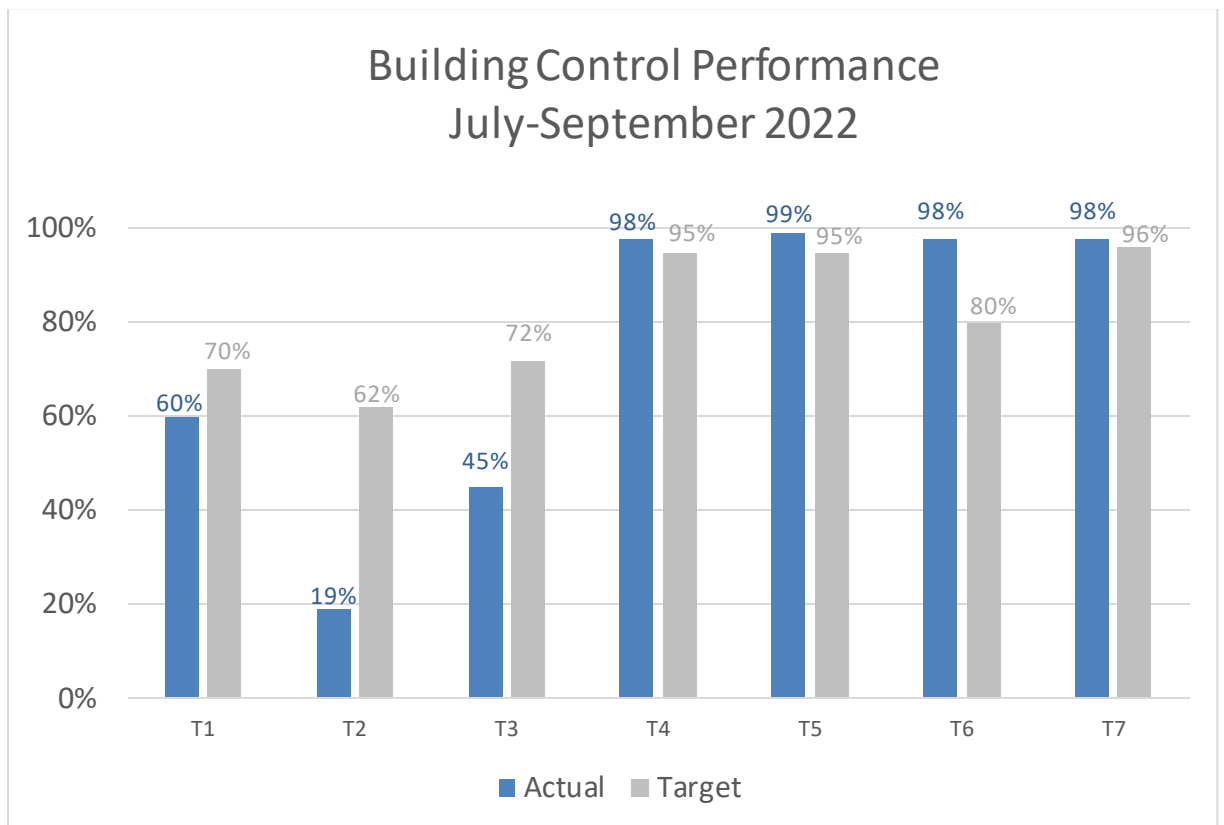
2.8 The chart below shows the income generated from following up complaints which has resulted in planning applications being submitted, with a variable pattern during Covid and then settling back to just higher than pre-Covid levels in the first two quarters of 2022-23.



### 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 in the second quarter of 22/23 and compares it against similar periods in previous years.



	Detail	Target	Actual Q2 19/20	Actual Q2 20/21	Actual Q2 21/22	Actual Q2 22/23
T1	Market share	70%	73	76	70	60
T2	Full Plans app decision / schedule within 3 weeks	62%	32	61	28	19
T3	Full Plans app decision / schedule within 5 weeks	72%	58	83	51	45
T4	Full Plans app conditionally or fully approved	95%	95	97	96	98
T5	Site insp's carried out on day they were arranged for	95%	99	99	99	99
T6	Customer satisfaction rating (from latest survey)	80%	98	98	98	98
T7	Sickness absence – attendance levels	96%	97	98	98	98

	Detail	Target	Actual Q1 19/20	Actual Q1 20/21	Actual Q1 21/22	Actual Q1 22/23
T1	Market share	70%	72	76	74	71
T2	Full Plans app decision / schedule within 3 weeks	62%	32	60	54	33
T3	Full Plans app decision / schedule within 5 weeks	72%	67	84	75	56
T4	Full Plans app conditionally or fully approved	95%	100	98	100	97

T5	Site insp's carried out on day they were arranged for	95%	99	99	99	99
T6	Customer satisfaction rating (from latest survey)	80%	98	98	98	98
T7	Sickness absence – attendance levels	96%	96	98	99	98

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 from the first two quarters of 22/23, indicate that the Teams market share has reduced slightly to that of the previous financial year, although it remains slightly higher than the national average of 58%. This is mainly due to the recent 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 unfilled vacancies, the performance against some of the locally set targets (including market share) shows a reduction in comparisons to the previous year.

Comparing the second quarter of the current financial year, against the previous 3 years, performance remains reasonably consistent, with the exception of the speed in which plans are being checked - which has declined. Having to cope with unfilled vacancies and increased workload has meant transferring resources from plan checking to site inspection duties and this has resulted in reduced performance in this area declining. However, vacancies are now being filled and an action plan has been put into place to address this particular issue.

#### Income and financial performance

3.3 Building Regulation income for 2020/21 covered the Sections costs in terms of its fee-earning work element and figures for income derived from Building Control charges for the first two quarters of 22/23 appears to show a similar trend with the deposit of a number of applications relating to volume housing developments and some larger commercial schemes.

#### Safety at sports grounds

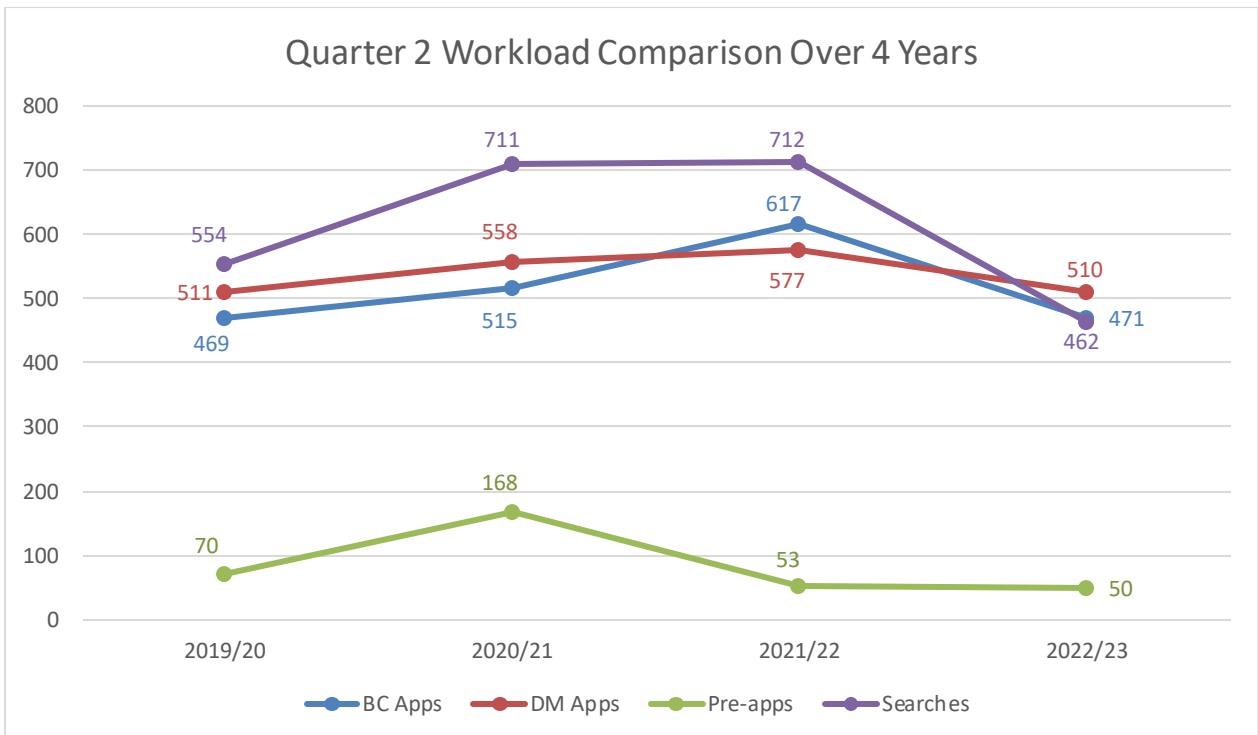
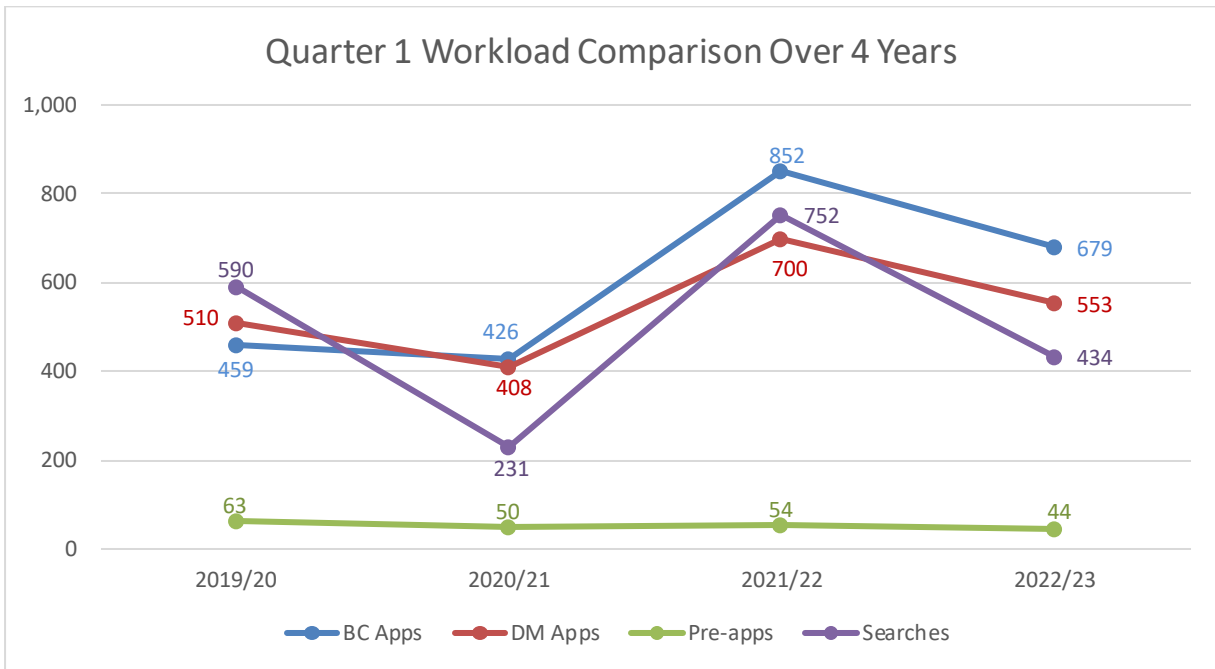
3.4 As part of conditions of the Safety Certificates held by Southport FC, Marine FC and Aintree Racecourse, the Building Control Team undertakes annual inspections in order to check the grandstands are properly maintained. Discussions are currently taking place with officials from Aintree Racecourse regarding structures proposed for the 2023 Grand National meeting.

#### Staffing

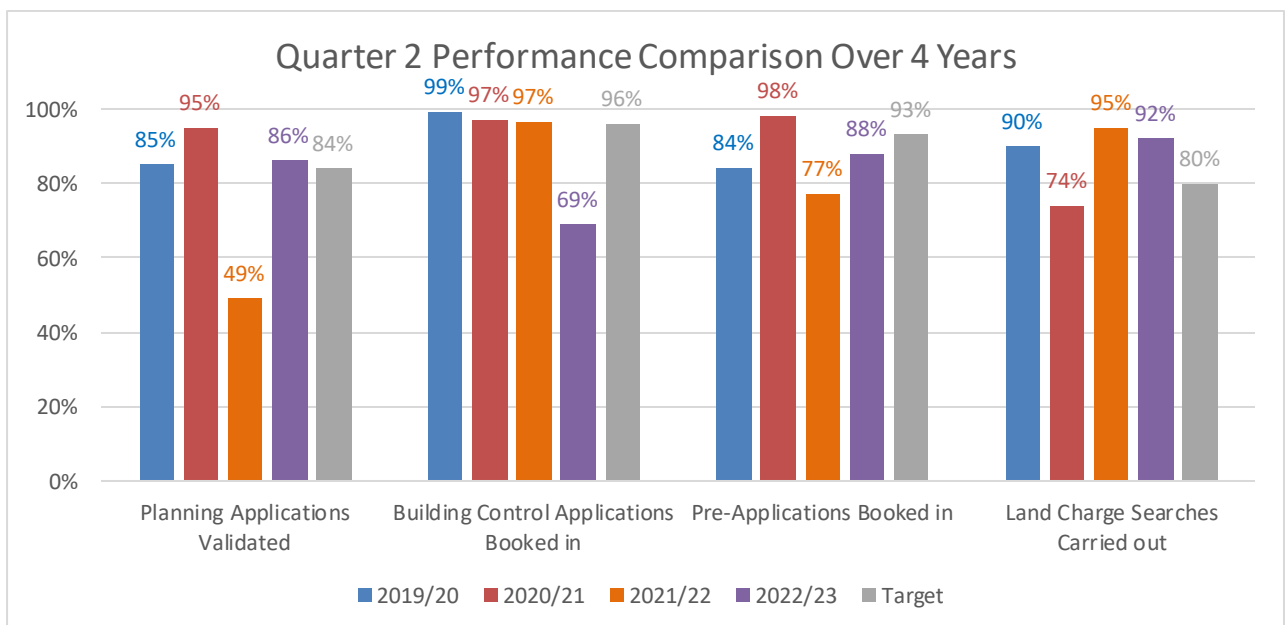
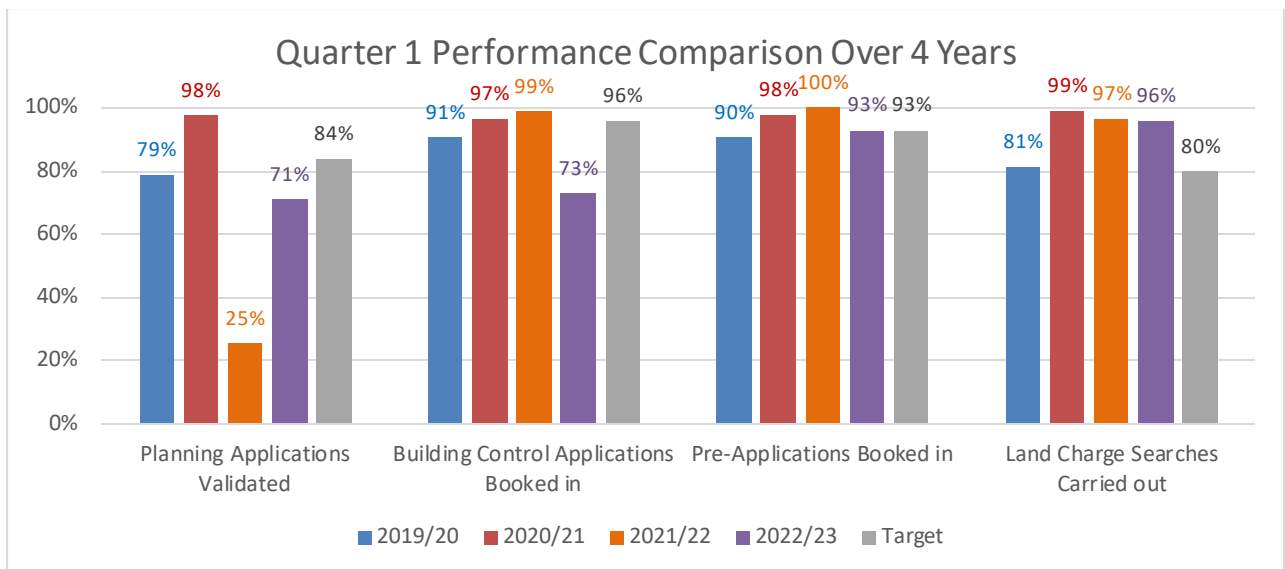
3.5 Over the last 6 months there have been a series of vacancies within the Building Control Team – the majority of which have been filled, currently leaving only a vacant BCO post to fill.

## 4. Technical Support

4.1 The charts below show workload and performance over quarters one and two over the last 4 years







Detail	Target	Actual	Remarks
Planning Apps validated within 5 days	84%	86%	Target exceeded
BC Applications registered within 3 days	96%	69%	Whilst below target, the overall average days taken to validate remains at 3 days.
Pre-Apps validated within 3 days	93%	88%	Whilst below target, the overall average days taken to validate is 1 day.
Searches completed within 7 days	80%	92%	Target exceeded

4.2 The team is multi-functional, and resources are allocated to the most urgent priorities daily. Performance on Planning Application Validation and Local Land Charge Searches exceeds current targets. The validation of Pre-Application Enquiries and Building Regulations applications is below target -

this is partly due to essential maintenance and downtime of our back-office systems and the training of two new team members.

- 4.3 The team has also taken on additional workload to ease the pressure on our other teams whilst recruitment takes place.
- 4.4 An improvement in performance across all areas is anticipated once the new recruits are fully trained and staff on long term sick leave have returned.

### **Service Development**

- 4.5 Work is continuing with the transfer of the Local Land Charges Register to HM Land Registry. We are nearing completion of the data cleansing phase, which is anticipated to be fully complete in November. HMLR are expected to serve notice that they will be assuming responsibility for the Local Land Charge Register in place early 2023. There will still be an ongoing requirement for us to provide updates to the register and continue with the CON29 portion of the Local Land Charge searches.
- 4.6 Following a recent meeting of the Service Improvement Group, several areas were identified for improvement. These include how we engage with our customers to make the process more user friendly, accessible and efficient. As part of this ongoing improvement works, we have identified a need to re-evaluate the information on our web pages to make the information more relevant and accessible to our customers.
- 4.7 As part of the Service Improvement Group, we have also introduced some automation in the generation of standard letters, making the process more efficient.

## 5. Local Planning

### The Sefton Local Plan

- 5.1 The Sefton Local Plan is now over 5 years old (adopted April 2017) and according to national regulations is required to be reviewed to see if it remains up to date. The Council have committed to undertake a high-level review to determine whether the Local Plan remains up to date or whether it needs to be updated wholly or in part. The Local Plan review will be done through winter of 2022-23 and be reported next Spring.
- 5.2 Planning applications continue to be submitted on Local Plan allocated housing sites. As of 14 October 2022, planning approval has been granted for 74.5% of the total indicative site capacity on Local Plan housing allocations, up from 66% last year. There has now been a total of 1,145 new dwellings completed on Local Plan allocated housing sites (as at 31 March 2022), an increase of 223 during 2021/2022. This equates to 15.76% of total Local Plan allocated capacity. This shows there is still a large supply of housing land 10 years into the 18-year period of the Local Plan (2012-30<sup>1</sup>).

### Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and other policy documents

- 5.3 The Planning Policy Team are currently consulting on a number of Supplementary Planning Documents and an Information Note to support the Local Plan. These include:
- Affordable Housing
  - Conversions to Flats and HMOs
  - New Housing
  - House Extensions
  - Contributions towards primary education from development
- 5.4 These are available for public comment until Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022. Work is also being progressed on a Social Value (Employment and Skills) Supplementary Planning Document.

### Liverpool City Region work

- 5.5 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 likely to be delayed until summer of 2023 and the Council will fully engage with this, and the supporting evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst the Local Plan was adopted in April 2017, it was based dated April 2012.

## Bootle Area Action Plan

- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 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. The Council are currently considering all the comments made.
- 5.8 Work is now progressing on the Preferred Options stage of the Bootle Area Action Plan. A series of discussions are taking place with both the Member Steering Group and the Officer Working Group on what the priorities for the Bootle AAP should be and the policies that will help deliver those. It is now expected that the Preferred Options will be published Summer 2023.

### Other work

- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 Following recent applications and appeal hearings for traveller accommodation sites, it was decided that the Council's evidence base for gypsy and traveller accommodation needed to be updated.
- 5.11 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 is a complicated and multidisciplinary piece of work and will be managed and led

by the Local Planning team. An initial draft has been received and the Local Plans Team is coordinating a response.

- 5.12 To inform both the Local Plan review and Bootle AAP (see above) we will undertake an Employment Land and Premises Supply assessment. This will look at all of Sefton's allocated and designated employment land, including Bootle Office Quarter. Consultants are well underway with the assessment and have visited every site and done many interviews with site owners/occupants. It is expected that a draft assessment will be available late this or early next year.
- 5.13 The Local Plan team have recently completed its first Movers' Survey. This looks at where people moved to newly built homes in Sefton and why. It also looks at what services and facilities they have had to switch because of their move. This will be undertaken every year. The initial results can be found at <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/media/5703/movers-survey-report-2022-first-edition.pdf>

## **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, including the major Lord Street Verandah project.
- 6.2 Recent success includes improvements undertaken at previous derelict and vacant sites with work beginning on the former school for the partially hearing at 40 Lancaster Road for which the Listed Building Consent is beginning to be implemented.
- 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 owners of targeted buildings. The first grant application is nearing competition - this is for 509-515 Lord Street, a grade 2 Listed Building on the Council's Buildings at Risk Register. Other schemes have now received Board approval and are slowly progressing. The team is speaking to owners of other target property with architects having offered advice and prices on some of these possible schemes.
- 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 performances of Southport's Victorians to various schools at the Atkinson. Excerpts of the script have been filmed and have been uploaded to YouTube. A successful and comprehensive week of Heritage Open Days have been undertaken and the exhibition held at the Atkinson called "Built on Sand – 200 Years of Southport's Changing Street Scene". This interactive, exhibition was hugely successful. 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.

Advice to Development Management team

- 6.7 The number of consultation responses sent in Quarter 2 (Jul – September 22) is 114. This is up from Quarter 1 this year (98), while Q2 last year was 177. This decrease from last year is due to removing the buffer zones for consultations so it means that requests for consultation are being targeted more effectively.
- 6.8 In addition, this part of the Service continues to assist in various appeals, on-site monitoring and enforcement cases.

**7. Performance Monitoring**

- 7.1 Work has been undertaken to prepare a directorate wide plan, which includes all the departments within the Economic Growth and Housing department. The plan demonstrates the links to Sefton’s 2030 vision and to departmental work themes and identifies performance measures to use in the future. Planning Services performance will include the following:

Performance indicator	Target
P1	Major applications to be determined within 13 weeks National - 60%    Local – 63%
P2	Minor applications to be determined within 8 weeks National – 65%    Local – 68%
P3	Other applications determined within 8 weeks National – 80%    Local – 83%
P4	80% of Pre-application decisions made within 21 days (Local Target)
P5	80% of Local land charge searches completed within 7 days (Local Target)
P6	Maximum of 10% of Council’s decision making on major applications by appeal over a 2 year period + 9 months (National Target)
P7	Maximum of 10% of Council’s decision making on minor applications by appeal over a 2 year period + 9 months (National Target)
P8	95% of all planning applications approved (Local Target)
P9	95% building regulation applications approved (Local Target)

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 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 we struggled to meet a number of key targets last year. However, we are on the way to meeting key targets again.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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 more or less at pre-Covid levels which is maintaining inward investment into the Borough.
- 8.4 A 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.
- 8.5 Major legislative change is heralded in the Levelling Up and Planning Bill. With current changes in Government it may take some time before we know what implications there will be for the Planning Service, but we will report these as they become known in subsequent updates.
- 8.6 The Service continues to respond to the unsettled context in which we are currently operating. We are prepared to adapt to further changes on the horizon.
- 8.7 Despite all the challenges we have faced over the past two years, we believe we provide a quality service and feedback from agents is that our service is the best in the region.