
Planning Service Performance Review

Economic Development, Transport and Climate
Emergency Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 11/03/2026

Lead director/officer: Grant Butterworth

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Grant Butterworth Head of Planning,
- Author contact details: grant.butterworth@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: V2

1. Summary

The report provides an overview of planning performance as requested at OSC. It sets out recent national and local planning trends in terms of:

- Planning service delivery and policy development
- Performance in terms of determining planning applications
- Planning Income

The report confirms recent challenging national conditions affecting development delivery across the country. This has resulted in consequential government performance assessments and negatively impacted planning income.

Like many councils, performance has been affected by a national shortage of planners, creating staff recruitment and retention issues. This was compounded locally by significant disruption due to the cyber-attack in 2024. In response proactive management action was initiated through a comprehensive organisational review of the Planning Service to address staffing capacity and service capability which was largely completed in summer 2025.

As a result, planning performance has now substantively recovered as set out in the report. The decline in income from fewer applications has been partly offset by increases in national fees and pre-application advice fees and it is considered that there are now strong foundations in place to sustain planning service resilience and good performance as the development market recovers.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Economic Development, Transport and Climate Emergency Scrutiny Commission is invited to:

- Note the national economic context
- Note the recent recovery in terms of planning application processing and performance
- Consider and comment on the contents of the report

3. Detailed report

3.1 Leicester City Council Planning Service Delivery & Development activity

In recent years the planning service has suffered significant staffing pressures due to a range of factors primarily- a national shortage of qualified planners which has adversely affected planning performance.

To address these issues a comprehensive work force action plan was implemented which introduced:

- a new staffing structure and career pathways to improve staff retention and development of graduate roles
- new pay grades and job roles which recognised technical specialisms

- a new People Manager role to allow planning managers to concentrate on technical supervision and development of staff

Delivery pressures increased with a significant workload backlog which developed after the cyber-attack in 2024. This occurred mid-implementation of the above organisational review.

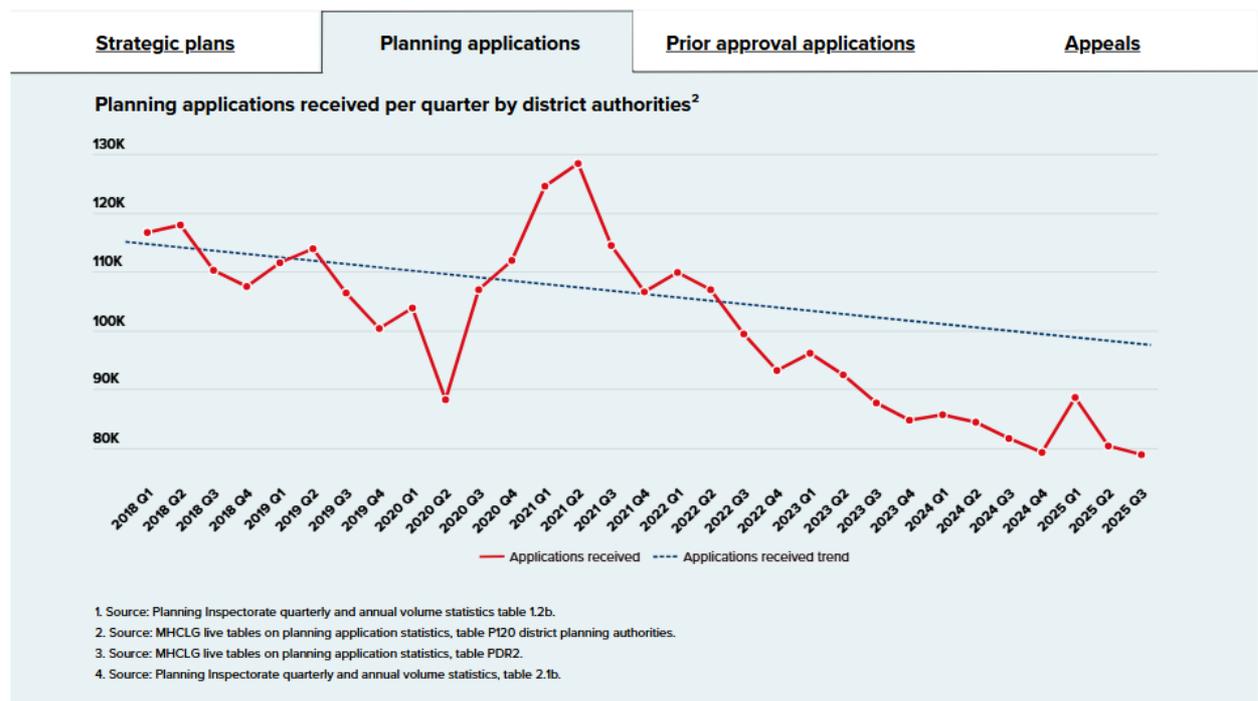
The staffing review was largely completed in summer 2025 and the service's performance has consequently improved as can be seen in section 3.4 of this report.

3.2 National context: Planning consents

Nationally there has been a significant decline in planning application submissions in recent years, driven by national economic factors as can be seen in the charts below which shows planning application data from Q1 2018 to Q3 2025.

Chart 1: National levels of Planning Applications in England to December 2025

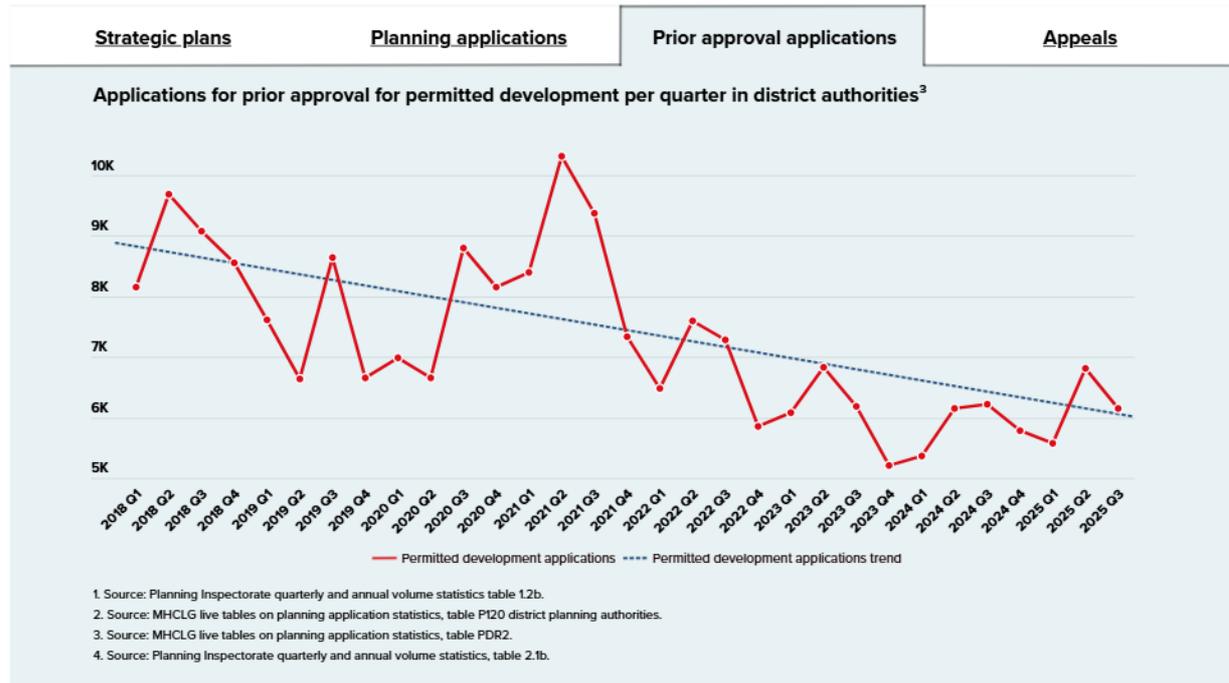
Activity in the planning sector in England



The chart below shows prior Approval Application numbers over the same period. Prior approvals largely comprise small scale residential extensions and some changes of use.

Chart 2: National levels of Prior Approval Applications in England to December 2025

Activity in the planning sector in England



The factors affecting this decline have been attributed to:

- International/national increases in energy costs due to Ukraine conflict and other factors
- Interest rates and the cost of borrowing and mortgages
- Construction and trade labour/skills shortages (particularly post Brexit)
- Materials cost increases
- Policy and regulatory costs such as the Building Safety levy (post Grenfell)
- Contraction in the SME builder's sector
- USA imposition of tariffs

The Government are in the process of deploying a very significant range of initiatives and policy levers to seek to reverse this decline:

- 2024 NPPF revisions: new standard method and new 'Grey Belt' policy provisions
- Planning and Infrastructure Act: new 30 Month Local plan system and new Spatial Development Strategies
- Proposed new national Scheme of Delegation to reduce scale of applications determined by Planning Committees
- 2025 NPPF consultation with significant amendments to promote development delivery

These initiatives have very recently begun to show results, although the bulk of recent developer activity is currently focussed on the new opportunities in Green Belt areas facilitated by the new NPPF 2024 Grey Belt provisions.

3.3 Local planning consents

3.3.1 Applications received

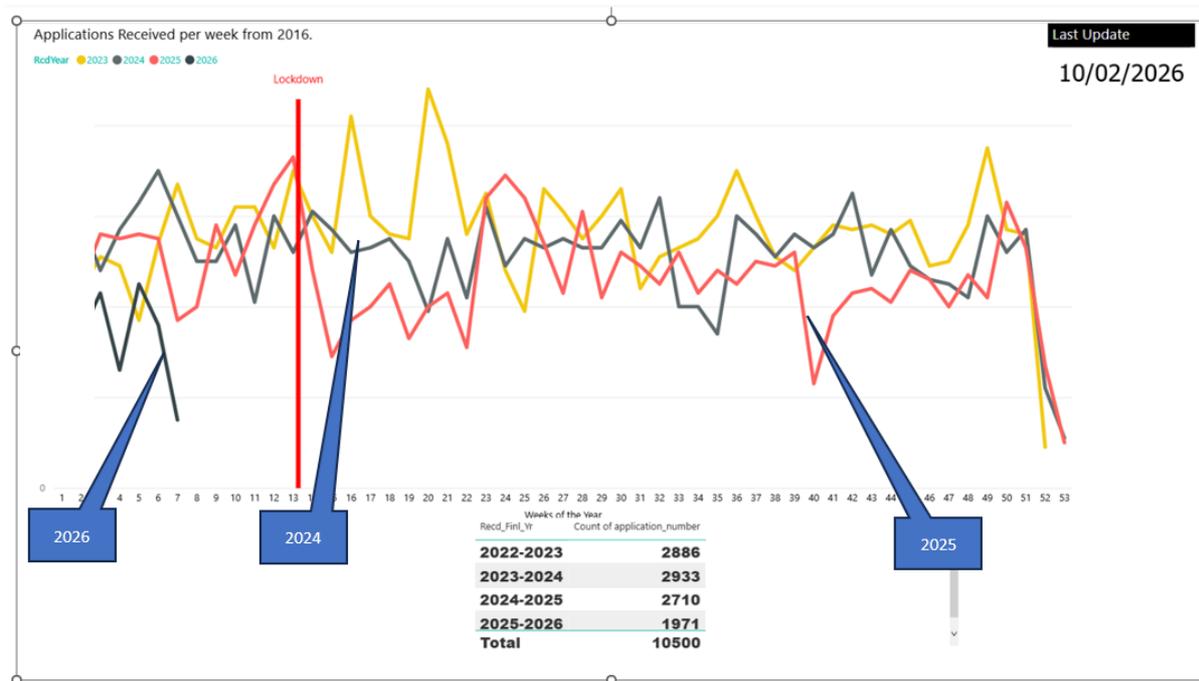
The numbers of applications received in recent years has reduced generally in line with national trends and major, non-major and prior approval trends are shown by category in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Major/Non-Major and Prior Approval Applications received

	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	April 25 to 17/02/2026
Major applications received and validated	58	49	53	41	52	32
Prior Approvals	560	389	224	233	170	120
Non major applications	1,293	1,479	1,367	1,255	1,157	908

The Chart below shows the trends of total application numbers since 2023.

Chart 3: Leicester planning applications Received 2023-2026



3.3.2 Leicester Performance in application Processing against Govt targets (September 2025)

Table 4: Application Performance against Govt Targets

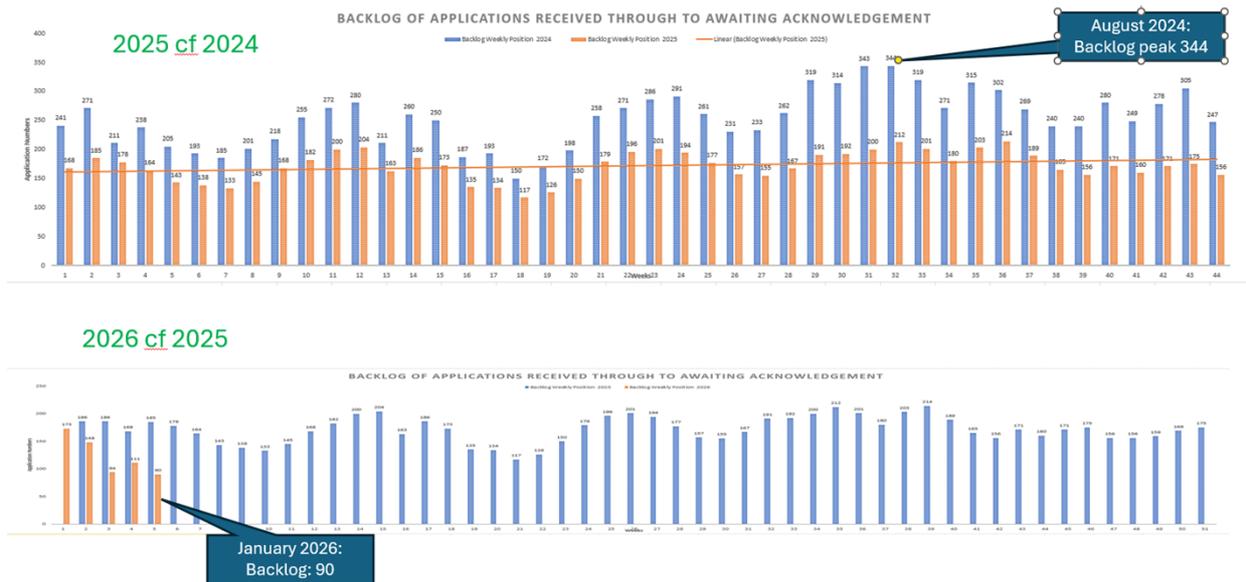
Category	Govt Target	LCC 2025 outcome (Rank of 329 LPAs)	Comments
Major applications in time (or with agreed Extension of Time)	Designation if < 60% over 12-month period	95.5% (Rank: 119)	Strong performance.

Minor applications in time (or with agreed Extension of Time)	Designation if < 70% over 12-month period	77.8% (Rank: 307)	Good recovery of position. Significant efforts made to improve performance over the year- from risk of designation in June 2025 at 62%. Latest performance data Sept 2025 to January 2026 is very positive at 97%
% of Major decisions lost at appeal	Designation if > 10% major application decisions lost at appeal	1.2% (Rank: 105)	Strong performance
% of Minor decisions lost at appeal	Designation if > 10% non-major application decisions lost at appeal	0.7% (Rank: 76)	Strong performance

3.3.3 Validation of Applications (applications awaiting commencement)

The level of applications awaiting validation hit a peak of 344 in summer of 2024 after the cyber-attack. The Chart below shows recovery of the position by the end of 2025 which has been sustained to a low level into 2026.

Chart 4: Applications awaiting acknowledgement



3.3.4 Planning Appeals

Chart 5 and Table 5 below show appeal decisions by type and date for 2022-February 2026

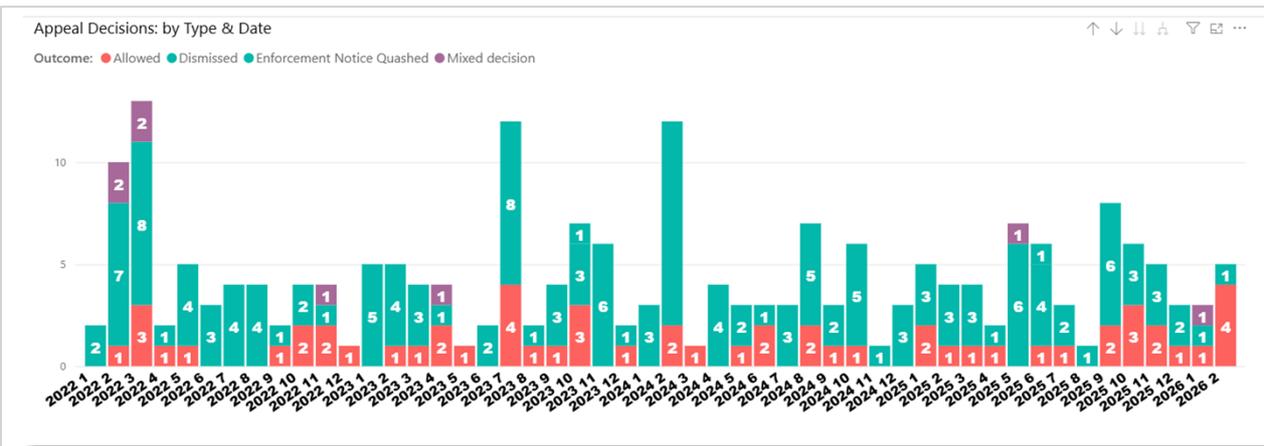


Table 7 below shows Pre-application advice income for the last 5 years. Pre-application advice charges were increased in January 2025.

Table 7 Pre-Application advice income 2021/22- 2025/26

Recd_Finl_Yr	Fee_Income
2021-2022	£111,648.00
2022-2023	£107,280.00
2023-2024	£108,076.80
2024-2025	£99,536.00
2025-2026	£145,120.00
Total	£571,660.80

Source- Planning system data

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

As a general performance update, there are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The issues identified within it have resulted in budget overspends for the Planning service, as reported through quarterly monitoring.

Signed: Stuart McAvoy

Dated: 2nd March 2026

4.2 Legal Implications

As the report is a briefing of recent performance, there are no legal implications relating to the report itself.

The challenges relating to recruitment of experienced Planning Officers also extends into the legal remit. Nationally, there is a shortage of experienced planning lawyers and recruitment to planning roles within Legal has also been difficult to achieve. Training and development of existing internal staff members continues and measures have also been put in place to provide support from a neighbouring authority. Recruitment efforts also continue.

Signed: Zoe Iliffe, Principal Lawyer (Property, Highways & Planning)

Dated:

4.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

This performance report on the Planning service has no direct equality implications, as it focuses on service delivery metrics, national trends, staffing recovery, and income. However, efficient planning processes indirectly support PSED by enabling timely housing delivery and building approvals, which can benefit protected groups through improved access to affordable, suitable homes. Ongoing service recovery, including the Local Plan adoption, will help maintain due regard to these needs in future applications.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 19 February 2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 19th February 2026

5. Background information and other papers:

None

6. Summary of appendices:

None