

Development Plan

Practice Note

03

Timetable

Revised November 2025

Version 2



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Department für

Infrastructure

Preamble

This Development Plan Practice Note (DPPN) is designed to guide planning officers, and others engaged in the planning system, through the key requirements for the preparation and submission of a Timetable to the Department¹ for agreement. It deals primarily with procedures as well as good practice. It forms part of a series of practice notes stemming from the **Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011** (the 2011 Act) and any related subordinate legislation. The emphasis is very much on advice but where explicit legislative requirements must be followed these will be made clear. In this practice note, any references to sections are references to sections of the 2011 Act and any references to regulations are references to regulations of the **Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015** (the LDP Regulations), unless otherwise stated.

Where appropriate, this practice note will therefore highlight:

- Relevant legislation;
- Procedural guidance;
- Definitions;
- Best practice examples/relevant case law.

This guidance is not intended to replace the need for judgement by planning officers in the plan making process. Nor is it intended to be a source of definitive legal advice. Reference should be made to the actual legislation referred to in this document and if any discrepancy or conflict exists between the Practice Note² and legislation, the provisions of the legislation will prevail.

¹ Department means the Department for Infrastructure unless otherwise stated. The Department for Infrastructure came into being on 8 May 2016 and the Department of the Environment was dissolved in accordance with the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and The Departments (2016 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

² Please ensure you are considering the most up to date version of Development Plan Practice Note 03 on the Department's website at www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk and the Planning Portal at www.planningni.gov.uk and the most up to date planning legislation on the UK legislation website at www.legislation.gov.uk, which is also available via the Department's website.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The timetable is a public statement of a council's programme for the production of its local development plan (LDP). The timetable will help ensure that the plan process is efficiently managed and that the key stakeholders such as the consultation bodies and the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) are kept informed and can manage their own resources to facilitate their involvement in the LDP process.

2.0 Legislative Context

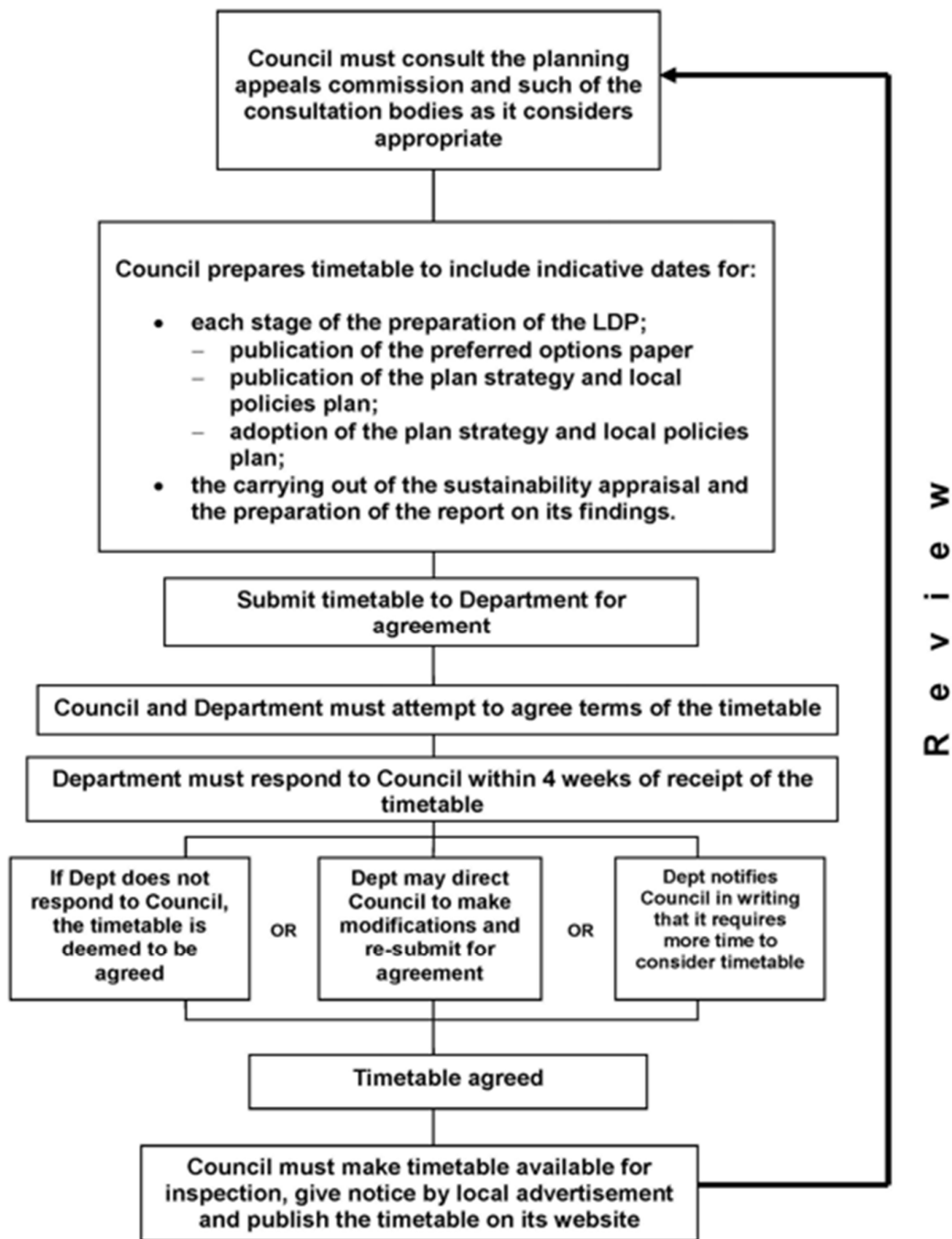
2.1 **Section 7** of the **2011 Act** requires a council to prepare, and keep under review, a timetable for the preparation and adoption of the LDP. Sections 8(4)(a) and 9(4)(a) require both the Plan Strategy (PS) and Local Policies Plan (LPP) to be prepared in accordance with the timetable.

2.2 **Regulations 5 to 8 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015** (LDP Regulations) sets out the requirements for the preparation, form and content, agreement and availability of the timetable.

3.0 Requirements for Preparation of the Timetable

3.1 In relation to a council's LDP functions, it is a statutory requirement that the LDP must be prepared in accordance with the timetable. Therefore, before a council can consult on its Preferred Options Paper (POP), it must have an agreed/approved timetable in place in order to inform the general public and all stakeholders of the key dates of the LDP process from the initial stages of the POP through to the preparation and adoption of the PS and the subsequent LPP. The process for the preparation and agreement of the timetable is broadly outlined in the Figure 1.

Figure 1: Requirements for preparation of the timetable



3.2 Regulation 5 of the LDP Regulations requires a council to consult the Planning Appeals Commission and such of the consultation bodies as a council considers appropriate.

- 3.3 It is important that consultation bodies are consulted as their input is required to inform the preparation of the LDP. They may also be required to attend the Independent Examination. Furthermore, as the PAC or appointed persons will have to undertake an Independent Examination into each development plan document, a council must also seek agreement on the timing of the Independent Examination early in the preparation process, particularly as the PAC or appointed persons may have to conduct more than one Independent Examination at any given time. Seeking consensus from all parties involved in the key stages of the LDP will allow for effective programme management by allocating sufficient time and resources and prioritising work where necessary in order to avoid unforeseen delays in the preparation process.

Content of the Timetable

- 3.4 Regulation 6 of the LDP Regulations requires a council to include indicative dates for:
- a) each stage of the preparation of the LDP including indicative dates for;
 - (i) publication of the POP;
 - (ii) publication of the PS and publication of the LPP;
 - (iii) adoption of the PS and adoption of the LPP; and
 - b) the carrying out of the appraisal under sections 8(6)(a) and 9(7)(a) of the 2011 Act and the preparation of the report on the findings of the appraisal under sections 8(6)(b) and 9(7)(b) of the 2011 Act.
- 3.5 The timetable should set out a council's programme for the production of its LDP. The LDP Regulations provide that the timetable must include indicative dates from the commencement of the LDP process up to its conclusion at the adoption of the LPP. It must set out the timings of the publication and public consultation for the POP and the development plan document as well as accompanying documents such as the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) including Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). A council may also wish to include timings for the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), and Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) reports which will also be published alongside the development plan documents. A council may also wish to include the tasks

that might require the input of others such as statutory consultees in advance of formal consultation on a development plan document. This may include the timings at which a council expects to engage with, or seek the views of stakeholders in policy development, share topic papers, or attempt to agree Statements of Common Ground. This may be particularly important at the LPP stage of plan preparation whereby a council is required to set out its local policies and site-specific proposals, designations and land use zonings required to deliver its vision and strategic objectives which will ultimately require greater involvement from statutory consultees. The inclusion of this information in a LDP Timetable could greatly assist consultees who are required to input on all eleven LPPs. The timetable should also make the public aware of the plan preparation and public consultation programme well in advance of the events.

- 3.6 It is recommended that indicative dates, on a quarterly basis are used as it may be difficult for a council to provide specific dates for the key stages of the plan process from the outset of the preparation of the LDP. Indicative dates also allow for a degree of flexibility to enable a council to effectively manage the LDP preparation process whilst reducing the potential need for the constant review and/or revision to the timetable.
- 3.7 The length of time allocated to a specific stage of the LDP will depend on a number of factors such as the availability of resources (council, statutory consultees, Department, and PAC or other Independent Examiner), the input of statutory consultees, the number of representations received, and the assessment of those representations, the work load of the Planning Appeals Commission and the subsequent changes to the draft PS/draft LPP stemming from the Independent Examination and direction issued by the Department.
- 3.8 Timescales should be realistic to reflect the resources available and the nature and complexity of the task. It may be helpful to undertake a skills audit of staff to identify strengths and weakness which will in turn help to prepare a suitable work or training programme for the preparation of the LDP. In preparing the timetable, a council should also carry out an analysis of the risks associated with the targets of LDP preparation.

3.9 Any revisions to the timetable should state the plan preparation progress to date, what remains to be completed, reasons for slippage of the timetable, and the implications this may have for the subsequent stages of plan preparation.

3.10 Annex 1 provides an example of a timetable for a LDP.

Agreement of the Timetable

3.11 Regulation 7 of the LDP Regulations sets out the requirements for the agreement of the timetable.

1. The timetable must be:
 - (a) approved by resolution of the council prior to submission to the Department for its agreement; and
 - (b) submitted to the Department.
2. The Department must respond within four weeks of receipt of the timetable unless it has, before the expiry of that period, notified the council that it requires more time to consider the timetable.
3. If before the end of the period specified in paragraph (2), the Department has failed to respond to the receipt by it of the timetable, it will be deemed to be agreed at the end of that period.
4. Until such time as the Department agrees the timetable, the council must not, in the preparation or revision of the LDP, take any steps under Regulation 10 to advertise its POP.
5. Paragraphs 1 to 3 apply to the revision of a timetable as they apply to its preparation.

3.12 It is important that a council liaises with the Department to agree the timetable to ensure that it is robust and realistic. It is good practice to keep both formal and informal communication channels open and update the Department and relevant stakeholders as and when necessary. This allows

the Department to determine whether it might be necessary to make arrangements to schedule further work or appoint an independent examiner other than the Planning Appeals Commission.

- 3.13 Once the timetable has been agreed by the Department, a council must comply with it when preparing all future documents in the LDP preparation process. In the event that a council cannot reach agreement with the Department, the Department may direct a council to revise its timetable and re-submit it to the Department for approval.
- 3.14 Legislation requires a council to keep the timetable under review to ensure that the preparation of the LDP is proceeding in accordance with the timetable. The Chief Planners Update 6 (1 May 2020) allows a council up to 6 months flexibility to formally revise its existing agreed timetable. It is recommended however, that a council should revise its timetable at the earliest available opportunity. Following any such review of the timetable, adjustments that may be required must be set out clearly and an explanation provided. A council should also consider the need to update its timetable prior to submission to the Department for Independent Examination (Chief Planner Update 7 (16 December 2020)). A council should also consider the need to update its evidence base and notional plan end date to take account of any slippage in its timetable. The revised timetable must be submitted to the Department for agreement. Any review of the timetable must be subject to the same agreement/approval requirements as set out in Regulation 7 above.

Availability of the Timetable

- 3.15 Following agreement of the timetable, Regulation 8 requires a council to make the agreed timetable publicly available for inspection at its principal offices and such other places within its district as it considers appropriate. A council must also give notice by local advertisement that the timetable is available for inspection and the place and times at which it can be inspected. A council must also publish the timetable on its website.

Annex 1: Example of Timetable for the Local Development Plan

Timetable for XXXXXX Local Development Plan

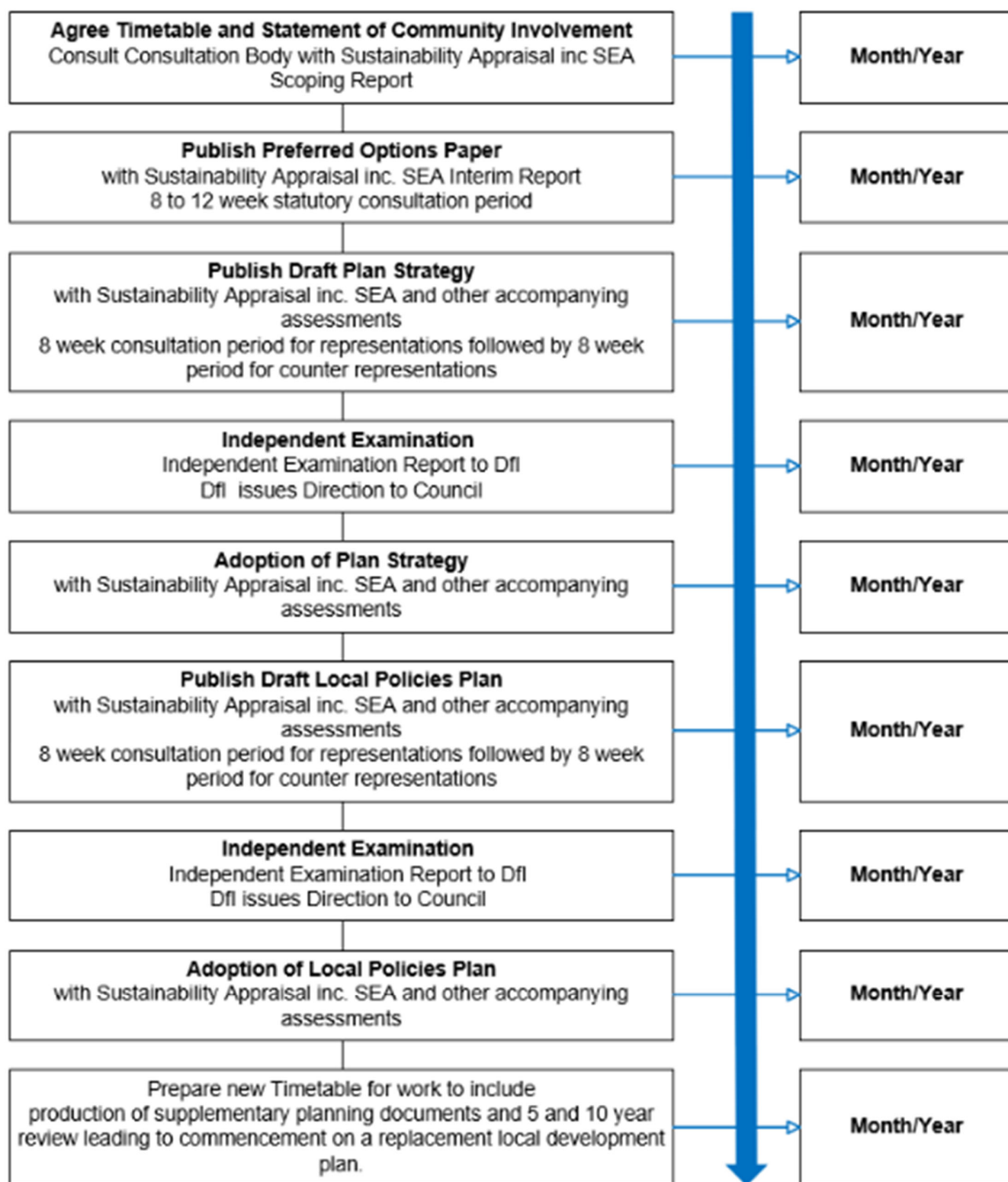
The purpose of the timetable is to set out the key stages in the production of the XXXXXX Local Development Plan and accompanying documents. An explanation is given, as to how the project is to be managed, the resources required, how risks of delay are to be minimised, and monitored arrangements.

The purpose of the XXXXXX Local Development Plan, comprising the Plan Strategy and Local Policies, is to inform the general public, statutory authorities, developers and other interested bodies of the policy framework and land use proposals that will implement the strategic objectives of the Regional Development Strategy and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement and guide development decisions within XXXXXX up to 20XX.

Status

The Local Development Plan will replace the XXXX Area Plan(s). The Plan will be produced in two stages consisting of first a Plan Strategy followed by Local Policies Plan. The Plan Strategy will set the aims, objectives overall growth strategy and associated generic policies applicable to the Plan Area. In contrast the Local Policies Plan will deal with site specific policies and proposals associated with settlement limits, land use zonings and environmental designations.

LDP Timeline



Project Management

Meeting the timetable is dependent upon Member involvement, adequate resourcing and risk management.

Member Involvement

Progress on the XXXXXX Local Development Plan will be reported to the council on a monthly basis. In addition to the attached timetable there are a number of critical dates for Members involvement:

- The Preferred Options Paper will be presented for Members agreement in (Date) to allow for (Date) publication.
- The findings from the public consultation exercise, the Sustainability Appraisal and Draft Plan Strategy will be presented for Members agreement in (Date) to allow for publication in (Date).
- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) to forward the Draft Plan Strategy with any representations to the Department for Infrastructure to request an Independent Examination. Any counter representations will be forwarded eight weeks later.
- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) on whether to accept or rebut the representations and submissions made to the Independent Examination by the date set.
- The Direction from Department for Infrastructure will be presented to Members to allow adoption in (Date).
- The Draft Local Policies Plan will be presented to Members in (Date) for authorisation of publication.
- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) to forward the Draft Local Policies Plan with any representations to the Department for Infrastructure to request an Independent Examination. Any counter representations will be forwarded eight weeks later.

- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) on whether to accept or rebut the representations and submissions made to the Independent Examination by the date set.
- The Direction from the Department for Infrastructure will be presented to Members to allow adoption in (Date).

Adequate Resourcing/Expenditure

The staff required to undertake the Local Development Plan is as follows:

XXXXXX

Include any additional inputs / consultancy.....etc.

Annual expenditure will be XXXXXX to cover all administrative, equipment and mileage allowances. The cost of publications and advertising as required by legislation is estimated as follows:-

(for each key milestone in local development plan process)

Risk Management

As already stated, the timetable is challenging and there are a number of risks that could slow down the Plan Programme. In order to manage risk, a Risk Management Log (Table 1) assesses a variety of risks, processes and countermeasures to mitigate delay.

Table 1 Risk Management Log

Area of Uncertainty / Risk	Effect	Likelihood	Impact	Response/ Countermeasure	After response	
					Likelihood	Impact

Key

Definition		Likelihood	Impact
1	Very Low	Rare	No notable impact identifiable
2	Low	Unlikely	Short term delays with no major impacts on stakeholders (months).
3	Medium	Likely	Significant delays (up to one year) impacting on investment.
4	High	Very likely	Long term delay (excess of a year) impacting on most stakeholders.
5	Very High	Certain	Failure to prepare a plan or deliver sustainable development.

Annual Monitoring

It is good practice to monitor progress periodically. Development Plan Practice Note 12 provides useful guidance on annual monitoring and review. An annual monitoring report will be produced by the council to inform Members and the Department for Infrastructure on progress in meeting the timetable and on the land availability for housing and employment. If progress on plan production has slipped, the timetable will need to be revised and agreed with the Department in accordance with the Development Plan Regulations.

DPPN 3 Review - Schedule of changes

Page Number	Paragraph Number	Summary of change
Cover page	N/A	Revised date and version number
Page 2	3.1	Correction of grammatical error
Page 4	3.2	Correction of grammatical errors
Page 4	3.3	Inclusion of Appointed Persons in addition to

		the Planning Appeals Commission
Page 4	3.5	Correction of grammatical errors and explanation of additional tasks that a Council may wish to include in the Local Development Plan Timetable, and the benefit in doing so, particularly at the Local Policies Plan stage of plan making when consultees are required to input on all eleven draft Plan Documents.
Page 5	3.6	Recommendation that a timetable includes indicative dates on a quarterly basis
Page 5	3.7	Correction of grammatical errors and change of reference from a “binding report” to a “direction”.
Page 6	3.11	Correction of grammatical errors
Page 6	3.12	Reposition of paragraph and elaboration of the importance of good communication with the Department and relevant stakeholders and its use in considering the need to schedule further work or appoint Independent Examiners
Page 7	3.13	Reposition of paragraph
Page 7	3.14	Elaboration that the Chief Planners Update allows up to six months flexibility to formally revise a timetable and a reminder that a Council should consider the need to update its evidence base and notional plan end date to take account of any timeframe slippage.
Page 8	Annex 1 Example Timetable	Correction of typographical errors and the inclusion of a reference to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement in addition to the Regional Development Strategy
Page 9	Annex 1 Example Timetable	Replacement of previous table with a clearer version
Page 9	Annex 1 Example Timetable	Replacement of Habitats Regulations Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment etc with other accompanying assessments
Page 9	Annex 1 Example Timetable	Replacement of Advisory Report with Independent Examination Report and updated references to the Department for Infrastructure
Page 9	Annex 1 Example Timetable	Replace reference to “binding report” with “direction”
Page 10	Annex 1 Project Management	Replacement of Department of Environment with Department for Infrastructure, updated references to draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan, replacement of the phrase “binding report” with “direction” and correction of typographical errors

Page 12	Annex 1 Annual Monitoring	Additional text on plan monitoring and review and reference to the appropriate Development Plan Practice Note, replacement of Department Of Environment with Department for Infrastructure and correction of typographical errors.
N/A	N/A	Updates to footnotes

Department for Infrastructure

James House

2 - 4 Cromac Avenue

Belfast

BT7 2JA