



Report to Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Date 18th April 2024
Title Planning Committee Performance
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1. Background

- 1.1. In November 2024 as part of ongoing monitoring of the Service the *Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee* received a review of the performance of the Councils Development Management functions for the financial year April 2022 to March 2023.
- 1.2. It was requested that the Planning Performance data/dashboards (Appendix 1 and 3) be reproduced for each of the Area Planning Committees.
- 1.3. At present we can only produce this data by legacy planning area, so amalgamates the North and Central Committees, and the East and South Committees. We have however manually also collated data regarding applications referred each individual Planning Committee for Jan-Dec 2023.
- 1.4. A project is underway known as “One Uniform” which is intended to move all planning application processing onto a single back-office planning system. Once this has been achieved, we will be able to interrogate a single database and produce a range of performance and monitoring information.

2. Planning Committee

- 2.2 The role of Planning Committee is to focus on those planning applications which would benefit from scrutiny, such as reviewing recommendations where the weighing and balancing of the issues is finely balanced.
- 2.3 In such cases the Committee is entitled to consider the issues and in giving them different “weight” come to a different decision to that being recommended by the Officers. All Committee decisions must be robust and capable of defence if challenged.
- 2.4 Five Area Planning Committees and a Strategic Planning Committee are operated as required by the Council Constitution. They can determine any “outline”, “full” or “reserved matters” planning applications brought before them.

2.5 There is no limit to the number of planning applications that can be identified as potentially benefiting from Committee scrutiny. This can be either through “Member Call-in”, “Late member Call-in”, “3 Member Call-in”, “Parish or Town Council Call-in” or the Head of the Planning & Environment Service may feel that it’s appropriate to send an application to committee by declining to use his delegated authority. In addition, the constitution requires that certain planning applications are automatically always considered by Committee e.g. where the Council is the applicant, etc.

3. Referral Process

3.2 Bringing any planning application before a Planning Committee will however result in additional cost and a delay in a decision being made.

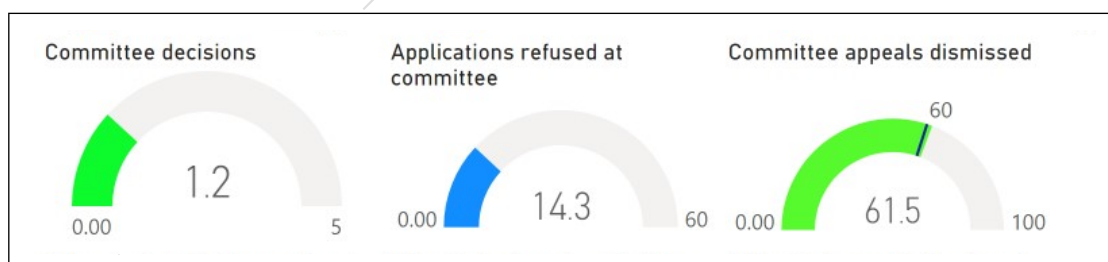
3.3 To ensure consistency all requests are considered in consultation with the relevant Planning Committee Chairman. This process ensures only those applications which would benefit from additional scrutiny are referred to Committee, allowing the others to be more appropriately determined under delegated powers.

3.4 Planning applications should be determined as quickly as possible. Most applications are straightforward (either approvals or refusals) and are therefore determined by Planning Officers.

4. Performance

Planning appeal statistics 2022/23

4.2 The overall headline figures for 2022/23 show an efficient process being operated. In accordance with good practice only a small percentage (1.2%) of applications are being referred to Planning Committee for scrutiny.



4.3 Of those considered at a Planning Committee only 14.3% are being refused. Then of those subsequently challenged at appeal the Council is then successfully defending its position in 61.5% of cases.

4.4 The fact that this is slightly lower than the Council wide figure for dismissed appeals (68.4%), is a reflection of the fact that it is the more challenging and complex applications that are considered by Planning Committee(s).

Planning appeal statistics 2023/24 (April 23 to 8th March 24)

- 4.5 The comparison of stats for most of 23/24 shows a performance that is close to the last year. The call up process is still working well. Like 22/23, and following good practice, 1.6% of applications went to Planning Committee for review.
- 4.6 Taking applications to Committee delays the decision and adds an average of well over £1,000 per application in processing costs.

The colours in the graphics below are not meant to convey any meaning or importance.



- 4.7 About 15% of the applications that go to a Planning Committee are being refused. Then, out of those that are then appealed, the Council is then successful in 57.1% of cases.

Planning appeal costs.

- 4.8 The Local Planning Authority has no control over the number or timing of planning appeals or other legal challenges. The Council receives no additional fee but must defend these or face having to pay the appellants costs on the grounds of unreasonable behaviour.
- 4.9 Once a valid planning appeal has been lodged the Planning Inspectorate decide the method by which the appeal will be determined and from that moment the Council must abide by a very strict timetable.
- 4.10 In particular “Public Inquiries” are becoming more expensive year on year. A two- or three-week Planning Inquiry can easily cost the Council around £80-£100K in additional external fees. There are many reasons for this:
- Appellants seem prepared to invest in a greater number of specialist witnesses (ecology, landscaping, highways, etc) and more senior legal representation,
 - Legislation is ever more complex, and government guidance is ambiguous and frequently changing, all of which leads to more disputes on points of law,
 - Inquiries into the larger housing proposals, and enforcement Inquiries, are taking longer which increases their cost to the Council: where in the past these might take 2 days, they are now taking 9 days or longer, and,
 - A significant Council cost comes from legal representation and both internal and external specialist professional witnesses. The cost of providing the specialist witnesses required to robustly defend the Council’s position, and particularly the cost of a good legal advocate (sometimes a QC) for “significant” Inquiries is every increasing. For 22/23 this cost £357,401 and

for 23/24 the costs have been £160,875, but as the Council is in the middle of an enquiry which started mid-March and will not conclude until May this figure may increase.

Planning Committee Meetings

- 4.11 Data manually collated regarding Planning Committees meetings from January to December 2023 indicates:

Planning Committee (January to December 2023)	Called Up	Withdrawn	Deferred	Number of Meetings Cancelled	Number of Meetings Held
Strategic Sites	16	1	0	6	10
North	5	0	0	9	4
Central	10	0	1	3	6
South	17	0	1	2	12
East	14	0	2	6	7
West	32	4	1	2	11
Total	94	5	5	28	50

- 4.12 Planning applications need to be decided quickly. However, the number and timing of applications that need committee attention will both vary over time and by committee area. To make sure applications are handled effectively, Planning Committee meetings are planned for the whole year. They are then called off if they are not needed, as this is clearer than trying to schedule meetings only when they are needed.
- 4.13 The updated “legacy area” data requested by the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee is reproduced in the attached appendices.

5. Benchmarking

- 5.2 By way of general context, the table below provides a national comparison of “Planning Applications” for the year 2022/23 against some of our immediate neighbours.

Local Planning Authority	Applications received	Applications decided	Applications withdrawn	Application decisions (Delegated)	Application decisions (Committee)	% Committee Decisions
Buckinghamshire	6462	5815	664	5745	70	1.2%
Hillingdon	2697	2384	216	2298	86	3.6%
Central Bedfordshire	2097	2104	0	2047	57	2.7%

Local Planning Authority	Applications received	Applications decided	Applications withdrawn	Application decisions (Delegated)	Application decisions (Committee)	% Committee Decisions
South Oxfordshire	1995	1959	134	1899	60	3.1%
Windsor and Maidenhead	1877	1752	167	1716	36	2.1%
Milton Keynes	1444	1499	151	1469	30	2.0%
Dacorum	1433	1309	150	1265	44	3.4%
Bedford	1250	1347	91	1306	41	3.0%
Three Rivers	1032	939	123	885	54	5.8%
Slough	721	738	57	730	8	1.1%

Source: Government national planning statistics collected on a quarterly basis

- 5.3 Buckinghamshire Council is one of the largest Local Planning Authorities in the country as is demonstrated by the volume of applications being processed annually. For context the 6462 applications received as a percentage of population (553,300 as of mid-2021) is 1.16%.

Appendices

- **Appendix One – Buckinghamshire:** Planning application statistics 2022/23 & 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)
- **Appendix Two – North & Central:** Planning application statistics 2022/23 & 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)
- **Appendix Three – South & East:** Planning application statistics 2022/23 & 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)
- **Appendix Four – West:** Planning application statistics 2022/23 & 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)

Appendix One – Buckinghamshire

Planning application statistics 2022/23.

Major applications determined on time



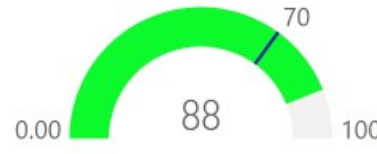
Committee decisions

Minor applications determined on time



Applications refused at committee

Householder applications determined on time

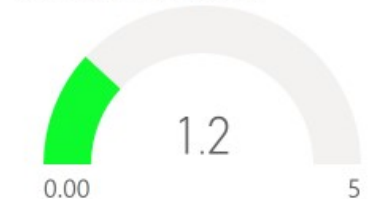
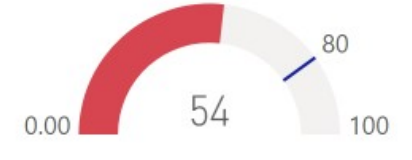


Committee appeals dismissed

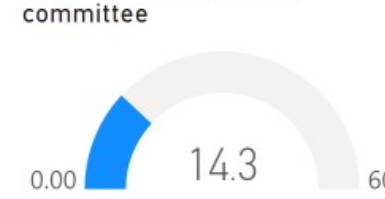
Other applications determined on time



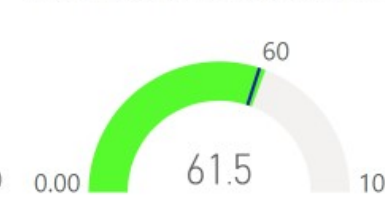
Decisions issued without extension of time



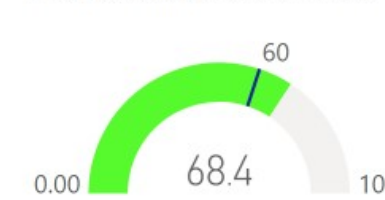
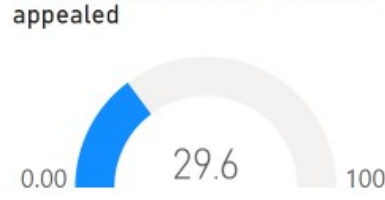
Delegated applications refused



Delegated refused applications appealed



Delegated appeals dismissed



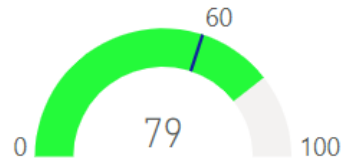
Major applications received	Minor applications received	Householder applications received	Other applications received	All applications received	Applications refused	Appeals received	Appeals dismissed
188	1441	4278	6505	12412	733	225	173

Committee decisions	Delegated in consultation with Chair
75	29
Applications refused at committee	Appeals received for committee refusals
10	1
Appeals dismissed	
5	

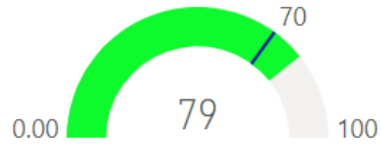
AREA	
■ Select all	
■ Minerals & Waste	
■ North & Central	
■ South & East	
■ West	

Planning application statistics 2023/24 (April 23-8th March 24)

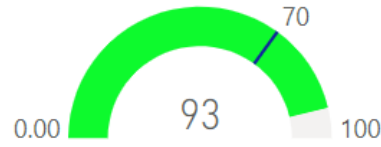
Major applications determined on time



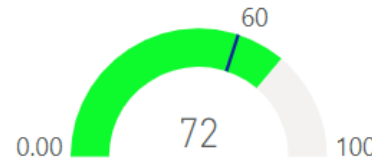
Minor applications determined on time



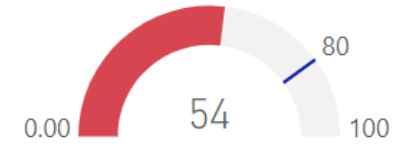
Householder applications determined on time



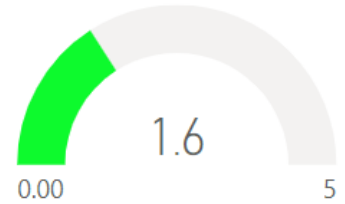
Other applications determined on time



Decisions issued without extension of time



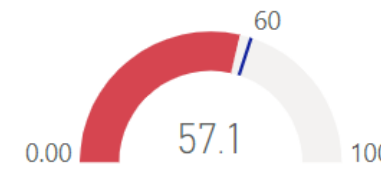
Committee decisions



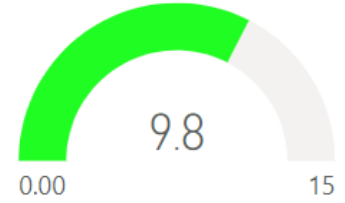
Applications refused at committee



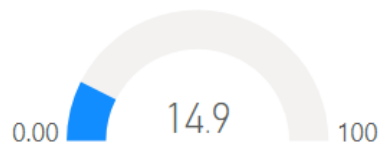
Committee appeals dismissed



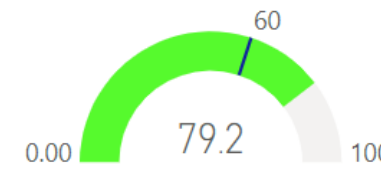
Delegated applications refused



Delegated refused applications appealed



Delegated appeals dismissed



Committee decisions	Delegated in consultation with Chair
42	11
Applications refused at committee	Appeals received for committee refusals
6	1
Appeals dismissed	
3	

Major applications received	Minor applications received	Householder applications received	Other applications received	All applications received	Applications refused	Appeals received	Appeals dismissed
85	634	1800	2975	5494	248	84	76

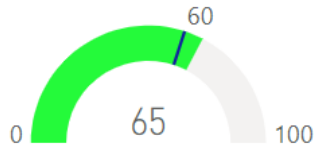
AREA

- Select all
- Minerals & Waste
- North & Central
- South & East
- West

Appendix Two – North and Central

Planning application statistics 2022/23

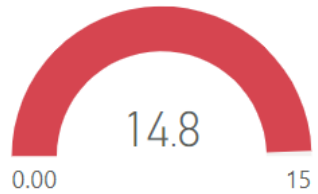
Major applications determined on time



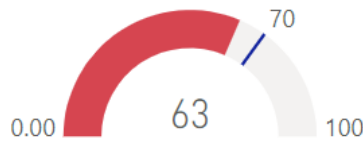
Committee decisions



Delegated applications refused



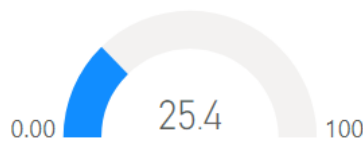
Minor applications determined on time



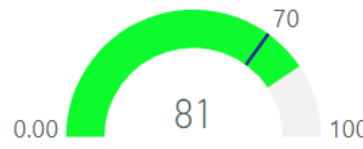
Applications refused at committee



Delegated refused applications appealed



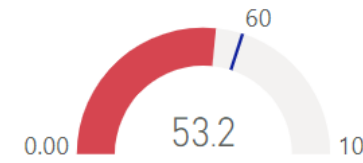
Householder applications determined on time



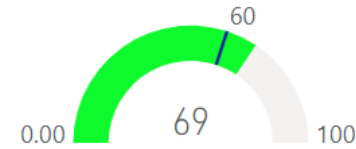
Committee appeals dismissed



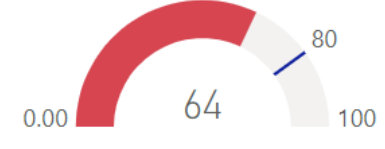
Delegated appeals dismissed



Other applications determined on time



Decisions issued without extension of time



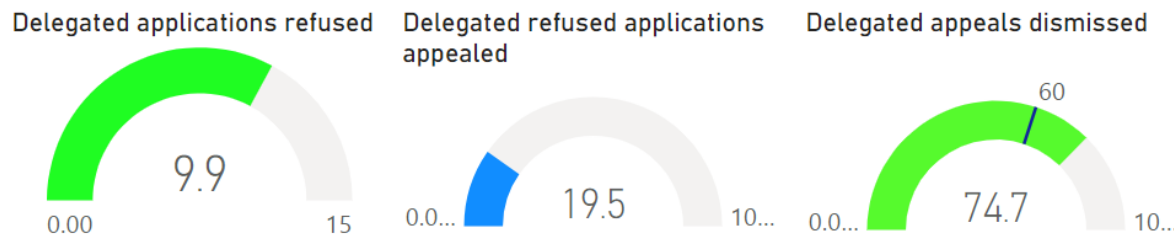
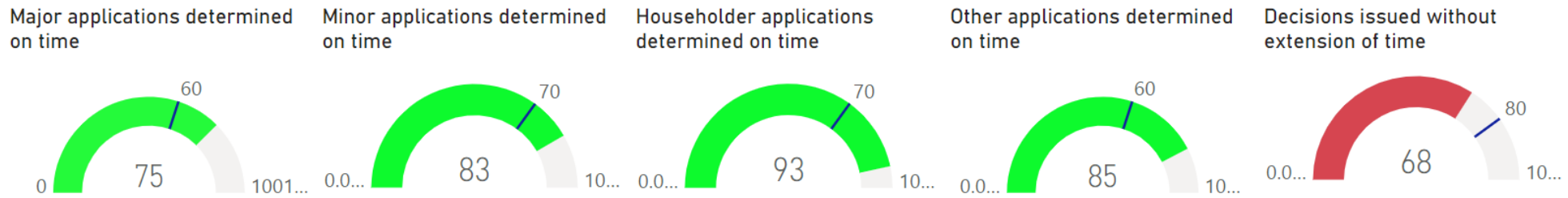
Major applications received	Minor applications received	Householder applications received	Other applications received	All applications received	Applications refused	Appeals received	Appeals dismissed
72	595	1187	2353	4207	272	79	48

Committee decisions	Delegated in consultation with Chair
22	3
Applications refused at committee	Appeals received for committee refusals
(Blank)	(Blank)
Appeals dismissed	
(Blank)	

AREA

- Select all
- Minerals & Waste
- North & Central
- South & East
- West

Planning application statistics 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)



Major applications received	Minor applications received	Householder applications received	Other applications received	All applications received	Applications refused	Appeals received	Appeals dismissed
80	536	971	2163	3750	157	44	53

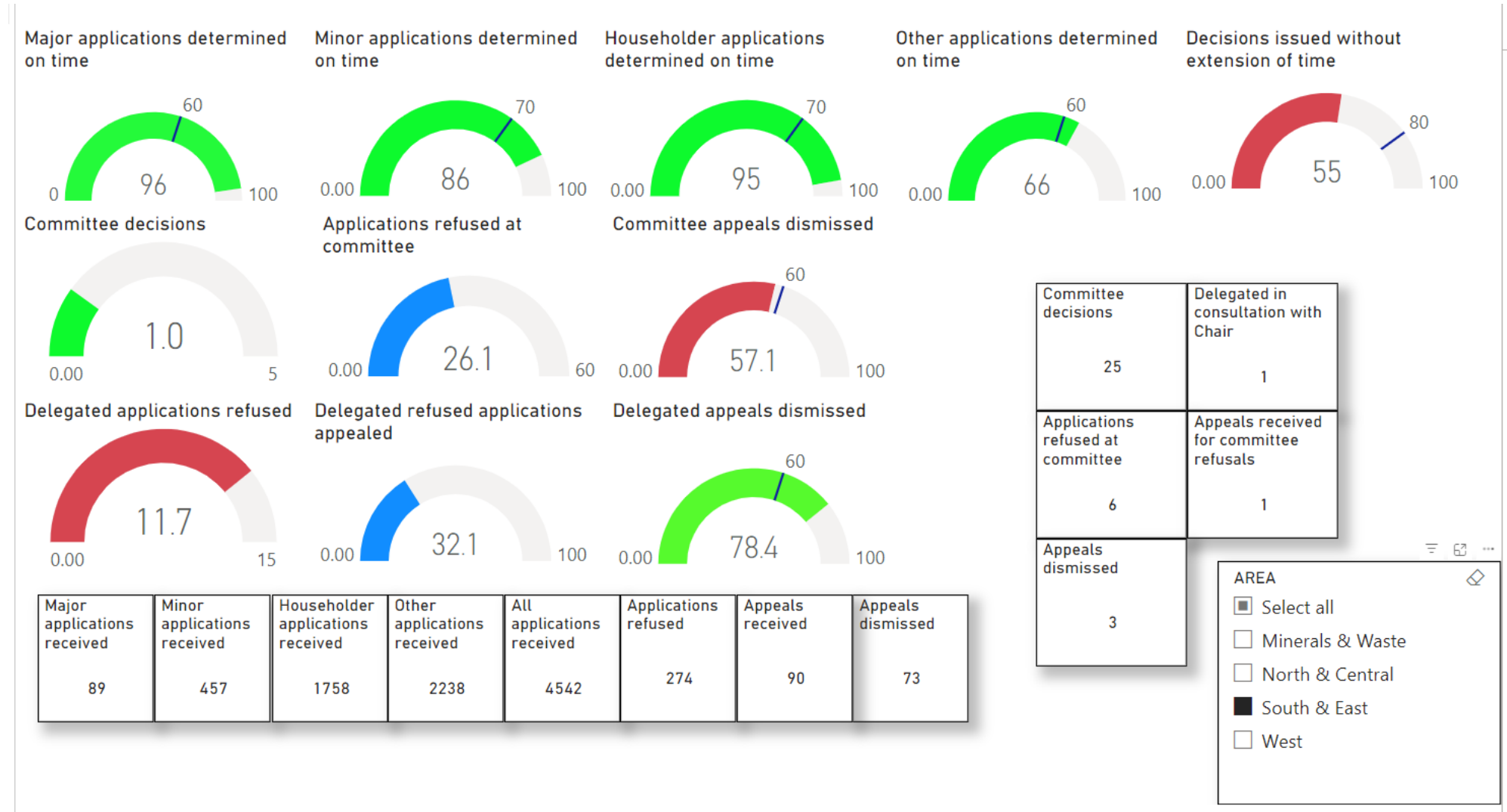
Committee decisions	Delegated in consultation with Chair
26	10
Applications refused at committee	Appeals received for committee refusals
3	1
Appeals dismissed	
1	

AREA

- Select all
- Minerals & Waste
- North & Central
- South & East
- West

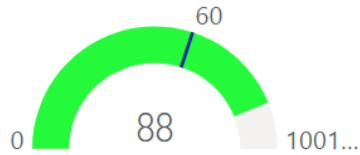
Appendix Three – East and South

Planning application statistics 2022/23.

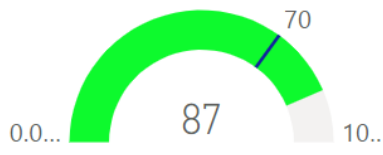


Planning application statistics 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)

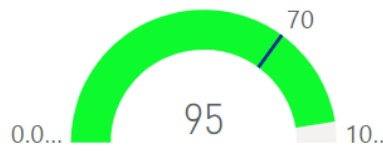
Major applications determined on time



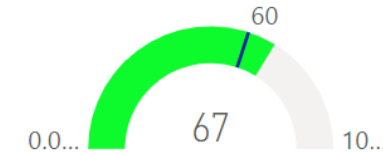
Minor applications determined on time



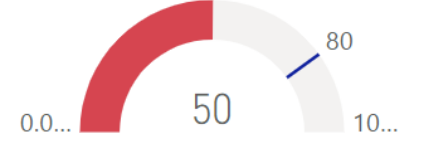
Householder applications determined on time



Other applications determined on time



Decisions issued without extension of time



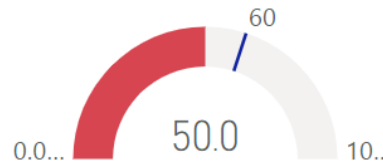
Committee decisions



Applications refused at committee



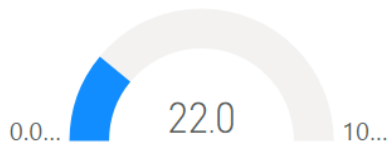
Committee appeals dismissed



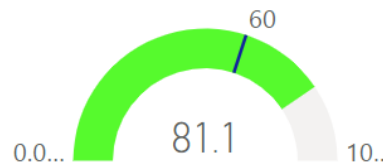
Delegated applications refused



Delegated refused applications appealed



Delegated appeals dismissed



Committee decisions	Delegated in consultation with Chair
32	3
Applications refused at committee	Appeals received for committee refusals
6	(Blank)
Appeals dismissed	
4	

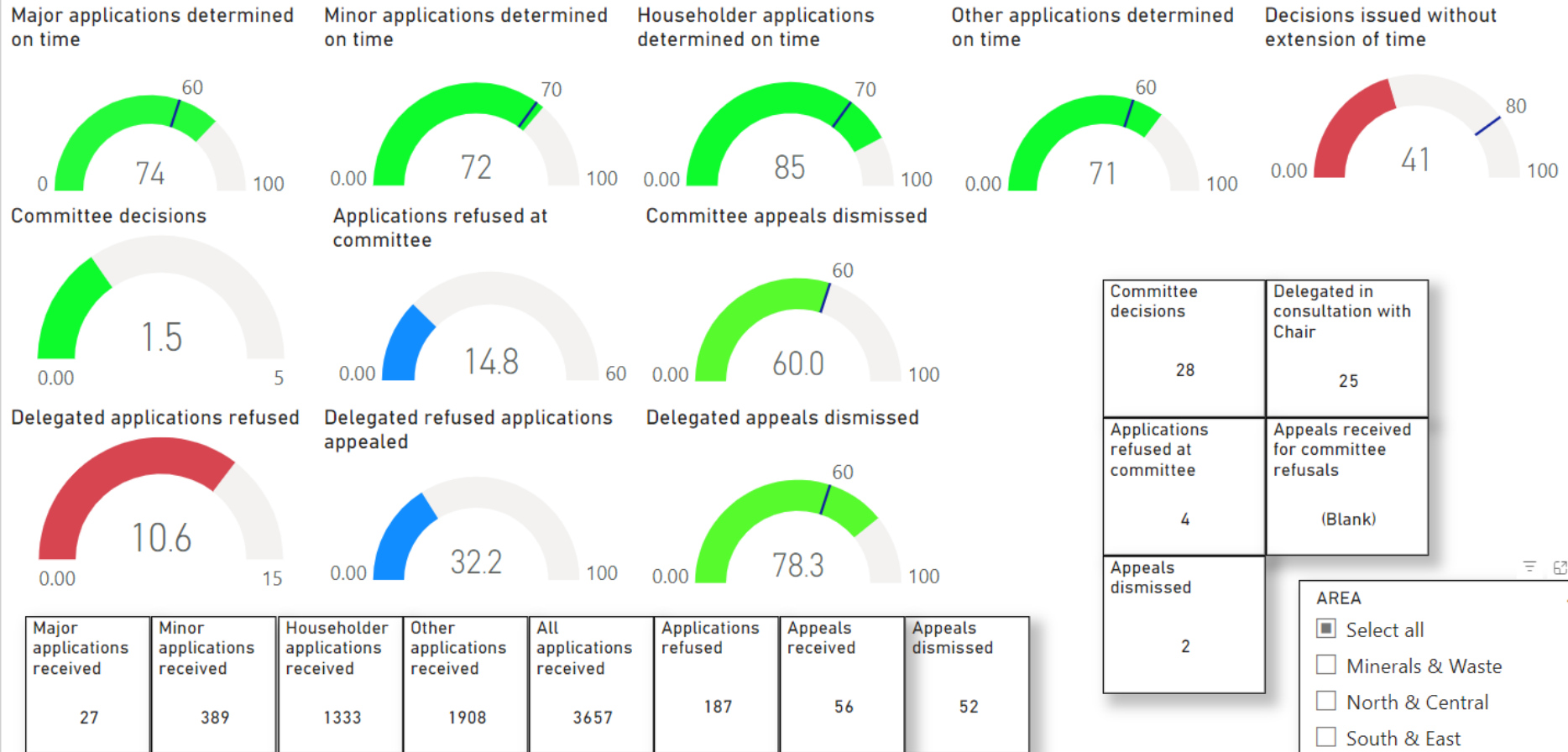
AREA

- Select all
- Minerals & Waste
- North & Central
- South & East
- West

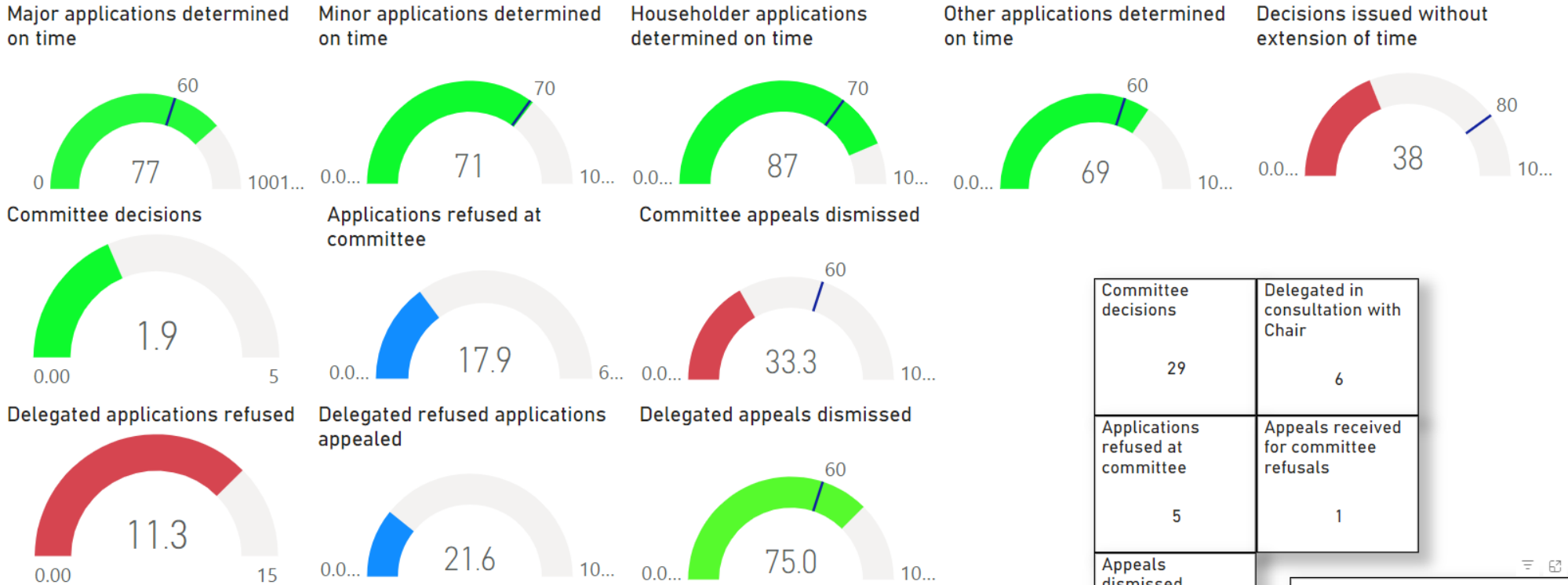
Major applications received	Minor applications received	Householder applications received	Other applications received	All applications received	Applications refused	Appeals received	Appeals dismissed
89	417	1395	2128	4029	233	74	76

Appendix Four – West

Planning application statistics 2022/23.



Planning application statistics 2023/24 (April 23 – 8th March 24)



Committee decisions	Delegated in consultation with Chair
29	6
Applications refused at committee	Appeals received for committee refusals
5	1
Appeals dismissed	
2	

AREA

- Select all
- Minerals & Waste
- North & Central
- South & East
- West

Major applications received	Minor applications received	Householder applications received	Other applications received	All applications received	Applications refused	Appeals received	Appeals dismissed
26	382	1102	1974	3484	172	54	37