

Appendix A: Some useful tools

These tools are provided to help council undertake a review. They should be applied as relevant and adopted to suit council requirements.

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

A2: File audit tool

A3: Planning workload and office statistics audit tool

A4: Planning processes audit tool

Feedback and suggestions for improvements to the tools are welcomed and should be emailed to planning.systems@dse.vic.gov.au

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Name of the auditor:

Title of auditor:

Date of the audit:

Counter signoff:

Date of previous audit:

Consistency with SPPF	No	Yes	If no, indicate future actions.
Does the planning scheme further the objectives of planning in Victoria?			
Does the planning scheme advance the strategic directions in the SPPF and adequately implement State Policy applicable to the municipality? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the MSS respond to or further the directions in Melbourne 2030 or other relevant State policies? 			
Are there clear links between the SPPF and the LPPF?			

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Local Planning Policy Framework			
	No	Yes	If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.
Have any issues emerged with the MSS since any previous review? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistencies with State policy • Difficulty in defending policy basis at VCAT • Outdated policy • Issues raised in consultation 	No	Yes	If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.
Is there repetition or conflict in the MSS, such as between housing and settlement policies?	No	Yes	If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.
Does the MSS comply with the Format of Municipal Strategic Statements (February 1999) VPP Practice Note?	No	Yes	If no, indicate future actions.
Does the MSS need simplification or clarification in any area? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have issues been raised in consultation? • Is there difficulty in arguing a case in officer reports or at VCAT hearings? 	No	Yes	If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Local Planning Policy Framework				
	No	Yes		If yes, indicate future actions.
Is any aspect of the MSS not relevant to land use decision-making? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do officer reports refer to the MSS? 	No	Yes		If yes, indicate future actions.
Are there any matters raised in VCAT decisions, or Planning Panels or Advisory Committee reports that require improvements to the LPPF?	No	Yes		If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.
Is council relying on adopted council policies or guidelines in decision-making that are not included in the planning scheme?	No	Yes		If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.
Are there particular planning issues that would benefit from a new or revised local policy?	No	Yes		If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.
Are there documents that should be included as a local policy (eg Advertising Policy or Urban Design Guidelines)?	No	Yes		If yes, nominate and indicate future actions.

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Assess the strategic objectives	No	Yes	If no, indicate future actions.
Do the objectives in the MSS adequately reflect the land use and development outcomes council wants to achieve?			
Do all the objectives have specific land use or development outcomes?			
Are the objectives being achieved?			
Do the objectives successfully guide planning decisions?			

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Assess the strategies	No	Yes	If no, indicate future actions.
Are the strategies clearly linked to and achieving the objectives?			
Are the strategies achieving the desired outcomes?			
Do the strategies help inform planning decisions?			

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

	No	Yes	
<p>Strategic gaps</p> <p>Has council reviewed the progress made on strategic gaps and actions identified in the last review?</p>			<p>If no, indicate future actions.</p>
<p>Have changes been made to the SPPF that require amendments to the LPPF?</p>			<p>If yes, specify future action.</p>
<p>Does council have commitments, policies or programs to address particular planning issues that should be included in the planning scheme?</p>			<p>If yes, specify and indicate future actions.</p>

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Links with the Council Plan	No	Yes	
Do the LPPF objectives align with land use and development objectives of the Council Plan?			If no, indicate future actions.
Since the last review, do changes to the Council Plan require amendments to the LPPF?			If yes, specify and indicate future actions.

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Assess the VPP implementation tools (local planning policies, zones, overlays)	No	Yes	
Are the VPP tools successful in achieving the objectives, strategies and desired outcomes?			If no, indicate future actions.
Are there any VPP tools used that are no longer useful or effective? Should these be modified or deleted from the planning scheme?			If yes, specify and indicate future actions.
Are the tools clearly linked to the objectives and strategies in the LPPF (are they strategically driven or do they provide for a strategic outcome)?			If no, indicate future actions.

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Format, consistency & usability	No	Yes	
Are the MSS and LPP expressed in plain English?			If no, indicate future actions.
Is the intent and language of the LPPF clear, usable and effective in meeting council land use objectives and decision-making?			If no, indicate future actions.
Are there superfluous or inconsistent policies, overlays and schedules that no longer contribute to council planning goals and objectives?			If yes, specify and indicate future actions.
Are improvements to the statutory drafting of the planning scheme required?			If yes, specify and indicate future actions.
Has the LPPF been assessed against the relevant VPP Practice Notes?			If no, indicate future actions.

A1: Planning scheme audit tool

Assess the monitoring of the scheme	No	Yes	
Is the planning scheme being regularly monitored and reviewed?			If no, indicate future actions.
Are there monitoring processes targeting the key strategic objectives of the scheme? • Is the information easy to collect?			If no, indicate future actions. If no, indicate future actions.
Are the monitoring processes the most appropriate means of measuring the performance of the objectives?			If no, indicate future actions.
Can the monitoring of the planning scheme be improved?			If yes, indicate future actions.

A2: File audit tool

The following checklist is not meant to be an exclusive list of the matters to be considered when undertaking a file audit. It is meant as a guide to assist council. Council can amend this list to suit its needs. For instance, council may use the file audit to confirm or deny matters raised by stakeholders or to check whether planning permit conditions are being applied correctly. In these cases, council will need to vary the checklist to include these issues.

Name of auditor:

Title of auditor:

Date of audit:

Counter signoff:

Date of previous audit:

Task	Comments
Description <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the planner accurately described the type of application in the file, the advertising material etc?	Describe and document instances where this has not occurred.

A2: File audit tool

Task	Comments
<p>Pre-application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was a pre-application meeting held? Was it documented? Who undertook the meeting? 	<p>Yes / No Yes / No</p>
<p>Further information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was a request for further information made? If yes, how long did it take to send out? 	<p>Yes / No Number of days</p>
<p>Public notification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the planner document the material detriment test? How long did it take to advertise the application once all information was received? 	<p>Yes / No Number of days</p>
<p>Delegation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the permit determined under delegation? How long did it take to get a delegated decision? 	<p>Yes / No Number of days</p>
<p>Referral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many days did it take to refer the application? How long did the internal referral comments take? How long did the external referrals take? 	<p>Number of days Number of days Number of days</p>
<p>Neighbourhood and site description (where relevant)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the planner certify the site description? How long did it take? 	<p>Yes/ No Number of days</p>
<p>Site inspections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the planner undertake a site inspection? After how many days? Was the visit documented? 	<p>Yes/ No Number of days Yes / No</p>

A2: File audit tool

Task	Comments
<p>Application assessment</p> <p>Did the planner document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why a permit is required? • Was the application assessed against the relevant provisions? • Were relevant policies used to assess the application? • Was the officer report concise yet complete in its assessment of the issues? 	<p>Permit triggers</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>The decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the conditions on the officer report consistent with the permit/the NoD? • Did the permit refer to which plans were being approved? • Were referral authority conditions accurately applied? • Was the decision made in accordance with the Deed of Delegation? 	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>
<p>Time taken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long did it take to decide the application (in total)? • How long did it take to make a decision after receipt of all information? • How long did it take to issue the NoD, permit or refusal after the officer report was approved? • Was a decision made before a 'failure to determine' review lodged at VCAT? 	<p>Number of days</p> <p>Number of days</p> <p>Number of days</p> <p>Yes / No</p>
<p>Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was a review lodged? • Was there internal and/or external representation? • Was information provided to VCAT on time? • How long did it take to issue a permit or refusal? 	<p>Yes / No</p> <p>Yes / No</p> <p>Yes / No</p> <p>Number of days</p>

A2: File audit tool

Task	Comments
<p>Register</p> <p>Were the details recorded in the planning register:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quickly?• Accurately?	<p>Number of days after receipt of an application</p> <p>Yes / No</p>
<p>File management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was material on the file kept in date order?• Were file notes legible and adequate?• Were documents missing?• Was the file kept in good order?	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>

A3: Planning workload and office statistics audit tool

Name of the auditor:

Title of auditor:

Date of the audit:

Counter signoff:

Date of previous audit:

Staff positions	Budgeted staff positions (expressed in equivalent full time positions "EFTs")		Actual staff numbers (expressed in equivalent full time positions "EFTs")		Staffing shortfall or oversupply	
	Last year	This year	Last year	This year	Last year	This year
Administration staff						
Enforcement officers						
Subdivision officers						
Statutory planners						
Strategic planners						
Co-ordinators/ team leaders						
Planning managers						
Directors						
Contract (or overload) staff						
Support staff that work in the planning unit (heritage, urban designer, arborist, student planner, para planner)						
Total						

Something to consider?

What role do consultants and contract staff play in the operation of the planning unit? For instance, do they work on minor applications or represent council at VCAT?

A3: Planning workload and office statistics audit tool

Workload

Data from Planning Permit Activity Report	Last year			This year		
	Council	Region	State	Council	Region	State
	No.	No.	%	No.	No.	%
Total applications lodged						
Total number of decisions on applications lodged						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit / NoD • Refusal • Withdrawn / lapsed 						
Main land use or development category for applications						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential alterations and additions • One new dwelling • More than one new dwelling • Other accommodation • Agriculture • Buildings and works only • Industry, warehouse or store • Office • Other • Retail premises • Subdivision only • Vegetation removal • Parking • Advertising signs 						
Other workload information						
Number of planning information requests/letters						
Number of planning certificates						
Number of requests to amend plans/planning permits						
Number of planning scheme amendments						
Number of Planning Panels/Advisory Committees						
Number of strategic studies or other planning initiatives						

A3: Planning workload and office statistics audit tool

Cost

Cost to operate statutory and strategic functions of the council	Last year	This year
A. Statutory		
B. Strategic		
C. Total cost (A+B = C)		
D. Fee income received		
E. Balance (C-D=E)		
F. Average cost per application (E/ total number of applications) = F.		

Something to consider?

- Is there an opportunity to share this data with other councils in your area to discuss cost structures?
- What lessons could be learned from sharing this sort of information?

VCAT Review and enforcement (refer VCAT)

Category	Last year	This year
Number of VCAT reviews		
Number of VCAT reviews by objectors about decision to grant a permit		
Number of VCAT reviews by applicants about decision to refuse a permit		
Number of VCAT reviews by applicant about conditions		
Number of VCAT reviews by applicant over failure to decide an application		
Number of enforcement order applications		
Number of other matters		
Total		

Time frames for making decisions

Using council information systems or relying on the information collected during the file audit, describe the time taken (statutory planning days) to determine planning permit applications.

	Last year	This year
Within 60 days		
Within 90 days		
Within 120 days		
More than 120 days		

A3: Planning workload and office statistics audit tool

Files per staff member

Describe the average number of planning matters that are allocated to planning staff.

A. Number of all planning staff involved in assessment of planning permit applications (including temporary, contract, administration staff and team leaders)	B. Number of active planning applications being assessed by council today	C. Ratio of applications per staff (B/A = C) This year	C. Ratio of applications per staff (B/A = C) Last year

A. Number of all planning staff involved in amended plans (including temporary, contract, administration staff and team leaders)	B. Number of active amended plans being assessed by council today	C. Ratio of applications per staff (B/A = C) This year	C. Ratio of applications per staff (B/A = C) Last year

A. Number of all planning staff involved in active VCAT reviews (including temporary, contract, administration staff and team leaders)	B. Number of active VCAT reviews being assessed by council today	C. Ratio of reviews per staff (B/A = C) This year	C. Ratio of reviews per staff (B/A = C) Last year

A. Number of all planning staff involved in active planning panels (including temporary, contract, administration staff and team leaders)	B. Number of active planning panels being assessed by council today	C. Ratio of panels per staff (B/A = C) This year	C. Ratio of panels per staff (B/A = C) Last year

A4: Planning processes audit tool

Name of the auditor:

Title of auditor:

Date of the audit:

Counter signoff:

Date of previous audit:

1. Pre-application Meetings		How we have performed		Improvements to performance (What do we want to improve?)		
		Yes	No	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
1.1.	Does council have a process for managing pre-application meetings?					
1.2	Are these meetings documented?					
1.3	Is there material available to inform applicants of the benefits of the process? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the counter • On the web site 					
1.4	Is there a checklist to show the sort of information to be submitted with planning applications?					
1.5	Have staff been trained to conduct pre-application meetings?					
1.6	Is there a process for involving staff from other departments in pre-application meetings? (eg traffic engineers/ arborist)					
1.7	What % of applications had file notes for pre-application meetings (collect as part of file audit)?		%			
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review?						
Is performance improving as proposed?						
Is further action required?						

A4: Planning processes audit tool

2.Registration, lodgement, referral and assignment

This information can be compiled either from the file audit or from council's planning register/database.

Planning actions	Current performance	Performance target			Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target
		Year 2	Year 3		
2.1 Register an application.	Council registers ___% of new applications within ___ working days of receipt.				Short term Medium term Long term
2.2 Send acknowledgment letter.	Council takes an average of ___ days to acknowledge an application.				
2.3 Create an electronic and hard copy of the application.	Council takes an average of ___ days to create electronic and hard copy application.				
2.4 Allocate the application to a planner.	Applications are allocated to a planner within ___ days.				
2.5 Internal and external referral requirements identified and application returned.	Applications are sent to referral authorities within an average of ___ days.				
2.6 External referrals sent out within 28 days of receiving required information.	___ % of applications where referrals sent out within 28 days.				
2.7 Advice from internal referrals is received.	Advice from internal referrals is received on average within ___ days.				

Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review?

Is performance improving as proposed?

Is further action required?

A4: Planning processes audit tool

3. Preliminary assessment			
Planning actions	Current performance	Performance target	Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target
		Year 2	Year 3
3.1	Undertake a site inspection.	Site inspections made within an average of ____ days of application receipt.	Short term
3.2	Undertake and complete a preliminary assessment of the application.	Preliminary assessments undertaken for ____% of applications .	Medium term
3.3	Provide advice on the acceptance of site context / design response plans (Clause 54, 55, 56) within 10 working days of the officer receiving the file.	Advice on site context and design response is usually given within ____ days.	
3.4	Make a request for further information within 28 days from receiving an application.	____% of requests for more information are made within 28 days of receipt.	Long term
3.5	Internal and external referrals received.	Internal referrals received on average: ____ days. External referrals received on average: ____ days.	
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review? Is performance improving as proposed? Is further action required?			

A4: Planning processes audit tool

4. Consultation and public notification				
Planning action	Current performance	Performance target		Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target
		Year 2	Year 3	
4.1	Document material detriment decision.	Documented in ___% of application files.		Short term
4.2	Documented advertising requirements.	Documented in ___% of application files.		Medium term
4.3	Advertise the application.	Average number of days taken to advertise the application after receiving all required further information is ___ days.		
4.4	Acknowledge submissions.	Average number of days taken to send a letter after receiving a submission is ___ days.		Long term
4.5	Conduct a consultation meeting (if required).	Average number of days before a consultation meeting is held (after notice requirements met – 14 days expired and statutory declaration returned) is ___ days.		
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review? Is performance improving as proposed? Is further action required?				

A4: Planning processes audit tool

5. Delegation				
Planning action	Current performance	Performance target		Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target
		Year 2	Year 3	
5.1	Is there a process to ensure that planners are aware of their responsibilities under the Deed of Delegation?	Yes/ No (Consider a brief survey of planning staff to check responses)		Short term
5.2	Are decisions made in accordance with the requirement of the Deed of Delegation?	Using a file audit, check that decisions have been made consistent with the Deed of Delegation. ___ % comply.		Medium term
5.3	When did council last review the Deed of Delegation?	Year last reviewed.		
5.4	Are there aspects of the Deed of Delegation that are leading to blockages in the assessment of planning applications?	List the aspects that are causing blockages.		Long term
5.5	What percentage of decisions are made by delegation?	Delegate decides ___ % of all applications.		
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review? Is performance improving as proposed? Is further action required?				

A4: Planning processes audit tool

6. Assessment, file management, reporting and decision-making				
Planning action	Current performance	Performance target		Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target
		Year 2	Year 3	
6.1	Are planners accurately describing the type of use or development proposed?	Achieved in ___% of cases.		Short term
6.2	Are planners certifying the neighbourhood and site description?	Certified in ___% of cases.		
6.3	Has the planner undertaken a site inspection (or documented the reasons why an inspection was not required)?	Site inspection occurred in ___% of applications. No site inspection occurred, but reasons given in ___% of applications. No inspection occurred and no reasons given in ___% of applications.		Medium term
6.4	Has the site inspection been documented?	Site inspection documented in ___% of applications.		
6.5	Has the planner assessed the application against relevant policies?	Applicable policies were assessed in ___% of applications.		
6.6	Has the planner assessed the application against the relevant provisions?	Applicable provisions were assessed in ___% of applications.		Long term
6.7	Is the material on file kept in date order?	Material kept in date order in ___% of files.		
6.8	Is the file complete with no documents missing?	Documentation was complete in ___% of files.		
6.9	Are the conditions in the officer report accurately included on Permit / NoD?	Permits accurately list officer's conditions in ___% of files.		
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review?				
Is performance improving as proposed?				
Is further action required?				

A4: Planning processes audit tool

7. Applications for Review				
Planning actions	Current performance	Performance target		Improvements that council will make to achieve performance target
		Year 2	Year 3	
7.1	Has council consistently returned advice requested by VCAT within the prescribed time?	Council returns material within prescribed time on ___% of occasions.		Short term
7.2	Are the conditions consistently circulated in the prescribed time?	Council circulates conditions ten days prior to hearing in ___% of reviews.		
7.3	% of Council decisions overturned at a review by VCAT.	Council decisions overturned on review by VCAT for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ___% of decisions made by officers. • ___% of decisions made by councillors. 		Medium term
7.4	How many VCAT reviews are undertaken by external consultants / lawyers etc?	___% of all reviews are undertaken by external staff.		
7.5	How many officer days has council spent at VCAT?	___ officer days are spent at VCAT.		Long term
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review? Is performance improving as proposed? Is further action required?				

A4: Planning processes audit tool

8. Enforcement		Current performance		Performance target		Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target
Planning action		Year 2	Year 3			
<p>Council is encouraged to develop an enforcement service that undertakes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reactive service, that responds to complaints from the public or other council staff and takes enforcement action where appropriate. • A compliance service that ensures proposals comply with permit conditions (either prior to completion or prior to occupation). For example, compliance with the requirements of a landscaping plan. • A pro-active service that monitors existing permits to ensure compliance with planning permits. 						
8.1	Reactive services How many complaints have been received by council in relation to breaches of the scheme etc?	Number of complaints received ____.				Short term
8.2	How many days has it taken council to respond to complaints?	Average number of days taken to a respond to complaint is ____ days.				
8.3	Compliance services How many planning permits are checked for compliance with conditions?	Number and percentage of permits checked. ____ ____%				Medium term
8.4	Pro-active services How many pro-active inspections are undertaken each year?	The number of inspections conducted each year is ____.				Long term
8.5	How many breaches are detected during these inspections?	The number of breaches identified is ____ which is ____% of the number of inspections.				
<p>Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review? Is performance improving as proposed? Is further action required?</p>						

A4: Planning processes audit tool

9. Training and support				
Professional training and education is vital in order to deliver high quality planning services. Most organisations have training plans in place for professional staff. This section provides an opportunity to review this plan and ensure its effectiveness and implementation.				
Training and education questions	Current performance	Performance target		Improvements that council will make to achieve the performance target.
		Year 2	Year 3	
9.1 Does the planning unit have an induction process for new staff?				Short term
9.2 When was the induction program last reviewed?				
9.3 Does the planning unit have a training plan for its professional and administration staff?				Medium term
9.4 When was this plan last reviewed?				
9.5 When was the last time staff were consulted over training and educational needs?				
9.6 Have managers or coordinators identified specific training needs that need to be addressed eg mentoring?				Long term
9.7 Have managers/co-ordinators been given appropriate management training?				
Has council met the performance target identified in the previous review?				
Is performance improving as proposed?				
Is further action required?				