

**DEVELOPMENT BUREAU
GENERAL CIRCULAR NO. 1/2026**

**Expediting Development Approvals for
Large-Scale Private Developments**

*(Note: This Circular should be read by the Directors of Bureau,
Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Department and officers
dealing with relevant matters.)*

Purpose

This Circular sets out new measures that aims to expedite approval processes for large-scale private development projects through concerted efforts from government departments.

Background

2. Large-scale private developments entail many processes from inception to implementation during which approvals from government departments are required at different stages. Timely approvals can allow developments to materialise faster and cheaper, bringing early benefits to the wider community. To follow up on the recommendation in the 2025 Policy Address of further streamlining administrative procedures, the Development Bureau (DEVB) together with its three departments (the Planning Department (PlanD), the Lands Department (LandsD) and the Buildings Department (BD)) have identified key approval processes at planning, lands, and buildings stages and in collaboration with other departments, formulated new measures to strengthen internal monitoring to expedite development approvals. These measures will be applied across the territory, to both the Northern Metropolis (NM) and non-NM projects.

3. Key features of the new measures are summarised below –

- (a) **Applicable projects** – efforts will be targeted towards large-scale or significant projects. Apart from housing and

commercial developments, private projects promoting industry development can also benefit (see paragraph 4 below);

- (b) **Stronger deadline management** – for key approvals (i.e. planning, lands, or buildings approvals resting on the critical path to project delivery), clear internal deadlines have been set for departments to provide comments, reconcile differences and escalate for steer. Departments are expected to observe both timeliness and reasonableness of their comments. Designated directorate officers in PlanD, LandsD, and BD will strictly enforce deadlines through the newly established escalation mechanisms (see paragraphs 6-15 below);
- (c) **Early escalation for high-level steer** – cases unresolved by PlanD/LandsD/BD under (b) above will be escalated to the newly established Northern Metropolis Projects Supervision Office (NMPSO) led by the Permanent Secretary for Development (Planning & Lands) for NM Projects¹, and the Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control (SGSDC) chaired by the Under Secretary for Development for non-NM projects². Both set-ups are under DEVB, with NMPSO supported by the Northern Metropolis Coordination Office (NMCO), and SGSDC by the Development Projects Facilitation Office (DPFO). Directorate officers from departments outside DEVB's purview will attend NMPSO/SGSDC meetings to facilitate decision-making if the subject cases so warrant. Unresolved cases will be put to Deputy Financial Secretary and other senior officials for ruling;
- (d) **The roles of NMPSO and SGSDC** – the two set-ups are not to replace departments' approving authority, but to provide a platform to narrow differences and resolve challenging cases with concerted efforts from departments. NMPSO and SGSDC will provide steer timely to allow the project to advance to next stage. It should also be stressed that enhanced development efficiency should not be at the expense of public safety. In other words, any streamlining and/or enhancement in development efficiency should not compromise our control over

¹ NMPSO consists of members from DEVB (including NMCO), PlanD, LandsD, BD and the Civil Engineering and Development Department. Depending on the actual cases to be discussed at any particular meeting, other relevant departments would be invited to join on a need basis.

² SGSDC was formed and has been having meetings since 2018. It is made up of members from DEVB, PlanD, LandsD, BD and other technical departments. Depending on the actual cases to be discussed at any particular meeting, other relevant departments would be invited to join on a need basis.

development-related safety issues;

- (e) **Performance monitoring** – NMPSO and SGSDC will meet regularly to deal with cases and monitor performance. A centralised database is being developed making use of the Common Spatial Data Infrastructure to assist DEVB in maintaining oversight and tracking progress. PlanD, LandsD, and BD have also formulated key performance indicators (KPIs) to facilitate performance monitoring; and
- (f) **Involvement of the trade** – developers may also approach NMCO or DPFO to bring challenging cases direct to NMPSO or SGSDC for discussion.

In gist, we hope that by setting clear internal deadlines for departments to follow, tasking PlanD, LandsD, and BD to closely monitor compliance and putting in place escalation mechanisms for high-level intervention, potential issues or challenges can be more timely detected and resolved to expedite development approvals. When processing land development-related applications, departments are expected to continue adhering to the policy directions and good practices set out in DEVB General Circular 1/2024 on “Adopting a Facilitating and Collaborative Mindset”.

Applicability

- 4. Applicable private development projects include -
 - (a) residential developments with 500 flats or more;
 - (b) commercial developments with gross floor area of 100 000 m² or more;
 - (c) all industry-related developments, such as those related to innovation and technology, education, medical and healthcare, tourism, logistics, green energy, as well as arts, culture and creative industries³; and
 - (d) other projects with strategic significance or with policy support requiring fast-track processing.

³ For clarity, such uses, if on a temporary basis, would not be eligible for facilitation under the solution.

5. Applicable key approvals are tabulated as follows -

Department	Approval Process
PlanD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ pre-application enquiries and planning applications under sections 12A and 16 of the Town Planning Ordinance (Cap. 131) (“s.12A and s.16 applications”)
LandsD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ big-ticket lease modification / land exchange applications▪ policy-driven private treaty grants (PTGs) and short-term tenancies (STTs)▪ certificate of compliance (CC) applications for non-New Territories Exempted Houses (non-NTEH) developments
BD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ general building plan approvals

Pre-application enquiries and planning applications

6. It is a statutory requirement that s.12A and s.16 applications are to be considered by the Town Planning Board (TPB) within 2 months of receipt of application, while complicated applications may involve submissions of further information hence requiring additional processing time as approved by TPB. To ensure timely processing, a three-tier monitoring/escalation mechanism is proposed to be set up administratively that will run in parallel with the existing statutory planning application process. Such a mechanism would also be applicable to pre-application enquiries⁴.

7. The first tier involves District Planning Officers (at D1 level), who will closely monitor bureaux/departments’ (B/Ds) comments, discuss and resolve issues with the applicant/proponent and relevant B/Ds. If relevant B/Ds’ comments remain outstanding (i.e. comments not received within 3 weeks after circulation) or unresolved (e.g. comments which the applicant/proponent considers highly unreasonable and/or there are major conflicting views between B/Ds even after best endeavors to resolve), the matter would be escalated to the second tier, i.e. the relevant Assistant Director (at D2 level) and/or Deputy Director (at D3 level), within 4 weeks from the date of receipt of the application/enquiry. If the issues remain

⁴ For pre-application enquiries, B/Ds will send written comments direct to the proponent with copy to PlanD so that PlanD could maintain oversight and be aware of any conflicting departmental comments earlier and escalate the matter as necessary for early high-level intervention.

unresolved within 6 weeks, PlanD would escalate to NMPSO or SGSDC, which would give a steer or ruling within 8 weeks.

8. For applicable projects, PlanD's KPI is to complete processing of at least 80% of pre-application enquiries and planning applications within 6 months. Graphical illustrations of this three-tier mechanism in the form of flowcharts are at **Annex A**.

Land-related applications

9. For big-ticket lease modification and land exchange applications meeting the criteria in paragraph 4(a) and (b) above, the current public pledge is that applications would be circulated to B/Ds before submission to the District Lands Conference (DLC) so that provisional basic terms offer or indication of in-principle agreement could be made to the applicant within 22 weeks from the date of receipt of a valid application. Under the new three-tier mechanism, if B/Ds' comments are not received and/or there are major conflicting views among B/Ds or problematic issues by the 12th week, a D1-level officer of LandsD will review the case and, subject to the endorsement of a D2-officer, escalate it to NMPSO or SGSDC, with a view to resolving outstanding issues before the application is considered at DLC within 20 weeks from the date of valid applications.

10. Based on past experiences, for policy-driven PTGs and STTs requiring fast-track processing, it will significantly save time on departmental circulation if relevant policy bureau can take the lead in consolidating and resolving departmental comments and requirements at an early stage. Therefore, under the new mechanism, if the policy bureau sees a need to process such land applications under a compressed timeframe, the policy bureau can put the case to NMPSO or SGSDC for discussion at an early stage to enable departmental issues to be resolved without the need to go through lengthy departmental circulation before consideration by DLC.

11. Regarding CC applications for non-NTEH developments, it is the target of LandsD for the CC or a letter indicating the reasons of non-compliance to be issued to applicants within 10 weeks upon receipt of valid applications under the new three-tier mechanism. To adhere to this target, B/Ds are requested to confirm applicants' compliance with obligations imposed by them under lease by the 5th week after receipt of a valid application. If substantive replies are outstanding or there are issues that could not be resolved by the 8th week, LandsD would submit the case to NMPSO or SGSDC for steer.

12. For big-ticket lease modification and land exchange applications, LandsD's KPI is to submit finalised proposal to DLC for consideration and approval within 20 weeks from the date of valid applications. Graphical illustrations of the above mechanisms in the form of flowcharts are at **Annex B**.

General building plans

13. According to the Building (Administration) Regulations (Cap. 123A), building plans submitted to the Building Authority⁵ will be deemed to have been approved if not rejected within 60 days. Currently, under the Centralised Processing System (CPS) for building plan applications, BD allows other B/Ds (i.e. CPS participants) 30 to 40 days to provide comments.

14. For applicable development projects in NM, BD's KPI is to shorten the general building plan processing time from 60 days to 45 days for first submissions or major revisions of plans.⁶ For applicable projects outside NM, the processing time shall remain as 60 days. To effect the compressed NM-specific processing time, the CPS response time allowed for each CPS participant would be reduced to a range of 23 days to 30 days. BD's another KPI is to approve at least 80% of general building plans of the applicable NM and non-NM projects upon their first or second submissions, provided that the projects have no major planning, land or fire safety issues.

15. To ensure timely approval of general building plan submissions, BD will also set up a three-tier monitoring/escalation mechanism (applicable to both NM and non-NM projects). The first and second tiers involve D1-level and D2-level officers of BD respectively while the third tier would be NMPSO or SGSDC, depending on whether the projects are in NM.⁷ Graphical illustration of the above three-tier mechanism in the form of a flowchat is at **Annex C**.

⁵ Referring to plans submitted for the first time or extensively revised as to constitute a major revision.

⁶ To facilitate inter-departmental communication, BD will inform CPS participants in the system whether a particular project falls within the applicability of the new measure and hence will be targeted for monitoring.

⁷ Tiers 2 and 3 only kick in after re-submission of building plans. This is because Tier 3 (i.e. NMPSO or SGSDC) shall focus on complex, problematic and/or atypical issues that remain unresolved after first submission so as to optimise the three-tier monitoring/escalation mechanism.

Enquiries

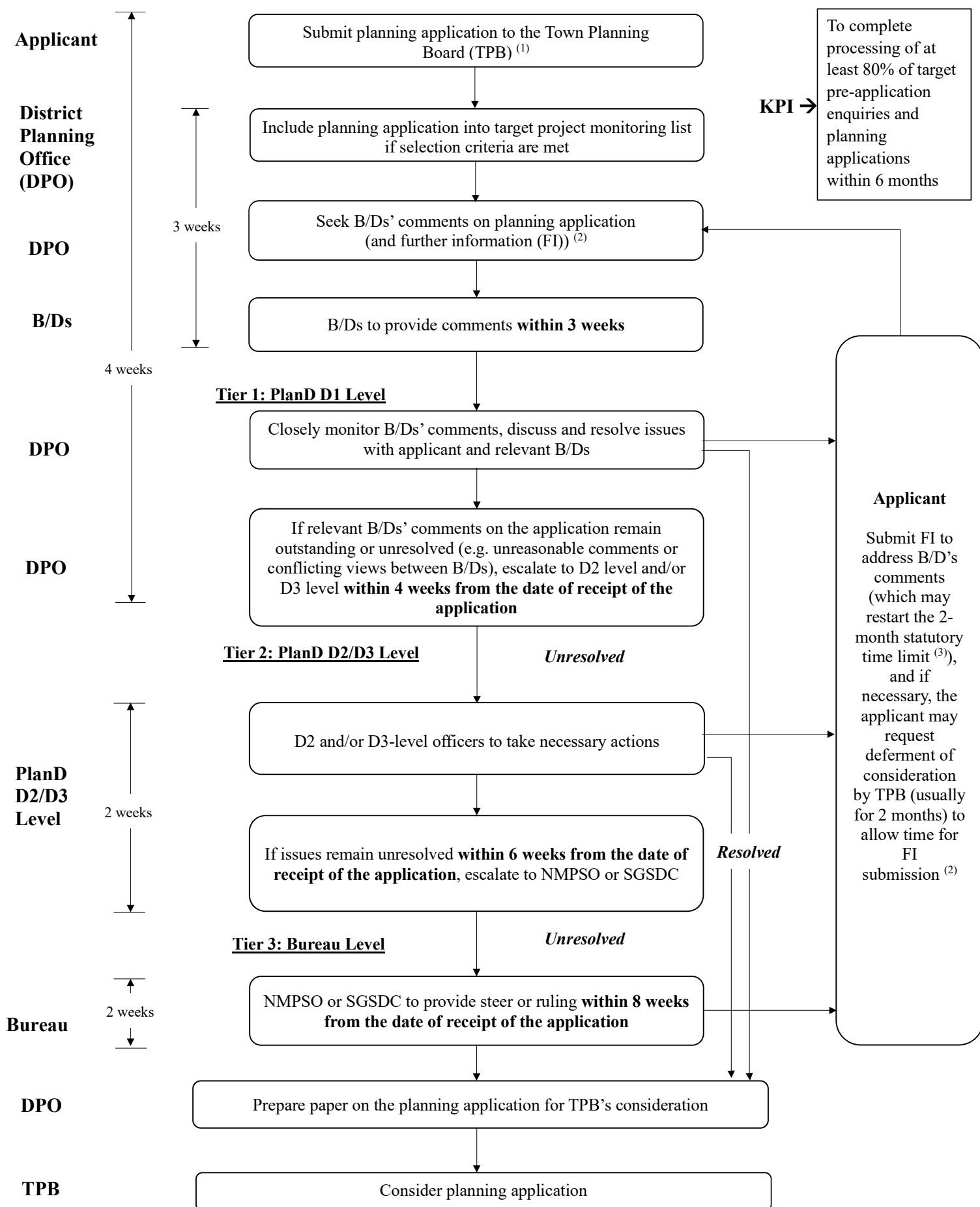
16. Enquiries on this Circular should be addressed to Senior Town Planner (Planning and Lands) of DPFO at 3841 7161 or Assistant Secretary (Northern Metropolis)4 of NMCO at 3915 4235.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a short horizontal stroke and a small upward tick.

(David LAM)

for Secretary for Development

Workflow for Processing s.12A and s.16 Planning Applications

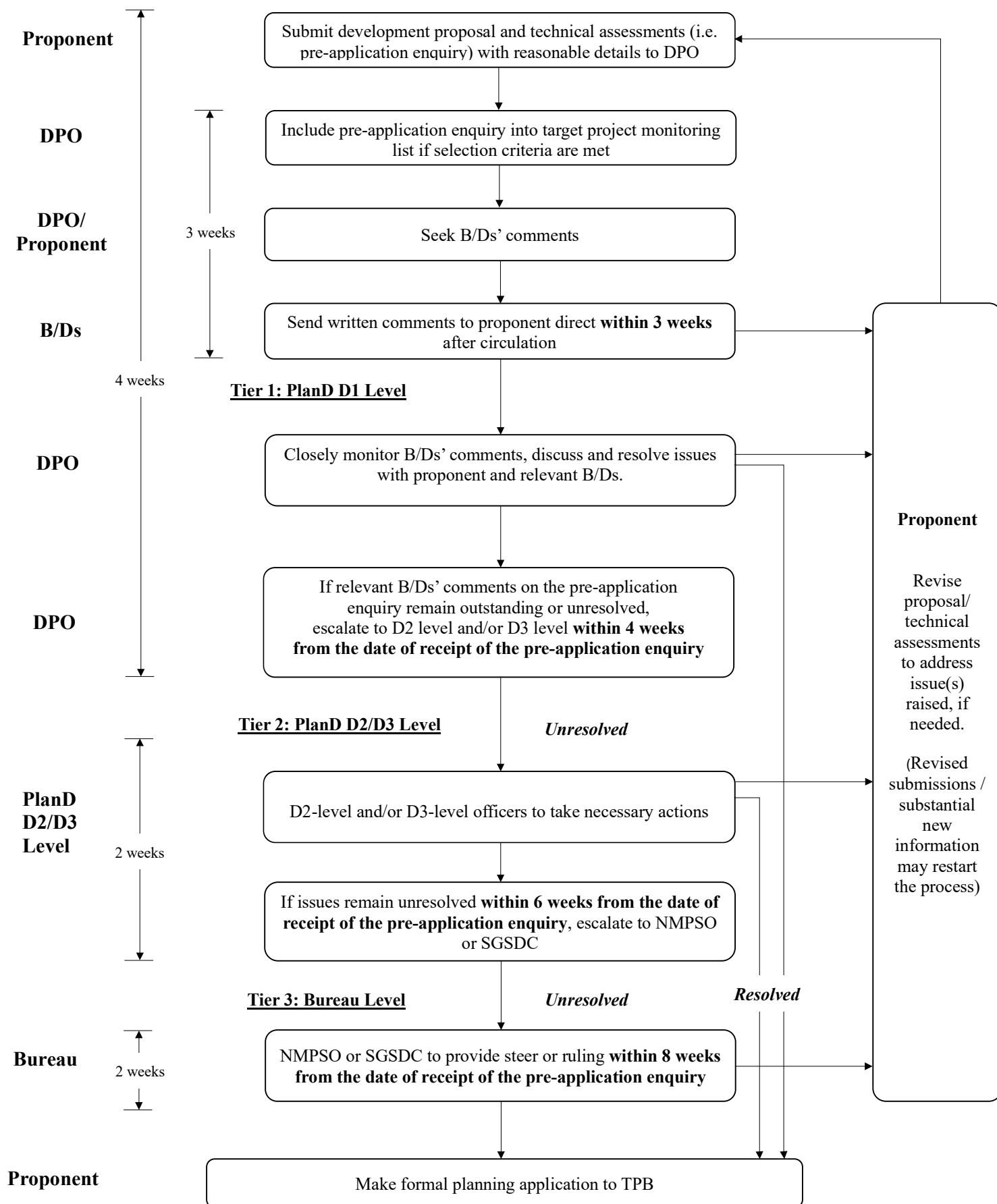


(1) S.16 applications will be published for public comment for 3 weeks

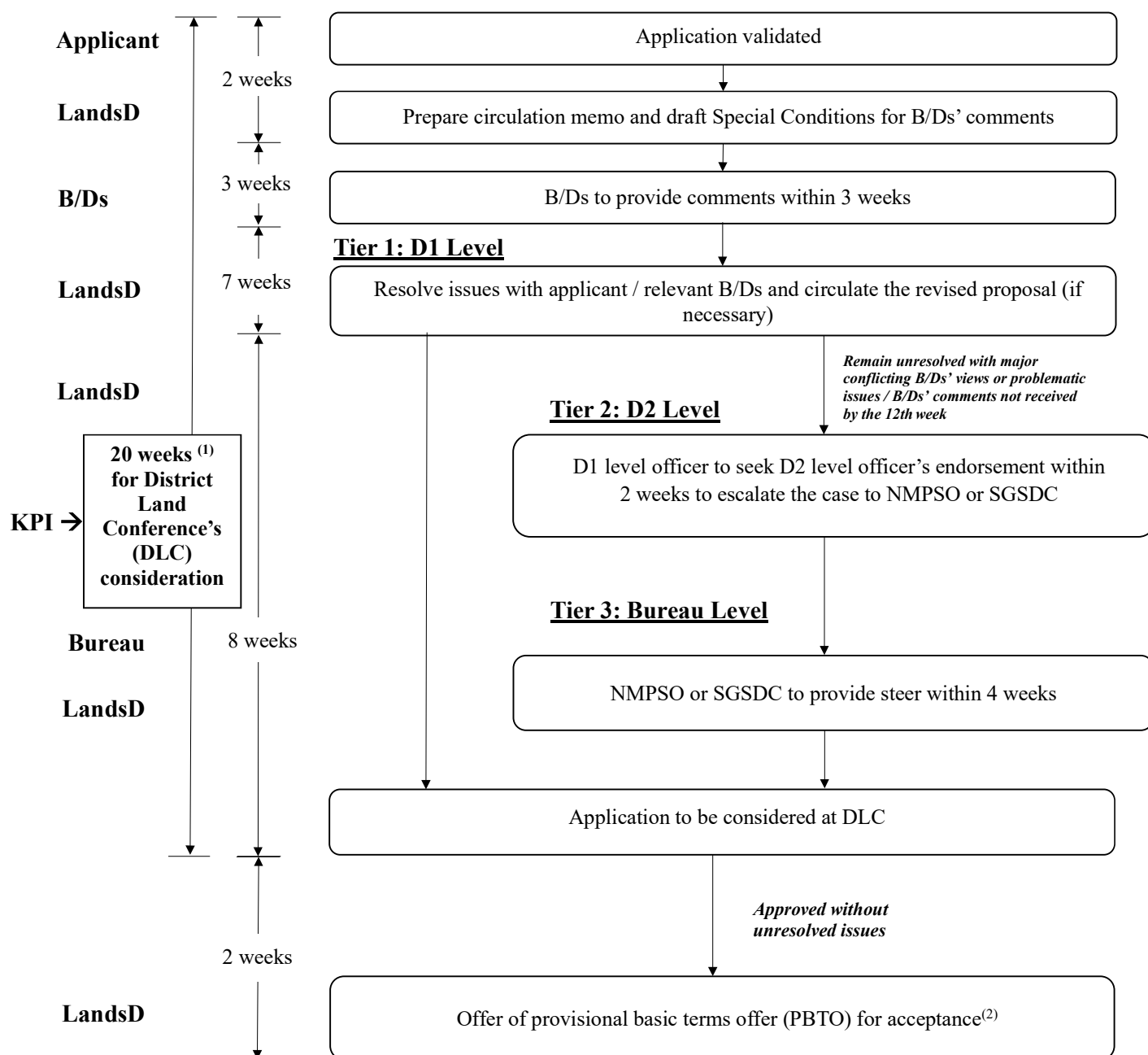
(2) FI has to be submitted within 2 months upon receipt of application/approval to defer consideration (subject to a maximum of 2 deferments)

(3) As determined by Secretary of TPB upon acceptance of FI

Workflow for Processing Pre-application Enquiries for s.12A/s.16 Application

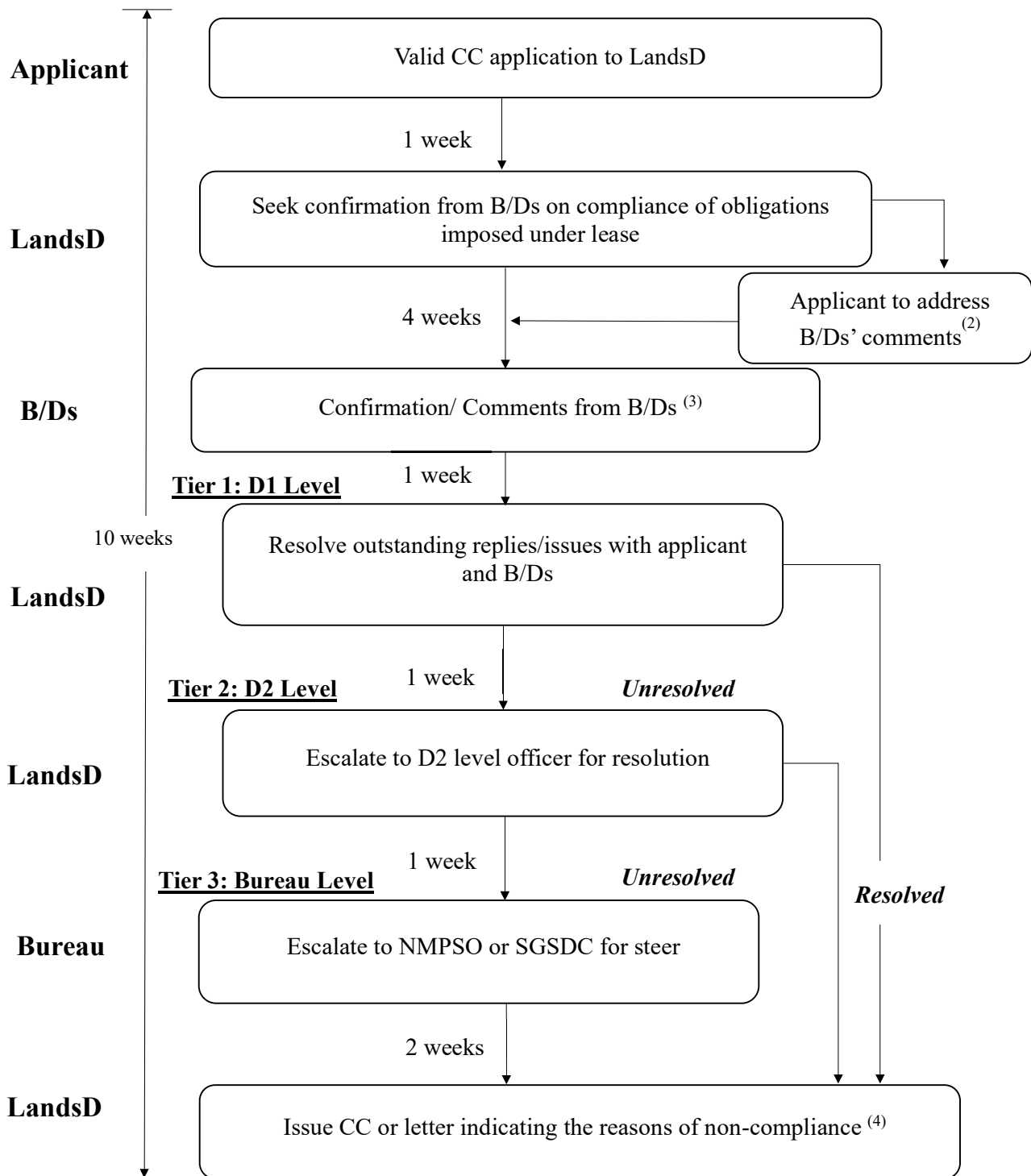


Workflow for Big-ticket Lease Modification and Land Exchange Applications / Fast-track Processing for Policy-driven Land Applications



- (1) The target timeframe does not take into account the time required by the applicant to address B/Ds' requirements; revise the proposal; and resolve objections as well as the time taken to undergo statutory procedures, legal proceedings, etc. (i.e. the processing time taken which is beyond the control of Government).
- (2) The existing KPI as promulgated in LAO PN 2/2023 is that PBTOT or indication of in-principle agreement should be made to the applicant within 22 weeks from the date of valid application of lease modification, land exchange and private treaty grant. Policy-driven STT may be subject to different timeline.

Workflow for Processing Certificate of Compliance (CC) Applications ⁽¹⁾



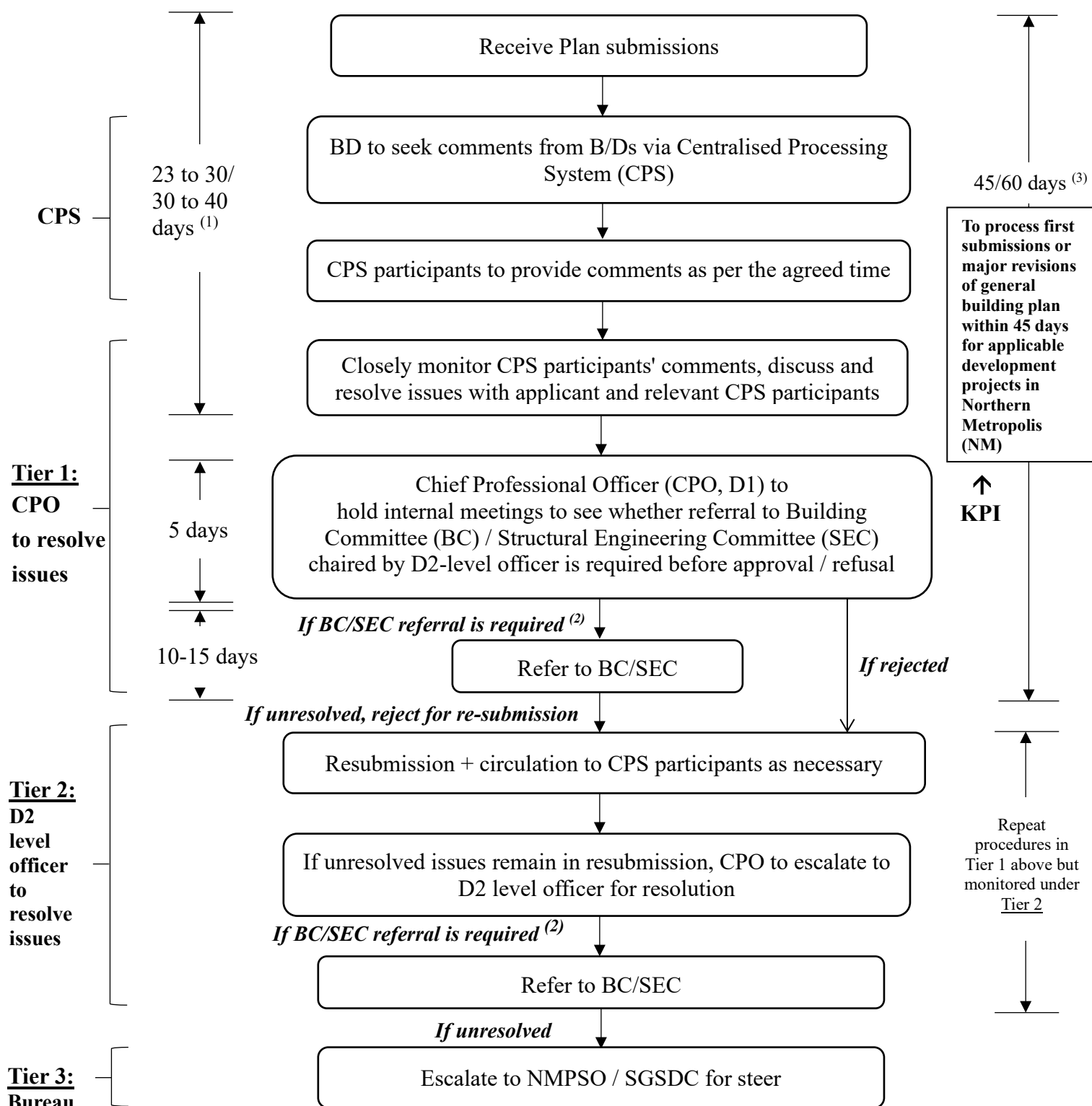
(1) For non-NTEH developments

(2) Not counting the time taken by applicant to respond B/Ds' comments

(3) Including the applicant's further submission to B/Ds to address issues / comments raised

(4) CC or letter of non-compliance within 10 weeks from date of valid application.

Workflow for Processing General Building Plan Submissions



- (1) CPS participants to return comments within 23-30 days for applicable NM projects / 30-40 days for applicable non-NM projects.
- (2) For discussion of contentious matters and/or endorsing recommendations for granting exemption/modification.
- (3) Processing time for fresh application and major revision in respect of general building plan submissions for applicable NM projects/non-NM projects are 45 days/60 days respectively.

KPI →

To approve at least 80% of general building plans of the applicable NM and non-NM projects upon their first or second submissions, provided that the projects have no major planning, land or fire safety issues