

Planning Service Improvement Plan

The **Service objectives** will flow from the Councils priorities: *Strong and resilient towns; Reducing inequalities; and Climate emergency*

For the Planning Service this means:

- Proactively positioning the Service at the centre of the organisation – acting as a positive and confident facilitator
- Attaching the highest priority to schemes that support the Council’s priorities – seeking solutions to issues; and supporting colleagues across the Council and partners
- Understanding and responding to the needs of all customers – reducing uncertainty for customers and maintaining the reputation of the Council
- Developing ourselves as a Service – establishing new ways of working; raising our performance and improving our skills
- Operating in a way that is financially prudent but responds to opportunities generate revenue that can be reinvested in improved outcomes
- Being led by performance and outcomes
- Preparing ourselves for the future – succession and career planning

The above objectives will be achieved by through our leadership in the areas of **staffing & development; performance management; customer service; and governance**

Leadership area	Key priority/links to peer review	Actions	Progress/targets	Resources/partners/dependencies	Risks/challenges/mitigations
1. Staffing & development	1.1 Review the factors which have contributed to recruitment difficulties for key posts (POS para 9.5, 9.18, 9.20-9.22)	1.1.1 Benchmark salaries	Completed February 2022	Working with the Recruitment team	Budget is finite; however, salary scale is not the only way to attract and retain high calibre staff – need to sell the attractiveness of working for Calderdale by promoting the quality and character of the area and the opportunities to gain wide experience and work on interesting/challenging projects
		1.1.2 Review role profiles and grades	It was originally intended to complete this by the end of April 2022; however, in practice it is being rolled out as posts are filled		
	1.2 Ensure that the number and type of staff are appropriate to the workload (POS paras 9.14-9.18, 10.4)	1.2.1 Apply PAS 150 application pa benchmark to application casework to identify the required establishment (it must be recognised though that this is just an average – individual caseloads will vary depending on role and experience)	These tasks were undertaken to support the bid for investment through the 2022/23 budget process	Working with the Recruitment team and existing managers within the Service to identify the staffing requirements (quantitative and qualitative); It is important to recognise that better management of casework is equally as important as resourcing	There is uncertainty about the number of applications that will be received in future, especially post adoption of the Local Plan; however more applications would generate higher income, so there is scope to respond through further growth
		1.2.2 Review resources required for effective enforcement – considering alternatives to the standard recruits to enforcement roles	1.2.2 is linked to the update of the Enforcement Protocol see 4.2.2 below		
		1.2.3 Review Policy team resources need post Local Plan adoption – linked to update of Local Development Scheme (LDS)			
		1.2.4 Complete recruitment to officer level posts including any backfilling	By late Sept 2022		
1.2.5 Complete recruitment to trainee/assistant level posts;					
				There is currently a severe national shortage of planners - we will therefore need to grow our own; minerals & waste is a particular vulnerability because knowledge and experience is concentrated with one an individual (in the future it is likely that there will be an increase propensity for councils to share minerals and waste resources); enforcement is also a particularly challenging recruitment area	

1.3 Ensure that leaders are in place to provide mentoring, supervision, and decision-making capacity (POS para 9.5, 9.34, 10.4, 12.1-12.3)	1.3.1 Recruit permanent managers to lead the Development Management and Policy teams	Completed February 2022 – Development Manager and Planning Strategy Manager are now in post	Working with the Recruitment team – a top-down approach with backfilling creates opportunities for upward progression at all levels	New managers will need to get up to speed so induction and handovers are important; A particular challenge is the recruitment of experienced ‘senior’ level case officers – there is currently reliance on agency staff with varying levels of success Need to ensure that staff at all levels are given opportunities to develop their careers and recognition for their skills.
	1.3.2 Recruit to Team Leader/Principal/senior tiers	Team Leaders (DM) and Principal (PS) are in post; Senior DM officers is presenting challenges		
1.4 Raise the skill level and confidence of all staff so that they can handle a more challenging workload now and, in the future; and have a better understanding of expectations (POS paras 9.44, 13.9)	1.4.1 Consistent Shared Conversions and one to ones	Ongoing from March 2022	Working with the OD team and existing managers within the Service Also need to ensure that Building Control team are brought into the discussion and given the same opportunities to develop their careers as the planners	Staff engagement and buy-in will be essential – careful planning and communication are required Managers need to ensure that time is made available, and these activities are prioritised and resourced Need to rebuild the links between the Planning and Building Control arms of the Service – i.e., communication at the case officer level – consider some shadowing activities for trainees/graduates in DM and BC
	1.4.2 Ensure a shared understanding of our priorities and objectives through workshops Service (and also Business Support staff who support the Planning Service)	Session away from the office during summer 2022		
	1.4.3 Audit skills (‘Workforce Analysis’) and identify a programme of individual learning for each staff member, setting objectives and making time available	By May 2022 – staff are currently completing the Workforce Analysis questionnaire – particular skills gaps are considered to exist in the areas of casework/performance management; and handling more complex applications		
	1.4.4 Offer all staff access to mentoring through the Council’s current scheme			
	1.4.5 Create opportunities for transfer between Policy and DM teams to widen experience and understanding			
1.5 Review arrangements for office and homeworking (POS para 9.4, 9.36-9.40, 9.46)	1.5.1 Put in place the required protocols, conditions, equipment, and support – key first step is procuring tablets for mobile working	April 2022 onwards – since April teams have been meeting physically one or two times a week for collaboration sessions, this is contributing to the reduction of the Development Management application backlog	Linked to implementation of workflow and mobile working software	Need to ensure that staff buy-in to the arrangements; This discussion will also need to consider the relationship to and needs of the Business Support team; A key issue is restoring the sense of ‘team’ for DM in particular
1.6 Resolve the future model for delivery of Business Support (POS paras 9.16-9.13, 11.10)	1.6.1 Determine whether BS should sit within Planning, remain central, or whether a hybrid is appropriate; also need to establish future requirement for outsourcing (i.e., the TerraQuest model), and explore the potential use of artificial intelligence (Agile) software to support validation	September 2022 – discussions with the Head of Finance started early-May	Working closely with managers and staff from Business Support team	Whilst POS strongly advocate return of team to Planning, the pros and cons require further discussion; issues around capacity and loss of key skills; decisions need to be taken about the continued use of TerraQuest to support application validation

2. Performance management	2.1 A corporate system for reporting on Planning application related performance based on an agreed set of objectives (POS paras 8.26, 8.29, 8.30, 11.10, 13.11-13.12)	2.1.1 Quarterly reporting of statutory and non-statutory performance indicators to TOG and Planning Committee In addition to statutory speed and quality indicators, also need to identify other measures of importance	From 1 st quarter for 2022/23 onwards – work has commenced building the performance management dashboard	Working with Business Change and Performance Management team; Working with Business Support team; there is also a staff development dimension to this priority, particularly in relation to the degree of cultural change that is required	Inappropriate data, or data without contextual explanation would undermine the process – careful scoping is therefore required This priority cannot be addressed without cultural change at all levels It is clear that further training is required to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of casework management; written procedures are required to underpin this.
		2.1.2 Implement performance management processes for the receipt and validation stage of the Development Management process			
		2.1.3 Establishing a performance management culture at all levels of the Service			
	2.2 Making performance information available to customers (POS paras 9.23-9.32)	2.2.1 Publishing information on a redesigned Planning website page	September 2022	Working with Business Change and Performance Management and Web teams	Potential criticism of weak performance outweighed by need for greater transparency
	2.3 Reporting on enforcement, performance activity and outcomes (POS para 12.1, 13.11-13.12)	2.3.1 Set criteria (see reference below to update of Enforcement Policy); reporting to Planning Committee – ensuring visibility and ownership of performance	June 2022 – key officer lead is now in post	Working with Business Change and Performance Management; Member input required to identify measures; linked to fuller utilisation of IDOX system	Inappropriate data, or data without contextual explanation would undermine the process - careful scoping is therefore required; significant benefits in terms of reducing time on FOI requests
	2.4 Reporting on Section 106 receipts and expenditure (and CIL in the future) (POS paras 11.24-11.28, 13.11-13.12)	2.4.1 Publish Infrastructure Funding Statement	August 2022 – key officer lead is now in post	Need to recruit officer to post to lead this task – need to exploit the potential to charge for S106 monitoring	Potentially a substantial task but significant benefits in terms of improved governance and reducing time on FOI requests
		2.4.2 Section 106 Monitoring system			
	2.5 Establishing Planning Strategy work programme and reporting on Local Plan outcomes (POS para 10.4)	2.5.1 Establish Local Plan monitoring system in-line with an updated Local Development Scheme	From 2023/24 onwards	Working with Business Change and Performance Management; Strategic Officer Group to take this forward once established	Potentially a substantial task but significant benefits in terms of improved governance and reducing time on FOI requests
	2.6 Effective management of workflow and processes (POS paras 8.22, 9.36-9.40, 9.41-9.43, 9.46, 11.14, 11.15, 11.18, 11.23, 11.29-11.30, 12.1, 12.4)	2.6.1 Use of Planning Performance Agreements for strategic schemes	From 2022/23 onwards	An early project for the incoming Development Manager	This a complex task that will require significant management input; however, it will ultimately be beneficial from the perspectives of revenue and performance.
		2.6.2 Protocol for using Extensions of Time/monitoring proportion of EOTs	From 2022/23 onwards	An early project for the incoming Development Manager	Risk of short-term adverse impact on performance; however, will lead to better outcomes in the medium to long terms
2.6.3 Review Development Management processes, finalise local validation list and Implement Enterprise workflow module; consideration to setting time envelopes for DM staff handling uncontentious cases		September 2022 – the new Development Manager has made progress on this since April – a key step has been to issues protocols to DM staff setting out roles and responsibilities	September 2022 – the new Development Manager has made progress on this since April – a key step has been to issues protocols to DM staff setting out roles and responsibilities	An early project for the new Development Manager in conjunction with ICT team	Requires considerable technical input and also training for staff; also need to ensure that cultural change does not undermine this objective; consideration needs to be given to more rigorous management of time spent on routine tasks
2.6.4 Review document management processes in relation to scanning, indexing and redaction		September 2022	Working with Business Support and Information Governance teams; linked to decisions about the future management of Business Support	Certain items of hardware are becoming old and unreliable; a key requirement is to speed up document management processes	

		2.6.5 Review expectations/performance of consultees	September 2022	Establish service level agreements	Consultee teams are also under pressure see need to explore a proportionate approach to consultation
		2.6.6 Improved management of strategic applications	September 2022	Strategic schemes protocol; oversight group for major applications and pre-apps	Need to establish a disciplined approach to prevent practices being abandoned over time - this is linked to the challenges around capacity, experience and expertise – there is a need for a structured programme of training and development
		2.6.7 Review use of planning conditions	November 2022	Greater standardisation; opportunity to reduce officer time on discharge of condition applications	Need to maintain a proportionate level of regulation and meet legal standards
		2.6.8 Work In liaison with Community Protection team to provide an effective first response service for enforcement complaints	September 2022	Use of the Community Safety Wardens to gather initial evidence and monitor sites	Protocols and training are required for this approach to work effectively – needs to be recognised that CSWs are not a replacement for experienced enforcement officers
		2.6.9 Take steps to categorise and where necessary dispose of old applications	July 2022	In liaison with case officers and application agents	Need to ensure a process that is legally robust and that does not treat customers poorly
		2.6.10 Set out clear expectations in terms of roles and responsibilities for casework and performance management; set out protocols for when issues should and should not be escalated; set out expectations in terms of time envelopes for tasks	May 2022 – new Development Manager issued protocols early May	This is closely linked to key priority 1.4; in input required from People Development team	A key challenge is to raise the level of confidence and resilience amongst those directly managing and leading on casework – training is required to reinforce compliance
3. Customer service	3.1 Re-establish the duty planning officer service (POS paras 9.23-9.32)	3.1.1 Establish processes and procedures; publicise service to customers	June 2022	Working with Customer Services team; consider the case for charging in the longer term	Need to determine whether duty officer will be physical or virtual – need to ensure alignment with strategy for Council premises
	3.2 Review the pre-application procedures, timescales, and charging (POS paras 11.3-11.9)	3.2.1 Establish processes and procedures; publicise service to customers – explore working with Planning Advisory Service on this objective	October 2022	The service will aim to cover its costs through an appropriate level of charge	At the present the service is not sufficiently credible to justify charges, so need to rebuild credibility with agents
	3.3 Re-design the Planning pages of the Council's website (POS paras 9.23-9.32)	3.3.1 Consider how the webpage addresses the customer journey	October 2022	Working with Customer Services team/Web team	In the longer term there will be a resource requirement to keep information up to date on the webpage
	3.4 Re-establish agent forum meetings (POS paras 9.23-9.32)	Meet agents twice a year to discuss service issues and receive feedback – building a relationship where effective two-way engagement can prevail	July 2022	Agendas need to be agreed with agents to ensure that they are relevant	There are likely to be difficult conversations with agents in the first instance; if not carefully managed meetings can become negative and unproductive; agents also need to be encouraged to review their own practices
	3.5 Review of standards for all forms of communication (POS paras 9.23-9.32)	3.5.1 Establish customer service standards 3.5.2 Deliver staff training	June 2022	Working with Customer Services – also explore training via the Planning Advisory Service	Need to set realistic standards and ensure that this is implemented in such a way as to help staff to manage their workload
	3.6 Pre-validation checking service (POS para 11.13)	3.6.1 Establish processes and procedures; publicise service to customers	December 2022	The service will aim to cover its costs through an appropriate level of charge	As a above a pre-condition to this is restoring credibility with customers
	3.7 Set up system for receiving customer feedback on individual applications (POS paras 9.23-9.32)	3.7.1 Establish an online feedback portal that all applicants and agents can access	October 2022	Working with Customer Services	Feedback form will need to be carefully designed to ensure that useful information is gathered and acted upon

4. Governance	4.1 Update Planning Committee Terms of Reference (POS paras 11.8- 11.9)	4.1.1 Committee pre-app/review Streamlining of casework referrals	December 2022	Approval through Business & Governance Committee in first instance	Legal input required to ensure risks are mitigated
	4.2 Enforcement Protocol updated and adopted (POS para 12.1)	4.2.2 Update 2012 policy to reflect current resources and priorities	December 2022	Approval through Planning Committee and Cabinet; closer working with partner services, especially Community Safety	Reconciling expectations and resources will require careful handling
	4.3 Conservation Protocol (POS paras 12.5-12.7)	4.3.1 Update policy to reflect current resources and priorities	December 2022	Approval through Planning Committee and Cabinet; need to engage with Historic England, and local groups such as Civic Trust	Reconciling expectations and resources will require careful handling
	4.4 Development Management Protocol	4.4.1 Publish approach to extensions of time; negotiations protocol; expectations of consultees; standards expected from agents	December 2022	Approval through Planning Committee and Cabinet	Reconciling expectations and resources will require careful handling
	4.5 Trees Protocol	4.5.1 Publish protocol for prioritisation of creating/reviewing orders versus handling tree related casework	December 2022	Approval through Planning Committee and Cabinet	Reconciling expectations and resources will require careful handling
	4.6 Strategic Officer Group	4.6.1 Managing the delivery of Local Plan applications through the Development Management process	July 2022 – protocol is now in place	Co-chaired by Planning Strategy Manager and Development Manager – input from other services including Housing and Transport teams	Need to ensure corporate buy-in at appropriately senior levels
	4.7 Member training (POS para 13.13)	4.7.1 Deliver a programme of training for Planning Committee members	December 2022	Working with Member Development Officer – potential to utilise PAS and/or POS	Need to ensure that all Members participate; consideration should be given to whether aspects of the training should be compulsory

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