

The Planning Peer Review



As part of the Local Government Association, PAS provides a range of tools and resources to help councils improve. The peer review is a key part of this offer; it is a robust and effective improvement tool managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector.

The planning peer review (PPR) is not an inspection. It is constructive challenge delivered by 'critical friends'. Local government planners and members (as peers) remain at the heart of the process, helping councils with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

The review works on two levels. It provides an assessment of how well different elements of the planning service work together and with the rest of the council to deliver the council's strategic, spatial, and place-based objectives. Importantly, it also helps the planning service itself review what it is trying to achieve; how it is going about it; what it is achieving; and where it might need to improve.

All our reviews are tailored to meet an individual council's needs and are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus.

Themes of the review

The review is designed to help an authority assess how it is managing planning pressures including the delivery of development management against national performance indicators, producing Local Plans and other development plan documents, and integrating the planning service into the delivery of the local authority's wider aims and objectives.

To ensure a comprehensive and systematic approach across all areas, the review will always assess the planning service against 5 broad themes:

- **Vision and leadership** - how the authority demonstrates leadership to integrate planning within corporate working to support delivery of corporate objectives
- **Performance and Management** - the effective use of skills and resources to achieve value for money, and the effectiveness of processes (and the roles of officers and members) in decision-making on development proposals.
- **Community engagement** – how the authority understands its community leadership role and community aspirations and uses planning to help deliver them.
- **Partnership engagement** – how the authority works with partners to balance priorities and resources to deliver agreed priorities.

- **Achieving outcomes** - how well the service leverages national and local planning policy to deliver the sustainable development and planning outcomes its community requires.

Scope of the review

Given their importance, the PPR generally focuses on the Development Management and Plan Making functions of an authority as well as the Planning Committee. We work with councils to agree on specific issues of focus such as performance, structures, or training and can also pick up individual functions of the planning service such as enforcement, developer contributions/infrastructure, and planning committee.

For example, in terms of **Development Management**, typical lines of inquiry for a review could include one or more of the following:

- performance of decision making and ensuring proportionate decision making;
- effectiveness of processes and supporting IT
- staff structures and workload or capacity
- pre application engagement
- managing consultee responses
- the Planning Committee, making sound and defensible decisions including delegation and codes of good practice
- post decision matters including appeals and enforcement
- effectiveness of the Council to deal with customer complaints

In terms of the **local plan**, councils whose plan is adopted may want the review to consider how core elements are being 'delivered' e.g. achieving the vision, the effectiveness of policy, or taking a look at performance (such as Housing Delivery or climate change targets). Other councils will be considering a review of their local plan and may want feedback on their strategy and how to scope out a review. Whilst others, earlier in the plan making process, may want the review to consider any risks or weaknesses e.g. in terms of evidence base or Duty to Cooperate.

A **Planning Committee** focused PPR may include:

- Officer / Member relationships and the impact of these on decision making
- conduct at Planning Committee and how they relate to the scheme of delegation and code of good practice
- decisions made by Committee and whether these deliver Council objectives
- the skills of officers and Members to make defensible decisions

However, PPRs should not be simply a detailed investigation of only one area of the planning service. They are most effective when they challenge the **whole planning service** to demonstrate how the different elements work together to achieve planning outcomes for the Council and its stakeholders. Therefore, any Planning Peer Challenge will need to look at your whole service and we work with you to identify specific lines of enquiry within that wider context.

PAS also provides other services, such as our Development Management Challenge Toolkit or Local Plan Project Management Support if you require more detailed support in these areas. This more focused work often follows a wider PPR.

How it works in practice

The PPR involves a team of experienced officers and members spending time in your council to provide challenge and share learning. Participating councils receive a comprehensive report and recommendations from the peer team and then identify their own action plan to respond.

The review will consist of the following stages:

- a scoping meeting with your authority to agree the scope of the review and identify issues of particular importance
- preparation of a position statement and timetable by your authority
- three days of onsite work by a peer team, principally interviews and discussion groups within the council and with other locally based stakeholders
- on the third day of the site work, onsite feedback on key findings and practical suggestions for accelerating improvement
- preparation of a report by the peer team, summarising key findings and recommendations, shared within three weeks of the onsite work
- follow up support as agreed with you authority, with a six month check in on progress

The peer team

We take a flexible approach so that we can bring together the right team for your council. The team will usually include:

- A member peer with senior leadership experience as either a planning portfolio holder or a planning committee chair to engage with members on planning matters.
- Lead officer peer – a director level planning peer or equivalent.
- Officer peer – an officer with detailed knowledge of the area of work under review.
- A Planning Review Manager - this will either be a member of the PAS team or other specialist appointed by the LGA.

Our peer challenge team members will always be experienced in planning services and local government.

A typical planning peer review will cost between £14,000 & £16,000, with precise costs dependent on size of authority, number in peer team, travel and accommodation, etc.

What to do next

If you are interested in having a Planning peer review please contact us on pas@local.gov.uk giving a brief outline of your requirements and one of the PAS team will contact you for an initial chat.