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| Planning Advisory Service |
| PAS Development Management Challenge Toolkit |
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| Training |



# Introduction

Training forms one of 15 sections of the [PAS Development Management Challenge Toolkit](https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/development-mgmt/development-management-challenge-toolkit). Please refer to the PAS website for information on the other 14 sections and further background to the toolkit.

Planning staff at all levels need training to do their job and DM staff need ongoing training to ensure that they can properly respond to changes in the Planning system both at a local and national level. However, there are often constraints on the amount of time staff have to undertake training and the cost of attending training events. Therefore, it is important that every opportunity is taken to maximise time and resources to ensure that staff are properly trained to do their jobs.

Please consider the statements below that attempt to define what an excellent and poor Planning Authority looks like and then consider some tips to improve performance. The purpose of defining poor and excellent is to be controversial and to stimulate debate within a Council. The tips will work for some Councils and not for others because every Council is different and therefore has different priorities for improvement. The tips are also aimed at getting Planning Authorities to think about solutions and to work through challenges in bite-size ways rather than being overwhelmed by the problems they face.

# How to use it

For each part discuss where you feel your Council sits on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). If you disagree with one another (which you may do) discuss why you have different views as perception is a really important factor in improving how things are done. Ultimately the final score is not as important as what you are going to do about it. However, it is really important to write down why you have either agreed on a score or why you can’t decide on a score. This will help you to understand where you are as a service on the journey between poor and excellent and if you don’t write it down you will have no record of why you came to those conclusions.

Next, decide what score you would like to be. It may seem obvious that you always will want to be a 5 (excellent) but this is not always the case as it depends on where you want to focus your priorities as a service. For example, how important is monitoring performance to your service? All Planning Authorities will want to monitor the speed and quality of decision-making as these are the minimum benchmarks set by Government but you will then need to balance the time spent in collecting information about all areas of the Development Management process against the staff resources you have to deliver an excellent service. Only you will know whether you want to reach a 5 or whether you may be happy to be a 3 or 4. We suggest you note down the reasons why you may not want to score a 5 at this time as this will help you prioritise your actions in any improvement plan.

Finally, look at the ‘top tips’ and actions you want to take from the session. Which tips are you going to take on board and which are you going to dismiss? – it is ok to say a tip is not for you as long as you know why. Then if you decide you want to take forward a tip decide how you are going to implement it. Some you simply need to do and others may involve outside support such as from PAS. Also, consider what other actions have come out of the discussion. Encourage all staff taking part in the session to generate other ideas and actions to help you develop an action plan.

Each section of the toolkit usually takes about an hour to an hour and a half to complete. However, the time you spend on each section very much depends on how much discussion and disagreement takes place – it will sometimes be shorter and sometimes longer. Also, some sections are longer than others so there will inevitably be a difference in time spent on each.

When you have completed the sections that you feel are important to your service you should be in an excellent position to prepare your own action plan of improvement in the format that is appropriate for your organisation. However, it is also really important to use the toolkit to reflect back on the things you are doing well and therefore do not need to change. Do not simply dwell on the negatives but celebrate success and promote best practice within your service. It is really important when Planning Departments are struggling with resourcing and workload pressures to celebrate with staff good practice and a job well done.

# How to involve staff in the discussion

Managers will have the detailed information to support this section and it is important that more junior staff can explain their own training needs that are either met or not met.

# Facilitator’s tips

* Ask yourself challenging questions such as: Do we agree with excellent? Do we agree with poor? Are the tips helpful? What do we need to do if anything to change?
* Make sure you have someone to write down your conclusions and check what has been written before moving on to the next session. It is really important to ensure everyone’s thoughts are represented accurately
* The scores are there to help you conclude the effectiveness of your Development Management service but do not spend too long debating the scores, they are only there to give you guidance and to stimulate debate
* As always it is about getting the right people in the room and making them comfortable to contribute. Some staff may feel that their contribution is not as important as others. Make sure it is inclusive and everyone’s views are given equal weight
* Some staff may feel uncomfortable when some topics are discussed. Ultimately you need to decide whether all staff should be involved in the whole session, but the toolkit works best when staff are able to express their views openly without fear of repercussion
* This process can work really well with people from different councils so that services can learn from each other and suggest ways of working together in the future
* Many issues that people identify can be tackled at a number of different levels. Encourage people to think of what they could just do on Monday, as well as the bigger trickier things that need buy-in.
* It is normal for you to speed up as you get to the end of each section as everyone gets tired and you run out of time. You may well find that you have already discussed a matter that is highlighted at the end of the section. The toolkit is designed to have some duplication to make sure you don’t forget important aspects of the Development Management service. There are no hard and fast rules so skip over things if they are not so relevant to you or you have covered them earlier.
* Always agree on a follow-up action plan that will result from the discussions, otherwise the ideas, enthusiasm, and momentum will be lost.

# For more information & Help

If you would like more information about any aspect of the Development Management Challenge Toolkit or would like to take part in or organise a facilitated improvement session please contact the Planning Advisory Service**pas@local.gov.uk****.**

To help you progress your action plan there is a range of support available on the PAS website along with links to other helpful sources of information. Please visit the website at <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas>

| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)**  | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
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| There is no training budget and very little training for staff. Staff will often complain that any training that does take place is not fairly allocated as there is no process to do this. Training tends to happen by necessity e.g. an application is submitted that needs certain expertise so the case officer is sent on the training regardless of cost and savings need to be made elsewhere to compensate. | The department has a training budget and staff are encouraged to attend training based on priorities identified in their annual appraisals. There is a fair system for deciding who goes on which courses and there is a practice of staff feeding back key learning points so that those who did not attend still get some benefit. The budget is carefully managed so that the money stretches as far as possible e.g. focus on online and local events to avoid extra travel costs. | 1. Try to plan out an annual training programme so that as many staff as possible can attend at least one event and these should be at the minimum cost possible
2. Have a maximum of 1 or 2 staff attending any single event and have a reserve list in case they cannot attend so any cost is not wasted
3. Have a regular lunchtime session so that staff can feedback on learning points to those who are interested
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| **EVALUATION QUESTIONS****What score have you agreed on?****Why have you given it this score?****What score would you like to get to?****If this isn’t a 5, why is it lower?****What top tips are you going to take up?****What other actions have you identified?** |
| Staff are frustrated that the service regularly employs consultants when they feel they could have done a better job. They feel frustrated that their talents are not being fully used and this often leads to high staff turnover. Sometimes staff mention a skill they have to their managers, but then it is forgotten because there is nowhere to keep such information. | The department is aware of the skills that all staff have even if these skills are not obvious in their role profiles. Staff are encouraged to use these skills and share them with others so that skills can be transferred across staff and staff are motivated to develop their learning. Sometimes the most unlikely skills are found in staff due to their previous jobs / experience / hobbies. | 1. Keep a skills register for all staff and renew yearly so that new skills can be captured
2. Keep a record of training that is carried out and refer to this before agreeing to employ consultants
3. Encourage staff to talk about their wider skills even if there is no immediate connection to the work of the department.
4. Encourage staff to undertake secondments to gain new skills. For example, technical support staff to deal with householder applications to gain professional planning skills.
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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** |  **Top tips** |
| No professional membership fees are paid and no support is given for staff who wish to apply for professional membership. The department does not make use of Government initiatives such as the apprentice levy or Planning Delivery and Skills Fund because it cannot spare staff time to undertake training. As a consequence, there is no formal on-the-job learning, and staff are therefore prevented from progressing in their careers at the Council because they do not meet the essential requirements. This leads to high staff turnover. | All staff are encouraged to gain professional membership of an appropriate body such as the RTPI including technical support staff who can apply for technical membership. The Council supports staff in making applications for professional membership and encourages them to have an RTPI mentor. Technical support staff and other junior officers are also encouraged to apply for apprenticeship and other learning opportunities at the nearest RTPI-accredited Planning course and get assistance with course fees and time off to complete the course. Staff are encouraged to keep up with their CPD learning and given as much time off and financial support as the business allows. | 1. Encourage officers within the department to mentor staff when they apply for professional membership.
2. Work with staff within the Council to maximise the use of the apprentice levy
3. Take advantage of other Government initiatives such as Pathways to Planning and Planning Skills Delivery Fund
4. Ask staff to sign learning agreements in exchange for supporting them in developing their professional qualifications to ensure staff retention post-qualification
5. Encourage staff to be active within their professional bodies and to promote the benefits of professional membership
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| **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TO FOLLOW UP** |