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



# Introduction

Workload Management 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.

This section looks at how you structure your service and how easily you can redeploy staff to manage pressures. Each Council organises its staff in different ways and it is often driven by factors that are outside the control of the Development Management service. However, it is essential in any organisation that the staff structures can enable the organisation to react to different work pressures such as a Local Plan examination or spike in planning applications.

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 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

It is particularly important to include case officers and technical support staff in this section to understand the current morale of staff and their perception of workload management. Managers should be in listening mode and ready to help identify solutions if there are problems identified.

# 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**](mailto: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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| The staff structures are inflexible and do not allow staff to be redeployed to deal with workload pressures. Managers work in silos and are protective of their staff resources so there is never a sharing of skills. Very few of the Development Management staff have experience of working in other areas of Planning. Therefore, when staff leave or go sick there is a kneejerk reaction rather than a planned approach e.g. by plugging the gaps with agency staff or simply loading more cases on the remaining staff. | There is a flexible organisational structure where staff are not pigeonholed into tightly defined specialisms and staff have a range of planning and related skills. Therefore, staff can easily be redeployed where pressures exist. For example, during a Local Plan Examination Development Management staff can help out with preparing statements and attending the examination. When a strategically important Major planning application is received policy staff can help by providing Development Management support to the case officer. When agency staff are used it is in a planned way to meet specific objectives e.g. backfill to allow a permanent member of staff to lead on a PPA. | 1. Make sure discussions on resources are included as a regular item in management meetings 2. Carry out a skills audit to find out what skills staff have that may not be obvious and enable staff to be re-deployed quickly if need be 3. Discuss career development at appraisals and 1 to 1s so that staff are encouraged to develop their skills 4. Forward plan likely work pressures to help manage peaks and troughs e.g. when it is known that a complex planning application is likely to be submitted |
| **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?** | | |
| The only people who are aware of their workload are the staff themselves and sometimes they are unaware as there is no comprehensive system of recording cases. When the pressure gets too great staff raise it with their manager, but there is not much the manager can do about it apart from sympathise and allow performance to slip or risk absence due to staff burnout. | Workflows are monitored on a weekly basis and this does not just include how many applications are outstanding but also includes applications determined and other associated work. Officer caseloads are not just monitored by overall number but also by type of application and include pre-applications. Managers discuss workloads with technical support and planning officers and help unblock issues. Where workloads become unmanageable action is taken and the officers are advised on the action taken and why. | 1. Create standard workload reports for each officer that can be run at any time 2. Ensure the planning software includes a project management tool to help staff manage their caseloads 3. If staff have difficulties managing their workloads use 1 to 1s to discuss strategies for managing their time effectively 4. Consider having an upper threshold for the number of applications per case officer that is tolerable |
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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| The number of staff employed in Development Management is based on an historic staff structure that is not based on workloads or on income generated by Development Management. As a consequence, there are often significant workload pressures and no clear mechanism for employing more staff to resource an income-generating activity such as a PPA. Staff morale is therefore low and staff turnover high. | The staff structure is based on a detailed workflow and resource analysis and is regularly reviewed based on staff feedback and benchmarking work. There is flexibility within the staff structures to employ additional staff when needed to match increased workload and income-generating activities such as PPAs. | 1. Undertake a resource review of the Development Management service and use external help to do this if you need to 2. Ensure that all income is clearly captured to inform resourcing debates 3. Benchmark with ‘nearest neighbour’ Planning Authorities to understand what workloads are right for your Planning Authority and use this to inform staff structure reviews |
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| **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TO FOLLOW UP** |