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



# Introduction

Performance 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 website for information on the other 14 sections and further background to the toolkit.

This section considers what performance means for your Development Management service. Do you keep on top of the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) speed and quality performance measures? Do you have other measures in place that assess how well you are doing? Do you actively seek feedback from both customers of the service and your own staff? Do you set down in writing what is expected of staff in terms of performance? If you have said no to any of these questions consider whether they are important to how you deliver your service and whether you can clearly justify your approach.

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

It is really important that you involve officers across the service in this discussion. The managers will be more aware of the information that is reported at management meetings, corporately and to Members but it is equally important that you understand what performance means for more junior case officers and the technical support team and their perception of the importance of performance.

# 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>

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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| The only performance statistics measured are the statutory performance measures that look at speed and quality of decision making. These are only considered on a quarterly basis when returns are asked for by DLUHC. Therefore, there is no real understanding of ongoing quality of service except in terms of the measures used by DLUHC and the Council does not know if it is in danger of not meeting the DLUHC performance standards in advance of the quarterly returns. | Uses a variety of performance measures so that there is a clear understanding of quality from a number of perspectives and ensures that there is regular information provided on performance as measured through the DLUHC performance tables. These performance measures are regularly reviewed as part of a programme of continuous and ongoing improvement. | 1. Regularly monitor the statutory performance measures – at least every month 2. Have a variety of qualitative and quantitative performance measures that are important to the Planning Authority 3. Include a customer feedback performance target |
| **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?** | | |

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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| The managers who take responsibility for the Development Management Service are unaware of ongoing performance until it is reported formally or they are required to return a fee because the council has not met the timeframes set out in the planning guarantee. There is no acknowledgement when performance is good and is not something that is discussed very often with technical support and planning officers except when they are told that management action is needed because of a performance target is missed e.g. following notification from DLUHC. | The managers regularly review performance and take decisive action when needed. Technical support and planning officers are regularly told about performance, have a chance to discuss performance, are praised when performance is good and are clear what action needs to be taken when performance needs to improve. | 1. Schedule performance discussions into relevant management meetings and staff 1 to 1s. 2. Create reports that can clearly be read and explain performance e.g. use of graphs, comparisons etc 3. Discuss performance with external bodies e.g. agents’ forums and take on feedback received 4. Include performance as a regular item for the Committee and include it in Chair and Portfolio briefings. |
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| Neither the technical support or planning officers have specific target dates for determining applications and so applications often go over the 8 and 13 week targets. If the 8 or 13 week target is coming up and pressure is put on staff by either their manager or the applicant to issue the decision in time the applicant is asked to agree to an extension of time regardless of the issues still outstanding. | Monitors applications through weekly reports to the management team and issues are discussed between the relevant officers and manager at regular 1 to 1s. Applicants are aware of likely decision times and extensions of time are agreed only when both sides agree it is appropriate and this agreement is made well in advance of the decision deadline. | 1. Make use of the Planning software to provide performance information 2. Provide different information to staff based on need and relevance e.g. Head of Planning only needs high-level information whilst a case officer will need detailed information about their own cases. 3. Monitor the performance of applications with and without extensions of time and by the planning guarantee timeframes 4. Have a proper system in place to record extension of times with reasons |
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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| There is no obvious opportunity for the Council’s customers to feedback on planning performance apart from the formal complaints route or a generic Council feedback process. When customers do provide feedback there is no process in place to respond and when compliments are received it is acknowledged in an ad hoc way if at all. | There are regular opportunities for customers – including agents, developers, stakeholders and the public - to feedback on performance. When issues are raised these are discussed by the management team and changes are made. These changes are fed back to the people who have given the feedback as part of a programme of continuous improvement. | 1. Consider regular local agents’ forums and other stakeholder forums 2. Raise customer feedback as part of regular staff and management meetings 3. Have a learning through experience process so that lessons can be learnt from both positive and negative customer feedback |
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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| There are no clear set down ways of carrying out the Development Management process apart from a few disparate notes on different aspects of the Development Management process. Staff learn on the job with whoever is available to teach them and different staff do things in different ways depending on how long they have worked in the job or who taught them. When changes are suggested the phrase “we have always done it this way” is a common response. | There is a clear set way of carrying out the Development Management function (e.g. through a manual on Development Management) for all staff to refer to that is written collaboratively with staff and forms part of the induction process. It is reviewed at least yearly with the input of staff and is referred to regularly by everyone involved in the Development Management process. No one uses the phrase “we have always done it this way” because staff are always keen to improve the way they work. | 1. Set down how Development Management is carried out. This can be in the form of a manual if you find this easier, but the important thing is to ensure it covers the key processes and all staff use it consistently 2. Make sure you have regular reminders to staff on the processes followed and allow staff to challenge if they think it is wrong 3. Use management meetings to discuss things that can be improved and translate changes into amendments to the procedures |
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| **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TO FOLLOW UP** |