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| Planning Advisory Service |
| PAS Development Management Challenge Toolkit |
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| Team management |



# Introduction

Team 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 staff are managed in your Development Management service. There are different approaches to management that are based on the management styles of individuals and the team structure in which staff work. However, there are key fundamentals to managing any team that involve: communication between the manager and staff; support to all staff; the ability for managers to safely challenge staff and staff to challenge the manager; and for all staff to be clear about what is expected of them.

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 isparticularly important in this section for case officers and tech support staff to take the lead with the managers listening to the feedback from staff and to test the perception of the management approach against the management systems that are in place and why there may be a difference in perception.

# 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 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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| When changes in policy, guidance etc. take place staff either find it out themselves through the professional press or through a generic Council circular. Time is not given in team meetings to discuss such matters and it is often the staff who have to bring it to managers’ attention when the opportunity arises. | There are regular team meetings where the managers communicate key planning information to staff so that they are up to date with Planning practice and policies. This includes changes in national policy, Council policy, changes in guidance, legal cases of relevance, etc. Staff then also have the opportunity to discuss issues of Planning practice. | 1. Put a standing item on the team meeting agenda to discuss changes in policy, guidance, or case law to remind everyone that items can be raised if necessary
2. Use a chat facility to enable staff to point out interesting appeal decisions, high court judgements, etc and encourage discussion on relevant items
3. Give as many staff as possible access to Planning news media e.g. Planning Resource
4. Encourage staff to gain membership to appropriate professional bodies such as the RTPI and TCPA
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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?** |
| Managers dip in and out of strategically important development proposal discussions and case officers are unclear when separate meetings have taken place and what was said. Case officers are given inconsistent guidance. Sometimes they are advised at the last minute on a recommendation they need to make so they do not feel empowered to make decisions. On other occasions, they are left completely on their own with no management support or interest. | There is an effective system in place to enable managers to monitor and advise on strategically important development proposals. Managers give support to case officers, helping them to navigate issues that arise and case officers are clear on what level of management support is needed and when they need to seek this support. | 1. Have a regular forum that enables managers to discuss the most contentious or strategically important applications with case officers and case officers have an opportunity to flag issues
2. Encourage managers to flag up development proposals of interest with the case officer at the start of a pre-application or application stage so that the case officer knows that there is management interest
3. Use 1 to 1s to ensure case officers are comfortable with their roles and the issues they are dealing with
4. Carry out debriefs when managers meet developers and case officers hold developer meetings so that developers do not perceive a ‘them and us’ between managers and case officers. Debriefs should ideally be face-to-face or verbally relayed rather than by email
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| Case officers are left largely to themselves to monitor their caseloads and to decide how to prioritise work. Managers work in a reactive way and will only normally see an officer recommendation when it is ready to sign off or when they are alerted to a problem through a customer complaint. When problems arise this is normally dealt with by asking the applicant for an extension of time so that the matter can be further considered by a manager | Managers monitor caseloads with case officers on a regular basis so that case officers can prioritise work and have the confidence to make decisions in a timely manner. For example, with high-volume applications managers can reassure case officers that there are no issues to impede a quick decision whilst giving support for more problematic applications so that a decision can be made. | 1. Ensure there is a regular flow of information so both the case officer and manager have up-to-date information on caseloads and details
2. Ensure monitoring of caseloads is always on a 1 to 1 agenda
3. Provide a guidance note for staff on how to prioritise caseloads and offer training if required
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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| There are no scheduled opportunities for managers and staff to discuss topical issues and the only time staff are brought together is when there is a problem e.g. a complaint or poor performance. These tend to occur at short notice at the convenience of management and all staff are told to attend regardless of their own diaries. | There are regular opportunities for managers to discuss topical issues with staff and staff feel able to raise any questions that are of concern to them. The manager agrees to a time when the majority of staff can attend and suggests agenda items, but staff have ample opportunity to place items on the agenda and decide how the issues are communicated e.g. presentation, discussion, workshop, Q and A, etc. | 1. Try to hold staff forums in a comfortable environment and not a formal setting to encourage debate. Try having them outside of the normal office environment
2. Consider the most effective way to hold meetings so that they can maximise attendance e.g. virtual, location, time of day, etc
3. Do not hold meetings too frequently otherwise they will be seen as chores, but ensure that they are frequent enough for topics of concern to be properly addressed. Try letting the staff decide.
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| **A poor Development Management Service (score 1)** | **An excellent Development Management Service (score 5)** | **Top tips** |
| Staff appraisals never, or rarely, take place because managers are too busy and they are not considered a priority . There are no individual work programmes produced because all staff either process planning applications or carry out the technical support function so their managers do not see the need for individual work programmes. | All staff have a work programme and annual appraisal targets so that they know when they are doing a good job and when improvement is needed as part of a culture of continuous improvement. There is a culture within the council that appraisals are given priority by managers. Targets are based on both the business needs and the individual needs of staff.  | 1. Let staff suggest performance targets and discuss if these are different from other members of staff who do a similar job
2. Have a standard template for appraisals and work programmes so that staff know what to expect and how to complete their part of the appraisal
3. Discuss work programmes as a team before asking individuals to complete them so that everyone understands their purpose and what is expected of them
4. Create a culture where appraisals and work programmes are a necessity rather than a “nice to do”
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| Complaints are dealt with as required under Council procedures and the relevant officers only know about them when they are interviewed by a manager to help with a response. The outcome is not known by the relevant officer unless it involves a disciplinary matter. There is no process to record compliments and therefore it falls upon the line manager to decide what to do with them. There is no review process for appeal decisions and it is usually the responsibility of the case officer to raise any points that they feel appropriate with managers or other staff. | The department has a learning through experience process in place whereby compliments, complaints and appeals information are logged and lessons can be learned through actions agreed upon by management. Equal acknowledgement is given for positive and negative feedback and staff are always aware that the feedback has been acknowledged and know what actions have taken place. | 1. Create a standard reporting method for learning points and summarise these reports regularly (e.g. once a quarter)
2. Ensure all managers are involved in writing the reports and feedback to staff at the appropriate forum e.g. 1 to 1s, team meetings, etc
3. Involve staff in the responses to complaints and let them review the draft before it is sent out for accuracy even if they do not agree with the conclusion
4. Ensure relevant managers praise staff when they receive compliments
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| **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TO FOLLOW UP** |