



planning advisory service



12 tips on keeping on top of Development Management performance

Planning Advisory Service

June 2021

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Who is this aimed at and how to use it?

- Aimed primarily at DM managers including: Heads of Planning, Heads of DM and DM team managers
 - Use as a checklist to investigate why DM performance may be slipping and deciding where improvements might need to be made
 - Use other PAS support material to consider ways that further improvements can be achieved e.g. DM Challenge Toolkit, training, peer challenge, mentoring or resource and productivity review
-

1. Make sure you have the right information

Suggested performance reports include:

- Number and percentage of Majors and non Majors determined in time over month, quarterly, yearly and two yearly period
- Number and percentage of Majors and non Majors out of time
- Number of applications outstanding and with extension of times / Planning Performance Agreements
- Caseload per officer and by application type
- Average days to validate applications
- Forward programme of possible Planning Committee items
- Number of current planning appeals and status of each appeal

Indicator Definition (quarterly)	2018/19 Actual	2019/20 Actual	2020/21 Actual
% of Major developments determined within time			
% of non Majors developments determined within target			
% of Major planning applications overturned at appeal			
% of Non Major planning applications overturned at appeal			

2. Make sure the information is up to date and is seen by the right people

- Consider generating weekly and monthly reports
- Decide who needs to see what information. Suggest:
 - Head of Planning (or equivalent) sees high level stats only
 - Head of DM (or equivalent) sees detailed stats at team level
 - Team leaders see detailed stats down to officer level
 - Case officers see their own stats and detailed stats at team level
- Discuss performance regularly at DM Service level and team level



3. Make sure everyone understands the role of the case officer

- The case officer should be the **convener** for all aspects of their planning applications who remains **responsible** for the application throughout and ensures there are no surprises
 - The manager needs to be clear with the case officer the level of input they want in an application. The manager should have **regular case reviews** and flag up when others may need to be involved. This should also take place before a draft decision has been reached by the case officer
 - **Never promise an applicant something you can't deliver** – it is very dangerous to say “I'm sure it will be fine” before you have received consultation responses
 - The applicant must be clear that the **case officer makes the decision** rather than a consultee – the case officer should always front up discussions between the applicant and objector
 - If a manager changes a case officer recommendation at the last minute think about the **impression that gives to the applicant or local resident** of the Planning Dept and the case officer. How can it be better managed?
 - **Trust and relationships** between the case officer and the applicant should never be undermined by the intervention of others
-

4. Make sure everyone sings from the same song sheet

- Consider having a set of process notes and **manual for DM** so that everyone works in the same way
- The manual can change whenever it needs to with the help of all the staff. It needs to be an **essential daily reference point** that all DM staff instantly go to for help
- Consider giving **individual officers responsibility** for sections of the DM Manual so there is a sense of ownership and relevance
- **Don't let "we have always done it this way" stop changes being made**
- **Don't tolerate staff having their own manuals or own way of doing things.** If they have good ideas then they can help improve practice for everyone.

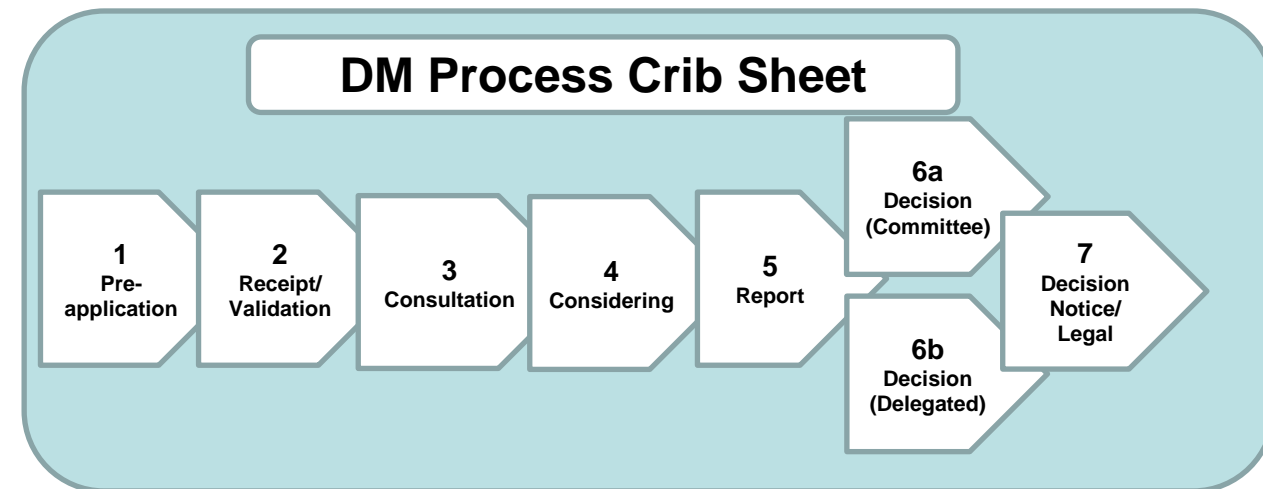
Development Management Manual for Case Officers 2020

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5. Make dynamic changes when they are needed

- **Take action when things go wrong** based on the information provided and feedback. Have regular management discussions involving the right people
- **React promptly** to changes in legislation, national practice guidance etc and make changes relevant to your particular circumstances
- **Don't let bad practice continue unchallenged**
- **Small incremental changes** can sometimes have a big impact on performance. Failure to make these incremental changes can lead to a downward spiral
- **Listen to your staff** to understand the problems and let them suggest the solutions – they are the ones who are doing the job every day



6. Praise good performance, challenge poor performance

- Use the detailed **performance information** in regular one to ones
- **Praise staff** when they are doing well and make sure staff know that managers know they are doing a good job
- **Challenge** why individual performance has dropped and support staff to improve. Don't leave this to the annual appraisal, review at least monthly.
- Ensure that there is a **culture of performance** and that performance matters to staff
- **Share stats** with staff, managers and members and discuss it regularly. Celebrate success, address poor performance
- Ensure **staff understand** what needs to happen when performance falls

Performance indicator	February performance	2020/21 performance
Majors in time		
Minors in time		
Others in time		
Certificates etc in time		
Trees in time		
Days to validate		
Electronic submissions		

7. Monitor caseloads

- Provide **regular reports** on caseloads per officer
- Make sure it is divided up by application type as well as overall numbers. Numbers are fairly meaningless without understanding the **workload involved**
- Include applications determined as well as applications outstanding so that **output as well as input** is monitored
- **Discuss caseloads regularly** with staff to manage numbers
- **Support and challenge** staff with their applications. Help them to make good timely decisions but don't do the work for them
- Understand what is a reasonable caseload and **what actions need to be taken** when caseloads exceed a tolerable level e.g. redistribution of cases, help individuals with cases, bring in temporary support etc
- Make sure case officers **see actions taking place** when issues are identified

Table P152a: District Matters Planning Performance Table for Quality of Decisions: January 2017 to December 2018 P

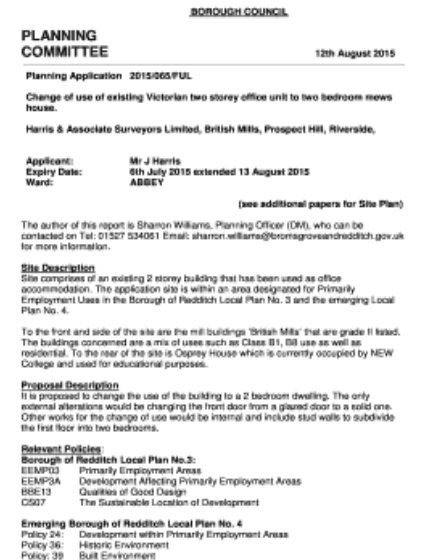
Table P152a: District Matters Planning Performance Table for Quality of Decisions: January 2017 to December 2018 P

Rows are sorted by the final column: quality of decisions (% overturned at appeal), excluding appeals relating to planning conditions

DMD name	DMD code	January - March 2017				April - June 2017					
		Total major application decisions	Major applications not determined	Total major decisions and non-determined cases	Major decisions overturned at appeal	Total major application decisions	Major applications not determined	Total major decisions and non-determined cases	Major decisions overturned at appeal		
England	E9000001	4,838	29	4,867	255	100	3,637	26	3,657	239	101
Wales of Scilly	E9000003	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adur	E9700023	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ardsle	E9700026	6	0	6	0	0	15	0	15	1	0
Ardsle Valley	E9700032	11	0	11	0	0	8	0	8	0	0
Blarney	E9700050	14	0	14	0	0	5	0	5	0	0
Barnstaple	E9700027	5	0	5	0	0	5	0	5	0	0
Barnstaple and Deane	E9700084	11	0	11	0	0	16	0	16	0	0
Barnstaple with Barnave	E9900005	6	0	6	0	0	4	0	4	0	0
Brecks Authority	E2400007	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2	0	0
Brecks	E9700095	4	0	4	0	0	6	0	6	1	0
Bristol	E9700172	4	0	4	0	0	3	0	3	0	0
Burley	E9700117	4	0	4	0	0	3	0	3	0	0
Bury	E9900022	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	10	0	0
Camden	E9900007	8	0	8	0	0	6	0	6	0	0
Canterbury	E9700106	14	0	14	0	0	18	0	18	2	0
Charnwood	E9700130	17	0	17	0	1	9	0	9	1	0
Cherley	E9700118	6	0	6	0	0	3	0	3	0	0
Chichester	E9700048	4	0	4	0	0	4	0	4	0	0
City of London	E9900001	4	0	4	0	0	4	0	4	0	0
Coventry	E9700021	10	0	10	0	0	12	0	12	1	0
Copeland	E9700029	4	0	4	0	0	4	0	4	0	0
County	E9700100	3	0	3	0	0	4	0	4	0	0
Cotswold	E9700079	12	0	12	0	0	7	0	7	1	0
Devon	E9700096	9	0	9	0	1	9	0	9	0	0

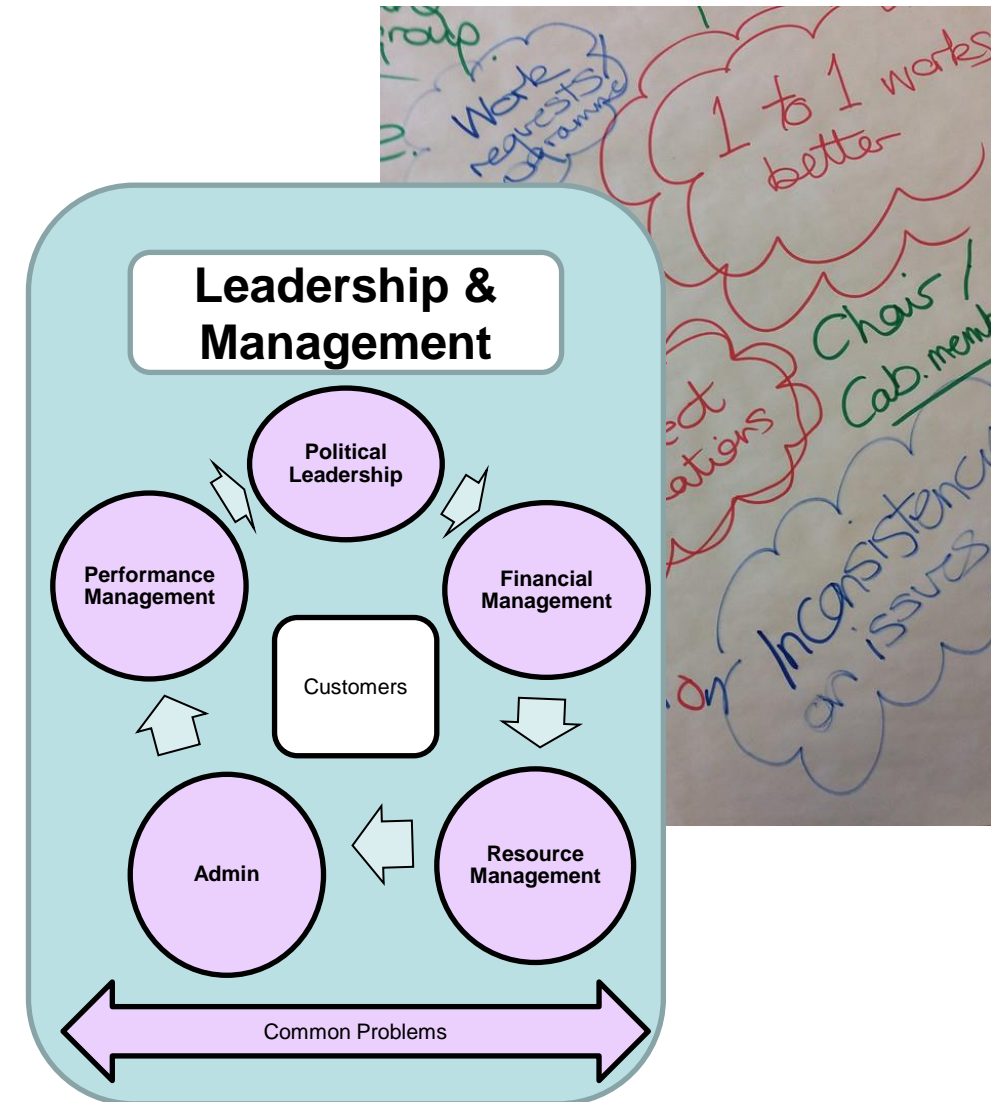
8. Ensure you understand the importance of the officer report

- Think about the **time you need to spend on an officer report**. A householder report with no objections and an approval is unlikely to be read by anyone except the case officer and manager so why spend a lot of time on it? A controversial report for a Major application recommended for refusal at Planning Committee will be read in detail by a lot of people and will form the basis of an appeal statement so it must be detailed and correct
- **Beware cut and paste**. It is good to be consistent with similar decisions but each application is different
- Officer reports are **read by the public** and they are usually not Planning experts so write them as such e.g. explain acronyms, use Plain English, avoid Planning jargon
- **Poor grammar and spelling** really does matter particularly for Planning Committee reports as it affects the credibility of the professional Planner
- Don't just blandly include standard paragraphs without **thinking about what you are writing** e.g. a sentence about the Equality Act will be there for a reason



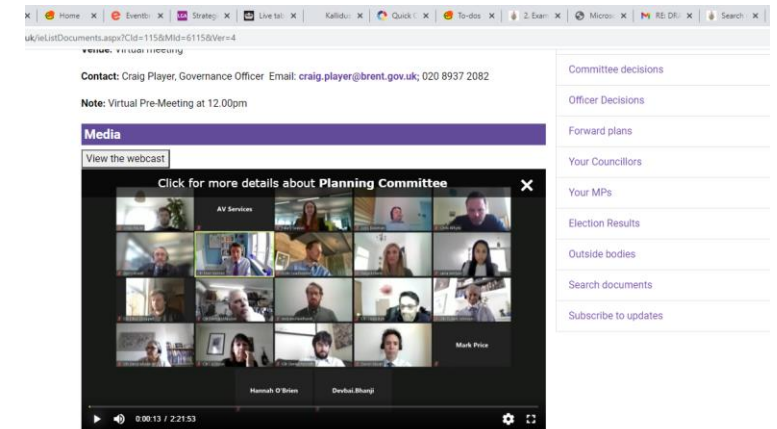
9. Communicate with the customer

- **Do the simple things properly** e.g. return phone calls / emails – no excuses
- **Get on the front foot with applicants.** Case officer to introduce themselves at the start of the application to gain a business relationship and repour
- Remember the customer is more than just the applicant, it is **all stakeholders in a planning decision**
- Don't be afraid to give bad news on timescales and issues. Most people will understand, **it is the lack of communication that frustrates people.**
- Work with your applicants through **local agents and developer forums.** A positive relationship can significantly help communication but a poor relationship can undermine the work of officers. **NEVER** discuss individual cases or case officers in an open forum.
- **Think out of the box** to break down barriers – what is the best way to communicate and improve relationships?



10. Involve Members in performance discussions

- Ensure the right Members understand the **importance of performance**
- Ensure Planning Committee **owns performance** and the possible consequences of decisions they make
- Include performance in **Member training**
- Include **lessons learnt** as part of the Planning Committee agenda e.g. reporting on appeal results and identify what went well or wrong



meeting, the nature and existence of any
al interests in the items on this agenda and

11. Learn from experience

- **Celebrate success** and use it as best practice. Examples:
 - An appeal win could mean the correct interpretation of a Local Plan policy
 - Good customer feedback could mean that a new DM practice is popular with customers
 - Good monthly performance could mean that a new DM improvement tool is working
- **Use poor feedback as an opportunity.** What can be learnt from something that has not gone well. Examples:
 - A lost appeal could require the rethinking of the use of a Local Plan policy
 - A DM practice may need to be reviewed following poor customer feedback
 - Poor monthly performance may need addressing early to avoid longer term poor performance



12. Learn from others

- Don't "re-invent the wheel".
- There is always **good practice** in other LPAs so speak to others.
- Don't be afraid to **copy good practice** from other LPAs – they will not mind, in fact they will be proud.
- **Use networks** to find out what others are doing e.g. DM regional groups

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Good Development Management Practice

What makes a good Development Management service? What has the biggest impact on delivering a good Development Management service? What are Development Management services doing to ensure that they are delivering one?

To answer these questions, in June 2019 we produced 13 case studies from a variety of councils that are tackling head-on the challenges of delivering efficient, high quality development management services under pressure from increased workloads and reduced resources. The case studies include examples of how councils are creating more capacity, plugging skills gaps and getting the whole machine operating more effectively.

We hope they'll inspire you to develop your own creative and new ways of working that will help improve the efficiency, quality and delivery of your Development Management service.

Download the fully report below for all case studies, key lessons and conclusions. Alternatively, you can download each case study individually.



Good Development Management
1.74 MB - PDF



1 London Borough Southwark Council Graduate Scheme
307.39 KB - PDF



2 Oxford City Council – Trainee Planner Scheme
189.71 KB - PDF



3 LB Brent Council – 'team approach' to large scale applications
273.46 KB - PDF

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Tips on managing Development Management Performance

12 tips on keeping on top of Development Management performance.

Development Management Challenge Toolkit

The Development Management Challenge Toolkit is based on what we've learned from high performing councils of all shapes and sizes. It is designed to challenge and improve your service by considering what an excellent Development Service looks like. It is structured to help you to engage with staff, managers, councillors and other stakeholders of the Development Management service.

What to do if you need more help

PAS can offer a range of services to support you including:

- Peer challenge
- Member and officer training
- Individual mentoring
- Resource and productivity reviews
- The DM challenge toolkit
- Other bespoke services



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Development Management Challenge Toolkit

Critically consider the health of your Development Management service to kickstart your improvement plan

Endorsements

Introduction
Is there a cost?
How to use it
Who is it for?
When to use the Toolkit
The DM Challenge Toolkit documents (to download)

Endorsements

“ We are currently working through a Development Management improvement plan linked to ensuring the ongoing efficient operation of the service and using the toolkit has really helped us focus on what areas require most attention. It has also acted as a great opportunity to celebrate what we do well. I would highly recommend it” (David Atkinson, Director of Planning and Regeneration, Harborough District Council)

“ We were delighted to help PAS to pilot the new toolkit. We have found it invaluable to help us prepare a Development Management improvement action plan. We will now be using PAS as a ‘critical friend’ to help us finalise the action plan and to ensure it delivers on the actions that have been generated through the toolkit work” (Anon, Executive, South Hams DC and West Devon)



Thank you

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