

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Report Title:** Development Management Service Review Update

**Name of Committee:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 16 September 2024

**Report Director:** Chief Officer - Growth and Investment

**Portfolio:** Growth and Investment

**Ward Relevance:** All

**Prior Consultation:** None

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**Public or Private:** Public

**Report Subject to Call-In:** No

**Report En-Bloc:** No

**Forward Plan:** Yes

**Corporate Priorities:** This report relates to the following priority(ies):  
 Rugby is an environmentally sustainable place, where we work together to reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change. (C)  
 Rugby has a diverse and resilient economy that benefits and enables opportunities for all residents. (E)  
 Residents live healthy, independent lives, with the most vulnerable protected. (HC)  
 Rugby Borough Council is a responsible, effective and efficient organisation. (O)  
[Corporate Strategy 2021-2024](#)  
 This report does not specifically relate to any Council priorities but

**Summary:** The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update of the findings of the review of the Development Management Service.

**Financial Implications:** None as a direct result of this report.

<b>Risk Management/Health and Safety Implications:</b>	None as a direct result of this report.
<b>Environmental Implications:</b>	None as a direct result of this report.
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	None as a direct result of this report.
<b>Equality and Diversity:</b>	The Council's equality and diversity policies for both staff and customers have been embedded within the processes and procedures recommended by the review.
<b>Recommendation:</b>	IT BE RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that the report be noted.
<b>Reasons for Recommendation:</b>	The report summarises the findings of the independent review into the Development Management Service and provides members with an update on the action plan.

**Cabinet - 16 September 2024**

**Development Management Service Review Update**

**Public Report of the Chief Officer - Growth and Investment**

**Recommendation**

IT BE RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL THAT the report be noted.

**1. Executive Summary**

1.1 The Development Management team (DM) is responsible for determining planning applications. As a frontline service, there are often competing priorities and increasing engagement from the public. The DM team was last reviewed in 2009 since that time there have been significant changes to the planning system, significant digital changes in the way processes can be undertaken and changing corporate priorities. As one of the fastest growing towns in the country, the DM team needs to be managing and facilitating this growth not impeding this growth by not having the systems and processes in place to ensure that resources are maximised in the most efficient way.

1.2 Hyas Associates Ltd was appointed to carry out the Development Management Review in the spring of 2023. The main findings of the review are as follows:

- Exceeding Government targets for speed of determination of applications
- Exceeding Government targets for quality of decision making
- Increasing use of 'Extensions of Time Agreements' second highest number of Extensions of Time issued in cohort group in 2021/22
- The pre-app service is aligned with best practice from across the country and the fees charged are average to high
- The scheme of delegation is similar to other Local Planning Authorities across the country
- Lowest number of applications per officer in cohort group but only Council with no technical support team
- Higher than cohort group average income per application
- Higher than cohort group average costs per application
- Planning Committee generally works well
- Ability to communicate with individual officers seen as good by customers but some changes have not been communicated regularly enough

- 1.3 The review recommended 64 changes. It was also recommended that the Council considers the recommendations and prepare an action plan to take forward those that it wishes to implement.
- 1.4 An action plan was prepared in the summer of 2023 and has been implemented during the remainder of the financial year. Of the 64 recommendations 49 have already been completed.
- 1.5 The key areas for change which have delivered the most significant change have been:
  - i) Redeploying Land Charges staff to create a Planning Technical Officers Team that now validates all planning applications and deals with general enquiries and other administrative staff.
  - ii) The introduction of written procedures and policies to all staff which can be quickly accessed.
- 1.6 The changes have meant an increase in speed in the validation of applications and freeing up officer time to focus on the determination of applications which has reduced the officer cost per application and has also led to a significant reduction in the reliance on Extension to Time Agreements which is a new government target. In 2021/22 63.6% of all application determined had agreed Extension to Time Agreements. This dropped to 45% in 2023/24 and in Q1 of 24/25 it dropped again to 38%. This is expected to fall further as the above processes are embedded.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 In 2022, the Growth and Investment Portfolio was realigned to ensure that it could deliver on the Council's Corporate Strategy and also its statutory functions as the Local Planning Authority. This realignment included the creation of a Major Projects and Economic Development team to lead on our large complex projects such as Houlton, Southwest Rugby and Ansty Park, to create an economic development function to support our local businesses and economy and resources to deliver the Regeneration Strategy. The realignment also ensured that planning enforcement was provided with the resources to provide a dedicated enforcement function rather than officers doing both planning and enforcement work.
- 2.2 The realignment also resulted in existing staff being moved into different teams within Growth and Investment Portfolio and given different priorities. In 2022 and 2023 the Council also approved additional funding to create new establishment posts to ensure that the team had the necessary skills and resources to fulfil its corporate strategy and statutory functions. These posts included:
  - a Senior Planning Officer post to deal with Southwest Rugby
  - an additional Enforcement Officer
  - 2 Economic Development Officers
  - a Community Infrastructure Levy and Monitoring Officer
  - a Principal Planning Officer Town Centres

- 2.3 Delivering effective and efficient services however are not just about providing more staff it is also about ensuring that processes are designed to deliver efficient services and to ensure best value for the taxpayer.
- 2.4 The DM team, is responsible for determining planning applications. As a frontline service, there are often competing priorities and increasing engagement from the public. The DM team was last reviewed in 2009 since that time there have been significant changes to the planning system, significant digital changes in the way processes can be undertaken and changing corporate priorities. As one of the fastest growing towns in the country, the DM team need to be managing and facilitating this growth not impeding this growth by not having the systems and processes in place to ensure that resources are maximised in the most efficient way.
- 2.5 The main identified drivers for the review were:
- Reduction in central support grant from the Government
  - Implementation of the Councils Corporate Strategy 2021-24
  - Council focus on delivering more efficient and effective services
  - Costs associated with appeals
  - Costs associated with temporary staff
  - Difficulties of recruitment and retention of Chartered Town Planners nationally
  - A relatively small but increasing backlog of planning applications
  - The aim to achieve a 'good' level of customer service
  - A team structure and processes that are performance based
- 2.6 In December 2022 Cabinet approved the use of funds from the Transformation Reserve to fund an independent review of the Council's Development Management function.

### **3. The Review**

- 3.1 Hyas Associates Ltd was appointed to carry out the Development Management Review in the spring of 2023. Hyas work with local authorities across the country on planning related matters including working with the Planning Advisory Service.
- 3.2 The brief for the project was to constructively evaluate the current approach to the delivery of services; clarify what outcomes the Council wanted to achieve for the service; determine 'what good looks like'; define the processes, tools, resources and skills required to achieve the agreed aims. The review sought to develop processes and procedures that embed good working practices within the team. The approach involved the following key tasks:
- Undertaking a benchmarking exercise looking at nationally recorded statistics, staffing numbers and budgets, to identify good practice and appropriate comparators.
  - Undertaking a desktop review of current approaches within RBC, including a review of procedure manuals/documentation where they exist.

- Spending some time with the team, following planning applications as they move through the system, considering how pre-apps are undertaken and how enquiries are dealt with.
- Review the Planning Committee processes from report drafting, engagement with Committee Chair and the meeting itself.
- Undertake one to one discussions with the following stakeholders both internal and external.

3.3 A copy of the review is attached at Appendix 1. The main findings of the review were as follows:

- RBC website provides a good amount of information about pre-apps
- The pre-app service is aligned with best practice from across the country
- Fees are charged for pre-apps are average to high
- The scheme of delegation is similar to other Local Planning Authorities across the country
- Increasing use of 'Extensions of Time Agreements'
- Second highest number of Extensions of Time issued in cohort group in 2021/22
- Lowest number of applications per officer in cohort group
- Higher than cohort group average income per application
- Higher than cohort group average costs per application
- Exceeding Government targets for speed of determination of applications
- Exceeding Government targets for quality of decision making
- Collective understanding that Rugby is a 'pro-growth' authority
- Some understanding about the corporate changes in culture and future emphasis on understanding performance and how its measured
- Fear of change/resistance to change from some officers
- Desire from senior management to capture more benefits of growth
- Planning Committee generally works well and there are opportunities to build on current good practice by undertaking more training, improving information exchange and engagement.
- Internal stakeholders worked well with the planning team. Relationships tended to be transactional rather than collaborative. Lack of efficient processes due to different systems.
- Ability to communicate with individual officers seen as good by customers
- Changes to service delivery have not been communicated to regular customers
- Officers focus on getting approvals rather than timescales and believe this leads to more applications approved and better quality applications
- Officers didn't take applications out of the box if they considered they had a full caseload already. Some officers left 'difficult' applications in the box
- Officers considered they do too much for agents/applicants
- Mixed approaches to personal development
- Good management knowledge and support
- Lack of written guidance on processes or procedures

- Lack of knowledge within the team about how the Agile system works and how to manage it
  - Lack of understanding of Planning Performance Agreements
  - Lack of heritage/conservation specialist
- 3.4 The review recommended 64 changes. It was also recommended that the Council considers the recommendations above and prepare an action plan to take forward those that it wishes to implement. It was important that the action plan sets key milestones for implementation and identified who was responsible for implementing the actions. The key priorities were:
1. Reducing the time spent on individual applications.
  2. Ensuring that all officers are clear about the statutory and regulatory requirements for processing planning applications.
  3. Utilising savings from vacant posts to establish a technical support role(s) that can undertake duties currently done by planning officers to give them more time to spend on planning issues on applications.
  4. Focus efforts to resource the enforcement team and consider opportunities to engage planning officers more frequently in enforcement work.
- 3.5 In relation to the four key areas of focus recommended by Hyas the following steps have been undertaken and all work is completed.

Reducing the time spent on individual applications

- 3.6 It was recognised that the concentration on discussion and negotiation on applications rather than statutory time limits meant that the time spent on processing individual applications has increased. The application fee however is only paid once, so allowing multiple opportunities to amend a scheme increases the cost to the service. Furthermore, the additional time taken to process applications is being masked by the use of Extension to Time Agreements as these are taken out of the quarterly returns to government. Extension to Time Agreements should only be used in exceptional circumstances however as the report identified they have become the norm with a higher usage than other authorities within the cohort. The previous Government sought to crack down on the use of Extension to Time Agreements and there is now a requirement to report on them as part of the quarterly statistics. In 2021/22 63.6% of all applications determined were covered by extension to time agreements.
- 3.7 The action taken has been to remind officers that Extension to Time Agreements should only be used in exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, to encourage the use of the Council's pre-application advice service to ensure that discussions on schemes can be held prior to the application being received which results in less amendments being required and ultimately a quicker decision-making process. Officers have also been advised that they do not have to spend exorbitant time negotiating amendments. Applicants should always be offered the opportunity to amend a scheme if it would make it acceptable or to lead to improvements but the number of times amendments are requested should be limited.

- 3.8 The quarterly returns for 2023/24 have already demonstrated that for 2023/24 the average number of days taken to determine applications is reducing. The annual return for 2023/24 saw the Extension to Time % reduce to 45% and the Q1 figures shows this has dropped again to 38%.
- 3.9 In July the government published data of the authorities who had the most Extension to Time agreements. The 50 worst authorities were named in Planning Resource they relied on Extension to Time Agreements for 56%-81.9% of all applications. The steps undertaken has meant that the Council has now a much improved record of the use of Extension to Time Agreements.

Ensuring that all officers are clear about the statutory and regulatory requirements for processing planning applications

- 3.10 The absence of process notes and procedure manuals meant that a lot of officer time was spent searching for the information or consulting with colleagues. Over the last year new process manuals on validation and other procedures along with new standard templates have ensured that officers are not only clear about the requirements for processing applications but also that this can be done in a more efficient manner which assists with the time taken to process individual applications. This has also contributed to the reduce reliance on Extension to Time Agreements and resulted in faster processing times.

Utilising savings from vacant posts to establish a technical support role(s) that can undertake duties currently done by planning officers to give them more time to spend on planning issues on applications

- 3.11 A significant issue raised by officers was the time taken to validate planning applications as result of the Vanguard method being employed which means that one officer, no matter how senior, manages all parts of the process rather than the task being undertaken by the most appropriate person. The review pointed to the lack of a technical team to assist with the validation process and other tasks which is common at other local authorities as being a significant issue.
- 3.12 A planning technical team has been created using two existing officers who assisted with land charges and also through the creation of a new post using a vacant planning officer post on the establishment. All three Planning Technical Officers are now in post and have been receiving training. The full responsibility for validation and other tasks commenced on 1 April 2024. The structure of the team will then be reviewed during 2024/25 to establish the impact of this change and the cost savings to the service.

Focus efforts to resource the enforcement team and consider opportunities to engage planning officers more frequently in enforcement work

- 3.13 The realignment of the Growth and Investment Portfolio and the establishment of a dedicated Enforcement team of three officers has created additional resources and a focus for enforcement. The team were not fully staffed however until Summer 2023. The adoption of Planning Enforcement Local



Plan means that Councillors and residents are provided with more information about the work of the team along with performance measures which are also KPIs and PIs. The Enforcement Team are now looking at ways in which they can involve planning officers in the work that they do to create a greater understanding across the Growth and Investment Portfolio.

- 3.14 Outside of the key priorities an action plan was also prepared and is attached at Appendix 2. Of the 64 recommendations 49 have already been completed. 10 are underway, of these seven are awaiting other internal changes or external bodies to allow them to be completed. Only five recommendations have not been started four of these relate to the establishment of an Agents Forum which will be established in 2024 and the other relates to the establishment of a Charter which will also be reviewed in 2024 following the establishment of the Council wide Customer Charter.
- 3.15 The outcome of the review and the implementation of the changes can be seen in the improvements in performance measures. It should however be recognised that many of the changes were not implemented until well into 2023/24 which means that greater improvements should be achieved in 2024/25. There have also been significant vacancies within the team which has impacted on performance and the Council remains reliant on agency staff to cover these vacancies.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The independent review undertaken has resulted in a number of recommendations which has formed part of an action plan to ensure that the Development Management service can respond to changing pressures at a national and local level, improve performance and provide a more efficient service. These recommendations have been adopted and the majority of the action plan has already been introduced. The efficiencies and improved performance can be recognised in the quarterly performance returns.

**Name of Meeting:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 16 September 2024

**Subject Matter:** Development Management Service Review Update

**Originating Department:** Growth and Investment

**DO ANY BACKGROUND PAPERS APPLY**  YES  NO

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Doc No	Title of Document and Hyperlink

The background papers relating to reports on planning applications and which are open to public inspection under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972, consist of the planning applications, referred to in the reports, and all written responses to consultations made by the Local Planning Authority, in connection with those applications.

Exempt information is contained in the following documents:

Doc No	Relevant Paragraph of Schedule 12A



Development Management Service Review

Rugby Borough Council

May 2023

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## Executive Summary

This report details our review of the Development Management Service at Rugby Borough Council. The focus of the work was on the delivery of the service and consideration of what good looks like and to identify the processes, tools, resources, and skills required to achieve the agreed aims.

The review commenced with identifying a comparator group and then benchmarking performance statistics, staffing numbers and budgets. This helped to inform interviews with Councillors, Senior Management, key internal stakeholders, customers and finally the DM team itself. The main findings are summarised as follows:

- RBC website provides a good amount of information about pre-apps
- The pre-app service is aligned with best practice from across the country
- Fees are charged are average
- The scheme of delegation is similar to other LPAs across the Country
- Reducing number of applications per year
- Increasing use of Extensions of Time
- 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of Extensions of Time issued in cohort group in 2021/22
- Lowest number of applications per officer in cohort group
- Higher than cohort group average income per application
- Higher than cohort group average costs per application
- Exceeding Government targets for speed of determination of applications
- Exceeding Government targets for quality of decision making
- Collective understanding that Rugby is a 'pro-growth' authority
- Some understanding about the corporate changes in culture and future emphasis on understanding performance and how its measured
- Fear of change / resistance to change from some officers
- Desire from senior management to capture more benefits of growth
- Planning Committee generally works well and there are opportunities to build on current good practice by undertaking more training, improving information exchange and engagement.
- Internal stakeholders worked well with the planning team. Relationships tended to be transactional rather than collaborative. Lack of efficient processes due to different systems.
- Ability to communicate with individual officers seen as good by customers
- Changes to service delivery have not been communicated to regular customers
- Officers focus on getting approvals rather than timescales and believe this leads to more applications approved and better quality applications
- Some officers admitted to approving applications that probably shouldn't have been because they had already asked for changes and writing up refusals and the threat of appeals was considered to be a lot of work.
- Officers didn't take applications out of the box if they considered they had a full caseload already. Some officers left 'difficult' applications in the box.
- Officers considered they do too much for agents / applicants.
- Mixed approaches to personal development
- Good management knowledge and support
- Lack of written guidance on processes or procedures.
- Lack of knowledge within the team about how the Agile system works and how to manage it
- Lack of understanding of PPAs
- Lack of heritage / conservation specialist

These were reported back to the DM team for feedback. Richard and Nicola had previously reviewed the findings and asked us to facilitate a session with the team to consider the issue of time taken to determine applications. It was felt this was important given proposed changes in performance management recording by the Government and feedback from customers. The team were asked to think about barriers to quicker decision making and what were the possible solutions.

The second part of the workshop focused on identifying what a good service looked like and the principles that underpinned it, based on SWOT analysis and the findings of the review.

The research undertaken identified a number of areas for improvement and further consideration as well as building on positive approaches. We have captured our insights and made associated recommendations on the purpose of the service, the culture, processes, performance, personal and careers development, and recruitment and retention:

1. Establish a regular agent / applicant forum.
2. Use the forum to communicate any changes in approach, new legislation or policies such as validation requirements and climate change SPD.
3. Invite Portfolio Holder and Planning Committee Chair to attend twice a year.
4. Use the forum to communicate expectations.
5. Consider preparing and adopting a Charter that sets out the Councils expectations from applications and the commitments it will make. This could include how many opportunities the Council will give to make amendments for example or information about the of PPAs e.g.
6. Put in place regular Officer / Member sessions to reinforce the messages around the “purpose of planning” and approach to key issues such as HMO and G&T. this could be part of the suggested monthly Committee briefing sessions.
7. Instigate joint sessions of DM and Policy to ensure alignment on key issues and corporate focus for emerging plan and decision making.
8. Ensure the principles established by the team are built into annual service planning and individual one-to-ones.
9. Work with team to explain why it is important to measure performance.
10. Ensure roll out of the rugby blueprint and check to ensure staff understand what it means. Can they deliver against it and how will they know?
11. Consider yearly sessions with the team as part of annual business planning to reflect back the approach required.
12. Ensure customer feedback is part of this process.
13. Empower principal officers to ensure consistency of approach and regulatory requirements followed.
14. Ensure officers understand that they are not alone and can ask for help.
15. Involve junior officers are more complex projects or appeals as part of a bigger team.
16. Consider more days in the office, particularly as teams.
17. Provide guidance and training for Members on enforcement.
18. Celebrate “successes” with members and public.
19. Strengthen relationships between enforcement and DM teams. Encourage DM officers to get more involved in enforcement activity.
20. Consider giving planning officers a small case load of enforcement work.
21. Consider the best approach for Rugby to strengthen the role of Members at pre-app stage. Options include:
  - a. issues papers at Committee when apps received;
  - b. briefing sessions to advise Members of pipeline of apps and progress;

- c. presentations from applicants either in public or in private.
- 22. Consider including some plans and drawings in the committee reports or sharing the presentation in advance.
- 23. Provide committee briefing sessions monthly to advise Members about what is upcoming and include details on proposals. This will help to highlight key issues for officers and give Members greater ownership and feeling of involvement. This could be an open invitation to all Members.
- 24. Consider whether it is necessary to amend the Scheme of Delegation to make it clearer that Members are able to request call-in of applications that are re-consulted on, or if reminding officers and Members about the ability for chief officer to refer applications to committee is sufficient.
- 25. Review SLA with WCC ecology. Review what applications they are being consulted on, what data they are providing for the Council to use, how comments are provided and how quickly they are provided.
- 26. Work with WCC to refine how they engage in the process and opportunities to work more efficiently and effectively.
- 27. Explore with WCC including a pre-app fee for WCC services which can then be passed on.
- 28. Explore with WCC opportunities for signing up to a PPA.
- 29. Undertake further work to understand any patterns such as particular consultees asking for further information, experience or confidence of officers.
- 30. Consider establishing a 'technical officer' who takes responsibility for managing and updating the IT system.
- 31. Consider training other officers to have an understanding of the "back office system" and how to run reports etc.
- 32. Consider corporate opportunities for a system that incorporates other disciplines such as building control and environmental health.
- 33. Undertake training on the drafting and use of PPAs for the team.
- 34. Promote the use of PPAs to applicants at agent forums.
- 35. Provide information on the website about PPAs e.g. Cornwall website: What we offer – Cornwall Council and their Charter: Planning Performance Agreement Charter (cornwall.gov.uk)
- 36. Document ways of working into a procedure or process guides / manuals. Involve the team to identify what would be most helpful and what they should contain.
- 37. Continually review, refine and improve processes and update the manuals / guides. Use the ideas from the workshop as a basis for reviewing approaches.
- 38. Investigate opportunities for specialist heritage advice such as shared with other councils, part time roles, consultancy appointments etc.
- 39. Ensure Rugby BC performance measures reflect those proposed by the Government.
- 40. Ensure staff understand why change is needed and empower them to make the changes.
- 41. Encourage the use of the pre-app service – promote its benefits (including shortening application times)
- 42. Ensure the pre-app service is meaningful and delivers benefits to the customer.
- 43. Ensure all officers understand the validation requirements and provide regular training and update sessions.
- 44. Ensure applications that do not have the required information are not validated. Suggest to applicants to use the pre-app service.
- 45. Seek to have a maximum number of days that applications sit in box.

46. Principals should take responsibility for ensuring the box is emptied regularly and should allocate applications which exceed the target for time spent in the box.
47. Principal officers regularly review progress on applications and provide proactive support to officers.
48. Case officers review progress of the application at week 4 to make a decision if the application can be amended to make it good enough to approve.
49. Circulate a list of applications which are 6 weeks old on a weekly basis to remind officers that they are close to their time targets. Officers to consider if all necessary amendments have been made or are likely to be made within target. If not, consider appropriate action such as EOT, refusal, asking to withdraw etc.
50. Consider appointing a technical support officer to help officers with technical tasks and ICT. This could help reduce the burden on some officers to manage the Agile system.
51. Principals should regularly monitor individual performance and data, checking on the type of applications and workload being taken from the box.
52. Undertake further work to understand income and costs, particularly the split between major and minor apps and how staff are allocated to these tasks. Identify opportunities to reduce the cost per application.
53. Introduce mentor or buddy system for junior planners reflecting the corporate values around nurturing staff.
54. Programme of organised CPD including sessions done as a team.
55. Encourage line managers to have more formal regular sessions with team members focusing on professional development where needs are identified, recorded and progress against checked and recorded.
56. Celebrate successes of teams and individuals.
57. Team leaders to review regularly case load and case work to ensure officers have a good mix of applications appropriate to their experience and skill set and personal development objectives.
58. Discuss opportunities with HR to consider financial incentives that can be applied such as golden hello's, golden handcuffs, market supplements etc.
59. Discuss with HR new approaches to recruitment including head hunters and selling the Rugby BC brand.
60. Involve internal stakeholders in the change process.
61. Encourage officers to establish good working relationships with external consultees.
62. Ensure the 3 teams are closely aligned and work closely with each other. Involve planning officers in key ED / Regen workstreams.
63. Ensure the Local Plan reflects the aspirations around LED.
64. Prepare a LED strategy.

We recommend that the Council considers the recommendations above and prepare an action plan to take forward those that it wishes to implement. It is important that the action plan sets key milestones for implementation and identifies who is responsible for implementing the actions. Based on risk to authority we recommend that the focus should be on:

1. Reducing the time spent on individual applications;
2. Ensuring that all officers are clear about the statutory and regulatory requirements for processing planning applications;
3. Utilising savings from vacant posts to establish a technical support role(s) that can undertake duties currently done by planning officers to give them more time to spend on planning issues on applications;



4. Focus efforts to resource the enforcement team and consider opportunities to engage planning officers more frequently in enforcement work.

## Introduction and Background

Hyas Associates were commissioned by Rugby Borough Council (RBC) to provide expert, independent support to aid the review of Development Management processes, performance, and outcomes. Our support involved: constructively evaluating RBC's Planning Service, with a focus on the delivery of the Development Management service; what outcomes it wants to achieve for the service; determine 'what good looks like'; define the processes, tools, resources, and skills required to achieve the agreed aims.

## Basis of Review

### Our approach

#### Desktop review and benchmarking

The first phase of our approach consisted of a desktop review and benchmarking. We undertook a benchmarking exercise which consisted of performance statistics, staffing numbers and budgets, to identify 'good' practice. The statistical data obtained was compared against Rugby Borough Council's comparator group provided to our team by the Council. The comparator group includes the following authorities:

- Ashford
- Basingstoke and Deane
- Blaby
- Braintree
- Broxbourne
- Cherwell
- East Staffordshire
- Harborough
- Huntingdonshire
- Hinckley and Bosworth
- Nuneaton and Bedworth
- Stafford
- Stratford Upon Avon
- Test Valley
- Tonbridge and Mailing
- Warwick
- West Suffolk
- Wychavon

Our team used two sources of data to obtain the data for the benchmarking exercise, comprising of data from the last 5 financial years (2016/17-2021/22). The first was the [GOV planning statistics tables \(PS1\) \(PS2\)](#) and the second was information from [LG inform](#).

The desktop review and benchmarking phase was used to build a foundation for the review. This was supplemented by spending some time with the team, observing behaviours and working practices, including following planning applications as they move through the system.

#### Interviews and Workshops

We spoke to a number of stakeholders who are involved in the planning process, from planning officers at the Council providing the service to applicants and agents who receive the service. We have summarised descriptions of those interviewed below. The interviews generally lasted between 30mins and an hour, with the exception of a group discussion held with planners and senior planners which lasted approximately 2 hours.

#### *Senior Leadership Team*

As part of our review Hyas had ongoing dialogue with the Chief Officer for Growth and Investment, this included feeding back on any significant findings and discussions and to agree the areas of focus as our work progressed. We spoke to the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive to confirm

their understanding of the development management service and to identify areas of improvement or focus from a managerial perspective.

#### *The Development Management Team*

We spoke to officers ranging from graduate level to principal officers, as well as the service managers. We approached the discussion with officers methodically by speaking to the junior members of planning and enforcement officers separately to the principal planning officers and the major projects team.

#### *Internal Stakeholders*

Hyas spoke to a number of internal stakeholders who have some form of involvement or input in the planning process, which varied from planning committee to planning applications. We spoke to representatives from Environmental Health, Green Spaces, Legal and Democratic.

#### *Agents/Developers*

We spoke to local agents/developers, typically undertaking householder applications and development through to small housing schemes (around 10 units), who were regular customers of RBC. We also spoke to agents and developers of larger schemes who were less regular customers. We did this to provide a range of perspectives.

#### *Councillors*

Our team had discussions with Councillors representing all of the political parties at Rugby. Some Councillors were involved in planning committee and others were the lead for their party on planning and development.

#### *Workshop*

Our team visited the RBC offices and held a workshop with junior planning and enforcement officers. We used an interactive software tool called Menti to capture thoughts/comments and to identify collaboratively areas of improvement and processes/elements that work well.

We returned to the Council on April 20<sup>th</sup> and held a second workshop with the whole DM Service. This involved feeding back and testing our findings with the team. We also facilitated a session with the DM team to identify areas of change.

#### *Survey*

The Council provided our team with a list of regular customers. We prepared and launched a short survey to gather customer/developer views about the service the identified regular customers receive from RBC, when preparing and submitting a planning application.

All aforementioned research and insight enabled our team to identify areas of focus and change including recommendations to the Council.

## Key Findings from the Review

### Desktop review

#### Pre-applications

Rugby Borough Council's pre-application web pages provide good detail outlining:

- The benefits of seeking pre-application advice
- Links to further information: permitted development rights (planning portal); Certificate of Lawfulness; and Warwick Building Control's contact information
- Rugby Borough Councils pre-application T&C's
- Development category criteria
- Submission requirements and guidance
- What happens when Rugby receive the pre-application enquiry (method of response and response time)
- Potential content of response (detail and level of service dependent on scale/type of development)
- Fees, service, payment and exceptions

Pre-application requests are submitted through the website and the fees can be paid via an online system.

The service offered by Rugby for pre-apps includes residential and commercial development. RBC offers pre-application advice on single option proposals only. Their website advises the level of detail of the response will depend on the level of detail submitted, accompanied with submission requests and advisory information. The formal response given to the client is dependent on the nature and complexity of the development. The response could include:

- relevant planning history and key issues to be addressed, including identifying potential impacts and site context
- an assessment of whether the site complies with relevant local and national planning policies
- design advice (comments on built form, scale, massing, views, street scene, historic context, etc)
- impacts on amenity (which properties may be affected)
- whether assessments such as noise, air quality, drainage/flooding, contaminated land, landscape or tree surveys need to be conducted
- general transport policy advice on car and cycle parking standards, and electric charging points
- identification of relevant constraints affecting the site, such as conservation areas or proximity to listed buildings

For a major development, customers can also expect:

- a meeting with the case officer (likely to be via Microsoft Teams). Further meetings usually require an additional request for advice and an additional charge
- information on supporting documents required for submission with a subsequent planning application
- advice on pre-application community engagement

- information on potential infrastructure requirements, including potential impacts which may require mitigation through a Section 106 Agreement, such as infrastructure listed in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Hyas alongside the University of Gloucestershire were commissioned by the Planning Advisory Service PAS to deliver a DHLUC funded project in refreshing its pre-application and PPA suite. The outputs included guidance for best practice. In reviewing RBC’s pre-application webpages, their content/level of detail provided aligns with the soon to be updated PAS pre-application guidance.

The pre-application service and fees across LPAs in England varies. The charges in the fees table below displays the local authorities base fees/service which most commonly include a written response but also in some cases included a meeting in addition to the written response. There is a lack of consistency between LPAs as to fee categories so we have attempted to standardise the categories. The data in the pre-application fee table shows that Rugby Borough Council’s fees sit close to the average charge, calculated by using the comparator group. However, Rugby’s fees are on the higher end of the range.

LPA	1-4 dwellings	5-9 dwellings/500-999m2	10-49 dwellings/1,000-4,999m2	50-99 dwellings/5,000-9,999sq.m	Large resi/ 100-150 dwellings 10,000-20,000sqm
<b>Rugby</b>	£ 395	£1,050	£2,400	£3,700	£5,500
<b>Ashford</b>	£400	£700	£1,500	£4,000	250+ dwellings £5,000
<b>Bassingstoke and Deane</b>	25% of the related application fee				
<b>Blaby</b>	Service currently suspended – no details available				
<b>Braintree</b>	£150	£150	£690	£1,010	n/a
<b>Broxbourne</b>	£328	£575	£2,070	£5,980	£8,625
<b>Cherwell</b>	£459 for the first dwelling then £90 per each additional dwelling		£1,200 first two dwellings then £36 for each additional dwelling		
<b>East Staffordshire</b>	£188	£375	£938	£1,250	£1,250
<b>Harborough</b>	£300	£780-£1200	£2,700	£6,000	£6,000
<b>Hinckley and Bosworth</b>	£391.40	£1,030	£2,360	£3,670	£5,460
<b>Huntingdonshire</b>	£420-£2,700	2,700	£3,600-£9,540	£11,520-£19,440	£22,500-£30,060
<b>Nuneaton and Bedworth</b>	£500-£1200	£1,200	£3,000	£5,400	£5,400
<b>Stafford</b>	Service currently suspended – no details available				
<b>Stratford</b>	£350-£600	£600-£850	£2,000	£3,000	£3,000
<b>Test Valley</b>	£144-£259	£259-£432	£763- 10% of full planning fee plus VAT		
<b>Tonbridge and Malling</b>	£506	£758	£2,340	£2,340	£2,400

<b>Warwick</b>	£480- £840	£840-£1,200	£2,400	£2,400	200+ £4,800
<b>West Suffolk</b>	£302	£302	£929	£929	£2,278
<b>Wychavon</b>	£346.20	£693.00	£1,370.50	£2,749.40	£2,749.40

Table 1 RBC Comparators : Pre-Application Fee's

### Scheme of Delegation

Rugby Borough Council's constitution sets out how Rugby conducts its business and processes. In terms of RBC constitution, in relation to the scheme of delegation and determining which applications go to planning committee RBC's delegated powers and determining threshold is not dissimilar from the authorities in the comparator group, which can be seen in appendix 1. Generally, the Chief Officer of Growth and Investment (comparator group equivalent: Corporate Management Team) has the power to authorise most functions/decisions and they can refer applications to Planning Committee (full or outline applications only). However, there are exceptions which most commonly consist of the following:

- The development is classified as a 'major development'.
- Planning applications have been 'called-in' under the Called-In procedure.

To be noted on average half of the comparator group adopt a similar approach to RBC in relation to the 'call-in' procedure, albeit they are labelled or categorised differently. Those authorities who allow the call-in procedure tend to follow similar practices to RBC as they require a written request, within the 21 day consultation period for that application. We did not find any examples which specifically referred to instances where applications were reconsulted upon and the 'call in' period restarting.

When we look at the percentage of decisions made that were delegated to officers, Rugby is higher than the average % (94.77%) in its cohort at 95.29% and 6<sup>th</sup> out of 19 LPAs.

#### Summary

- RBC website provides good amount of information about pre-apps
- The pre-app service is aligned with best practice from across the country
- Fees are charged are average
- The scheme of delegation is similar to other LPAs across the Country

### Benchmarking and Statistical Data

#### Government Targets and Performance

The performance of Local Planning Authorities is measured by the Government in terms of quality and quantity of decision making. The latter involves measuring time taken to make decisions on the major, minor and other classes of application. The measure is the % of applications in these classes determined within 13 weeks for a major (16 weeks where there is an EIA) and 8 weeks for non major applications, over a rolling 2 year period. It is important to note that this measure excludes applications where an extension of time has been agreed.

The targets set by Government and the current performance (24 months to end of September 2022) is as follows:

Application Type	National Indicator	RBC Actual Performance
Major Applications	60%	94.1%
Non Major	70%	85.2%

Table 2 Planning Application Performance Speed. 24 months to end of September 2022 (Table\_P151.ods (live.com) and Table\_P153.ods (live.com))

In addition the Government measures the quality of decision making. The Government measure for this is the % of applications that are approved at appeal over a rolling 2 year period. The targets set by Government and the current performance (24 months to end of September 2022) is as follows:

Application Type	National Indicator	RBC Actual Performance
Major Applications	10%	2.6%
Minor Applications	10%	0.8%

Table 3 Planning Application Performance Quality. 24 months to end of September 2022

(Table\_P152\_October\_2019\_to\_September\_2021.ods (live.com) and

Planning\_Live\_Table\_P154\_July\_2019\_to\_June\_2021.ods)

In terms of these measures, Rugby is performing well. However, it is worth noting that the Government launched a consultation in February 2023 which included proposals on amending how performance is measured ([Technical consultation: Stronger performance of local planning authorities supported through an increase in planning fees - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/consult/technical-consultation-stronger-performance-of-local-planning-authorities-supported-through-an-increase-in-planning-fees)).

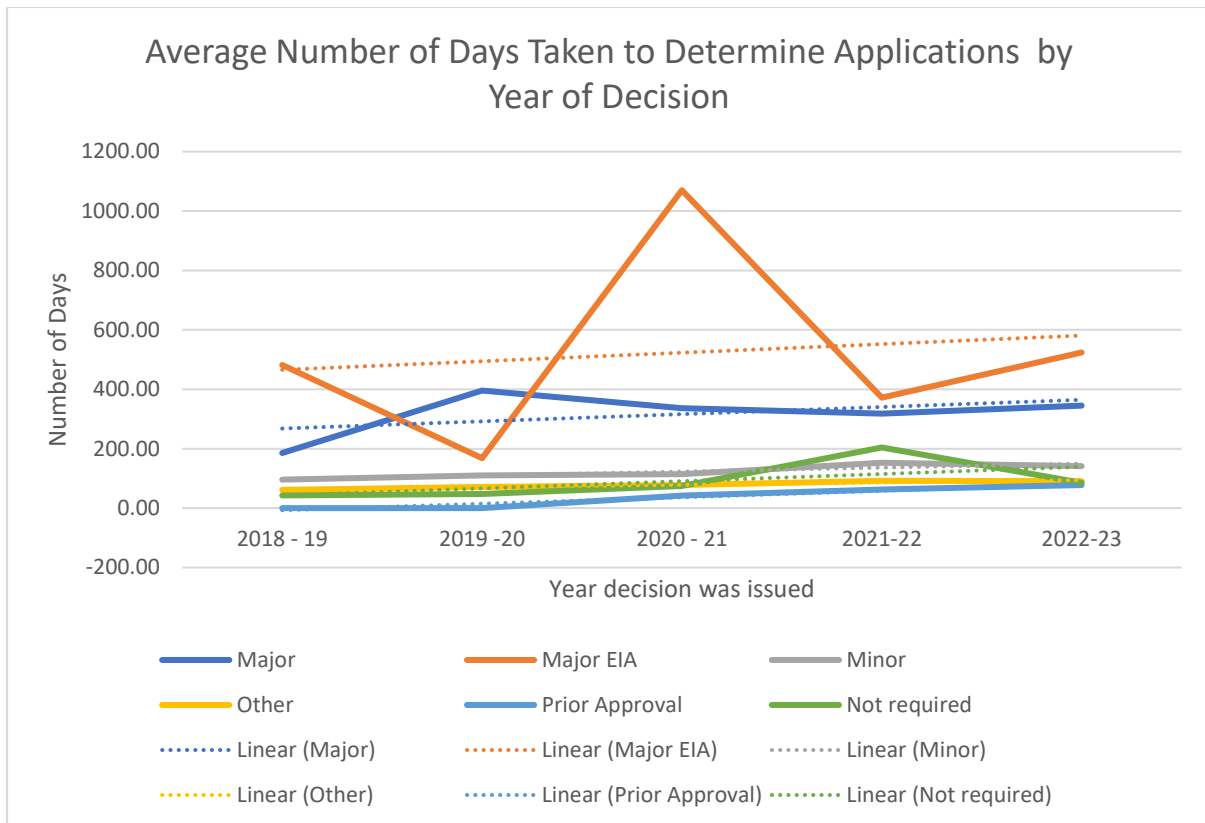
The proposals state that the Government intends to “introduce new metrics that more closely monitor local authority performance against statutory determination periods, as well as those including extension of time agreements, in order to drive improved performance”. It is therefore important to understand the time taken on all applications, regardless of whether an extension of time or Planning Performance Agreement has been signed. The consultation document also includes a range of suggested measures including the number of extensions of time issued and the average time taken to validate planning applications.

Using data supplied by the Council we looked at the length of time taken to determine applications. This included data on applications determined between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023. The data was based on categories identified by the Council. The following table and graph shows the average time in days taken to determine applications in each of the categories.

Decision year	Major	Major EIA	Minor	Other	Prior Approval	Not required
2018 - 19	185.63	482.00	95.88	61.35	0.00	42.79
2019 -20	395.71	168.00	110.56	71.35	0.00	47.18
2020 - 21	336.09	1070.00	114.14	77.62	42.14	74.43
2021-22	318.39	371.75	152.70	91.92	62.60	204.14
2022-23	345.20	524.33	141.67	90.66	77.66	85.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>307.45</b>	<b>478.00</b>	<b>121.82</b>	<b>78.02</b>	<b>64.85</b>	<b>63.36</b>

Table 4 Average time taken to determine applications (days)

Graph 1: Average numbers of days taken to determine applications (2018/19-2022/23 annual)



The graph shows that for all application types there has been a trend of increasing length of time to determine applications each year. Whilst the Major EIA apps have fluctuated the most, this category has the smallest number of applications and are the most complex so no trends are apparent.

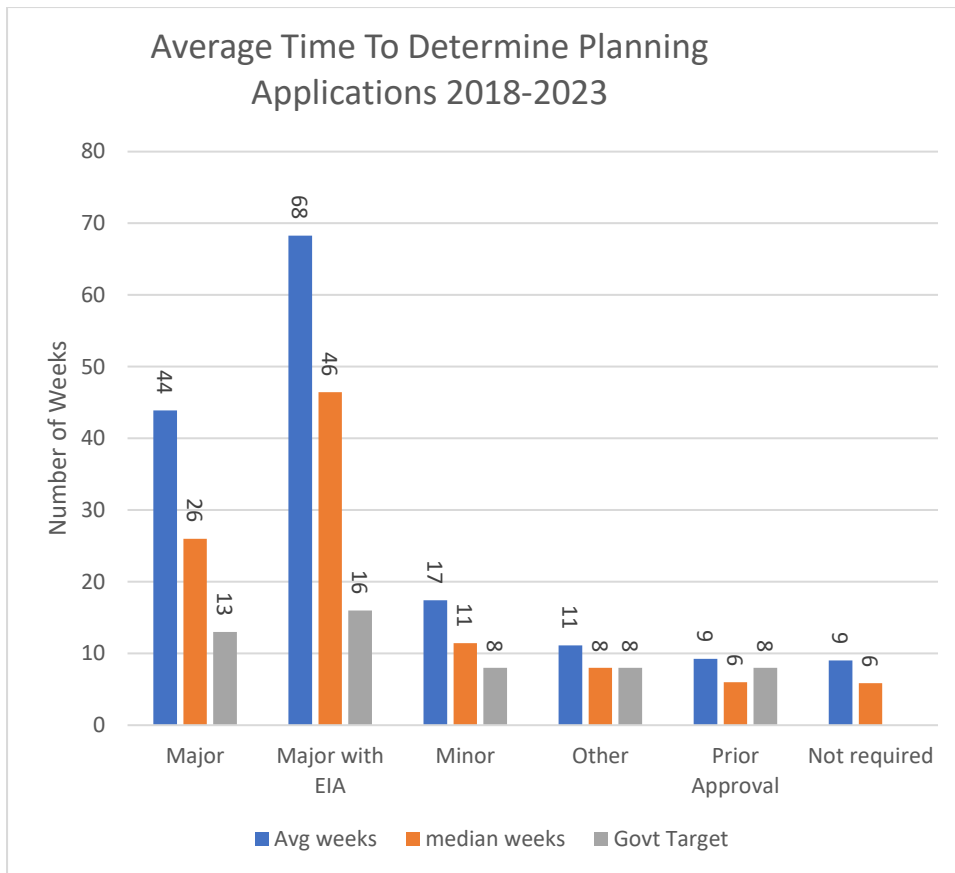
The following table and graph show the overall average for each category against the Government targets. Both the mean and median are shown as there are some outliers that can affect the mean calculation.

Type of application	Number of applications	Average number of days to determine	Median number of days to determine	Average number of weeks to determine	Median number of weeks to determine	Govt Target
Major	199	307	182	44	26	13
Major with EIA	10	478	325	68	46	16
Minor	1108	122	80	17	11	8
Other	2770	78	56	11	8	8
Prior Approval	314	65	42	9	6	8
Not required	458	63	41	9	6	

Table 5 Time taken to determine applications measured against Government targets

Graph 2: Average time to determine planning applications (2018-2023)





It is apparent from this data that the average time taken to determine applications exceeds the Government targets with the exception of Prior Approvals when using the Median.

### Caseload

Using the officer performance data provided by the Council, we analysed the productivity of officers. The data provided covered the period April 2022 to January 2023. We have indexed the data as some officers work part time or undertake study leave. Some officers joined during the period and we have assumed a month grace (as officers would not be considering and determining applications straight away). Generally the data suggests that officers across all teams appear to be performing similarly to other officers in the same category (i.e role, team). Some variations in performance have been identified and have been discussed separately with Richard Holt.

### Benchmarking

Whilst looking at data over time can tell us about how the service has changed, it is important to look at the wider context. To do this we have compared data against a number of other authorities. These authorities were suggested by the Council.

The table in Appendix 2 provides a summary of the data we reviewed.

Rugby performs well across the measures we have identified when compared to its benchmarking cohort, exceeding the average in most measures. However, there are some measures where Rugby is below average, and we have focused our analysis on these.

Firstly, the average number of extension of times issued over the period 2016-2022 is above the average for the cohort as seen in the following table.

LPA	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Trend	Average
<b>Rugby</b>	10.39%	27.90%	30.57%	38.76%	45.33%	63.60%		<b>36.09%</b>
Ashford	20.60%	27.24%	41.98%	57.83%	42.32%	45.20%		39.19%
Bassingstoke and Deane	27.47%	27.39%	19.22%	20.28%	28.90%	33.20%		26.08%
Blaby	17.55%	24.85%	44.40%	39.53%	55.98%	85.17%		44.58%
Braintree	20.87%	25.67%	28.29%	39.15%	53.06%	45.29%		35.39%
Broxbourne	12.94%	20.82%	22.46%	20.58%	29.24%	47.47%		25.59%
Cherwell	12.85%	13.98%	22.37%	28.56%	26.33%	37.54%		23.61%
East Staffordshire	19.19%	24.54%	27.66%	20.13%	28.21%	40.74%		26.74%
Harborough	15.93%	18.17%	18.27%	15.59%	19.66%	21.19%		18.14%
Hinckley and Bosworth	22.20%	30.43%	40.50%	48.77%	53.59%	53.92%		41.57%
Huntingtonshire	22.00%	18.85%	18.94%	23.83%	29.46%	27.82%		23.48%
Nuneaton and Bedworth	10.30%	14.29%	15.81%	17.11%	24.50%	35.82%		19.64%
Stafford	9.60%	13.39%	24.79%	27.48%	31.54%	59.85%		27.78%
Stratford	13.70%	39.34%	33.52%	33.48%	43.44%	42.89%		34.40%
Test Valley	23.00%	23.00%	22.13%	20.61%	25.19%	26.63%		23.43%
Tonbridge and Malling	13.72%	16.30%	16.27%	11.38%	10.78%	30.75%		16.53%
Warwick	19.73%	15.33%	25.74%	33.92%	51.97%	56.81%		33.92%
West Suffolk				39.72%	42.22%	47.50%		43.15%
Wychavon	16.98%	22.28%	20.61%	22.68%	23.53%	32.43%		23.09%

Table 6 Percentage of all applications given an extension of time 2016-2022

When we look closer at the data, the proportion of applications where an EOT has been used has been increasing. The trend is similar to other LPAs who have all seen increased use over the 6 years, but the value of 63% for 2021/22 of all applications having an EOT is the second highest in the cohort group. Notably the highest Council (Blaby) has also been through the Vanguard process. So it is possible that this has led to similar working practices where the focus has been on working with applicants to amend schemes rather than timescales to make decisions. Given the Government view that EOT should be used in “exceptional circumstances” this is a significant number.

Secondly, and linked to the above point, the percentage of applications where there is no EOT, PPA or EIA involved, that are determined within the statutory time limits, is 74%, just below cohort average. This equates to 36% of all applications which is below the average for the benchmarking cohort. This is the latest data from the PS2 returns and only covers the period January 2022 to December 2022. These are useful measures, as they show what is happening to applications where there is no EIA, PPA or EoT involved and a quarter of them are being determined outside of the statutory time limits.

Thirdly, whilst the average income per application is high (we assume because there is also a higher than average proportion of major applications), the average cost per application is higher than average. This leads to a net spend (or cost to the Council) of £312 per application. This is better than average but again is worthy of note. (We have been advised by the Council that further work has been done across Warwickshire that shows different figures and that Rugby is the cheapest in the County in terms of costs per application in 21/22 per head of population).

We have sought to understand costs further by looking at number of employees. This information is not widely available and we have utilised contacts in LPAs to source comparisons, although data is anonymous.

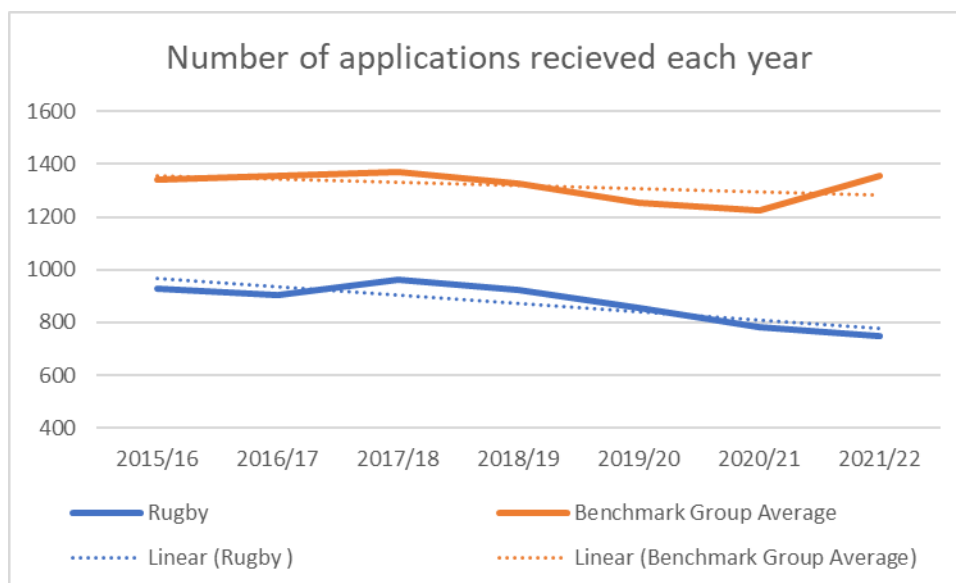
Post	Warks Council 1	Warks Council 2	Notts Council 1	Staffs Council 1	Leics Council 1	Rugby
Planning Assistant		1				
Planning Officer	6	2	2	2	4	5
Sen Planning Officer		1			2	3
Principal Planning Officer	2	2				4.6
Major Projects Officer			1			
Tm Leader			1	1	2	
Head of DM			1		1	
Tech/Validation Officer			0.5	1	3	
Appeals Tech Asst	0.32 fte					
Technical, Conditions & Monitoring	0.5 fte					
Graduate Planning Officer			2			1.6
Total	8.82	6	7.5	4	11	14.2
Number of applications received 2021/22	633	511	624	363	848	776
Average per officer	71.77	85.16	83.2	90.75	77.09	54.65

Table 7 Number of employees- small sample comparator group

This small sample shows that Rugby has the highest number of officers and the lowest number of applications per officer per year. Rugby is the only Council in this sample that operates without any technical support which partly explains the higher number of staff. It also goes some way to explain the higher costs.

It is also worth highlighting that the number of applications received each year has been on a slow decline and is forecast to be lower this year than last. This will have an impact on income received and will increase the cost per application if all other costs remain the same.

Graph 3: Number of applications received each year



Finally, it is worth highlighting that in terms of quality of decision making, Rugby has the second lowest number of appeals in the cohort and an above average record of defending appeals. This could reflect the pro-growth stance of the Council, low number of Councillor overturns at Committee and the approach to work with applicants to get to an approval.

**Summary**

- Reducing number of applications per year
- Increasing use of Extensions of Time
- 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of Extensions of Time issued in cohort group in 2021/22
- Lowest number of applications per officer in cohort group
- Higher than cohort group average income per application
- Higher than cohort group average costs per application
- Exceeding Government targets for speed of determination of applications
- Exceeding Government targets for quality of decision making

**Interviews**

**Councillors**

Councillors we spoke to understood and celebrated the ‘pro-growth’ stance of the Council. They linked this to increased economic activity in the area and benefits to the community. However, they did highlight concerns about the lack of a strategic view, particularly in relation to highways and were mindful that the impacts of development on a wider area needed consideration. There was a suggestion that greater benefits should be achieved from large scale applications and a need to take a wider view of development, such as highways and public health.

The impression we received from the Councillors interviewed was that they took their responsibilities about Planning Committee very seriously and were keen to increase their understanding about the planning process and seemed keen for further regular training sessions, particularly on key issues. They would also like to understand proposals in more detail. They felt that the reports could contain more information, such as plans and photographs so they can be better prepared for Committee. They highlighted that there was little opportunity for early sight of upcoming applications and often the

first time a Councillor is aware is when it appears on the agenda. Furthermore, they talked about little opportunity to get involved in the pre-application process.

There was a clear desire from Councillors to improve communication with officers and build relationships. We heard that often they are not sure who is the case officer or how to access information about the application.

We heard that Councillors were concerned about officer workload and the amount of technical tasks they were doing and cited the amount of work that went in to preparing the Committee presentation and shared examples of information not being ready for Chair briefing sessions. They also were concerned about the lack of a conservation officer and had been reassured that the necessary skills were in the team but they were uneasy about this.

Councillors had received feedback from applicants about the time it was taking to get decisions but Councillors did suggest this could be linked to poor quality applications. They felt that there was often a misunderstanding from the general public and some applicants about how policy is applied and that it is not black and white. They also shared some individual experiences some applicants had had about officers not sharing consultation responses in good time and a lack of a pro-active approach from the case officer. One Councillor suggested that it would be good for them to meet agents and applicants at some sort of open forum so they can articulate what is important to them and what their expectations are.

### Senior Management

We spoke to the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive as well as other Chief Officers. They were consistent in their views of Rugby being a pro-growth authority and that they wished to remain so. They recognised and were proud of the role the planning service has played in this. There was a concern that Members may follow the national mood and become more averse to development and feel Rugby has “done its bit”, particularly with the loss of New Homes Bonus. There may also be a concern that the Council cannot afford to keep expanding its services e.g. expanding the waste services means new vehicles as well as staff and the Council Tax does not cover this.

The Council are going through a period of organisational culture change and are becoming more focused on performance. There was recognition that this might be a change for the planning team who had previously adopted the “systems thinking approach”. The new way of working for the Council is described in the “Rugby Blueprint” (see appendix 3). It was noted that this is being rolled out across the Council and so it is not yet embedded. It was noted that the systems thinking approach is customer focused but Senior officers are receiving complaints, particularly about timescales, and there was uncertainty about this juxtaposition, noting that some of the delays are down to others. The Council should focus on its customers but should also operate efficiently and effectively. It was noted that the current structure and approach was designed under different circumstances and it may need revisiting.

There is a desire for the Council and the planning team to be more commercial in the way it provides its services, generating income and working more efficiently and economically smart. The team have already started to do this by introducing charges for pre-apps services and the use of PPAs.

It was also felt that opportunities to capture the benefits of growth are sometimes being missed. This was in relation to certain schemes not being recognised as strategically important and not being progressed quickly enough or given as much priority. There was also a concern that the local economy

is not very diverse and reliant on key sectors such as logistics. There was a desire to strategically influence the type and location of future development.

We heard that across the Council there is a lack of a “one Council” approach. This was considered to be a historic culture issue and steps are being taken by the leadership team to address this.

There was recognition that Rugby salaries were about average compared to nearby LPAs and historically there had been low staff turnover. There was an understanding of issues across the country with retention and recruitment of planners but also a recognition that this extended to other professions in the Council such as Environmental Health and Building Control.

### Internal Stakeholders

Generally, the internal stakeholders we heard from: legal; environment; local plan; democratic services and green spaces, were positive about the DM team and approach. We heard the aforementioned stakeholders are able to pick up the phone and speak to them when needed. Some frustrations were expressed about how they are consulted and not having joined up systems. They have to access application documents through the public website and sometimes felt they had to wade through lots of documents to find the information relevant to them.

### Customers

We heard mixed views from customers in regard to the service they receive. Overall, the feedback from agents, developers and other customers of Rugby Borough Council Development Management service has been relatively positive. From the interviews, we found all customers were pleased by the accessibility to contact officers and this resulted in good working relationships being built. Many expressed that the ability to contact the case officer at RBC was highly appreciated and valued. They also shared their frustrations with surrounding LPAs (officers) being unreachable.

We sensed these good working relationships with customers meant they were generally happy to sign extensions of time. However, it appears that views of what customers (applicants) want from the planning service have not been sought in some time. We heard that some applicants were unhappy about the time it took to get decisions and also the service they received at times.

The positive feedback we heard mainly came from applicants of larger schemes, both residential and commercial. Once again the ability to contact the case officer was appreciated and overall the service, they received was good and efficient. We heard specific comments about the use of PPAs being a positive experience. In addition, agents were positive when comparing Rugby against other LPA's and the level of communication and engagement that happened.

Many of the concerns about timescales related to a perception that statutory consultees were at fault with highways and ecology being singled out. Of particular note, we heard from applicants about recent requests for bat emergent survey works to be undertaken before applications are determined. Many felt this could be conditioned and noted that other legislation covered the issue.

We heard that the service received varies, depending on the officer, which can sometimes cause frustration and some expressed it can result in unpredictable decisions. There appeared to be a need for a standardised approach to reduce the variation of service customers receive. This may be due to the experience of the officer, as some customers felt some officers lack experience.

Some of the regular agents we spoke to told us of concerns over changes in approach and blamed new officers not understanding the “Rugby way”. They cited the recent loss of experienced staff. Some advised that they had made complaints and had been told that “this is the way we do things now”. It felt that if changes of approach have happened then this has not been fully explained to regular customers.

#### DM Team

There was a collective understanding that RBC is a pro-growth authority. The Development Management Team recognised the aspirations for economic growth and the pro-development nature of Rugby. However, some officers struggled to align the pro-growth approach, customer focus and maximising benefits of growth. We heard from some of DM junior officers they felt they were acting as project managers, due to chasing consultees rather than planners.

When we spoke to the team about metrics such as time taken to determine applications and caseloads, we encountered some resistance from the planning team to potential changes of approach. The general response is that the systems thinking approach the Council adopted for planning puts customers at the heart of what they do. This translates, we believe based on what we heard, into a perception that the important thing is to get a planning permission issued and that their role as case officers is to make that development the best it can be, no matter how long it takes.

For the period Jan 22 to Dec 22 (PS2 returns) Rugby did approve a higher than their cohort average percentage of all applications. This potentially supports an argument around working with applicants to improve applications, so they are able to be approved. However, Rugby was 5<sup>th</sup> out of 19 of the cohort and its approval figures (93%) were not significantly away from the average (91%) so it is questionable how much of a difference this approach is making. It is worth highlighting however, that this does not measure the quality of the final approved scheme and officers did make the point that whilst approvals may not be significant higher the quality of final schemes may be better.

The systems thinking approach as well as putting the customer first is also designed to front load the process. We heard of applications sat in the box for several weeks (up to 6 weeks during the summer) before any work was done on them and consultation letters sent out – this will not help statutory consultees. The focus should be on keeping the box as empty as possible, prioritising validating the application and starting the consultation period. However, during our research we were told by officers that the backlog, i.e. the length of time that the applications had sat in the box before being picked up was 2 weeks. Some advised that during summer holidays when less people about it had got up to 6 weeks. For applications that have 8 week timescales, such delays in validation and consultation mean that it is already impossible to achieve because of the 3 week consultation period not starting until an officer has picked it up. This could be described as a “setting up to fail” situation.

Some officers mentioned the new “targets” for how many applications they determine each year. Some welcomed the guidance and it helped them in managing their workload; but it was apparent that others thought they were ‘gaming the system’. The recording of applications dealt with also counts pre-app enquiries and all workload as single units, so answering a pre-app counted the same as undertaking an application. Some officers admitted that if their numbers were low they would pick from the box things such as pre-app enquiries that required less work to boost their numbers. However, we have been advised that the system does record the different types and monitoring of numbers of each type does take place by the DM manager.

We heard that generally relationships with agents are good and there is a feeling that agents / applicants like the approach that Rugby takes, for example giving opportunity to make amendments.

However, there was some concern expressed from Senior and principal officers that maybe they are 'too soft' with agents in giving almost unlimited opportunity to make amendments and in spoon feeding them information. There was a concern that this might not be the best experience for younger planners who may see granting EoTs as the norm.

The issue of amendments and EoT was raised a number of times. As well as it being seen as positive and resulting in better quality development, some admitted that they probably approved schemes which could have been refused because after 3 or 4 rounds of amendments they had 'application fatigue' and felt it was not bad enough to refuse. They also admitted that writing up refusals and the risk of appeals meant more work for them.

The DM team seemed to appreciate and like the autonomy they are given and liked the end-to-end approach the council takes, however this approach appeared to present challenges and limitations. Some expressed there is a need for clearer guidance on matters such as conditions, who they consult and how many times they ask for amendments. It was recognised that there was a lack of consistency in the way reports are written and the general approach to dealing with applications.

Some, particularly the more experienced members of the team, liked that their reports were not checked but some of the less experienced officers were less confident about this way of working. We heard there is a desire for written or additional clearer guidance on expectations in regard to processes for example amendments, as the systems thinking 'customer first' approach appeared to leave the DM officers conflicted. Many expressed a need for clearer guidance to promote a more standardised approach across the team. Some officers were concerned (some very concerned) about the amount of time they spent undertaking 'technical' tasks, particularly categorising documents, preparing letters for email and uploading them to the system.

The DM team were very positive regarding management support across the Council and in particular they highlighted Richard and his extensive knowledge and his trust in the team. Although management is helpful, enhanced support and mentoring would be appreciated, and there is a perception that management seems reluctant to engage on an one to one basis. Some thought that too many meetings took place and there was an acknowledgement that the office environment and broader interactive teamworking has not fully recovered since COVID.

During the interviews, it emerged there are different perceptions in relation to the term "personal development" which the junior officers tended to categorise personal development and career progression as the same thing. The more senior officers interpreted personal development as personal progression from a knowledge stance, with reference to courses, online seminars and CPDs. Whilst one to ones seemed in the main to be taking place between officers and their line manager, it felt that these were often discussions about current workload and a lack of discussion on personal development objectives and progression towards these. It was acknowledged that there are opportunities for additional training and indeed a number of officers have benefited from undertaking intensive long-term training. There was a desire expressed to do more collective training and CPD and it was recognised that there are less opportunities with flexible working to learn from each other and share knowledge.

The team felt that Member relationships were good but there was frustration at some of the decisions at Committee – however, officers recognised that this was often down to local politics.

With regards to systems, there were mixed views about Agile, with most raising concerns about its reliability (examples were cited of it being unavailable for a number of days) but happy generally with its functionality. There were concerns expressed that one of the principal officers took on a lot of



responsibility for updating the system, interrogating the system and chasing up when there are issues. There were concerns that if that principal officer was not available was there sufficient knowledge in the team to resolve issues. There were suggestions made to make changes to the website to enable more self serve and provide more information for applicants. Some were concerned about is user friendliness.

The majority of the team had little experience of the use of PPAs as a tool. Those that were working on applications with PPAs were not aware how they had been drafted and agreed as this was done by senior officers. There was also some resistance to using PPAs as some of the principal officers felt that this went against the Rugby way in that it set fixed dates and targets.

In terms of relationships with consultees there were frustrations expressed about the time to get responses back from Warwickshire County Council on Highways and Ecology especially. The team felt that they had good relationships with internal consultees and stakeholders. It was noted that the absence of specialist conservation / heritage advice was a concern. Some officers felt that they were 'winging it' in this regard.

#### Summary

- Collective understanding that Rugby is a 'pro-growth' authority
- Some understanding about the corporate changes in culture and future emphasis on understanding performance and how its measured
- Fear of change / resistance to change from some officers
- Desire from senior management to capture more benefits of growth
- Planning Committee generally works well and there are opportunities to build on current good practice by undertaking more training, improving information exchange and engagement.
- Internal stakeholders worked well with the planning team. Relationships tended to be transactional rather than collaborative. Lack of efficient processes due to different systems.
- Ability to communicate with individual officers seen as good by customers
- Changes to service delivery have not been communicated to regular customers
- Officers focus on getting approvals rather than timescales and believe this leads to more applications approved and better quality applications
- Some officers admitted to approving applications that probably shouldn't have been because they had already asked for changes and writing up refusals and the threat of appeals was considered to be a lot of work.
- Officers didn't take applications out of the box if they considered they had a full caseload already. Some officers left 'difficult' applications in the box.
- Officers considered they do too much for agents / applicants.
- Mixed approaches to personal development
- Good management knowledge and support
- Lack of written guidance on processes or procedures.
- Lack of knowledge within the team about how the Agile system works and how to manage it
- Lack of understanding of PPAs
- Lack of heritage / conservation specialist

## Workshop

On the 20<sup>th</sup> April we facilitated a workshop with the DM team and managers. The purpose of the session was to feed back on our initial findings and seek the teams views and to facilitate the team to identify potential changes. The feedback from the team was positive about the findings we reported back. As described above there were mixed views from the team when we spoke to them separately about certain matters and this was acknowledged at the workshop by participants that the feedback may not have been their experience but they understood it was others.

The team were split into 3 groups, each facilitated by a member of the Hvas team. The first exercise sought to address the issue of timescales to determine applications. The groups were asked to identify the barriers to quicker decision making and think about any solutions. The table below summarises the discussion:

Barrier	Solutions?
<p><u>Consultees</u></p> <p>Not responding within 21 days. Officer having to chase. Not as bad on smaller applications</p>	<p>Validation requirements to make sure all required information is submitted.</p> <p>Need to understand why ecology are asking for additional surveys when previously they haven't.</p> <p>Potential to have a consultant panel for larger schemes (in progress)</p>
<p><u>Agents</u></p> <p>Can take a long time to submit additional info but then expect a quick turnaround</p> <p>Need spoon feeding about what information is required and how to address issues</p> <p>Quality of submissions often very poor- applicants wait for comments from consultees to detail what they need</p>	<p>Change approach and give deadlines to submit info although nervous this will result in poor relationships.</p> <p>Need better education and understanding of what's required - improve the website</p> <p>Engage in a paid pre-app separately with consultees</p> <p>Be more ruthless on validation</p> <p>Advise applicants if they it can't be found acceptable</p> <p>Do consultees always need to be consulted? How do you know who needs to be consulted?</p> <p>Good enough to approve/bad enough to refuse</p>
<p><u>Amendments</u></p> <p>Working with applicants to improve schemes can lead to lots of requests for amendments</p>	<p>Could ask to withdraw or refuse (although worried about effect on relationships )</p> <p>Need guidance/threshold to improve consistency about when to ask for amendments and how many</p>
<p><u>Section 106</u></p>	

<p>Can take a long time to get agreements finalised as they are not worked on until post decision.</p>	<p>Use a template s106 Give applicant option of using external solicitors</p>
<p><u>Validation</u></p> <p>Applications can sit in the box for some time. Invalid applications can remain so for a long time</p>	<p>Pick things out of the box by date order Implement timescales for making application valid</p>
<p><u>Team</u></p> <p>Lack of specialists- conservation, ecology, carbon emission etc Losing experienced staff Under resourced Burden of non-planning related work Newer staff- less experience Workload</p>	<p>Incentives for retention</p> <p>Use PPA and other tools to resource consultants or to backfill (Works better for larger schemes) Restructure of time, time management- review meetings could some be combined?</p> <p>Utilise surgeries and meetings. guidance and process guidance need to be up to date and not too detailed</p> <p>Manuals and guidance would be useful</p>
<p><u>Process</u></p> <p>IT/technical tasks is time consuming How the box is managed Planning Committee process Planning committee deferrals (particularly HMO and G&amp;T) because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More info</li> <li>- Scared to make decision</li> <li>- Site visits</li> <li>- Playing to gallery</li> </ul> <p>Small applications can be difficult, particularly related to neighbour response and demands on time Scheme of delegation e.g. cert. of lawfulness, legal take long time to respond New requirements mean new skills and takes time to learn e.g BNG Complexity of applications Lack of policy and guidance e.g. HMO and G&amp;T</p>	<p>Technical team would reduce timescales, set terminology to be able to find documents easily EoT safety value</p> <p>Queries (can have duplicated in the box) rotate all planning officers to empty and go through the box, as many can be quick queries that can be solved with a simple yes/no</p> <p>Clearer advice on what needs a response and what queries can be re-directed to the website</p> <p>Changes to the way queries/apps are categorised</p> <p>Do legal need to check committee reports?</p> <p>Encourage councillors to speak to officers- constant dialog</p> <p>CLlr briefings</p> <p>do legal need to check all Cert of lawfulness or could we introduce thresholds?</p> <p>Work with Policy to progress Local Plan</p>

	Push more applicants to pre-app and seek to include consultees in that process
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In the second exercise we asked the groups to undertake a SWOT analysis of the service. The composite response from the exercise is as follows:

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team/ the people</li> <li>• Career development</li> <li>• Autonomy- the range of work/ apps opportunity</li> <li>• Flexible working</li> <li>• Resilience eg. Covid and Agile</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Quality of decisions are good (see appeal success)</li> <li>• Supportive members</li> <li>• Customer engagement</li> <li>• Relationship with customers</li> <li>• Supportive management</li> <li>• Ability to amend to resolve issue</li> <li>• Diversity of team and knowledge within team</li> <li>• Enforcement</li> <li>• Currently performing well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less experienced team</li> <li>• Staff turnover</li> <li>• Lack of specialism</li> <li>• Lack of process note</li> <li>• Too much time spent on technical tasks</li> <li>• IT system</li> <li>• Under-staffed</li> <li>• Council not popular – bad reputation</li> <li>• No written guidance</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge</li> <li>• Variety of work</li> </ul>
<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Threats</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New team – can mould and opportunity for engagement</li> <li>• Growing borough and varied borough</li> <li>• Variety of projects</li> <li>• Improved feedback to individuals (checks)</li> <li>• Comms celebrate success</li> <li>• Pay and conditions in local govt</li> <li>• More engagement with Cllrs</li> <li>• Planning fees to increase</li> <li>• Use the website more- agents more self-service</li> <li>• Consultee panel</li> <li>• Training opportunities and progression</li> <li>• Members keen to know more- member briefing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government shift towards performance- affect this could have on customer relationships</li> <li>• Retention of staff</li> <li>• Social media – mental health</li> <li>• IT system change</li> <li>• Different approach</li> <li>• Growing your own</li> <li>• Public misconception</li> <li>• Threat of finance- council budget</li> <li>• Planners leaving the public sector- stigma and culture</li> <li>• LPAs pay less than consultancies (linked to retention of staff)</li> <li>• No written guidance- lack of policies and procedures</li> <li>• WFH</li> <li>• Changes in requirements – BNG</li> <li>• Lack of consistency =&gt; JR risks</li> </ul>

Using this as a basis, the groups were asked to think about what good looked like and what principles underpinned a successful DM Service. A summary of the discussion is as follows:

1. Driving excellence – quality of apps/approvals, within the team – knowledge and professionalism, clearer expectations such as validation checklist; local enforcement plan, consistency in decision making; timely manner, lead times shortened in various ways, responding to wider system changes
2. Making a real difference- to the quality of the built environment (eg. Focus of key areas such as climate change); con areas; respect for places; training; tours of existing good and bad/ugly development. More public engagement, shadowing on major discussion on Friday mornings
3. Great team morale, working as a diverse team, positive CANDO attitude and approach to growth and development
4. Taking a collaborative approach – ensuring effective communication, a wider team approach, a system approach, involving a range of stakeholders, being innovative and ‘ballys’ to solve problems

### Summary

- The process of bringing the team together to think about these issues is a good start to the change process. It also helps to strengthen team bonds.

## Insights and Recommendations

The research undertaken identified a number of areas for improvement and further consideration as well as building on positive approaches. These are captured in the following tables alongside recommendations for the Council to consider. Some recommendations are duplicated as they address different issues and insights.

### Purpose

Insight	Recommendation
<p>Whilst customers value individual relationships with case officers and the ability to speak to them, there isn't currently a corporate approach to communicating change of key messages to customers. This can lead to differences in approach and understanding of requirement from customers, leading to expectations not being met and complaints being made.</p>	<p>Establish a regular agent / applicant forum. Use the forum to communicate any changes in approach, new legislation or policies such as validation requirements and climate change SPD.</p> <p>Invite Portfolio Holder and Planning Committee Chair to attend twice a year.</p>
<p>Customers are not clear on the approach that the Council has in terms of processing and determining applications.</p>	<p>Use the forum to communicate expectations.</p> <p>Consider preparing and adopting a Charter that sets out the Councils expectations from applications and the commitments it will make. This could include how many opportunities the Council will give to make amendments for example or information about the of PPAs e.g.</p>
<p>There is common understanding about the role of the DM service at Rugby across the organisation. However, there is a risk that Members priorities change with local elections. There is also an aspiration to capture more benefits from development.</p>	<p>Put in place regular Senior officer / Member sessions to reinforce the "purpose of planning" at Rugby.</p> <p>Put in place regular Officer / Member sessions to reinforce the messages around the "purpose of planning" and approach to key issues such as HMO and G&amp;T. this could be part of the suggested monthly Committee briefing sessions.</p> <p>Instigate joint sessions of DM and Policy to ensure alignment on key issues and corporate focus for emerging plan and decision making.</p> <p>Ensure the principles established by the team are built into annual service planning and individual one-to-ones.</p>

### Culture

Insight	Recommendation
<p>The Government is indicating it will require more detail in future from LPAs about their</p>	<p>Work with team to explain why it is important to measure performance.</p>

<p>performance. The Council is also introducing more measures of performance and reporting to members. There is some resistance and lack of understanding from the team about why this is happening believing that it doesn't fit with a focus on customers. Measuring performance and a customer driven approach are not mutually exclusive. There is no evidence to suggest customers have been asked what they would like (e.g. are longer decision times acceptable for 2% increase above the average in approvals?)</p>	<p>Ensure roll out of the rugby blueprint and check to ensure staff understand what it means. Can they deliver against it and how will they know?</p> <p>Consider yearly sessions with the team as part of annual business planning to reflect back the approach required.</p> <p>Ensure customer feedback is part of this process.</p>
<p>The current approach empowers case officers to take responsibility for applications. Some officers are not comfortable with the approach and perceive it as being left on their own. Managers must not see the approach as absolving them from their responsibilities. There is a need for consistency of approach and to ensure all statutory requirements are being met and they have a responsibility for making sure this happens. There is also a balance between checking all work and empowering staff to take responsibility and gain experience.</p>	<p>Empower principal officers to ensure consistency of approach and regulatory requirements followed.</p> <p>Ensure officers understand that they are not alone and can ask for help.</p> <p>Pair junior officers up with a buddy.</p> <p>Involve junior officers are more complex projects or appeals as part of a bigger team.</p> <p>Consider more days in the office as teams.</p> <p>Ensure the principles established by the team are built into annual service planning and individual one-to-ones.</p>
<p>Members have a perception that more enforcement activity could be undertaken. By its nature enforcement can be a long process and its not always possible to provide regular updates. Recruitment of enforcement staff is also difficult.</p>	<p>Provide guidance and training for Members on enforcement.</p> <p>Celebrate "successes" with members and public.</p> <p>Strengthen relationships between enforcement and DM teams. Encourage DM officers to get more involved in enforcement activity.</p> <p>Consider giving planning officers a small case load of enforcement work.</p>

Process

Insight	Recommendation
<p>The planning committee operates efficiently and effectively with a small number of appeals being lost. Councillors are keen to learn more</p>	<p>Consider the best approach for Rugby to strengthen the role of Members at pre-app stage. Options include:</p>

<p>and to have more engagement in applications earlier.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• issues papers at Committee when apps received;</li> <li>• briefing sessions to advise Members of pipeline of apps and progress;</li> <li>• presentations from applicants either in public or in private.</li> </ul> <p>Consider including some plans and drawings in the committee reports or sharing the presentation in advance.</p> <p>Provide committee briefing sessions monthly to advise Members about what is upcoming and include details on proposals. This will help to highlight key issues for officers and give Members greater ownership and feeling of involvement. This could be an open invitation to all Members.</p>
<p>When applications are reconsulted on, Members have been told that they are unable to call them in to Committee if they didn't already call in during the first round of consultations. Schemes can change during the course of an application and raise new issues that members feel warrant further discussion at Committee. There is flexibility in the Scheme of delegation that enables the Chief officer to bring applications to Committee if they feel appropriate and this could be used in those instances where consultation takes place.</p>	<p>Consider whether it is necessary to amend the Scheme of Delegation to make it clearer that Members are able to request call-in of applications that are re-consulted on, or if reminding officers and Members about the ability for chief officer to refer applications to committee is sufficient.</p>
<p>Statutory consultees were often cited as a reason for delays to planning applications. However, officers were also accused of being consultee led and failing to make a decision on conflicting issues.</p>	<p>Review SLA with WCC ecology. Review what applications they are being consulted on, what data they are providing for the Council to use, how comments are provided and how quickly they are provided.</p> <p>Work with WCC to refine how they engage in the process and opportunities to work more efficiently and effectively.</p> <p>Explore with WCC including a pre-app fee for WCC services which can then be passed on.</p> <p>Explore with WCC opportunities for signing up to a PPA.</p> <p>Undertake further work to understand any patterns such as particular consultees asking for further information, experience or confidence of officers.</p>
<p>Whilst the team generally liked the functionality of the IT system (Agile), very few members of the team were trained to manage</p>	<p>Consider establishing a 'technical officer' who takes responsibility for managing and updating the IT system.</p>



<p>the back office system. This is a business continuity risk.</p> <p>Duplication (EH adding to their system)</p>	<p>Consider training other officers to have an understanding of the “back office system” and how to run reports etc.</p>
<p>The Agile system is only used by planning and other internal teams use the public facing web portal to access information. This can lead to waste time looking for the relevant documents. Some teams have to create new records in their own system when they are consulted. This is duplication of effort.</p>	<p>Consider corporate opportunities for a system that incorporates other disciplines such as building control and environmental health.</p>
<p>The use of PPAs may not be included in the Government performance measures in the same way EOT will be. There is the potential to have more PPAs set up for complex sites, collections of sites and for bespoke pre-app work. However, staff have little experience of the use and drafting of PPAs.</p>	<p>Undertake training on the drafting and use of PPAs for the team.</p>
<p>There is a lack of promotion of or information on PPAs on the website which is likely to reduce the interest in them</p>	<p>Promote the use of PPAs to applicants at agent forums.</p> <p>Provide information on the website about PPAs e.g. Cornwall website: <a href="#">What we offer – Cornwall Council</a> and their Charter: <a href="#">Planning Performance Agreement Charter (cornwall.gov.uk)</a></p>
<p>Historically the team has seen little change in personnel and ways of working have developed into a shared culture. Process and procedures have not been written down. The COVID pandemic and subsequent increase in remote working means less opportunity for staff to evolve and learn ways for working together or for new staff to learn by osmosis.</p>	<p>Consider requiring the whole team to work from the office more regularly.</p>
	<p>Document ways of working into a procedure or process guides / manuals. Involve the team to identify what would be most helpful and what they should contain.</p>
	<p>Continually review, refine and improve processes and update the manuals / guides. Use the ideas from the workshop as a basis for reviewing approaches.</p>
<p>There is a lack of specialist skills in the department, particularly conservation. Work is progressing to appoint a range of specialists on a call off contract. The lack of a heritage specialist is a risk in terms of decision making and process.</p>	<p>Investigate opportunities for specialist heritage advice such as shared with other councils, part time roles, consultancy appointments etc.</p>

Performance

Insight	Recommendation
<p>The Government is indicating it will require more detail in future from LPAs about their performance, including the actual time taken to</p>	<p>Ensure Rugby BC performance measures reflect those proposed by the Government.</p>

<p>determine applications, regardless of extensions of time. The time taken to determine applications at Rugby has been getting longer year on year and exceeds current government targets. There is a risk if the Government proposals are brought in that Rugby could be seen to be performing poorly. This could be exploited by applicants and have issues for retention and recruitment of staff. There are opportunities to shorten the time taken to determine applications by removing delays from the measured process.</p>	<p>Ensure staff understand why change is needed and empower them to make the changes.</p>
	<p>Encourage the use of the pre-app service – promote its benefits (including shortening application times)</p> <p>Ensure the pre-app service is meaningful and delivers benefits to the customer.</p>
	<p>Ensure all officers understand the validation requirements and provide regular training and update sessions.</p> <p>Ensure applications that do not have the required information are not validated. Suggest to applicants to use the pre-app service.</p>
<p>It can take several weeks before an application is validated and consultation with stakeholders commences. This squeezes the amount of time left to make a decision in the time targets.</p>	<p>Seek to have a maximum number of days that applications sit in box.</p> <p>Principals should take responsibility for ensuring the box is emptied regularly and should allocate applications which exceed the target for time spent in the box.</p>
	<p>Principle officers regularly review progress on applications and provide proactive support to officers.</p>
	<p>Case officers review progress of the application at week 4 to make a decision if the application can be amended to make it good enough to approve.</p>
	<p>Circulate a list of applications which are 6 weeks old on a weekly basis to remind officers that they are close to their time targets. Officers to consider if all necessary amendments have been made or are likely to be made within target. If not, consider appropriate action such as EOT, refusal, asking to withdraw etc.</p>
<p>Caseload per officer is low when compared to other Councils yet officers are concerned about the time they have to work on applications, particularly undertaking technical tasks or IT system tasks. Some officers workload appears</p>	<p>Consider appointing a technical support officer to help officers with technical tasks and ICT. This could help reduce the burden on some officers to manage the Agile system.</p>

high as they are taking easier, short turn around applications and pre-apps from the box.	Principals should regularly monitor individual performance and data, checking on the type of applications and workload being taken from the box.
Income and costs are higher than the cohort average but overall net costs are better than average. This could be because of the number of major apps received as a proportion of the total and the number of officers employed.	Undertake further work to understand income and costs, particularly the split between major and minor apps and how staff are allocated to these tasks. Identify opportunities to reduce the cost per application.

### Personal and Career Development and Recruitment and Retention

Insight	Recommendation
There is a good team culture and a good blend of experience. Senior and more experienced planners share knowledge and assist junior staff when asked. There are formal weekly sessions where issues can be discussed. Some junior staff are not confident enough to utilise these. Regular one to ones are taking place between managers and reportees but these are often focused on workload rather than professional objectives.	Introduce mentor or buddy system for junior planners reflecting the corporate values around nurturing staff.
	Programme of organised CPD including sessions done as a team.
	Encourage line managers to have more formal regular sessions with team members focusing on professional development where needs are identified, recorded and progress against checked and recorded.
	Celebrate successes of teams and individuals.
Some officers are not pro-active or confident to take a range of applications	Team leaders to review regularly case load and case work to ensure officers have a good mix of applications appropriate to their experience and skill set and personal development objectives.
	Involve junior planners in project teams on complex sites and appeal work.
	Officers in office together more
Recruitment and retention of planners and enforcement staff across the country is extremely challenging. The team is fairly settled with some recent new starters. The empowerment of staff and the independence they enjoy is attractive to some, particularly more experienced planners. The opportunities for less experienced planners to undertake further training and get involved in a range of applications is also a good selling point. There is some concern that pay levels at Rugby are not that attractive.	Discuss opportunities with HR to consider financial incentives that can be applied such as golden hello's, golden handcuffs, market supplements etc.  Discuss with HR new approaches to recruitment including head hunters and selling the Rugby BC brand.

### Other

Insight	Recommendation
There are good internal working relationships and some good relationships with statutory consultees.	Involve internal stakeholders in the change process.

	Encourage officers to establish good working relationships with external consultees.
Having economic development / regeneration as part of the planning function and working closely with DM is a positive step. As is the focus on major applications. The economic development / regeneration team and function is relatively new. There is a desire to capture greater economic benefits from development for the area. By ensuring close working between Policy, DM and Economic Development / Regeneration this will help to ensure that all understand their role and seek to maximise opportunities.	Ensure the 3 teams are closely aligned and work closely with each other. Involve planning officers in key ED / Regen workstreams. Ensure the Local Plan reflects the aspirations around LED.  Prepare a LED strategy.

### Strategic Recommendations

1. The above recommendations should be turned into an action plan with clear milestones attached;
2. A clear focus should be on reducing the time spent on individual applications;
3. Ensuring that all officers are clear about the statutory and regulatory requirements for processing planning applications
4. Utilise savings from vacant posts to establish a technical support role(s) that can undertake duties currently done by planning officers to give them more time to spend on planning issues on applications;
5. Focus efforts to resource the enforcement team and consider opportunities to engage planning officers more frequently in enforcement work.

Appendix 1

Comparator group- Scheme of delegation, applications which are referred to Planning Committee

LPA	What apps go to planning committee	how it is communicated	requirements	Time-scales
Rugby	Applications where any borough Councillor has requested that the application be determined by the Planning Committee. Such requests must be made in writing or by email to the case officer within the 21-day consultation period for that application. Applications delegated to the Chief Officer for Growth and Investment but which he or she considers should be determined by the Planning Committee. Full or outline applications (but not applications for the approval of reserved matters; variation of conditions; or removal of conditions, included within the definition of "major developments" as set out in the General Development Control Return, produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government or any such relevant body.	written or by email	to the case officer by the deadline of the original consultation period	21 days
Ashford	applications for planning permission for the provision of dwellinghouses where: (i) the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or (ii) the development is to be carried out on a site having an area of 0.5 hectare or more and it is not known whether the development falls within paragraph (a) (i). (b) applications for planning permission for the provision of a building or buildings of 1000 sq metres floor space or more where the proposed use of that building or one of them is for retail or hotel purposes. (c) applications for planning permission for the provision of a building or buildings of 1000 sq metres floor space or more for commercial / employment use where it is prop(d) applications for planning permission for the provision of a building or buildings of 1000 sq metres floor space or more where: (i) the proposed use of that building or one of them is for any commercial/employment purpose other than retail or hotel, (ii) it is proposed to approve the application, but (iii) 6 or more of the Planning Committee Members have requested that the determination of the application should be elevated to the Planning Committee in accordance with the procedure in note (iv) below. (e) applications for planning permission for the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 10,000 sq metres or more. (f) applications submitted by or on behalf of a Member of the Council or member of staff or his or her partner. (g) applications which, in the opinion of the Strategic Development and Delivery Manager/Development Management Manager, are sensitive and should be determined by the Planning Committee. (h) applications submitted, promoted or sponsored by or on behalf of the Borough Council. (i) applications for reserved matters approval for the appearance, layout and scale of building(s) or dwellings referred to in paragraphs (a) to (e) where 6 or more of the Planning Committee Members have requested that the determination of the application should be elevated to the Planning Committee in accordance with the procedure in note (iv) below.		for material planning matters – 6 or more members	third working day that report was emailed to the member

<p>Basingstoke and Deane</p>	<p>The Committee shall be responsible for:          1) Development Control and Enforcement functions (including the determination of planning applications for permission in principle and technical details consent - and those pursuant to the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. Where the Head of Planning and Infrastructure is unable to determine development control matters or where s/he believes a matter should be determined by the Development Control Committee then the Committee will deal with the matter. In this scheme of delegation "application" shall be interpreted as meaning an application for planning permission, permission in principle and technical details consent, advertisement consent or listed building consent.          2) "High Hedges Legalisation".          3) Listed Building and Conservation Area Control.          4) Functions in connection with requiring the proper maintenance of land.          5) Highway diversion and closure.          6) Hazardous substance consents.          7) Tree preservation.</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>signed by five members, sets out reason for call-in and suggests an alternative course of action</p>	<p>21 days of the date of registration</p>
<p>Blaby</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning Applications for 10 or more residential units or where an outline application for residential development relates to a site of 0.5 hectares or more;</li> <li>- Planning Applications for non-residential development with a gross floor area of more than 1,000 square metres or where an outline application for non-residential development relates to a site of 1 hectare or more;</li> <li>- Planning Applications for a mixed use development where the development exceeds any of the following:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10 or more residential units;</li> <li>- More than 1,000 square metres (gross) of non-residential floor area;</li> <li>- An application for outline planning permission where the residential element would comprise more than 0.5 hectares;</li> <li>- An application for outline planning permission where the site area is 1 hectare or more;</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Applications for approval of reserved matters for 50 or more dwellings and/or non-residential developments with a floor area of more than 2,500 square metres (gross);</li> <li>- Planning applications submitted in which the applicant is a current Member or Officer of the Council;</li> <li>- Planning applications and applications for listed building consent which have been called in to be considered by the Planning Committee under the Member Call-In Procedure.</li> </ul>	<p>written request</p>	<p>to the development services manager and development services team leaders setting out planning reasons</p>	<p>21 days of public consultation period</p>
<p>Braintree</p>	<p>(a) Major Planning Applications (Application for Outline Planning Permission, Reserved Matters Approval or Full Planning Permission) for residential development comprising 10 or more proposed houses or commercial development (including changes of use) comprising floorspace of 1,000sq.m, including any linked application for Listed Building Consent.          (b) Major or Minor Planning Applications for Renewable Energy Schemes, including solar, wind and bioenergy projects, and proposals for Anaerobic Digestion Plants.          (c) Where the Applicant is Braintree District Council.          (d) Where the Applicant or Agent is an employee or Member of</p>		<p>the application has been 'Called In' for determination by a BDC Member by the end of the specified consultation period and is accompanied by planning reasons</p>	

	<p>Braintree District Council.</p> <p>(e) Where the Applicant or Agent is related to an employee within the Planning Department (Development Management or Planning Policy) (change from Braintree District Council) or a Member of Braintree District Council.</p> <p>(f) Any application which is deemed to be 'significant' by the Planning Development Manager.</p>		<p>for why the application should be referred to Planning Committee for determination; or</p>	
Broxbourne	n/a			
Cherwell	<p>All Major applications (full, outline) except for minor material amendments and the variations and removal of conditions. Major applications are defined as;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Applications for 10 or more dwellings</li> <li>· Applications for new buildings where the floor space to be created is over 1000sqm</li> <li>· Applications for commercial (non-householder) renewable energy schemes, including single wind turbines.</li> </ul> <p>2. All recommendations to approve a significant departure from the adopted development plan or other Council approved policies and/or strategies. 3. Applications called in by a member of the Council within 21 days of the 4. Applications submitted by;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Any Officers with management responsibility in a personal capacity</li> <li>· Officers employed in the Development Management Service</li> <li>· Councillors (other than applications relating to works to trees)</li> <li>· A member of staff or Councillor acting as agent or advisor or consultant.</li> </ul> <p>5. Applications affecting the Council's own land or where the Council is the applicant (other than applications for works to trees advertisements or for public information purposes)</p> <p>6. Any application which the Assistant Director Planning and Economy considers should be referred to the Planning Committee (in consultation with the Planning Committee Chairman (Vice Chairman in the Chairman's absence)) because of its controversy or significance. registration of an application subject to the following:</p>	written or by email	<p>must be for material planning reasons and made within 21 days of the registration of the application as valid</p>	21 days
East Staffordshire	<p>a request is made by a Ward Councillor;</p> <p>the application is contrary to agreed local plan policy and its approval would represent a significant departure; the application is of significant public interest, and/or is believed to be controversial; any other circumstances in which the Head of Service or the Planning Manager considers it appropriate.</p>	written or by email	<p>state the decision they would like to call in ten members must sign -</p>	21 days

<p>Harborough</p>	<p>Any application (other than Advertisement Consents; Prior Notifications and Prior Approvals; Hedgerow Removal Notices; Tree works applications; High Hedge applications; County Matters applications and Screening and Scoping requests) where any Member has requested determination of the application by the Planning Committee, within 28 days of the date of the publication of the weekly list on which that application appears. N.B. The request for consideration may be withdrawn at any time, and the application returned to delegated authority (subject to compliance with the other criteria explained below).          Requests should be made to the Development Planning Manager in writing (which includes email) and set out the planning reasons for the request (such as Highway safety, or the character of the surrounding area) for the request and should clearly state the impact of the development.          (b) applications where the intended decision would depart from currently adopted and up to date development plan policy.          (c) Where the application is made by a member of the Council or by a Council Officer or immediate members of their family, or it involves land owned by any of them.          (d) Applications for 25 or more dwellings (other than substitution of house types) and for commercial floor space of 10,000m/sq. or more.          (e) Where the proposal involves the Council as applicant or land owner except where applications are for works to protected trees.          (f) Matters which the Development Planning Manager, in consultation with the Briefing Group, considers should be considered by the Planning Committee due to their size, nature or impact, or for any other reason, including probity.          (g) The revocation of any planning or other permission, with or without the payment of compensation by the Council.          (h) The discontinuance of use or alternation or removal of buildings or works with or without the payment of compensation by the Council pursuant to Section 102 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.</p>	<p>written</p>	<p>member requested to go to planning committee</p>	<p>28 days</p>
<p>Hinckley and Bosworth</p>	<p>Considering amendments to the application of Local Plan policy documents          · Determining the following types of planning applications:          - An application that has received written comments from occupiers of five or more addresses (including the parish council), the views of which are contrary to the officer recommendation          - An application where a member of Council requests in writing to the Head of Planning that the application be referred to Planning Committee for determination. The request must be received within 21 days of publication of the weekly list and based on sound planning reasons as determined by the Head of Planning          - An application that the Head of Planning, in discussion with the chair of the Planning Committee, considers necessary to be determined by the Planning Committee          The exceptions to the above are the following application types:          - All tree preservation order applications (including those within a conservation area)          - Certificates of lawful use (existing and proposed)          - Prior notification of proposed development by telecommunications code system operators          - General development order permitted development prior notification applications</p>	<p>written</p>		<p>21 days</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- County council matters</li> <li>- Neighbouring authority consultations</li> <li>- Non material amendments. Page 28</li> <li>- Determining a major application that is submitted by, or on behalf of, the Borough Council for its own development</li> <li>- Determining any application made by, or on behalf of, a member of the Borough Council or an employee of the authority</li> </ul>			
<p>Huntingtonshire</p>	<p>determination of planning applications, or proposals in accordance with the development plans, where objections or contrary observations are raised by other local authorities (including parish councils or parish meetings)<sup>1</sup>, statutory consultees, persons adversely affected by the proposals (provided that the objection or observation is on planning grounds and the objection or observation has not been previously considered and discounted by the authority), or an appropriate local Member;</p> <p>ii. determination of minerals and waste applications requiring Environmental Impact Assessments;</p> <p>iii. determination of applications for District Council development where objections are raised to the proposals;</p> <p>iv. approval of major departures from development plans arising from planning applications and proposals.</p>			

<p>Nuneaton and Bedworth</p>	<p>Where an Environmental Impact Assessment has been submitted with a planning application.</p> <p>ii. Where five or more letters of objections have been received from neighbours, interested parties or statutory consultees within the 21 day consultation period, unless where the objection does not, in the Head of Development &amp; Building Control's opinion, relate to valid planning considerations (which are set out in the leaflet 'Having Your Say on Planning Applications' and in Schedule 2 below), or where the objections will be addressed by the decision of the officer either by the refusal of the application, or by attaching suitable conditions, or where amendments to the application overcome the objections.</p> <p>Where the application is recommended for refusal and the Head of Development &amp; Building Control has informed the applicant and objectors of this, the Ward Members be given notice of this, and allowed five working days in which they can refer the application to Committee.</p> <p>iii. Where five or more letters of support have been received from neighbours, interested parties or statutory consultees within the 21 day consultation period, and where this will be addressed by the decision of the officer to approve the application.</p> <p>iv. Where a Member requests and the Head of Planning &amp; Building Control agrees (having consulted the chair of the Planning Applications Committee) that:</p> <p>i. in the case of a minor application in their ward; or</p> <p>ii. in the case of a major application, any 3 Councillors, that application will be dealt with by the Planning Applications Committee.</p> <p>The request has to be made to the Head of Planning &amp; Building Control in writing or by e-mail within 28 days of the date of the relevant weekly list of planning applications (or 14 days in the case of a non-material amendment or proposals submitted to other authorities). In both cases above, sufficient and rational reasons need to be given for the call in to be determined by Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the chair of Planning Application Committee.</p> <p>v. The Head of Development &amp; Building Control considers the application or notified matter should be considered by the Planning Applications Committee.</p> <p>vi. The terms of a legal agreement needs to be agreed other than where a contribution is in accordance with a tariff agreed in adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance.</p> <p>vii. The proposal involves the Borough Council either as applicant or land owner, and the scheme is not of a minor nature, as defined in statistical returns to the Government.</p> <p>viii. The applicant is a member or an employee of the Development Control or Building Control Section.</p>	<p>writing or email</p>	<p>with rationale and reasoning</p>	<p>28 days of the date of the relevant weekly list</p>
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<p>Stafford</p>	<p>developments on which the officer recommendation would conflict other than to a minor extent with The Plan for Stafford Borough policies or other relevant planning policies                  (ii) developments which raise unusual issues of planning policy or which the Head of Development considers should be presented to the Planning Committee for decision                  (iii) applications where a written request for consideration by the Planning Committee, supported by an appropriate planning reason, has been received from a Member of the Council relating to an application in their Ward or a nominated Member where there is no Ward Member able to act, no later than 21 days following notification being sent to the Ward Member, or in relation to any prior approval application for telecommunications development where a decision could not otherwise be made by Committee before the statutory deadline for determination such lesser period as may be necessary. Where amended plans and information of a significant nature are received on an application, an additional Call-in period will be given, the period for which will be specified to suit the circumstances of each case                  (iv) a Ward Councillor, from an adjoining Ward, may call in a planning application where that application could adversely affect one of their constituents living in a property abutting the site of the proposed planning application.                  (v) Where a ward is represented by a single member that member may during a period of absence from the Borough or inability to act for any reason nominate to the Head of Development another member to act in their place for the purposes of this provision. This will also apply in wards with more than one member when all members are absent or unable to act for any reason (Where an application is called-in by any Member who subsequently ceases to be a Member of the Council before the application is determined, the remaining and/or new Members of the same Ward will be asked if they wish to take over the call-in. If no Member takes over the call-in, it shall be treated as withdrawn)                  (vi) applications where a written request for consideration by the Planning Committee, supported by an appropriate reason, has been received from 3 Members of the Planning Committee no later than 21 days following notification being sent to the Ward Member, or in relation to any prior approval application for telecommunications development where a decision could not otherwise be made by Committee before the statutory deadline for determination such lesser period as may be necessary. Where amended plans and information of a significant nature are received on an application, an additional Call-in period will be given, the period for which will be specified to suit the circumstances of each case                  (vii) applications to which there are objections or to which paragraphs (i) to (v) above apply, submitted by or on behalf of :-a serving Councillor of the Borough Council or the spouse/partner of a Councillor; an employee of the Borough Council or the spouse/partner of an employee; and a person who, in the period of two years prior to the date of application, was either a Councillor with, or an employee of, the Borough Council or the spouse/partner of such a person; where a Councillor or an employee of the Council has a pecuniary interest in the outcome; applications submitted by or on behalf of the Council for its own developments or where the Council has a pecuniary interest in the application except for the approval of routine minor developments to which no objection has been received;                  (viii) Large Scale Major applications other than applications to</p>	<p>written request</p>	<p>with rationale and reasoning</p>	<p>21 days</p>
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	renew or amend previously permitted applications, or reserved matters;			
Stratford				
Test Valley	have to request the document from legal			
Tonbridge and Malling	<p>cases where there is a balance to be made between diverging and significant policy considerations shall be referred to the relevant Area Planning Committee. in the event of a recommendation by the Director of Planning,</p> <p>Housing and Environmental Health of any application which, in the opinion of the Director of Central Services &amp; Deputy Chief Executive, might lead to an adverse judicial finding, award of costs against or to the payment of compensation by the Council, such application shall be referred to the relevant Area Planning Committee</p> <p>(iv) Member for the relevant Ward in which the application site falls may require that the application be determined by the relevant Area Planning Committee provided that:</p> <p>(a) The request is made within 21 days of notification of the application to the Member; and</p> <p>(b) The request is made with reasoned justification on proper planning grounds as determined by the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health in consultation with the relevant Area Planning Committee Chair.</p>	in writing with justification	On planning grounds	21 days
Warwick	<p>Object on environmental and other grounds to applications for goods vehicle operators licences, such objections to be reported to the Committee for instruction as to whether an appearance should be entered at any hearing</p> <p>which might take place into the objection. Applications where a written request is received from a member of Warwick District Council within the specified consultation period i.e. 21 days. that Committee referral is required. Such requests should clearly state the reasons why a Committee referral is required</p> <p>(ii) Applications where 5, or more valid representations are received where these are contrary to the officers' recommendation unless the Head of Development is satisfied that the plans have been amended to address the concerns raised so that there are no more than four contrary representations.</p> <p>(iii) Applications where the recommendation of the Head of Development</p> <p>i.e. Grant/Refuse is contrary to the representations made by a Parish/Town Council, i.e. Object/Support, except in the following circumstances:</p> <p>a. the Head of Development is satisfied that the plans have been</p>	written request		21 days

	<p>amended to address the concerns of the Parish/Town Council;</p> <p>b. where the representations made by the Parish/Town Council do not raise any issues which are material to the planning assessment of the particular application; or</p> <p>c. where the concerns of the Parish/Town Council have been previously considered as part of the assessment of an extant permission on the site and there has been no change in circumstances</p> <p>(iv) Applications where the principle of development would represent a material departure from any policy within the Development Plan.</p> <p>(v) Applications known to be submitted by or on behalf of a Warwick District Councillor, Warwick District Council employee or former employee of the Council, or the spouse/partner of any such person.</p> <p>(vi) Applications submitted by Warwick District Council or Warwickshire County Council, other than for approval of routine minor developments.</p> <p>(vii) Where applications are to be refused and enforcement action is being recommended, following consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee and the relevant ward member(s) except in the circumstances where the Head of Development considers it appropriate for that matter to be determined by Planning Committee.</p> <p>(viii) Applications where an Environmental Impact Assessment has been provided.</p> <p>(ix) Any application which raises significant issues such that in the opinion of the Head of Development, it would be prudent to refer the application to Planning Committee for decision.</p>			
West Suffolk	unable to access	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wychavon	<p>The Council has an approved Scheme of Delegation for officers to deal with planning applications and other planning and building control matters. Local Members are supplied with regular lists of planning applications. Where a matter is delegated to an officer under the Scheme of Delegation only the Chairman, the Director of Planning and Infrastructure and the Local Member may refer an application to Committee. Such persons should only request that an application be referred to Planning Committee for determination if there are matters of material planning concern. Such a request should be in writing, give the reasons for the referral and be placed on the planning file.</p>	written		

Appendix 2:

Table: Summary of the statistical data reviewed

LPA	Proportion of appeals against total apps determined 2016-2022	Proportion of appeal dismissals of total 2016-2022	% of major apps decided in time 2016-2022	% of minor apps decided in time 2016-2022	% of other apps decided in time 2016-2022	Average income 2016-22 (£000's)	Average expenditure 2016-22 (£000's)	Average number of applications received annually 2015-2022	average income per application (£) 2015-2022	average cost per application (£) 2015-2022	Net cost per application (£) 2015-2022	Proportion of major apps of total 2015-2022	Average % of EOT 2016-2022	% of decisions made in time where the application had no PPA EOT or EIA, as a proportion of the total number of applications made Jan 22-Dec 22	% of all decisions made in time of the total number of apps made	% of decisions (where no EIA PPA or EOT) that were made out of time limits, of the total number of decisions (where no EOT PPA or EIA required) Jan 22-Dec 22	% of applications approved Jan22 - Dec 22	% of delegated decisions 2016-2022
Rugby	1.44	72.22	98.51%	85.13%	88.13%	1276	1549	866	1473.63	1788.30	314.67	4.92%	36.09%	35.66%	48.82%	25.75%	92.89%	95.29%
Ashford	2.08	69.59	74.30%	78.51%	86.27%	1517	2849	1542	983.57	1847.91	864.34	3.96%	39.19%	40.25%	43.06%	14.70%	86.27%	96.51%
Bassingstoke and Deane	2.15	72.58	75.36%	68.65%	84.37%	1424	3350	1662	856.43	2015.24	1158.81	2.65%	26.08%	34.75%	36.53%	33.63%	93.58%	97.35%
Blaby	1.41	79.31	98.15%	95.46%	97.25%	651	1607	729	893.87	2205.63	1311.76	3.51%	44.58%	33.43%	61.82%	9.47%	92.59%	95.11%
Brantree	4.49	67.19	81.05%	74.66%	85.05%	1442	2152	1542	935.15	1395.27	460.12	4.34%	35.39%	48.25%	43.45%	9.43%	85.23%	91.29%
Broxbourne	2.45	82.41	75.72%	81.24%	87.44%	686	818	798	859.47	1020.46	160.99	3.13%	25.59%	32.60%	49.31%	33.89%	89.23%	97.25%
Cherwell	2.08	67.66	88.87%	85.92%	88.38%	1695	2309	1808	936.97	1276.35	399.38	4.63%	23.61%	47.22%	45.47%	11.48%	87.57%	94.00%
East Staffordshire	1.48	69.62	97.10%	94.33%	97.54%	900	1047	956	941.75	1095.57	153.82	4.43%	26.74%	48.05%	48.17%	7.31%	94.44%	98.06%
Harborough	2.00	65.35	84.64%	81.60%	85.05%	1301	1487	1248	1041.79	1191.05	149.27	4.84%	18.14%	47.92%	23.71%	35.86%	91.07%	94.36%
Hinckley and Bosworth	3.26	73.20	74.82%	77.06%	81.09%	1128	1548	1537	733.95	1007.16	273.20	4.84%	41.57%	18.91%	20.00%	72.90%	95.65%	94.67%
Huntingtonshire	2.15	76.97	80.62%	74.84%	86.22%	1712	1532	852	2009.78	1798.51	-211.27	4.22%	23.48%	27.26%	52.10%	34.82%	90.50%	93.97%
Northamptonshire	2.12	50.82	88.04%	92.23%	90.95%	774	787	693	1116.61	1135.97	18.75	6.47%	19.64%	58.64%	37.42%	6.29%	92.56%	92.15%
North East Bedfordshire	1.96	68.75	83.40%	84.43%	90.94%	811	1587	1127	719.04	1407.92	688.88	5.12%	27.78%	16.87%	62.17%	40.99%	91.47%	93.88%
Stafford	3.84	66.18	95.19%	89.99%	85.73%	1771	3373	2222	796.88	1517.85	720.97	4.13%	34.40%	33.08%	48.38%	30.76%	90.42%	92.67%
Test Valley	2.08	73.21	89.70%	86.14%	92.89%	1336	3647	1619	824.89	2252.42	1427.53	3.00%	23.43%	59.10%	31.73%	7.76%	90.60%	94.92%
Tonbridge and Malling	2.07	70.07	78.44%	78.73%	88.55%	1027	1652	1298	790.99	1272.96	481.58	3.02%	16.53%	32.62%	41.02%	39.97%	87.41%	97.22%
Warwick	2.43	63.35	93.88%	84.73%	88.91%	1458	1781	1449	1006.10	1228.64	222.54	3.76%	33.92%	33.87%	38.89%	36.86%	87.90%	92.40%
West Suffolk	1.73	71.85	91.61%	96.83%	98.48%	1514	2278	1397	1083.89	1631.15	547.26	4.92%	43.15%	46.57%	50.41%	9.65%	92.50%	95.27%
Wychavon	3.06	73.12	88.92%	89.05%	94.47%	1384	1242	1502	921.86	826.97	-94.89	4.44%	23.09%	55.63%	30.21%	13.14%	93.63%	94.29%
Average	2.33	70.18	86.23%	84.18%	89.35%	1253	1926	1308	996	1469	473	4.23%	29.60%	39.51%	42.77%	24.98%	90.82%	94.80%
Median	2.08	70.07	88.04%	84.73%	88.38%	1252	1947	1332	970	1451	482	4.19%	29.24%	39.72%	42.44%	24.94%	90.70%	94.77%

## Appendix 3

### The Rugby blueprint

*“We have worked with all employees to create the Rugby Blueprint.*

*The Rugby Blueprint supports the evolution of our culture, provide a framework for how we will become the best we can be; to be more innovative, with empowered decision making at all levels. That includes our communities: we want to work with them as equal partners to achieve their aspirations and collectively shape our borough and enhance local pride.*

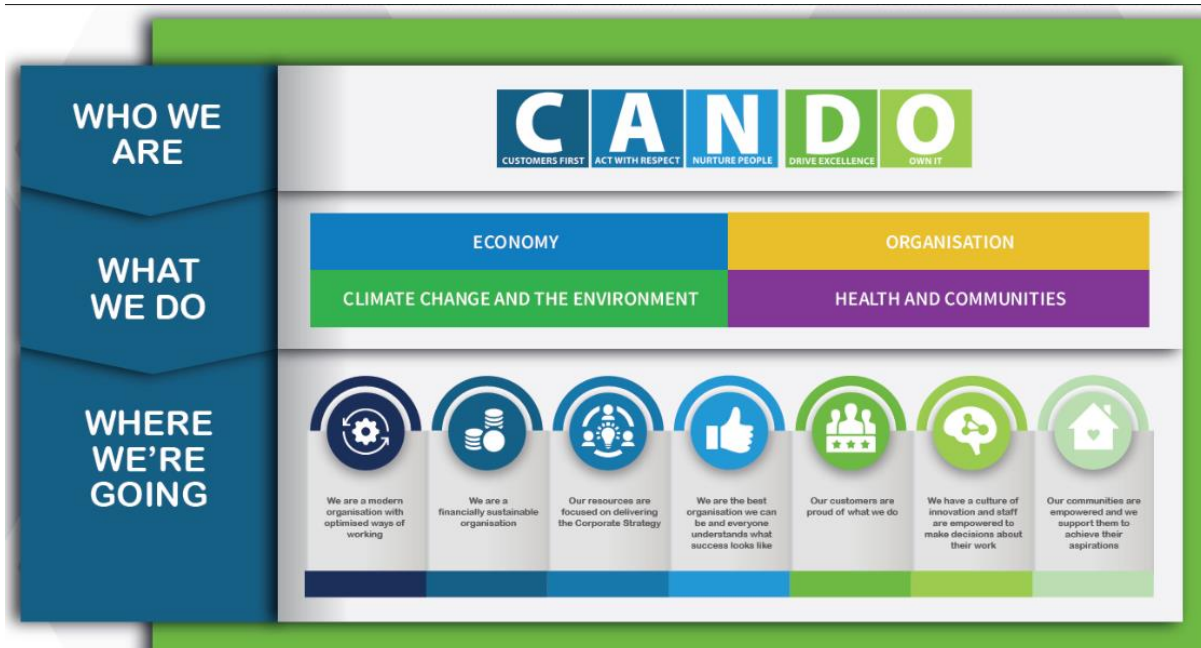
*We will become more agile, make best use of technology to optimise our ways of working and improve our processes, while delivering high quality services to our residents.*

*We recognise the importance of effective working between Councillors and officers and will strengthen that relationship to support robust decision making and to provide effective community leadership. We will become more commercially focused, maximising income to help to protect our services and deliver financial sustainability.*

*Alongside this, we will ensure that we remain as efficient as we can be, and that best value is achieved wherever we spend public funds.*

*Our ‘CAN DO’ values remain at the heart of all we do. They represent who we are, and they will be an important part of our HR and Workforce Strategies.*

*Overall, our vision for the borough is clear – we want to address the climate emergency, support a thriving economy and ensure healthy communities. This vision will be delivered by an ambitious Council comprising of employees and councillors acting as one team to do what is Right for Rugby.”*



WHO. WHAT. WHERE.

WHO WE ARE

**CANDO**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
ORGANISATION

WHO. WHAT. WHERE.

WHAT WE DO

ECONOMY  
CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
ORGANISATION  
HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES

WHO. WHAT. WHERE.

WHERE WE'RE GOING





- Strategic Advice & Strategy Development
- Supporting Projects Through Planning
- Project Management & Governance
- Viability, Funding & Delivery
- Building Capacity & Skills

DM Review Recommendations	Accepted Y/N	Action to be taken	Timescale	Commentary
Establish a regular agent / applicant forum.	Y	Create a database. Consider frequency once or twice a year	By end of 23/24	The need to prioritise the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain and Community Infrastructure Levy this has been postponed to Q1 of 24/25
Use the forum to communicate any changes in approach, new legislation or policies such as validation requirements and climate change SPD.	Y		By end of 23/24	The need to prioritise the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain and Community Infrastructure Levy this has been postponed to Q1 of 24/25
Invite Portfolio Holder and Planning Committee Chair to attend Agents Forum	Y		By end of 23/24	The need to prioritise the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain and Community Infrastructure Levy this has been postponed to Q1 of 24/25
Use the Agents forum to communicate expectations.	Y		By end of 23/24	The need to prioritise the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain and Community Infrastructure Levy this has been postponed to Q1 of 24/25
Consider preparing and adopting a Charter that sets out the Councils expectations from applications and the commitments it will make. This could include how many opportunities the Council will give to make amendments for example or information about the of PPAs e.g.	Y	To review other Charters to consider options	2023/2024	Look to progress in 24/25
Put in place regular Officer / Member sessions to reinforce the messages around the "purpose of planning" and approach to key issues such as HMO and G&T. This could be part of the suggested monthly Committee briefing sessions.	Y	Programme of Member Training to be establish and updates given through Planning Services Working Party	By end of 23	Consultations undertaken with Issues and Options for Local Plan Review along with Member conversations on Local Plan. Member training also been undertaken on Biodiversity Net Gain & Planning in 2023. Programme for 24/25 currently being worked on with Democratic Services.
Instigate joint sessions of Development Management and Development Strategy to ensure alignment on key issues and corporate focus for emerging plan and decision making	Y	Already underway sessions on Planning Performance Agreements, Retail the	Ongoing	Development Strategy now invited to monthly Major Project meeting and are now attending key pre-app meetings. Policy Surgery restarted and also Design Surgery meets regularly.
Ensure the principles established by the team are built into annual service planning and individual one-to-ones.	Y	Already underway.	Apr-24	Awaiting corporate roll out of appraisal system in 24/25
Work with team to explain why it is important to measure performance.	Y	Team meetings, staff briefing	Ongoing	All staff had training with Rugby Blueprint rolling out through other corporate training programmes and Corporate Briefing updates. Annual meeting celebrating successes of entire portfolio based on KPIs and Pis
Ensure roll out of the rugby blueprint and check to ensure staff understand what it means. Can they deliver against it and how will they know?	Y	Bespoke training sessions, Team Meetings, One to ones	Ongoing	
Consider yearly sessions with the team as part of annual business planning to reflect back the approach required.	Y	More reflection as part of annual service planning with team and with managers	Ongoing	Staff involved in service planning. Annual review meeting provides opportunity to reflect on the past year and look forward to the next.
Ensure customer feedback is part of this process.	Y	People already provide feedback via email to the officer. Feedback is always squewed if the application is refused. Look at ways to record feedback e.g Team meeting and team folder in sharepoint	Ongoing	Folder in SharePoint for feedback
Empower principal officers to ensure consistency of approach and regulatory requirements followed.	Y	Planning and Enforcement Manager has stepped away from weekly planning surgeries which are now led by the principal officers. Process notes will assist with consistency.	Ongoing	Friday weekly meet with the Development Management Team able to identify patterns and discuss issues. Fortnightly Principal Planning Officer meetings to discuss issues
Ensure officers understand that they are not alone and can ask for help.	Y	Stressing that everyone is available. Team day once a week, everyday in the office with new starters for the first few weeks.	Ongoing	Friday weekly meet with the Development Management team. All Principal Planning Officers help others not just their team. Senior Plannng Officers are also involved in assisting more junior members of the team.
Involve junior officers are more complex projects or appeals as part of a bigger team	Y	Planning Performance Agreements which involves a project team approach like that in the private sector allows more junior members of the team to be involved in larger projects and gain invaluable experience.	Ongoing	Training given to officers about how this works in practice. Monthly major projects meeting provides opportunity for updates.
Consider more days in the office, particularly as teams.	Y	Team day once a week, all service day once a week to allow colloboration between the teams	Ongoing	
Provide guidance and training for Members on enforcement.	Y	Arrange member training sessions on enforcement	Ongoing	See line 7. Has previously been undertaken look to undertake refresher in 2024.
Celebrate "successes" with members and public.	Y	Updates provided to Communications for Members where applicable.	Ongoing	Member communications have been used to provide information on Development Management. Report to Scrutiny on the performance of the Enforcement Team. Updates to the website are also planned now that the website has been updated to provide more information to residents.
Strengthen relationships between enforcement and DM teams. Encourage DM officers to get more involved in enforcement activity.	N	None		This was already established prior to the publication of report.
Consider giving planning officers a small case load of enforcement work.	Y	Explore opportunities where this can occur. Resource implications.	Ongoing	Planning officers have become more involved in certain enforcement works, particularly those relating to sites they are familiar with. This helped support the enforcement team when there were vacancies.
Consider the best approach for Rugby to strengthen the role of Members at pre-app stage. Options include:	?	Pre-apps are confidential and may contain commercially sensitive information. Need to remain confidential, however agents for major schemes tend to conduct pre-app consultations with Members and third parties already. Regular discussions take place between Head of Service and Portfolio Holder. Large applications which are covered by a Planning Performance Agreements also now required meetings with Ward Members and Planning Committee.	Ongoing	Ward Councillors informed of applications in their Ward once valid and provided details of named officer to liaise with.
Consider including some plans and drawings in the committee reports or sharing the presentation in advance.	Y	Hyperlink provided with the committee report to all plans and documents. In additional to plans and photographs in the Committee Presentation, key plans incorporated into reports when deemed appropriate.	Completed	
Provide committee briefing sessions monthly to advise Members about what is upcoming and include details on proposals. This will help to highlight key issues for officers and give Members greater ownership and feeling of involvement. This could be an open invitation to all Members.	Y	Briefings already happen with the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee. Chief Officer to investigated opposition briefings on a monthly basis and committee briefing	Completed	Meetings set up with opposition groups to discuss planning issues

DM Review Recommendations	Accepted Y/N	Action to be taken	Timescale	Commentary
Consider whether it is necessary to amend the Scheme of Delegation to make it clearer that Members are able to request call-in of applications that are re-consulted on, or if reminding officers and Members about the ability for chief officer to refer applications to committee is sufficient.	Y	Need to make abridged version same as main version of Constitution. Need to ensure that only planning applications can be called to Committee. Majors that are recommended for refusal can be delegated to officers or all majors delegated and just caught be number of objections or member call in.	Completed	New delegation scheme agreed and came into play from February 2024.
Review SLA with WCC ecology. Review what applications they are being consulted on, what data they are providing for the Council to use, how comments are provided and how quickly they are provided.	Y	SLA still to be finalised. Pinsent Masons provided legal background to ecology legislation and WCC Ecology provided two bespoke training sessions for officers.	Ongoing	Service Level Agreement has been with Warwickshire County Council for over a year. Latest SLA drafts in circulation and further meeting with RBC/WCC to be set to finalise.
Work with WCC to refine how they engage in the process and opportunities to work more efficiently and effectively.	Y	Management regularly meet with WCC Highways to discuss issues. WCC Highways are currently reviewing their own processes. Looking at bringing in a triage service for Highways which will then create standing advice.	Ongoing	Management also met with WCC Education to discuss timely responses and requests.
Explore with WCC including a pre-app fee for WCC services which can then be passed on.	Y	It has been offered.	Ongoing	WCC set up their own pre-app service for advice, such as highways and ecology. Discussions around collaborative working ongoing.
Explore with WCC opportunities for signing up to a PPA.	Y	It has been offered awaiting for WCC to set up	Ongoing	
Undertake further work to understand any patterns such as particular consultees asking for further information, experience or confidence of officers.	Y	Further training of officers to increase confidence.	Ongoing	Ongoing and been filtering into Friday morning meetings.
Consider establishing a 'technical officer' who takes responsibility for managing and updating the IT system.	Y	3 Technical officers to be established within the team.	Ongoing	New Planning Technical Officer appointed and training ongoing. Will be fully operational by 1st April 2024
Consider training other officers to have an understanding of the "back office system" and how to run reports etc.	Y	3 Technical officers to be established within the team.	Ongoing	Discussed amongst the Principal Planning Officers and rolled out. Other key officers jhave ability now to log calls/make changes to system.
Consider corporate opportunities for a system that incorporates other disciplines such as building control and environmental health.	Y	IT Review undertaken and continuing with bespoke system	Completed	Look to progress newer version of system in 24/25 with additional modules such as mobile app for officers and the use of artificial intelligence for validation.
Undertake training on the drafting and use of Planning Performance Agreements for	Y	Already undertaken	Completed	Update and further training ongoing.
Promote the use of Planning Performance Agreements to applicants at agent forums	Y	Will do when Agents Forum is arranged	24/25	see 1
Provide information on the website about PPAs e.g. Cornwall website: What we offer – Cornwall Council and their Charter: Planning Performance Agreement Charter (cornwall.gov.uk)	Y	To review	24/25	Some changes have been made to website futher changes in train.
Document ways of working into a procedure or process guides / manuals. Involve the team to identify what would be most helpful and what they should contain.	Y	Validation Checklist; Validation & Registering process notes; Appeal Procedures PINS; Appeal Procedure Internal; List of Conditions /Informatives; Enforcement Procedures	Completed	
Continually review, refine and improve processes and update the manuals / guides. Use the ideas from the workshop as a basis for reviewing approaches.	Y	Workshop ideas have been now put in to best practice within the team	Completed	
Investigate opportunities for specialist heritage advice such as shared with other councils, part time roles, consultancy appointments etc.	Y	To be procured as part of an panel for complex applications and appeals but a	Apr-24	Currently reviewing tenders for specialist heritage advice for large complex applications and appeals. Specialist heritage advice secured from neighbouring authority through a Service Level Agreement from April 2024 for few hours a week .
Ensure Rugby BC performance measures reflect those proposed by the Government	Y	Already in place	Completed	
Ensure staff understand why change is needed and empower them to make the changes.	Y	Staff briefing, team meetings, staff workshop	Ongoing	
Encourage the use of the pre-app service – promote its benefits (including shortening application times)	Y	All staff are encouraged to promote	Ongoing	
Ensure the pre-app service is meaningful and delivers benefits to the customer.	Y	Routine checks of Officers letters. Letter should include Policy, Principal of development, key issues, constraints, PD, responses from internal consultees. Hyperlinks to validation checklist, sustainability checklist, local plan, details of WCC Highways contacts details etc. S106 Head of Terms and PPAs. History, extant permissions and adjacent development. Snapshots of layers if relevant. Existing templates to be reviewed	Completed	
Ensure all officers understand the validation requirements and provide regular training and update sessions.	Y	Staff have received training and a validation manual has been produced.	Completed	
Ensure applications that do not have the required information are not validated. Suggest to applicants to use the pre-app service.	Y	21 days no reminders. Standard paragraph inserted in letter advising that after 21 days application will be returned. Officers to use discretion in cases where applicant / agent is proactive in advising of the need for extra time if reason is provided.	Completed	In place and ongoing.
Seek to have a maximum number of days that applications sit in box.	Y	7 days	Completed	Introduction of new Planning Technical Officers
Principals should take responsibility for ensuring the box is emptied regularly and should allocate applications which exceed the target for time spent in the box.	Y	Principal Officers to regularly meet to review the box and to allocate accordingly	Ongoing	

DM Review Recommendations	Accepted Y/N	Action to be taken	Timescale	Commentary
Principal officers regularly review progress on applications and provide proactive support to officers.	Y	Principal Officers already conduct monthly case management meetings with officers to review progress and caseload	Ongoing	Additional meet ups undertaken if required.
Case officers review progress of the application at week 4 to make a decision if the application can be amended to make it good enough to approve.	Y	Principal Officers already conduct monthly case management meetings with officers to review progress and caseload	Ongoing	
Circulate a list of applications which are 6 weeks old on a weekly basis to remind officers that they are close to their time targets. Officers to consider if all necessary amendments have been made or are likely to be made within target. If not, consider appropriate action such as EOT, refusal, asking to withdraw etc.	Y	This can be picked up within case management meetings	Ongoing	To be discussed further in team meeting and one to ones.
Consider appointing a technical support officer to help officers with technical tasks and ICT. This could help reduce the burden on some officers to manage the Agile system.	Y	Two search and systems officers converted to Planning Technicians and another officer recruited. Job Description amended.	Completed	New Planning Technical Officer appointed
Principals should regularly monitor individual performance and data, checking on the type of applications and workload being taken from the box.	Y	Already undertaken and reported at monthly Service Managers	Completed	
Undertake further work to understand income and costs, particularly the split between major and minor apps and how staff are allocated to these tasks. Identify opportunities to reduce the cost per application.	Y	Officer split of work discussed at Service Managers meeting	24/25	Acknowledged further work to be done on this following the appointment of Planning Technical Officers and the redistribution of workload.
Introduce mentor or buddy system for junior planners reflecting the corporate values around nurturing staff.	Y	Buddy allocated within the team	Completed	
Programme of organised CPD including sessions done as a team.	Y	Organise a training schedule linked to Royal Town Planning Institute Professional Development Plan	Ongoing	
Encourage line managers to have more formal regular sessions with team members focusing on professional development where needs are identified, recorded and progress against checked and recorded.	Y	All Officers should have an Professional Development Plan using Royal Town Planning Institute Form. Should be completed annually in April.	2024/2025	Commenced but not completed by all to date. Needs to form part of new corporate appraisal system.
Celebrate successes of teams and individuals.	Y	Team Meetings, use corporate praise. Need to be more proactive with In Touch	Ongoing	Examples given to Communications to promote service.