

Action Plan - PAS Review – update March 2026

Action No.	Recommendation	Action	When	Owner	Progress Update
R1.	<p>Embed strategic leadership, vision and culture Build on the updated Corporate Strategy by working with the planning teams and members to better articulate how planning supports the ambition and long-term vision in the Corporate Plan. The involvement with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member is important in this process to foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and strategic thinking within the Planning Service.</p>	Organise a 'check in' session with Leader, Cabinet Member, Area Planning Committee Chairs, CE, DPHRS and Head of Planning to review this action plan and consider additional actions/communications.	March 2026	DPHRS	Meeting organised and taking place w/c 23 February Plan to meet quarterly/as needed
R2.	<p>Enhance governance and delivery capacity Introduce a programme of training for middle management within the Planning Service to increase their skills and awareness in delivering the corporate ambitions of the wider council. This should provide these key individuals with better confidence to deliver the ambitions set out in the emerging Local Plan.</p>	<p>Corporate programme for middle management already being developed – identify relevant Planning staff to attend this.</p> <p>Set one off individual meetings for DPHRS/HOP to meet with relevant Planning staff to talk about career and skills development.</p> <p>Via Team Leader meetings, the middle management within the Planning Service will be responsible for reviewing and monitoring this action plan. The meetings will be held at least monthly and will have a rotating Chair to empower these staff and provide an opportunity to develop skills within their own working environment.</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>Jan/Feb 2026</p> <p>Nov 2025</p>	<p>HR via HOP</p> <p>DPHRS</p> <p>DM</p>	<p>Program being developed by HR and key middle manager staff identified to attend training program. Also reviewing extra training options via RTPI/PAS.</p> <p>E-mail sent to all Planning staff and career development meetings booked in.</p> <p>First meeting already held with monthly meetings booked in for next six months.</p>
R3 & DM11	<p>Rebuild member-officer relationships Invest in targeted member development and joint officer-member working initiatives and training opportunities to reduce the "us vs them" dynamic. Promote shared ownership of the Local Plan and democratic decision-making. This can be carried out in different ways and could include: learning from experience discussions from appeal decisions and other contentious planning decisions; a joint exercise to review the format of officer reports; and chair of planning committee "meet the staff" sessions.</p>	<p>Links to DM11.</p> <p>(i) Development Manager and Team Leaders will develop a programme of workshop sessions (via their meetings above) to discuss with Area Planning Chairs and Vice Chairs</p>	From February 2026 onwards	DM	<p>See R12 where action sits.</p> <p>The Development Manager is currently arranging the first workshop session which will focus on Planning Committee Report format.</p> <p>Second workshop session – Chairs and Vice chairs will be asked to meet the planning staff on a convenient day. Arrangements for this are currently being worked through. Also considering an organised visit to a neighboring Planning Authority with the Chairs/Vice Chairs to view a Planning Committee in action.</p>
R4.	<p>Review of the service structure To strengthen the effectiveness of the current Planning Service, a review of the current staff structure is required to address existing skills deficiencies—particularly in the areas of heritage and design support, which are increasingly critical to good planning outcomes.</p>	<p>Consider Heritage/Design/Landscape and other skills as part of wider service structure review, to be carried out by May 2026 and implemented by October 2026 and progress on the Action Plan be added to each H&P as a standing item. This will include considering options to work on a partnership basis with neighbouring authorities.</p> <p>Include a specific review of Business Support Manager role and</p>	From Dec 2026	HOP	<p>Work on the review of the service structure is underway, however discussions with neighboring authority already providing Conservation and Heritage advice are underway to increase this within their team to ensure the postholder has peer support.</p> <p>We have also been successful in our bid for a Graduate Planner under the Pathways to Planning scheme, which has provided the majority of funding for this post.</p>

	<p>There are opportunities within the service to better support Planning Officers and build capacity without exceeding the existing budget envelope. This could be achieved through a strategic redesign of roles and responsibilities. For example, the Technical Team, which is relatively large for a service of this size, could be better utilised to provide broader support across the service. Additionally, the Business Support Manager post is a valuable resource that is currently underutilised. A clearer alignment of this role with service needs could significantly enhance operational efficiency and coordination.</p> <p>This review should be approached with a view to maximising internal talent, improving service resilience, and ensuring TMBC is equipped to meet both current and future demands.</p> <p>As part of the wider review of the Planning Service, the Business Support Manager role presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen operational delivery and strategic oversight. A focused review of this post will enable TMBC to assess its alignment with service needs and unlock its potential to support key functions more effectively.</p>	<p>Technical Team capacity and skills, alongside implementation of validation software and move of front-line calls to the Customer Service team.</p>	<p>From Nov 2025</p>	<p>HOP</p>	<p>In order to ensure the review of the service structure is not carried out in a piecemeal fashion, a comprehensive report setting out all anticipated changes including those required to implement the Building Safety Levy will be brought forward to Members in spring/summer 2026.</p>
<p>R5.</p>	<p>Pre-application service</p> <p>In particular, this review should include a comprehensive evaluation of the Pre-Application and Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) service, using the PAS guidance as a benchmark. This is a critical area where improved structure, performance monitoring, and customer value can significantly enhance planning outcomes.</p> <p>By refining this service, there is the opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address current gaps in performance and consistency. • Introduce a robust performance management system to assess effectiveness and ensure accountability. • Reinforce the value of the PPA and pre-application process to developers, members, and residents. • Generate additional income to support service delivery and capacity building. 	<p>Review to be undertaken by relevant staff in consultation with Cabinet Member for Planning and Chair of H&P with specific actions implemented for new financial year.</p>	<p>By Mar 2026</p>	<p>DM</p>	<p>The DM is currently reviewing the PAS checklist and scoring against the checklist to establish how our current pre-application service operates against the PAS recommendations.</p> <p>Once this has been completed, recommendations will be made for any necessary changes and these will be discussed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and the Chair of H&P.</p>

	<p>This approach will also help ensure that the service is transparent, responsive, and aligned with the Council's broader growth and regeneration objectives. It is essential that any enhancements are embedded within a framework that supports member and resident oversight, while also delivering a high-quality, commercially viable Planning Service.</p> <p>By refining this service, there is the opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address current gaps in performance and consistency. • Introduce a robust performance management system to assess effectiveness and ensure accountability. • Reinforce the value of the PPA and pre-application process to developers, members, and residents. • Generate additional income to support service delivery and capacity building. <p>This approach will also help ensure that the service is transparent, responsive, and aligned with the Council's broader growth and regeneration objectives. It is essential that any enhancements are embedded within a framework that supports member and resident oversight, while also delivering a high-quality, commercially viable Planning Service.</p>				
R6 & DM10	Planning software transfer As part of the ongoing transfer of planning software from Agile to IDOX Uniform, ensure that all staff are engaged in testing the software to confirm that it meets the requirements of all staff within the Planning Service who will need to use the software. This should include a learning through	TMBC considers this action to already be largely completed – this is evidenced the audit undertaken on the previous project, the creation of a Service Transformation Manager role to specifically manage these issues for the return to IDOX and the agreement of specific JD insertions for key staff to be given responsibility have also been actioned. The communication and engagement approach for the project is now embedded.	By January 2026	STM	Complete
R7.	Parish council and other community engagement Create a stronger relationship with parish councils and other community groups so that TMBC can maximise the local knowledge and expertise from within the local community whilst managing the expectations in delivering the Government's wider growth targets. A practical example of achieving this would be through the local community support in preparing a local list and conservation area management plans. This	This will be included in the 2026/27 Annual Service Delivery Plan.	26/27	PPM	This has been included within the Annual Service Delivery Plan. Brief is currently being drafted for Conservation area work and due to go tender in early March.

	will ensure the local community can have a clear role in bringing forward a Local Plan that properly respects the heritage of the local area.				
R9.	Community engagement in the Local Plan process Ensure that the local community is empowered to engage positively in the Local Plan process. This should ensure there are clear messages from the senior leadership in the council about the growth agenda that needs to be delivered at TMBC, whilst articulating how the community can engage in a meaningful and timely way.	TMBC can evidence that this is underway through communication with key groups such as Parishes/MPs/interest groups, a leaflet drop to the whole borough etc	Ongoing until December 2026	HOP	Underway - as evidenced through Regulation 18 consultation engagement. We achieved almost 80% engagement through our consultation platform and the results of the Reg 18 consultation will be reported to H&PSSC.
R10 & DM 7	Development and agents' forums Engage with developers and local agents in a more structured way. This should take the form of developer and agents forums so that the development community has a channel for finding out about key initiatives taking place at TMBC, such as key stages in the Local Plan process. The forums should also be used to improve performance and customer service and create a collaborative environment whereby the development community can help improve the Planning Service provided by TMBC.	This will be included in the 2026/27 Annual Service Delivery Plan. There will be two tiers to this – one will be a DM focused agents/developer forum and the second will be a strategic development forum that will include Planning, Housing, Economic Development.	26/27	DPHRS/DM	This has now been included in the Annual Service Delivery Plan for 26/27. Due to delays in data transfer from Agile to Uniform, where it has not been possible to extract contact details for agents, there has been a delay in setting up the meetings, however DPHRS and DM are working up proposals to progress these meetings in early Summer.
R11.	Connections with wider partnerships Ensure that the Planning Service is in the best possible position to engage in local government reorganisation by improving its involvement in existing wider partnerships. For example, the Planning Service would benefit from greater involvement with the local Chamber of Commerce, Kent Nature Partnership, the Kent Association of Local Councils and joint planning initiatives involving neighbouring authorities.	Programme of meetings for DPHEH and HOP to meet with relevant contacts for introductory meetings, followed up by Planning attendance at existing partnership meetings.	By summer 2026	HOP	Link to R10 and DM7 A meeting has been set with the Economic Regeneration Manager to discuss the best ways to engage with wider stakeholder partners. The Economic Regeneration Manager already engages with most of these parties and it is considered that this may be best achieved through engagement via the Strategic Developer Forum (see R10 and DM7 above)
R12.	Member and officer planning committee learning Undertake a joint training programme with officers and members to learn from other best practice councils in running planning committees. This should involve discussing different approaches to running planning committees and how they impact on planning outcomes. Through this joint learning TMBC should review its current planning committee protocol so that it meets the requirements set out by Government whilst also addressing the priorities for TMBC. Reference should be made to the	Develop a 26/27 training programme for Members and Officers, including constitutional matters. This will consider use of external resources to deliver some training sessions.	26/27	DM	The HOP and DM are currently working through a programme of training for Members and Officers which will include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Belt workshop • Design workshop • BNG workshop both practical and one for the legal side. • Appeals workshop to cover R13 below Planning committee management – potentially via PAS

	PAS planning committee best practice self-assessment toolkit to help the planning committee review.				
R13.	Planning appeals Introduce a learning through experience process whereby members and officers can reflect on key planning decisions made, learning from areas of best practice and avoiding, wherever possible, planning appeal overturns and costs awards. The learning should build on the current regular reporting at planning committee on appeal decisions to a more active learning approach.	Include appeal specific sessions in training programme at R12 above. This could include external trainers from PAS. Consider agenda order when appeal cases are being reviewed	As above	DM HOP	As above see R12.
R14.	Planning enforcement Build on the progress that has already been made on strengthening planning enforcement performance by creating a culture of proactive enforcement. This should involve local members in helping officers to prioritise planning enforcement activities that makes the biggest impact to areas of most concern to the local community.	A review of the Local Enforcement Plan is due to be completed in 25/26. Completion of business case for implementation of software to help manage enforcement cases and provide real time information to Members – this will be part of the ASDP.	By March 2026 Spring 2026	HOP STM	Enforcement report to be considered at the same committee as this update.
	Development Management Review				
	Short term				
DM1	Review the current forms of communication within the development management teams to understand why staff are not responding effectively to management directions and guidance.	A central database has been created and is accessible via the Teams folder, providing a single point of reference for key service information. All key communications/process/legal information are stored here. Development Management service-wide meetings will continue to take place as scheduled led by the Development Manager and his management team. Team Leaders will take an active part in these meetings, including presenting items. In addition, the Planning Officer team meetings — which are led by Team Leaders - are scheduled to occur at least once a month to support team cohesion and communication.	Complete Ongoing Ongoing	DM	Programmed every two months Difficult Planning Application meetings scheduled in from March every fortnight. Team Leaders have fortnightly meetings.
DM2	Undertake awareness training in the use of Power BI so that all staff can appreciate its use as a project management tool and to enable all managers to use it to monitor performance within the development management teams.	All staff have access to the relevant Power BI dashboards. and Team Leaders have been tasked with encouraging their teams to actively use these tools to support case management and performance monitoring. New power-bi dashboards together with training of the new Enterprise system (when operational) under Idox will be prioritised.	Ongoing	DM	This has not been progressed as awaiting Uniform migration completion and will start in April 2026

			During 2026	STM	
DM3	Review the current guidance provided to staff on their day-to-day work in development management and internal communication channels to inform staff of procedural matters. This should involve all staff to ensure it meets the needs of everyone involved in development management work	As set out in DM1 a dedicated Teams folder has been created to centralise key service information. All key communications which involve processes will be directed through this channel with Development Manager and Team Leaders responsible for ensuring it is updated regularly. This will be a standing item on service meetings to drive continuous improvement.	Ongoing	DM	Already completed.
DM4	Introduce a process for monitoring the time taken to validate applications so that there is a better understanding of how validation is impacting on performance management and procedural efficiencies.	This is an objective for the Business Manager and has been tasked as a priority for power-BI reporting following the return to Uniform.	By March 2026	PBM	This has not been progressed as awaiting Uniform migration completion and will start in April 2026
	Medium Term				
DM5	Ensure that the action plan is delivered that has involved a skills audit of all staff across the two teams to identify specialist expertise, service-relevant skills, knowledge gaps, and individual development goals. The implementation of the action plan should include all members of the service and serve as an ongoing reference point. It also presents a valuable opportunity to support future resource planning, as this work will facilitate improvements to internal communications and workload balance.	This work is already partly underway. The Planning Business Manager has been tasked with ensuring the Skills Matrix is up to date for the technical team. A similar Skills Matrix will be developed for Planning Officers and will be in place for use by managers from the 26/27 financial year.	By March 2026 By March 2026	PBM DM	Mostly completed for Technical Team Working is progressing with a skills matrix for Development Management Officers.
DM6	Review the current approach to providing pre-application advice and Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) to create a more customer-focused service. This should be linked to a consist approach to dealing with amendments to live planning applications. The review should use PAS Guidance on Pre-Applications and PPAs	The pre-application module will be reintroduced as part of the transition back to the Uniform system.	By end of 2025	STM	Covered by R5 above
DM8	Keep the revised officer scheme of delegation under review to monitor how effective it is in allowing pressure to be taken off managers to sign-off all applications. Where appropriate this should be accompanied with further training for affected staff to ensure it is easing workload pressures and improving the quality of service to customers.	A revised Scheme of Delegation is already in place and is currently being updated to increase the resilience within the team. This flexible approach will ensure that the scheme supports service delivery without placing undue pressure on teams during periods of reduced staffing or high workload.	Ongoing	HOP	On-going action and already updated but kept under regular review.

DM9	Introduce a learning through experience process whereby the teams can learn from customer feedback, both positive and negative, so that the council can continuously learn from feedback received and improve the service it provides to customers accordingly.	This will be a standing item on the service meetings where customer feedback will be discussed and ideas for change supported.	Ongoing	HOP/DM	This is included on the DM Team Agenda as a standing item.
	Long Term				
DM11	Review officer report templates so staff can take a more proportionate amount of time to prepare officer reports. This should include streamlined reports for more straight forward decisions using the PAS Best Practice in Officer Report Writing for guidance.	See R3 above where Members will also be involved in suggested streamlining, together with a cohort of officers.	By end of March 2026	DM	DM currently reviewing templates to be implemented following Uniform migration. Starting with simpler householder application and then working to the more complicated reports.
	Additional activity Proposed by the Council				
1.	Planning Referrals	Implement a review of the Planning Referral system in the Constitution.	By March 2026	DCS	Led by Director of Central Services – report went to Full Council 24.02.26

DPHRS – Director of Planning, Housing & Regulatory Services

DCS – Director of Central Services

HOP – Head of Planning

PPM – Planning Policy Manager

STM – Service Transformation Manager

DM – Development Manager

PBM – Planning Business Manager