

Staff Structure Review and Flexible Workforce Planning



Context

In 2024, the Inverclyde Council appointed a new Head of Service. This came at a time when the service was carrying several vacancies and it created an opportunity to rethink the structure of the planning service. Falling planning application volumes also influenced the decision to design a more efficient and flexible service model.

What Happened

The process led to a number of changes across the service.

Planning Service Structure

After examining workload trends and the division of responsibilities, a combined Development Management and Development Planning Team Leader post was formalised from a temporary to a permanent position. It was considered that this would reflect manageable workloads and strengthen succession planning by giving future leaders experience across both planning functions.

There were changes made to development management where one Senior Planner role was removed. Work is now managed by one Senior Planner and two Planning Officers, who can now handle more complex cases. Enforcement work, previously centred on the Team Leader, is now shared to broaden knowledge and build resilience. In the Development Planning side, a Planning Officer post was filled, but two technician roles were not replaced. Instead, a Graduate Planning Assistant post was created—bringing new design expertise and allowing flexible movement



between development management and development planning, with potential support for gaining a planning qualification.

The service has also identified a gap around GIS and digital capability, and with an upcoming retirement to the support team, options are being explored on how that role could perhaps be reshaped to include GIS and digital planning responsibilities.

Data, Monitoring & Process Improvement

The new approach has also led to improvements in gaining a complete and accurate picture of workload and performance to support future resource planning. This has included formalising processes for recording enforcement cases and moving toward consistent recording of all work streams in Uniform and the development management system. This will provide a complete and accurate picture of workload and performance, supporting future resource planning and service improvement.

Areas of Collaboration

With a small development plans team, the service has brought in external consultancy for parts of the Evidence Report being published as part of the Local Development Plan process. It has also worked closely with Council's Housing service on the housing aspects of this.

Like many authorities, Inverclyde faces ongoing recruitment challenges. In response, the council has developed a clear workforce planning strategy aimed at improving both recruitment and retention. It aims to have a more proactive approach to recruitment approach. This uses digital and social media advertising and working in partnership with other organisations such as SOLACE. This has delivered positive results, including several successful recent appointments and higher engagement with job adverts.

Overall Result

A key aspect of the new structure is the emphasis on shared responsibility, regular cross-team working and a no silos approach. This is important for resilience in a small service. The structure looks to support staff growth through cross functional experience for the Team Leader, shared enforcement responsibilities and a graduate pathway for early career progression. It is hoped that these will strengthen retention and job satisfaction.

The Planning Service will continue to review the effectiveness of the structure and the processes introduced. It also aims to explore how it impacts on the customer and stakeholder experience through surveys, agent forums, and complaints analysis.

Lessons Learned

- Using data effectively can help inform how to structure and design your service.
- Be bold in rethinking staff roles and responsibilities. Think beyond what has worked in the past.



- Creative recruitment approaches can deliver better results.
- Flexibility builds resilience.
- Think beyond your silo. Collaboration with other services can strengthen what you do and how you do it.

This case study has been prepared in collaboration by Inverclyde Council and the National Planning Improvement Team at the Improvement Service. We publish good practice case studies identified through our work on the National Planning Improvement Framework and the National Planning Hub. They aim to support the sharing of good practice and build collaboration across the sector in addressing common challenges. Please email us at npi@improvementservice.org.uk if your authority has a good practice case study to share.

