

**Committee:** Local Plan Scrutiny

**Date:** 13 March  
2023

**Title:** Local Plan – Project Plan to February 2023

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## Summary

1. This report provides an update on local plan progress, and risks and mitigations including staff resourcing.

## Recommendations

2. That the Committee note the conclusions of the report on risk and project management and timeline implications.

## Financial Implications

3. Within existing local plan budget.

## Background Papers

4. None

## Impact

Communication / Consultation	The Developer Contributions SPD (referred) was subject to a seven week consultation period between 17 November 2022 and Friday 6 January 2023.
Community safety	None
Equalities	None
Health & Safety	None
Human Rights / Legal	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific Impacts	Covers all wards
Workforce / Workplace	None

## Situation

### *Risk Register Update*

5. The latest version of the local plan risk register is attached as *Appendix 1*.
6. There are eleven risks identified, five of which have been updated this quarter (updates in italics). **Risk ID Ref 2 – Staffing Risks** has been a critical issue since January and was reported to Scrutiny Committee on 17 January 2023. At that time there were four vacancies in the team; two planner posts; the team manager; and the transport planner post. At time of writing, two permanent career grade planners have joined the team (end of February). The team has been without a Manager since early January, with the Director of Planning directly managing the team with support from the directorate's Business & Performance Manager. This has not been ideal in terms of being able to dedicate sufficient time to the management of the team. A replacement Team Manager joins on 16 March (initial 6 month contract), along with a permanent, replacement Transport Planner. The recruitment piece will be completed on 24 April when a permanent principal planner joins (the manner in which Interim and remaining staff have performed their roles during this time is commendable).
7. In the past two months we have thus recruited four new planners to the Local Plan Team – three on permanent contracts. The existing team members have coped remarkably well in the circumstances, working ever-more collaboratively, briefing new officers, and prioritising time-sensitive tasks (see section below). During this time the team has also supported the 'making' of a neighbourhood plan and prepared and carried out consultation on the Developer Contribution Supplementary Planning Document, which will assist UDC in securing planning obligations (via S106) until a new local plan is adopted.
8. The team has absorbed some of the pressures as a result of reduced people resources, and as we approach Q4 of 2022/3 is running approximately four weeks behind the programme established at the beginning of Q3. Throughout March and early April we will be briefing, training and bringing four new recruits up to speed. The incoming team manager will also need to review work to date and coalesce his professional views with the work undertaken up to now. It is not a good point in the process to introduce a new local plan manager who will now be required to take ownership of the work recently undertaken.
9. In terms of **Risk ID Ref 8 – Timetable Slippage**, despite the mitigations in place it is likely a Regulation 18 version of the local plan, to the standard required, may necessitate more time than set out in the published LDS. The LDS currently sets out a Reg18 consultation commencing late August 2023. Depending on how quickly new, key staff members can read, align and run with work already undertaken, officers are to request an extension to late October 2023.
10. A number of mitigations have been put in place to prevent significant and short-notice staff losses including:

- Focus on attracting permanent staff with longer notice periods
- Supporting new staff in learning and development (including university courses funded by the apprenticeship levy)
- Mentoring / coaching of staff
- Increased in-person interaction and team building

11. Recruitment and retention of planning professionals remains a nationwide issue. The latest Local Government Workforce report<sup>1</sup> suggests planning is the single most difficult local government profession to recruit to (see table below). Indeed, only this week it was reported that Portsmouth City Council experienced a similar situation to that we saw in January; the immediate loss of a number of planning staff. Portsmouth reports it is now at risk of government designation.

**Table 9: Please indicate for which of the following occupations, if any, your authority is experiencing recruitment difficulties – counties, districts and single tier roles**

	Counties	Districts	Single tiers	All councils
	%		%	%
Planning officers	83	63	47	58
Legal professionals	67	50	53	53
ICT professionals	83	31	45	43
Chartered surveyors	50	35	40	39
Engineering professionals	58	6	42	27
HR and industrial relations officers	33	19	32	26
Finance officers (other than s151)	50	22	21	24
Heavy goods vehicle drivers	17	28	17	22

**LGA Workforce Survey 2022 – professions for which local government experiences recruitment difficulties**

12. Of course, with the private sector growing and the draw of major projects in London boroughs, it remains possible that further staff leave the team during the Reg18 period. We cannot continue to allow the local plan slip if a similar significant-loss situation were to arise again. As such, the following additional mitigations are being explored as ‘further’ and ‘last resort’ measures and to add further resilience:

- Planning Service developing relationship with Public Practice (a DLUHC-supported not-for-profit, public sector recruitment specialist). Public

<sup>1</sup> [LG Workforce Survey 2022 - Final for Publication - Tables Hard Coded.pdf \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

Practice recruited our Urban Design Officer, and soon-to-join Conservation Officer on our behalf.

- Director of Planning, Business & Performance Manager and HR Manager are working with the LGA and neighbouring councils to explore potential regional recruitment and retention approaches in planning.
- Director of Planning and Business & Performance Manager exploring 'alternative delivery models' (i.e. externalised services) such as outsourcing, forming a Community Interest Company, a Public Service Mutual, a Local Authority Trading Company etc. [This is a 'further option' option, is long-term and would require full member agreement].
- Director of Planning exploring externalising local plan production to a private company [last resort option].

13. Other updates to the Risk Register can be found in the appendix, including the noting of UDC's response to the recent government consultation on the NPPF and planning reforms. Officers will continue to monitor central government reforms in order to ensure best possible positioning in terms of our local plan timetable.

#### *Project Plan*

14. The project plan is now monitored and updated in real time using MS Project software.

15. Since the last meeting of Scrutiny Committee a sub-team of officers has been working on the SLAA. Officers have applied the updated site assessment methodology (which was reviewed at LPLG 10 November 2022) to approx. 165 of 299 sites put forward in the call for sites and continues to work through the remaining 134 plus the approx. 130 sites identified from other sources (employment land and housing land monitoring etc). This exercise will complete late April / early May. Further information on this work is published with the LPLG papers for 13 March 2023.

16. Draft policy areas have been reviewed for NPPF compatibility with general compliance.

17. Settlement hierarchy revisited and updated using responses from the latest Parish Survey.

18. Further transport work is being commissioned in conjunction with Essex CC. This will explore potential development scenarios in the vicinity of the A120 corridor.

19. The Developer Contribution SPD has been through consultation, subjected to minor amendments, and is to be taken to Members for proposed adoption later this month.
20. The team is approximately four weeks behind the previously established timetable. This slippage is as a result of staff resources throughout January, February and early March.
21. Officers are now, and will accelerate work on, refining a development strategy and site selection methodology in liaison with the LPLG. This work will then steer site the site allocations work – i.e. enable a series of proposed sites for development to be identified. This is next significant tranche of work and is programmed to take place from May. Further information is published with the LPLG papers for 13 March 2023.

## Conclusions

22. Work is progressing in accordance with the latest published LDS and project plan, although has slipped approximately four weeks due to loss of staff, resources having being put into recruitment, and now the onboarding and briefing of new members of staff in what is a very difficult recruitment landscape.

## Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Failure to successfully Project Manage the Local Plan will result in an unsound Plan	2 – Recruitment and retention of planning staff remains a national issue.	4 - Lack of an adopted (or advanced emerging local plan) leading to potentially unacceptable development.	Staffing mitigations in place and further mitigations being developed. Project management system in place.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Local Plan Risk Register

Appendix 2 - Extract of Local Plan Project Plan 03.03.23