

Appendix 1: Designation Action Plan PUBLIC

Cherwell District Council

Section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

**Designation of the Council by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing,
Communities and Local Government**

**Development Management National Performance Indicator:
Quality of Decisions on Applications for Major Development
Designation Action Plan**

Version 3

Executive Summary

1. A summary of the 'Circumstances and Issues that have led to the performance failure' paper will be added here. This summary will be relevant to MHCLG and reflective of the guidance received:
 - Be concise 'less is more' and provide an executive summary aimed at the Minister as an audience.
 - Set the tone as forward looking and not dwelling on the past – the Plan should not recover content/ arguments already made as part of the exceptional circumstance's consideration.
 - Be 'self-aware' and demonstrate that learning has been taken onboard and being implemented. Factual data on the achievement of targets since designation and the forward forecast should be provided.
 - Reflect the Council's relationship with its stakeholders and their confidence in the Council to develop a high-quality service. Indicators of this can be the lack of 62A applications (to date there have been none) and feedback gathered as part of the PAS Pre-App/ PPA Review on 2nd October 2026.

Note that this will be supplemented by a covering note from the Leader and Portfolio Holder.

Purpose of this Designation Action Plan

2. This Designation Action Plan looks to address the issues that have led to the performance failure to enable sustained improvement across the Development Management service. In doing so, it provides:
 - a. A clear understanding of the performance data baseline for the quality of decision making for major developments and other national performance indicators
 - b. A clear understanding of the causes of performance failure / areas of weakness / future risks across the Council (including cross service, member engagement and committee decision making) including actions already undertaken to address them
 - c. The remedy for those causes / weaknesses / risks
 - d. The clear expectations for future performance
 - e. A clear pathway to exiting designation
 - f. A framework for sustaining requisite performance and meeting future expectations
 - g. A framework for monitoring, managing and reporting on performance
3. The Designation Action Plan sets out the actions for delivering sustained improvement and reflects analysis undertaken and the outputs of lessons learnt sessions with officers. These are broadly grouped into the following themes:
 - Baselineing, Governance, Performance and Reporting
 - Engagement and Communication
 - Resourcing and Capacity
 - Processes, Systems and Tools
 - Training and Development
 - Continuous Improvement and Knowledge Management

4. The Designation Action Plan is supported by a detailed mobilisation and project plan which includes the following:
 - a. Clear roles and responsibilities for delivery of the Action Plan
 - b. Project Governance, Management and Reporting
 - c. Project Resourcing, Risks, Issues and Dependencies
 - d. Performance Reporting and Tracking
 - e. Councillor, staff and stakeholder communication
5. It should be noted that the Council is currently delivering a Transformation Programme, Cherwell Futures, that includes wider improvements to the Planning and Development Management services such as updating IT systems, processes and reporting. Some elements of this programme of work forms part of the Designation Action Plan and will be delivered in parallel.

Mobilisation, Implementation and Governance

6. The delivery of the Designation Action Plan falls within a clearly defined governance structure with appropriate accountability, decision-making authority and assurance throughout the programme lifecycle:

Role	Responsibilities
Corporate Leadership Team	Corporate oversight and senior decision making forum receiving updates from the Transformation and Change Board and monitoring of the achievement of performance related measures and indicators.
Transformation and Change Board	Oversight and assurance, reviewing material decisions, dependencies, benefits, risks and escalations and exercising or recommending approvals within its remit.
Directorate Portfolio Board	Directorate-level portfolio oversight, prioritising demand against capacity, coordinating dependencies and escalating exceptions
Sponsor	Executive accountability, strategic leadership, funding approvals and Executive reporting.
Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)	Overall responsibility of programme delivery, benefits realisation and strategic decision-making.
Project Board	Coordinates and drives execution of the Action Plan; maintains the detailed delivery plan and dependencies; monitors progress, risks, issues and resource constraints; escalates matters requiring Director Portfolio Board decision; and provides consolidated delivery reporting.
Project Manager	Delivery, governance, reporting, planning, risk management and stakeholder engagement.
Project Team	A team of subject matter experts' delivery specific tasks and activities within the Designation Action Plan.
PMO	Programme assurance, reporting standards, governance support and quality management.

7. A dedicated project team operates beneath the Directorate Portfolio Board as the principal delivery forum responsible for coordinating and driving execution of the Designation Action Plan. The team brings together the relevant subject matter experts to maintain delivery momentum and realisation of the outcomes identified.

8. Through the Project Manager, the project team translate the strategic direction and decisions of the Directorate Portfolio Board into coordinated delivery activity, monitoring progress against the project plan, managing cross-workstream dependencies, identifying resource or delivery constraints, escalating risks and issues where required, and ensuring that outputs collectively contribute to the project's objectives and outcomes. It will also provide a consolidated view of delivery progress into the Directorate Portfolio Board and Transformation & Change Board rather than individual projects operating as separate or disconnected initiatives.
9. The Project Manager maintains a single integrated risk, issue and opportunity register throughout delivery. Risks, assumptions, issues and dependencies will be reviewed through the Project Board, with material exceptions escalated through the Transformation and Change Board and other corporate governance where appropriate.
10. A regular cadence of progress reporting will be put in place with MHCLG which is recommended to be on a monthly basis.

Designation Action Plan

11. The Designation Action Plan is grouped into the following themes and desired outcomes:

Theme	Outcomes
Baselining, Governance, Performance and Reporting	• Capture of baseline data to inform the forward forecast of performance information • Project management, governance and oversight • Benefits realisation and achievement of de-designation
Stakeholder Engagement and Communication	• Coordinated, purpose driven stakeholder engagement • Proactive communication and collaboration • Increased Committee and Member awareness and understanding
Resourcing and Capacity	• Required skills and expertise in place • Renewed focus on performance and service driven results • Future service design planning
Processes, Systems and Tools	• Effective processes, systems and tools • Documented and established ways of working • Improved efficiency to increase capacity to utilise subject matter expertise and value-added service
Training and Development	• Investment in Officers to develop within their roles • Support for Members to execute their responsibilities with confidence • Return on investment in new systems and tools
Continuous Improvement and Knowledge Management	• A well-run service that learns from experience and feedback • Sustained achievement of targets and measures • Structured methodologies and approaches ready for aggregation into the North Oxfordshire Unitary Authority

Designation Action Plan

Status key:

	On target		Issue that requires escalation for resolution
	At risk with mitigations in place to manage		Complete

Note that no 'RAG' status indicates that activities have not yet started.

Section 1: Baselineing, Governance, Performance and Reporting		
Action	Deliverables	RAG
Project management for duration of the Action Plan	Detailed project plan and project initiation document (PID)	
	Risk, issue and opportunity log	
	Performance monitoring and reporting cadence to key stakeholder groups – internal and external	
	Governance forum Terms of Reference	
	Lessons learned from 2025 to designation notice	
	Benefits realisation plan and tracker	
Decision making analysis to identify learnings for the future	Analysis of decision used for designation decision and external factors that have contributed to designation	
	Recommendations paper on improvement opportunities (Designation Action Plan)	
	Baseline of data for comparison	
Develop and embed performance analysis, visibility and reporting	Monthly performance data reporting and analysis	
	Quarterly Performance Report	
	Monthly Portfolio Holder updates	
	Monthly progress updates to MHCLG and PAS (to be agreed)	
	Defined requirements capture of future Power BI dashboard reporting	
	Build, implementation and adoption of automated performance dashboards	

Section 2: Engagement and Communication		
Action	Deliverables	RAG
Develop a stakeholder map and supporting engagement plan	Stakeholder map	
	Developer Forum	
	Internal Members Forum	
	MHCLG and PAS dedicated points of contact and agreed planned engagement points	
Identify cross-council opportunities for collaboration with common stakeholders and projects	Collaboration with the Growth and Economy Team to support work on projects such as the New Towns Programme with ATLAS, Homes England and the Growth Commission	
Section 3: Resourcing and Capacity		
Action	Deliverables	RAG
Increase internal capacity to deliver Planning and Development Management services	Third majors team recruited and established	
	Recruitment of a Planning Performance Manager	
	Recruitment of two Senior Planning Officers	
	Establish a new Biodiversity and Climate Resilience service	
Restructure of the service to support decision making and delivery	A new Place and Regeneration Directorate	
	Future service design recommendations paper	
Section 4: Processes, Systems and Tools		
Action	Deliverables	RAG
Implement and embed changes to the structure, cadence and format of the Planning Committee	New Planning Committee membership in place post May 2026 elections	
	New Planning Committee structure/ format implemented	
	Internal Members Forum	
Document and publish Protocols and guidance for Stakeholders, Members and Officers	Member Engagement Protocol	
	Member Engagement Protocol – Internal Guidance	
	Site Visit Protocol	
	Updated Charging Schedule	
Improve the management and coordination of applicant engagement	Information tracker and management report for strategic cases providing a single view of milestones, workload, risks, consultation status and performance	
Review and identify improvements to the consultee process	An approved, streamlined route for commissioning specialist advice	
	Consultation service standards for internal and external consultees and defined escalation route to resolve delays	
Develop and implement a more efficient and shorter s106 process	Redesigned and documented s106 workflow with clear stages, owners, service standards and escalation points	
	End-to-end developer contribution process mapped	
	Updated negotiation protocol for s106	
Readiness for Government led reforms	Response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation	
	Reviewed and refreshed Housing Delivery Action Plan to reflect changes to the NPPF and circumstances since its publication in 2025	

	Engagement and contribution to the anticipated SDS regulations and guidance working with Thames Valley colleagues	
	Refreshed protocol, Constitution (where required) and Scheme of Delegation to support the implementation and adoption of the National Scheme of Delegation	
Identify and implement technology-based improvements to increase efficiency, tracking and visibility of performance information	Structured DEF capability, configuration and unused functionality assessment	
	Implementation of agreed DEF functionality improvements	
Horizon scan future technology developments and opportunities to continuously improve the services provided	Recommendations paper on opportunities for the adoption of new, emerging technology developments and skills development to support their implementation	
Section 5: Training and Development		
Action	Deliverables	RAG
Scope and deliver a structure training and development plan for Officers and Members	Rolling Member training programme	
	Comprehensive Member induction programme post May 2026 elections	
	PAS Planning Committee Role Play Training Session	
	Committee Chair completion of Leadership Essentials for Councillors focused on changes in the planning process and the specific skills of this key role.	
	DEF system training both on existing functionality and new as it is introduced	
	NPPF Officer and Member briefings	
	National Scheme of Delegation Officer and Member briefings	
Identify and implement peer to peer learning and sharing opportunities	Establishment of cross-service forums focused on major and minor applications (BIG and Little DIG)	

Section 6: Continuous Improvement and Knowledge Management		
Action	Deliverables	RAG
Review existing technical library used by Officers to identify and close any gaps in the knowledge bank	Documented technical library with version control and refresh points	
	Gap analysis and plan to address	
Establish a feedback process from stakeholders to identify opportunities for continuous improvements	Documented and implemented feedback process and methodology for proactively seeking sentiment from stakeholders using the Development Management service	
	Documented and implemented internal lessons learnt capture and feedback loop into continuous improvement processes	
Identify and progress externally provided opportunities for peer review and recommendations	PAS Decision Making Recommendations Action Plan	
	PAS Pre-App and Planning Performance Applications Review Report	