DRAFT MODERNISATION ACTION PLAN

Ref No.	Action		Status
			Complete ✓✓✓ **Partially Complete** ✓✓ **In Preparation** ✓ **To be commenced**
Capacity, Workload, and Recruitment			
1	**Review staff roles, the staff structure, and pay grades.**	Consider hours of working, apprenticeship and graduate roles when reviewing the staffing structure and use the Apprenticeship Levy to support the costs of part-time Degree and Post Graduate qualifications. To align with the council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2021 - 25 and other corporate policies regarding pay and grading processes.	✓
2	**Support career progression.**	Look for opportunities to develop career graded roles to support progression. Establish and fill apprenticeship and graduate roles across planning and ensure all eligible staff have their PDRs annually to support objective setting and their continued professional development.	✓
3	**Develop and grow staff; establish a Built Environment Talent Academy.**	Formalise systems for support, personal development, mentoring, training, coaching, shadowing, and progression of qualifications to further develop staff for the benefit of the service and wider Department. Aligning with the Council's Workforce Strategy 2021- 2025 and establish a formal programme of work shadowing, mentoring, and coaching at all levels of the service.	
4	**Learning sessions facilitated by specialist staff - specialist subjects.**	Arranged once the DM backlog has been reduced.	
5	**Consider introducing a lead Planning Transformation, Customer Engagement and Performance role.**	As part of the future structure, in accordance with the corporate approach to restructuring and consultation. Develop and maintain a customer engagement focus which delivers the Council's Customer Charter, manages a new 'Single Point of Contact' function for Elected Members, analyses, and reports on performance, oversees planning systems, oversees recruitment to ensure consistency and enables DM staff to concentrate on planning applications. This will be considered as part of any staffing restructure having regard to corporate policies regarding pay and grading processes.	
6	**Recruitment.**	Work with communications and HR teams to draft an exciting advert template for all recruitment, co-ordinate staff recruitment campaigns, and ensure a Communications Strategy is developed to support this.	✓✓
7	**Short-term capacity needs.**	Continue to utilise Capita to help accelerate the reduction in the planning application backlog Supporting the DM function.	✓✓✓
8	**Appoint 2 x 0.5 FTE fixed–term officers to erect site notices.**	These posts to be in place until the backlog is reduced.	✓✓✓
9	**Review the Ringway Jacobs contract** - to provide additional specialist flood risk and drainage advice to the service.	To provide additional specialist flood risk and drainage advice to the service.	✓✓✓
10	**Establish new Team Leader Major Projects role and Principal Planner Major Projects role.**	This is in response to the anticipated increase in major business expansions and major projects. Eg. HS2, having regard to corporate policies regarding pay and grading processes.	✓✓
11	**Use alternative recruitment frameworks when posts can't be filled via Comensura.**	This is when posts can't be filled via Comensura because the appropriate skills and experience is not available.	✓
12	**Review the business needs of the service in the context of the corporate approach hybrid working.**		
12.1	· **Consider how and where is best to create an environment of on-the-job training and learning.**		
12.2	· **Think about how and where is best to support colleagues** with tricky or challenging conversations with applicants, agents, and objectors**.**		
12.3	· **Consider how to get a 'happy medium'** between home / office working in the interests of the business needs and the customer.		
12.4	· **Be consistent across comparable teams.**		
13	**Join in with corporate team conversation toolkits** at team meeting level.		
14	**Adopt a proactive enforcement monitoring and compliance approach:**		
14.1	· **Recruit to the vacant Enforcement and Compliance Officer role** with immediate effect.		✓✓
14.2	· **Dedicate the borough-wide compliance role** to proactive monitoring of approved plans and planning conditions and prioritise residential developments.		
14.3	· **Issue a press release promoting the Enforcement and Compliance role.**	and proactive approach being taken by CEC once staff member in post.	
14.4	· **Ward Councillors and residents to be updated in writing throughout residential development construction.**		
15	**Write to major housebuilders operating in the borough** to advise that development conditions and approved plans will be proactively monitored in future.		
16	**Improve the relationship with all housebuilders operating in the brough**, working with them to resolve local issues.		
17	**Improve the image of the Service internally and externally by:**		
17.1	· **Celebrating individual and team successes.**	For example, enter the RTPI's Awards for Planning Excellence. The Local Plan Strategy is one example worthy of celebrating the outstanding work of the team.	
17.2	· **Developing a Communications Plan** for the Planning Service**.**		

Ref No.	Action		Status
			Complete ✓✓✓ **Partially Complete ✓✓** **In Preparation ✓** **To be commenced**
17.3	**Further promote the work of the planning enforcement team and use media to raise awareness of what the team can and cannot enforce.**	By illustrating successes with compliance and prosecutions through media releases.	
17.4	**· Using job adverts as a promotional tool** to showcase the borough as an attractive place to live visit and work. **Promote its Zero carbon ambitions, highlight its ambitious projects such as HS2 and Crewe, showcase its place shaping and urban design credentials and its work with major employers such as Bentley.**	Promote its Zero Carbon ambitions, highlight its ambitious projects such as HS2 and Crewe, showcase its Place Shaping and Urban Design credentials and its work with major employers, such as Bentley.	✓✓✓
17.5	**· Highlight how the planning service helps facilitate economic, health and sustainability benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors.**	By Actively promoting its planning decisions.	
18	**Utilise staff connections with the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and LGA.**	Promote CEC's planning successes once the backlog has been reduced.	
19	**Consider establishing, through the restructure, a 'Planning Transformation, Customer Engagement and Performance' team.**	The team lead to work closely with the Customer Contact Centre to improve customer satisfaction at 'first point of contact'. This will be considered as part of any staffing restructure having regard to corporate policies regarding pay and grading.	
Culture and Leadership			
20	**Ensure strong leadership and vision** for the planning services.	To deliver the Corporate Plan and Customer Charter and drive service transformation at pace.	
21	**The Service Director and Head of Planning to take ownership and accountability.**	For delivering the modernisation plan and implementing continuous improvement and learning.	
22	**Business Continuity Risks - identify and address potential problems early and escalate risks.**	So that DMT and CLT to have oversight of business continuity issues, and the service has senior level buy-in to risks, mitigations, and solutions.	
23	**Risk Registers** - ensure business continuity risks feature in the service, directorate, and corporate risk registers as appropriate.		✓✓
24	**Customer Focus** - ensure a culture of customer-focused service delivery.	Designing processes to help improve the customer experience of CEC's planning services.	✓✓
25	**In support of a one council approach - Elected Members and officers should work together to resolve service problems.**		
26	**Embrace and welcome a culture of collaborative learning and working:**		
26.1	**· Work with other in-house council teams**, such as Communications officers, Democratic Services, Regeneration, and the Legal Team:	To help deliver and underpin changes as a result of this review.	✓
26.2	**· Maximise networking opportunities with other council planning teams.**	Including those known for innovation and those large complex LPA's similar to CEC.	
26.3	**· Set up a Cheshire & Warrington Chief Planner's Forum in consultation with subregional colleagues.**	In consultation with subregional colleagues.	
26.4	**· Learn from LGA Peer Challenges and independent reviews** of other LPA's.		
26.5	**· Observe and learn from other Councils' online planning committee** meetings.		
26.6	**· Review the government's digitalisation agenda.**	Seek out opportunities for service improvement, such as digitalisation of local land searches.	
26.7	**· Identify additional Brighter Futures Champions from the service**.	The Champions to be involved in implementing the Modernisation Plan.	✓
26.8	**· Consider the role of champions in the transformation board** and modernisation plan.		
26.9	**· Identify another LPA which has introduced the same IT System** as that currently being implemented at CEC.	Seek to buddy up with the other LPA for learning purposes and ascertain whether there could be a secondment opportunity from that LPA.	✓✓
27	**Adopt a 'one-team' approach** across the planning services to resolving challenges.		
28	**The service to work with the RTPI Women's Network to support a culture of inclusivity and diversity.**		
Process and use of Technology			
29	**Establish a triage system.**	To set up and manage the DM mailbox, to triage written enquiries and issue standard letters on behalf of the DM service throughout the process.	
30	**Managing enforcement complaints - introduce a process for keeping ward Members and complainants up to date regarding alleged breaches of planning control.**	Post holders to work closely with DM officers' and the Customer Contact Centre.	
31	**GDPR Compliance** - immediately review and update procedures and processes to ensure compliance.	To include exploring more efficient ways of checking / redacting documents.	✓✓
32	**IT Systems Project** - review governance, risks, capacity, and managerial responsibility for the IT Systems project as a matter of urgency.		✓✓
33	**Preparing decision reports** - update the list of standard planning conditions to help with more efficient decision making.		✓✓
34	**Improve the quality of planning submissions** - establish and review protocols.	To include the validation checklist.	✓
35	**Signing off planning decisions** - review and implement an improved planning application sign off procedure.	To ensure consistency amongst officers and teams.	
36	**Member involvement in the planning process.**	Ensure a clearly laid out planning application process is established for involving elected Members and that this is widely communicated.	
37	**Improve links between planning and the contact centre.**	Ensure both have access to relevant information so that telephone queries are resolved at first point of contact.	

Ref No.	Action		Status
			Complete ✓✓✓ **Partially Complete ✓✓** **In Preparation ✓** **To be commenced**
38	**Reduce the number of site visits** - appoint one FTE officer for a fixed-term to secure photographic and video information for DM and other specialist officers.	To speed up application processing and until the planning application backlog is resolved.	✓✓✓
39	**Re-introduce a full pre-planning application service** - including use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) once the backlog of applications has been cleared.		
40	**Quality of decisions - undertake an analysis of why appeals have been allowed by the Planning Inspectorate and learn from these decisions – both officers and elected Members.**		
41	**Avoid duplication across multiple services -** reiterate to applicants and agents that contact should not be made with consultees, and they should wait until the application is allocated to a planning officer.		
42	**Establish a robust performance management process to Monitor, measure, and report:**		✓✓
42.1	· **The number of Extensions of Time's applied verses number of decisions in that period** (broken down by application type).		
42.2	· **The percentage of applications dealt with under delegated powers** to officers**.**		
42.3	· **Number of appeals made to the Secretary of State percentage allowed by Planning Inspectors** (including percentages where committee decision was made contrary to officer recommendation).		
42.4	· **The number of enforcement complaints received, investigated, and found to be non-compliant**.		
42.5	· **Customer satisfaction data** (Brighter Futures Customer Experience Project Manager to help identify performance measures).		
42.6	· **Number of applications determined invalid upon receipt** by the planning support team.		
42.7	· **Number of applications determined invalid upon receipt** by the planning officer**.**		
42.8	· **Applications over 26 weeks.**		
42.9	· **All S106 decisions and spend on a quarterly basis.**		
43	**Develop and publish a list of accredited agents** to drive up quality of planning application submissions.		
44	**Pilot a 'fast track' validation service** so it is ready to launch once the planning backlog has been reduced.		
45	**Monitor performance of planning applications validations.**	To ensure quality as well as timely validations.	✓
46	**Encourage staff who validate applications to seek advice and support from DM officers and specialist staff.**	To ensure consultation requests are administered correctly.	✓✓
47	**Improve links between planning support, DM, and environmental planning teams.**	To help address validation quality and capacity issues and provide potential career pathways – from administrative, technical, and professional roles.	✓✓
48	**Provide training** including shadowing planning officers, urban design and conservation staff for staff validating planning applications**.**		✓

Customer Experience

Ref No.	Action		Status
49	**Establish and maintain a clear, transparent, customer focus which effectively manages customer complaints**.	Customer services to undertake a pilot project with the planning service to improve responses to complaints, to include Local Government Ombudsman training.	
50	**Reduce the number of doorways** into the service by actively promoting the use of the DM planning enquiry mailbox.	Signpost all customers to the mailbox.	
51	**Update site notices and neighbour notification letters** so that customers are directed to the mailbox only.	Provide details of the website in these communications and update planning webpages so that they explain the role of officers and that of local ward Councillors. Provide a hyperlink to ward member contact details.	✓
52	**Establish a Cheshire East Planning Partnership** (Stakeholder Forum).	To include Planning Agents.	
53	**Design an interactive 'Day in the Life of an Application' tool**.	Once adopted, a similar tool can be designed for enforcements cases. The Cheshire East Planning Partnership to help with its development.	
54	**Work with corporate communications** to update the website and planning application acknowledgement letters to better explain the backlog issues.		✓✓
55	**Re-introduce a planning help desk service.**	Improve self-service options and communications.	
56	**Review the messages and information provided to customers post validation and pre planning officer allocation.**	Ensure contact with customers in maintained regularly.	
57	**Ensure all staff receive the corporate customer care training**.	Improve all content and digital forms to be more customer focused.	
58	**Proactively seek customer feedback via a dedicated mailbox.**	Use signposting from the Planning webpages.	
59	**Work with the Contact Centre** to review the potential for using webchat.		
60	**Establish a 'one point of contact' for Ward Councillor, Parish and Town Council and MP enquiries.**		
61	**Ensure clear and consistent protocols** across the DM service for consulting on amended plans.		✓✓✓

Policy and Governance

Ref No.	Action		Status
			Complete ✓✓✓ Partially Complete ✓✓ In Preparation ✓ To be commenced
62	**Review the timescales for elected member 'Call In' and align with neighbour consultation timescales as far as practically possible**.		
63	**Ensure Members are aware of the way central government monitor the quality of decisions and the consequences to the council if the numbers exceed the parameters acceptable to central government.**		
64	**Provide training for members on the Councillors Planning Code of Conduct as set out in CEC Constitution Chapter 4 Part 4.**	Provide clarity on 'pre-determination' and pre applications, for example.	✓
65	**Review the enforcement policy together**, via joint Officer / Member group.	Ensure there is understanding amongst Councillors, parish, and town council's that planning enforcement action is discretionary and, in most cases, it is not an 'illegal' act when there are breaches of planning.	
66	**Officers and Members work together to establish a common understanding of the Local Plan Strategy and the government's future planning reforms.**		
67	**Committee Chairs and officers to review the planning committee protocols together.**	Learn from others by comparing how other council planning committee's work.	
67	**Establish a clearly laid out planning application process for engaging with committee Members, ward Councillors, Parish, and Town councils.**	This to be published on the council's website.	
69	**Establish a Member / Officer group to take forward a more detailed review of issues relating to process of S106 planning obligations.**		
Members			
70	**Improve training for Members, Parish, and Town Councils.**	Ensure up-to-date training for elected Members. This will also help to ensure there is a clearer understanding of what is achievable by officers and the timescales involved dealing with complex matters, such as major development and planning enforcement.	
71	**Enforce mandatory planning training for Councillors who determine planning applications.**		
72	**Planning Committee Members to observe other council planning committees.**	Especially those of comparable size and complexity as CEC.	
73	**Seek feedback from Councillors, Parish and Town Councils on the format, frequency, and content of the planning newsletters.**		
74	**Establish new and refresher training programme for Councillors including the following topics, to be facilitated by external providers where necessary and to include case studies:**		✓
74.1	· **Principles of planning law, material considerations, planning conditions, legal agreements, probity in planning, pre-applications, lobbying, bias, pre-determination and pre-disposition, understanding of different roles and decisions (eg. Council as landowner and project sponsor V that of the LPA).**		
74.2	· **Key policies of the Local Plan Strategy,** explaining what they relate to.		
74.3	· **Development Management** – follow the journey of a planning application, planning enforcement.		
74.4	· **Encourage peer networking opportunities for Members, such as through the LGA.**		
75	**Improve the effectiveness of planning committees as decision-making forums,** this could be helped by:		
75.1	· **Workshops and mentoring to improve Councillors' understanding of their role in the planning process.**		
75.2	· **Officers to engage Members in the decision process earlier, including at pre application stage to help alignment with the Corporate Plan and Local Plan Strategy.**		
75.3	· **Officers and Planning Committee Chairs** to review committee proceedings with officers and Planning Committee Chairs to minimise duplication and time and make better use of staff resources.		
Managing the Transformation			
76	**Develop the Modernisation Plan.**		✓✓
77	**Establish a Planning Service Transformation Board.**	Chaired by the Executive Director Place.	
78	**Temporary Planning Services Review Lead to continue to support the modernisation process reporting directly to the Executive Director of Place.**	Reporting directly to the Executive Director of Place.	✓✓✓