
Planning, Infrastructure & Economic Growth

Business Plan 2022 - 2023

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Foreword

This Service Plan focuses on the delivery of services within Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth that will have the most beneficial impact in 2022/23.

The Plan should be read in conjunction with the Environment Directorate Service Plan 2022/23.

To enable effective delivery against objectives and targets, the Planning Infrastructure & Economic Growth Service area is broadly structured into seven main service areas:

- Planning Development Management
- Planning Heritage & Compliance
- Planning Policy and Housing Strategy
- Building Control
- Transport Policy and Highways Development Control
- Economic Growth, and
- Town Deal

About Us

Who we are

Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth is the service that sets the Council’s vision for the future of the Borough, and then works to make that a reality. We work with Members, officers from across the Environment and other Directorates, developers, funding bodies, infrastructure providers, central government departments and the people of Bedford Borough to deliver the homes, jobs and associated infrastructure that will makes Bedford Borough thrive.

Our Directorate’s vision is to “Value our environment, work to enhance the place we live, work and play, and support our communities in order to be healthy and prosperous”.

Our strategic aims are to:

- Make plans to enhance places and the environment within our communities whilst encouraging economic growth and prosperity.
- Support the economic and environmental benefits, and minimise the harms, associated government investment surrounding EastWest Rail.
- Conserve our built and natural environment.
- Provide a thriving destination for leisure and cultural activity promoting a healthier and more active population benefiting from regular participation and embracing volunteering and community involvement.
- Protect our working and living environment securing the health, safety and welfare of residents and workers within the borough at work, at home and at leisure.

- Work with key partners and government agencies to invest in improving sustainability and connectivity, particularly first / last mile travel, in order to encourage people to live health lifestyles and reduce pollution.
- Encourage inward investment that creates value, jobs, provides opportunity to uplift the skills for local residents, and provides economic prosperity at a local, regional and national level.
- Contribute, where appropriate, to the Council's Transformation Programme in order to deliver efficient and well-run services.

We are a service area within the Environment Directorate led by Jon Shortland, Chief Officer for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth.

As of 1 April 2022, the number of people expected in post is 90.3 Full Time Equivalents.

The Team structure can be found in Appendix B.

What we do

Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth consists of seven teams that deliver cross-cutting and complementary functions.

Planning Policy & Housing Strategy

- Preparing the Local Plan 2040 and associated policies
- Preparing housing strategies and associated action plans
- Reducing the number of empty homes in the Borough

Development Management

- Determining new planning applications
- Giving pre-application advice on planning matters
- Discharging planning conditions and collecting s106 / CIL funds

Heritage & Compliance

- Giving heritage advice on planning applications
- Taking enforcement action on planning matters
- Defending appeals on planning matters

Building Control

- Advising on plans for new or altered buildings
- Providing advice about matters of safety
- Ensuring building work accords with the regulations

Transport Policy & Highway Development Control

- Preparing the fourth Local Transport Plan
- Giving highways advice on planning applications
- Working with road and rail bodies to secure vital new infrastructure

Economic Growth

- Delivering the Jobs Hub service and the skills agenda
- Delivering the Town Centre Plan and the High Street HAZ project
- Promoting the economic growth of the Borough Town Deal

Town Deal

- Delivering those projects agreed as part of the Town Deal
- Servicing the Town Deal Board set up to oversee the Town Deal
- Promoting inward investment into the Borough

Wixams Station

- Design and construction of a new railway station
- Jointly managed with Transport, Highways & Engineering

In carrying out our functions, we support the Council's following statutory obligations:

- We are the Local Planning Authority
- We (together with parts of Transport, Highways and Engineering) are the Local Transport Authority
- We ensure compliance with all of the relevant legislation covering the areas of planning, building control, highways and transport

Our Policy Framework

We have responsibility for the following key policies and strategies:

- Local Plan 2030 (and the emerging Local Plan 2040)
- Empty Homes Strategy
- Housing Strategy and its daughter-documents
- Local Transport Plan 3 (and the proposed Local Transport Plan 4)
- Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plan
- Growth Plan
- Skills Led Recovery Plan
- Town Investment Plan
- Town Centre Plan

These and other Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth documents can be found on the Council's website at the following pages:

- [Planning and Building Control](#)
- [Strategies and Projects](#)
- [Invest in Bedford](#)

Our Budget

The projected net expenditure for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth for 2022-2023 is £1,495,000, plus income targets amounting to £3,088,000. This gives an overall budget of £4,583,000.

This is broken down as follows:

- Planning, Building Control and Housing Strategy £586,000 + £2,797,000 income
- Infrastructure and Development Control £554,000 + £11,000 income
- Economic Growth £355,000 + £280,000 income

The total capital budget for the service in 2022/23 is as follows:

- Superfast Broadband Project £565,000
- High Street Heritage Action Zone £781,000
- Town Deal £4,913,000
- Affordable Housing £118,000
- Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use £600,000
- Wixams Railway Station £6,000,000
- East-West Railway £16,000

2021 - 2022: What We Did

Our Performance in 2021 - 2022

Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth is responsible for two key Corporate Plan indicators and one service indicator. We also contribute to an overall Corporate Services Directorate indicator on attendance levels. Information on how we performed in relation to our targets, and where necessary the interventions required to drive improvement, can be found in Appendix 1.

What we achieved

Key Achievement	Outcome
Successful review undertaken by the Planning Advisory Service	PAS recommendations were helpful and supportive.
Carried out consultation on local plan strategy options and draft development management policies	Gathered input to the scope and content of the local plan from a wide variety of consultees in order to produce a better quality plan.
Drafted the Local Plan 2040 Plan for Submission	Keeping to the fixed timetable for the local plan review, despite the impact of Covid and associated restrictions.
Assisted 20 Neighbourhood Plan groups to prepare their plans; eleven of which have now been adopted	Fulfilled the Council's statutory duty and helped Parish Councils to write good quality plans.
Supported the school building programme with data analysis and mapping	Provided better quality information on which to make important decisions about school planning.
Drafted a Borough-wide Design Guide ready for public consultation during 2022	Bedford is responding quickly to new government policy. The guide will help to shape development proposals in the borough.
Progressed development briefs for Ford End Road, South of the River and Greyfriars, Bedford	Progressing the detailed planning of urban brownfield re-development sites to improve the environment and provide new homes, infrastructure and open space.

Key Achievement	Outcome
Published a new Housing Strategy 2021 – 2026	After an intense period of production, the Council’s overarching Housing Strategy is publicly available.
Updated the Action Plans for three parts of the Housing Strategy	We have new Action Plans covering Empty Homes, Learning Disabilities Accommodation and Mental Health Accommodation.
Completed a Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review	We have information from a wide range of consultees on the subject of homelessness and rough sleeping to inform the preparation of a new strategy.
Carried out a comprehensive update of the statutory Self and Custom Housebuilding Register	The register is now divided into two parts to give priority to registrants with a local connection.
Commissioned eight viability appraisals in cases where the affordable housing policy was challenged.	The maximum possible number of affordable houses has been achieved in these schemes.
Set up regular meetings with bpha to move forward their programme to redevelop unused garage sites.	Regular liaison now in place to speed up the redevelopment of these brownfield sites to provide affordable homes.
Successfully defending the Council’s planning decisions	We defended over 60 appeals against refusal of planning permission in the first nine months of the year, with a success rate of 71%
Enforcing Planning Controls	We issued 43 statutory notices against planning breaches in 2021.
Giving Historic Environment advice	We provided comment on heritage impacts for over a thousand planning applications and reviewed the impacts on nearly 450 potential local plan sites.
Protecting Trees	We determined over 350 applications for works to protected trees in 2021.
Determining planning applications	We dealt with nearly 3,500 new planning applications in 2021, and achieved the government’s targets for determining them in time.

Key Achievement	Outcome
Collecting Community Infrastructure Levy payments from developers	We have collected over £3.5M in CIL payments in 2021/22.
Providing a statutory Building Control function	The Building Control team has dealt with over 750 Initial Notices in 2021/22.
Securing a Town Deal	Awarded £22.6m for the Town Investment Plan and works now underway.
Started delivering the High Street Heritage Action Zone	The first buildings have been awarded grants and building work is underway.
Supporting people into work	The Jobs Hub has successfully helped over 300 people (so far) into a positive outcome (against a target of 200).
Delivered town centre events to encourage footfall	We have delivered a series of events, including Christmas celebrations.
Produced a new Skills-Led Recovery Plan	We have produced a new plan to help the economy recover from the impact of Covid.
Created a new Bedford Borough Traffic Model	The model has been used to develop the appropriate strategy for the new Local Plan.
Successfully bid for and delivered 30 new EV charge points	On street charging placed in locations where there is little or no off street parking, so that households without driveways can access charging points.
Updated the Bedford Rail Investment Strategy	Sets out Bedford’s ambitions and plans for rail infrastructure and services to increase options for sustainable travel for Bedford’s residents and visitors.
Undertook the highway site assessments for the Local Plan 2040	Consistent approach to assessment of highway impact of 445 sites to shape Local Plan development allocations.

Key Achievement	Outcome
Completed the Access Fund programme delivery	Delivered a series of sustainable transport interventions at schools, businesses and key facilities in Bedford.
Submitted a £15m bid to the Levelling Up Fund	The bid was unsuccessful, but feedback has shown that the bid was well-written and received. A re-bid will need to focus solely on regeneration and active travel.
Responded to the EWR consultation	The Council has a clear vision for EWR in light of complex construction and operational challenges.
Represented the Council at the A428 Public Inquiry	The Inquiry has finished its hearing sessions and we await the outcome.
Responded to highway search requests and to planning applications as a statutory consultee	Over 1,250 responses in 2021/22

2022 - 2023: What We Will Do

Strategic Issues

Resources within the Council continue to be tightly constrained, and the service will be required to play its part in identifying and delivering savings within its base budget.

Following the recent Planning Advisory Service review of the Development Management and other planning functions, a number of recommendations have been made and need to be acted upon in 2022/23.

Our Priorities

The focus for our work programme is to deliver on two streams of work: Corporate Plan Strategic Priorities and our general Work Programme, noting that there is some overlap.

1. Corporate Plan Strategic Priorities

The table below sets out how we will contribute to the Council’s strategic priorities as set out in the new Corporate Plan.

Strategic Priority	Projects	Project Synopsis	What success looks like (in 2022/23)
EP1 Support and enhance the diversity of our urban and rural places	Local Plan 2040 Borough-wide Design Guide Ford End Road, South of the River and Greyfriars	Submit the Local Plan for Examination Prepare a guide covering all parts of the Borough Masterplans and Development Briefs	Plan submitted by January 2023 Guide adopted as Council policy Development Briefs for FER and SoTR, and a masterplan for Greyfriars prepared

Strategic Priority	Projects	Project Synopsis	What success looks like (in 2022/23)
<p>EY2 Improve our town centres</p>	<p>Town Deal</p> <p>High Street Heritage Action Zone</p> <p>Levelling Up Fund</p> <p>UK Shared Prosperity Fund</p> <p>Delivery of the Town Centre Plan</p>	<p>Seven individual projects to be delivered within the project’s lifetime.</p> <p>Deliver year 2 of the 3-year programme</p> <p>A second bid is submitted</p> <p>A project is developed to utilise Bedford’s funding allocation</p> <p>Six specific Action Plans as identified within the overall Town Centre Plan</p>	<p>Business Cases accepted by central government, funds secured and delivery underway</p> <p>Available funding fully spent on qualifying works</p> <p>The bid is successful</p> <p>The project is accepted by central government</p> <p>The Town Centres are more resilient than in neighbouring council’s areas</p>
<p>EY3 Support educational attainment and skills development for all ages</p>	<p>Skills-Led Recovery Strategy</p>	<p>Set up and lead the new Core Delivery Partnership (CDP)</p>	<p>The CDP understands local trends and these are reflected in local training offers</p>
<p>SP3 Work with partners to provide the right housing mix</p>	<p>Homelessness Strategy</p> <p>Empty Homes Strategy</p>	<p>Preparation of a new strategy for the Borough</p> <p>Continue work to reduce the number of empty homes</p>	<p>A new strategy is in place.</p> <p>The number of homes empty for over five years is reduced</p>
<p>EC2 Support communities to help one another and to thrive</p>	<p>Neighbourhood Plans</p>	<p>Support local communities to prepare NPs</p>	<p>All NPs that pass a local referendum are “made” by the Council</p>

2. Work Programme 2022-2023

In addition to the Council’s strategic priorities, we will provide support and enabling projects through our ‘day-to-day’ work that deliver our core functions (see above). Key projects for 2022-2023 are set out below.

Project	Project Synopsis	What success looks like
PAS Review of Planning	Recommendations to improve performance in meeting government targets (see Appendix C)	Recommendations put into practice and improved performance in determining minor applications
Operating Model	Identification of Front / Middle / Back Office saving opportunities	Thorough review of services to determine if savings are or are not achievable
Section 106 funding	Establish a quarterly review process to ensure funds are spent to deliver the identified projects	EXACOM system implemented and operating, and funds fully and correctly spent by deadline dates
Responding to the new Building Safety Regulations	Introduce a new QA system and ensure staff are trained to newly instituted competency standards	QA system in place and staff competencies at the required standard
School Places Board	Establish the requirements of Local Plan 2040 growth to inform the school build programme.	We have a robust plan to deliver schools at the right time and in the right place to meet future demand

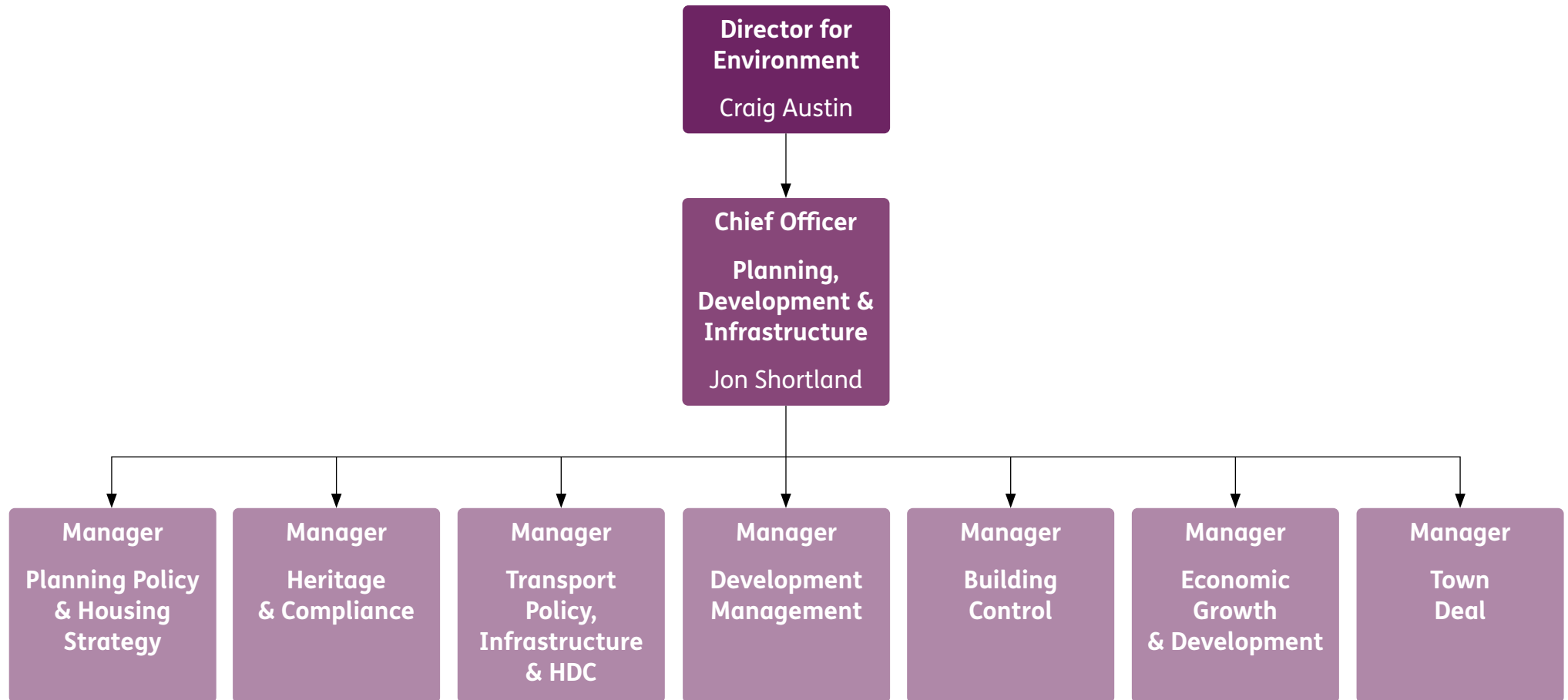
Risks

The service’s risks are captured within the Council’s corporate systems and are subject to regular review. Our work programme has been developed, and is monitored, to reduce the identified risks. This approach is supported by the consistent use of the Council’s Performance Development Review approach with all team members.

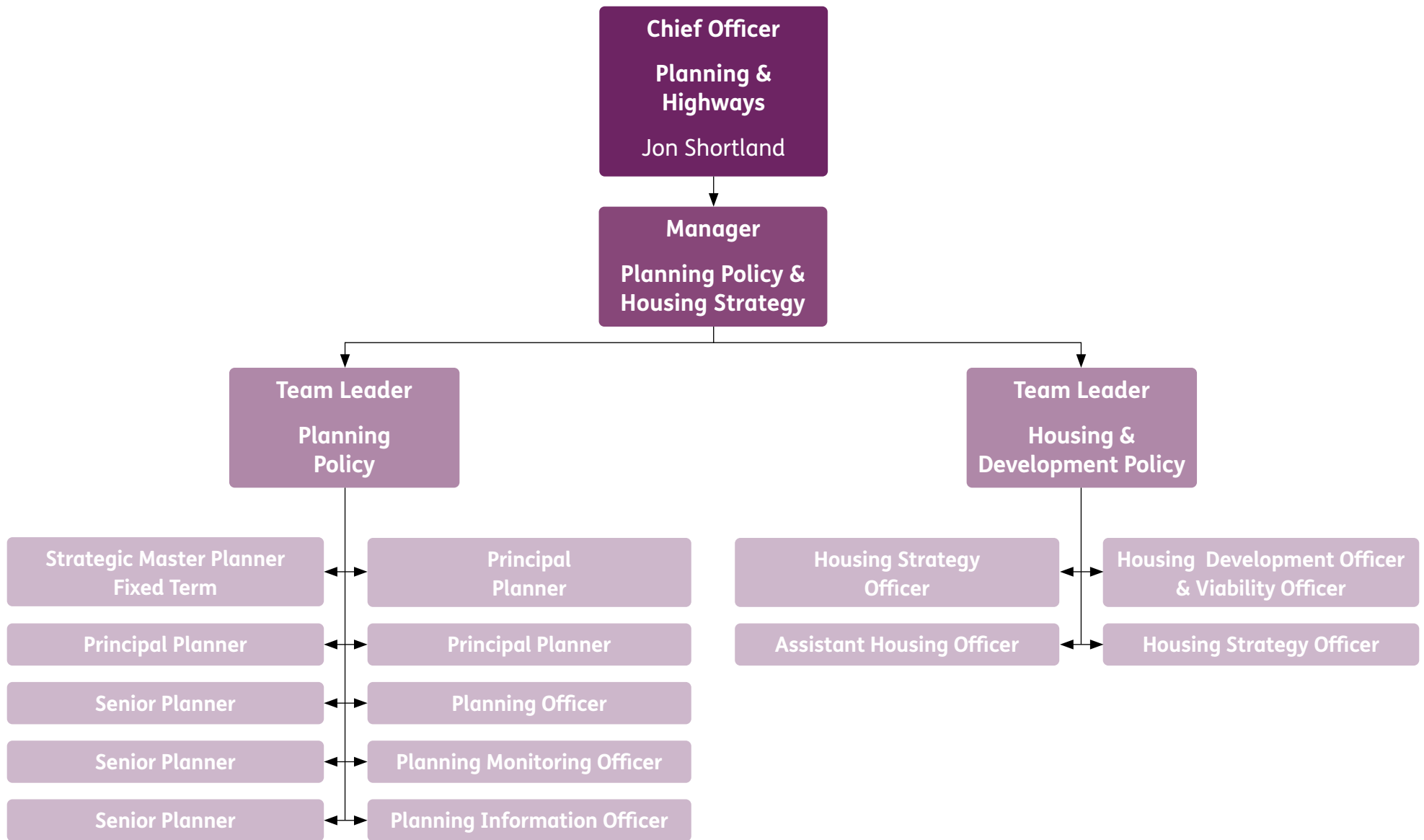
Appendix A: 2021 - 2022 Performance

Corporate Performance Indicators for Environment																
Indicator reference	Cum CP QM	Description	Excellent is...	Reporting frequency	2020/21 Actual	2021/22 Target	2021/22				YTD / Cumulative	Current RAG / DoT	Comparator Groups		Risk to Data Quality	Commentary
							Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4			National (most recent available)	Statistical Neighbours / Regional (most recent available)		
PLANNING																
C20a	CW3A	Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks Major 1-6 - Including Planning Performance Agreements and Agreed Extensions of Time in Line with DCLG	High %	Quarterly	80.9% (38 / 47)	60%	71.4% (10 / 14)	90.0% (9 / 10)	100% (6 / 6)		83.3% (25 / 30)	⬆️ G	88.3% Jul 19 - Jun 21	90.7% Jul 19 - Jun 21 CIPFA	😊 G	
					2020/21 →	50%	80% (16 / 20)	90% (9 / 10)	69.2% (9 / 13)	100% (4 / 4)	80.9% (38 / 47)					
C21a	CW3A	Planning applications determined within 8 weeks including Planning Performance Agreements and Agreed Extensions of Time in line with DCLG - Minor and Other developments 13-21	High %	Quarterly	71.7% (788 / 1,099)	70%	78.1% (242 / 310)	71.5% (248 / 347)	67.2% (238 / 354)		72.0% (728 / 1,011)	⬆️ G	88.0% Jul 19 - Jun 21	90.3% Jul 19 - Jun 21 CIPFA	😊 G	
					2020/21 →	50%	67.7% (155 / 229)	73.6% (190 / 258)	65.6% (193 / 294)	78.6% (250 / 318)	71.7% (788 / 1,099)					
D44a		Planning Approval of Conditions determined within 12 weeks (Includes EXTs)	High %	Quarterly	58.2% (228 / 392)	Context	71.9% (87 / 121)	65.5% (97 / 148)	41.2% (49 / 119)		60.1% (233 / 388)	⬇️	-	-	😊 G	
	2020/21 →				Context	55% (55 / 100)	76.9% (10 / 13)	55.8% (86 / 154)	61.6% (77 / 125)	58.2% (228 / 392)						
D45a		Planning Cases determined within 8 weeks - DOE 26-27 and 28 (not AOC) (Including EXTs)	High %	Quarterly	76.2% (575 / 755)	Context	63.5% (139 / 219)	71.6% (144 / 201)	72.2% (143 / 198)		68.9% (426 / 618)	⬆️	-	-	😊 G	
	2020/21 →				Context	79.2% (95 / 120)	79.9% (175 / 219)	79.5% (171 / 215)	66.7% (134 / 201)	76.2% (575 / 755)						
D46a		Planning - Pre-application Enquiries responded to within deadlines (13 weeks) (Includes EXTs)	High %	Quarterly	79.4% (342 / 431)	Context	87.4% (83 / 95)	82.7% (81 / 98)	68.2% (45 / 66)		80.7% (209 / 259)	⬇️	-	-	😊 G	
	2020/21 →				Context	47.2% (34 / 72)	85.2% (92 / 108)	83.2% (94 / 113)	88.4% (122 / 138)	79.4% (342 / 431)						
C23		Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks County Matters (Minerals & Waste) (Includes EXTs)	High %	Quarterly	66.7% (2 / 3)	Context	100% (2 / 2)	0% (0 / 1)	0% (0 / 2)		40.0% (2 / 5)	⬇️	-	-	😊 G	Caution: Low numbers
	2020/21 →				Context	100% (1 / 1)	0% (0 / 1)	n/a (0 / 0)	100% (1 / 1)	66.7% (2 / 3)						
HOUSING																
EDS M4 M1	CW3A	Net additional new homes provided	High	Annual	1,198	Context	X	X	X	Due Q4	-	-	-	-	😊 G	

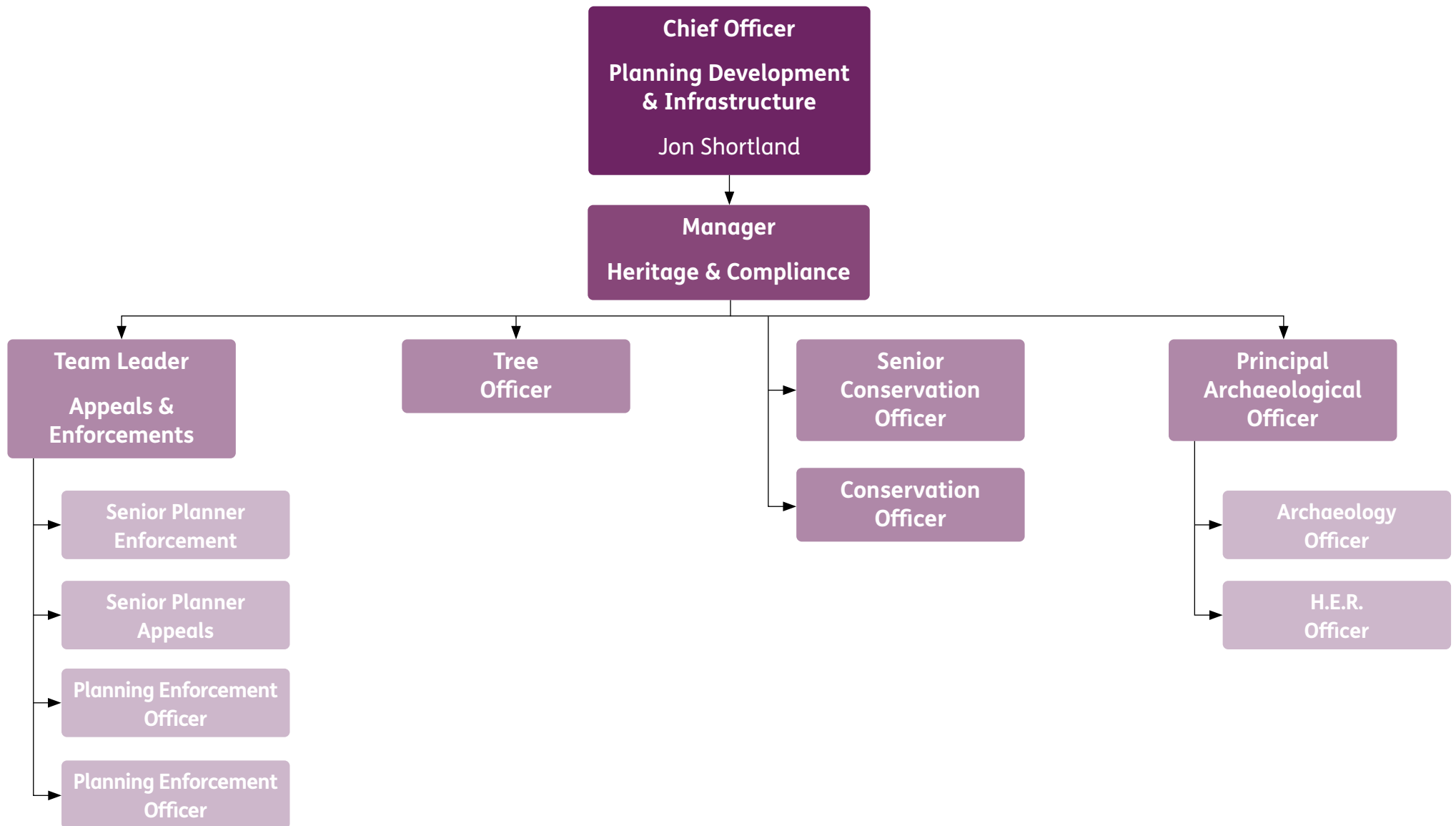
Appendix B: Structure Chart



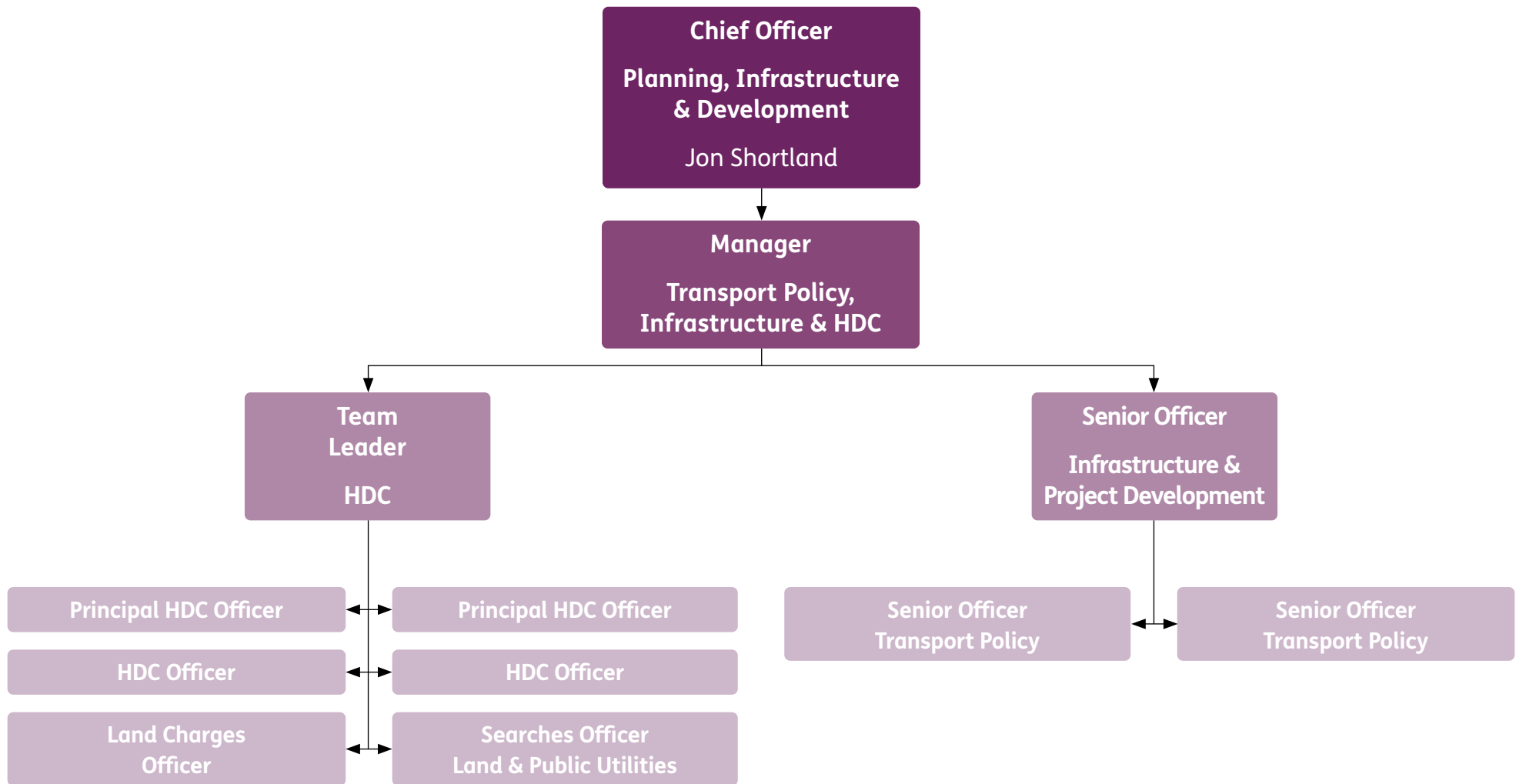
As of 1st April 2022



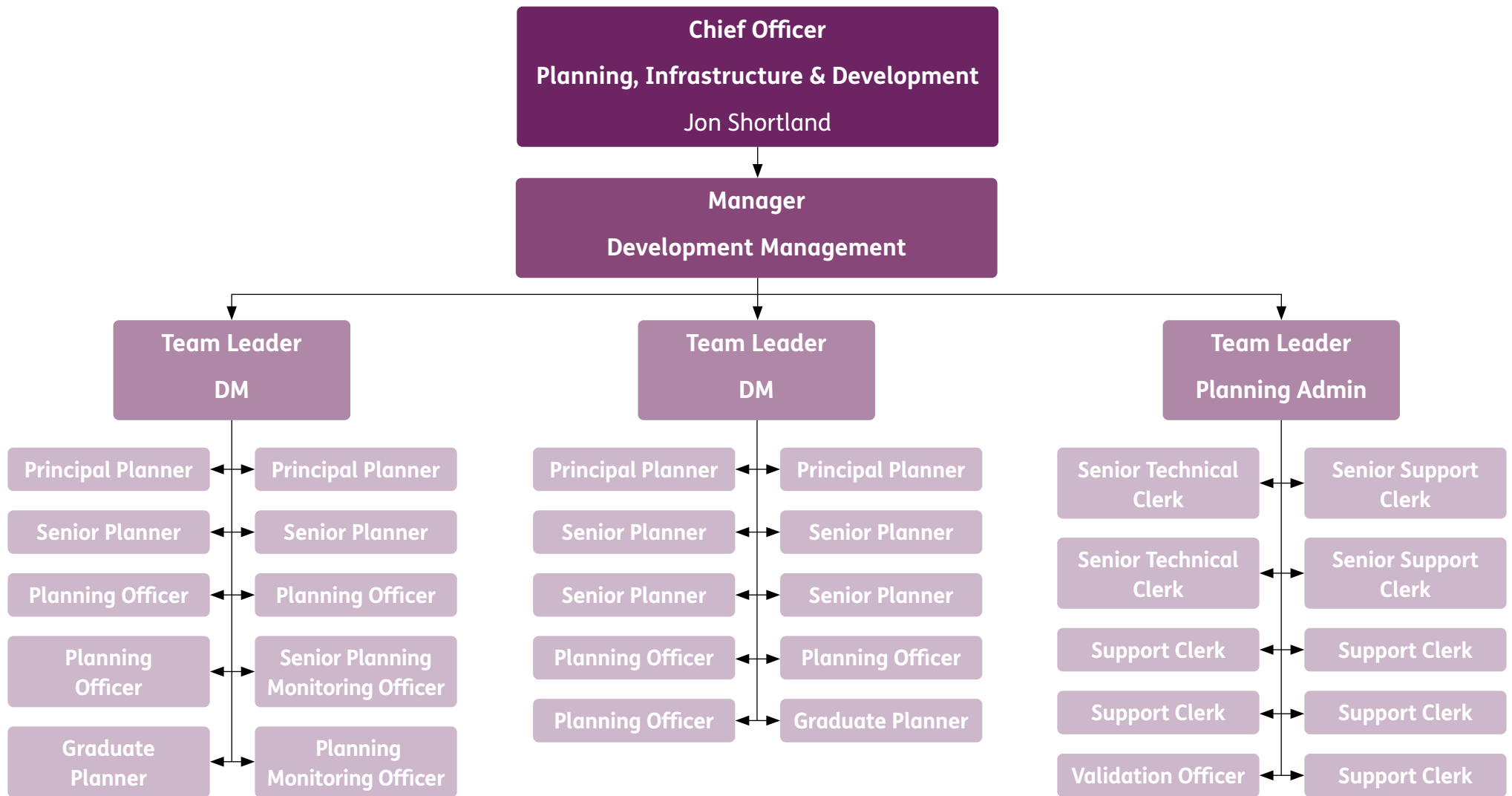
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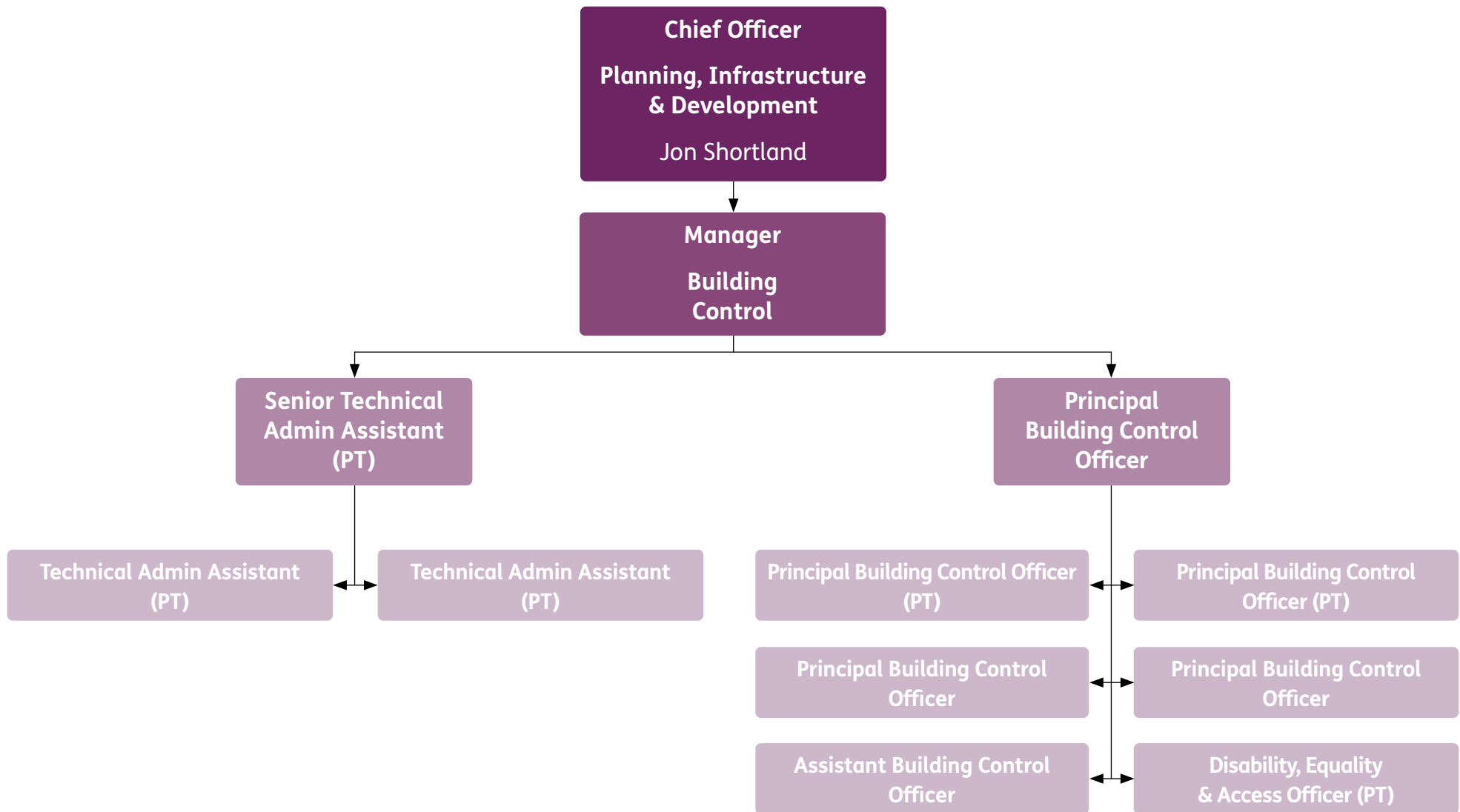
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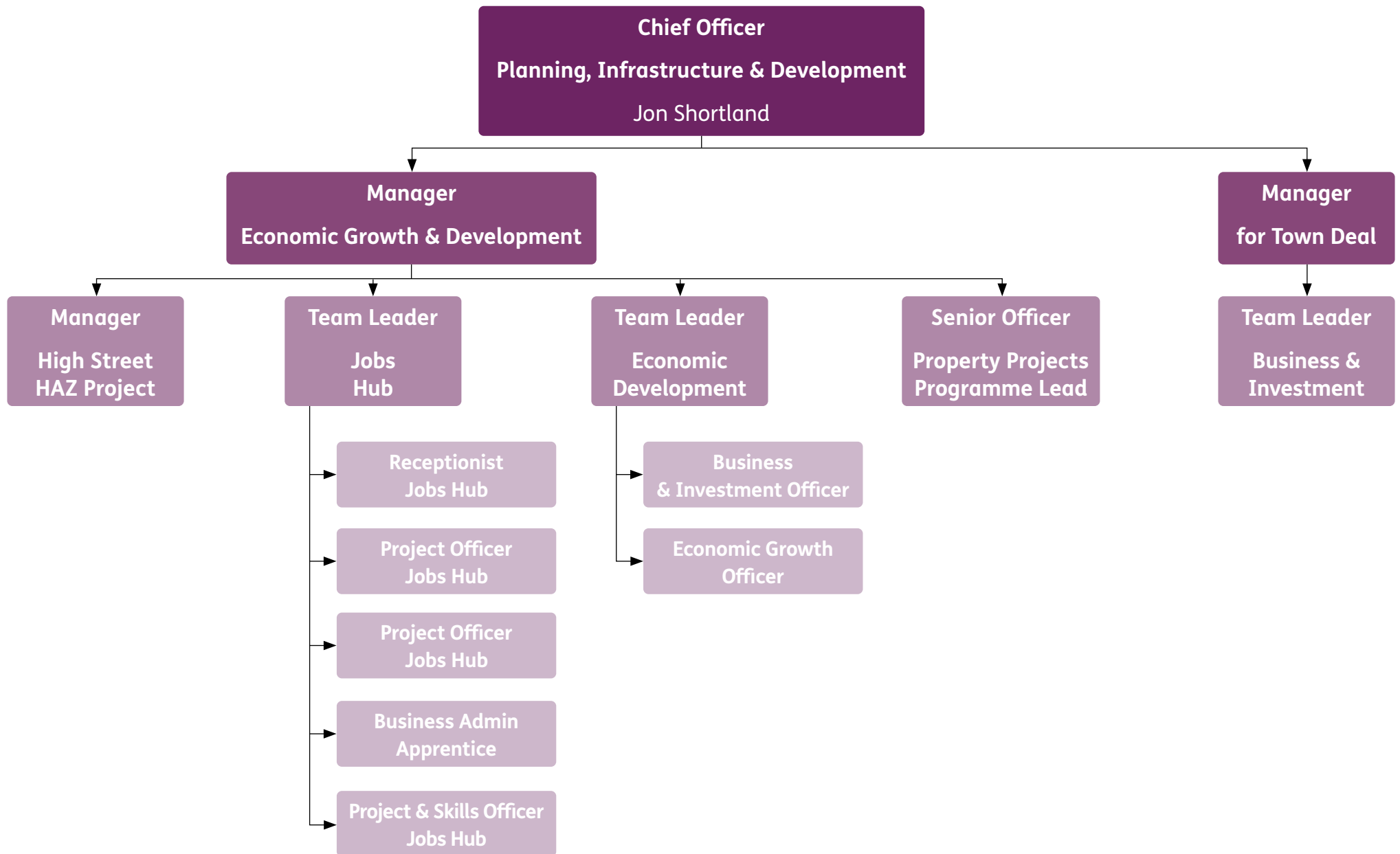
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As of 1st April 2022



As of 1st April 2022



Appendix C: PAS Recommendations

Priority actions to address immediate challenges

- a. Undertake a focused marketing campaign to promote Bedford as a great place to live and work as a Planner and develop relationships with Planning Schools to provide a source of potential applicants for roles in Bedford.
- b. Review roles within existing structures so that they can be used more flexibly to aid recruitment and to get the best Planning officers at all levels of experience.
- c. Commission a one off consultancy to reduce the open cases and consequent planning applications backlog. This needs to be tightly monitored to bring caseloads back to a manageable level.
- d. Focus on clearing caseloads in Appeals and Enforcement, including closing down old cases and those with minimal impact learning from best practice from councils in similar positions throughout the country
- e. Undertake a joint review by Planning and administrative staff of the existing report templates, using best practice throughout the country, to create more flexible and accessible report structures that can be adapted to different application types, including simplified report formats for delegated decisions.
- f. Reinstate the pre-applications service as soon as resources permit, to speed the determination of applications once submitted, enhance the Council's reputation for proactive delivery of quality developments and as a source of additional income. This should include a thorough review of the Council's current pre-application charging schedule and use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs).

Further actions to improve the effectiveness and quality of the service

- a. Identify a team of officers with a focus on strategic growth and other major projects to proactively deliver the strategic priorities set out in the Local Plan, taking advantage of grants and maximising income generation through the introduction of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs).
- b. Ensure a performance driven culture once vacant posts are filled with very clear targets for each officer on speed, quality and customer service and responsiveness to councillors. Ensure regular monitoring of performance that is visible to councillors.
- c. Ensure clear communication with stakeholders on the status of enforcement and appeals and likely timescales for action.
- d. Provide training and mentoring of Planning officers to use discretion and interpret consultee responses, so that case officers see themselves as project managers for the range of inputs to a report as the basis for subsequent determination.
- e. Review resources across the wider Environment Directorate to see if there is scope to provide the specialist advice to DM currently provided by outside parties (such as Wildlife Trust) and support those sections who provide internal consultations.
- f. Provide regular training opportunities for members of the Planning Committee and officers who advise them, with clear mandatory training requirements for Planning Committee members and an annual refresh.

- g. Ensure clear understanding and awareness of the protocols for Planning Committee procedures, including appropriate councillor contact with officers and identification of the potential need for site visits in advance of consideration at Committee, to avoid the need to defer to a subsequent meeting.
- h. Establish an officer / councillor focus group to review the information and presentation of officer reports to Committee so these are more accessible to councillors and support effective decision making. This should include the Legal Officer to ensure reports remain robust against possible challenge.
- i. Review the relationship between Planning officers and the Planning Admin team to clarify and develop a better understanding and clear demarcation of their respective roles.
- j. Examine whether Uniform can be made more responsive and streamlined for Planning officers and the Planning Admin Team, by a best practice review of other councils using Uniform and by specialist advice to provide an external perspective and additional expertise.
- k. Review the compatibility of the Uniform system and other software systems in place in the Council to enable consultees (such as Highways and Environmental Services) to more efficiently comment on planning applications without multiple handling of information and duplication.
- l. Consider reinstating the agents / developer forums to enable better engagement with the development community, with a view to the potential to foster better collaborative and proactive working between the Council and the development community to aid decision making in future.

Finding out more



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