

# Delivering Planning Change in a Time of Uncertainty

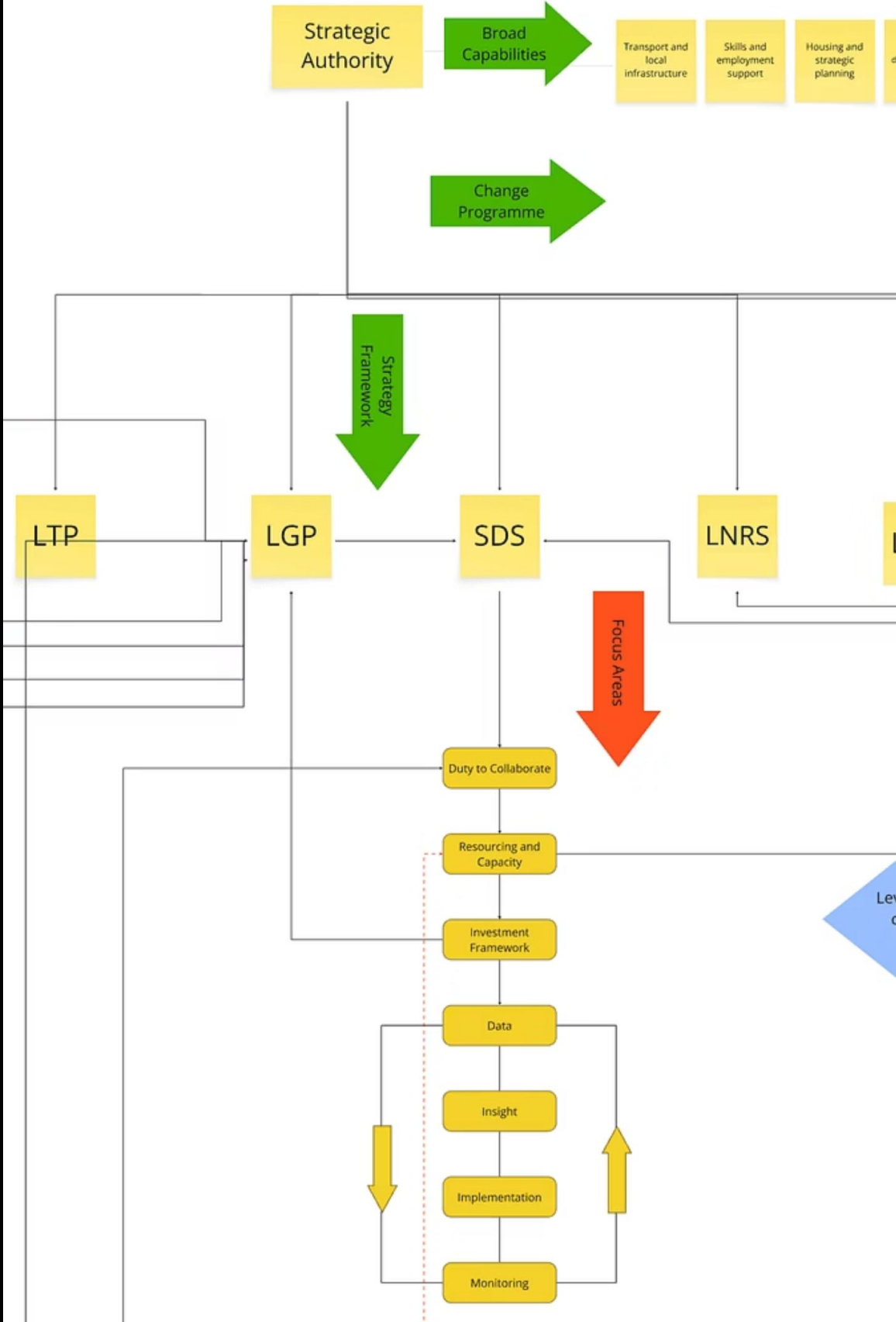
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planning advisory service

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# A Fast-Tracked, High-Risk Timeline

- 1** — **Now – Spring 2026**  
Mobilisation & Preparation: The Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025 now in place, councils in LGR areas should be designing and preparing their approach to transition and transformation (PMO, no regrets work)
- 2** — **May 2027: Shadow Unitary Authority elections.**  
Considerations around governance and decision making, committees and collaboration. Managing dependencies and risk (early prep)
- 3** — **May 2028**  
For Devolution Priority Programme areas (Greater Essex; Norfolk & Suffolk; Sussex & Brighton; Hampshire & Solent) inaugural mayoral elections have been moved from May 2026 to May 2028 to align with LGR completion. \*Two extra years of "pre-mayor" shadow working (SDS risk)
- 4** — **April 2028 (Vesting Day)**  
New Unitary Councils go live. Planning services must be "Safe and Legal" from Day One with no disruption to casework, applications, or plan preparation.

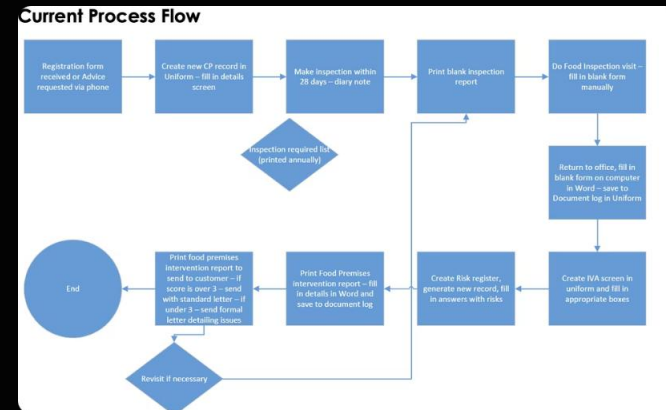


# Intersecting challenges



## The Local Plan Roundabout

Chief Planners must run two plan systems simultaneously, consolidating District Local Plans into Unitary-wide strategies while aligning with emerging MCCA spatial development strategies. The window to act is narrow, and the pressure to progress without pausing is real.



## Development Management Reforms

LGR transition is a high-vulnerability period for performance, and the risk of statutory designation under s62A is acute as teams merge and committees harmonise. Resilience must be built into PMO setup from the outset not retrofitted under pressure.



## Delivering Strategic Planning

Reorganisation creates two new planning tiers: Unitary and MCCA each requiring new cross-boundary relationships and joint planning frameworks to be built quickly. Connecting local infrastructure and housing delivery to broader economic growth corridors is the measure of success.



## Managing the Digital Revolution (Data First)

A standards-based approach to data is the foundation for spatial strategies, evidence bases, and devolution programmes, creating single sources of information that eliminate costly inconsistencies. This is the moment to redesign services using GenAI to automate routine tasks, free skilled capacity, and tackle application backlogs head-on.



# Five Actions to Ensure Planning Has a Profile During LGR (My 5....)



 ACTION 1

# Demand a Dedicated "Planning Transition PMO"

Establish a shadow governance and PMO kit specifically for planning to manage the complex merger of LPAs.

## The Framing

Establish a shadow governance and PMO kit specifically for planning to manage the complex merger of LPAs.

Story telling is essential to clearly communicate what planning actually is and the risks of not addressing transition properly.

## The Gap & Build-Out

Whilst much local government focus is heavily weighted on corporate IT, HR, and Social Care aggregation, Planning is a highly visible and complex, politically sensitive statutory service. Chief Planners must secure dedicated transition resources to standardise validation checklists, unify conditions libraries, and map out target IT architectures specifically for planning before Vesting Day.

## Why This Matters

Planning cannot be an afterthought in corporate transition plans. Without dedicated resources, the service risks becoming invisible until problems emerge.

# Development Management

## Project Management

ACTION 2

## Track Delivery Performance Through the Chaos

Reorganisation creates the perfect conditions for DM performance to deteriorate, just when scrutiny is intensifying. New mayoral combined authorities will bring call-in powers and strategic oversight that raise the stakes further. Chief Planners must build resilient performance frameworks that survive the transition and protect housing delivery throughout.



### Power BI Dashboards for Real-Time Oversight

Deploy Power BI dashboards that give live visibility of performance across all application types with specific focus on high-risk and strategic sites. Track speed, quality, and designation thresholds in one place. Make this data visible to senior leadership and the LGR PMO, not just planning managers.



### Elevate DM Risk to the Corporate PMO

DM performance cannot be managed by the planning service alone during LGR. Ensure development management is on the corporate risk register and that the council's LGR PMO actively supports planning transition resourcing, skills mapping, and capacity planning. Housing delivery depends on it, and that's a corporate priority, not just a planning one.



### Prepare for Mayoral Call-In Powers

The English Devolution Act will give strategic authorities new call-in and intervention powers over significant planning decisions. Map which application types and site categories are most likely to be affected. Build early relationships with the emerging mayoral authority to understand how these powers will operate in practice and reduce the risk of surprises.



### DM Technology & Data Integration

Merging authorities means merging planning systems, different back-office platforms, validation processes, conditions libraries, and reporting structures. Develop a clear integration roadmap: audit existing technology stacks, identify skills gaps in teams, and plan phased migration. Poor integration is the fastest route to performance collapse.

# Build Collaborative Partnerships for Spatial Development Strategies (SDS)

Chief Planners must proactively build working relationships with partner councils and emerging mayoral combined authorities now before SDS powers formally transfer. The foundations laid today will determine you being in partnership or passive recipients.

## The Opportunity

Spatial Development Strategies will require unprecedented cross-boundary collaboration. Getting ahead of this means establishing formal frameworks such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), data-sharing agreements, and shared governance structures

Data Sharing

Formalise MOUs/DSAs

Joint Capacity Planning

Shared Governance

## Building the Foundations

- **Data Sharing & Evidence Alignment:** Agree common data standards and shared evidence bases across partner authorities.
- **Memoranda of Understanding:** Formalise working relationships with MOUs that define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making protocols
- **Capacity Planning:** Map skills and resource gaps across partner authorities. Develop joint workforce strategies and secondment arrangement.
- **Shared Governance & Technology Integration** — Establish joint governance boards with clear terms of reference. Align digital transformation roadmaps and shared workflows.

# Become a Digital Leader: Data & AI at the Core of Planning

## Build in Digital & Data Pilots as part of Transition

- **Why Now:** Digital change is inevitable — and planning is one of the biggest winners. Services runs on vast, unstructured information, data and repeatable workflows. How can we use the LGR window to reimagine planning services of the future.

### Areas to Focus

- **Start with what you already own:** Microsoft 365 (SharePoint, Teams, Power Automate, Power BI), Azure, GIS, and the Open Digital Planning stacks. Only add niche tools after transitions or as an exception.
- **Stand up sprints/discoveries and end-to-end pilots during transition** that use generative AI (MS Co-Pilot) to reduce admin and hand-offs target  $\geq 20\%$  time savings with longer-term gains. Use human-in-the-loop to ensure safe and appropriate deployment and build skills within the team.
- **Design for scale:** Build once, reuse everywhere, templates, prompts, schemas, dashboards, and training that other teams can lift-and-shift.

### Guiding Principles

- **Outcomes first:** Fewer reworking workflows, reduce duplication, integrate local plan data, merge sequencing and LDS.
- **Human-in-the-loop:** Officers stay accountable; AI is assistive, transparent, and explainable.
- **Security & ethics:** Governance, DPIAs, red-team testing, prompt libraries, and model cards.
- **Small bets, fast learning:** 90-day sprints that slot into PMO roadmaps, then scale.

# Rethink Governance & Delegation That Improves and Speeds up Decisions

- 🗑️ **EDCE Bill × National Delegation:** Build a two-tier, trained, rules-based committee model under the 2025 Act, whilst designing in the roadmaps to fast, advisory neighbourhood area committees to satisfy the EDCE Bill so you gain speed, legal robustness, and credible local input.

## Legal Framework

- **Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025:** Enables a national scheme of delegation and modernised committees; the scheme will be mandatory via regulations.
- **Devolution overlay:** The English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill creates Strategic Authorities/SDS and a duty to establish neighbourhood governance (your Area/Neighbourhood Committees).
- **How they dovetail:** National delegation governs who decides what. Area committees are advisory only, feeding structured local insight into officer reports within strict SLAs not a second decision stage.

## Things to consider

- **Constitution & Scheme of Delegation:** Think lean Strategic Development Committees/streamlined main committees.
- **Area Committees Protocol:** Define scope, SLAs, and NDMP/SDS compliance checks. Keep them advisory, not quasi-determinative.
- **Member Training:** Mandatory training on probity, NDMPs, and SDS: non-negotiable before committees sit.
- **Timing & Dependencies:** Track the 2025 Act commencement waves and forthcoming regulations through 2026. If you're in a Devolution Priority Programme area, design committees to work through LGR now and pre-mayor to May 2028 without re-wiring later.





# Planning as the Enabler of Reform

Planning is not a back-office function waiting to be reorganised, it is the engine that delivers housing, growth, and place and is fundamental to the viability of councils themselves. If CEXs and council leaders don't invest in planning transition now, they risk much more than designation, stalled housing delivery, and a devolution agenda without spatial credibility.

Build your roadmap.

## Strategic Foundations

- **Build clear dependency roadmaps:** Map the critical path across all five actions, what must happen before vesting day, what can run in parallel, and what sequences through to the mayoral authority standing up.
- **Embed digital and data from day one:** Don't bolt on technology after transition. Bake data standards, Power BI reporting, and AI pilots into the PMO workstreams from the start.
- **Reimagine resourcing:** Think in three horizons: immediate (protect capacity, backfill key roles, commission strategic support - not reports), medium-term (automation, upskilling, shared service models), and long-term (cross-authority teams, AI-augmented workflows, new professional pathways).

## Tell the Story of Planning

- **Why should CEXs and leaders care?** Planning is the gateway to housing delivery, economic growth, and devolution credibility. A failing planning service doesn't just attract designation, it undermines the entire reform agenda.
- **Frame planning as an enabler:** Position the service as the council's route to unlocking growth, not a regulatory bottleneck. Every housing target, infrastructure commitment, and spatial strategy runs through planning.
- **Make the case for investment:** Dedicated transition resources, digital pilots, and workforce planning aren't costs, they're the insurance policy against reform failure.

"Act now. Don't just survive LGR. Define what good local government looks like on the other side."