

**PAS Chief Planners  
Conference - *Delivering  
change in a time of  
uncertainty***

City Hall, Leicester

# A message from PAS

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This year's conference explores delivering change in a time of uncertainty - a theme that reflects the significant shifts underway in both the planning system and local government. Since its establishment in 2004, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has supported councils through every phase of reform. Initially created to help embed the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, PAS continues to evolve in response to the sector's changing needs. Today, councils face increasing demands and limited capacity. PAS helps bridge that gap by offering practical tools, expert guidance, and access to peer networks that enable planners to respond confidently and proactively.

*"PAS understands the pressures we face and always brings practical, timely support. Their events are a rare chance to step back, reflect, and connect with others who really get it."* - **A Chief Planner**

*Well begun is half done.* Through this conference, we aim to equip you with valuable insights, support, and a community of peers, so that you can begin well.

## Our mission

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Our aim is to support LPAs in delivering effective, efficient, and innovative planning services that serve their communities while aligning with national priorities. We prioritise assistance to LPAs most in need and provide crucial support during times of sector-wide reform or change. Through our distinctive sector-led improvement approach, we facilitate collaboration between LPAs, enabling them to learn from and support each other in their continuous improvement journey. We keep local government officers and councillors equipped with current knowledge and best practices, while also offering specialised consultancy services to LPAs seeking expert review and enhancement of their planning services.

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# Our core services

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The Planning Advisory Service (PAS), as part of the Local Government Association (LGA), is funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to help LPAs in improving planning services. We support councils in keeping local plans up to date, strengthening decision-making, and navigating key planning issues. A key part of our work is running events that provide training for officers on new policies, legislation, and government guidance, ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to implement changes effectively. Our support also includes councillor training, peer challenges of planning services, and sector-led improvement, where councils collaborate to drive continuous progress. We connect you with experienced officers and members, offering practical and cost-effective advice. Whether responding to consultations, implementing new systems, or driving improvement we act as your critical friend—facilitating networks, sharing best practices, and developing toolkits to support local government.

## Planning Reform

In today's world nothing stands still for long, least of all the planning system. PAS support focuses on helping LPAs work and continue planning within a dynamic and changing system. This includes bespoke events to help councils respond to consultations and working papers, and practical support to help you keep planning in between current and proposed reforms to the planning system.

## Resources, Training & Development

PAS helps LPAs build skills and capacity to deliver cost-effective planning services through tailored workshops, virtual events, and learning modules. We help with resourcing challenges through initiatives such as the Pathways to Planning graduate programme, mentoring and coaching for planning managers, and supporting the government's capacity and capability programme. We are supporting the implementation of new technology transforming service delivery.

## Development Management Performance and Decision-Making

We support LPA Development Management services with a particular focus on councils who are designated or under threat of designation. Our activities include reviews of Development Management services, reviews of Planning Committees and officer and Member training. We provide online support through best practice guidance and will be working with LPAs to establish a local fee setting methodology.

## Plan-Making & Place Shaping

We provide advice and support to help LPAs navigate national planning policy changes, local plan production, and design and placemaking requirements within an evolving planning system. Our offer includes direct support, practical guides and toolkits. Whether it is a friendly catch-up with our experienced team or more in-depth, hands-on assistance from PAS and our expert partners.

## Developer Contributions & NSIPs

We provide practical support and planning tools to help improve the governance, management and delivery of developer contributions. We help LPAs navigate the complexities of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. Our support includes practical steps to identify areas for improvement, action plans and access to best practice ensuring impacts are mitigated, and the right infrastructure is secured.

## Planning & The Environment

We provide support for local authority planners and ecologists working together to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain, and specific programmes on Nutrient Neutrality, Nature Recovery, and Protected Sites Strategies, promoting integrated land-use approaches.

## Peer Challenges & Support

Our experienced officer and councillor peer challenge teams offer a strategic and in-depth look at the planning service and deliver an impartial and external assessment of the strengths and weaknesses. It's a powerful way to improve a current service and to shape long-term thinking in response to future challenges.

## Support for Councillors

Councillors' needs vary between LPAs, roles and length of experience. We provide training and briefings that provide information about the planning system in general and on specific topics. We also support chairs/vice chairs of planning committee and portfolio holders to help them understand the key characteristics of their role and developing their skills as a chair and leaders of the Local Plan.



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# The PAS TEAM



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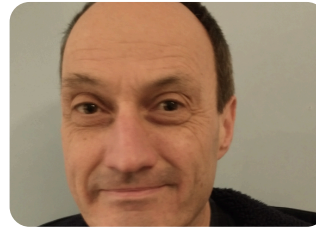
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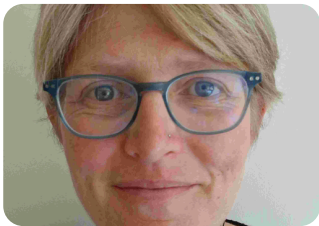
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# What's on - workshops

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## Day 1

### **Local Plans: The Two-System Helix**

Be part of the unveiling of the Government's new plans system from MHCLG. This session will explore how the new approach will operate alongside the existing system, followed by a panel discussion with MHCLG, PINS and local planning authorities on managing two plan systems in parallel.

### **Development Management Reforms: A Time to Embrace Change!**

This interactive workshop explores the Government's reforms to development management and their impact on planning decision-making. We'll examine how the changes aim to improve speed and quality, identify the challenges facing planning authorities, and discuss practical ways to respond and adapt.

### **Strategic Planning Is Back: What Does It Mean for You?**

This session begins with a briefing on the new era of strategic planning, devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Through facilitated group work, participants will explore the implications for local plans, engagement, governance, decision-making, resources and investment, focusing on actions you can take back to your organisation.

### **Managing the Digital Revolution**

As part of the Government's commitment to modernising the planning system, digital transformation is at the forefront of reform. Led by colleagues from MHCLG, this workshop will showcase the potential of digital technologies and explore how local planning authorities can position themselves to respond effectively.

## Day 2

### **The Local Plan Roundabout: Responding to the New System**

This interactive workshop invites participants to rotate through a series of themed discussions, exploring how to respond to the new local plan system in practice. Topics will include proportionate evidence bases, nature and environmental reforms, digital plan-making, maintaining momentum during LGR and SDS alignment, and meeting the 30-month timetable without losing your sanity.

### **Development Management Reforms: Learning from the Best**

This masterclass showcases how development management reforms can be a catalyst for innovation and excellence. Led by experts, the session will explore best practice in embracing change to improve the speed, quality and consistency of planning decision-making.

### **How Do We Help Deliver Strategic Planning?**

Two expert speakers will share real-world experience of making strategic and local plan working effective, highlighting practical lessons, common pitfalls and success factors. The session will challenge delegates to consider their own role in supporting strategic planning, with the aim of developing a practical 12-month action plan for cross-authority collaboration.

### **Preparing for and Delivering the Digital Revolution**

Three local planning authorities will present their digital transformation journeys, sharing key milestones, lessons learned and practical approaches. Delegates will leave with a clearer understanding of the steps and actions they can take to prepare for and deliver digital change in their own organisations.

## Keynote speakers

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### **SIR PETER SOULSBY**

#### **Mayor of Leicester**

Peter has served as Leicester's first City Mayor since 2011, having been re-elected in 2015, 2019 and 2023. He was previously Leader of the Council for 17 years in the 1980s and 1990s, and Member of Parliament for Leicester South (2005 -2011). As City Mayor, Peter has led delivery of the Connecting Leicester programme, investing in walking and cycling infrastructure, developing quality public realms and major regeneration to transform the waterside.



### **JOANNA AVERLEY**

#### **Chief Planner, MHCLG**

Joanna has been Chief Planner since 2020. She has over 30 years' experience working across tiers of government, major projects and with the public and third sector. She has been involved in all aspects of planning: research, policy, practice and project delivery.



### **KAREN SHAW**

#### **President of the Planning Officers Society (POS)**

Karen Shaw is Head of Planning Strategy and Geographic Information at Nottingham City Council, President of the Planning Officers Society and also Secretary for the Planning Officers Society Spatial Planning Network. Karen is a Chartered Town Planner and has over 25 years' experience working in the public and private sectors in planning. In her current role she is responsible for preparing the Local Plan for Nottingham City and managing a GIS Team which provides both corporate and planning functions.



### **GRAHAM STALLWOOD**

#### **Interim Chief Executive, PINS**

Graham joined the Inspectorate and Civil Service in 2019 to lead services across England and Wales, bringing over 20 years' experience in planning and leadership roles within local government, including as a Chief Planning Officer. He was previously a trustee of the RTPi for nine years and chaired its Board of Trustees.



### **TONY MCARDLE**

#### **Senior Sector Advisor, MHCLG**

A Chief Executive for over twenty years at District and County Councils including involvement in LGR in two county areas. Currently Lead Commissioner at Birmingham and previously intervention lead at Nottingham, Northants and LB Croydon. Has also undertaken senior roles advising DfE and as a Director of UKHSA during Covid.



### **PAUL FRAINER**

#### **Olive Branch Consulting**

Paul is a senior strategic planning advisor and digital specialist with 20+ years across local government and consultancy. He has consulted or led on a wide range of joint and strategic plans and currently advises on SDS, LGP's LGR and devolution, and has recently led the advisory work on PAS's SDS Readiness Guide. He currently working with a number of client authorities preparing SDS programs, linking digital data, growth plans, institutional capital and pension fund strategies.



## STEPHEN GABRIEL

### Chief Executive, Tamworth Council

Stephen has been Chief Executive of Tamworth Borough Council since April 2024, with over 36 years in local government. Starting at Birmingham City Council in 1989, he worked with communities and became Director of Housing Management. He later served as Programme Director for West Bromwich town centre regeneration at Sandwell Council, overseeing major projects and pioneering anti-modern slavery work, earning an APSE Awards nomination. He continues to lead with a focus on community impact and effective governance.



## RT HON NICK RAYNSFORD

### President of TCPA

Nick Raynsford has had a lifelong career in housing and public policy. Formerly Director of SHAC, he helped secure the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act and the introduction of Housing Benefit. Elected MP in 1986, he served as a Housing Minister after 1997, leading major initiatives including the creation of the Greater London Authority and the Decent Homes Programme. Since leaving Parliament in 2015, he has remained active in housing, planning and infrastructure, serving as President of the Town and Country Planning Association and holding senior advisory roles with Crossrail, the Government's New Towns Taskforce and the Independent Panel on Building Control.



## ABIGAILE BROMFIELD

### Leader for New Settlements and Regeneration, Homes England

Abigaile leads Homes England's national advisory work on New Settlements and Regeneration, supporting key Government priorities. Previously a Director at Arup and Midlands Growth Director, she has helped shape national planning policy, co-authoring guidance on Planning Performance Agreements and mediation. She is a Fellow of the RTPI and a Non-Executive Director at Midland Heart.



## JAMES SCOTT

### Group Director of Planning & Strategy, Urban&Civic

James is the Group Director of Strategy and Planning and a founder member of master developer Urban&Civic. Prior to Urban&Civic, James specialised in planning and environmental law at Dechert LLP and was part of the senior executive team of Lend Lease Europe. Having previously served as a Non-Executive Director of East Thames Housing Association and sat on the Development Committee of L&Q, James is also a Senior Advisor to Dorrington PLC and a Non-Executive of Natural England.



## LOUISE WOOD

### Head of Planning, Cornwall Council

Louise is Service Director for Planning and Housing (Chief Planner) at Cornwall Council. With a background in art and design, she began her career in London before returning to Cornwall in 2008. She has led major projects including West Carclaze Garden Village and now oversees planning and Council Homes. Louise is also a Non-Executive Director at Public Practice, supporting future place leaders.



## JON PALMER

### Head of Planning, Milton Keynes City Council

Currently Head of Planning at Milton Keynes which ranks among the top cities for productivity, high-tech jobs, and high rates of housing growth in the UK. This follows on from life as a policy planner within the public sector working for a few Local Planning Authorities and Regional Development Agencies.



## **GRANT BUTTERWORTH**

### **Head of Planning, Leicester City Council**

Grant Butterworth has worked in a wide range of planning roles in City environments since 1987, heading up planning services at Nottingham and Liverpool before his current role as Head of Planning at Leicester City Council. He currently seeks to shape Leicester's growth through ambitious planning, design and sustainability actions.



## **ROB KRZYSZOWSKI**

### **Director of Planning and Building Standards, Haringey Council**

Rob is the chief planner and oversees the Planning, Building Control, Transport & Travel services at Haringey in north London. The service won Local Authority Planning Team of the Year at the 2024 Planning Awards. Rob co-founded Planning Out, a network for LGBT+ planning professionals and he is also a peer reviewer for PAS Planning Peer Challenges.



## **BEN WOOLNOUGH**

### **Head of Planning, Building Control & Coastal Management, East Suffolk Council**

A Planner since 2007 and Head of Service since 2024, Ben leads a team of 115 officers across one of the largest District Councils in the country. East Suffolk has a diverse mix of rural and urban challenges, from major brownfield regeneration, a large and sensitive National Landscape and major ports and energy projects.



## **ALISON BLOM-COOPER**

### **Head of Planning, Somerset Council**

Alison is the Chief Planning Officer at Somerset Council. Having gone through local government reorganisation in 2023 Alison has created and built the unified planning service for Somerset, one of the largest planning authorities in England. She was named as a Woman of Influence in 2025.

# Agenda

On day one we will focus on understanding the planning reforms landscape and setting the foundations for change, and on day two we will look at delivery; leading and managing change, maximising resources and innovative solutions, covered by:

- Insights, guidance and updates on the key planning system reforms and policy changes;
- Expert-led sessions focused on delivering resilient, high-impact planning services

We'll also be making space and time for dedicated networking and discussion sessions, giving you the chance to connect with fellow planning leaders to share perspectives on the opportunities and challenges as you prepare for 2026 and beyond.

## Day 1 – February 26th 2026

### *The planning reform landscape & setting the foundations for change*

<b>9.00</b>	Registration and Coffee	
<b>10.00</b>	Welcome, Introduction and Conference Programme	<b>Anna Rose</b> , Head of Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
<b>10.20</b>	Welcome to Leicester - Opening words	<b>Sir Peter Soulsby</b> , Leicester City Mayor
<b>10.30</b>	MHCLG Keynote Address	<b>Joanna Averley</b> , Chief Planner at MHCLG
<b>11.00</b>	Break	
<b>11.15</b>	Plenary Discussion - Roadmap to Reform	<b>Karen Shaw</b> , President of POS; <b>Graham Stallwood</b> , Chief Executive, PINS ; <b>Tony McArdle</b> , Senior Sector Advisor at MHCLG; <b>Paul Frainer</b> , Olive Branch Consulting
<b>12.30</b>	Networking Lunch	
<b>13.15</b>	Concurrent Seminars	Refer to <i>What's On</i> section for Day 1.
<b>A</b>	Local Plans: The Two-System Helix	PAS Team/Guest(s)
<b>B</b>	Development Management Reforms: A Time to Embrace Change!	
<b>C</b>	Strategic Planning Is Back: What Does It Mean for You?	
<b>D</b>	Managing the Digital Revolution	
<b>14.30</b>	Break & Networking	
<b>14:45</b>	Concurrent Seminars	Repeat of previous sessions.
<b>A</b>	Local Plans: The Two-System Helix	PAS Team/Guest(s)
<b>B</b>	Development Management Reforms: A Time to Embrace Change!	
<b>C</b>	Strategic Planning Is Back: What Does It Mean for You?	
<b>D</b>	Managing the Digital Revolution	

## Day 1 – February 26th 2026

### *The Planning Reform Landscape & Setting the Foundations for Change*

16.10	Delivering in a Time of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity	<b>Stephen Gabriel</b> , Chief Executive, Tamworth Council
16.50	Closing Remarks	<b>Anna Rose</b> , Head of Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
<b>End of Day One</b>		
19.15	Pre-dinner Address	<b>Nick Raynsford</b> , President of TCPA
19.30	Networking Dinner	

## Day 2 – February 27th 2026

### *Delivering Change*

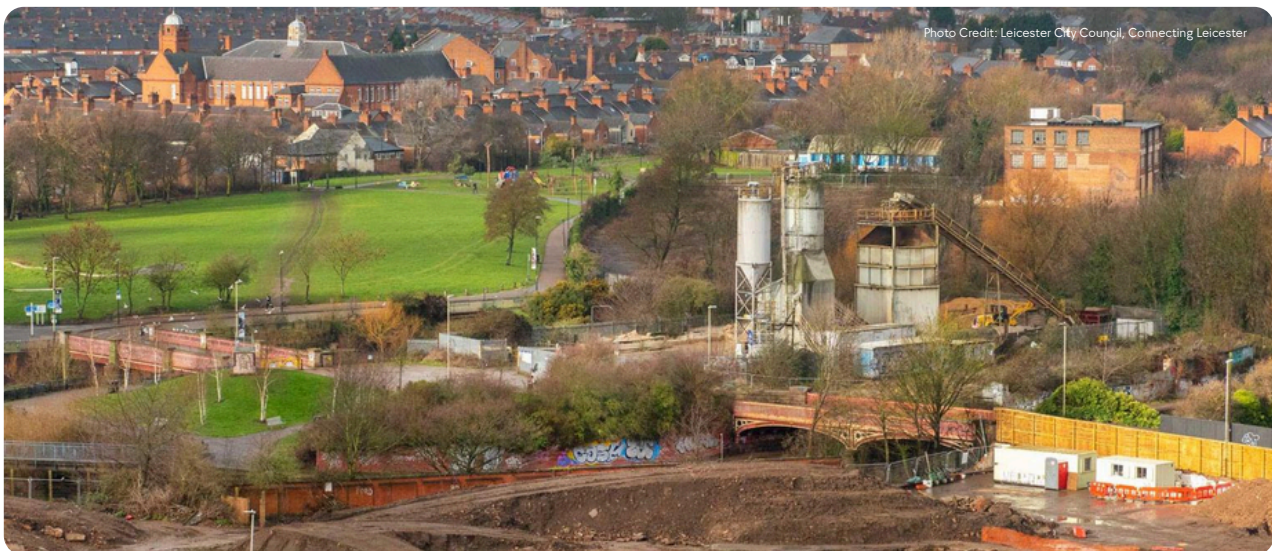
8.30 - 9.45	<b>(Option 1)</b> Leicester Planning Team: Tour of Leicester - <b>a)</b> <i>Waterside</i> , <b>b)</b> <i>Leicester's Heritage</i> , <b>c)</b> <i>Connecting Leicester</i>	Meet at the Holiday Inn Hotel Foyer
8.45 - 9.45	<b>(Option 2)</b> Networking	Meet at the Conference Venue
9.45	Introduction to Day Two	<b>Anna Rose</b> , Head of Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
9.50	Plenary - Delivering Successful Projects	<b>Abigaile Bromfield</b> , Leader for New Settlements and Regeneration, Homes England; <b>James Scott</b> , Group Director of Planning & Strategy, Urban&Civic; <b>Louise Wood</b> , Head of Planning at Cornwall Council; <b>Jon Palmer</b> , Head of Planning at Milton Keynes City Council.
11.00	Break & Networking	
11.15	Concurrent Seminars	Refer to <i>What's On</i> section for Day 2.
<b>A</b>	The Local Plan Roundabout: Responding to the New System	PAS Team/Guest(s)
<b>B</b>	Development Management Reforms: Learning from the Best	
<b>C</b>	How Do We Help Deliver Strategic Planning?	
<b>D</b>	Preparing for and Delivering the Digital Revolution	
12.30	Networking Lunch	
13.15	Concurrent Seminars	Repeat of previous sessions.
<b>A</b>	The Local Plan Roundabout: Responding to the New System	PAS Team/Guest(s)
<b>B</b>	Development Management Reforms: Learning from the Best	
<b>C</b>	How Do We Help Deliver Strategic Planning?	
<b>D</b>	Preparing for and Delivering the Digital Revolution	

## Day 2 – February 27th 2026

### Delivering Change

14.30	Plenary Panel - Delivering Change - How would we do it? Discussion focused on the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the Local Plan to be progressed under the current system or do we await the new system?</li><li>• What are we going to do about planning fees?</li><li>• What are we going to do about LGR?</li><li>• How are we gearing up for delivery?</li></ul>	<b>Grant Butterworth</b> , Head of Planning, Leicester City Council; <b>Rob Kryszowski</b> , Director of Planning and Building Standards, Haringey Council; <b>Ben Woolnough</b> , Head of Planning, Building Control and Coastal Management, East Suffolk Council; <b>Alison Blom-Cooper</b> , Head of Planning, Somerset Council
15.15	Closing Comments/Address	<b>Anna Rose</b> , Head of Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
15.30	End of Conference	

### Walking tours - *additional information*



**For delegates who have signed up to these, the three walking tours will run concurrently from 8:30am to 9:35am.**

**a) Waterside:** Led by **David Beale** and **Brendan McGarry** – Explore a comprehensive, area-based regeneration project delivered through a dynamic public-private partnership. Featuring innovative SPD and CPO strategies, this initiative demonstrates how targeted planning can drive direct outcomes, building confidence and certainty in the market.

**b) Leicester's Heritage:** Led by **Justin Webber** – Discover 2,000 years of history and how heritage is preserved through proactive design, direct action, and effective development management. This tour highlights the impact of the Townscape Heritage Initiative and Heritage Action Zone programmes in safeguarding the city's rich architectural legacy.

**c) Connecting Leicester:** Led by **Steve Richards** – Explore a transformative public realm initiative designed to create vibrant new spaces that are pedestrian- and cycle-friendly. This scheme connects key areas of the city centre, enhances accessibility, and reduces the dominance of roads, showcasing innovative approaches to urban regeneration and sustainable city planning.

# PAS support - what's on offer?

## Planning Peer Reviews

Peer reviews (also known as peer challenges) are sector-led and improvement-focused, with the scope agreed and tailored to reflect each council's local priorities and specific needs. Delivered by experienced officers and councillors from across the sector, the process provides constructive challenge, practical support, and targeted ideas to help councils respond effectively to local issues.

Designed to be proportionate and minimise burden, peer reviews focus on efficient preparation and maximising impact. Review teams are carefully selected to match the council's requirements, typically comprising 3–4 senior peers, supported by an LGA peer review manager to ensure a well-organised and effective process.

If this is of interest to your council and you'd like to arrange a peer review at your council, get in touch with the PAS Team.

## Become a Peer Reviewer

We are regularly recruiting planning peers and would be delighted to hear from you if you are interested in getting involved. To become a planning peer for PAS, you must meet specific criteria to ensure maximum benefit for the councils we support and to enable you to gain valuable experience for your own professional development.

If you are interested in contributing your expertise to support sector-led improvement, we would welcome a conversation.

## Development Management

This support is designed to help councils review and improve their processes, using practical tools and sector expertise. Reviews are tailored to your council's priorities, whether focusing on key areas of Development Management or Planning Committee operations. Delivered by experienced former DM Managers, senior planning officers, and member peers, the process includes interviews with councillors, officers, and key stakeholders. The outcome is a clear, concise report with findings and structured, actionable recommendations to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and the value generated.

## Planning Committee Training & Support

Training for Planning Committee members is designed to provide the essential knowledge for new members, refresher sessions for existing members, and practical experience through case studies.

Sessions are supported by experienced member peers, offering insight from a councillor perspective. Training can also be bespoke, covering topics such as Enforcement, Local Plans, or Biodiversity Net Gain, and may include mentoring or coaching to help committees operate effectively in challenging circumstances.

Fees range from £1,500 for focused training to £17,000 for a comprehensive peer challenge. To explore training options, contact the PAS Team or speak with Programme Manager Richard Crawley.





## Pathways to Planning

*Are you facing resourcing challenges in your planning and/or surveying teams?*

Since its launch in 2023, the LGA's Pathways to Planning programme has brought more than 200 new planners into over 100 local authorities in England. Pathways to Planning is a government-funded graduate programme aimed at recruiting a diverse pipeline of talent into built environment professions in local authorities, statutory consultees, and councils hosting nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs).

The programme offers a diverse talent pipeline of high achieving graduates to work as planners, construction project managers and surveyors in local authorities. Each graduate comes with an educational bursary to fund their study on a part-time master's selected by the employer, fast tracking their professional development.

A limited number of salary bursaries valued at £40,000 are also available to authorities with high need who cannot fund graduate posts due to financial constraints. Applications for funding are considered on a rolling basis, with the first-round deadline at the end of February. If you miss this initial opportunity, we will have a second window for councils to sign up in April and May. The next cohort of graduates will start in September 2026.

If you are interested in hearing more about the programme please contact [emma.roberts@local.gov.uk](mailto:emma.roberts@local.gov.uk) or visit: [www.local.gov.uk/pathways-planning-council-info](http://www.local.gov.uk/pathways-planning-council-info), for further information.

**February 2026**

Get in touch with us at: ***pas@local.gov.uk***

[www.local.gov.uk/welcome-planning-advisory-service-pas](http://www.local.gov.uk/welcome-planning-advisory-service-pas)