



Workshop Day 1

Managing the digital revolution (room G02)

local.gov.uk/pas

Aims & Objectives

Day 1 - Managing the digital revolution

Government is committed to modernising the planning system and core to this is the digital transformation of planning services. Led by colleagues at MHCLG this workshop will provide an overview of the possibilities of digital technologies and discuss how LPAs can be best placed to respond.

Day 2 - Preparing for and delivering the digital revolution

Three LPAs will share their digital transformation journeys, highlighting key milestones, lessons learned, and practical strategies for success. This will enable delegates to identify strategies, steps and actions that could be taken to position themselves for the digital transformation.

Aims & Objectives

- Day 1 vs Day 2
- Similar topics, but different purpose
- Day 1 = “what is going on?”
- Day 2 = “what am I supposed to do about it?”

- This is day 1 What is going on ... ?

Expectation Management

- We are not going to demo flashy new technologies
- No rushed “show & tell”
- Instead – a step back. What has happened so far, and what should happen next?
- We are at an interesting time. The end of a three year programme, the start of the next.
 - (This is why MHCLG digital team are not here)
- Questions for understanding as we go – discussion at the end. You might not agree!

Agenda (Workshop)



- We run for 1 hour and 10 minutes
- 10 mins: **Richard Crawley** : Digital planning in four acts
- 15 mins: **David Waterhouse**: The wider “cap & cap” perspective from Government
- 10 mins: **Kat Salter**: Skills, training and what we have learned so far
- Bringing it together and discussion: Richard
 - Make sense? Agree?
 - What have we missed out?
 - What other drivers are in play?
 - How much is your planning service able to influence corporate approaches?

Digital Planning in 4 phases



- Phase 1: Product-led experimentation (before scaling) “*Can we build better tools?*”
- MHCLG funded local authority–led digital innovation through the Local Digital Fund
- Focus was on specific pain points in planning, not whole-system reform
- Two early products emerged:
 - PlanX – for guiding applicants through planning questions
 - Back Office Planning System (BOPS) – for handling applications and documents

PlanX

PlanX is a content management system for creating digital planning services. It allows local planning authorities to collaboratively build and maintain data-driven planning services.

Back Office Planning System (BOPS)

BOPS is a back-office planning system that has been designed, developed and tested with local authority planners.

Digital Planning in 4 phases



- Phase 2: Realisation that products alone won't scale (around 2022)“ *Tools don't spread by themselves*”
- What changed?
- MHCLG concluded that adoption was limited without:
 - shared standards
 - peer support
 - consistent data
- This is when Open Digital Planning (ODP) was intentionally formed as a community, not just a product suite
- ODP is described as the way MHCLG connects councils, projects and long-term change, rather than running isolated pilots.



Digital Planning in 4 phases



- Phase 3: Structured onboarding via the Digital Planning Improvement Fund (last 3 years) “*Bring more councils in, in a consistent way*”
- What the Improvement Fund does
 - Councils receive: Funding (£50k per authority)
 - A digital planning maturity assessment
 - Support to:
 - publish key datasets to the Planning Data Platform
 - improve digital capability
 - join the Open Digital Planning community
- Not competitive funding / bids
- Cohorts, learning together and helping each other. The start of PAS involvement.



Laying the foundations for better local public services

ODP resources

Access digital and data training

User research

Content design

Human centred design

Monitoring and evaluation

Procurement

Power BI

Introduction to change management

Artificial intelligence (AI)

Agile delivery training

GIS and spatial data

Introduction to Agile

Guides and tutorials

Collaborating with other LPAs

Modern procurement guidance

Digital Planning case studies

Monitoring and evaluation of

ODP products

Digital Planning in 4 phases



- **Phase 4: Integrated product stack and system change (now)** “*From improvement to live service change*”
- What’s different now?
 - Products are no longer standalone pilots
 - PlanX, BOPS and the Digital Planning Register are being tested together as a single end-to-end service
 - Live pilots with multiple councils using the full stack*
 - Building control tests have started

Digital Planning in 4 phases



- My own take –
 1. ODP is a marvellous community (energy! enthusiasm!) but disconnected from the rest of the service (*“Jenna is the innovation person” / “We have some people somewhere funded by ODP but I don’t know what they’re doing”*)
 2. Funding councils is great! (but they’re often rolling the money forwards not sure what to spend it on)
 3. It’s not a product you can buy, so much a lifestyle you can lead
 4. This is not a solved problem, and it’s a great time for senior people to lean in. LGR = opportunity?
 5. Unresolved questions about who receives value from better, standard data and how to incentivise councils
- Next: David and the wider cap&cap story



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Planning Capacity & Capability overview

David Waterhouse
Deputy Director - Planning Capacity and Capability

MHCLG

26 February 2026



What problem are we solving?

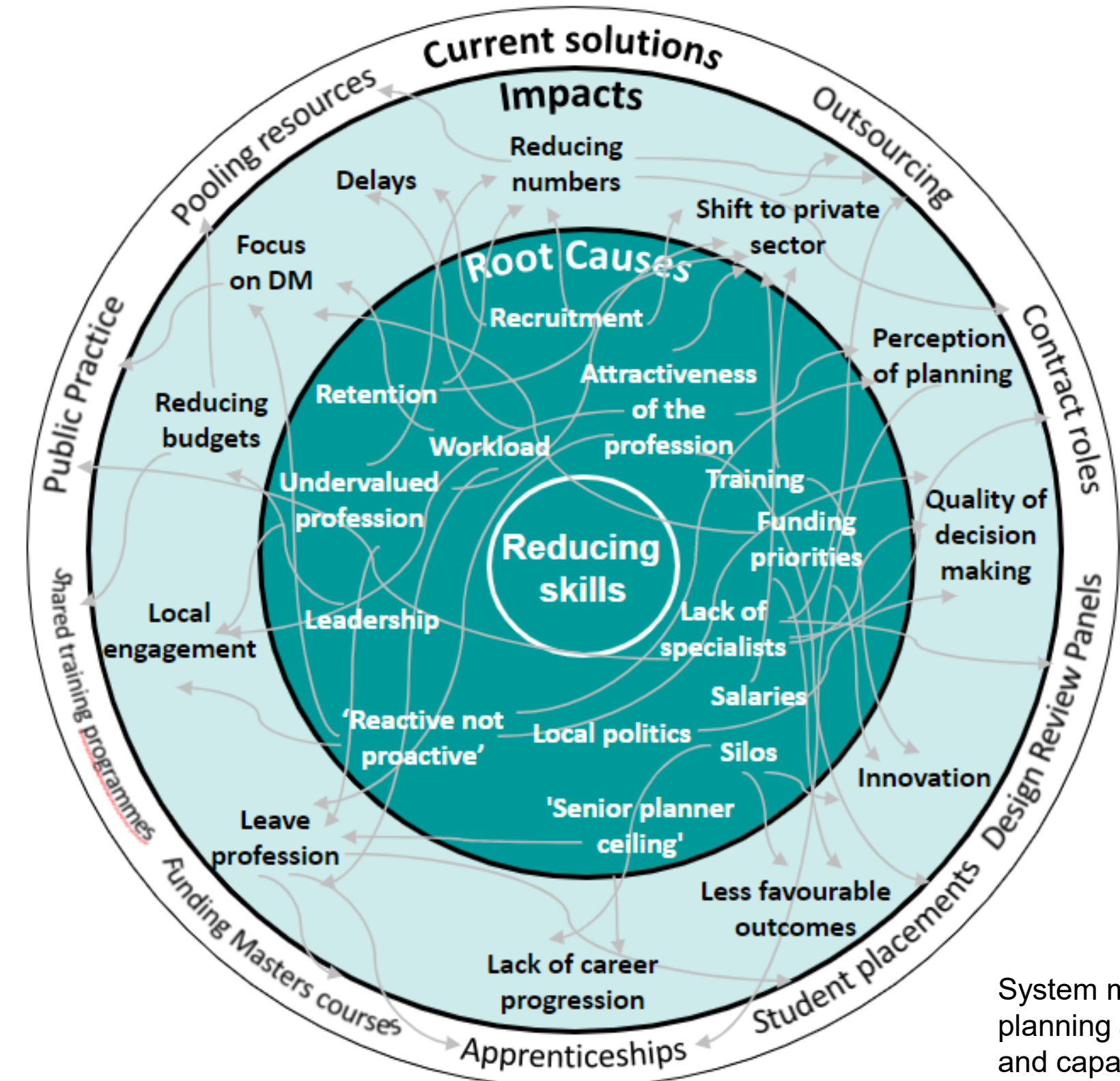
Causes, Effects and Current Solutions For The Skills Gap In LPAs

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) face challenges in meeting current demands and adapting to ongoing and future planning reforms.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the Planning and Infrastructure Act, will significantly reshape the planning system.

The Capacity and Capability Programme, developed with the sector, aims to support a modernised planning system that is better equipped to manage demand and deliver reform.

- **Key stats: 79% recruitment difficulty (2025) | 44% retention difficulty | 93% skills gaps**



System map around local planning authority skills and capacity

MHCLG PLANNING CAPACITY AND SKILLS PULSE SURVEY 2025

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE & CONTEXT

The survey helps us understand the requirements of local planning authorities in respect to the skills and people needed to deliver the planning service, implement reforms and unlock development.

All 327 local authority planning departments were invited and **148** participated.

This excludes Development Corporations.



PROGRAMME PURPOSE

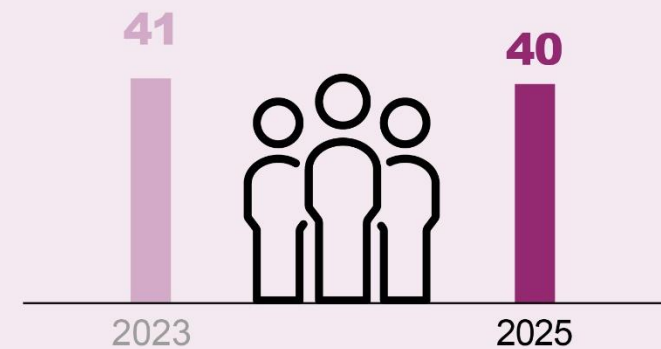
The government recognises the pressures facing local planning authorities and is investing £46 million in 2025-2026 to strengthen their capacity and capability to deliver planning reform and meet housing targets.

The Planning Capacity and Capability Programme is a core part of this, supporting recruitment, training, and improved service delivery across the country.



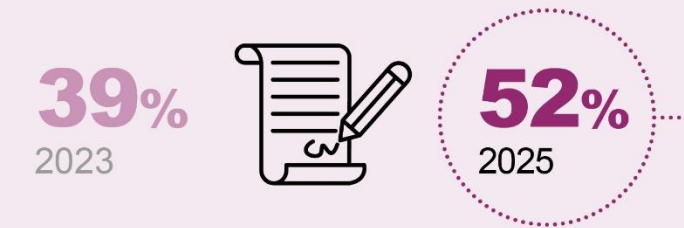
WORKFORCE SNAPSHOT

Only a small change in planning department team size.

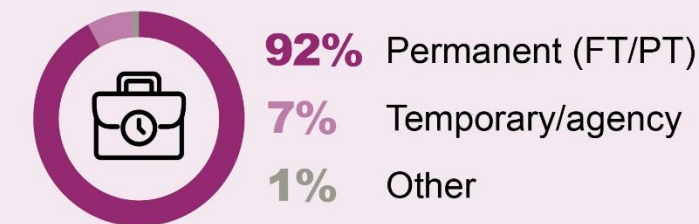


Over half of local authority planning departments share services with other authorities.

Sharing skills via contract or formal agreement

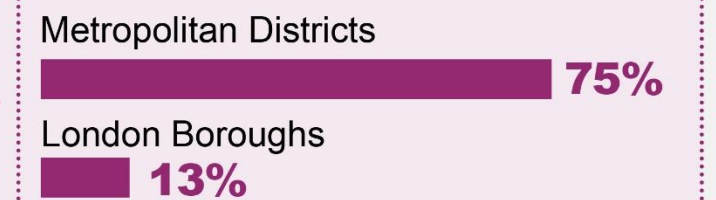


Majority permanent and full-time staff.



Some local planning authority types were more likely to share services than average.

Metropolitan Districts more likely to share services than average in 2025.



Training budget per person:

c. £250-£300

68% of planning departments identified budget was a key barrier to upskilling.



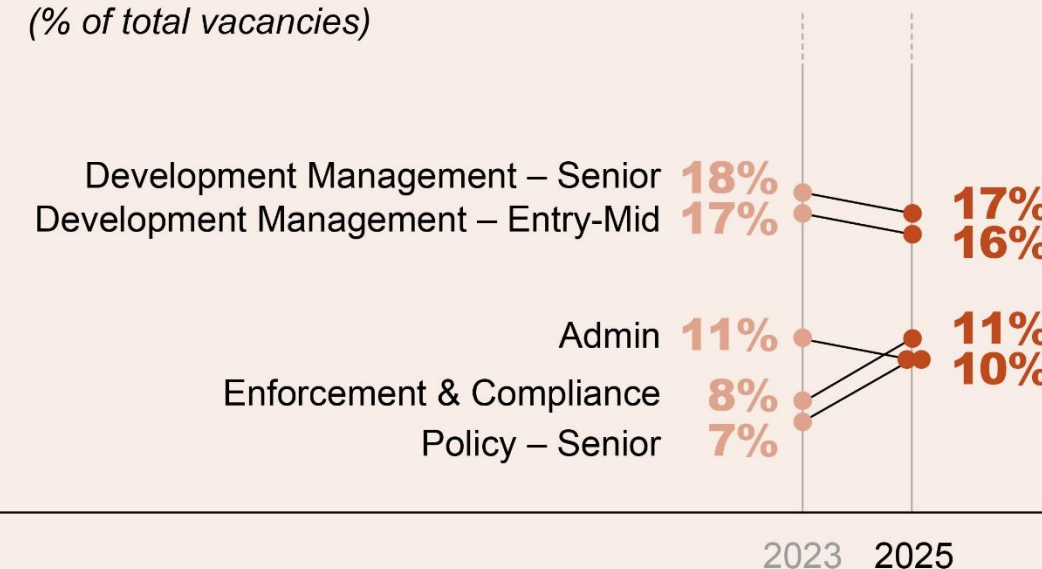
VACANCIES & NEW JOINERS



On average there were **5.7 vacancies** open per department in 2025, compared to **8.8** in 2023.

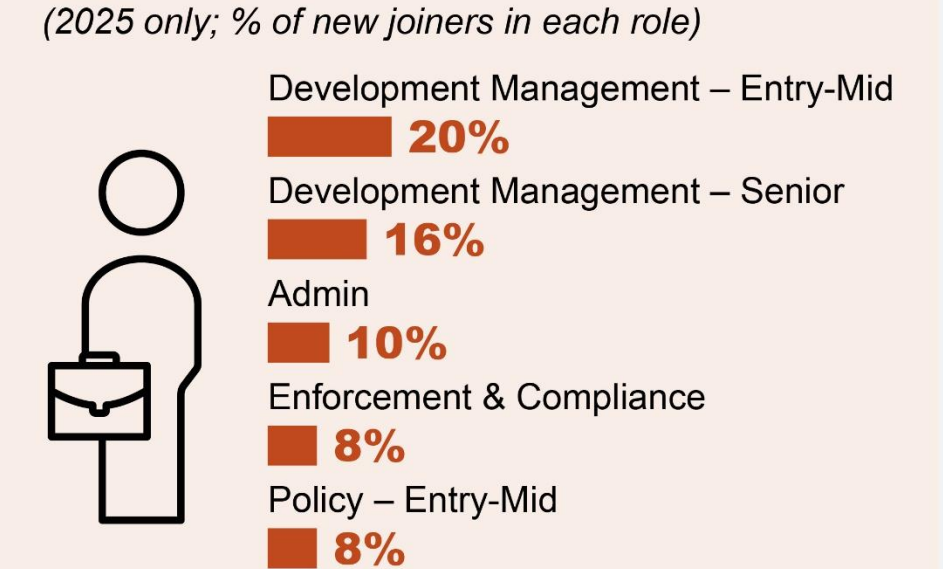
Profile of roles with most vacancies remained similar to 2023

(% of total vacancies)



Profile of new joiners similar to roles with most vacancies

(2025 only; % of new joiners in each role)



MHCLG PLANNING CAPACITY AND SKILLS PULSE SURVEY 2025

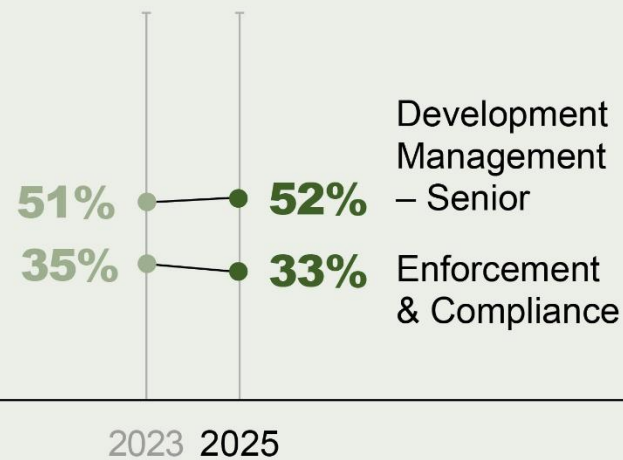


RECRUITMENT DIFFICULTIES

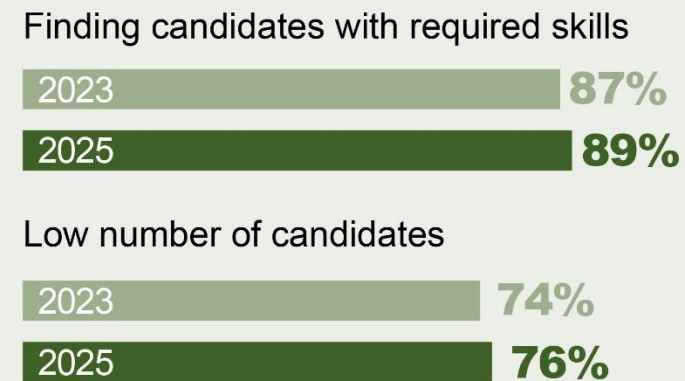


Fewer departments report recruitment challenges.

Roles that remains challenging to recruit
(% of all departments)



Key challenges reported
(% of departments with any difficulties)



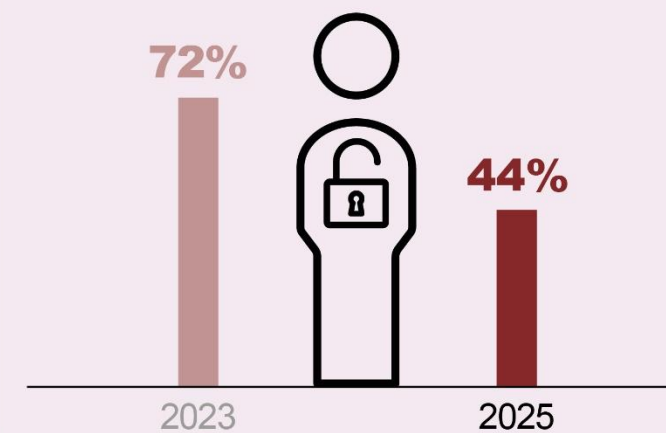
Main impacts caused by recruitment difficulties
(% of departments with any difficulties)



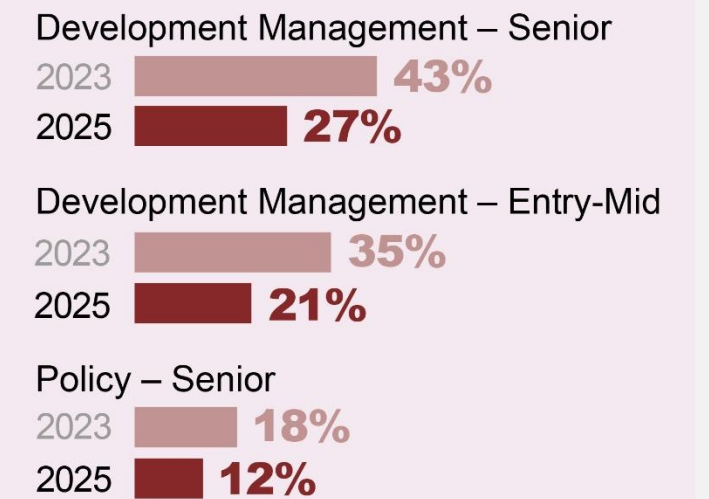
RETENTION DIFFICULTIES

Retention is improving but Development Management roles remain a challenge.

Reported retention difficulties have decreased
(% of all departments)



Difficulties Retaining
(% of all departments)

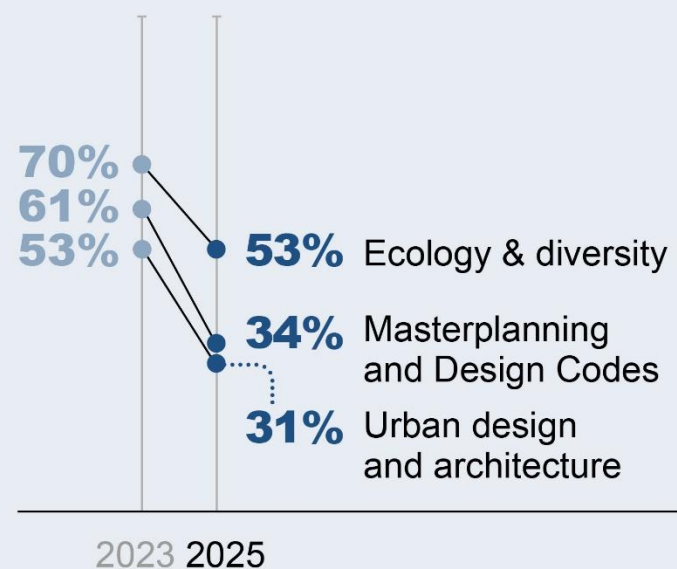


SKILLS & TRAINING

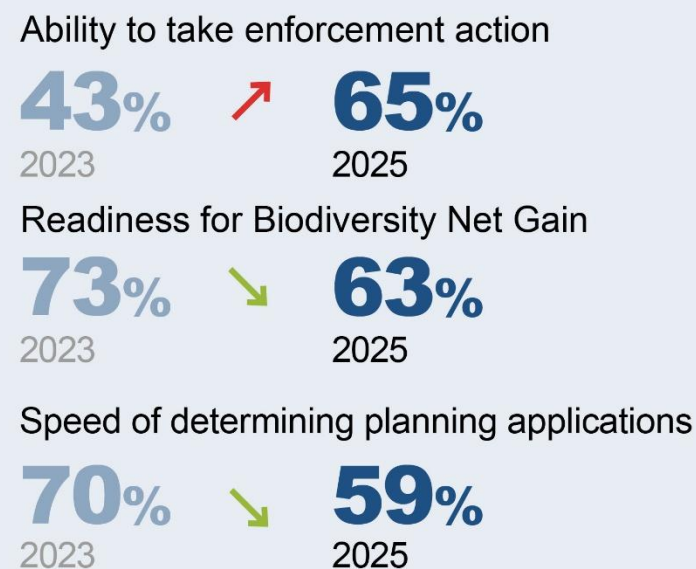


93%
of local planning authorities report skills gaps

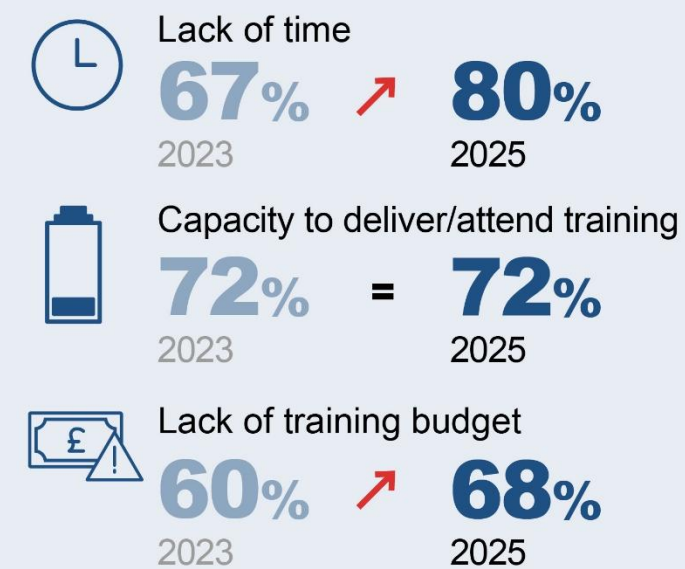
Skills gaps decreased:
(% of all departments)



Skills gaps have an impact on:
(% of all departments)



Key barriers to upskilling:
(% of all departments)



READINESS



Only **48%**
of authorities report being ready for forthcoming planning reforms.



Vision & Objectives

Attract, develop and retain talent; equip LPAs to implement reform effectively.

Our vision:

"To enable a modernised and sustainable planning system by attracting, developing and retaining talent, and delivering and coordinating a package of policy, digital and delivery support to local government to implement planning reforms effectively."

Recruit

Grow the pipeline of planning and built environment professionals

by promoting careers in planning, supporting entry routes into the profession, and working with partners to increase the attractiveness and accessibility of planning roles in local government.

Pathways to planning

Public Practice

Attract/Retain

Strengthen workforce stability and drive positive culture change

by supporting local authorities to create inclusive, motivating environments that value planners, reduce churn, and build long-term capacity.

PAS

Comms & Engagement

Upskill

Equip planners with the knowledge, skills and tools they need

through targeted training, guidance, digital tools, and knowledge-sharing platforms, enabling local planning teams to deliver high-quality, efficient services.

PAS/Careers Hub

Public Practice

Implement

The successful implementation of national planning reforms at local level

by bridging policy intent with local delivery, ensuring reforms are understood, actionable, and embedded in practice.

Policy support

Funding

Direct Support

Provide direct, practical, on-the-ground support to LPAs

through delivery partners and targeted funding—addressing immediate needs, reducing pressure on services, and helping unlock stalled planning capacity.

PAS

ATLAS

Leadership & Engagement

Provide visible leadership and a trusted voice by engaging the sector, identifying key challenges and opportunities, and building an evidence-based foundation for delivery. We will drive collective progress through clear communication, active engagement, and strong collaborative partnerships.

User Research-survey, M&E

C&C Working group



Capacity - growing the workforce

Graduate and mid-career routes scaled to meet demand this Parliament.

Pathways into Planning

- **Over 200** graduates supported to date: 87 in FY24/25, ~130 in Sept 2025.
- **£7m investment**, including £5.5m salary bursaries for RTPI-accredited postgraduate study
- **Strong demand:** over 2,100 applicants for Cohort 3.
- Key driver for scaling workforce **toward ~1,400 planners this Parliament.**

Public Practice

- **£2m investment**, including £1.6m targeted salary support for LPAs.
- Brings experienced built-environment professionals into planning teams.
- Supports councils with hard-to-recruit roles and specialist skills.
- Contributes to the expanded recruitment ambition across the Parliament.



Enablers: supporting Councils to deliver

Unblocking major sites and lifting capability nationwide

Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS)

- Since Autumn 2024, a multidisciplinary team of built environment professionals have been deployed to support Local planning Authorities in unblocking complex planning issues.
- 29 strategically important sites across 24 LPAs, supporting delivery of ~90,000 homes.
- Strengthens delivery of major development and infrastructure.
- Works alongside NHA London and GLA-supported enabling activity.

Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

- We are providing around £2.85m in grant funding to PAS, a significant increase from previous years to support delivery of planning reforms.
- PAS helps LPA's improve efficiency through training, peer learning, and tailored advice.
- Leads work on developer contributions: guidance, toolkits, and direct support to 65+ councils.

Impact:

- 51 events engaging 98% of LPAs
- Supported 9,000 officers
- 92% rated mentoring excellent



What's next?

Scaling delivery and supporting reform

Budgets & Workforce

Major Budget Uplifts

- £46m (2024) – stabilising planning capacity in 2025/26 £48m
- (2025) – three-year uplift to grow the workforce and strengthen capability (incl. £28.8m for C&C Programme).

Expanding the Workforce

- Scaling from the original 300 commitment toward ~1,400 planners this Parliament.
- **Careers Hub:** national gateway for CPD, mentoring, leadership and conversion routes; coordinates with PAS, Pathways, Public Practice and RTPI offers.

Direct Support and Modernisation

Direct Support to LPAs (Delivered This Parliament)

- DM funding: £8m targeted at high-pressure LPAs, incl. £3m via GLA to support London boroughs.
- Local Plans & Green Belt: £29m+ since early 2025 (incl. £9.31m to 133 LPAs; >£19m for Reg 18/19 evidence).

Modernising the System

- Supporting LPAs to adopt digital tools, improve data use and prepare for reform.



2026 Planning Capacity and Skills Survey

**Need more resource?
More training opportunities?
More support?**

Tell us through the survey.

**Launching 9 March
On DELTA**



How will MHCLG use the data?

- The survey provides a national sector-led evidence base to secure future funding, shape programme strategy, target priority areas, and inform wider policy development.

Why your voice matters?

- Taking part will also give you valuable insight into how your workforce capacity and skills gaps compare to national averages, to support you in reviewing your priorities for future development and support.



Register your LPA!

Planning Skills and Capacity Survey 2026 - Contact Registration



What we need from you:

MHCLG has contacted all authorities to request:

- A **lead contact** you wish to register (name, email and role)
- A **backup contact** (name, email and role)

If your authority has not yet responded, or if your details need updating, please email:

LPA.SkillsSurvey@communities.gov.uk or sign up through the QR code by **Monday 2 March**.



Building capacity and capability – the role of PAS

Kat Salter
Principal Consultant, PAS

Recruitment: Pathways to Planning



- Graduate recruitment programme – provides local authorities, statutory consultees and councils hosting NSIPs with a pipeline of graduates to build capacity in the built environment professions including town planning
- Hugely successful – help to achieve Government's ambition of 300 new planners. Increased to 1400!
- Work in a full-time role and alongside this study for an RTPI accredited degree
- PAS deliver learning and development programme
 - On-boarding
 - CPD seminars
 - Quarterly away days



Strengthening planning teams – capacity and capability



16.2% of planners intend to retire in the next 3 years – “without a concerted effort to shore up both the early-and-mid career pipeline of planners, valuable knowledge will be lost, and succession planning made difficult”
[RTPI, 2025](#)

“without investment in people management and leadership development, retention and morale will continue to suffer”
[Public Practice, 2025](#)



Coaching and mentoring

PAS Management Academy

Coaching and mentoring



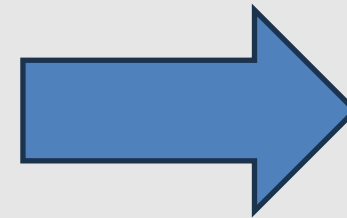
- 2025-2026, cohort of 42 new planning managers are being coached and mentored by experienced local government managers
- Offer formal coaching training to twelve of the manager participants – offer of gaining a Level 3 ILM qualification in coaching



Management Academy



- 6-month structured leadership programme for 27 participants across 13 largest unitary authorities in England
- Focus on range of leadership skills – guest speakers bring to life in a planning context:
 - Introduction to Leadership
 - Direction and Culture
 - Managing risk and uncertainty
 - Teamwork and collaboration
 - Communicating Effectively
 - Bringing it all together



“More confident in managing team members”

“Inspired to empower staff rather than take an overly directive approach”

“Reflective approach...think about how could have said / done things differently rather than rushing to address everyday problems”

“Focus on organising work and tasks for the team”

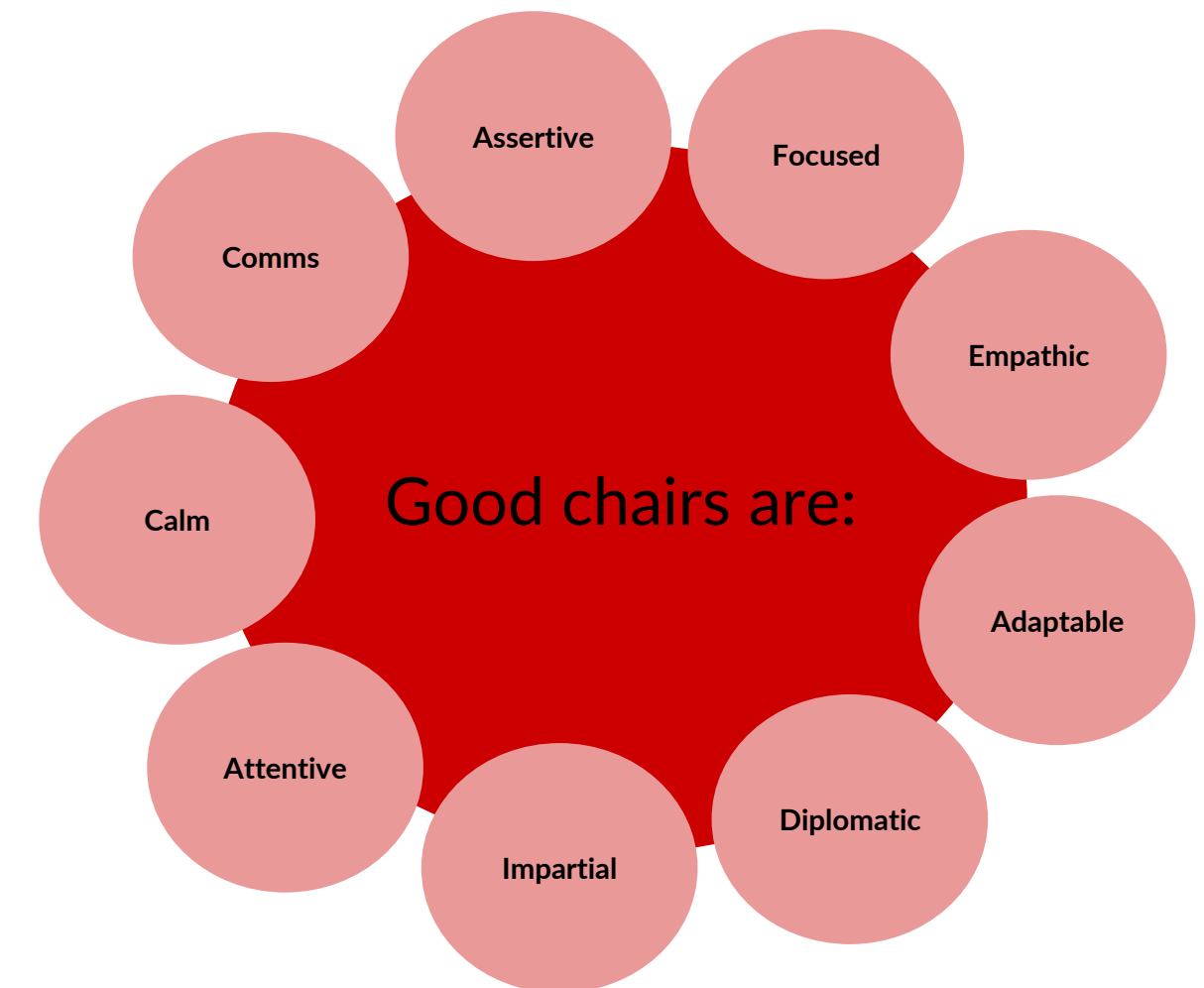
Reflection from a manager that team member is *“more confident in dealing with new ways of working, dealing with their team and those working under them”*

Plus: Thriving in local government + Action Learning Sets

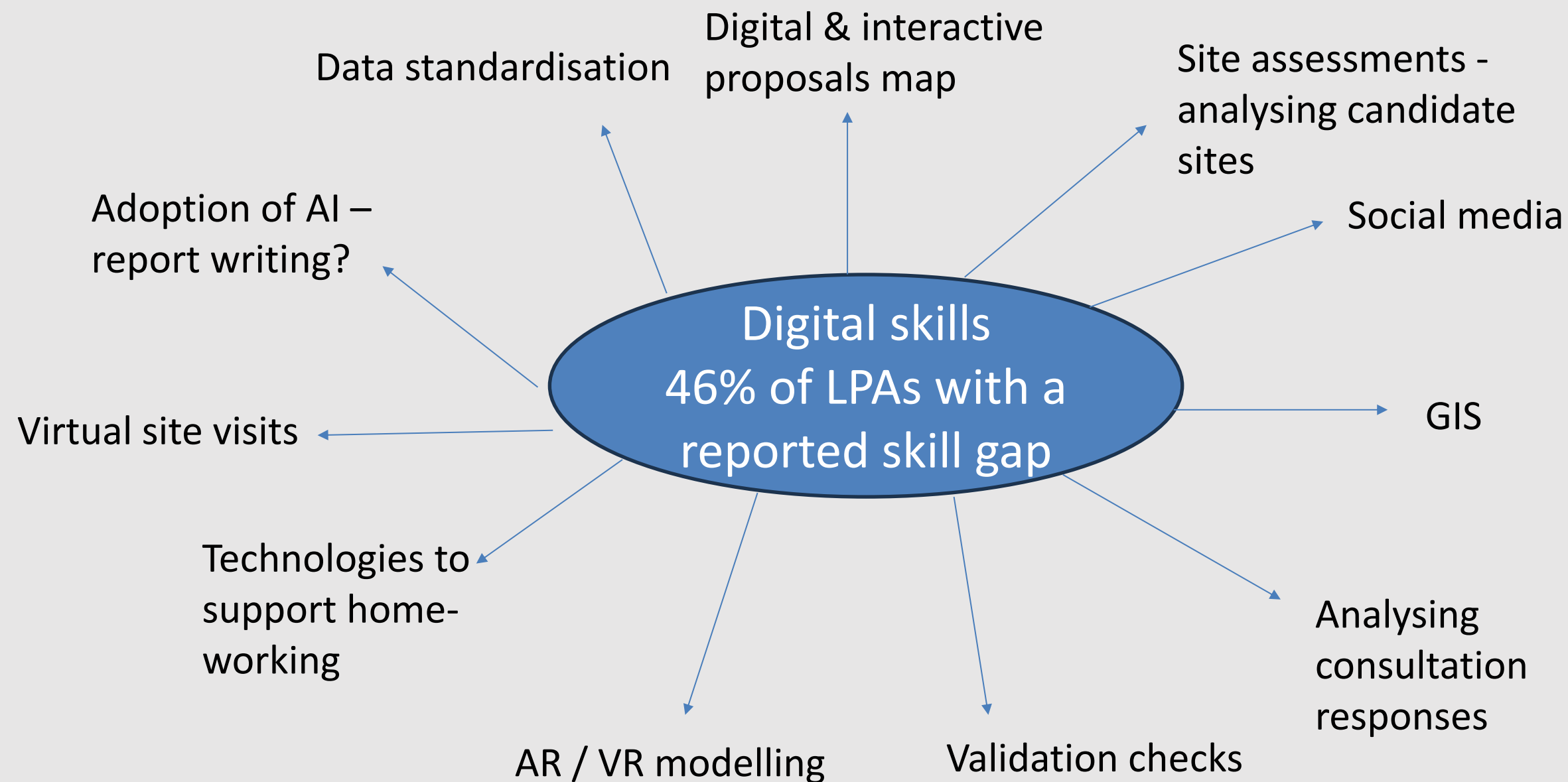
Leadership Essentials



- Specialised, 2-day residential workshops designed for council leaders, planning portfolio holders, and committee chairs.
- Planning Committee Chairs
 - Understand the characteristics of a good committee
 - Develop their skills as a chair
- Local Plans
 - Current system
 - New System Local Plans
- Delivered by PAS and Member peers
- Emphasis on upskilling, sharing best practice, peer-to-peer learning and support.



Digital skills – what is missing?



What is on offer?



Digital Planning



Are you a practising planner? Do you want to get on top of the digital planning agenda and how it will apply to you?

This intensive Digital Planning training will give you a grounding in the latest thinking and practice on digital planning. It will cover open data, digital twins, 3-D modelling, participatory planning, digital plan-making, Artificial Intelligence, and how to overcome the barriers to adoption.

You will learn with and from a select cohort of planners and hear from leading practitioners and planning academics from Cardiff University.

Conference

Digital planning (Liverpool)

from **£85**

28 April 2026 at 09:30 am - 04:30 pm

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, 1 Mann Island, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom, L3 1BP

Online

Young Planners Ask an expert: digital planning

from **£0**

16 April 2026 at 01:00 pm - 02:00 pm

Short Description

This course provides an in-depth introduction to recent advancements in digital planning, including new digital methods and tools used to undertake urban modelling and support planning processes, as well as an appraisal of the potential of digital planning to make planning systems and processes more transparent, inclusive and participatory.

University of Glasgow

Future investment:



PLANNING

Reeves announces new 'Planning Careers Hub' to 'retain and retrain mid-career professionals' as part of £48m investment

Chancellor Rachel Reeves has announced the creation of a new "Planning Careers Hub" to "retain and retrain mid-career professionals" and confirmed £48 million of "additional" funding for three government departments to recruit 350 new council planners.

Where does this lead us?



- Need for nuanced data on what digital skills are missing – where is the specific learning gap and training need?
 - Within the planning service or more broadly?
 - Procurement / commissioning?
 - Data management and security?
- Investment is at individual LPA level– focus on technologies and project solutions rather than process management and staff development?

Digital and data standardisation are seen as critical to improve the efficiency of planning processes but planning departments do not currently have the skills or capacity to deliver these changes, despite promising pilots and some government funding for demonstration projects

[\(MHCLG, 2025, 9.1.12\)](#)

- Need effective feedback loops and evaluation at sector-level

Thank you for joining!

