

Title of Report:	Planning Department Business Plan 2023/24
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	23 August 2023
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership Improvement and Innovation Protecting and Enhancing our Environment and Assets
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them
Lead Officer	Head of Planning

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Planning Budget
Included in Current Year Estimates	No
Capital/Revenue	As per budget
Code	5301
Staffing Costs	As per budget

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:

FOR DECISION

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Planning Service Business Plan is to set out the key business focus for Planning over the next business year for consideration and agreement by Members.

2.0 Details

- 2.1 The Planning Department Business Plan sets out the key objectives for the business over the next business year. It takes account of the current position at end of 2022/23 and builds on this performance for the incoming year.

3.0 Purpose of the Plan

- 3.1 The strategic aims of the Service are:

- To contribute to the growth of a sustainable economy and investment in the Borough by making timely decisions and developing sound planning policies.
- To contribute to the protection of the environment and the creation of safer communities by making sound decisions and developing sound policies through the development plan process.
- To engage customers, stakeholders and partners more effectively in order to increase understanding of and compliance with processes and regulation.
- To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within a strong corporate governance framework.

- 3.2 The business plan objectives are:

- To improve performance in relation to processing of planning applications
- To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively within the corporate governance framework

- 3.3 The Planning Service Business Plan is attached at Appendix 1 and the Planning Department Risk Register attached at Appendix 2.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 **IT IS RECOMMENDED** that the Planning Committee APPROVE the Planning Service Business Plan 2023/24 and NOTE the Planning Department Risk Register 2023/24.



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PLANNING

BUSINESS PLAN
2023-2024

SECTION 1

Purpose of this plan

- Give a clear sense of what the service is for and the challenges it faces.
- Show how it is supporting Council's priorities.
- Show how it is contributing to the efficiency drive and transformation of service delivery.
- Show how it is aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Help us to hold ourselves to account and ensure we deliver for Council and its ratepayers.

The Vision for the service area

'Working in partnership with our community we will seek to protect and enhance our environment, promote well-being, and support a sustainable economy.'

Strategic Themes / Functions

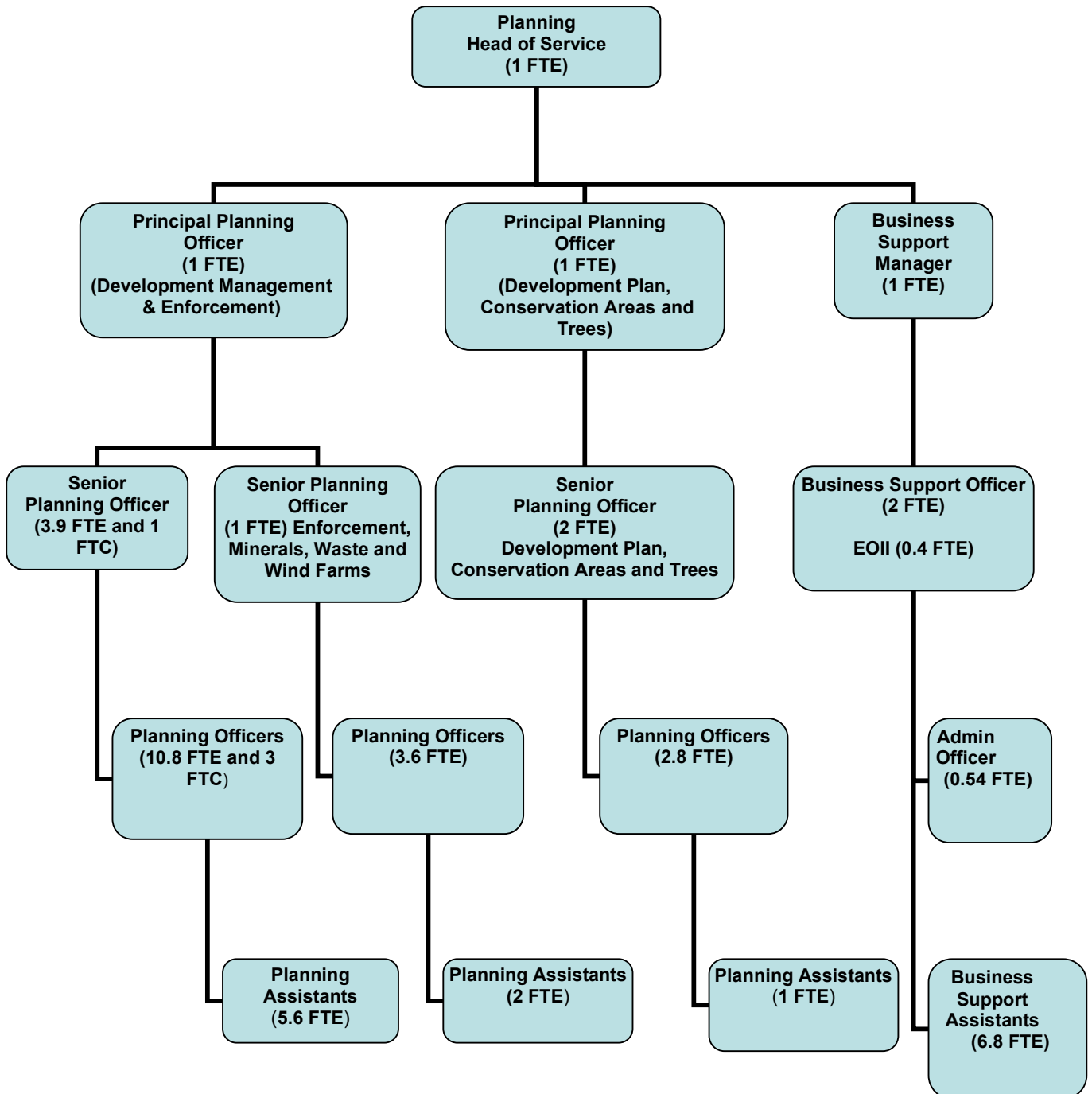
The key functions of the Planning service area are:

- Local Development Planning – creating a plan which will set out a clear vision of how the council area should look in the future by deciding what type and scale of development should be encouraged and where it should be located to create a sustainable environment; designation of conservation areas; issuing Building Preservation Notices and Tree Preservation Orders.
- Development Management – determining the vast majority of planning applications and other planning consents, including waste and minerals applications, conservation area consents, advertisement consents, certificates of lawful development, non-material changes, and discharge of conditions.
- Planning Enforcement – investigating alleged breaches of planning control and taking action where it is considered expedient to do so; issuing of Urgent Works Notices.

Strategic Aims of the Service

1. To contribute to the growth of a sustainable economy and investment in the Borough by making timely, quality decisions and developing sound planning policies through the development plan process.
2. To contribute to the protection of the environment and the creation of safer communities by making timely, quality decisions and developing sound planning policies through the development plan process.
3. To engage customers, stakeholders and partners more effectively in order to increase understanding of and compliance with processes and regulation.
4. To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within a strong corporate governance framework.

Organisational Structure - Staffing





SECTION 2

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater engagement with Elected Members in the Local Development Plan process bringing greater local awareness of needs.• Greater engagement with Elected Members in the decision-making process for planning applications.• Agreed Protocol and Scheme of Delegation with Planning Committee in place and regularly reviewed.• Positive engagement with internal and external stakeholders.• Teams established to deal with specific application types provides consistency and efficiency to development management process.• Staff have developed detailed local knowledge of the areas within which they work resulting in greater consistency and efficiency in decision-making.• Flexibility and commitment of staff to adapt to change and continue to deliver services in challenging circumstances.• Experienced and resilient staff employed on permanent basis with wide range of knowledge and skills.• Positive attitude throughout the office.• Clear assigned roles in relation to Development Management, Development Plan and Enforcement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty recruiting experienced staff to cover temporary posts.• Increased caseloads reduce performance• Increasing complexity of legislation and environmental areas/issues.• Detailed policies within SPPS constrain Council's ability to develop policies specific to needs of Borough within its new Local Development Plan (LDP).• Application processing constraints due to delays resulting from late submission of information and representations, and external discussions with stakeholders not agreed prior to submission of application.• Operational issues arising from the implementation of the new Regional Planning IT System• Delays to changes to legislation due to lack of an Executive.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop better partnership working between internal and external stakeholders to improve working relationships and service improvements. • Improve performance by reviewing procedures for processing single rural dwellings. • Continue to input into amendments to planning legislation to bring about improvements to the planning function. • Refinement of local plan policies to reflect local circumstances. • Improvements to the new Planning Portal IT System ensuring up-to-date stable system with improved customer interface. • Delivery of topic specific training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of living crisis and potential recession resulting in decrease in planning applications submitted and income generation and resultant impact on budget. • Lack of functioning Executive resulting in delays to changes to planning legislation. • Loss of experienced staff due to sick or resignation resulting in increased pressures on other staff and delays to delivering the planning function. • Greater risk of challenge through Judicial Reviews/Ombudsman on planning decisions and impact on staff resources and budget costs. • Risk to breaches of confidentiality/data protection due to high volumes of correspondence received and uploaded onto the Planning Portal. • Impact on the planning function due to, performance issues with new system when implemented.

Summary Narrative

Planning is a demand-led service and we are affected by the wider economic factors which determine the level of applications received. Enforcement is similarly reactive process as the majority of complaints are received from the public.

Planning cannot control the number of planning applications or enforcement cases opened as this is driven by the needs of the wider public and strength of the economy.

Planning is largely constrained by complex legislation, policies and guidance published by central government. The risks involved in failing to comply with these can result in a significant financial cost, delay and reputational damage to Council. It is therefore important to ensure that Planning has sufficient staff

resources with the necessary skills and knowledge to make sound planning decisions thereby reducing the risks of administrative errors.

The significant challenge ahead for Planning is the difficulty in recruiting staff to fill vacant temporary posts. This has significantly increased caseloads for staff impacting on staff morale, customer service and performance against statutory targets.

The impact of the non-functioning Executive continues to impact on the delivery of legislative changes to improve the efficient delivery of the planning function.

The Council is responsible for the publication of a new Local Development Plan that will, when adopted, form the basis of planning decision making within the Borough. The draft Plan Strategy was presented to full Council for ratification at the meeting held on 04 October 2022. At that time Members resolved to defer ratification in order for further workshops to be held to discuss specific areas of concern. Workshops were held in November and December 2022 with further workshops scheduled for August and September 2023. The focus for the year ahead for the LDP is to obtain ratification from full Council to publish the draft Plan Strategy and to publish an amended Timetable to reflect the resultant delay to publication.

The Council has signed up to the delivery of the new Northern Ireland Planning Portal with 9 other Councils and DfI. This shared system went live on 05 December 2022 and will provide Council with a stable, up-to-date system that will have an improved customer interface. Initial issues with the new Portal are largely resolved and the system is now operating effectively for development management; issues are currently under resolution for the enforcement module. The reduced output in determining applications during this implementation stage has had a knock-on effect on customer service performance and staff case-loads.

Positive engagement with stakeholders to the planning function provides the opportunity to collaborate on driving forward improvements to customer service. A review of the planning process for pre-application discussions has reached advanced stages and new procedures drafted for agreement.

PESTEL Analysis

Political	Local accountability as Elected Members have responsibility for decision making for those non-delegated decisions and for agreeing the new LDP. The lack of a functioning Executive will impact on delivery of amendments to legislation required to improve the planning function and reduce costs to Council in delivering the service.
Economic	Receipts are closely related to general economic activity in the Borough. Planning can be an enabler of development and can be viewed as an income generator to the overall benefit of the Council. The impact of inflation increases may have a significant impact on the income generated by planning applications over this business year.
Social	Opportunity to improve the wellbeing of citizens of the Borough through the linkage with the Community Plan and greater community involvement in the development plan process. Continue to implement the agreed Statement of Community Involvement. Continued engagement with internal and external stakeholders will assist in improving service delivery.
Technological	Implementation of the new Planning Portal contributes to improvement in customer accessibility and engagement in the planning functions and open and transparent decision-making. Remote meetings provide an opportunity to continue engagement in a hybrid format with potential for greater attendance at meetings and workshops.
Environmental	Ability to protect the environment and encourage economic development through a balanced delivery of the planning function. The new development plan process will encourage greater political and community involvement in the process with each option appraised through the Sustainability Appraisal and other Assessments. Continuation of the collaboration with other council staff will improve knowledge and evidence to produce sound planning policies to promote sustainable development.
Legal	Working in a complex legal environment increases the risk of challenge through Judicial Reviews/Ombudsman cases. Large number of European designated sites in the Borough and increased scrutiny through The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 and the Council Directive 92/43/EEC raising complex issues.

Summary Narrative

Planning has implemented a new Planning Portal providing greater access to information on planning applications by the general public. This improves open and transparent decision-making making more information available digitally to the general public on how decisions are reached on planning applications. This increased publication of information also increases the risk of data protection due to large volumes of data being uploaded for public viewing. The increased scrutiny of decision-making also increases the risk of challenges to decisions. The risks involved in failing to comply with the complex legislation, policy and



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guidance can result in a significant financial cost, delay and reputational damage to Council. Training of Members and staff is important to ensure timely, quality and consistent decision-making to reduce the risks of challenge.

Mandatory training is carried out with Planning Committee Members annually and other training provided as identified throughout the year.

SECTION 3

Planning Strategic Aims and Objectives Aligned with Council's Strategic Aims and Objectives:

BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVE 1: Improve performance in relation to processing planning applications

WORKSTREAM	ACTION	OUTCOMES	BUDGET	TIMESCALE	KPI	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	PROGRESS	RAG STATUS
Streamline the planning application process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree Standing Advice with NI Water and DfC HED • Develop KPIs for individual teams • Develop an Action Plan for applications in the system over 12 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in number of consultations with NI Water and DfC HED to improve performance against KPIs • Reduction in timeframes to improve performance against statutory KPIs 	Within agreed budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q4 • Q4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree Standing Advice for implementation • Achieve quarterly target for 2023/24* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Local applications average processing time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q1 - 30 weeks; Q2 – 25 weeks Q3 – 20 weeks Q4 – 17 weeks b) Major applications: process average processing time of 40 weeks. c) Reduce number of live enforcement cases by 15% d) reduce number of planning applications in the system over 12 months by 10%. 	Head of Planning, Development Management and Enforcement Manager and Senior Planning Officers within Development Management and Enforcement sections		
Maintain sufficient staff resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit/retain agreed staff resources • Develop training plan for staff and Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit staff to fill vacant posts • Reduce workloads to a manageable level – below 50 cases per FTE • Clear training plan in place for staff and Members 	Within agreed budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q2 • Q4 • Q2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable staff resource • Reduction in staff caseloads • Commencement of roll out of training identified in Training Plan 	Denise Dickson Head of Planning		

*The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which the application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The median is used for the average processing time as any extreme values have the potential to inflate the mean, leading to a result that may not be considered as "typical".

Planning Strategic Aims and Objectives Aligned with Council's Strategic Aims and Objectives:

BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVE 2: To publish Council's draft Plan Strategy

WORKSTREAM	ACTION	OUTCOMES	BUDGET	TIMESCALE	KPI	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	PROGRESS	RAG STATUS
Publish Draft Plan Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete further workshops with Members • Review and agree changes to work programme • Agree policies through Planning Steering Group • Complete Sustainability Appraisals, EQIA, RNIA • Agree draft Plan Strategy with full Council • Review and agree changes to published LDP Timetable with Planning Committee, Planning Appeals Committee and Dfl • Publish draft Plan Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops held with Members • Agree draft Plan Strategy for publication • Agree reviewed Timetable for LDP and work programme • Publish draft Plan Strategy for public consultation 	Within agreed budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q2 • Q4 • Q4 • Q4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops concluded in accordance with amended work programme • Policies agreed through Planning Steering group for draft Plan Strategy • Present draft Plan Strategy to Council for ratification • Agreed LDP Timetable published • Draft Plan Strategy published in accordance with published Timetable 	Head of Planning, Development Plan Manager and Senior Planning Officers within Development Plan section		
Maintain sufficient staff resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review/recruit/retain agreed staff resources • Develop a training plan for staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources reviewed and agreed • Training plan for staff agreed 	Additional staffing is outside of budget and subject to agreement of any future business case All other costs within agreed budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q3 • Q2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable staff resource • Commencement of roll out of training identified in Training Plan 	Head of Planning, Development Plan Manager and Senior planning Officer within Development Plan Section		

BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVE 3: To manage finance, staff, information and other resources effectively and efficiently within the corporate governance framework.

WORKSTREAM	ACTION	OUTCOMES	BUDGET	TIMESCALE	KPI	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	PROGRESS	RAG STATUS
Ensure all Audit/Ombudsman recommendations are implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit/retain agreed staff resources Develop a training plan for staff on procedures and implementation of policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff recruited to fill vacant posts Training Plan agreed Training events delivered as per Training Plan 	Additional staffing outside existing agreed structures is outside of budget and subject to agreement of any future business case. All other costs within agreed budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q2 Q3 Q4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in number of vacant posts Number of cases where Ombudsman determines maladministration is less than 0.4% of all decisions made 	Denise Dickson Head of Planning, Development Plan Manager, Development Management and Enforcement Manager, Senior Planning Officers		



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SECTION 4

Financial Position for 2023/2024

The delivery of the Planning function will be in accordance with the agreed budget set for the 2023/24 business year. Any additional funding requirements have been identified and subject to agreement of any future business case.

**Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Corporate Risk Register**

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Planning Department Risk Register 2023-24

Notes

Risk Ref No	Raised By	Date Raised	Risk Owner	Risk Description	Prob of Occurring (1-5)	Risk Impact (1-5)	Risk Ranking	Status	Mitigating Actions	Risk Review Date	Prob Last	Prob This	Impact Last	Impact This	New Risk Ranking	
1	Denise Dickson	01/04/23	Denise Dickson	Financial Management (risk of over/underspend) Income and expenditure are not contained within budget and/or are not properly accounted for leading to possible overspend Reduced income received below that of predicted income Ensure sufficient funds available for annual payment for new replacement Planning Portal IT System	3	3	9	Medium	Fee Calculator and fee checks Deferred Income Report Weekly list of applications validated Finance issue discussed at Planning Committee and raised with Director Budget Holders receive monitoring information on a monthly basis Monthly monitoring of budget expenditure Finance Department provided with copy of payment installments required for new IT System							
2	Denise Dickson	01/04/23	Denise Dickson	Propriety and Regularity Planning does not apply the Council's corporate governance framework resulting in unauthorised expenditure and/or failure to secure assets including data Legal Challenges to Planning discourage investment and increase costs not contained within budget	2	3	6	Medium	Adherence to the Council's Corporate Governance framework Audit Committee Monitoring of outstanding audit recommendations and reporting to SMT and Audit Committee Council guidance on procurement and contract management Development Management Practice Notes Risks reviewed by HOP and through SMT on a quarterly basis Redaction carried out by SPTO and secondary check by BST Implementation of Audit report recommendation Raising concerns Policy applied Data Protection Policy applied Hospitality and Gifts Register maintained by Corporate Services Declaration of Interests Register maintained by Corporate Services Key risks recorded and monitored in Planning Department's Risk Register Review of Planning Policies and Procedures, Planning Committee Protocol and Scheme of Delegation Part time Solicitor dedicated to Planning Function appointed							
3	Senior Staff	01/04/23	Denise Dickson	Human Resources Increased workloads and staff leaving inhibit the management of an appropriately skilled staff complement against available resources and as a result failure to deliver key Planning functions and achieve business objectives	3	4	12	High	Meetings with Planning SMT Quarterly full Staff Team Briefing Monthly Head of Planning meeting with HR Staff training Quarterly update to Planning Committee on performance against statutory targets Continue to recruit to fill vacant posts Inform SMT and Planning Committee of staffing issues Quarterly monitoring of workloads Ensure staff are kept informed on issues which affect them Identify training needs and develop and deliver solutions							

