WEST OF ENGLAND | MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE:	Principal Planning Policy Officer (Maternity Cover)
MANAGED BY:	Planning Policy Lead
GRADE:	12

ROLE OVERVIEW

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) is preparing its first Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). The SDS is a statutory strategic plan that will establish the long-term framework for where homes jobs and infrastructure are delivered across the region over the next 30 years. Covering the MCA area and North Somerset, the SDS will guide housing and employment land allocations, identify strategic infrastructure priorities, and embed climate resilience, environmental protection, and inclusive growth.

The SDS must meet strict statutory requirements, pass the Planning Inspectorate's "tests of soundness", and align with both national policy and local authority Local Plans. Government expects adoption within the current Parliament, with the SDS forming the spatial expression of the West of England Local Growth Plan and informing key investment decisions.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer will lead the professional delivery of the SDS, working closely with the Planning Policy Lead, Planning Policy Officers, and partner local authorities. They will oversee the development of a robust technical evidence base, ensure legal compliance, and coordinate complex multi-stakeholder engagement across political, technical, and community audiences.

This is a senior technical leadership role requiring a deep understanding of strategic spatial planning, planning law, and cross-boundary governance. The postholder will balance high-level strategic direction with hands-on management of evidence, consultation, and programme milestones to ensure the SDS is examination-ready and delivers tangible outcomes for the region.

THE ROLE

Reporting to the Planning Policy Lead, the Principal Planning Policy Officer role will specialise in the delivery of aspects of the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

As a Principal Planning Policy Officer, and in the context of the SDS, you will be

expected to:

- Be accountable for preparing or overseeing the commission and project management of consultants in the delivery of key strategic evidence base documents in support of the preparation of the SDS.
- Support the set-up, preparation and roll-out of engagement and consultation processes and materials in line with our policy and legislative requirements.
- Draft and integrate thematic policy sections and reasoned justifications, ensuring technical accuracy and consistency with the evidence base.
- Be aware of the process of preparing a strategic plan, and the interdependencies with emerging Local Plans in the region.
- Ensure technical excellence and quality, legal compliance and soundness are embedded in progressing policy options for discussion.
- Manage delivery within their thematic area, allocating work to Officers, tracking progress, and reporting risks and dependencies to the Lead.
- Develop and maintain strong relationships collaborating with the Unitary Authorities and other key stakeholders across the region to ensure cooperation in the preparation of inputs to the SDS.
- Work across Directorates within the MCA to review baseline evidence and check interdependencies with emerging strategy work.
- Support the preparation of briefings for the Mayor, Corporate Leadership Team and Housing and Planning Board on significant spatial planning related policy decisions and planning matters.
- Chair topic specific working groups on key elements of the SDS.
- Lead, manage and develop team members to deliver agreed objectives, including setting clear expectations, monitoring performance, supporting wellbeing, and ensuring compliance with organisational policies and employment law.
- Plan, resource and oversee team activities to meet service priorities, including effective workload allocation, recruitment and induction, fostering a positive and inclusive culture, and maintaining high standards of health, safety and governance.

As part of your role, you will also be expected to be agile and flexible to supporting wider opportunities from across the Place Directorate and other Directorates. Current directorate projects include delivering the Future Places Fund, leading the region's work on ending homelessness, and implementing the region’s Growth Strategy.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

You will be expected to be accountable or responsible for the following:

Technical Expertise

- Accountable for the preparation of well-researched and justified key strategic evidence base documents or overseeing the commissioning and project management of consultants.

- Ensure technical excellence and 'soundness' is at the core of all evidence work, to allow balanced policy choices and decisions to be informed by soundness and legal compliance.
- Defend evidence documents at examination, or progress towards this experience through the development of the SDS.
- Contribute to the process and preparation of materials for engagement and consultation.
- Lead significant aspects of policy development and preparation of the SDS strategy.
- Check interdependencies between evidence base documents and be aware of interactions with emerging Local Plans within the region, monitoring spend of consultants against overall budgets and inputting into a project programme for individual projects.
- Set up and input into monitoring frameworks being established for the SDS.
- Input into briefings for the Mayor, Corporate Leadership Board and Housing and Planning Board on significant spatial planning related policy decisions and planning matters.
- Own continuous professional development, maintaining current knowledge of planning reforms, appeals and decisions.
- Input into spatial planning and maps to enable information to be presented and communicated in a clear and succinct manner.

Collaborating across the Place Directorate and MCA Directorates

- Work seamlessly with other members of the Housing and Strategic Planning Team and Place Directorate. Expected to work across the Analysis and Evaluation and Strategy Directorates, whilst supporting the development of a culture of trust, openness and technical excellence.
- Develop strong working relationships with other Directorates to review baseline evidence being prepared for the SDS and checking interdependencies with emerging strategy work.
- Share planning knowledge with non-technical members of the organisation, and input into cross-Directorate requests as these arise.

Representing the MCA Externally

- Promote strong cross-boundary working relationships to support a culture of collaboration with our UAs.
- Chair topic specific working groups on key elements of the SDS within and beyond the region, including working with statutory consultees and environmental and other interest groups.
- Represent the MCA at various external events and engagement / consultation events, including working closely with local communities, developers and landowners.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

ESSENTIAL (MUST HAVE)	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Qualifications and Knowledge	• Educated to degree level or equivalent in relevant academic subject (planning, built environment, environmental planning) with technical knowledge and have relevant practical experience. • Hold Chartered Status as Town Planner (Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute). • Excellent planning knowledge and practical experience of policy and legislation, particularly related to SDS and strategic policy issues. • Excellent knowledge of strategic issues within the West of England, and interaction of strategic and emerging Local Plans.
Experience	• Previous experience preparing, commissioning and project managing technically sound evidence base documents. • Previous (preferably geographically-local) experience preparing Local Plan or Joint Plan evidence base documents. ○ Experience working with key stakeholders within the region. • Being accountable for defining evidence-led and justified policy options and recommendations in relation to cross-boundary issues and standing by these recommendations. • Demonstrable experience working with statutory consultees in the strategic environmental assessment of plans and programmes. • Previous experience working in multi-disciplinary environments and working collaboratively to achieve good outcomes. • Previous experience working in political environments.
Skills and Competencies	• Strong initiative and the ability to work independently with minimal supervision. • A problem-solving approach to fulfilling responsibilities, with the ability to proactively identify and initiate new actions needed to achieve the team's objectives and desired outcomes. • Excellent communicator, with strong written, digital and visual communication skills through the full range of Microsoft packages. • Ability to make effective, justified, balanced and evidence-led recommendations. • Ability to balance competing priorities on time and workload. • Articulate and persuasive, skilled in delivering clear guidance and influencing outcomes effectively. • Highly organised with a proven ability to manage competing priorities and consistently meet deadlines. • Demonstrable commercial and programme management awareness. • Ownership of continuous professional development.

DESIRABLE	
Qualifications and Knowledge	Understanding of strategic housing and planning landscape in the West of England.
Experience	Experience preparing and defending decisions at Examination in Public.
Skills and Competencies	• ArcGIS and Spatial Mapping • Current driving license.