

Planning Roundtable

22 February 2019



Prepared by Audit Scotland & Improvement Service

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Context

Background

1. The aim of the roundtable was to understand and highlight what key stakeholders think needs to be done to reposition planning to as a recognised key contributor to improving places. In particular, to discuss how planning is an enabler for improved physical and mental health, which can improve connectivity and capacity for inclusive growth. An important context for this discussion was the impact budget cuts and policy changes are having on the ability of planning authorities to deliver this change.

Round Table discussion

2. To explore these issues Audit Scotland and the Improvement Service held a Round Table with a group of council Heads of Planning and representatives from COSLA, SOLACE, Scottish Government, Key Agencies and the Royal Town Planning Institute (see full attendee list in [Appendix 1](#)). The Round Table focused on three key areas:
 - Repositioning Planning: the purpose of planning and place in delivering health priorities and Community Planning outcomes.
 - Streamlining Planning: the intention behind reviewing planning and impact as it progresses.
 - Resourcing Planning: impacts of budget cuts and the cost of planning.

Format

3. Short presentations set out the context under the three key areas of focus for the Round Table, following which group discussions were used to identify the key challenges and what needs to change.

Key Findings

4. Planning needs to be better resourced, have streamlined regulatory duties, and reposition corporately to promote its position as an enabler delivering optimum place outcomes. Doing so will enhance its proven contribution to improving physical and mental wellbeing while contributing to preventative spend. Summary of key themes to progress this are:
 - Shift of emphasis from regulatory to enabling role through increased resourcing and new performance measures.
 - Transforming the service to an outcome rather than process focus.
 - Improving the profile of the value of Planning, and
 - Proactively lead on solutions for cost recovery and resourcing the planning service.

The discussion points around these themes are described further below.

Presentations

Repositioning Planning: Purpose of Planning and Place in Delivering Outcomes

Source: National Performance Framework

There is a key role for Planning as an enabler in delivering the National Performance Framework's focus on increasing the wellbeing of those living in Scotland as well as delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth.



OUR PURPOSE

To focus on creating a more **successful** country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased **wellbeing**, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth

5. The Framework puts improving wellbeing as a policy priority in line with the Christie Commission principles:
 - People
 - Partnership
 - Prevention
 - Performance
 - all in the context of Place
6. Scotland's Planning System is a key enabler to create these successful places and contribute to long term preventative spend. Working closely with Community Planning Partners it can shape its spatial policies to deliver Local Outcome Improvement Plan priorities.
7. Ongoing Public Health Reform has well evidenced links on the impact of planning policy and planning decisions to create places that enable Scotland's population to live healthier lifestyles. The Reform emphasis on achieving a "whole system" approach to delivering health priorities puts Local Government in a central role. The role of Planning in delivering within this system has been acknowledged with the Reform team looking to use it as an "early adopter" example.
8. Place Principle provides a strong message of support from Scottish Government and COSLA for all of the Christie Principles. It introduces a presumption in favour of place-based working between sectors and organisations, between areas within an organisation and with communities. It seeks to 'change the culture evident in public service delivery to place-based working'.

Streamlining Planning: Impact of the Planning Bill

Stage 2 Planning Bill will substantially increase the number of duties on planning authorities without providing new resources



RTPI have significant concern over the ability of the Planning Review to deliver its original intentions around:

- Delivering outcomes
- Less 'silo' working
- Connection between planning and delivery

9. Research undertaken by the RTPI records that as the bill progresses through parliament, the initial key financial assumptions that it would be cost neutral is highly unlikely. The same research concludes that the Bill has moved away from streamlining and freeing up resources to introducing 91 additional unfunded duties – 66 new duties for councils and 25 new duties for Scottish Government. Many of these new duties will require resources to deliver should they remain in the Bill during stage 3. Many are also inappropriate for inclusion in an Act and more suited to secondary legislation or policy.

Resourcing Planning: Budget Cuts and the Cost of Planning

Context of budget cuts



Planning Resources – February 2015

RTPI promoted change:

Resourcing – increased investment needed

Workload – reduce burdens to undertake more enabling role

Workforce – career promotion and skills development

10. RTPI Research on Planning budget concludes that Local Authorities spend 0.38% of their total budget on planning. Also, since 2009, planning authority budgets have decreased by 40.8% and staffing has been cut by 25.7%.
11. Heads of Planning Scotland have recently undertaken three key areas of research on:
 - Skills capacity and sharing skills.
 - Impact of major development fee increase, and
 - The cost of planning service update.

12. All of the above has informed concerns over resourcing and budget issues in several areas:
- Need for discussion with the Scottish Government about significant resourcing challenges resulting from Planning Bill.
 - Increase in fee for major applications has not benefitted each authority equally with many experiencing very little increased resource.
 - Budget challenge – where planning sits within councils has an impact on what the budget position is.
 - Role of full cost recovery given that key elements of Planning provide “public good” making it debateable whether the full cost of the service should be passed on in planning application fees.
 - Decisions needed on:
 - what aspects of the service should a planning application fee cover?
 - should there be cross funding across the service?
 - Determine merit in a more business- like approach to fees that helps close the inequalities gap between areas by charging less of a fee in areas of multiple deprivation.

Themes from the session

Theme 1 - From regulator to enabler

13. Planning authorities are becoming more regulators than enablers at a time when planning should be widening its enabling role to deliver on the National Performance Framework’s focus on increasing the wellbeing of those living in Scotland as well as delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The emphasis on regulation is being driven by:
- **Resourcing** issues around staff numbers mean that planning authorities are tending to focus on the statutory elements of their work rather than developing planning’s enabling role. Linking planning to wider outcomes is not a priority on day-to-day, especially with increasing resource pressures.
 - Planning is measured and assessed on its regulation role and this results in a tension between its role in delivering outcomes and the immediacy of meeting the **performance** indicators in the annual Planning Performance Framework. These Frameworks are a good vehicle to promote the activity of Planning Services but as a performance tool or as means of driving improvement are not really fit for purpose as the performance measures don’t reflect planning’s wider enabling role. The focus on short term planning application timeliness distorts behaviour and fails to capture the wider contribution that planning makes to longer term economic and social outcomes. RSL assessments submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator are a good tool to monitor performance and to highlight opportunities for management to take extra measures etc. Something similar may help with Planning.

- In summary, both **planner's capacity and current performance culture needs to change**.
14. Planning policy and “place making” needs to return to a stronger emphasis on the role of enabling the creation of places that promote wellbeing. Doing so will require a focus on:
- Supporting **cultural change** around Planning being about long-term; prevention through the well evidenced impact of places on health and wellbeing.
 - **Alignment of corporate investment plans to outcomes** to help give planning visibility.
 - **More collaboration** across council services to break down ‘silos’ around a need to ‘concede to gain’.
 - Re-think the framework through which **performance** is judged so that ‘success’ isn't attributed to specific services.
 - Shift focus from service-specific and output-focused performance indicators to **focus on planning's contribution to delivering outcomes**.
 - More utilisation of the **Place Standard** given its assessment of place in terms of health and wellbeing.
 - Planning to be an intervention tool to **mitigate inequalities** in communities, and
 - More **engagement with wider public sector stakeholders** e.g. the NHS (and emerging Public Health Scotland) about what planners can do to help deliver outcomes.
15. It was acknowledged that planning has received limited coverage in the Accounts Commission's Best Value audits of councils, perhaps reflecting its low corporate profile and perceptions of it being a ‘back-room’ service. It was suggested that rather than audit what Planning services are doing to deliver operational planning decisions (important though that is) consideration could be given to considering planning's wider corporate contribution to improving place in each local authority, with partners and at regional level (e.g. through City and Growth Deals).

Theme 2 - Transforming the service

16. The original intention of the Planning Review was to streamline the planning process and free up capacity for Planning to focus more on meeting the needs of communities. It was felt that the current list of Planning Bill amendments will do the opposite and will make delivery of outcomes more difficult.

Looking ahead, planning needs to consider that:

- Not all of the provisions require primary legislation and could be implemented by Statutory Instruments and that not all aspects of previous planning policy changes have been implemented fully. **Planners need to be more active in trying to influence the eventual outcome of this ongoing process**.
- The Bill is only one element of planning reform and there is a **need to look to other opportunities for streamlining** during secondary legislation and national policy formulation.

- Change is needed in areas such as a Local Development Plan preparation to ensure they focus on delivering outcomes. This will need **space and resources to transform services away from the conundrum of ‘planners plan, and others implement’**.
- There is a need for **strong leadership, clarity of vision and future proofing the workforce**, and
- **Focus on identifying good practice** which planning authorities can use either working in (regional) groups or nationally to standardise practice.

Theme 3 - Improving the profile of planning

17. It was felt that Planning has a low profile leading to a narrow view and understanding of its enabling role, including:
- Within councils – across other services and with elected members there is a lack of ownership/appreciation of the corporate value of the Local Development Plan.
 - Externally – e.g. within partnerships, planning is undervalued and seen as a regulatory profession.
 - With the public, and
 - Planning is viewed as a process rather than delivering outcomes.

There is a need to:

- **More effectively communicate** the scale of influence, at corporate level, across partnerships and on the national stage, that planning has in adding value and improving outcomes (both short and long-term).
- **Better articulate the challenges** for the planning service.
- **Provide an overview of the Scotland-wide picture** (could be achieved by an annual overview of PPFs Scotland wide), and
- **Streamline the number of council strategic plans** and ensure the planning function is linked to these.

Theme 4 - Resourcing

18. The need for increased investment, reducing workload burdens to undertake more enabling role and career promotion and skills development informed discussion. It was felt that there is a need to proactively address circular discussion about fees, ringfencing, the cost of planning and set out options for resourcing and generating income, several of which have been ongoing within the planning community for many years. Need to consider and take account of:
- The opportunity for enabling a **comprehensive and business-oriented charging regime** to be determined at local level with clarity about the scope of service and evidence of costs to be covered.
 - **Identifying the actual costs (private/public) in delivering the planning function**. This could look at where LOIP priorities are being implemented as a guide and where a site is not in a Development Plan.

19. Use work already done on the cost of producing LDPs / supporting policy documents as well as the 'Planners' element of individual Planning Applications.
20. The wider costs for Roads assessments, education analysis, contaminated land assessments, noise assessments etc and the benefits of factoring them in.
21. **Identifying what constitutes full cost recovery.** Discretionary fees could reflect demand e.g. lower to encourage development in deprived areas vs higher in higher demand areas non-deprived area.
22. Income from fees can vary hugely from year to year depending on changing circumstances often not within control of the Planning Authority, and
23. The issue of whether **key agencies** should charge for services and the implications of this.

Next Steps

24. Audit Scotland:
 - Explore the positioning of the service as enabler and the need for outcome-based measures in the Local Government Overview 2020.
25. Improvement Service
 - Continue the conversation
 - Tailored support to HoPS.
26. Heads of Planning Group
 - Take the initiative to engage with Scottish Government, SOLACE and COSLA - articulate the vision for the service and explore options for change.
 - Consider the lifecycle of a planning application and the role – and costs - of the development plan in streamlining and frontloading development management processes.
 - Engage with Skills Development Scotland about promotion of planning as a career.
 - To develop a range of actions taking forward the key themes identified in the report:
 - Shift of emphasis from regulatory to enabling role through increased resourcing and new performance measures.
 - Transforming the service to an outcome rather than process focus.
 - Improving the profile of the value of Planning, and
 - Proactively lead on solutions for cost recovery and resourcing of planning.

Appendix 1 - Roundtable Attendees

Name	Organisation
Fraser Carlin	Head of Planning & Housing Renfrewshire Council
David Leslie	Chief Planning Officer Edinburgh Council
Christina Cox	Chief Planning Officer Stirling Council
Douglas Duff	Head of Planning and Economic Development Falkirk Council
Kate Cowey	Service Leader – Planning and Communities Angus Council
Pam Ewen	Chief Officer - Planning Fife Council
Craig McLaren	Director of Scotland and Ireland Royal Town Planning Institute
Keith Winter	Planning Portfolio Lead SoLACE
Helen Wood	Assistant Chief Planner Scottish Government
Andrew Stevenson	Key Agencies Group Representative
Forbes Barron	Head of Planning and Building Standards Glasgow City Council
Robert Nicol	COSLA
Calum Lindsay	COSLA
Irene Beautyman	Improvement Service
Carol Calder	Audit Scotland
Antony Clark	Audit Scotland
Ruth Azzam	Audit Scotland