

Executive Summary

Introduction and Scope

Arup were commissioned by the Improvement Service in July 2007 to undertake an evaluation of the Planning Development Programme. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the learning opportunities and other initiatives supported through the Programme are contributing to meaningful, positive and lasting change.

The research would not have been possible without the willing co-operation of many individuals within planning authorities that provided survey returns, and more specifically to those that also agreed to be case study authorities.

Planning Development Programme

The Planning Development Programme is managed and run by the Improvement Service with funding from the Scottish Government. The purpose of the Programme is to contribute to the improved delivery of planning services and engagement with communities and businesses by providing relevant training and skills development opportunities and resources, enabling sharing of experience and good practice and supporting innovation. In summary, the aims of the Programme for 2006-08 are to:

- Support the modernisation of planning and the delivery of an efficient, effective and responsive planning system by addressing gaps in the skills and knowledge of planning staff, planning authority senior management and elected members;
- Support more effective engagement between planning authorities and the communities they work for;
- Improve planning authorities' ability to respond to the needs of the business community and to facilitate responsible business development; and
- Develop and evaluate new models of service delivery that will create a positive environment for housing, community and economic development through the more integrated provision of planning and regulatory services.

The then Scottish Executive allocated the Programme a budget of £500,000 for 2006-07, rising to £750,000 for 2007-08.

Since its inception, the Programme has evolved to include a wide range of initiatives, including:

- Undertaking a planning authority skills assessment;
- Delivery of many topic based learning events on a range of relevant planning issues;
- Providing grant support for local learning events and access to existing learning opportunities;
- Funding for PlanningMatters licenses for all planning authorities;
- Development and delivery of design awareness training modules;
- Creation of an induction pack on planning for elected members and delivery of introductory workshops;
- Funding for Planning Aid for Scotland projects for communities;
- Supporting business process reviews within planning authorities;
- Agreement to a joint work shadowing scheme with Homes for Scotland; and
- Preparation of a Guide to Learning and Development for Planning Managers

Methodology for this Evaluation

The methodology adopted for the evaluation comprised of the following stages:

- **Stage 1** – scoping and data gathering, including gathering stakeholder opinions;
- **Stage 2** – questionnaires of Programme participants (staff, managers and members);
- **Stage 3** – case studies: planning authority interviews with staff and management;
- **Stage 4** – assessment and recommendations.

As a consequence of this approach, over 91% of planning authorities contributed to this report's findings.

Evaluation Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Meeting the Aims and Outputs of the Programme

- **Develop a clear understanding of the skills and knowledge that will be needed in planning services to enable effective service delivery within the modernised planning system, working with stakeholders to identify priorities**

Case study authorities firmly agreed that the subject areas chosen thus far were a very accurate representation of the main topic areas in which authorities felt they required support. The questionnaires highlighted a need to better understand the specific learning needs of senior professionals, as compared with all staff.

A significant proportion of the funding provided through the Programme went towards learning opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge. Whilst authorities were not able to point towards any direct correlation between investment through the Programme and improvements in service delivery, there was anecdotal feeling that the Programme was enabling more training of junior staff which meant that pressure on senior staff was eased. Authorities also felt that the range of learning opportunities on offer had contributed towards compiling effective Professional Development Plans (PDPs). Thus, not only had the Programme identified the areas of need in which it should focus, it had also helped other parties in identifying the areas within which they should focus.

- **Develop a Programme of training events and other learning opportunities that target identified skills and knowledge needs within planning authorities and provide support for local learning events and initiatives and access to learning opportunities.**

Central to this output is the provision of support that targets identified needs. The questionnaires and discussions identified that the financial support offered by the Programme was most often identified as one of the key strengths. Clearly the Programme is meeting the provision of support that it sets out to do. This evaluation found an overwhelmingly positive response to the training offered. In-house events proved to be the most popular form of training, but open events were also viewed very positively. The authority survey highlighted that managers felt the Programme has either met or exceeded their training needs in around 80% of cases. Further, this evaluation identified 90% satisfaction with the member training events undertaken. Case study interviews identified that as part of making contact with authorities, the Improvement Service had also sought to scope the needs and priorities of authorities to ensure that training was delivered in a way that met those needs.

Overall, the Programme has been demonstrably active in all of the training of a range of professional staff, technicians, administrative staff and members, offering easy and free access to a much wider range of training topics than the authority could provide on its own.

- **Work in partnership with planning authorities, stakeholders and training providers to deliver and evaluate the Programme, agree arrangements for joint funding where appropriate**

Feedback from all sources confirmed that the Improvement Service has made a concerted and effective effort to make contact with planning authorities, described by case study authorities as a genuine undertaking towards partnership working. The Improvement Service has also made contact with a wide variety of stakeholders and engages with them via the Programme's Stakeholder Group and through direct liaison.

In terms of evaluation, attendees at Programme-supported events complete event feedback sheets. Case study discussions with managers identified that the Improvement Service have also taken on board personal and informal feedback within normal communications. Finally, the Improvement Service has commissioned this evaluation to consider the impacts and to guide the Programme where appropriate.

Little action has been taken to date in terms of agreeing arrangements for joint-funding. Case study discussions with authority managers suggest that this route could be viable, and see value in 'buying in' to Programme activities to ensure their viability. The Improvement Service is currently considering appropriate means by which this could be realised

- **Work with planning authorities and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement mechanisms to encourage and support effective engagement with communities and the business sector**

Questionnaire results showed that planning officers engaging with the Programme were relatively unsure or doubtful as to the effectiveness of the Programme's effect or efforts to implement mechanisms for engagement with communities and the business sector. Case study discussions highlighted that better engagement with the business community had not been a priority to date. However, this was not felt to be a criticism or failing of the Programme or the Improvement Service but a practical reflection on the number of staff working on the Programme and the level of resources available to the Programme.

At a planning authority level, case study authorities reinforced that the Programme has contributed to noticeable operational improvements, even if this has not yet become apparent in terms of performance indicators. Interviewees also responded positively about the effects of the 'kaizen blitzes' aimed at improving processes.

- **Promote and support innovation in service design and delivery, and provide a framework for disseminating the learning from such innovation**

The 'kaizen blitzes' facilitated by the Programme were aimed at improving the processes and delivery in planning authorities. Comments received about these were entirely positive.

The responses to the questionnaires indicate that there is potential for more integrated service delivery, although this judgement could be as much a view of the 'length of the journey still to be taken' rather than purely related to the Programme measures to date.

Dissemination came out of the case studies as a major area of potential improvement, especially ways in which the Programme-supported learning can be passed on to colleagues to try and maximise the benefits from such events. Overall, the main focus of Programme activities to date has been training.

- **Establish mechanisms for stakeholder involvement and ensure that stakeholder views are embedded into the Programme.**

The establishment of a stakeholder group to support and inform the Planning Development Programme is undoubtedly a positive action. The Group has been seen to play a valuable part in both informing the Programme and its priorities, and in offering experiential feedback on their perceptions of both Programme take-up and delivery.

Addressing Development Requirements

The response provided by the questionnaires illustrates a strong Programme which is effectively addressing the development and training requirements that it has identified. Some 70% of planning authorities responding to the evaluation questionnaire felt that skills gaps overall were being addressed by the Programme. Around 80% of responding authorities said that the Programme was meeting their training needs as they had expected. It was clear from both the questionnaire and the case study focus group discussions that officers valued the training they had received and felt that it met their development requirements. It was also clear that the Programme funding allocated to the development of new training opportunities is linked to an estimate of the likely demand for those events.

Approaches Showing the Most Potential for Changing Attitudes and Practices

A recurring theme in this evaluation is the support that authorities gave to the learning opportunities provided by the Programme, and in particular to in-house training events, indicative

of the increased participation that can be achieved from training given in this way, i.e. undertaken by colleagues simultaneously and in a shared environment.

The questionnaires also highlighted a strong communication flow from the Improvement Service through to individuals. The majority of case studies highlighted the strength of communications and their relationship with the Improvement Service as a positive outcome from the Programme.

Grant support, whilst small in absolute terms compared to some of the other spending areas under the Programme, has managed to reach out to approximately half of all planning authorities. In each case, where an authority had received a grant they had responded in the authority questionnaire saying that the grant had been either extremely useful or useful. Whilst this is not surprising, the case study interviews reinforced the actual impact that this money had brought about, in particular in overcoming the financial burden of travel from remote authorities to attend events.

Extent to Which the Programme is Contributing to Professional Experience and Morale

Whilst there was a marginal preference for in-house training events, external open events were still viewed very positively. The case study discussions highlighted the benefits of learning alongside attendees from other authorities at open events. In addition to the more obvious networking opportunities, this allowed structured discussion around issues and the pooling of practices.

Within the individual questionnaire, around 90% of agreed that they had acquired relevant new knowledge and skills as a result of the Programme. Further, almost 80% agreed that they had been able to use their new knowledge or skills in a work situation.

Open workshops and learning events were also judged to have a positive effect in terms of morale. By sharing experiences and challenges, individuals were able to feel a greater sense of self-belief since their problems and learning needs were demonstrably similar to those of other delegates. There were also morale effects highlighted by case study authorities when staff such as technicians and administrative staff that did not traditionally benefit from training were able to become involved.

Examples of Good Practice in Skills and Knowledge Development

Attendees and managers perceived that in-house training was a preferable route towards effecting process and culture change, and that open events allowed for sharing of experiences and practices elsewhere. This was reinforced by the questionnaire findings and points to significant positive effects derived from learning events. Some 60% of authorities reported that they collaborate with other authorities or public agencies in organising training provision.

Planning authorities felt that within the Programme good progress has been made in skills and knowledge development, but that there was scope for the Improvement Service to enhance its role further as the central conduit of matching training needs and identifying synergies between authorities.

The Programme training package formulation process was itself identified as good practice. With its basis in the needs identification exercise carried out by the Improvement Service conducted at the outset of the Programme, it meant that the resulting training was judged to be more relevant than other commercial training organisers.

Additionality of Programme Outputs

The authority questionnaire did not identify any noticeable net change to other sources or amounts of training engaged in by planning authorities. In this context, it could be reasonably assumed therefore that the training provided by the Programme has been genuinely additional.

Through the case study discussions, authorities were questioned in such a way as to try and identify the counterfactual, or what might have happened in the absence of the Programme, i.e. would training provision have increased anyway. All case study authorities felt that without the Programme the overall level of training that that had received or undertaken would not have been as high as it had been. Some authorities felt that the training they had received might have

occurred at some point in the future, but that it would have likely cost more, would have meant some other training would have been forfeited in turn, or may have involved fewer members of staff.

The authority questionnaire asked planning authorities what they thought that the impact would be on their planning service if funding for the Programme did not continue beyond March 2008. In response, 85% considered that the impact would be felt by their authority. Case study discussions confirmed that authorities do not expect to be able to fund the same level of training through other non-Programme means.

Issues for the Future of the Programme

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 underpins a fundamental and comprehensive reform of both the development plan and development management systems and processes. The case study authorities frequently referred to the impact of the Act on their workload, in the context of an ever-widening range of policy agendas, government initiatives, and changes to authority planning responsibilities and procedures. It is likely that the Planning Development Programme will be requested by authorities to react to several key themes of the Act as more detailed proposals emerge.

Future Areas of Focus

- **Increased Focus versus Increased Range**

Within the questionnaire, 75% of respondents felt that one improvement that the Planning Development Programme could make would be to offer different methods of training delivery. This is in contrast to opposition by some to alternative learning methods (particularly e-learning), and comments by others that the Programme ought to try to further prioritise and focus its efforts to make them more effective. The challenge for the Programme is to build on the previous experiences of its first phase, consolidating its current strengths and to continue to work within a relatively confined budget and personnel complement.

- **Community Engagement**

It is also felt that consideration should be given to the reasons for, and expected value of, engaging with communities. Only if it is felt that the Programme can genuinely add value within its resources should this be pursued as a long-term objective. It may not be appropriate or viable for the Programme to deliver this.

- **Topic Coverage**

In terms of future topics, both the questionnaires and the case study discussions have included several lists of future subject areas that respondents would like to see either included, rerun or expanded upon. A select list of the most common responses included the 2006 Planning Act requirements, climate change, development plan preparation and best practice, enforcement and e-planning. Irrespective of new topic areas, consideration should be given to how dissemination of learning can be maximised.

- **Elected Member Training**

The overall perception from the evaluation was that a good start had been made by the Programme in training Members, and that the provision was well received. However, authorities stressed that this was very much an ongoing requirement rather than a one-off hit. Rather than each authority preparing training on a broadly similar set of issues, a rolling programme by the Improvement Service would be a more fitting use of resources and expertise.

- **Culture Change**

The issue of culture change proved challenging to explore with case study authorities. Whilst there was disagreement as to how it might best be effected, it was generally agreed to be an important issue for an evolving service. Culture change is also an issue for the private sector.

Economies of Scale

Based on attendance data and feedback forms, the normal range of attendance at learning events varied considerably. For example, over the assessment period of this evaluation, between 6 and 26 persons attended each of the design workshops. There are thought to be benefits associated with trying to better optimise the attendance levels at some events. This

would also maximise the networking benefits of events. Advance timetabling of events could also help to increase uptake.

Opportunities for Leverage and Maximising Impacts

Subject to the funding levels resulting from the 2007 Spending Review, the Improvement Service might consider the possibility of moving towards a shared funding scenario, as was explored with case study authorities. For those authorities, the first and main preference was for training to continue to be provided on a free basis, but any scope for subsidy or joint funding was also seen in a positive light if it meant a net increase in training levels, and with a greater range of training that they themselves would be able to sustain. In terms of the grants offered as part of the Programme, it is recommended that consideration be given to ways in which the leverage effects of the grants could be maximised, for example through using cost sharing principles.

Finally, it is important that the Programme continues to maximise the additionality of its interventions. To date it is felt that the additionality has been very high, but over time it is possible that planning could be increasingly seen as an easy target within authorities in setting budgets for training expenditure if it is known/felt that there will be an ongoing external resource commitment from the Improvement Service.

Acknowledgements

The study team comprised:

Arup – Christopher Tunnell, Kieron Hyams, Jillian Hastings and Matthew Wright

Independent – Geoff Peart

The research would not have been possible without the willing co-operation of many individuals within planning authorities that provided survey returns, and more specifically to those that also agreed to be case study authorities. The planning authorities that participated were:

Aberdeen	Loch Lomond & Trossachs NP
Angus	Midlothian
Argyll and Bute	Moray
Cairngorms NP	North Ayrshire
Clackmannanshire	North Lanarkshire
Dumfries and Galloway	Orkney
East Ayrshire	Perth and Kinross
East Lothian	Renfrewshire
East Renfrewshire	Scottish Borders
Edinburgh	Shetland
Eilean Siar	South Ayrshire
Falkirk	South Lanarkshire
Fife	Stirling
Glasgow	West Dunbartonshire
Highland	West Lothian
Inverclyde	

The following six authorities took part in the case study data collection process:

Edinburgh
Glasgow
North Ayrshire
Perth and Kinross
Scottish Borders
Comhairlie nan Eilean Siar