

National Planning Improvement Hub: FAQs

What is the National Planning Improvement Hub?

The National Planning Improvement Hub will provide planning authorities with access to specialist expertise, to upskill their staff and to prepare their workforce for the future.

When will the Hub be up and running?

Initial work on establishing the Hub has already commenced with initial scoping and recruitment in place. Now that the Hub has been confirmed in the Programme for Government, we will continue to full set up at pace.

Why has the National Planning Improvement Hub been set up?

Scotland has ambitious aspirations and targets for achieving net zero, having a prosperous economy and reducing inequality that can often depend on new investment and development that will need to be planned and consented through the planning system. Given this, the NPIH will support planning services to gain the new skills and expertise required to deal with these effectively and efficiently.

Will the National Planning Improvement Hub be involved in decision making on planning applications?

No. Its role is to provide planning authorities with access the expertise and good practice that they may need to do this.

Who will manage the National Planning Improvement Hub?

The National Planning Improvement Hub will be hosted in, and coordinated by, the National Planning Improvement team in the Improvement Service and will be supported by staff from Scottish Government, key agencies and other partner organisations. Its work will be guided and supported by Scottish Government, COSLA, Heads of Planning Scotland, SOLACE, other members of the High Level Group on Planning Performance, and by industry.

Will planning authorities be charged for its services?

The NPIH is funded by Scottish Government this year so that there are no direct costs to planning authorities. We will be looking at a range of funding options for future years, with the intention that there will be no charge to planning authorities.

Will the National Planning Hub take staff away from planning authorities?

No. The NPIH will comprise a small and agile team that will collaborate with others to deliver its work and to embed learning. It does not intend to employ frontline planning authority staff.

How will the National Planning Improvement Hub support planning authorities?

It will assemble specialist expertise and deploy this to support planning authorities. It will work with planning authorities to support the sharing of expertise and learning amongst them. It will develop tools and resources to highlight good practice and help planning authorities to use these to improve their practice. It will support learning through events and networking.

How will the National Planning Improvement Hub prioritise its resources and expertise?

Some of the learning materials and events will be open-access and free to use or attend. Some specific learning materials and events will only be available to planning authorities and the organisations they are supported by. The deployment of specialist expertise will be decided through analysis of planning authorities' and industry needs.

What will the National Planning Improvement Hub's priorities be?

Between September 2024 and March 2025 the NPIH will focus on supporting planning authorities to plan for hydrogen projects.

Why hydrogen?

Hydrogen has been identified by industry as having great potential to support Scotland's ambitions on net zero whilst there is a challenging consenting pipeline for hydrogen projects. Awareness of, and expertise in, planning for hydrogen is thought to be low amongst planning authorities and they would benefit from specialist expertise. Funding has been made available from Scottish Government net zero to pilot the hub concept through focusing on hydrogen.

What will happen after March 2025?

The first phase of the NPIH will be a pilot that looks to provide proof of concept for the it to be in place for the longer term with a plan to extend the services offered by the Hub in 2025-26 to support wider developments including the delivery of good quality homes and onshore wind. Decisions on the future funding of the NPIH will be agreed through the Scottish Government budget for 2025/6.

How is the National Planning Improvement Hub related to the Scottish Building Standards Hub?

There is no direct relationship between the planning and building standards hubs, though they may share good practice and expertise that is relevant to one another. They are funded separately, have different governance arrangements and have different ways of working.

How does the National Planning Improvement Hub relate to the National Planning Improvement Framework?

The National Planning Improvement Framework process will provide evidence on key challenges facing planning authorities and the improvement actions they intend taking to address these. This can help to scope future learning materials and expertise that could be developed and shared through the Hub. The process also involves identifying good practice by planning authorities and this can be shared through the Hub.