

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

SUBMISSION FROM THE ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE SCOTLAND

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit. We have around 2,200 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of nearly 23,000. We:

- support policy development to improve approaches to planning for the benefit of the public
- maintain the professional standards of our members
- support our members, and therefore the majority of the planning workforce, to have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver planning effectively
- maintain high standards of planning education
- develop and promote new thinking, ideas and approaches which can improve planning
- support our membership to work with others who have a role in developing places in Scotland
- improve the understanding of planning and the planning system to policy makers, politicians, practitioners and the general public.

Our evidence on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's Inquiry into Public Sector Reform is set out below under the three strands identified by the Committee.

Strand 1: Partnerships and outcomes - to examine the ongoing development of community planning partnerships and the community planning process and assess how these could be built upon to support outcome-based approaches to service planning and delivery in local areas.

A properly resourced planning system working within the right framework is key to achieving ambitions for sustainable development, economic growth and successful places across Scotland. This was recognised by the Government's Council of Economic Advisers who said "*a central purpose of the planning system is to facilitate good quality outcomes...the ultimate test of an effective planning system is the maintenance and creation of places where people want to be.*" The planning system is also a key lever to support approaches to sustainable development and for protecting Scotland's environment.

However, the cross-cutting nature of planning, and the range of outcomes it can help achieve, mean that it is often difficult to ensure that the different users of the system

appreciate its value and role. An example of this is the current disconnect between Community Planning, Single Outcome Agreements and the spatial planning system. If these were to be better connected it would allow for a more integrated approach which could ensure a more effective articulation of the spatial dimensions of many public sector initiatives and programmes. We do not suggest that spatial planning and community planning are merged but that arrangements are put in place which allows these systems to join up better.

Better integration of the development plan and Community Plan production processes could lead to a more effective use of resources, a more joined up approach to policy development and more coherent allocation of resources and delivery. For example, the planning system in Scotland is now plan-led and aims to produce more succinct and up-to-date development plans which are reviewed every five years. This puts an increased emphasis on early discussion and agreement on priorities across public sector bodies, with other stakeholders and with communities. Development plans and Community Plans both undergo stakeholder and community engagement. However these processes can sometimes be undertaken in isolation which can, in turn, lead to confusion and duplication of work.

Also, Community Plans and Single Outcome Agreements outline programmes and initiatives which will often have spatial dimensions to them, however these are not often articulated in a spatial way. A clearer link with the development plan would allow this to happen more effectively.

It should also be borne in mind that a key aim of Community Plans and Single Outcome Agreements is to allocate resources. Again, this may have a spatial dimension to it, and if these were linked with the development plan it could help to ensure that development plans are more closely connected and, ultimately, more deliverable.

And finally, good planning relies upon early and effective public engagement in auditing communities, analysing their needs, planning their short- and long-term management for community benefit, monitoring action programmes and outcomes on the ground, and reviewing circumstances. This analysis and its associated evidence should be key considerations also for community planning and the development of Single Outcome Agreements.

Spatial planning aims to provide certainty, confidence and predictability for developers, investors, communities and stakeholders. Better integrated development planning and community planning processes would help to achieve this.

Strand 2: Benchmarking and performance measurement - to examine the development of work that has taken place over the last two years in relation to the development of benchmarking and comparative performance data and cost measurement and assess how it can contribute to the performance of local authorities in Scotland.

Key challenges for benchmarking and performance measurement are the fact that no two local authorities are the same and so each will therefore face different challenges and have different opportunities. It can also be difficult to quantify and measure impacts, especially if the outcomes are about the quality of a service or a community. Many of the outcomes strived for will only be attainable in the longer term and this has to be recognised both in reporting on progress made towards them, and in making decisions on policy and resource allocation.

The emerging Planning Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF), which is being developed by Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) and Scottish Government appears to be a good example of an approach which balances the statistical/quantitative elements of performance with the softer/qualitative elements. National Headline Indicators will focus on decision making timescales, delivery of outputs, age of development plans and success of project planning, whilst the Framework will look at ways of measuring a high quality service through assessing how the authority is open for business; how it delivers high quality development on the ground; how it provides certainty; how it engages with its customers; how it is efficient and effective in making decisions; how effective its management structures are; its approach to financial management; and how it embeds a culture of continuous improvement. The framework will also identify future improvements to be made, and share progress on improvements that had been previously identified.

In doing this the PPAF attempts to embed a culture of continuous improvement and whilst not advocating formal benchmarking across all planning authorities, it does allow for this to happen between those authorities who are able to compare and who would find this useful. The PPAF does, however, encourage planning authorities to share good practice. This is welcomed although it will only be effective if there is a joined up approach to identifying, sharing and applying good practice and innovation in disciplines, such as planning. Currently a range of organisations do this in ad-hoc fashion which means that the good practice is not easily accessible. Also, much of this type of work focuses on upskilling the individual when there is a more pressing need to ensure that the organisations they work within have the right culture to allow them to use these new skills.

Strand 3: Developing new ways of delivering services - To examine progress in relation to the development of shared services and other innovative ways of achieving economies of scale and harnessing the strengths and skills of key public sector partners to deliver the best possible quality services in local areas.

The Committee should bear in mind that good planning can prevent the need for further spend at a later date. Policy and investment decisions should recognise that good planning is 'early intervention' which can save costs in the long term by anticipating future issues. This fits the Government's proposals for public service reform, and specifically its response to the Christie Commission, to support local authorities in improving outcomes for people living in Scotland and helping to drive demand out of the system. This makes it even more of an imperative that we get things right at this early

stage. The 2006 Planning Act aims to push many planning functions 'upstream' and, in doing this, attempts to create a more collaborative and less adversarial approach. Investing in this approach can go a long way to help design out potential conflicts and issues, which could be raised at a later date. This relies on recognition of the need to think in the longer term when allocating resources

I trust that the Committee will find this helpful. If you would like to discuss any aspect of it, or require clarification on any points raised, please contact me on 0131 229 9628 or 07850 926881.

Yours faithfully

Craig McLaren
National Director, RTPi Scotland

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