



House of Commons  
Communities and Local  
Government Committee

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# Planning Matters— labour shortages and skills gaps

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Eleventh Report of Session 2007–  
2008

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*Oral and written evidence*

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## **Communities and Local Government Committee**

The Communities and Local Government Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Communities and Local Government and its associated bodies.

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Dr Phyllis Starkey MP (*Labour, Milton Keynes South West*) (Chair)

Sir Paul Beresford MP (*Conservative, Mole Valley*)

Mr Clive Betts MP (*Labour, Sheffield Attercliffe*)

John Cummings MP (*Labour, Easington*)

Jim Dobbin MP (*Labour Co-op, Heywood and Middleton*)

Andrew George MP (*Liberal Democrat, St Ives*)

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The current staff of the Committee are Huw Yardley (Clerk of the Committee), David Weir (Second Clerk), Sara Turnbull (Inquiry Manager), Josephine Willows (Inquiry Manager), Clare Genis (Committee Assistant), Gabrielle Henderson (Senior Office Clerk), Nicola McCoy (Secretary) and Laura Kibby (Select Committee Media Officer).

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## Taken before the Communities and Local Government Committee

on Monday 28 April 2008

Members present

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts  
John Cummings

Andrew George  
Mr Greg Hands

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*Witness:* Sir John Egan gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** The issue of planning skills shortages seems to have been suggested for at least a decade, and there have been other reports before yours: do you think the situation had changed when you made your report or have things changed subsequently, or have things stayed the same?

**Sir John Egan:** I cannot talk about what has happened since the report. I can talk about the situation as we saw it when we wrote the report. We were asked to look at the skills required to create sustainable communities. We first tried to understand what the Government meant by “sustainable communities” and then looked to see whether that was indeed what people wanted. We used the huge amount of evidence there was from Mori polls and polls that we did ourselves to check what it was that people wanted. The nice thing about it was that there was very close similarity between what the Government had in mind and what people wanted. Indeed, we thought that the creation of sustainable communities was a very good end point for the planning process. Instead of trying to make lawyers rich, we should try to create communities fit for people to live and work in, and we thought that the goal that the Government had created in its definition of “sustainable community” was that these were communities that people would like to live in.

**Q2 Chair:** I am interested in the view that you seem to have that planners should have much more generic skills training in project management and partnership working.

**Sir John Egan:** Yes.

**Q3 Chair:** That is not an obvious skill to a lay person that a planner should have.

**Sir John Egan:** When we looked at the situation that we inherit today in most towns, the problem is that I am sure no rational planner would have planned to have the things that are there! Typically, you will have retail developments here and housing developments here, and schools in the green belt there, and hospitals in the green belt there, and no sense of community and no sense of place. The new things that we have been doing over the last thirty or forty years have not been sustainable communities; they have been something quite different. It might be very convenient to fit everybody’s guidelines into

these single purpose developments, and we thought the biggest single contribution we could make was to say that what we are doing now is not what people want, and these are not sustainable communities; we should be trying very much harder to create something closer to what people wanted, and these tend to be much more mixed developments than indeed what we have been creating. We thought it was more important to be very clear on what we were trying to achieve, rather than trying to achieve more of what we were doing today. Generic skills: indeed, the whole planning process itself is very wasteful, with loads and loads of misused effort and time, with often the planning application going backwards and forwards between the developer and the planning committee, with planning committees not clear about what they were trying to achieve, with the communities getting things they did not want. The whole idea of planning makes most normal communities very unhappy because they assume this new plan will be against their best interests. We were suggesting that it was very important to have much more cohesion in the pre-planning of a community. We needed a vision, a way of describing that vision, processes to achieve it and processes to engage the community and all the elements of central government in a common cause, working together. We were struck, for example, by what people wanted in their lives. It was extremely interesting. The thing that people wanted more than anything else was to be safe. The second thing they wanted was for it to be clean; the third was for it to be friendly, and the fourth was that they wanted some open spaces for their children to play in, and other things after that: but nobody was attempting to do these things. The police were certainly not involved in the development of any new community. If we were going to plan places for people to live in, there had to be far more cohesion between all the elements of local government, with local government, before we could start to pre-plan the kind of communities that people wanted to live in, and perhaps go back and overcome some of the mistakes we had been making over the previous thirty or forty years—so lots of skills required here.

**Q4 Chair:** Do these same issues apply equally to where you are doing relatively small developments in a pre-existing, largely developed urban environment? Is it the same thing for that as where you are building a wholly new development?

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**Sir John Egan:** The committee's view was that we should use the planning process to improve the sustainability of a neighbourhood, and not just dump houses into a field; put houses where they will have the best productivity between retailing and business and so on—try to cut down the car journeys. We were also thinking about CO<sub>2</sub> emissions: how do we really get environmental sustainability? Simply adding communities and dumping them into a field and not worrying about their governance—who is going to be in charge; who will give leadership; how will this community work—we have to think about all of these things if we are going to make each development an improvement on a neighbourhood and not simply an annoyance to it.

**Q5 Mr Betts:** Are the terms “planning” and “planners” trying to cover too much? On one level you have skills about the visual environment, almost akin to architectural type skills; and at the other end, on complicated projects say in the city centre like regeneration schemes, you need skills that are more financial, project-management related or even legal. Can individuals encompass that enormous range of skills that would make a planner capable of delivering?

**Sir John Egan:** To be honest with you, these are skills that every business person should have. They are the same skills that make businesses successful: communication skills and project-management skills are all generic skills to all successful businesses, and there is no reason why our planners should not have these skills as well. Some of these planners are planning huge projects that do require stages in them to make them successful. They need pre-planning. They need the same kind of cohesion of effort and thought as any complicated project. I would say that the more complicated it is, the more skills these people require. They are the normal skills of normal business and are not really very complicated.

**Q6 Mr Hands:** On which of your key recommendations in 2004 do you think little progress has been made?

**Sir John Egan:** Has some progress been made? I am saying I simply do not know the nature of the progress that has been made, although since you asked me to give evidence you said it was more in terms of the thinking behind the report you were interested in rather than the progress, but I have checked on some of the progress that has been made. One of the things we did suggest, amongst all the skills, was skills in central government to delegate to local authorities. We suggested that communities that people wanted to live in were not going to be designed here in Westminster; they were more likely to be designed in local places. The skills to delegate to local authorities were very important. I am delighted to see that some of those skills are appearing. It is very important that we do not try and do it all from Whitehall; that local authorities give leadership to their communities. I am delighted to see that progress has been made there.

**Q7 Mr Hands:** What about a council of training, one of the things you talked about—unskilled councillors or committees making decisions? I recall in the local authority that I recently served on going on a training course for members of the planning committee probably in 2002, quite some time ago; but I cannot recall whether this is compulsory now or recommended. I wonder if you can comment about how far you think that is important and your impression as to how far that has permeated down?

**Sir John Egan:** We thought it was more important that councillors bought in to the vision for the future and the strategy of development than it was for them to do particular planning courses themselves. What we did not like was the idea of councillors sitting on a planning programme who did not agree with the general direction that the plan was going to go in; so we wanted to see informed people agreeing with the general vision and strategy of the community. We thought it was important that they did have some planning background, but it was more important that they bought in to the general plan, and, secondly, that they represented the plan to the community they served. That was more important than trying to become an amateur planner.

**Q8 Mr Hands:** How much does that give rise to a conflict for a councillor, if you are talking about the need to communicate the plan and the vision for the community on the one hand, and on the other to avoid any sense of predetermination of planning application that might be given rise to if you are talking about the general regeneration of an area?

**Sir John Egan:** I think you are going to have to have some predetermined ideas as to the kind of community you want to create. I think we have to be quite bold here. We have done an awful lot of awful planning over the last thirty or forty years—dreadful retail parks with barbed wire around them, business parks with beautiful fountains in them but barbed wire fences around them. The business communities, which can give leadership to communities, are separated off by these barbed wire fences. The person who is probably more likely to be able to keep a neighbourhood clean is the guy who runs the Tesco store; he knows how to keep places clean, so why should he not be helping to keep the general neighbourhood clean? He is the expert on getting sub-contractors to deliver to their contracts. There is loads and loads of expertise in the business community that is not being used to give leadership to their communities. When you are starting to think about the governance of an area, often the business people or the school leaders or the hospitals could be giving leadership, but they are often split off from the community they serve. Governance is an extremely important concept for us to have at the back of our minds when we are looking at the places people live in. It really is not satisfactory to put 20,000 people into a huge field with houses of all the same kind and expect somehow or other some governance to fall into place. These huge housing estates that were built after the second world war simply have not worked, and we need to retro-fit them all, make them places fit for people to live in

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and put some leaders in there who will help to keep the place clean and help to make it work. These are simply things we have not done or even thought about.

**Q9 Andrew George:** Sir John, would you not agree that there are some “Emperor’s Clothes” which your review failed to identify or even acknowledge?

**Sir John Egan:** I am certain there would be.

**Q10 Andrew George:** That is that the planning system is fuelled by greed rather than by need; and that if the process is driven by developers that want to maximise the value of the planning permission secured, how are you ever going to achieve sustainable communities?

**Sir John Egan:** Well, the planning system also builds hospitals and schools. Do we need to put the school into the green belt and have everybody drive there by car? Do we need to have single-purpose retail developments? Do we need to allow any of them? The one thing we did say in the report is that we should stop creating any more of these awful places; just do not allow them to be built. I agree with you entirely. I have got no problem with what you have said.

**Q11 Andrew George:** If land is identified for housing and the community needs affordable housing, how do you achieve that under the present system? What skills are required?

**Sir John Egan:** There are two or three things that we have to do. First, why should we necessarily sell the land—if the Government has developed the land from a brownfield site, we could quite easily split the ownership of the house into the land perhaps and concentrate on getting high-quality, low-cost housing on to this land.

**Q12 Chair:** Can I just take you back, Sir John, to what this inquiry is about? In the context of Mr George’s question, what skills would planners need in order to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing within any development?

**Sir John Egan:** Affordable housing is more complicated. Let us say good-quality housing is relatively easy. We have to make sure they are part of mixed developments, and not simply houses dumped into fields. We have considered the governance of those houses and the nature of the community they have gone into, and we have understood that these are places to live—work and live proper lives with open spaces and so on—and it is a little bit complicated but not over complicated. Certainly the one thing we did see was that wherever you put huge numbers of people of the same social class into one area, and do not think about leadership and governance of that area, it will not work. For example, we notice that whenever you have anything more than, say, 30% of affordable housing, it becomes difficult to create the open spaces and keep them clean and get the proper leadership in there to keep it.

**Q13 Andrew George:** What skills are required amongst planners to ensure that the local authorities are not railroaded by the power of large businesses and developers?

**Sir John Egan:** I think what they have to do is understand the nature of the sustainable community as defined by the Government and make that their goal.

**Chair:** That takes us very nicely to John.

**Q14 John Cummings:** The Committee has been told in evidence that the Academy for Sustainable Communities has received to date some £13 million from the Department of Communities and Local Government, and that is since it was set up in 2005; and yet there has been immense criticism that the result of that sum has been influencing the learning of only 1.3% of its target workforce. To what extent do you believe that the Academy has filled the gaps identified in practical, technical and generic skills?

**Sir John Egan:** I am afraid I was asked to write a report and we made some recommendations, but I have not been asked to speak to the performance of the Academy at all. If I were running the Academy it might be different to the way it is being currently run, but I do not know anything about that, I am afraid. Nobody has kept me up to speed with its performance.

**Q15 John Cummings:** It did not figure in any of your investigations or inquiries at all?

**Sir John Egan:** It was not in existence. It was brought into existence after this report, and I was not asked—

**Q16 Chair:** But you did recommend that the Government should set up a national centre for sustainable communities.

**Sir John Egan:** Yes.

**Q17 Chair:** It could be argued that the Academy for Sustainable Communities is what the Government did to fulfil that particular recommendation, so I guess the question would be: how do you think it is different from what you recommended?

**Sir John Egan:** It was not part of my remit to keep in touch with it. I think I should have done! I personally was not asked to keep any further contact in it at all.

**Q18 John Cummings:** Having said that, how do you think that the ASC could improve its operations? Do you believe that we are getting good value for the £13 million it has spent so far?

**Sir John Egan:** I think I made it clear I was not able to give any evidence about what happened after my report was written. We were asked to write a report, and that is what we have done. I was hoping to keep contact with it through the work I was asked to do on the Thames Gateway, but that soon petered out. The committee did not meet very often, I have to say.

**Q19 John Cummings:** Have you any personal observations?

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**Sir John Egan:** I cannot give you any personal observations about the work of the Academy, no.

**Q20 John Cummings:** What do you believe is further required by the Government in order to improve the situation?

**Sir John Egan:** I can only tell you of the things that I thought the Academy should do. Whether they have done them or not, I simply do not know. I simply would not know whether they have been done.

**Q21 Chair:** Can I ask you about the group that was under your chairmanship that wrote the report: how often did you meet, as a matter of interest; roughly how many times did you meet?

**Sir John Egan:** We met many times over about a six-month period.

**Q22 Chair:** Then of course you wrote the report.

**Sir John Egan:** Yes.

**Q23 Chair:** Then nothing?

**Sir John Egan:** I was on a committee that the Prime Minister was chairing, which was to develop the Thames Gateway, and I rather hoped that I would be able to keep contact with the happenings of the report through that; but that particular committee only met two or three times within the year following the report, and then it seems to have been disbanded. I do not know anything much beyond that.

**Chair:** I must say it seems a slightly odd way of doing it, something I am sure we will wish to pursue with the Minister when we finally getting round to hearing the evidence.

**Q24 Mr Betts:** Do you think that once you produce a report like that you should be asked to do maybe an evaluation of progress a year or two years after it?

**Sir John Egan:** I think that is absolutely the case. If somebody has written a report like this, I would have thought it automatic that I should have had some contact with it over time, yes. That seems not to have been the case.

**Chair:** I think we are all feeling that. We do not necessarily need you to explore that point any further, so we will certainly explore it in due course with Ministers, but not now. Are there any additional points that Members wanted to ask Sir John?

**Q25 Andrew George:** It does follow from that; when you took on the brief to undertake the review, were you reassured that all of the efforts that you and your review team would be making in this regard would be followed through? To what extent were you reassured by the Department that all of the efforts you had gone to in producing an extremely comprehensive and well thought-through report would be followed through?

**Sir John Egan:** I was somewhat mollified by the idea of being on the Prime Minister's committee to advise on the development of the Thames Gateway, so I thought that there seemed to be an almost automatic system for me to keep contact with a real life development of the ideas that we produced here. We were hoping that the major hope for the Academy was that it could help in the process of delegating authority from central government, that they could produce a system of checking that could see that progress was being made towards creative, sustainable communities; and also in making sure that the generic skills that we were looking for were being taught to the various professionals that are involved in the planning process. By the way, when it comes to planning, if you try to see a comprehensive planning system under development and being developed, you will see there are literally dozens and dozens of different kinds of people involved in the planning process itself. It is too simplistic just to think of them as people planning by drawing lines on pieces of paper; that is not necessarily the key part of the planning process. We wanted to make sure that all of the people in the planning process were indeed receiving these generic skill trainings.

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*Witnesses:* **Mr Stuart Hylton**, Director of Strategic Planning and Transport, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Convenor, South-East Region, and **Ms Lynda Addison**, Consultant, Planning Officers' Society, and **Mr Lindsay Frost**, Director of Planning and Environmental Services, Lewes District Council, gave evidence.

**Q26 Chair:** I know we can see your names, but can you tell us who you are?

**Mr Frost:** I am Lindsay Frost, Director of Planning and Environmental Services, Lewes District Council in Sussex.

**Mr Hylton:** I am Stuart Hylton; I am head of a joint unit which provides strategic planning services for the Berkshire local authorities, and I am also Chairman of the South East Region of the Planning Officers' Society.

**Ms Addison:** I am Lynda Addison; I am Director of a consultancy called Addison Associates. I am here on behalf of the Planning Officers' Society because I

sit on the management committee. I am an ex-director of planning and transport from the London Borough of Hounslow. I am a planner. We are all planners in that sense.

**Chair:** You are all from the South East.

**Mr Hands:** Nothing wrong with that necessarily!

**Q27 Chair:** You were obviously here during Sir John's evidence, and I would like to ask each of you to say briefly whether what Sir John said matches your experience as planning officers.

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**Mr Hylton:** It is struck me that in some respects Sir John was talking about the problems that resulted from planning process that went on some years ago—post World War II housing estates. If we look at the development that is going on today, the majority of housing, for example, is being built on brownfield sites within existing communities rather than stuck out on big fields miles away from anywhere. The development process—he was describing the comprehensive planning that he had aspired to—is very much along the lines of the kinds of development plans that were produced by local authorities just after the Second World War. If you look at something like the City of Manchester plan back in the 1940s, there was absolutely no shortage of vision there, both on a grand strategic scale down to the detailed design of the houses. In that respect, the problems he was describing were not necessarily the result of a lack of planning so much as from a different approach to planning, which is to some extent part of a bygone era.

**Mr Frost:** I would go along with a lot of what Sir John said. I think there has been some progress since his report in 2004, for example on project management through the local development scheme system, and increasingly large applications and planning performance agreements are starting to come in. I think also there is a wider understanding in the profession of what sustainable development means; it is not simply the physical environment, it is also resource use, social cohesion and economic prosperity. We are also getting a clearer idea in the profession on some financial management, financial appraisal issues, which particularly crop up in big, complex, mixed-use developments, particularly where the local authority is seeking development contributions. We need to look very carefully at the viability of development of brownfield sites as to whether they can provide the usual range of requirements. Those are areas where I think there is progress. There are some difficult areas, and Sir John mentioned several. The ones I would add are the leadership role, which is proving very difficult in terms of local authorities and local authority partners producing visions of the sort of place they want to be in 15 or 20 years' time. It is very easy, in my experience, for that sort of work to be hijacked by the very simple “no” message that one can get from campaigning groups. The sort of breakthrough thinking that was discussed in the Egan report—where we are thinking out of the box—is getting difficult with the sort of tick-box mentality there is in the local development framework process, reinforced by the tests of soundness when you get to an examination. I think that is making creativity in planning harder, as there is a sort of audit/accountancy mentality that is there. I think that upskilling staff in terms of the generic skills that Sir John is advocating is very difficult in terms of the target culture; it is very much a nose to the grindstone approach—churn the stuff out, hit the targets—and also there are resource problems in many local authorities, to some extent met by Planning Delivery Grant—but that is variable and

unpredictable and does not allow you to plan long-term. The new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant will be even more problematic, particularly as it looks as though we are entering a period where the housing market may not be as active as it has been in the past. Most of all, the area where difficulties are coming is that despite some of the advances that have been made on the supply side in terms of bursaries and training to bring more people into the profession, the demand requirements of the planning system are increasing, and the gap, if anything, is widening. Part of that is a fairly unstable policy and legislative background; we are having yet another review of the planning system after several bites over recent years. I think that the perpetual atmosphere of reform does make progress on some of the delivery of sustainable development objectives a bit more difficult.

**Ms Addison:** I think there has been significant progress on some of the aspects that Sir John Egan talked about in terms of the issue around vision and building sustainable communities in the context of the local development framework process. I think that also has moved on. However, because it has moved on, I think it has left real skills gaps with local authorities. One of the pieces of work me and my colleagues have been doing on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service is doing what is called a diagnostic of local authorities. We have done over 80 local authorities now, looking at how they are doing their local development framework process, which is about the vision process, *et cetera*. I can confirm that we found, as part of that concern in that work, that the generic skills are missing. They are required and they are missing. We have listed them in the POS submission. Also, there are significant technical skills missing in the work that we did as well. There is not very much progress being made in helping those authorities to develop skills, but it is starting to come into play through work like the Academy for Sustainable Communities, and also the Planning Advisory Service; but there is a lead-in time, and it is a very slow process. Then you have to get those officers and the members—who I will come back to—to attend the training session, which is voluntary—and absorb it and use it. There is a long process time leading in to that. Progress has been made but there are still enormous gaps. Lindsay is right: the gap is getting bigger, and it will get bigger. It is being reinforced because of perfectly valid and appropriate changes to the planning system, but that means a lot of cultural and skill behaviour change, which is going to be very slow to implement. I think that the Academy of Sustainable Communities is now starting to do some of the right work but, again, it is a long lead-in time, so it is not starting to deliver at the moment. There is further to go.

**Q28 Mr Betts:** Is the immediate problem quality or quantity?

**Ms Addison:** In terms of skill, I think it is both. If we do not have within the profession, and it is not just the profession, in the whole area because, as our evidence has said, and the Planning Advisory Service, this is not just planners having these skills;

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this is the wider environmental community having these skills—the private sector and the other agencies that one has to deal with. They all need the skills. It is a problem of the skills not being present, both generic and technical, but also the quantity not being there as well: it is both—given the scale of demand.

**Q29 Mr Betts:** There is a problem, is there not, with this? It was explained to us about the age profile—there are many people about to retire and there is not much in the middle.

**Mr Hylton:** There was a report published last week which said that two-thirds of local government employees generally were over forty, and a third of them were due to retire within the next 10 years, and with the demographic generally there is a time bomb in terms of skills building up, which will only compound the problem we have got at the moment.

**Ms Addison:** If you put that in the context of the demand for the skills that was in the Arup Report for the Academy, you have this major problem growing. There is a time issue.

**Q30 Mr Betts:** What are authorities doing to cope, given the ideal solution, which would be lots of highly qualified, newly trained and experienced people, which is—

**Mr Hylton:** It is a variety of things. They can try and de-skill the jobs in some cases, and this can potentially solve problems in the short term but can lead to other problems such as a lack of creativity and the good design and negotiation skills. They can grow their own.

**Q31 Chair:** Can you explain that? How can you solve a problem by de-skilling?

**Mr Hylton:** In the same way that Henry Ford solved the problem of building cars, by breaking it down into very simple components and pursuing it with more of a tick-box approach. It is a way of processing applications more efficiently. The point I was making is that you can have associated problems with it in terms of the negotiation and design skills that can go into it.

**Mr Frost:** It is essentially less skilled, less experienced people doing the simpler applications, and using your more skilled, more experienced people to do the more complex things.

**Q32 Mr Betts:** Are there other ways that authorities are trying to cope?

**Ms Addison:** There is a major problem in most local authorities that they are short of resources and overloaded with work, which means that they do not have the time to get people to get to the training that they need to do and then start to use it. The other thing they are trying to do is grow their own: they are training up people who have come through this process of bringing in non-qualified people to do basic work, which is fine. Growing their own is one of the ways they are doing it. They are also trying to make better use of other skills—not planner skills—for doing some of the work; and they are also trying to work with their neighbours, adjacent authorities

or groupings of authorities, in order to put fewer resources into doing work across boundaries, which in principle is extremely good. However, having been party to some of the work they are trying to do in some local authorities on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service—the collaborative work—it is quite time-consuming and it needs particular skills in terms of conflict resolution, partnership development, getting over political issues as well as officer issues. That demands different negotiation skills than you might have had if you were just trying to do things in-house. That is one of the other ways that authorities try to deal with a basic shortage of skills.

**Q33 John Cummings:** Are there examples of local authorities coming together to provide these sorts of educational courses to assist each other?

**Ms Addison:** Yes.

**Q34 John Cummings:** Are they successful? Is it national?

**Ms Addison:** There are groups of authorities that are getting together to work together.

**Q35 John Cummings:** You say they are getting together: are there any examples where such an exercise has been carried out over a number of years? According to your comments this afternoon, this is not a problem that has suddenly descended upon us; it has been there for a number of years.

**Ms Addison:** The current examples I can give you at the present moment are Hampshire getting together to try and work on looking at IT in planning. They are—

**Q36 John Cummings:** You say—

**Ms Addison:** Sorry, am I missing the point?

**Q37 Chair:** Yes. John is asking whether you have any specific examples where authorities have already been working in partnership so that one could see whether it worked or not, as opposed to people deciding to do it.

**Ms Addison:** Hampshire has.

**Q38 Chair:** How long, roughly?

**Ms Addison:** For at least two or three, if not three years. Also, a group of authorities in Norfolk have. They have been working together on a whole series of things probably for at least three years. There are groups of authorities in London that work together, for example when I was Director of Planning and Transport—so we are talking rather a long time ago, at least 15 years ago when the authorities in West London were working together to do joint work, and they are now doing also in other authorities in parts of London. Those are just some of the examples I could give you, so it is happening, I am sure.

**Mr Hylton:** I am a living example of it! For the last 10 years the Berkshire local authorities have worked together to provide strategic planning. That is included—

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**Q39 Chair:** For those Members who are not necessarily familiar with Berkshire; Berkshire is entirely unitary.

**Mr Hylton:** Yes.

**Q40 Chair:** Four or five—I cannot remember?

**Mr Hylton:** Six unitaries. For the last 10 years we have worked together to deliver the strategic planning services that the County Council used to provide—minerals and waste planning, structure planning previously, and now the input to the South East Regional Plan. That included an element of training on strategic planning matters. At this moment I am preparing a planning training course for some of the leading councillors.

**Mr Frost:** The Surrey authorities did a project under the auspices of the Planning Advisory Service, and they looked at a whole range of county, district and borough planning functions, everything from enforcement, sharing specialist officers like tree and conservations officers, linking up IT, shared evidence-base work on planning policy—and that was the subject of a recent evaluation exercise by the Planning Advisory Service. I think some of the recommendations are now being carried through, so that project is into its second or third year now.

**Ms Addison:** Certainly the authorities in the South East have done lots of joint training sessions in terms of just skills development.

**Q41 Mr Hands:** I have a very quick question on the quantitative side of this thing. My impression is that the number of planning applications has increased significantly in the last 10 or 15 years, which in turn obviously creates more demand for planners; but how much of that is cyclical, due to the growth of private sector housing, construction, and large development, and actually might it solve itself over the next few years? I am not asking you to forecast the economy.

**Ms Addison:** In broad principles, in terms of planning applications and particularly major planning applications as opposed to the minor and other applications, that has tended over past history to go with the economy in terms of it usually lagging behind; the numbers come down when the economy has fallen. Given the Government's targets on things like housing development and the local development framework issues, I am not convinced personally that in effect it will follow the same pattern in the future; and the growth has been very steady over a long period of time, and all the projections would look as though the application process will continue to give rise to some major applications in order to meet the growth agenda in its broad sense, and the renewal agenda also of course for those areas that are not growing. Added to that, a lot of the work we are talking about is not just derived from planning applications but from the local development scheme as well, which is driving the demand for more staff and more input.

**Q42 Mr Betts:** One way of coping with the shortages you are talking about is consultants. Is that your experience, that more consultants are being used at ever greater expense; and are they being well used?

**Ms Addison:** One of the pieces of work that I have done for the Government over the last few years, which I completed last year, was the evaluation over four years of the Planning Delivery Grant. I led the research on that and produced a report for the Government. One of the pieces of work we did as part of that research was look at where the Planning Delivery Grant was going in terms of money, and how significant it was in terms of the overall budgets of local authorities; and the evidence from that was that there were significant parts of that money going into us of consultants because of shortfalls either in expertise or staff resources overall. So the local authorities have made extremely extensive use of consultants by and large. The problems they have got is that—I am from the consultancy sector—the consultants have, by and large, the same problems as the public sector; in other words there is a shortage of people with the skills, so it is not necessarily a solution to use the private sector because we have not got the skills and it is robbing Peter to pay Paul quite often, with people swapping around, and there is a gross shortage. Secondly, the private sector itself is developing the new skills in the same way the public sector has got to—so that is what it has been doing. Thirdly, one of the problems that has really been experienced in the practical skills issue is that the public sector is not good at using consultants. They are not skilled at drawing up specifications, performance managing them, ensuring they are delivered to cost time and making sure they get effective use of the money and judging what the amount of money is to do the piece of work they are asking for. This is a new area of expertise.

**Q43 Mr Betts:** Looking at the range of skills that are needed and given the Planning Bill will materialise at some stage and come back in to the House, one of the major components is the infrastructure levy. It should bring a whole lot more demands, not merely in quantity but in difference in nature, on planners' jobs.

**Mr Hylton:** With one of my other hats, I am trying to advise colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government on skills issues, and I am going to produce a report on that particular subject very shortly. A lot of what is identified in the evidence we have given you today is relevant to the delivery of the community infrastructure levy.

**Ms Addison:** They do not have it. Coming back to the diagnostics that we have done across over 80 authorities, the evidence we have got is the planners do not have the skills, nor do their colleagues in other departments, whether education, social services or transport, who need to have the same skills; added to which, the other agencies that need to have the skills, like the Environment Agency or the Highways Agency, also do not have those skills, and they will need them to put together the

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community infrastructure levy and the implementation of that in the local development framework.

**Q44 Chair:** One of the ways in which skills and labour gaps can sometimes be filled if there is a shortfall is workers from abroad. Is that an option at all?

**Mr Hylton:** There is extensive use already of planners particularly from Australia. There is a strong Antipodean component.

**Q45 Mr Hands:** In my own local authority, Hammersmith and Fulham in West London, it is astonishing the number of Antipodean planners we have; it is four or five or six in the department.

**Ms Addison:** If you took them away, most authorities in the South East would collapse.

**Q46 Chair:** Is that because the Australian planning system is similar to ours?

**Mr Hylton:** Yes.

**Q47 Mr Betts:** In major regeneration projects it is traditional for the private sector to have a senior manager for the developer who will have a team of people, including accountants, lawyers and planners, and the lead officer in the private sector may not always be a planner. When it comes to the local authority, the person dealing with the project is assumed will be a trained planner. Is that necessary, to have project managers responsible in local authorities who are being advised by trained planners—

**Mr Hylton:** I do not think that is necessarily the case. You find in a lot of planning departments now that planning is subsumed within wider technical services or another directorate which could be managed by somebody from any kind of discipline and who is chosen for generic management skills rather than necessarily being a qualified planner. The idea of a free-standing planning department with a chief planning officer holding sway over it is in many cases a thing of the past.

**Ms Addison:** To add to that, depending on what sort of project you are talking about—a big regeneration project is quite often not led by a planner, but is quite often led by a regeneration officer in a regeneration department who may or may not be a planner—could be anything.

**Q48 Mr Betts:** Are there skills with regeneration officers and the problem that people do not seem to have those skills either?

**Ms Addison:** That is true. There is a shortage of those skills as well as planner skills, but quite often you have other people leading those particular projects; it could be a project manager with project management training, or a regeneration officer or something in another department. If you are talking about major planning applications, then by and large that is a planner that leads those, and increasingly the view is that they should be led in the way of a project management type approach, which has not been the situation in the past. That is why the

new planning performance agreements are being suggested for major complex applications, so they do actually get project managed as opposed to just dealing with it as an application going through the system, and it is not managed in terms of the time frame or the evidence that is needed at any point in time in the discussions.

**Q49 Andrew George:** As professional planners, can I ask you whether planning, as you see it, is an art or a science; or is it an art trying to be a science?

**Mr Hylton:** It has elements of both and several other things—it is also a branch of politics.

**Q50 Andrew George:** Do you believe there are circumstances where, if you put all the inputs in, including the legislative framework in which you operate the local development framework, *et cetera*, there is a correct answer and it is not a debating point?

**Mr Hylton:** There was a fashion for what they called systems planning back in the seventies, where the idea was that you put all the facts into the machine, turned the handle and out came the right answer. I do not think there is a right answer. Planning is about dealing with winners and losers, and there is a judgment to be made about who should win and who should lose and how the whole process should be managed. That is what I mean about it being a branch of politics.

**Q51 Chair:** Mr Frost, you had a specific point about local development frameworks.

**Mr Frost:** Yes. You touched upon use of consultants. Like many other planning authorities, we had to quite extensively use consultants in our LDF work. I thought this might come up today, and to date, over the last three years, we have spent £170,000 on external consultants for various pieces of work. If I go back to Sir John Egan's point about generic—

**Q52 Mr Betts:** How does that compare with your planning budget?

**Mr Frost:** Our planning budget is over a million a year, but what we have spent over the last three years has been far, far higher than we spent under the old local planning system, just to meet these evidence-based requirements. I think the key thing in use of consultants—and Lynda touched upon it—was how you manage them. It is being an intelligent client, if you like, knowing what questions to ask of a consultant. I am not a river engineer, but I have recently had to commission a strategic flood risk assessment, and in the process I had to know sufficient about flood risk management in order to pose the right sort of questions to the consultant to get that work done. There is that element of planner skills in learning sufficient about an area of work that comes to us now which did not come in the past, sufficient to manage a project and get the right sort of questions posed and answered as part of that work.

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**Q53 Andrew George:** You said in your evidence that the introduction of local development frameworks resulted in writing off thirty years of planning skills.

**Mr Frost:** A lot of planning skills were, yes; the old-fashioned land use planning has gone. It is now spatial planning and it requires a much bigger canvas that we are being asked to—

**Q54 Chair:** Is that a problem or is that better?

**Mr Hylton:** It is better in terms of practice, but it is problematic in the short term in terms of delivery in that there is a huge learning curve to be gone through.

**Q55 Chair:** I am going to move on to the Academy for Sustainable Communities and ask where you think the Academy needs to focus its attention, given with the scale of the problem that it is not going to be able to do everything. What is the top priority?

**Ms Addison:** I think it is client focus, which is very much around the generic skills, is the right one. I do not think it is possible for it to develop work around the technical skills. They still need to happen but those can probably be done elsewhere. I think that probably the priority, certainly from the work we have done for the Planning Advisory Service and in discussions with the Planning Officers' Society, would indicate that it is around issues like negotiation, leadership and project management, although the Planning Advisory Service is doing a lot of work on project management now. It is about understanding the management of resources and understanding the management of contracts and consultants, which would be a very useful set of skills for them to develop so that people could use those.

**Q56 John Cummings:** Do you think it is value for money?

**Ms Addison:** I do not think I am in a position to make that judgment because I do not have the evidence to say one way or the other.

**Q57 Chair:** Do the other two of you roughly agree with that?

**Mr Hylton:** In terms of the major skills, yes. Like Lynda, I do not have the evidence to make a judgment on that.

**Q58 Chair:** Given the problems you have outlined to us, what do you think would happen if these problems are not sorted out, and does it matter?

**Ms Addison:** Yes, it matters extremely. I think you could end up with the outcomes that the Government is seeking in terms of sustainable communities—houses, viable communities, attractive places to live—all that sort of wide stuff will not be delivered. You will end up with the sort of development that Sir John Egan was talking about with housing estates that you do not want, which are not sustainable and badly designed; or you will get a lot of aggro growing in terms of dissatisfaction by the community and by the private

sector in terms that the authority is not delivering in terms of the planning system; and you will get a totally demoralised planning system, which will get worse and worse as people disappear under the weight of what they are trying to do and the complexity of what they are trying to do, because they are trying to combine art and science. You need science to get the evidence; to understand the evidence then you need the art to negotiate the solutions with the community, with politicians or the private sector or whoever; so you need a combination of art and science.

**Mr Hylton:** The development of these new areas of skills, for example in coordinating different streams of investment in order to make the infrastructure happen that needs to support development—if we cannot get that right, we will end up with the kinds of problems that Sir John talked about in terms of uncoordinated development. We are now bringing a whole load of new players into the planning system in a more active way—Network Rail, the statutory undertakers, the emergency services—they are all going to be looking for a share of the community infrastructure levy. They will need the kind of skills we are talking about here today in order to make their case because they are going to compete with each other for that resource. If we cannot get those skills right, in the right numbers, then we will have a problem of uncoordinated development, which will further alienate the public, as Lynda said, and make it more difficult to deliver the Government's agenda.

**Mr Frost:** I cannot really add to that.

**Q59 Mr Betts:** There is another area of development that the Government is now looking at, and that is the whole sub-national review agenda, the development of city regions, the identification I suppose that the planning will be an absolutely key element of success in the regions with the transport element, the skills element and how you make a sub-regional economy work. Is that simply adding more problems on top of the existing ones; is that changing the nature of the problem; is the planning profession up for it and can it respond?

**Mr Hylton:** We are up for it, but from 10 years of experience of trying to make sub-regional joint arrangements work, I can tell you that it is no soft option. If you ask me what the training needs for somebody in my job are, I suggest you look at the manual for Kamikaze pilots! It can be done, but do not assume it is the quickest, cheapest or easiest way. It has real benefits in terms of coordination, economy of use of resources and so on, but the difficulty is getting six very diverse authorities in the case of Berkshire to work together should not be underestimated.

**Ms Addison:** It is yet another change in the planning system, which is affecting people's ability to focus on the job today because they are worried about what is going to happen. For example, some authorities are already starting—some regional bodies are starting to lose staff because of the threat

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of a sub-regional review, sub-national review. It is again about different skills and problems of staff morale and change that are affecting delivery.

**Q60 Mr Betts:** Can I ask whether there is a more optimistic way? There are a lot of immediate pressures, but in terms of the future and attracting young people into the profession, if you are saying, “Do not come and judge somebody’s dormer window application but come and help frame a city region and develop a sustainable community, is there not potentially something quite exciting there and should you not encourage more people to come into—

**Mr Hylton:** Can I speak from personal experience again? My son has just entered the profession and is now working for a planning consultancy and doing a post-grad part-time; and he has certainly found it quite an exciting career to come into. Despite what I say about being a Kamikaze pilot, I still get a kick out of doing the job and I try to communicate that.

**Q61 Mr Betts:** You have survived so far!

**Mr Hylton:** So far! I am only nineteen, mind!

**Ms Addison:** I am a visiting professor at the University of Westminster and the figures are going up enormously, so it is reflecting exactly what you are saying. The profession in terms of people’s interest in going into the profession is growing enormously. The courses are full.

**Q62 Mr Betts:** Have they been expanded as well?

**Ms Addison:** There has been some expansion, yes, correct; but question mark—we have been through this phase before in planning. Like Stuart, I would not want to be anything else but a planner, but we have been through periods where courses have been full but then within a few years they have closed down because there have not been enough people. It is back to the cyclical issue. At the moment they are more than full. They are overloaded and lots of people want to do it, and the quality of people going in to planning has got better, because that went down the pan too. It is positive, absolutely positive.

**Mr Frost:** There is a new course starting up very close to me in Brighton University this year, which will be an enormous boon for planning authorities in my part of the world.

**Q63 Mr Hands:** I have a final couple of questions on the role of elected members and their training and skills needs, whether you think that elected members involved in planning—which is in itself all kinds of possible roles—whether they definitely need training. Should training be compulsory, or are the existing arrangements satisfactory?

**Ms Addison:** On behalf of the Planning Advisory Service, we have done a lot of diagnostic work and we have done member training across the country, and what is very evident is that there is a tremendous desire by members to be trained and there is a real gap in terms of training provision so far. Most of them agree they need it because an awful lot of members still think of the planning system as it was 10 or 15 years ago. Even when you get new members

coming in to the system, they come in to the same sort of culture because the planning system has not changed within the authority; and then they are re-introduced to the old system, not the new system. So it is essential, and in my view, from our experience in doing member training and as an ex chief planning officer, it should be compulsory. There should be a programme, and not only just around development control, but the need to understand the local development framework system, because spatial planning is so different. They need to be an active player in it, and that is what we are training them in doing.

**Q64 Mr Hands:** If you made such training compulsory, why should planning be any different from any other set of skills that a local authority member needs, for example licensing or doing any of the other roles? Can you get to a point where, if you make training compulsory for members of particular fields, those fields would inevitably expand and you would reach a position where your members are effectively becoming more and more like council officers and less and less like elected members?

**Ms Addison:** There is a real difference in terms of planning and licensing or other areas of activity that members get involved in. Both planning and licensing are quasi-legal and therefore there is a need to understand the system in a totally different way than there is in other aspects of work within the local authority. In my experience, a number of authorities are making planning and licensing compulsory training for members because they believe it is so important, and it is built in to their code of conduct, the standing orders within the local authority. There are others that do not do that. A lot of authorities have a very good programme of regular training and bringing members up to date on licensing, on local development framework information, government guidance, on these sorts of issues. Planning, even more than licensing, engages with the public, day in and day out; it is the most heavily customer-focused activity that the authority does. Therefore, the members need to understand what they can and cannot say and what the current law is, in order to talk to the community effectively.

**Q65 Mr Hands:** I can see where you are coming from, and I do not mean this disrespectfully, but as a planning consultant you are almost bound to want to propose there should be more training for elected members. You are saying it is a quasi-judicial function, which of course it is, but there are a lot of other quasi-judicial functions out there, and a lot of other important functions of elected members where training might be helpful, such as for example officer recruitment and all kinds of other things. I was merely raising the point as to whether at some point you load on so much compulsory training that you might make becoming an elected member unattractive and potentially time-consuming. One of the points that was made is how difficult it is to get elected members to go on the training courses.

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Obviously, if you pile more and more training courses on, I think it will get harder and harder to get them to go.

**Mr Hylton:** One of the challenges there would be to manage the time you devote to training efficiently. You need to be very carefully focused. You are quite right about the concerns, not so much about going native, but the pressures on members. Simple things like trying to get committee meetings set up can be a major challenge with their diaries being so full; but provided the training is absolutely focused, that will help also to get them to come along to it because they will see that their time is being well spent.

**Q66 Chair:** Would you make a distinction between members of a development control committee—who are deciding applications where you could argue it is quasi-judicial—and the wider membership of the council being able to understand the local development framework? If the local development frameworks are truly to reflect the division of elected members, whichever group it is, how will they input to that if they do not understand the way it works?

**Ms Addison:** I would agree with that wholeheartedly, which is why I think all members need to understand spatial planning at a generic level; and then obviously you have got much more specific training requirements, which are not necessarily very frequent, maybe once or twice a year

on specific issues around development control as such—but, yes, I think all members need to understand the local development framework, and then the cabinet or the local development framework's steering group, which some authorities have got, need to understand in more detail how you go through the process.

**Q67 Mr Hands:** How much cost benefit analysis has been done on the merits of providing training as a way of reducing the number of successful appeals against an authority? Has anybody ever linked that?

**Ms Addison:** I am not aware of any research on that basis. The only research that I am aware of is that there has been an evaluation through the Planning Advisory Service that has been done on the value of the member training that has been carried out; and that has been very successful.

**Q68 Chair:** How do they measure its success?

**Ms Addison:** Feedback from the events.

**Q69 Chair:** So the members thought it was worthwhile!

**Ms Addison:** Yes, the members thought it was worthwhile, and the local authority has been contacted, and the local authority thought it was worthwhile, but I am not aware of any other evaluations being done—not linked to appeals or anything.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed.

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**Tuesday 6 May 2008**

Members present

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Sir Paul Beresford  
John Cummings

Jim Dobbin  
Dr John Pugh

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*Witnesses:* **Ms Liz Peace**, Chief Executive and **Ms Sue Willcox**, British Property Federation, gave evidence.

**Q70 Chair:** I thank you both for being here and for your written submission. The BPF raised a number of concerns about the impact on the development industry of skills shortages and what you felt to be the limited capacity of local authority planning officers. Can I ask you what you think the impact will be on the property and development industry if those gaps are not fully addressed and can I also ask you why you think those gaps have arisen?

**Ms Peace:** From the development perspective it is clearly very, very damaging for planning to take as long as it takes and consequently cost as much as it does. If you get more and more delays in the system then you are going to see developers who are less and less willing to undertake big and high risk schemes and that is going to become even more relevant given the current climate for development and the current attitude to risk. What you are then going to see are developers who batten down the hatches and say "We will not bother to do that. We will just sit on the property we have and collect the rent" and that will be damaging in the context of regeneration and rebuilding many of our town and city centres. Basically planning oils the development system and if planning is not working well, the development system is going to be severely impacted. I will ask Sue, because she has direct experience of trying to get things through the system, what it has meant to her business.

**Ms Willcox:** From our point of view, when one submits a planning application difficulties can arise if a local authority is not properly resourced or if they experience a huge turnover in staff, and low numbers of professionally qualified officers able to deal with the complexity of the application, then necessarily the applications take longer. It takes longer for that investment to be made and in the case of my employer's, Sainsbury's, then longer for beneficial improvements to stores or new stores to come forward.

**Q71 Sir Paul Beresford:** Where have they gone or have they never been there?

**Ms Willcox:** What has happened, and we have put some of this in our evidence, is perhaps there has been a concern that the status of planning officers has changed. There is much more about tick-box planning, fulfilling criteria and meeting the development control targets and, therefore, more processing going on for senior planners which has been less attractive to them. It does not look as though the planning skills at the other end of the

system have been feeding planners into the system and a gradual shortage has emerged of experienced planners.

**Q72 Sir Paul Beresford:** The Government is partly at fault because they have set this agenda of bureaucracy but what about the developers? They have taken more and more planners on and you have the additional tier of meeting assemblies, the London Mayor, if I might mention that at the moment, and all of their planners and the battle between the different levels. Does that contribute to it?

**Ms Willcox:** One of the reasons we are here is to say that the private sector is very concerned about that and we are here to discuss ways in which we can suggest improvements.

**Q73 Sir Paul Beresford:** What are you doing about it?

**Ms Willcox:** We are putting forward suggestions which might include cross-secondments with the private sector and public sector planners in order to improve training. We are taking forward suggestions which are not our own but made by a number of parties in the past such as Barker, partly Egan, certainly the Audit Commission, about ways in which the planning system might undertake process reviews in order to make the system more efficient and make better use of the planners you have.

**Q74 Sir Paul Beresford:** Over the years the private sector has taken them away from local government and you are now offering to send them back.

**Ms Peace:** It has got into something of a downward spiral. I would have to concede that a lot of planners do leave local authorities to work in the private sector but then you have to look at why they are doing that. One of the things Sue alluded to is the status of planning in the private sector. We have been inputting to every review under the sun for the last five years saying you really need to do something to raise the status of a planning officer's lot in the public sector so that once you have them in there they are not all stampeding for the door at the earliest opportunity. You also have to make sure that you use the planners you have in the public sector in the best possible way. I do not for a moment think there is a magic answer of pouring more resource into the public sector and pay them all double. That is not going to work. What you have to do is look at maximising the use of the resources that you currently have. If anything, we would rather see

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fewer highly qualified planners who are paid more and take some of the lower level stuff, which at the moment qualified planners are dealing with, out of the expert planner's system and give that to what we call para-planners in the way you have para-legals, technical people or clerks. A lot of it can be done by people who do not have the full panoply of planning training.

**Q75 Chair:** What is to stop local authorities doing that already?

**Ms Peace:** We do not know. You will have to ask local authorities. We have said it so many times on many occasions and a number of people have come up with this idea in the reviews that have been conducted. Kate Barker wanted to move some of the lower level planning activity out of the planning system completely, and that is also something the Department for Communities and Local Government have been circling around for some time. Things take a long time. The Department launched something called the Householder Consents Development Review.

**Q76 John Cummings:** To whom are you addressing your questions?

**Ms Peace:** To the Department for Communities and Local Government, the planning directorate, the director general in charge of that, ministers when we get the opportunity.

**Q77 John Cummings:** Do you think they are taking you seriously?

**Ms Peace:** Part of the problem is this is such a huge issue. There is no shortage of will to try and do something about the planning system but I think it becomes caught up in lots of issues to do with bureaucracy, increasing complexity, and there is no doubt the system is increasingly complex.

**Q78 Sir Paul Beresford:** Planning managers or technical planners or both?

**Ms Willcox:** Probably both. There are some mechanisms the government has tried to put in place, such as planning delivery agreements, and those are other areas where an applicant might be able to offer financial assistance in order to free up a senior planning officer to deal with my complex application. I am willing to pay you, the authority, some sums of money to back fill other applications that he or she might be dealing with. There are local authorities who are unwilling to do that and are unwilling to go down that route. This is an area where the government has given a local authority a facility to do this but a lot of them are unwilling to do it. We have had a recent example in Slough Borough Council where we did make the offer of a planning delivery agreement and working through and paying money to back fill so a senior officer could deal with their application but they were uncomfortable with it.

**Q79 Chair:** Why?

**Ms Peace:** Because they were worried about the propriety issue. I had this conversation with the chief planning officer from Birmingham some time ago. Birmingham is one of those councils who I believe have actually found a way of getting the developer to make a contribution through the Section 106 route which they then use to bring in consultants and expert help to actually process the planning permission more quickly. There are some local authorities who are very nervous that that might be seen to be the developer paying for a favourable outcome but we do not see it like that at all. We see it as putting money into the system to lubricate the system and we accept that the outcome will be the outcome. It is not that you are paying for a favourable outcome. When Sainsbury's do it you know full well it has to go through the process and if it is a refusal then it is a refusal but we want to see the system speeded up.

**Q80 Chair:** One of the things we have been told is there is a shortage of planners, therefore although I can see that if they are being paid more they will move from the public to the private sector. If there is actually a shortage then getting the developer to pay for additional planners is a zero sum gain; they have to get them from somewhere.

**Ms Willcox:** That is our perception as well. There are not enough in the system and there needs to be investment in training and training new people to come through. In my team at Sainsbury's I have a guy who was grocery manager at the Whitechapel store and he fancied doing planning and we are putting him through planning school so we are adding one into the system. I think that there can be a lot more encouragement to get people to fund people through planning schools and to try and add to the overall, but in the meantime we are where we are with a very complex planning system and a shortage of planners. There are still some things that could be done to improve the effectiveness of resources we have at the moment.

**Q81 Sir Paul Beresford:** I have had my head in my hands about planners especially when one of the last Mayor's planners told a developer that he would not want the plan of the flats to go through because there was no room for skis to be put in and he thought there should be skis in the development. Equally I have listened to planning committees and have had my head in my hands in absolute despair with some of the councillors. Should they be trained and, if so, what should you do, how often and for how long?

**Ms Peace:** It is imperative that planning committee and development control committee members do have some form of training. There should be a programme of courses they all have to do before they take decisions and that is for their own benefit and not just about us wanting to move the system more quickly. It is quite dangerous for them to be in that position without having some sort of formal training. From our perspective what we would like that formal training to include is fundamental knowledge of development economics, not because

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we are special pleading but because when you see something that a developer is pushing forward the committee needs to understand the level of risk in the project and the sort of return a developer expects. It is no good at the end of a debate, as happens from time to time, that the committee thinks the developer can afford to do that, the developer can pay this and that, if they do not understand broadly how the financials of the scheme actually work.

**Q82 Sir Paul Beresford:** Would your Federation run them?

**Ms Peace:** We are a very small Federation. We have a lot of members but in terms of a secretariat we are quite small. What we have tried to do in the past, and we have been at this for some time and this came out of the first Urban Summit in 2003, we did a module at that Urban Summit as a result of which a number of planning committee members came to us and said why do you not turn this into a commercially available package that can be used as a training aid. We joined forces with IDeA, the Improvement and Development Agency, and one or two of our members, and we actually funded the development of this module. It ended up as quite a fun interactive training module that could be wheeled out to local planning authorities to the members so they could go through this two or three hour module and actually understand something about development economics. I have to say regrettably IDeA seemed not to promote it particularly actively and it ground to a halt. We are trying to get the department interested in reviving and improving it but at one or two pilots I did sit in on the reaction of the planning committee members was fascinating. They said they really liked the financial stuff and wanted to learn about balance sheets, profit and loss accounts, how a developer does his investment appraisal, and were very keen on having a quality and interesting introduction to that side of things.

**Chair:** That is something we can take up with IDeA by letter.

**Q83 Jim Dobbin:** Specifically talking about planning training for officers and members, the issue is as high on the agenda as environment and climate change. Certainly an understanding of that is high on the agenda of planning departments at the present time. We have seen that over the floods that have taken place across the country. On the flood plains we have a growth of small developments where there is no communication between everybody that ought to be involved in that planning decision; the utilities people, for example, the Environment Agency and local authorities. There is an issue high on the agenda of planning that needs to be targeted there. We may be looking at specialists in this area to be appointed to planning departments and of course that has to percolate over into the planning committee.

**Ms Peace:** I would not disagree with that at all. Planning departments need a lot of input from a lot of different specialists because of different aspects: they need historic building specialists, they need

nature conservationists and they need environmentalists. I think it is back to what we were saying earlier that there should be means for them to pull in that expertise and resource if they do not have it themselves. I am not offering my members' money willy-nilly but developers are prepared to pay to make sure the process is dealt with swiftly and if that means bringing in consultants who can be funded through the development of Section 106, they will certainly be prepared to do it. Fundamental skills in the environmental side are hugely important. What we are finding increasingly is that my developer members are being subject to some very strange conditions in the interests of environment. There is no earthly use sticking windmills on a building that does not get any wind or photovoltaics where there is no sun. We are as interested as anybody in the right level of expertise.

**Ms Willcox:** Obviously the Environment Agency are statutory consultees on a very wide range of planning applications and the threshold for what is described as a major application, to which the Environment Agency have to be a statutory consultee, is reasonably low. There should be a safety net that they are coming in and giving that expert advice. As you rightly say, there are a lot of other environmental policies that are emerging. They are emerging in one area of the country and then being replicated elsewhere, perhaps not with a full understanding, and that is why perhaps local authorities pooling resource or sharing a resource might be a short-term measure to deal with that. Longer term I believe we are all on a big learning curve and we are investing time and money in understanding the emerging issues. Local authorities will have to do that too, and certainly planning schools.

**Ms Peace:** Is it worth adding the point we talk about the Environment Agency as a statutory consultee but there are a whole load of other statutory consultees. I know this is nothing specific to do with the skills issue but better coordination of the way the statutory consultees are consulted actually then makes the whole planning process more straightforward and saves on the time that your qualified planning officers have.

**Q84 Chair:** We have noted that but it is not actually part of this inquiry. Is it your view that it should be compulsory for councillors to have training on planning issues before they are on a development control committee?

**Ms Peace:** Yes.

**Ms Willcox:** I might add that one of my team brought to my attention the fact that there is quite a vast difference between the sizes of planning committees. In some authorities it is almost the whole council and could be 36 members and then in others it can be under 10, which may not be sufficient to have a good caucus for a decision. It would be better if some guidance were given to the sensible size of planning committees and then when you are committing resources to training them you know, as

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a local authority, you have to train 15 people rather than 36, which seems rather a large committee. I do not know how they get anything done.

**Q85 Sir Paul Beresford:** If it is compulsory and you have elections which re-shuffle, what do you then do? You are going to have a committee in which 50% or more never had training straight after the election and you have no planning decisions until they are trained.

**Ms Peace:** It ought not to take long to get a basic level of training set up. There are courses on tap. There are things like the work that we did with the IDEa. There should be a training needs assessment for members of planning committees, perhaps three or four key courses and as soon as somebody moves to that committee they are sent off to do that.

**Q86 Sir Paul Beresford:** Some of the recycling is enormous. Some of the elections have a tremendous re-shuffle on councils.

**Q87 Chair:** Particularly if you have all-out elections.

**Ms Peace:** But the alternative is you then have a group of people taking decisions on what is a highly complex matter.

**Q88 Sir Paul Beresford:** Is the answer to have a minimal size?

**Ms Peace:** Sue's point about keeping members to a sensible level would certainly help. Given the complexity of this subject and the almost quasi-judicial nature of the decisions that are being taken, it seems to me extraordinary that someone could turn up one week having done nothing in this field and be asked to opine on something that is extremely detailed.

**Q89 Chair:** To clarify this, the course that you did for IDEa: how many sessions was it?

**Ms Peace:** Five or six my colleague is telling me. The module varied and changed as we were developing it. It was basically a half-day module so two to three hours. It was an interactive play acting session where you divided the course up into two or three. It was done for five or six local authorities.

**Q90 John Cummings:** The Department has indicated to the Committee that the Academy for Sustainable Communities has received to date some £13 million and yet it has only reached 1.3% of its target workforce. Do you believe that the Academy is providing value for money and is it making the objectives that Sir John Egan envisaged for it?

**Ms Peace:** I would have to say I am doubtful that the Academy for Sustainable Communities has so far made a real difference.

**Q91 John Cummings:** Has it made any contribution at all?

**Ms Peace:** I have not done an academic measured assessment of it but we have engaged with it on a number of occasions. We have been mainly interested in saying how can we help, and how can you help us with the private sector, and making sure

they are behaving well and doing the best possible planning applications. We have had very little feedback or response. I do believe they are trying very hard to pull their act together but it has taken a long time. I would like to think that sum of money, coupled with the amount of money that has gone into the Planning Advisory Service, ought to have been able to make a significant amount of difference.

**Q92 John Cummings:** Is it really a damp squib? Is it really wanted by the Department or is it a sop?

**Ms Peace:** I cannot say what the Department want. We were very doubtful about its value when it was first set up and I have expressed those doubts. What I would like to see is much more targeted support to the planning system in terms of training. The problem with the Academy for Sustainable Communities is it had a very broad remit. You could almost say it sounded somewhat wishy-washy—"supporting sustainable communities". If we are looking at actually helping the planning system and getting resources into the planning system, then I think resources should be targeted specifically at that. That is what the Planning Advisory Service has started to do, although again there is too much emphasis on broad brush guidance documents hoping that planning authorities will pick it up and learn from it. The other aspect of the Planning Advisory Service, the advisory team on large applications which actually sits in EP, I think they have done a very worthwhile job. They provide a tiger team that actually goes out and helps and supports local authorities with big difficult planning applications. That sort of targeted help is a lot better use of taxpayers' money than something very broad brush in the educational sense.

**Q93 John Cummings:** Are you of the same opinion?

**Ms Willcox:** I have not had very much contact with the Academy for Sustainable Communities at all.

**Q94 John Cummings:** But what of the contact you have had?

**Ms Willcox:** I have not had very much at all.

**Q95 John Cummings:** Your memorandum suggests that planning departments could perhaps use their senior planners more efficiently. Can you give examples in which way this could be achieved and how it would operate?

**Ms Willcox:** It would be helpful to free them up from some of the more minor applications so that they can concentrate on the more complex cases and provide their skills for that. That is the essence of it.

**Ms Peace:** Part of the problem when you look at the planning system is it has to deal with everything from the garage extension right through to a Kings Cross and trying to get the people with the highest level of skills working on the things that really are complex and difficult is hugely important. Some things, householder stuff, mostly could be dealt with by a tick-box approach by a clerk with a minimal amount of training compared with what planners have to go through.

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**Q96 Chair:** If you have these senior planners doing the Kings Crosses of this world and the junior planners just doing people's garage extensions, how are you going to raise the status of the profession?

**Ms Peace:** I did not say the junior planners. I said you do not need trained planners doing a lot of the minor stuff at the bottom of the system. In most walks of life you grade the quality of the task that needs to be dealt with and train the people accordingly. Our perception, and certainly the people we have talked to in local authorities, is a lot of trained planning skill is used on this stuff at the bottom of the system which does not actually need planning training.

**Ms Willcox:** If you are a junior planner and you get stuck with minor household applications and garages and radio masts and things, then you move on. If there is no room to move up because the local authority has not got the authority for increased head count then that is when you move out to the private sector because you are bored.

**Q97 John Cummings:** Obviously local authorities embrace a very diverse, wide range of skills so which particular skills might local authorities usefully be able to pool on a local or a regional basis?

**Ms Peace:** Any of the more specialist knowledge. For example, over the years I know English Heritage have been concerned at the level of historic building expertise in a local authority. Maybe it is not worth a single local authority training up somebody to be an historic building specialist when you could have somebody who perhaps covered an area. The environmental issues, energy performance, renewable energy, all these sort of specialisms are exactly the sort of area where it seems to be helpful to pool expertise.

**Ms Willcox:** Our experience is, until recently when he retired, Ted Aisles used to serve all the Wiltshire area and all the districts as a specialist on retail so when a retail application came in, of whatever size or complexity, if the local authority felt they did not have the expertise to deal with that they would refer it to Ted Aisles. He was formerly with the county but then stayed on and served this pooling function and provided that service to them and helped to advise them on planning applications. That is direct experience we have had. As Liz said, it is often on the cases of environment and other specialisms that come about. Local authorities share one arboriculturist between a number of authorities.

**Q98 Chair:** Can I pick up on one of the questions you answered before which was about up-skilling staff? Have you any examples or specific points about how people could be up-skilled to fill the gaps?

**Ms Peace:** In terms of expanding the numbers available, we have talked quite a lot about training for members. Actually having the right syllabus of continuing professional development for planning officers is also important. Very early on in my tenure in the BPF I recall a conversation with the head of the RTPI and he actually said planning officers need more training in things like development economics. "Why do not you guys", talking to me, "fund a distance learning package in development economics?" It is something we have not forgotten but we have not had the time to address that and there is an issue as to whether it is really our core business. We would like to promote other people to look at that and how my members can support that, be it financially or with expertise. Whenever I have discussed this with our senior company members they have all said they would be more than happy to make themselves available to go and lecture on planning courses or CPD-type situations in order to get across what it is really like from the development perspective. The other angle, and this is something that Sue is particularly keen on, is this exchange secondment.

**Ms Willcox:** If there were career packages developed for planners so you would see that in your career path as a planner coming into the system you would get X amount of experience in development management, then in formulation and policy planning, some exposure to different areas, depending on your area of business so you can understand the application you are dealing with, we think that would be very good. A few years ago we did try an exchange with the London Borough of Southwark where we swapped one of our planners for one of theirs for six months to give each other the appreciation of what it is like to be a planner operating from the other side of the fence, which was very interesting. The girl in question from the London Borough of Southwark went back to the London Borough of Southwark. We did not keep her. She was very competent and we would have been happy to keep her if she had wanted but she was happy to go back. It was a good exchange and I think there might be opportunities to do that with perhaps planning consultancies, some of the BPF members might be interested in doing that. We had a very positive experience from it.

**Ms Peace:** Could I add one last point? We, in the industry, are extremely keen in seeing the highest quality of planners because the engagement that the development community has with local authorities should be a tough negotiation, and the development community should be held to account. It is in our interests to have good quality planners as well as local authorities.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

*The Committee suspended from 5.00 pm to 5.30 pm for divisions in the House.*

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*Witnesses:* **Councillor Ruth Cadbury** and **Councillor Norman Dingemans**, gave evidence.

**Q99 Chair:** First of all, given that both of you were sitting there for the previous witnesses I would like to run past you some of the things they said and get your comments on them. The first one is this issue about councillors using the staff they have in a smarter way and why it appears that councillors are not doing it, or maybe you think councillors are doing it? The second is the issue about consultants, and if there is a big development the developer paying either to get extra staff in at a top level or use your top planner but back fill underneath. The third point would be about whether you think there should be compulsory training for councillors.

**Cllr Cadbury:** To remind you, and for the record, we are both speaking in a personal capacity and not representing any particular organisation but we are both experienced councillors and have, or have had, lead member roles on the Council. I would agree with the previous speakers that there should be compulsion for particularly basic regulatory elements of making planning decisions, the core roles of development control and key for us is the issues of a code of conduct and bias, pre-disposition and pre-determination. Those elements do form the core of what training there is and I think it should be compulsory. In addition to that, there should be additional enhanced training for the chairs of planning committees because they have a crucial role in the effectiveness of the meetings and the preparation prior to meetings and I think there should be that in order to support their committee members.

**Q100 John Cummings:** Would the compulsory training be followed by a compulsory examination or a certificate of competency?

**Cllr Cadbury:** I think to ask elected politicians to hit a certain standard, should there be exams for MPs, you are getting into very difficult realms. We are elected and our competence to make decisions is based on our electoral mandate.

**Q101 John Cummings:** You do not agree with certificates of competency.

**Cllr Cadbury:** In a democratic system that is a quite a difficult one and you need a political philosopher to answer that.

**Q102 Sir Paul Beresford:** Should the training be internal or external because external brings more lateral thinking?

**Cllr Cadbury:** I have experienced internal training, I have done a bit of training myself, and in other fields I have participated and worked on IDeA training. I think there is a lot to be gained from external training but whether the capacity is there I do not know. Officers, whatever their profession, are good officers but they may not be good trainers so there is the skill of training as well which might be internally in the council's training departments but I think the training could be more imaginative. There could also be more than just briefing-type training. There is plenty of electronic-type knowledge that could be signed up for on our behalf that we could get

through on a regular basis and I do not think councillors benefit enough from that kind of use of education technology.

**Cllr Dingemans:** I do not hold quite the same ideas as Ruth. I think training should be mandatory but I would not go down the route of having a national certificate for it. Each Council varies, some are urban and some are more rural and therefore there is a different accent on the training that is needed. Could I perhaps explain what our council does, and it picks up the point you made earlier. When we have an all-out election our people who are appointed to the development control have to have two days intensive training before the first development control meeting. If subsequently somebody new joins development control, they have to complete that training within six months of going on the development control. The reason for that is you have the rest of the committee who have done the training before. It is delivered in-house because if you start using outside courses you escalate the costs fairly quickly. The sort of things it covers is the relationship between town and parishes and the council; conflicts; disclosure of interest personal and prejudicial; planning decisions; delegation to officers; committee reports, what to look for in the reports when making a decision; and conducting site visits, what happens when you go out on site to look at it. Also there is a particular training on decisions made contrary to officers' advice and the things you need to think about. It covers case studies and enforcement matters and then Section 106 agreements which was referred to by the previous speakers. A clear point there is if it is a major development you are looking at then you need to do the Section 106 agreement very early. You need highways, you need PCT and education authorities all involved so that you are not chipping away at the profit margins of the developer, as was referred to, so you get a package together. Then there is drainage and flooding. Then every six months there is a training session for the whole of the development control committee to look at the results of appeals, particularly if they have gone against the decision that was made to reject or particularly where it is against an officer's advice, so that is an examination which gives everybody a very good grounding.

**Q103 Chair:** Have you altered your training or added extra bits in following the greater emphasis within the planning system now of drawing up the local development framework and taking into account sustainable communities issues?

**Cllr Dingemans:** Yes, we have, very much so. The local framework concept has made the planning process much more confusing and has complicated it. When you consider you used to have a structure plan from county and a local plan from the districts, it has confused it a lot and makes it even more important that you have some form of training.

**Cllr Cadbury:** Ours has not yet. Our training officers last summer surveyed London authority training officers to find out what planning training there was and of the 13 who replied, on the whole, I would say the list was fairly procedural, fairly development

control based. One respondent said their council members had a session on policy but there was no mention of place shaping, strategic context, climate change, or sustainability in all the responses that I saw.

**Cllr Dingemans:** On the question of officers, we all have a lack of planning officers and one of the problems is a lot of them do go to the private sector. We are about to lose our head of planning to become a private consultant who set himself up. The reasons he has given is the whole thing has become so complicated with the LDF process and the lack of planners around that he had had enough. Regrettably we have to look for a replacement. We did try in the West Sussex area where we are based, to set up a virtual training academy between all the councils to try and overcome this business because we poach off each other, or tend to. We bought in four graduates about five years ago to train them and that worked very well until they reached a ceiling, because of waiting for dead men's shoes, to move up in the hierarchy and they were all poached by other councils around. What I was looking at was something where we could all work together to try and avoid that. We have a lot of big applications coming in for big sites for development in Bognor Regis and Littlehampton and we are setting up a small cell for consultants from outside to handle the major applications because our existing team will not be able to do it. We are bringing those in so we will not be seen by the developers as holding up the process by not having the capacity to do it. One of the comments made by the last witnesses was where we are asking the big applicants to help fund that. We do not promise them they will get their application but we point out that by doing that the decision will be made a lot more quickly than it would be otherwise. There is a problem nationwide on shortage of planning officers and I am not sure how we solve it.

**Q104 Chair:** On that funding issue, if a developer is coming with an application and giving you a financial contribution and then you approve the application, do you then feel vulnerable to your electors?

**Cllr Dingemans:** No, if you make it quite clear that it is funding consultants who are not actually members of the authority. We would be looking outside to consultants to appraise what the applicants have put in, like sustainability assessments and things like that. They will make their recommendations back to this major team we are setting up, which is internal, and they will make a recommendation to the development control committee.

**Q105 John Cummings:** Has the significant change from planning and development control towards more active place shaping really changed the relationship between councillors and officers?

**Cllr Dingemans:** I do not think it has. It has made it more complicated for both sides. I think the number of recommendations from officers that are overturned by councillors has not changed very

much as a proportion of the whole. It has forced them to work closer together because it is more complicated, and if development control can understand the officer's report, which I referred to as part of the training programme, they need to work very closely together. If you have the development control committee at odds with the officers all the time, you are not going to get very far.

**Cllr Cadbury:** It provides opportunities for members who are, after all, representing their communities and the concept of place shaping makes a lot of sense. It is quite difficult and the regulatory culture of making a decision on a planning application sometimes you are supposed to make a decision on the merits of that application only and you are quite restricted in looking around the outside and the impact of that development on others or the impact of other developments on that application. You are supposed to be very narrow when you make that decision and that does go against the concept of place shaping. It is an example where there is a challenge between place shaping community leadership and regulatory development control and preparing for a development. The resources are beginning to be there as more authorities are negotiating up-front support from developers to ensure the quality of the pre-application and the nuancing of the application but there is still a long way to go on that. There has been a misrepresentation in some councils, not mine but talking to other people, that councillors are not allowed to be in touch with a developer at all once an application has gone in which is an over-restrictive interpretation of the code of conduct and that does cause problems for councillors who have a big application. In principle they may well support it but they have real issues about some of the details, Section 106. I am told they are not permitted to be around and that is a challenge for them as community leaders.

**Q106 Sir Paul Beresford:** Should they be involved with pre-applications?

**Cllr Cadbury:** I think they should be involved in both within constraints and so long as there is no risk of being accused of pre-determination or conflict of interest. We are expected to only meet developers when there are officers present in a structured way and that is fine but apparently there are some councils where councillors really are not actively involved, except right at the beginning, and then when it comes to committee and you either have to support approval or refusal, maybe deferral which sometimes happens, but then you get clocked for the delay.

**Q107 John Cummings:** Have you any experience yourselves of staff shortages and skills gaps reducing the quality of advice given to councillors?

**Cllr Cadbury:** Yes, particularly on complex applications, particularly ones which need negotiation, liaison, expertise. On one example we need expertise around the sporting issue, and generally around sustainability there is a real shortage. In Hounslow (West London) we have

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filled the numbers gap to some extent by recruiting Antipodean and South African planners but they are often here only for a couple of years and then they are home so there is not the career movement and the development of their skills. A lot of them are very capable but they are not around long enough to progress beyond being in development control. In Brentford, my ward, we have had a lot of big developments and I do not think we have had the number and skills there to adequately support us in making good decisions on those applications.

**Cllr Dingemans:** I would agree with that. We have not had any particular problem with really poor advice but at times it has taken longer to get it through, particularly when you have the government targets of eight weeks. Some organisations will put in an application knowing they are going to have to go to appeal and that prolongs the proceedings. It does waste a lot of officers' time in trying to get it to development control when they know it is going to go to appeal because it is against the local plan or the draft LDF and it is a try on by the developer.

**Q108 John Cummings:** Have you any feelings as to what extent should councillors be involved in the pre-application process?

**Cllr Dingemans:** You have a real problem under the code of conduct, as Ruth was saying, about being accused of either bias or pre-determination and it is quite difficult for a councillor who is trying to represent an electorate when they see him or her sitting firmly on the fence unprepared to say I support or do not support this because if they are on development control they will be hauled over the coals for pre-determination. It is quite difficult for a councillor to toe that middle line and be involved in pre-application work.

**Q109 John Cummings:** Do you believe councillors are properly qualified to sit on Local Member Review Bodies to consider appeals against planning decisions?

**Cllr Cadbury:** I do not know enough about what this involves but if it means that small applications—roof extensions and garages—are going to be determined by officers, therefore members in effect will be available to look at those when they come to appeal. In which case the nature of the information to make the decision is probably fairly similar, but I think there is a lot of uncertainty about the proposal. Is there an upper limit on the size or application? What sort of applications? There are issues of time as well because it is more than just whether or not you have LMRBs, but how the application is going to be determined in the first place. In a sense, does that mean there is going to be more workload on officers? I think it is worth exploring but we are not aware enough of the detail of what the proposal is.

**Cllr Dingemans:** There is a problem. If you had a development control who made a decision to refuse which then led to an appeal and a review, you could not have the same councillors sitting on that because they have already made their mind up and made that clear with the original decision. You could either

have councillors from another council, another local authority, or some other councillors from the same body but then you have inter-tribal warfare going on inside the local authority. Possibly, having made the decision, whether we like the inspectorate or not, it is probably best left to them to be completely independent.

**Cllr Cadbury:** On small applications, under the current system or the future system, there is a real issue about being a ward councillor and determining applications in your own ward. On our licensing committee we have a rule that you may not determine licence applications if they are in your own ward and there is some merit for that on development control under the current system and certainly on the LMRBs.

**Q110 Dr Pugh:** Would there not be a tendency for there to be many appeals with proposals dealt with on a rather more populist basis? I am thinking in particular of things like telephone masts where councils cheerfully oppose it knowing with absolute certainty that as the rules go they will be overturned on appeal. If you have an appeal body which is made up of a subset of the council, it is likely to terminate just there, is it not? Do you think there would be any difference in the character of decisions that come out at the end simply because you have this procedure rather than the other procedure?

**Cllr Cadbury:** It depends what sort of applications you are talking about. I am not aware of what the threshold would be. Phone masts are a case in point anyway because there is major controversy about the harm they cause.

**Cllr Dingemans:** If you are going for a popular decision, a good idea is to raise the question of eco-towns. We have Ford Airfield just south of Arundel which is one of the 15 sites and I can tell you what the popular opinion is around that area. We, as a council, have been told to keep out of it. It is a campaign being run by the two MPs and residents. We have set up a select committee rather like this to look at it, councillors who are not on the development control. The rest of the cabinet have been told to keep our heads down and do not, under any circumstances, express an opinion either way.

**Q111 Chair:** Told by whom?

**Cllr Dingemans:** Our solicitor advised us to keep out of it under our code of conduct.

**Q112 John Cummings:** In relation to that, because the Planning Bill is currently awaiting its Third Reading in the Commons and has to be considered by the Lords in the current session, it does mean some very fundamental changes to the role of certain members, considerable changes, carrying a good deal of responsibility. Do you know whether your Association of Councillors and your Local Government Association have made representation to the Secretary of State in relation to this?

**Cllr Cadbury:** The Local Government Association, and I have seen a letter from Paul Bettison, is giving qualified support to the LMRB proposal but I personally do not know enough about the proposal.

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6 May 2008 Councillor Ruth Cadbury and Councillor Norman Dingemans

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**John Cummings:** The professional bodies are very much against it. Is there anything you can tell the Committee as to what steps are being taken to remedy any deficiency in the knowledge and skills required to operate these panels?

**Q113 Chair:** Are we talking about the Local Review Bodies again?

**Cllr Cadbury:** It will have to become far more judicial. The planning is already quasi-judicial and it would be more so in an appeal context and that raises issues about going even further away from being a local representative which is possibly why my suggestion of not determining anything in your own ward or own patch would be a minimum. I am speaking purely personally on this. Ultimately they are making informed decisions on applications, which is what they should be doing in planning committees anyway. In that sense there is not a lot of change.

**Q114 John Cummings:** There will be a cost attached to that: training for councillors, independent advice.

**Cllr Cadbury:** That cost presumably is currently attributed to the inspectorate. We know in local government responsibilities get shifted to us but the cost of the funding does not.

**Q115 Dr Pugh:** You seem to be saying you are unhappy with local members representing a particular ward making a decision in that ward

because it would not be as judicial as it might. The other argument is that they know the ward, they know the circumstances, and they have better input than councillors from elsewhere who may be relatively indifferent to whatever outcome is the planning decision.

**Cllr Cadbury:** You have to go by the material considerations and they are usually the borough-wide policies, borough-wide extension guidelines, and those kinds of things. I do not know enough about it and I do not know what level of applications you are talking about. If it is just the very small, very specific ones that fit easily within guidelines, then that is one thing. If you are going beyond that to schemes that have an impact across the whole community, then that is more difficult.

**Cllr Dingemans:** There is one other aspect. We did try about 10 years ago in our authority to take planning decisions much more locally and we did exactly what you are talking about: ward members making decisions about their area. We had just one particular committee who did it for about 18 months to two years but we had to stop it because the solicitor and the officers were very concerned that the members were being put under undue pressure by the residents who had voted for them so we went back to one central development control. It was a good experiment.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. I am really sorry about the way you have been messed about but circumstances were not under our control.

**Monday 12 May 2008**

Members present

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts  
John Cummings

Mr Greg Hands  
Mr Bill Olnier

*Witnesses:* **Mr Robert Upton**, Secretary General, and **Ms Sue Percy**, Director of Membership, Education and Lifelong Learning, Royal Town Planning Institute, gave evidence.

**Q116 Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome. The Committee has already heard significant evidence about the need to replace the missing generation of planners but also to upgrade the skills of the planners that we already have. Can we start off with you briefly explaining what the RTPI is doing to try to meet the gap in availability of skills, to meet the sustainable communities agenda and the other parts of the Government's planning agenda?

**Mr Upton:** I think there are two elements to this, firstly the shortage of professional planners in general and secondly the actual shortage of skills. When it comes to the shortage of planners we have undertaken some quite significant educational initiatives over the last seven years or so which has increased the throughput, particularly of postgraduate planners. Some very able people are coming through the planning schools now. We have also revised our routes into membership so that, for example, through the new class of associate membership it is possible for more people to be drawn mid-career into planning and to be developed that way. In terms of the actual shortage of skills, we ourselves offer a very wide range of training on both the commercial basis and also low cost events. We have our own programmes like *Planning Matters* which provide online support to planners. I think it is important here to take the long view. The development of skills absolutely rests on a bedrock of education. The skills which planners require will change many times during their working careers and that is a function not just of new legislation and new policy but changing circumstances and changing requirements. What good planners critically need is a very solid educational foundation. If they have the solid education and they understand the "why" then they will be able to develop new approaches to the "what" and the "how" over the years. For us that is a very major part of our mission.

**Q117 Chair:** Who are you addressing? Which institutions are you addressing when you are trying to ensure that that bedrock of education is provided?

**Mr Upton:** We have a direct relationship with planning schools and universities in this country and indeed elsewhere and we set the basic educational philosophy which they are required to respond to.

**Q118 Chair:** They are required?

**Mr Upton:** If they want accreditation that is.

**Q119 Chair:** So the lever that you have is that you provide the accreditation.

**Mr Upton:** That is right and that is quite valuable. We have been very successful and very much assisted by the bursaries which the CLG gives to postgraduate students. One thing which we think for a very small amount of money in relative terms could be done which would improve the situation would be if the Government were to make a similar amount of money available to support final year undergraduate students, in particular those who are progressing to what we call a professional masters. There is a critical shortage and it is still quite hard in current circumstances to make sure that all courses are full of good people. We think that a small amount of money would go a very long way there.

**Q120 Chair:** When you say a small amount, how much are you thinking of?

**Mr Upton:** The students on postgraduate bursaries get just over £3000 to cover their tuition fees and a living stipend of £6000 so it comes up to about £9000 per person. I cannot remember exactly how many bursaries there are at present but somewhere in the region of over a hundred as I recall and they are scattered around the planning schools. A similar effort directed towards undergraduate education I think would yield good results.

**Ms Percy:** It is aimed at the full time students and there are seven bursaries per 15 schools. It is there to attract people coming into education and for the undergraduate route as well I think it would be an extremely attractive offer to actually accelerate the supply line coming through and then into the profession.

**Q121 Mr Olnier:** When do you first start casting your net to try to attract somebody into the profession of being a planner? Do you start at age 10, 12, 15, 16, 18?

**Mr Upton:** I think I would like to be honest and say that we have an aspiration to do a lot more career development than our resources currently allow us to. These days quite a lot of the work which young people do in school on issues around climate change or sustainability or indeed many geography projects will point them towards that. We seek to develop a system where there are multiple entry points. I think one of the reasons why the planning profession has suffered in the past was because we got to the stage where there were too few ways of getting into professional planning unless as a young person you make possibly a rather fortuitous choice. We encourage what we call a mixed economy in terms of both undergraduate courses and postgraduate

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courses and then the ability now to come into the profession after graduation. Some local planning authorities have made very good use of the existing Planning Delivery Grant by using that to train staff they already have in service on part-time day release courses at good planning schools—South Bank, Westminster and others—where they can qualify within three years, they are working while they are doing it, the local authority knows them, they have a track record of wanting to work in local government. That has been a really intelligent use of Planning Delivery Grant.

**Q122 John Cummings:** When you spoke about the number of bursaries, how do the number of bursaries for prospective planners at universities compare with other similar professions?

**Mr Upton:** I do not know how the figure is calculated; it is a mystery, I think, known only to the Communities and Local Government Department.

**Q123 Chair:** I think we need to ask the Minister. The memorandum we have had from the Government does point out that of the students on these bursaries 99% complete their studies—which is excellent—but on graduation 36% go into local government, 34% in private planning consultancies and the remaining students to the voluntary sector. Do you think it is good value for the tax payers' money if only one in three of them are actually going into the local authorities where the need for additional planners is highest?

**Mr Upton:** Again I think you have to take the long term view. I talk to a lot of planning students in their final year and I always ask them whether they are going to go into the public or the private sector and it tends to be 50-50. If I then ask them whether they think that at some stage they will have a career in the other sector then again at least half of them think that that is going to happen. First of all it increases the total stock, so that cannot be a bad thing; secondly there is a real possibility that some of those who go into the private sector initially will come into the public sector later on. There are many reasons why people do chose the private sector for a first career. One is the perception about the range of activities they might be involved in and the perception that in some cases being confined to the more regulatory functions in local planning authorities may not be very attractive. Another factor is simply the fact that the private sector recruiters are much smarter on their feet than the public sector. I guarantee you that in the best planning schools the private sector will have been around them all dealing with those postgraduate students this year and will have made job offers. They just cream the stock. Local government cannot do that.

**Ms Percy:** There are also issues around perceived career progression and I think the students coming off the courses sometimes perceive that their career will be accelerated in the private sector. There is also a perception about who will look after their professional development and their professional careers. In local government there is a view at least

by some of the students coming off that perhaps the amount of money that is available for their professional development is pretty tight in local authorities and that the time and the resource to support them on their journey are going to be quite limited.

**Mr Upton:** This has become an absolutely critical issue. In terms of the development of skills and training there is a real failure not on the supply side but on the demand side. We put this in our evidence. We did a limited survey of local authorities to see just how much money they had available to support the continuing professional development of their planners and in some cases it is a pitifully small amount. If you add to that the situation where many of them have vacancies—for example the city of Birmingham has now got a 30% vacancy rate—then it becomes hard not just to find the money to train people but the time in which to release them. In those circumstances their professional development is severely hampered.

**Q124 Chair:** Do you have any suggestions as to how that particular problem can be met?

**Mr Upton:** Yes, we absolutely have. We think that the Government needs to develop its performance management regime—either the Government itself or the National Audit Office—so that there is a real focus on professional development. I do not think that this just applies to the planning profession either. I think that if it wills the end it must will the means as well; there needs to be money feeding straight through into the training budgets of local planning authorities. The evidence at present is that it is not and we are particularly concerned that when the Planning Delivery Grant is replaced by the Housing and Planning Grant that it might get worse because it is not so clearly directed towards improving the planning budget.

**Q125 Mr Betts:** Is there anything else that can be done? The likelihood is that you are not going to get that, are you? The move is all away from specific grants, indeed the planning development grant is slightly unusual in that it is a new specific grant that has been brought in. The idea the central government is going to micro-manage local authority finance so that it targets planning training as being an issue for a specific grant is unrealistic, is it not?

**Mr Upton:** That is a matter for government. I take the point that the trend may be away from that, but then the Planning Delivery Grant itself bucked that trend. If it is really necessary I think that it can be done, but at the very least I think the performance management regimes need to emphasise this.

**Q126 Mr Betts:** You have also been critical of central government for not dealing with the problem of a lack of culture change. Could you elaborate on that a little bit more?

**Mr Upton:** When the 2004 Act came in the Government said—and we agreed with it—that a change in culture was as important as a change in the regime. I acknowledge the efforts that are being

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made by successive ministers and civil servants to try to influence this, but I think that it has not happened yet. It is severely undercut by the target regime which applies at present which puts all the emphasis on being able to tick boxes to say that X per cent of applications have been dealt with in Y time. There is no reference to quality whatsoever. There is no reference to the development of the capacity of the people undertaking those tasks. I think that as that regime has actually got tighter it has had a pernicious effect; it has undercut the drive towards the change of culture. What we had all hoped to see with the 2004 Act was a move towards what in PPS1 is called a practice of Spatial Planning which has a focus on good quality outcomes and delivery.

**Q127 Mr Betts:** You do not think the new Climate Bill is a step in the right direction then with the emphasis on pre-application consultation—which surely is one of the ways we can practically deal with this issue of change of culture?

**Mr Upton:** Pre-application discussions are generally an excellent idea; we strongly support that. You do have the problem, though, that there are some local authorities who again are so strapped for people that they find it impossible to offer that service or only to offer it at a price.

**Q128 Mr Betts:** Do you not think that your organisation has some responsibility in this culture change because, after all, you are the professional body? Should you not really be taking the lead on it and bringing government along with you?

**Mr Upton:** I think that we have tried as hard as we possibly can to take a lead on that and bring the government along with us. Again we refer in here to the study which we have been doing jointly with the Government on what is infelicitously called Effective Practices in Spatial Planning but it took us two years to persuade the Government to co-fund that with us.

**Q129 Mr Betts:** What else should you be doing? Presumably the content for your courses is actually quite crucial. In the post-Egan report era there is the recognition that planners and their skills are much changed. Twenty or 30 years ago a planner might have been someone with an eye for an attractive development, now they are project managers in quite a complicated process involving many other professionals. Have you taken a lead in terms of the content of courses and how you are developing people?

**Mr Upton:** Yes, we do. We do not specify the detail of courses; we leave that to the individual planning schools. We talk about certain educational outcomes which the courses should achieve, and an awareness of the complexity of planning and of the number of other players, if you like, that are involved is a very key part of that. We certainly do our best to make available educational support through our training courses which encourage people to develop their skills. You are quite right that planning has changed a great deal; this is not a new phenomena, it has to be said, planning has been changing for a long time and will continue to change

which is why the emphasis has to be less on a prescription that these are the skills which we need for the next few years and more on the ability to understand the way in which planning is developing and what the future skills will be. We can say at present that there are really critical issues, for example, around lack of urban design skills and that is absolutely true. We can try to do things about that and we are, but it will not end there. We can see in the future that issues around climate change and the requirements of truly sustainable development are going to be tougher still than any regime which we are practising at present.

**Q130 Mr Betts:** Do you actually create opportunities to attract young people into planning which were probably not there 20 years ago? Planners are now at the heart of what we are trying to do in terms of urban development, in sustainability, tackling climate change. Planning is at the heart of all these issues, is that not something you should be enthusing about as an organisation and saying, “Come and join us, this is really attractive”?

**Mr Upton:** I think we are. There are some very enthusiastic people coming into play now. I would not want to knock the older generation, some of whom have given yeoman service. There is a highly motivated cadre of people coming into planning now—there is no question about it—people who understand the imperatives around climate change.

**Q131 Mr Olnor:** Following on from what Clive said, there is also a plethora of other organisations. I do not know if they are your competitors or what, but you are not the sole voice on planning. I just wonder whether you ought to be working not in a form of competition but perhaps working in a form of doing what we all want to see and that is more town planners out there with the expertise.

**Mr Upton:** Again I think we are not complacent, but I think that we have a track record which shows that we are doing quite a lot. You say that we are not the sole professional planning body; there is a part of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors which focuses on planning and development and I do not feel any need to knock them, I would simply note that most of their members are also our members so I do not really see them as a competing organisation in that respect. There are no other professional bodies dealing specifically with planning. There are cognate bodies such as the Landscape Institute and RIBA with whom we have good working relations. We do encourage planning schools to consider joint courses—or at least joint initial phases of courses—and there are courses such as at the University of the West of England which are dually accredited by both RIBA and us for the production of architects and town planners. We were a founder member of the Urban Design Alliance which has been a cross-disciplinary organisation seeking to promote good urban design amongst all professions and beyond and we seek to work with other organisations in terms of continuing professional development.

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**Q132 Mr Olnier:** Can you not move that forward and make one point of connection instead of all these other disparate forms?

**Mr Upton:** I think that in terms of recognising what is the most important professional body in planning I do not think there is much question that we occupy that position, and we do not occupy it jealously or selfishly. There has been a significant increase quite recently of universities seeking accreditation from us in this country but overseas as well. I think that we are seen as offering a platform for initial professional education which is genuinely valuable and highly regarded.

**Q133 John Cummings:** Who are the bodies who perceive themselves to be in competition rather than in alliance? It is in your evidence. The RTPI states that “there is inevitably some duplication of effort, not least because some of these bodies perceive themselves to be in competition rather than in alliance”.

**Mr Upton:** This is competition in the sense only of offering educational opportunities in terms of courses, many of which are offered commercially. The point we were trying to make is that there is a whole range of bodies which are in competition to the extent that they are bidding for the marginal pound, if you like; they are out there offering opportunities in training.

**Q134 John Cummings:** Is there any reason why you are not working together?

**Mr Upton:** Some people make a good deal of money out of this.

**Q135 John Cummings:** Including the Royal Institute?

**Mr Upton:** Yes, through our commercial partners it is a significant part of our income, otherwise it would go on subscriptions placed upon our members.

**Q136 Mr Hands:** I have a question about one of the groups, that is the new Academy for Sustainable Communities. How have you seen that working so far? Do you think it has been a success? Do you think it is providing value for money? What sort of joint work are you doing with it?

**Mr Upton:** I do not think I am in a position to offer the rigorous assessment which that question seems to call for. We have worked with the Academy from the outset. I was quite deeply involved in the working group that was set up by what was then I think the ODPM after Sir John Egan’s report trying to establish exactly what the focus of the Academy should be. Since the Academy has been set up we have signed the Statement of Commitment and we have supported the Academy wherever we can. My colleague, Sue, is consulted by the Academy with great regularity and sits on quite a few of their working groups.

**Q137 Mr Hands:** There is a lot of joint working, but in terms of value for money is it too early to tell?

**Mr Upton:** I think it is important to remember that the Academy is looking at a very wide range of professions, not just planning. I am in a corner, if you like; I do not feel that I have that overview.

**Q138 John Cummings:** In your memorandum you indicate that the lack of time, money and employer commitment is the single most critical factor in the overall training problem, not a lack of supply of appropriate training. If this is the case what do you believe the Government should be doing to improve the uptake?

**Mr Upton:** I go back to the answer I gave earlier, I am afraid, which is that I think the very least the Government must do is to encourage or bring about performance management regimes which recognise the need for professional staff to continue and develop their professional education. I think that is simply crucial. As part of the performance management regime they should be required to make the time and the money available to support that. If the local authorities are making the case that they do not have sufficient resources then I think the Government has to ask itself whether this is a case for steering more money directly to that area.

**Q139 John Cummings:** Have you made such a submission to the Government? Could you tell me what their response has been?

**Mr Upton:** I think this has been part of our consistent representations to government for a long time. I do not think it has drawn a direct response; I think that it is regarded as too difficult.

**Q140 Chair:** Can you pinpoint any local authorities that, from your experience, you think do invest adequately in upgrading the skills of their planning people?

**Ms Percy:** We have a number of what we term Learning Partners which are employers of planners, both public and the private sector, who apply for learned partner status which is a benchmark of excellence in the professional development of their staff. We do have a number of those who are local authorities and that includes, for example, Three Rivers District Council, Cambridge City Council, London Borough of Merton and others. That is where they have proper schemes in place which actually look after the professional development of their staff. They take it very seriously and they do look to release their staff so that staff can actually go on courses but not just on a “just in time” basis where they literally just get the information, use it, forget about it and move on. These Learning Partners actually have proper investment in the way their staff are developed and there are indicators now that for a number of these Learning Partners there are also retention benefits; it is not just about up-skilling their staff, it is actually about recruiting because some students now ask the local authorities if they are Learning Partners because they are actually very savvy and they want to know whether they are going to be supported through their professional lives.

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**Q141 Chair:** Could that information be made available to us, the evidence that it actually has an effect on retention or recruitment for that matter?

**Ms Percy:** We can certainly supply what we have, although it is early stages.

**Mr Upton:** Yes, it has been going for just over a year I think. It is essentially the kitemark which we grant not just to public sector but to private sector organisations to show that they have satisfied us that they have made a proper commitment to developing and supporting their professional staff. The Planning Inspectorate, for example, was one of the first organisations.

**Q142 Mr Olnier:** We have dealt with training for professionals, but I find it outstandingly arrogant that you should be saying that before a local authority member can sit on a planning committee they should be trained. I say this as an ex-local authority member, as an ex-chairman of a planning committee; I just wonder what route you are trying to go down in saying that before anybody sits on a planning committee they should receive some formal type of training.

**Mr Upton:** I am sorry if it strikes you as arrogant. I do not think it is arrogant, I think it is concern for their welfare.

**Q143 Mr Olnier:** Or might it be to put some more money in your pockets because you will be doing the training?

**Mr Upton:** No, not necessarily. Again there are many people out there who are prepared to offer those services; we do a small amount of it but we are not fighting for market share. It is for their own protection. As I am sure you are all well aware, it is very easy these days for local authority members to get themselves into significant trouble if they are not well advised and do not have a real understanding of issues around probity and what they can and cannot do. What we are not trying to do is to turn them into junior professionals; that is not the object of the exercise at all, they have professionals there to advise them. They need to know enough about the environment and the circumstances and the conditions in which they are working so that they do not get themselves into trouble or get the authority into trouble.

**Q144 Mr Olnier:** Most local authority members I know who sit on planning committees do know that but they are also there to represent the people who elected them. I have to say that the planners do not always get it right.

**Mr Upton:** I agree entirely. As we say in the submission, there are many, many members of local authorities who have served on planning committees of one sort or another over many years who have developed a great expertise; there is no question about that but they are not born that way. Also I think there is not a consistency of practice between local authorities.

**Q145 Mr Olnier:** There is not a consistency between the advice that is given to councillors from planning officers either.

**Mr Upton:** That is also true.

**Q146 Mr Hands:** Also as a former local authority member (but I was not distinguished enough to be chairman of a planning committee), I was slightly surprised when you said that the issues in your view are much more related to probity rather than, say, a general knowledge of how the planning system works. I am sympathetic to a lot of what you are saying, especially given the quasi-judicial nature of a planning committee, but are issues of probity really better dealt with by the local authority in-house rather than compulsory training for councillors? In other words, we have this whole structure in place of standards, committees and registrations of interest, how much of the probity side of things do you think is covered by that and how much do you think specifically needs training?

**Mr Upton:** Yes, local planning committee members will have access to the advice of the borough solicitor or whoever, but I still think that in their own interests it is very worthwhile them having some basic induction training that sets out the basic ground rules so that they understand that. They need to know, apart from anything else in their early days, possibly when to ask for advice. We are not talking about a great, long formal training course; we are saying a basic training. We acknowledge that a great deal can be done through mutual learning. It is a good idea, for example, for elected members to take part in organisations like the Town and Country Planning Summer School (a separate charity, I hasten to add) which has a very successful elected members school which gets about 400 elected members each year. It is really good—I do not say that in any patronising way—they have really good discussions and they help to develop each other's skills, knowledge and confidence.

**Q147 Mr Hands:** I am trying to think what you are trying to teach the local authority members. Is it more a kind of a procedural training: how do you deal with an applicant who approaches you and in what context should you or should you not meet with the applicant? Or how you should handle objectors. Is it very nitty-gritty training you are talking about?

**Mr Upton:** I think it has to do that but it has to do that in the context of what is this system and how does it work. If you do not have that context about what is a section 106 and things like that I think they will find it harder to relate to issues that an applicant might be raising which a member needs to be savvy about.

**Q148 Mr Olnier:** My authority changed political culture at the district elections last Thursday, so is the new incoming portfolio holder, because he has not done an accredited course, not able to be that portfolio holder? It seems to me that you are setting up an obstacle. Nobody minds training; I have no problem with that at all, in fact I learned what I

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know when I was vice-chairman of planning from the chairman of the planning committee and the office is constantly updated on changes in planning law. I am just worried that you are starting to put a little wedge in there that says “without being accredited and without having been to a training school, you cannot be a member of a planning committee”.

**Mr Upton:** No, we are not trying to go there at all. I am sure that the new portfolio holder will have the most excellent advice from his officers, all of whom I am sure are members of the Royal Town Planning Institute. I am arguing that it is in the interests of that portfolio holder and in the interests of public confidence frankly that at an early stage they should receive some training.

**Q149 Chair:** Apart from everything you have already talked about, one of the points raised by this inquiry in general is that the nature of planning has changed. Do you think the member training should also take account of that so that even people who have been on development control committees for some time may nevertheless need some sort of upgrade?

**Mr Upton:** Yes, we tried to make that point in the memorandum. For a start it is distressing that the focus is so much on development control. We have talked here about our attempts to develop good and effective practice in spatial planning, planning which is focused on good quality outcomes and the delivery of them. We think that that should be something which elected members are involved in as well. They should understand what can be achieved through this. We have examples which we can use. We say also that we think that one of the critical issues for the long term is really an issue of leadership. We are always moving into uncharted territory here and we think that the leaders of councils and the senior officials should be taking part in a form of leadership training which looks to see what good spatial planning which brings together the actual local development framework, which brings together what will now be the community infrastructure levy and local area agreements, section 106 or whatever, what can be achieved for the people through that. Let us all raise our gaze here and see what we can achieve.

**Chair:** On that uplifting note, thank you very much; we will move onto the next set of witnesses.

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*Witnesses:* **Mr Paul Lovejoy**, Executive Director, Strategy and Communications, **Ms Pat Tempany**, Head of Urban Renaissance, Housing and Policy, **Ms Miranda Pearce**, Renaissance Manager, South-East England Development Agency and **Mr Dominic Murphy**, Executive Director, Sustainable Communities Excellence Network, gave evidence.

**Q150 Chair:** You were all here during the last evidence session. All I would say is, do not all feel obliged to answer every question, particularly if you are just going to say the same thing that somebody has already said. If there is a specific something that you want to add, then please indicate. I will start by asking you if you could maybe outline what you believe to be the most significant skill shortages and the action you are taking to address those shortages.

**Ms Pearce:** We have done some research over a number of years with professionals in the south-east region and also more recently with developers and councillors. There have been some consistent messages that have been coming through that research. The main skills challenges they face are around, as the last speaker said, leadership and vision, project management, development finance, urban design and increasingly, sustainability. Those are a sort of package. Then along with that you have communication skills both cross-professional and cross-institutional communication. Community engagement and working with communities has always been and continues to be an important skill that everybody needs to have, from professional to councillor.

**Mr Murphy:** I represent the National Network of Regional Centres of Excellence. There are a couple of things I might add into that. We are particularly asked for expertise around climate change issues (individual local authorities requesting help around that issue) and the opportunity to get together with developers. You were talking in the other session

about very early discussions about major planning proposals; those are the sorts of things they are looking for to gain an understanding from as well. That has come up in various regions across the country so it is quite consistent. I would also say that in the future community engagement is something we are just getting filtering through with planning departments starting to ask where they can get training and that is to do with the duty to involve in the Planning White Paper.

**Ms Pearce:** In terms of what we have been doing, we do not just target the planning professions specifically; we have particularly tried to bring together cross-professional organisations. Increasingly, certainly in our South East Excellence programme we are looking to bring together developers and councillors. To give an example, urban design has been one of the areas that consistently has been selected as an area where both sides of the planning debate—the private sector and the public sector—believe they need additional skills. In our region when SEEDA came into existence we established a number of infrastructure supports so we put in place a regional design review panel that complements the national panel that CABE delivers to which is now a model that has been taken up by other regions and promoted through CABE. We put in place what we call a design champion’s club. When local authorities were asked to create a design champion in their organisation we thought it would be useful to bring them together so they could learn collectively and

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develop a peer network. Again that is something that has been taken up in a number of other regions. We also support our Architecture and Built Environment Centres which provide independent advice and often the first stage of that advice can be free to local authorities and to communities. They are then available as an independent consultancy resource for local authorities. More recently we have recognised that you need different levels of support, those who need to know basic information and those who almost need master classes in more detail and depth. We are working with Design for London and Inspire East which is the equivalent to us in the east of England to develop a new learning tool around urban design which will enable a large number of people to gather a basic understanding of urban design. At the same time we work with the Urban Renaissance Institute which is part of Greenwich University to deliver a series of master classes for those who perhaps need more detailed master class type advice and guidance. That is an example of what we have done in terms of the urban design skills shortages that have been with us for a while. We are currently in the process of looking at how we respond to the sustainability challenge, what is the package that we put in place to address that agenda.

**Ms Tempany:** Just picking up on something Miranda just said regarding the research that we have done in the south-east, that was focussed on looking at what the barriers were to delivery and looking at the skills and attributes that were needed by key decision makers. As Miranda said, that was identified as developers and council members. One of the things that they both said that came out of that was that they wanted more opportunities for engagement with each other so rather than formal training opportunities they wanted the opportunity to sit round a table, look at a development or talk about a development or go and see something and have that opportunity to talk to each other and learn from each other informally. I think whilst we are working in a formal way with some of them, they are also now looking to put more informal opportunities together so that they can learn from each other.

**Q151 Mr Hands:** I have a question for the SEEDA members and that is that you mentioned just now the research you commissioned last year and from our reading of the research it seems to suggest that the shortage of planning skills had a negative impact on the quality of development in the south east. What has caused that? Has it been the poor quality of decisions that have been made? Has it been perhaps the slowing down of the whole planning process or has it been perhaps over-hasty decision making? Can you go through what, in actual terms on a local authority basis, has led to this poor quality decision making?

**Ms Pearce:** I think a lot of the issues around quality come back to urban design and confidence amongst local authorities, both staff and members in their understanding of urban design. That has certainly led to some concerns. Also there is concern from a local authority side about the quality of the

applications they receive. You are probably aware of the CABE research into the quality of housing where it showed that all developers can produce good schemes although they do not consistently produce good schemes. What they need is a council to challenge them to consistently produce good schemes. It is often the confidence in that language and the questions to ask to be able to challenge poor quality. Yes, there are issues about speed and there are issues about costs, but actually it is the confidence to challenge and the confidence to insist that is sometimes missing.

**Q152 Chair:** If a private developer can produce good quality, why would they not bother to do it all the time? Is it cheaper to produce poor quality?

**Ms Pearce:** Yes. It is sometimes easier and faster because they can take perhaps a standard house type and apply a standard house type to a particular patch. They do not necessarily have to give the detail that would give a local distinctiveness. In that respect design quality ultimately produces a good value scheme, but if it is easier and faster to do your standard product you will seek to do your standard product.

**Q153 Mr Hands:** I think your research also highlighted what, in your view, is a variability of local authority members. What do you think is causing that and what do you think could be done about it?

**Ms Pearce:** There are very many areas where there are differences. I think that was the main thing that came out. Part of our research involved three workshops with developers and councillors together. We thought it would be useful to hear from them what are the skills and attributes they thought the others needed and what they themselves thought they needed. What was coming through there was a variable practice across the region where some, for example, would meet regularly with developers and developer forums but others were not sure they should even be at the meeting with developers there. Again a lot of it comes back to confidence and knowledge. It is not necessarily an issue of specific technical training, it is having a general understanding and being clear what questions they should be asking, have a design check. Often the issue is: "What are the questions I should be asking? I do not need a detailed understanding of design; I need to know what questions I should be asking of an applicant or asking my team." A lot of it does come back to understanding the language, having confidence and understanding the other side. That is the other thing that came through consistently; both sides wanted to understand the drivers behind the other. The developers wanted to understand more about the political process and the context within which politicians were asked to work and the councillors really felt they needed to understand what makes a development work, how do developers make decisions about risk, but they never really got a chance to ask those questions of each other because there was always a concern about probity and whether they should be talking.

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**Q154 Mr Hands:** Were those councillors members of the planning committee or chairs of the planning committee or were they principally councillors in charge, say, from an executive point of regeneration?

**Ms Pearce:** The majority of them were either committee chairs or members of the planning committee.

**Q155 Mr Betts:** What impact will the sub-national review have on local authorities in terms of the amount of work or the change in the nature of the work for planning members or for elected members?

**Mr Lovejoy:** In our view it will have a very substantial impact, the full scale and dimensions of which are still being worked through. Perhaps I could give you an illustration from the point of view of our organisation and the impact that it will have on us as a regional development agency. First of all, any involvement in the quasi-judicial process of planning for appointed board members will certainly mean a very significant shift in the skills required and the job description that will be set on appointment for the board members. It will have an impact on the conduct of meetings. For example, most RDA board meetings are held in closed session; it is inconceivable that the planning process will be handled in closed session in our view. Turning to our professional skills, there will be a requirement for regional development agencies to either recruit or establish other access to direct professional skills that will allow them to complete a regional strategy. Our view is that that will require something in the region of 15 to 20 members of staff. Currently, for illustration, there are roughly five members of staff involved in similar work in the regional development agency. There is also alongside that team roughly 20 members of staff currently working in the regional assembly whose skills will be particularly needed. We are also clear, particularly in a region as large and diverse as the south-east, that it has often been the contribution made by local authority planning officers and indeed members that has been absolutely critical to the development and formulation of the strategy. We are looking at ways in which we can secure and perhaps invest that capacity at local authority level. So there is a very substantial impact, yes.

**Q156 Mr Betts:** There is no more work, is there? Is it about transferring people around?

**Mr Lovejoy:** In one sense in some areas you may see an opportunity for efficiencies, for example now that the regional development agency and the regional assembly are both statutory consultees on major planning applications. The regional assembly has a role with regard to conformity of local development frameworks whereas the regional development agency is a consultee. So you may see some slimming there. Certainly there is a need to move capacity from some centres to others. The big concern that I think is emerging very rapidly in the south-east is that given the uncertainty around some of the issues and the quite prolonged transition phase that we will see with the proposed run-out of assemblies after 2010 that a number of the skilled regional

planners—of whom there are relatively few—will choose other options between now and 2010 leaving the regional planning body at 2010 in a difficult position in trying to take forward a regional strategy and having lost some of the skills and background that will be needed to make a success of it.

**Q157 Mr Betts:** Are you looking for extra funding for all of this or is it a matter of redirecting the money that is already there?

**Mr Lovejoy:** We believe it is the latter and we believe that provided the CLG are able to provide confirmation to regional development agencies that the funding that they currently provide to regional assemblies to fund the statutory planning process will be transferred from 2010 to regional development agencies then that will be sufficient to the task. The issue plays out differently in different regional development agencies. We are speaking for a regional development agency with a relatively small budget for whom the accommodation of these new capacities will be a significant issue. It will look differently to some of our colleagues in the Midlands and the northern regions where they are working with larger budgets and often with smaller numbers of local authorities.

**Q158 Mr Hands:** What would be your overall assessment of the performance so far of the Academy for Sustainable Communities? What do you think should be the priorities for its work?

**Mr Murphy:** I will deal with the last point first. I would like to just make the point that the regional centres of excellence—the regional centres that I am representing here—emerged out of the Rogers report so they well pre-date the Academy and they were to do with the Urban White Paper and what the Lord Rogers was talking about in terms of what then was a mainly re-generation and urban design issue. We have expanded into broader place making and sustainable communities work. We were around before but we did see a real opportunity with the creation of the Academy to deal with those things that are better dealt with at a national level. It is all very well operating regionally and being close to the practitioners, but things do come up where you need somebody who has access to the corridors of power. As Miranda was saying earlier, there is some really good practice in the south-east that we need a way of getting out quickly across the whole country. That would be a real help in delivering large schemes. There are a number of roles that an organisation like that could take on. We are hopeful that that can still be the case. I think that all of these things seem to always take longer than you hope when they are first set up. We have all worked with the Academy. The Academy is in touch with us and up until last year was helping us to do some of our national networking; we now do that on our own. It is fair to say that again it is work in progress and we are keen that we get a clear demarcation. I am aware of the fact that some people are concerned about duplication, if you have a national centre and nine regional ones you have to be really careful not to duplicate what you are doing. I think we need to

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prioritise that sort of work as well and make sure we are clear what it is we want to do, be decided and clear at the region what it is.

**Q159 Mr Hands:** To summarise it, it is networking, exchange of best practice, that kind of thing. What about the statistic that only 1.3% of the possible target audience had their training at least influenced by the ASC?

**Mr Murphy:** I saw that in the evidence. I do not know where that figure came from so I will not comment on that. What I would say is that the way to deal with that is to work through the regional centres, all of whom have practitioner networks in the thousands, so straightaway they have access to at least 20,000 real live practitioners working today, many of whom are planners—but not all—and are working on that whole place making issue. Some of them are private sector working in the private sector and some of them in the voluntary sector as well. I am not sure that that is the mission of the ASC to actually directly train a workforce.

**Q160 Mr Hands:** Having an impact on the training of practitioners I think is part of its mission statement.

**Mr Murphy:** How did they define having an impact?

**Chair:** It was indeed from the Academy of Sustainable Communities, that they influenced the learning of only 1.3%.

**Q161 Mr Hands:** What about the other representatives? What are your views on the ASC?

**Ms Pearce:** As Dom said, we have been part of the excellence network from the start and certainly we have attended meetings with the chief executives and the Academy has been invited to attend those as well. We have received some funding from the Academy to deliver some projects. They are in the difficult position of being a relatively small organisation that is trying to talk to both the national agenda but also being respected and understood by the practitioners. That is always very difficult because you are looking both ways; you are trying to be strategic but you are also trying to provide practical support. I think certainly in the south east they have had a limited impact to date because they have had a limited involvement to date. Certainly we are very keen to work with them more constructively and we see that certainly going forward. We are hoping that the pilot that we are carrying out with the HCA will enable us to address our relationship in that way. We have benefited from their funding. They part-funded the research we referred to earlier bringing councillors and developers together. The Learning Laboratories Programme that they encouraged all the centres to take part in has been very successful and certainly in our region it has given us an idea of how we can move forward and do similar work in other parts of the region. I think all the centres have found that a very rewarding process and as a network we are looking at how we can learn from what each other has done. For example, in the east there was a very interesting diagnosis process working with a number

of local authorities and that is something we would be interested to try in the south east. So they have provided an environment in which we can innovate and experiment as network members. Perhaps where it has been less clear what they have been doing—although I imagine they have been doing something—is at the national level where they have perhaps been influencing some of the strategic players, the sector skills bodies, professional institutes and other bodies such as Atlas and IDeA. We are not best placed to answer to those relationships, but certainly in terms of regional relationships I think it is something that is developing and could potentially be very fruitful going forward.

**Q162 Chair:** Can I just pick up a couple of issues which have come up in the evidence? What relationship do your bodies have with the various professional bodies, the RTPI is one but the other professional bodies as well?

**Ms Pearce:** We have various relationships with the professional bodies. Through SEEDA we have spent a number of years trying to bring the professional institutes together, trying to encourage pan-professional learning. We supported, mainly driven by the South East Centre for the Environment working very closely with RTPI and RIBA (who have been some of the biggest collaborators in our region), we encouraged them and gave them some funding to start to bring together a common CPD website which enabled all the institutes to put CPD programmes available onto a common source which I think is now rolled out nationally. We have also encouraged them, through small amounts of money, to come together and look at how they can plan joint CPD activity so that members from RIBA, RTPI, RICS, CIOB *et cetera* can come to events and that is something we are taking forward now, trying to get a common memorandum of understanding between in the region of 16 of those organisations. It is a model that has worked very well in the north-west and in the east of England, again through the Regional Centres of Excellence Network and we are building on that expertise and are trying to push it into our region. There we want them to collaborate, to plan CPD provision and in our case we would try to encourage them to look at CPD provision that addresses the eight components of the Egan wheel. For example, they might collectively look at housing issues and then equity and economic development, but do it in the context of joint professional learning. So far it is positive. We have a number of the chairs who want to come to a common signing and certainly historically we have had very successful events, particularly held between RIBA and RTPI looking at issues of sustainability, for example. There are good examples of collaboration in the region and that is what we are trying to encourage, to bring them together, to let them talk to each other and then from that to spin out and develop their longer term relationships. As an RDA and centre of excellence we see a lot of our role as actually building

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cross-professional relationships to enable people to work through themselves to sustain those relationships.

**Q163 Chair:** Did you want to add anything else?

**Mr Murphy:** I think that is a really good answer by Miranda. I would just say that right across the regions there are examples of working across professional institutions. Certainly in our region I taught on the RTPI CPD programme which just

rolls through the year. They contact us and ask us if there is anything we particularly would like to get included in their programme and similarly with RICS as well. They are part of our network basically and we have regular discussions at the regional level and also make sure that there is representation on those bodies on our governing bodies as well because that is good when you are having strategic discussions about where you are going to go next.

**Chair:** Thank you all very much indeed.

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**Monday 19 May 2008**

Members present

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts  
John Cummings  
Andrew George

Mr Bill Olnier  
Emily Thornberry

*Witnesses: Professor Peter Roberts OBE, Chair, Dr Gill Taylor, Chief Executive and Mr Kevin Murray, The Academy for Sustainable Communities, gave evidence.*

**Q164 Chair:** Can I welcome you to this afternoon's session. I notice there are three witnesses, we thought there would only be two.

**Professor Roberts:** Yes.

**Q165 Chair:** Can I encourage you, obviously, not to repeat what other witnesses have said. I imagine you have been keeping up-to-date with the evidence that has been given thus far in the inquiry, in which case you will know that quite a few of our witnesses have been distinctly sceptical about what the Academy for Sustainable Communities has been doing and where the £12 million has gone. Could you perhaps start off by briefly commenting on those criticisms and explaining where the money has gone, and what difference it has made.

**Professor Roberts:** Thank you. We did notify David Weir about the additional witness because we thought it might be helpful if there were questions about continuity between the Egan Review and the current operation of the Academy if we brought along one of our Board Members, Kevin Murray, who was an adviser to Egan and is also a current Board Member. We just thought there might be a question of where do you start and where are you now, so that is why we have the additional witness, Chair. Can I just say we are very grateful for the opportunity to come and talk to you. The essence of your question is really to say to us, well what have we achieved since we were set up. Can I start off by making the point that the Academy started in full operation in May 2006, so we have now been in operation for two years, and one of the things the Academy was very, very clearly directed towards was, as well as dealing with some of the short-term issues, to make sure that we dealt with the long-term capacity problems. I think our intention is to make sure you do not need to have a similar inquiry to this one in 2018, in other words that we have attended to long-term as well as the short-term problems. The work over the past two years, of course, has not solely been with planners. Can I emphasise the point that Egan identified 102 areas of activity which make up the sustainable communities activity system as a whole, so planners only represent a very small part of the total constituency that we are addressing ourselves to. Secondly, can I make the point that the Academy was never designed and never tasked to be a direct delivery body for all the things that we were asked to deal with. We were principally created as the national strategic agency to help better to understand the problems that were faced in relation

to skills and knowledge across all the sustainable communities professions and other groups, such as local authority elected members and people working in the voluntary sector. We were tasked as the national strategic body with the identification of things that needed to be done, with establishing meaningful and productive partnerships with all the other agencies and organisations involved in delivery of professionals and other people working on sustainable communities, and also we were tasked with dealing with knowledge and understanding in the sector. We were tasked with finding out more about where the gaps are. In the last two years what we have done is principally to develop particular areas of activity to allow us better to understand the marketplace that we are working in, to create those strategic partnerships and start delivering programme resources, principally for other people to physically deliver to individuals.

**Q166 Mr Olnier:** What does that all mean you have done though?

**Professor Roberts:** I have brought with me a small selection of the material that we have actually developed, the products that we have developed, for people working in planning and planning related activities. For example, we have developed learning programme materials which have been accessed by some 24,000 professionals. We gave you the figure for 2006–07 because we did not have the audited figure for 2007–08. In our submission we said 10,000 for 2006–07, we have now got the audited figures for both the years we have been operating and we have now delivered learning to 24,000 professionals.

**Q167 Chair:** Can I just clarify, you said at the beginning that you were concentrating on long-term capacity problems, does that mean that you are not or were not intending to do anything to prevent the predicted labour shortage in planning that is going to occur by 2012? Is that long-term or medium term?

**Professor Roberts:** I said we were established chiefly to deliver a long-term solution, solutions which would last, which were not just quick fixes. To that extent, that is what I am going to try and illustrate now for you, Chair, the way in which we have been able to do that. Yes, we did have to attend to short-term issues and, yes, that is why we have engaged with 24,000 professionals over the two year period.

**Q168 John Cummings:** What do you mean by engage?

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**Professor Roberts:** We have made available learning materials and they have accessed those learning materials.

**Q169 John Cummings:** Do you know whether they have actually read them?

**Professor Roberts:** We do know they have read them.

**Q170 John Cummings:** Is there a follow-up? Are you following it up?

**Professor Roberts:** We asked people have they found value in the materials which we present to them and they respond. I think we have got—I cannot remember the exact figure—about 90-odd per cent of people who engage with us say they have found our material valuable.

**Q171 John Cummings:** I find that remarkable because the evidence that this Committee has received, Chair, does not indicate that at all.

**Professor Roberts:** Right. Well, I can only tell you what we have had in terms of response.

**Q172 John Cummings:** Could you give an indication of any national associations that have responded in a positive manner?

**Professor Roberts:** National associations?

**Q173 John Cummings:** Yes.

**Professor Roberts:** Every year we have done evaluations of our programme and that has been done independently by an appointed contractor and they have engaged with the various stakeholders that we have dealt with and, again, the evaluations have been broadly positive.

**Q174 Emily Thornberry:** The British Property Federation, for example, told us that they thought that the ASC was wishy-washy; representatives of South East England Development Association said that they had had little contact with it.

**Professor Roberts:** I find it surprising in relation to the South East Centre of Excellence because we have co-funded some of their programmes and they have taken our resources to deliver things like the learning laboratories, so I find it incomprehensible that should be the case. In the case of the British Property Federation, we have worked with some of the member companies of the British Property Federation and they have collaborated in our programmes, they have sponsored our activities, they have attended our events. Maybe from the British Property Federation perspective, we are not delivering to them as an association but we have been working with the member companies.

**Q175 John Cummings:** It just seems so contrary to what this Committee has taken in evidence over two particular sessions. We are talking about some very eminent national associations. Having said that, why in three years, and given the urgency of the shortages of personnel and skills, have you influenced only 1.3% of your target audience?

**Professor Roberts:** I think I corrected that figure. The figure that we gave you in our written evidence was the figure for the first of our full years of operation.

**Q176 John Cummings:** What percentage would it be? If 1.3% is not correct, what is the correct figure?

**Professor Roberts:** It is in excess of 3%.

**Q177 John Cummings:** How much?

**Professor Roberts:** How many? 24,000.

**Q178 John Cummings:** Your targeted audience.

**Professor Roberts:** 24,000.

**Q179 John Cummings:** What is that in percentage terms?

**Professor Roberts:** The figure that we gave you was the figure for one year only. We have now completed two years of our programme, not just the first year, and the figure you have of 1.3% refers only to the first full year of operation. Now what we have is a figure which has risen in the second year from the figure which was in the first year so we have now increased the number of people who have gone through our programme from that figure, it has more than doubled.

**Q180 John Cummings:** Could you tell the Committee why your website does not contain a business plan?

**Professor Roberts:** I am sorry. Can I refer that to our Chief Executive.

**Dr Taylor:** I am astounded actually because we have just completed the business plan for next year but it has not been to ministers yet.

**Q181 John Cummings:** What about the present business plan?

**Dr Taylor:** This is the present business plan we are talking about because we are now in May, but until that has been signed off by Iain Wright we are not able to put that on our website. In terms of previous ones, if they have been taken off already, I am surprised. We have consulted extensively with our partners and stakeholders in terms of building up the new business plan.

**Q182 John Cummings:** Obviously Sir John Egan wanted the ASC to work with education providers, employers, professional institutions, skills councils, regional centres of excellence and other skilled bodies to promote excellence in sustainable communities skill development. As a small organisation with a limited budget, to what extent can you achieve these goals that Egan has set you working across the whole spectrum of educational providers?

**Professor Roberts:** We can answer that directly, Mr Cummings, and we have material here which I will leave with the Clerk and you can look at this at your leisure. We have some material which we have enough copies of for everybody. Let us take the first one of those, working with the professional bodies. This is part of the long-term solution which I referred to, in other words we could have chosen to

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spend the monies available to us doing an instant series of short courses on topics for the day, individual topics. We chose not to do that. Indeed, we were advised and tasked not to do that. One of the things that we have done is to enter into a series of joint commitments with the various professional bodies, including the Royal Town Planning Institute, and these commitments mean that the professional body has agreed to work with us on developing the generic skills which Sir John Egan quite rightly put at the heart of the skills needed to create sustainable communities. We are not tasked to deal with the particular specialist skills required by individual professions, we are tasked to deal with the generic skills that everybody needs in order to make and maintain better places: skills like visioning, programme development, project management, communication, partnership building, leadership and so on, and that is what we were tasked to do. I would have had my ears chewed off as Chair if I had allowed us to start developing and delivering things which were not within our tasked framework.

**Q183 John Cummings:** Could you be quite specific and put this to bed once and for all because this Committee have been told in no uncertain terms by previous witnesses, particularly talk about Sainsbury's who say they have had little contact with you, so can you give some specific examples of where you have done work with employers and professional institutions?

**Professor Roberts:** I have made reference to these joint commitments with the various professional institutes and you have had evidence from the Royal Town Planning Institute which is that they have worked with us. We have also worked with a number of other professional bodies, all of which were operating in areas of labour shortages and all of which contribute to the achievements of the tasks which planners are central to. We have worked with people like Constructing Excellence, we have worked with people like Encams, we have worked with people like the Landscape Institute, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Institution of Economic Development, the Chartered Institute of Housing and so on, and these people have signed commitments. We have developed and delivered.

**Q184 John Cummings:** When you say you have been working with them, can you give an example. It is not just a matter of sending a brochure out.

**Professor Roberts:** No, we will give you a really hard-edged example and, again, if you want the detailed evidence in terms of number of throughput students, we can give you that. For example, one of the real difficulties that we were specifically charged with resolving when I was appointed was the fact that it has proved in the past, historically, very difficult to get the various professionals—we talked about 102 activity areas—to work together as a team to deliver better places. One of the things we have done in order to do that is (a) to get the professional institutes to agree in principle to do it and (b) through a programme called Raising Our Game to

design and deliver continuing professional development programmes in regions, supported by, endorsed by and accredited for professional development purposes by eight professional bodies. This programme was first piloted in the north-west region, it was successfully delivered in the north-west region, we had our first graduates from it a year ago. You cannot do these things instantly; you need to pilot them and you have to do them properly. There is no point in half training people or badly training people, so we piloted Raising Our Game and delivered it in the north-west region. From that pilot, we smoothed off a few of the rough edges and we launched the programme in other regions. That programme is now running in most of the English regions. That is a hard edged thing to deliver.

**Q185 Emily Thornberry:** How many people are benefitting from it?

**Professor Roberts:** I said in total, we can give you the detailed figures, I do not have them to hand.

**Q186 Emily Thornberry:** Roughly.

**Professor Roberts:** About 25 per region. We did 24, I think, in the north-west and it has now been rolled out; we have had, I think, 18 graduates in the south-west and we have other people coming through the programme, but can I emphasise, it does take a year or so to develop the agreement with the professional bodies, to develop the learning material, and then to start delivery. You cannot do these things overnight.

**Q187 John Cummings:** How many in the pipeline?

**Professor Roberts:** In the pipeline, about 150 people going through the pipeline at the moment.

**Q188 Chair:** I appreciate that it is difficult to come up with the figures on the spot. Can we make sure that the actual figures are provided afterwards? That would be very helpful.

**Professor Roberts:** Yes. The feedback we have had from employers and participants in this programme has been absolutely positive, and the Royal Town Planning Institute and other professional bodies have encouraged us to roll it out as fast as we can. Our problem is, as ever, the capacity problem. We cannot get people to teach them.

**Q189 Andrew George:** Just moving on to the report, Mind the Skills Gap, how can the status of the planning profession be raised?

**Professor Roberts:** How can the status of the planning profession be raised? If you do not mind, I would like Kevin Murray to comment as well. I think there is an issue first of all which you are presumably referring to, in terms of the way in which in recent years planners have found themselves unable to make progress in some of the areas of employment which they have sought. I think money is an issue, salary is an issue, especially in the public sector, but it is not the sole issue. I think the opportunity to practise the profession across the full sphere of planning activities would help. One of the suggestions has been, of course, that local authorities should be required to have a chief

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planning officer, somebody to provide leadership for the profession within an authority, rather than just having an omnibus title, you know, director of planning, development, environment or whatever. The third thing I think is clearly the opportunity for people to gain experience across the full range of professional activities, so that they do not find themselves stuck in a rut, just doing a small defined function, say in development control, but can Kevin Murray add to that, please?

**Q190 Chair:** Can you say how you would get them to get that broad range of skills that Professor Roberts just referred to?

**Mr Murray:** There are a range. Partly it is linked—and sorry, I should say that I am a past president of the Royal Town Planning Institute, so I am on the professional side as well. One is through encouragement through the Institute for employers to give them the range of experience, that was something that happened, was stipulated in the past, and is not so strongly pressurised now, so people can go through narrower strands of training. The other is through exchanges between employers, so, for instance, people working for developers or development agencies, working in local authority planning departments, to understand that, whether they stay or whether they move depends, but it increases the capacity and the understanding across the disciplines. Likewise, seconding people from Government departments for a period to work, as happens, but not enough in my opinion. So there is capacity for mutual learning, enhancing the number of people, but not to the scale that I think we all recognise the deficiencies.

**Q191 Andrew George:** Can I just take the second of the three strands, the creation of more chief planning officers, which is something which has been a trend—the trend has been going in the opposite direction, has it not? If you as an agency have a role in this, then presumably, you are talking to local authorities, and you are emphasising to them the importance of it, so could you explain to me your role in developing that particular initiative and how successful you have been so far?

**Professor Roberts:** Well, we do have, as part of our Raising Our Game programme, a specific diploma which is concerned with leadership, and it can be leadership across the board or it can be leadership in relation to particular professional functions, but we are also working with local authorities. Again, you have caught us literally at the point where we have just launched one of our new products, which is this one, Planning for Non-professionals. This has been launched with local authorities, only just been piloted, so we are just evaluating this pilot, but this makes the point about the leadership of professional activities in local authorities. We recognise these problems, and I am not trying in any sense to be defensive on this, but there is a reality check in terms of if we want to produce a quality contribution to improving the standard of our professionals, planners and the other 101 categories of professional that we are tasked with dealing with, then this

literally cannot be achieved in a year. We cannot instantly produce a product, because nobody, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Landscape Institute or anybody else would pay serious attention to it. They would not be happy to validate, they would not be happy to put their endorsement on it. The other thing that we could clearly do in relation to the specific point you raise is to make sure that there is, if you like, a professional development pathway for people, so that they start as a graduate, they enter employment, and they follow a professional development pathway. One of the things that we are currently exploring, which we have not finalised yet, is the idea of having a professional education and training passport for people, so they can go through a process of continual upgrading of their skills, which then allows them to end up as the chief planner or some equivalent post within a local authority. We need to create those pathways.

**Q192 Andrew George:** Could I just ask, if you were to fill the skills gap, either you go down the route of the professional development pathway; or the challenge is one of recruitment of new planners, because you think that the quality that you have presently is insufficient, and you need to bring new blood into the profession; or it is a question of on-the-job training, and there is insufficient training. Of those three, if you like, areas of work, which would you say is the biggest challenge, and the one which you should be concentrating most of your time and resources on?

**Professor Roberts:** On-the-job training is the thing we need to deal with immediately, and that is why we are doing Raising Our Game, that is why we are working with the colleagues through the joint commitments, and why we are working now with local authorities, and you have seen our first pilot. Again, I will leave all these things for you and you can read them, and please come back and ask us further questions. I said at the very beginning that we were established chiefly to deliver solutions which would stick in the long term, so we did not have to come back and have this debate in 10 years' time, and that means, Mr George, that we have to influence the career choices of young people. We have been doing a lot of work on careers, we have been piloting and developing this work, including work which I am sure the Chair knows about in Milton Keynes. We have had a major programme called Making Places, and this is a major product which has been rolled out, so that we have now, according to the audited figures, influenced something in the order of 70,000 young people to try and persuade a higher percentage of these young people to come into the sustainable communities professions, including planning. We need to make this an attractive, challenging and positive career choice for young people.

**Q193 Mr Betts:** Can I just follow up? I see exactly what you are saying about having a range of professionals, and you are trying to equip them with a greater range of skills and get a broader outlook on

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life and equally trying to get the various professions to work together. That all seems consistent with a way forward, but to then argue that at the same time you want to create a planning department, distinct with a head of planning or chief planning officer, almost seems a step backwards. You are saying on the one hand you want people to work together, you want them to have a broader range of skills, but then we need a chief planner to make sure things work.

**Professor Roberts:** The broader range of skills is to make sure we connect the various professions together. If you have a problem with professional leadership, then you have to address that as well.

**Q194 Mr Betts:** Why do you need a chief planner to do that? Why could not a surveyor be in charge of that group of people, including planners?

**Mr Murray:** I think the question Peter was responding to there was the status of the profession, how can we make planning attractive, and one of the answers to that is to have a distinctive role and head and function, that if it is in part of a department of technical services, it is harder to see that. But I would also add to what Peter is saying, also we have to cater for and encourage people in the design professions, like urban design and landscape and architecture, into housing and other areas, so planning is one of them, and we are encouraging young people from different backgrounds to go into a range of those, not exclusively planning, but I think he was responding to the question about the status and image of planning.

**Professor Roberts:** I am not denying that, we do need a common connector, and that common connector between the various professional groups is the package of generic skills that Sir John Egan quite rightly said every person working in this field needs, and that is the common connector.

**Q195 Andrew George:** I just wanted to get down to brass tacks: do you see it that the problem with planning is that over the last decade or so, it has simply attracted people of too low a calibre, or is it that it is a problem of training, professional development and the structure of the organisations themselves?

**Professor Roberts:** This is not something on which we have provided written evidence and we have not drilled down into it in great depth from an ASC perspective, because we have treated it as part of the broader research that we have done. Can I just respond as somebody who has actually been engaged in planning education since 1969, so I have 39 years' experience, so *mea culpa*: if your planners are not good enough, I am part of the reason. I do not think there is a single answer—it is not either/or, Mr George, I think there are a variety of things. First of all, when I started working in planning education, planning was seen as something where people were making positive choices, this was a subject that people really went into, we had an expanding provision of planning schools. It is difficult to get the figures, but I did a round robin with half a dozen previous colleagues of mine, and I think there were something like 26 planning schools operating in

England in the late 1970s, there are now less than 16. So we had an expanding capacity in the 1960s and 1970s which then shrank in the late 1970s, in the 1980s and into the 1990s, so there is a capacity problem. Secondly, there was a general downgrading of some of the enthusiasm for planning and fewer young people with the better qualifications came into planning. I think we have seen that the bursary scheme, which the Department launched, has largely reversed that, and again, I have been a recipient of that. I remember saying to a colleague, when we get somebody with a first in economics from the London School of Economics choosing to do postgraduate planning rather than going to be a City broker, that is success. When I worked at the Department of Civic Design in Liverpool, we got somebody with an economics degree from the London School of Economics choosing to do the postgraduate course in planning. So I think planning is now successful in attracting some of the brightest and the best, but we have a severe capacity problem in terms of the number of places available in our university planning schools. That is coupled with the need to retain planners in planning, because planners have actually proved to be very adaptable and flexible, and we have found a lot of the more able planners have moved out of planning functions *per se* into other sustainable communities activities: economic development, environmental management, and so on. So planning education is actually proving very successful at producing flexible and adaptable individuals. Then there is the third point, we continually have to develop people through better, more effective, better resourced and supported continuing professional development. So it is all three, I am afraid, Mr George. You cannot just do one, because we come back to the problem again over time.

**Chair:** We are starting to run out of time and we have two more topics. Emily, do you want to move on the Homes and Communities Agency?

**Q196 Emily Thornberry:** I wanted to move on really to the future of the Academy. As we understand it, you are going to be taken into the Homes and Communities Agency. How are you going to be able to remain independent within such a substantial agency?

**Professor Roberts:** Can I pass that to Dr Taylor, because she has been directly involved in this?

**Dr Taylor:** Thank you. Moving into the HCA was something that the steering board of ASC asked to happen, as it were. Because we are a small organisation—20 core staff and a budget of £5.5 million per year—one of our biggest issues, as I think has come out today, is about leverage. We were never set up as a direct delivery agency, we are there to fill the gap, and in fact even state aid law would prevent us from doing a lot of direct delivery of training because we would be in competition with others. So how can we have more impact, you know, more bang for the bucks that Government is putting in? And working with the HCA I think gives us a number of opportunities. However, the chief executive designate of the HCA,

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Sir Bob Kerslake, has already said that he wants the separate identity and brand of the ASC retained, he wants us to retain our core staff as now, at the moment, and certainly he sees the advantage of us remaining quasi-independent in terms of we work with groups of stakeholders and partners, as we said, with the Sector Skills Councils, with the professional bodies and with the HE sector, and these are different core stakeholders from most of the rest of the HCA, so there needs to be a degree of separation. But we would certainly be part of that organisation, and I think adding value to it.

**Q197 Emily Thornberry:** So if you are going to be adding value and if you are going to increase your leverage, could you perhaps give us some practical examples of what that would mean, and how will things change?

**Dr Taylor:** Yes, I think one very practical example, and we have had discussions with the HCA over this, is the reach we have into communities, if you like, and also into the local government sector. There are a number of places which are undergoing major transformation, whether they are growth areas, whether they are areas with housing market renewal partnerships and so on, and certainly in terms of going in and working with places and providing some more practical support to the regional directors that would be working in the HCA, in terms of their analysis of whether their core partners have the capacity and the skills to be able to take up the challenges for the HCA to take up the new housing numbers. I think we can certainly add value into that, so I think that is one very practical example.

**Q198 Emily Thornberry:** So you will be able to tell the regional directors how good the planners are in their area and whether they are going to be able to do the job?

**Dr Taylor:** I do not know about telling them, but certainly we can provide an analysis with a number of stakeholders about what the capacity is, and it is not just the planners, it can be leaders in a number of different professional fields. There can also be other areas where there are shortages, or where there is a need to do more with the professionals who are there to upskill them around zero carbon, for example, the implications of conflict resolution and governance issues, to carry on with the sort of community benefit of new infrastructure and so on. There are a number of areas, I do not think it is just with planners.

**Professor Roberts:** Or with brownfield.

**Dr Taylor:** Yes, the other practical example that I could give you is we are leading the national Brownfield Skills Strategy on behalf of Government, together with English Partnerships, and that will be some really practical training and development activities, including with the RTPPI and the planning profession, about a professional development framework which focuses particularly on brownfield, and given that 60% of new housing

targets are expected to be on brownfield land, that is an incredibly important skills gap which many of us have at the moment and needs to be bridged.

**Professor Roberts:** We have copies of that document available for members of the Committee.

**Q199 Andrew George:** Given that the major area identified by Egan is that of needing to develop the skills to deal with climate change, what have you done to address that skills gap and that need for skills development? I need a brief answer.

**Dr Taylor:** Very quickly, we are certainly not doing that alone, because there are a lot of people in the field dealing with climate change. Two of my directors today are in an important meeting with the Green Building Council to do a gap analysis of exactly what is there, what is missing, what our role is and what their role is. But in other practical terms, for example, we have recently developed with a range of partners a tool around zero carbon which will be about mitigation and adaptation. That will be going on our website and is being launched within the next month, and that will be of direct benefit to planners, but it will also be of direct benefit to another group of organisations and individuals.

**Professor Roberts:** We have also been providing advice and support on the Eco-towns programme, and running a series of national dissemination seminars for people involved in the Eco-towns programme, and that work will continue. There are various strands of work which are reflected in the more specific spatial focus in our current business plan. This helps us to focus on some of the issues for particular places like Eco-towns, like growth areas, like housing market renewal partnerships, and carbon is a big issue in all of those.

**Q200 Andrew George:** Do you find that you will need, or do you feel that you will need, to bring in the skills of other professions, such as the kind of engineers that are required to actually assess the veracity of the claims?

**Professor Roberts:** Absolutely, and that is the real power of operating on an interdisciplinary, interprofessional base, focusing on those generic skills. Although we have not discussed this with Sir John Egan, Sir John Egan produced a portfolio of generic skills which he felt that all professionals and others involved in creating and maintaining sustainable communities should have. We think the ability for non-professionals to recognise and, if you like, mitigate the carbon consequences of development choices should be added to that portfolio. We think that is so important.

**Q201 Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. I noticed from the remarks you just made at the end there, you may be aware the Environmental Audit Select Committee is doing an inquiry on Eco-towns. Have you submitted written evidence to them?

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**Professor Roberts:** No, we have not.

**Q202 Chair:** I suggest you might want to.

**Professor Roberts:** Chair, can I just simply say, Kevin Murray reminded me of a point that was made when the Egan review was taking evidence: the whole purpose of ASC was not to be just another brick, but to be the mortar that connects the bricks together, and that is what we have tried

to be, Chair. We are very conscious of the need to deal with planning and planners' issues, but we are not solely concerned with that. Thank you very much. Please let us know if you need any further material or evidence. If you would like to visit the Academy in Leeds, you are most welcome.

**Q203 Chair:** Thank you. And you will provide the extra data?

**Professor Roberts:** We will indeed, thank you.

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**Witnesses:** **Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP**, Minister for Planning, Delivery and Performance, gave evidence.

**Q204 Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. We are a bit thin on the ground, I think there are people at the by-election, particularly our Conservative members, apart from ones in the Chamber.

**Caroline Flint:** I have just come back myself.

**Q205 Chair:** Excellent. If I could start, Minister, the Government has very ambitious targets on its housing, transport, environment and regeneration targets. Apart from the slow-down in the economy being a bit of a problem, how do you think that the Government is going to be able to meet those targets if the planning profession does in fact face labour shortages of 46% by 2012 as some estimate?

**Caroline Flint:** I would say a few things in relation to that. First of all, obviously, before I came into the Department, there has been some good work happening over the last few years to encourage the flows in, into the courses that exist, I think roughly about 1,500 new entrants, where it was 800–900 a few years back, so that is good. But I think clearly, and other people have raised this with me, there is a concern about that generation of people who might be exiters from the profession, retiring and what have you, and what do we do about that? Again, I think some of the programmes that people are able to do actually in the local authorities, for those technicians and admin people to upgrade their skills, I think that has been a good development. I think where it is appropriate for other people within a local authority, who again could take advantage of distance learning as well, that is another opportunity which I think we have tried to facilitate, and I know you have had the ASC in before to speak to you. But I think there is another aspect of this as well, which is about how planning is valued within the local authority, and given the opportunity we have given through the planning delivery grant, other resourcing we provide, fees for planning applications—which of course is not ringfenced, that is for a local authority to decide what they want to do with that money that they gain from their applications—is how, within the local authority, planning is valued, and in doing so, how you make sure you have the right people in the right place, but as importantly as that, the right teams in place. I do think, and in the last three months in this job, I have become even more acutely aware that there are a number of people who are not necessarily planners

but who have skills to offer to the process, and I think there is a task here to be smarter in how the function is supported and also planners are grown.

**Q206 Chair:** Just on that point about the status of planners, there has been a suggestion that every local authority should have a chief planning officer. Is that the Government's view?

**Caroline Flint:** Well, that is a matter for local authorities to decide. We have just appointed our chief planner in the Department, Steve Quartermain is taking up his post. I certainly feel that it should have a status that is reflected in terms of the importance; as a function, whether they want a chief planning officer, that might be for them to decide. I asked a question the other day actually, I did not get the full answer back, about how many chief executives are actually planners by profession compared to a few years back. I did not get the answer to that as yet, but I know that Richard McCarthy, my senior director, one of the things he has been doing over the last few months is actually going out and meeting chief executives, I suppose in many respects to talk up how important this is, because so much of what I am working on at the moment, whether it is in terms of the housing targets or sustainable communities, it really does touch every aspect of a local authority, in terms of having that vision about your needs for a community, both in housing, in terms of regeneration and development, how you are building green spaces in those communities, cohesive communities and neighbourhoods and so forth, that it is hard actually to think about where planning does not have a role in all of that. Therefore, the smarter aspect of how different departments work together I think is an important part, as well as addressing a serious issue about the professionals themselves and how we can not only have them coming in but where we might gain professionals to, if you like, create and sustain planning for the future.

**Q207 Andrew George:** In the Government's memorandum, it says that the shortage of planning capacity is historically rooted and stems from underinvestment during the 1980s and 1990s, and this was identified in Lord Rogers' report in 1999. Given that it was identified so early, why is it that labour shortage is still so chronic and persistent and in fact growing at the moment?

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**Caroline Flint:** Well, as I said earlier, I think the response to some of that has been to boost the numbers going into the profession in terms of graduates and entry, and I think that has shown that there has been a significant improvement, I think it has gone up by something like 40%, so I think that is a sign that is positive, but I think again, part of the work of the Department, but other organisations that help with this, whether it is providing through the Planning Advisory Service in IDeA or through the Academy of Sustainable Communities, it is about how you actually also make sure that planning is valued in the local authorities, the staff feel valued, that they stay there. We know that planning is one of those disciplines in local government which always has, if you like, a tension between those who stay in the public sector and those that go to the private sector. They are not exclusive to that in local government, but I think there is clearly, if you like, a labour market tension there that does not exist in other parts of local authorities, and we are just trying to do what we can, as I say, to support the status of the profession, but also in different ways, whether it is the bursaries or whether it is training within local authorities, and with the resources we give back to local authorities to support their activities to make it happen, but I have to say local authorities have to also take some responsibility for how they see this work within their authority, and how they support it and encourage it and value it.

**Q208 Andrew George:** If it is down to local authorities and you can wash your hands of any responsibility for the lack or the shortage of planners in local authorities, surely you would accept that the government still sets or is able to steer the budgets, is able to give local authorities, if you like, plaudits for good practice, is able to steer and encourage, and you also debate and meet with local authorities, so surely you are able to perhaps set targets, to actually improve on the success of local authorities in achieving these objectives?

**Caroline Flint:** I think what we try to do is support it in a number of different ways. For example, we have over 500 planners being funded through university, we have 24,000 practitioners who access the ASC learning programmes. We obviously have the Planning Advisory Service that supports, we have ATLAS that has worked on 47 development projects. As I say, we do try and support in different ways local authorities for both best practice and enabling their planners and other staff that are important to the planning function to improve their skills. We have given, through the planning delivery grant, £605 million over five years; we have £510 million over the next three years through the housing and planning delivery grant; and planning fees, as I said, we have seen, in 2005, the fees increase by 25%, they have increased again by 23%, taking planning fee income for local authorities to £290 million. So in a lot of different ways, both enabling people to get qualified, whether that is a full-time course or distance learning, we have tried to facilitate that, and I think have had some good outcomes. In terms of

the value of planning and support to have the very best, we do that in a number of different ways, and I have to say there are some excellent local authorities out there, both large and smaller local authorities, who clearly show that smarter working can have good outcomes. And finally, in terms of resources, the overall resources have gone up in the sector as well, but at some point, and this is not passing the buck, it is about devolution, local authorities also have to think about how they are going to support the function within their own organisation, and the staff and other allied teams that have a contribution to make.

**Q209 Andrew George:** You have listed a catalogue of a lot of inputs, a very impressive list of inputs there, but over recent years, the status of planners has unquestionably fallen, and senior planners have been leaving local authority planning departments in their droves, so where has it all gone wrong?

**Caroline Flint:** I do not think it is where it has all gone wrong, I think we have had a period of intense activity in terms of building and planning and development, and we have seen that over the last eleven years. As I mentioned earlier, I think within that, there has always been a particular issue around the private sector and the public sector, and trying to find that flow and balance right in terms of where professionals go. For example, we have taken action for the bursary from this year, for 2008–09, to make a condition against the bursary that in the first five years of employment in the sector, at least two years would be in the public sector, for those graduates coming out. So we have tried to learn, if you like, from the past, and think about where it is reasonable, given the investment and support we are giving, to expect some input into that sector, but I think again the other part of this is there are things we still need to look at about this balance in terms of where planners are, whether they are in the private sector or in the public sector, but I also think as well looking at other mechanisms that can achieve better outcomes. Certainly, you know, looking at some case studies over the last few months, there are some very good examples where pre-application engagement has actually led to some good outcomes, it has led to some more resource for the local authority to spend on the planning function, and actually has helped the process, because the other side of this is: how do you motivate people? Part of the motivation has to be: does the process make sense, do they think they will get satisfaction out of it, and does that make them keen to stay on and continue to work in the public sector? I think that is another side of what we are looking at in terms of reforms that we think have good outcomes for those working, for those applying as well.

**Q210 Mr Betts:** You just made reference to the bursary scheme, which most people think is an excellent idea, but could not the Government have foreseen the likelihood that without any requirement to work in the public sector, the

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majority of people on the bursary scheme will simply not work for local government? Has that not been a bit of time lost in terms of the scheme?

**Caroline Flint:** David might want to say a bit more on this, but I think we have had about 51% actually going to work in the public sector bursary scheme. We would like to see it more than that, but actually --

**Q211 Mr Betts:** We had a figure of 36% went into local government.

**Mr Morris:** Well, it is 51% in the public sector, because obviously there are a lot of planning jobs in other agencies, like the Environment Agency and Regional Development Agencies and so on, that also employ planners, so that might account for the difference.

**Q212 Mr Betts:** Perhaps we could have a breakdown of the figures, because we have slightly different ones here.

**Caroline Flint:** Yes, that is fine.

**Q213 Chair:** Which actually came from the Government memorandum, so I think the Government needs to agree with itself.

**Caroline Flint:** In the public sector, just over half of the graduates have gone into that area. Again, you learn from different things, this was something which was felt that given the resource that was going in, it was another way we could underpin and sustain those skills and those talents for those young people going into local authorities.

**Mr Morris:** Part of the reason when we started this was to try and attract as many people as possible into the profession and so did not want to place too many restrictions on it. It has actually been highly successful, and we are now putting these criteria on people coming in through the scheme, so that more of them hopefully will spend time in the public sector.

**Q214 Mr Betts:** Do we have any figures overall of the number of people who are going into the planning profession now, in net terms, over the last couple of years, and how many specifically have gone into local government? What we are hearing is all right, there may be some going in at one end, but there is actually an outflow at the other as well. Do we know whether there has been an increase in people, as planning professionals, working in local government and the public sector?

**Mr Morris:** There has been an increase in the number of graduates coming through, which has gone up by 50% since the bursary scheme came in. There are actually more people coming through than there are bursaries, so it has had a knock-on effect on other people who are not actually getting bursaries, which is also very good. There has been an increase in the number of people employed in planning in local authorities, because of the increase in work, I would have to get hold of the actual numbers.

**Q215 Mr Betts:** It might be helpful to have some numbers there. Is there more that the Government can do in the short-term? Everyone can see that you

work in a bursary scheme and over a period of time things will improve, but actually in the short term, we have some very big issues to tackle: the housing programme, regeneration schemes, a whole range of other major construction-type activities. So in the next three or four years, are there things that can be done to improve the situation in terms of planners? At the same time, we know there are quite a few planners reaching retirement age, you almost have this gap, you have new people coming in, you have quite a lot of experienced planners, and a gap in the middle, but as some of those experienced planners drop out the other end, there are going to be additional problems there, are there not?

**Caroline Flint:** In terms of those currently working in local authorities, one of the things is whether or not there are certain aspects of the planning function that could be better done by technicians and admin staff within the teams and departments, as well as the other side of that, whether some of those employees would like to upgrade their skills through the distance learning programmes. I think again, some aspects of planning today, in terms of strategic planning, regeneration and the wider vision for communities, I think there probably are other people who are working in local authorities who probably have a role to play in that, and maybe one aspect of that is how they work much better together across the departments in a local authority. We know that local authorities, for example, do employ people involved in community engagement; again, those people might have something to offer as part of that planning process, not to deal with the details of what a professional planner would do, but certainly bring something to bear that could inform the debate at a community level and add to the process, I think. Again, there is not a one size fits all, but I think there are certain factors of good practice. Some of this was brought out by the Egan Report about communications, about leadership, about more effective working together across different disciplines, that there is something we could do in the short-term on, and in fact some local authorities are doing. Some smaller local authorities, for example, have sought to work in partnership with each other, so that actually, they are working together on planning applications that affect maybe more than one district. Again, I think there are some aspects of this that are just about, say, looking at the best practice, which obviously we do try to get out there in various forms, every single day, but again, we need, with partners like the LGA, and hopefully with the HCA as well, to see how we can get better at that, and get that best practice taken up, because some of it is not about inventing something, it is already out there.

**Q216 Mr Betts:** I suppose the bottom line is do you have any concerns that any of the Government's key programmes are going to be hindered, stalled, delayed, reduced in size by a shortage of planners?

**Caroline Flint:** I do not think so *per se*, I think the thing is about any given day, what do we have, at the moment it is something like 600,000 applications a year, some of that is about looking at how more

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effective local planning authorities could be. For example, from this autumn, in a number of areas, permitted development will take out of the planning process some of those applications that come in at the moment. As I say, we are looking through the HCA—and I have had discussions with Sir Bob Kerslake about this—about how better with the ASC as part of the HCA (ATLAS going in there as well) we can improve more on particularly the big developments where extra support might be needed, not taking away from local authorities but trying maybe to align better some of our supportive services to get better outcomes. But we are still focused as best we can on all our different big projects.

**Q217 Emily Thornberry:** Was it an unintended and probably unforeseen consequence of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, with a significant change in the planning system away from development and control planning towards wider spatial planning for communities, that the planning officer status has been undermined? We have heard witnesses talking about tick box culture and targets and that sort of thing, so has that been one of the reasons?

**Mr Morris:** I actually think it is the opposite, in that what the 2004 Act did was introduce this idea of spatial planning, which is trying to move away from planning as being a purely regulatory function, and it should be taking it right to the heart of the local authority, and setting out what the long-term vision should be. What we are trying to do, and we have been doing a whole programme with the Planning Advisory Service, which is trying to instil something called development management within local authorities, which is getting away from development control, which is this tick box yes/no procedure, and trying to think about how planning is going to deliver this vision which you are setting out: are you talking to developers about what their plans are? Are you doing pre-application discussions to ensure that these projects are moving forward? What are you doing after planning permission has been granted to ensure that they are actually built? So it is trying to open out the profession, so it is actually really about delivering what a place looks like over 20 years and getting it out of this regulatory box. That is a big change for a lot of planning departments, and that is part of this culture change which a lot of the evidence you have had has talked about, but that is partly what we are trying to address here.

**Q218 Emily Thornberry:** But you saw the evidence that we had had from Lindsay Frost of Lewes District Council, who cited that as being one of the ways in which the skills held by older planning officers were swept away, with the sort of things they used to do just not being valued any more.

**Mr Morris:** I do not think it is being swept away, but it is a question of adapting to change, and the environment in which planners are working is changing the whole time, not just the regulatory environment which we are setting, but also the way that business operates and the way development

operates, and planners need to adapt and change to that as well. There is a lot of resource going in, in terms of training and help and best practice that we have just been talking about, to try and help planners do that.

**Q219 Emily Thornberry:** We have been given an amazingly long list of agencies that have been given the job of helping to develop planning skills. We have DCLG; the Academy of Sustainable Communities; ATLAS, that has already been referred to; the Planning Advisory Service; the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government. I have another 10 on this list, it goes on and on. Is this a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth?

**Caroline Flint:** Obviously a lot of different organisations are very protective of their own identity, obviously the ASC and ATLAS will be going into the Homes and Communities Agency, and they do have different roles. Then also we have CABE as well, and as you mentioned, the Planning Advisory Service too, and obviously you have another load on your list. I think part of what we are trying to look for, in the ones we directly, if you like, support, is where they are in terms of their connection to other things that happen. That is why I think actually the move into the HCA is a good idea for the two I mentioned, but also, I think even for those that are outside of that, what I would be quite interested in, and it would be interesting to hear your views when you produce your report, is how some of the work could be better aligned, because as an ex-local government officer myself, I suppose, you could imagine a scenario where with the best will in the world, you have competing organisations which are all about making the planning function work better and improve, and one week you are getting something from one organisation saying, “Come to this conference, come to that conference”, and what have you, followed by another one the next week. So it’s not against that, because again, it is quite different, say, for example, the ASC’s work in terms of, if you like, the academic framework, and how that exists, and how that can be made more accessible for people, whether they are going into it fresh or they are already working in the area they want to refresh, or they are working in local government and they want to get into this discipline, as opposed to ATLAS dealing with major applications. But I think some alignment is worth looking at to make sure that we are not just creating organisations for the sake of it, and just ending up with lots of different voices all on the same issue which is supporting the function and trying to raise the quality, competing for space, because that is probably not the best thing that people working on the ground really need.

**Q220 Mr Betts:** Not surprisingly, we had Sir John Egan here to give evidence, given it was his report that tended to focus or begin the programme of action on the whole issue on sustainable skills, but I think we were all surprised when we said to him,

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“How is it going, Sir John?”, and he said, “Don’t ask me, nobody has talked to me about it since I produced the report”. Is that not a bit surprising?

**Caroline Flint:** I am surprised about that, because my information is something like 20 recommendations, I understand, have been pretty much taken on board and dealt with. I know the ASC have been trying to meet with Sir John for a while, and I hope that comes to fruition, but as far as I understand, inheriting this brief, most of the 28 recommendations have been taken on board.

**Q221 Mr Betts:** So there is regular monitoring then of the recommendations of the report and whether they have been enacted?

**Mr Morris:** Of the 24 recommendations, I think they were all broadly accepted by the Government, and as far as I am aware, nearly all of them have been implemented in one form or another.

**Q222 Mr Betts:** Are there any that have not?

**Mr Morris:** I am not aware of any.

**Q223 Mr Betts:** So they all have?

**Mr Morris:** Yes.

**Q224 Mr Betts:** Would it not be a good idea, do you think, as a matter of good practice, when someone produces a report, which generally is welcomed across the board, including by Government, that maybe a couple of years afterwards, the keeper of that report, the author of it, was just asked for a review, an independent review, as to how they perceive matters to have moved on since the report was produced?

**Caroline Flint:** I cannot say anything off the top of my head here wrongly providing information about what has happened with those 24 recommendations, absolutely. Whether or not a review, because review summons up all sorts of different things, is the right language I would use for following it through, I am not sure. I think it is quite right to ask, what happened with the 24 recommendations, and what information do we have as to the impact they are having, and I am happy for us to look at those and provide the Committee with as much as we can give them on that.

**Q225 Mr Betts:** I suppose there is a little bit of scepticism sometimes, that if the recommendations actually relate to governments and civil servants, sometimes the people who monitor them themselves might be less harsh on whether they have been actually implemented than someone looking from outside independently. Would that be fair comment?

**Caroline Flint:** Well, we have scrutiny in this place as well, so you can always have—not that I am asking for one, but you can always have another inquiry on the 24. There are different ways, obviously, that when reviews are undertaken in departments, about what the follow-up is. I just think what shape that takes can be different, and I am not saying anything against this particular Committee, but we can end up into a bit of a review-itis situation, where no sooner do we do one thing, we have another review, and I

am not sure as a vehicle that that is always—I am not saying never—is the best way forward, but I think it is fair enough to say, well, what happened to the recommendations? The other thing is, in this particular regard, I understand we have basically taken broadly all of them on board and have tried to execute them. In other reviews, the Government does not always take on board all the recommendations that have been made, so it sounds to me like in one sense this was a pretty good outcome for his review.

**Q226 Chair:** As you know, Minister, we had the Academy of Sustainable Communities just before you, they gave a robust defence of their performance, although I have to say that many of our previous witnesses had been less than complimentary. What is your view on the ASC? Do you think it has fulfilled the role that Egan envisaged for it?

**Caroline Flint:** From what I have read and seen, I think it is doing a pretty good job. I think it has worked well in terms of particularly some of the work around staff in local authorities being able to access various courses. I understand they have established with a number of universities further opportunities for the qualification base to be accessible and to be enhanced. I think in terms of the move into the Homes and Communities Agency, that is the right move, I think it will allow them to have a distinct role, but also I think be embedded with the other work the organisation will be taking on, in terms of obviously its housing work and other planning support work, so I think overall it has pretty much done what has been expected. Their new business plan, I think, is due to be signed off by my colleague, Iain Wright, I do not think it has happened yet, in the not too distant future.

**Q227 Chair:** How will they be better able to work with the new Homes and Communities Agency than they could have done up until now with the component parts, English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation?

**Caroline Flint:** I think for the same reason, that English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation, coming together into HCA, and bringing together, if you like, the land and the housing elements, and I think there are very valid and good reasons for that. Again, it is not that they have not done good work or work with those organisations, I think it is just about simplifying things, better alignment, and as I say, a better home for them, whilst retaining their particular role in terms of qualifications and working with academia to support that and give that sort of sense of focus.

**Mr Morris:** Could I just add that being part of a bigger organisation with a regional structure in place, who will be having dialogue with local authorities on a regular basis, should give the ASC more input, if you like, into the work on the ground and possibly greater focus on what it does as part of that process, but that is part of the discussion about what its role is within the new agency, which is part of an ongoing discussion.

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**Q228 Chair:** That implies a certain lack of focus up until now.

**Caroline Flint:** I think it is just also about—as David says, the regional framework that I have discussed with Sir Bob about the HCA will give, I think, a better sense of networking capacity there that is quite difficult for a relatively small organisation. 20 people, I think, are employed by the ASC, and I think again, there is a sort of strengthening there, a bigger organisation. The trick will be about how not to lose their particular role, and the work they are able to get on with, which is very important in terms of developing people's skills, and the sector in terms of the staff and the profession.

**Q229 Andrew George:** Could I just come back to, if you like, the other side of the coin of the questions I was asking earlier? Primarily, and your answer was addressing itself to the answer of pulling more people into the profession, the question is: has the Government made any kind of assessment of those aspects of Government policy which are perhaps pushing people out of the profession, the initiatives, the large number of agencies, the regionalisation, in other words the sucking of powers away from local authorities, for example?

**Caroline Flint:** Come back to me if I have not understood your question, but I actually do not think a lot of what we are doing is necessarily about pulling powers away from local authorities. Actually, we have put a lot of powers to local authorities, with the local development frameworks, their core strategies, the work we are doing through the planning bill at the moment, and discussions around things like the community infrastructure levy and so forth, you know, it seems to me that in terms of really that wider corporate vision that local authorities should have in terms of—I think your language was place setting in communities trying to pull that together in a way that I think is possibly more motivating than the sense of this, I think, as Emily was suggesting, the sort of tick box application process. I think it presents a quite exciting and undoubtedly challenging time for those who are currently working in planning or, to be honest, for those in local authorities who have everything to gain by getting this sort of corporate vision strategy right. Now the other side of it is about what do we do to maybe make the process better, not just for those working in the local authority who are processing applications, but for those who are making applications as well. We have the end-to-end review at the moment on the planning application itself, David Pretty and Joanna Killian working on that, one from the construction sector, one person from senior management level in local authorities. We have the work going on in terms of permitted development, which will take out of the process again potentially a number of applications that currently come in, it is not that they are not important, but actually in the big scheme of things, people should maybe be able to get on with their solar panels and other things too, and to try and disentangle maybe some of the processes that people find, particularly those working in local authorities,

time-consuming and not particularly necessarily the most motivating work that they would like to spend their time on.

**Q230 Andrew George:** I think my question was really whether you have assessed the effect of various initiatives like the ones perhaps you have described, I do not know, or other aspects of Government policy might have created an environment in which people in the profession have said, “We are no longer prepared to put up with this”, and they are leaving. In other words, whether you have made any kind of assessment of that.

**Caroline Flint:** Well, insofar as we recognise that there is a vacancy issue to deal with, we have recognised that actually we need to attract more young people into the profession, and as we talked earlier, we do recognise that we have a number of people who are coming up to retirement going out of the profession as well, so all the things we have discussed so far I think are part of a jigsaw that we feel, David and colleagues in the Department having spent a considerable amount of time talking to those working on the frontline, various reports that have been done over the years and research into this, we hope will tackle some of those different things that people have raised that are a problem, but I think there is more work to be done on this, and part of it, I think, again is about how local authorities also work particularly with the developers, and how we can get that relationship working better or as good as we know it does work in other areas, which does not by any means hand everything over to the developers, but actually just makes the process more engaging, more productive, good outcomes for local authority, and reasonable outcomes in line with planning law for the developers.

**Andrew George:** Finally, do you and does the Government have a view about the training of councillors? I know that local authorities have strong feelings because they are worried about the decisions they might make, but does the Government have a view, just leave it to local authorities to decide?

**Q231 Chair:** Do you think it should be mandatory?

**Caroline Flint:** I am not signed up to it being compulsory or mandatory. Councillors play different roles, and I think certainly all councillors having an understanding as part of their induction into how planning fits into the service provision, what is happening in their communities, regeneration housing, whatever, is a good idea. We are not short of courses out there, I have to say, and training opportunities for that. Likewise, on another level, for those who actually sit on the scrutiny panels or planning committees, there is obviously another order there for those people, in terms of what they have to understand as their role, what they can and cannot do and so forth. But I think what I would say is that I do not think it is about a councillor necessarily doing training that is almost like a qualification as a planner or anything like that, because I think what is important here again is the relationship of the professionals within the

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organisation to those lay members and councillors, and the advice they give to them, and the way in which that advice is given. Then I think the particular, if you like, role that an elected person brings to that function, which is not to be the professional, I think it is somewhat different. So I think it is quite difficult to say “everyone must be trained to this level”, because I am not sure that would work and it would not necessarily work in terms of the turnover you might need when you are actually dealing on the ground with the changes we have in our elected system.

**Q232 Andrew George:** But surely you would agree that there is need for mandatory training just to protect the councillors legally, given it is a quasi-legal status, those on the planning committee need to be cautioned about the potentially catastrophic effects --

**Caroline Flint:** Obviously I would hope, just as a Minister, when someone gives me advice, and the lawyers in the Department say, “Minister, I just need

to tell you that this is legal, this is maybe”—that sounds terrible, “This is legal, this is not so legal”, we never get any advice like that! But when you get advice from your lawyers, this is the other issue, at any given stage, if you are dealing with a planning application or what have you, and as a Member of Parliament, obviously I have represented different cases and different issues or sought clarity on issues probably 99% of the time, you need good advice from your planners and your lawyers to tell you just what the legal proprieties are, and what is legally right and what is not legally right, and to be honest, I do not think there is a training course *per se* that could do that for a councillor to cover all eventualities. There is obviously a basic sense of what your role is and your legal role and quasi-legal role, but ultimately, on a day-to-day basis, when you are faced with different applications, I think that is where you need the good advice from within your local authority from good staff, and then you have to make a judgment, just as Ministers have to make a judgment.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed, Minister.

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# Written evidence

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## Memorandum by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the mark of property professionalism worldwide, welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities.

There are 22,000 members of the RICS Chartered Planning and Development Surveyor Faculty. Planning is essential to the work of all Chartered Surveyors, of which there are 140,000 worldwide. Whilst qualified planners are in increasingly short supply their services are much needed as a result of the scale of development being proposed and undertaken in the UK. This is particularly the case in light of the Government's challenging housing targets. Simultaneously the public sector has found it challenging to recruit and retain planners with the skills needed, or to maintain the highest levels of innovation.

### 1. *Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

The range of issues that planners, public and private sector, are expected to deal with has increased significantly in recent years thereby putting more pressure on planning officers. This extra dimension has not been matched by an additional growth in resources.

As a result of the closure of several planning courses in the 1980s (for example Nottingham University), fewer planning graduates entered the profession in the early and mid-1990s. This "lost planning generation" has become particularly prominent today as it is those planners, who typically have 10–15 years experience, who are most sought after. The typical situation is now such that senior planners are often overstretched on highly technical matters whereas more junior planners tend to be transient workers who lack the requisite experience and local knowledge, often as a result of being trained as a planner outside the UK.

Attracted by higher salaries, many planners from the public sector have moved to the private sector. Consequently, public sector planning departments are often understaffed and private sector salaries have risen at an unsustainable rate (15–20% per annum).

The decreased number of planning graduates has coincided with the property boom and contributed to a large increase in the number of planning consultancies. The net result of this has been a resource and skills problem whereby planning has become increasingly compartmentalised and specialised.

As a final point, not only does the formal move to a spatial planning system place a stronger emphasis on the technical skills needed by the planner, it also places more responsibility on planners to develop relationship skills so that they are able to lead the process of "co-production".

### 2. *Main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced*

There are a number of areas where the lack of qualified planners is pronounced. Particular examples include:

- Conservation and listed buildings: many local authorities lack anyone with these skills.
- Design and quality: local authority officers often lack experience in these critical areas.
- Lack of understanding about the costs of providing affordable housing and the impact this has on the viability of development. This may be exacerbated by the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Economic development seems likely to receive greater emphasis in the light of Draft PPS 4, but very few planning officers are equipped to advise on these issues.
- Planning officers are being asked to enforce new sustainable and climate change measures. There is, however, a lack of understanding about the principles and technology involved (for example on site, near site and off site renewables).
- Minimal understanding of new plan making and procedures which have contributed to a greater workload and more bureaucracy for planning departments.
- Lack of understanding about waste management, for example, landfill issues.

Planners are increasingly asked to play project management and networking roles for which they are under resourced and ill experienced. In order to address this, the RICS recommends that techniques such as story banks should be applied to planning so that information can more easily be shared between colleagues. Story banking could take the form of an open online resource designed in such a way that planners are able to share the challenges that they have faced and the particular and innovative ways in which they have responded.

*3. Skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including Local Member Review Bodies*

Many senior planning officers are concerned about the lack of training and understanding that newly elected councillors have. So as to address this, RICS maintains that councillors should have a certain level of training before being able to sit on a planning committee. Such a prerequisite will ensure that, at the very least, councillors are well versed in the planning system and are able to make reasoned decisions rather than solely on the basis of public opinion.

Therefore, RICS does not support the introduction of Local Member Review Bodies. As things currently stand, lay members do not have an adequate understanding of the planning system and councillors are not sufficiently knowledgeable to mediate impartially.

*4. Role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments*

As stated above, there is a training gap and a potentially stronger role for professional bodies such as RICS and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) to play.

*5. Effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them*

Government has been slow to respond to the changes and increased demands placed upon local authority planning departments. An example of this has been the increased workload and stretched budgets which have come about as a result of the imposition of Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) upon local authorities. RICS maintains that such decisions need to be taken in conjunction with the planning community so that the full impact of all new proposed policy can be properly evaluated.

For example the planning system is in some instances being asked to deal with matters which RICS considers should be the remit of building regulation control rather than planning. Whilst laudable, the recent announcement from Communities and Local Government (CLG) on planning for lifetime homes begs the question as to whether planners were consulted on the proposals as they will place further burdens on already overstretched planning officers.

To address the planning shortfall, it is important that the profession is promoted as a more fulfilling career. One relatively easy measure, which is already occurring in the private sector, is to make it easier for professionals from other areas to move sideways into the sector. The public sector has some work to do in this regard.

As a final point, it should be noted that the increasing emphasis by local planning authorities on targets has had a number of unintended consequences, foremost amongst which has been the diversion of resources and subsequent delays.

*6. Long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

The impact of the so-called “missing generation” of planners is that many “senior level planning jobs are vacant and will continue to be so. The remedies proposed to date have been mere sticking plasters on a gaping wound. It is essential that the problem is now addressed head on so that planning is portrayed in a more favourable fashion and that routes to practice are made easier for professionals. At present, most senior planning officers are running to stand still and do not have the luxury of time to speculate or plan ahead for years to come.

In summary, it is essential that the public and private sector planners do not operate in isolation. Although their experiences and practices may differ it is important for these to be brought together so that planning practice can be improved.

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**Memorandum by Janet Askew, MRTPI, Head of the School of Planning and Architecture,  
University of the West of England, Bristol**

*1. Introduction*

1.1. This evidence is submitted to the CLG Select Committee Inquiry on Planning Skills by Janet Askew, Head of the School of Planning and Architecture at the University of the West of England, Bristol. The school is the largest planning school in the UK, with 63 staff and approximately 900 students studying for degrees which are accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute. Qualifications include undergraduate and postgraduate initial planning education, delivered through taught courses as well as by distance

learning. In addition, the school has a reputation for delivering courses for continuing professional development, including a large number of short courses on different subjects, aimed mainly at people employed in the profession in both private and public sectors. The school is a member of the Committee of Heads of Planning Schools, the current chair of which has submitted generic evidence about the skills and knowledge being developed in planning schools, acknowledging that different schools offer different approaches and different types of programmes. All schools offer initial planning education, but the University of the West of England, Bristol has also pioneered some practice based education for new planners, as well as mid career planners, and it is this that this evidence will concentrate upon. It will attempt to respond to the following points in the call for evidence:

- Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills in planning departments.
- Main areas where lack of skills is most pronounced.
- Skills, knowledge and training needed for councillors.
- Role and effectiveness of agencies providing specialist knowledge to planning officers and councillors.

## *2. Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills in planning departments, and main areas where lack of skills is most pronounced*

2.1. Planning is undergoing a culture change, and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004 heralded a new approach to planning, which is termed the “spatial planning approach”. In particular, this major “culture change” in the way that planners perform their jobs, asks that a new and integrated approach to planning is adopted. The reforms demand new types of plans at the regional and local levels, and a new more pro-active approach to managing development, which moves away from the negative control culture, so often associated with the profession. The new approach places the profession of planning at the heart of local government, and requires planners to encourage development by facilitating the involvement of all stakeholders, including developers, the community, sectoral interests—transport, health, education, environment etc. The new planner is supposed to be bringing all interests together across sectors and across geographic boundaries where necessary. This is all set within a national framework of policies and plans, and in order for this to happen, there are many new regulations (some requiring primary legislation and the Planning Bill is going through parliament now), but also a new language which challenges old ways of doing things.

### 2.2. MA Spatial Planning

Since 2004, academics and practitioners have been coming to terms with the new planning system. To recognise this, CLG commissioned UWE in 2005 to design and deliver the MA in Spatial Planning, for which they paid £250,000. (see reference to it in White Paper, 2007). The new course had to be flexible, cheap, accessible, possible to be studied as and when people had time, and aimed at mid career practitioners to encourage them to engage with the new skills for a new agenda. The MA Spatial Planning has been designed to be offered entirely by distance learning with interactive educational methods, and can be done as continuing professional development (CPD), or students can build up credits from a series of topics (63 in total), which, along with a dissertation, leads to the award of a master’s degree. It is possible for students to develop this qualification into a professional doctorate too, with the writing of a much longer thesis contextualised in the workplace. It was launched in November 2005 by Baroness Andrews, since when it has been recruiting students. The website for this degree can be found at:

<http://www.built-environment.uwe.ac.uk/spatialplanning/>

2.3. Along with civil servants from CLG, a steering group advised UWE on the content of the course, including representatives from the Planning Inspectorate, the Local Government Association, the Planning Officers’ Society, the Royal Town Planning Institute and a community planner, and the course content was subject to review. The subjects identified reflect ideas about what planners in mid career need to understand to enable them to proceed with the new agenda, and include:

- Spatial policy integration—understanding the integration of different sectors, sometimes across geographic boundaries, to produce much needed development, such as new housing and sustainable communities.
- Understanding spatial development—this sets the agenda to allow planners to understand what drives development, including economic and social drivers, and the influence of different sectors—transport, health and education for example.
- Spatial policy and plan-making—looking at how new plans should be made, and the kind of techniques required to make the new set of regional and local plans, and in particular how they differ from the former series of plans.
- Inclusion in planning—this recognises the new emphasis on engagement with communities, and in recognising this, helping planners define different communities, and how to approach and plan for their inclusion. This might include hard to reach groups, but also other interests, such as the business community.

- Policy appraisal—looks at techniques for appraising and monitoring how policy is working, and new methods of doing this, including new approaches such as GIA, impact assessment including sustainability appraisal, strategic environmental assessment, environmental impact assessment, sectoral impacts, such as health and transport impact.
- Delivering development—planners often suggest that they do not sufficiently understand economic and financial approaches to development, but there is a requirement for them to adopt more pro-active partnership approaches now, which are explained in this module, along with an understanding of how the development industry works.
- Efficiency and effectiveness in managing development—planners must adopt more positive methods of delivering development and assisting the industry to deliver without the negative connotations of control. New regulations and initiatives in recent years have encouraged a speedier response by local planning authorities to development proposals, but efficiency must not be at the expense of quality. This looks at how the transition from development control to development management might be effective, with techniques for negotiation, assessment (of, for example, flood risk, waste, environmental impact) explained.
- Research for policy and practice—the new planning system requires a sound evidence base. This is something that planners have traditionally been good at, but understanding research techniques is clearly important for the credibility of the work that planners undertake.

2.4. The course is aimed mainly at planners, but as the new agenda reaches out to other sectors, there may be aspects of the course that are interesting to health professionals, educationalists, councillors, community workers, etc. This is how UWE interpreted the new planning agenda, and these are the new skills and knowledge with which senior planners need to engage if they are going to deliver spatial planning to produce sustainable communities.

## 2.5. Foundation Degree in Development Management and Planning Practice

The University of the West of England was commissioned by CLG in 2007 to produce a Foundation Degree in Development Management and Planning Practice. Statistics (Audit Commission 2006) show that local planning authorities are experiencing severe shortages in the area of planning and the management of development, formerly known as development control. There has been a steep increase in the number of planning applications, and research shows that recruitment is a problem for local planning authorities, especially in the area of the consideration of minor applications (householder applications, for example). To this end, UWE designed a new programme aimed at unqualified people who were working in local planning authorities and who needed to learn the new skills of development management as soon as possible. This is the new foundation degree, delivered by “blended learning” with distance learning components and some face to face contact (six days per annum), delivered at three universities in Bristol, London and Sheffield, giving a geographic spread across England. The skills on offer in this programme initially give enough of an understanding of the new planning system to enable people to process planning applications, while developing and building a knowledge about planning, firstly towards a foundation degree and ultimately to a full professional qualification. Skills are an important part of a foundation degree, and these will be developed in conjunction with some experiential learning undertaken in the work place. The aim of the course is not just to assist local authorities to manage development control workloads, but to engage the students with the new agenda and ways of carrying out the more pro-active methods of development management.

## 3. *Role and effectiveness of an agency (UWE) in providing specialist knowledge and skills to planning officials and councillors*

3.1. Recruitment to all planning courses for undergraduates and postgraduates is high at UWE, with approximately 150 students in the first year studying initial planning education on RTPI accredited courses. Recruitment to postgraduate courses across England has been assisted by the award of bursaries by CLG to outstanding candidates for the MA in Town and Country Planning, the prospect of a bursary inviting an over-subscription of candidates for the courses, creating competition between students who apply. UWE has always recruited well amongst part-timers, many of whom undertake the degrees with sponsorship from employers, and most employers who sponsor students are local planning authorities. The current intake of part time students to the master’s degree is about 50 per annum. There is also a part time course for undergraduates, attracting about 15 per annum, nearly all sponsored by local authorities (separate from the afore-mentioned foundation degree). In addition, UWE manages and runs the only initial planning education to be delivered by distance learning, mostly carried out by people who are in a related work field, and again, mostly in local authorities, with about 70 recruits per annum. This course operates a waiting list as it is over-subscribed. Recruitment to the new foundation degree is promising in its first year of operation and there are about 15 students, all of whom are from local authorities. In other words, local authorities recognise that they cannot recruit staff, and that the best way to acquire qualified staff is to pay for their

training and education. Part time courses offer much to local authorities, as students undertake their studies more or less in their own time, apart from the days they attend college, and in the case of the foundation degree, this is only six days per annum.

3.2. Figures and take up for the new CLG-sponsored MA in Spatial Planning are less than we might have hoped by this time in the age of the course. We are confident that the “product” is good and relevant, and also that numbers will grow as the course develops a reputation, but we might have expected more students to have enrolled by now. To date, only 150 students have studied on the MA Spatial Planning course, many of whom are using it for CPD purposes, but some seem likely to proceed to complete the degree. Every local authority in England was written to in a joint letter from the Chief Planner at CLG, the Chief Executive of PINS and the Dean of the Faculty of the Built Environment urging them to engage with the new course, and sponsor students to study on it. An extensive advertising campaign continues, along with numerous initiatives; feedback suggests that the course offers relevant knowledge and appropriate skills for the new agenda. The course has already had a constructive spin-off in assisting UWE to further develop spatial planning ideas with undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as investigating other courses, such as the MBA in Planning. Leadership in planning has been identified as a major weakness in the planning profession (Morphet, 2007).

3.3. What is disappointing is either the apparent reluctance of existing (and qualified) planners to re-train in the new skills, or of local authorities and consultancies to pay for mid career planners to study for further qualifications. It is likely that the numbers accessing the course will build, but it is worth considering some of the reasons why mid career planners are not engaging with lifelong learning:

- It is aimed at mid career planners who report that they are already hard-pressed at work, trying to engage with the new system, including trying to meet planning application targets. High workload is partly a factor of the difficulties in recruiting newly qualified planners, but recruitment in universities is high, and this will release more planners into the labour market over the next few years.
- Anecdotally, there is some negativity amongst professionals about the implementation of the new system, and many local planning authorities are slow to change (to write new plans for example: PINS reports that the progress of the production of core strategies has been much slower than originally anticipated).
- Mid career planners are more likely to have domestic responsibilities which prevent them from undertaking further study.
- There is a view that CPD is not particularly well supported by the employers—both in the public and private sectors. The public sector (mainly) seems willing to fund staff for initial planning education, but not necessarily for already qualified staff to change their skills. Whilst the aim of this select committee is to look at planning skills in the public sector, it needs to be understood that some of the work of the public sector is in fact done by the private sector on a consultancy basis (Audit Commission, 2006), meaning that consultants have to engage with new learning too. This is not only about funding courses, but about giving time to staff for pursuing a new course or CPD.
- There is no reward in financial terms for mid career staff who do progress their learning with new qualifications. Staff are often promoted upon becoming members of the profession (RTPI), but promotion is seldom tied to additional qualifications in the mid career.

3.4. It is recommended that the Select Committee gives some consideration to ways in which planners who are already working in both public and private sectors can better engage with the new agenda to produce more meaningful spatial plans and more effective and efficient ways of managing development.

#### REFERENCES

Audit Commission (2006) “The planning system: matching expectations and capacity”, Audit Commission, London

CLG (2007) “Planning for a Sustainable Future” White Paper, HMSO, London

Morphet, J. et al, “Shaping and Delivering Tomorrow’s Places: Effective Practice in Spatial Planning”, RTPI, London

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#### Memorandum by The Institution of Economic Development

This submission has been prepared by the Council of the Institution of Economic Development (IED). The IED is the leading professional membership organisation for UK economic development practitioners. The views contained within this submission are endorsed by the Council of the IED, on behalf of the IED. The intention is to represent the views of those involved in the economic development profession, as other professional organisations represent the views of their given profession.

## A POINT OF CONCERN

It is unclear whether the ambition for this inquiry is to evaluate “the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities” (Call for Evidence, 22 Jan 08) or to focus exclusively on planning skills, as the guidance questions suggest. It could be that this call for evidence is the first in a series and that future calls from the same inquiry will explore other professions, such as landscape architecture. If this is the case, it could have been articulated more clearly. If this focus on planning skills is the sole element of an inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities, then this would be of some concern; work in this area has unequivocally shown that a cross-disciplinary team of professionals is required to best deliver this important objective. Alternatively, it may be that the Committee wishes to look exclusively at planning skills; if this is the case, it is disingenuous to badge the inquiry as revisiting the Egan Review, as its scope is clearly narrower.

Moreover, the Egan Review and, subsequently, the Lyons Review and the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) are in agreement that a buoyant and diverse economy invariably provides the foundation for sustainable communities. The Lyons Review and the SNR go further, showing a keenness to place local government at the heart of place shaping with a new statutory responsibility. With this in mind, the skills required by those charged with achieving growth in economically underperforming areas should be at the fulcrum of any examination of skills shortages.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

The feeling amongst those working in economic development is that relations between the economic development and planning professions are currently very good. This is perhaps in contrast to the past, where the interaction might well have been characterised by mutual misunderstanding; economic development departments perceived planning departments to be hindering their attempts to encourage economic growth, and those in planning felt that those in economic development were negligently disregarding good practice in a single minded rush to secure growth on their patch.

This situation now sees economic development and planning functions working in a more co-ordinated fashion. This is perhaps in part due to some cross-fertilisation of the professions, although this has typically seen planners move across to work in economic development, rather than vice versa. A new shared agenda vindicates the notion that the objectives of the two professions are not necessarily in opposition. Planners have recognised that schemes that they are keen to implement have a greater chance of being approved if they are considered to have a good chance of delivering economic growth, while economic development officers have recognised that ad-hoc developments rarely maximise potential investment in the way that those within a strategic framework can.

## THE FUTURE FRAMEWORK

The planning skills required in local authority departments will be influenced by the future designation of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) as the lead agency for spatial planning. Until the future relationship between the RDAs and the local authorities is more firmly established, it is difficult to determine exactly who should be in possession of which skills. The progression of the SNR consultation will be influential in informing this debate.

This analysis extends to councillors as well as officers. Currently councillors are most likely to be involved in this domain through membership of a Development Control Committee (or equivalent) or a Scrutiny Committee. Under the status quo, councillors might be required to develop or monitor policy that will impact upon the local authority of which they are an elected member. Essentially, the objectives of council officers and elected members should be conterminous. Under the SNR proposals, councillors could find themselves serving on a regional committee monitoring the planning policies set in place by the RDAs. In this scenario, they would not necessarily be working with officers whose objectives were conterminous with theirs and their understanding of the principles and delivery frameworks would be more important.

## PRIVATE PROVISION AND THE RETENTION OF TACIT KNOWLEDGE

The questions outlined in this call for evidence sees the skills challenges facing the planning industry through the prism of local government. Currently, local authorities are in a position whereby any skills shortages that they experience can be overcome through commissioning external consultants who do possess the required skills. This relationship needs to be better understood for two principal reasons:

1. Local authorities are not in a position to control their own destiny. It is rational to expect the market to provide consultants as long as there is demand for them, but private sector consultants are exposed to skills shortages in much the same way as local authorities are. Therefore, expecting external expertise to be available on “permanent stand-by” is unrealistic; not only might the private sector be unable to recruit people with suitable skills, but they also might find a sector that is more lucrative than local government in which to work.

2. During the development of a piece of work it is inevitable that not all of the information that is processed will be included in a final report. If every piece of work is commissioned to external organisations, a lot of tacit knowledge will be retained by the external organisation and not by the commissioner. This knowledge would be retained, should the organisation have the capacity to conduct the work in-house.

#### AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

The original Egan review (ODPM 2004) highlighted a persistent paradox. Delivering sustainable communities requires collaboration across a number of agendas, including core public services such as education and health services. However, combining the objectives of these agendas should not compromise the overall quality of their delivery. In other words, people charged with delivering sustainable communities are required to take a strategic view of the various policy areas and how they interrelate, while also possessing considerable expertise. In all of them. This is unrealistic, and this is acknowledged to some extent in the Egan review itself. The development of a solution to this challenge feels like unfinished business, and it is unclear exactly how it has been tackled since.

The most comprehensive piece of work looking at this area is *Mind the Skills Gap* (2007), which was completed by Arup for the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC). A selection of the most pertinent findings:

- Those organisations seeking to recruit Planners are expected to face a 27% labour shortage by 2012—the biggest of all the professional disciplines assessed in the study. This shortage will be felt most acutely by the public sector, who anticipates facing a 44% shortage.
- The position of the regions is not uniform. Of the nine English regions, two were expected to have a surplus (or at least a reduced deficit) by 2012. These were Yorkshire & the Humber and the West Midlands.

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### **Memorandum by the Chief Economic Development Officers Society [CEDOS] and the County Surveyors Society [CSS]**

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The Chief Economic Development Officers Society [CEDOS] provides a forum for Heads of Economic Development in upper tier local authorities throughout England. Membership includes county, city and unitary Councils in non-metropolitan areas, which together represent over 47% of the population of England and provide services across over 84% of its land area. The Society carries out research, develops and disseminates best practice, and publishes reports on key issues for economic development policy and practice. Through its collective expertise, it seeks to play its full part in helping to inform and shape national and regional policies and initiatives.

2. The CSS represents local authority Strategic Directors who manage some of the most pressing issues facing the UK today. The expertise of CSS members and their vision is fundamental in the handling of issues that affect all our lives. Operating at the strategic tier of local government they are responsible for crucial transport, waste management, environment, planning, energy and economic development issues. CSS membership is drawn from all four corners of the United Kingdom.

3. CEDOS and CSS welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry into the skills capacity within local Government to deliver sustainable communities.

#### CEDOS/CSS VIEWS

4. The delivery of sustainable communities is a vital issue facing all of us. Following on from Sir John Egan's *Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities*<sup>1</sup>, the Committee's decision to carry out an inquiry into this important subject is most welcome as is the specific focus on local government. In his review, Sir John Egan made it clear that local authorities should take the lead role in the delivery of sustainable communities, a view that was endorsed by the majority of respondents to his public consultation and by the Government<sup>2</sup>.

5. We are, however, disappointed that the inquiry's terms of reference appear to relate almost exclusively to planning skills and planning departments. We believe this is too narrow a focus. Sir John Egan made it clear that delivering sustainable communities requires the active engagement of more than just built environment professionals. A wide range of professions and occupations have an essential role to play. This follows from the Egan Review's definition of sustainable communities as ones that "meet the diverse needs

<sup>1</sup> *The Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities*. ODPM. April 2004

<sup>2</sup> *Government response to the Egan Review* August 2004

of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity”.

6. The Egan Review identified seven key components, all of which need to be addressed if we are to deliver and maintain sustainable communities:

- Social and cultural—vibrant, harmonious and inclusive communities.
- Governance—effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership.
- Environmental—providing places for people to live in an environmentally-friendly way.
- Housing and the built environment—a quality built and natural environment.
- Transport and connectivity—good transport services and communications linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services.
- Economy—a flourishing and diverse local economy.
- Services—a full range of appropriate, accessible public, private, community and voluntary services.

7. To address all of these inter-related components, for which Sir John Egan emphasises there is no hierarchy, the goal of sustainable communities “will require new skills and new ways of working for everyone involved”<sup>3</sup>.

8. For local government, leadership, partnership building and working are critical overall skills. In terms of professions, we agree with Sir John Egan that focussing on one group of professionals in isolation will not produce the outcomes we are seeking. As he says: “sustainable communities are a holistic long-term objective requiring a holistic approach to skills to deliver the outcome we are seeking”. Within local government, there is a need for a multi-disciplinary, inter-departmental approach. Planning skills are clearly vital but whilst town and country planning is a broadly based profession, a wide range of others are equally vital including architects, surveyors, highway engineers, transport planners, economic development, community safety and other professionals.

9. Although it is right that planning skills are an important part of the Committee’s inquiry, in our view it is essential that the other key skills are also covered. Indeed, alongside planners, we believe there is a strong case for arguing that specialists in economic development, transportation and environmental issues are equally important. This view is supported, amongst other things, by the number of local economy, environmental and transport related indicators included in the new set of national indicators for local authorities and local authority partnerships.

10. Sir John Egan has illustrated their importance in his list of the key components of sustainable communities:

Transport and connectivity—good transport services and communications linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services:

- transport facilities, including public transport, that help people travel within and between communities;
- facilities to encourage safe local walking and cycling;
- accessible and appropriate local parking facilities; and
- widely available and effective telecommunications and Internet access.

Environmental—providing places for people to live in an environmentally—friendly way:

- efficient use of resources now and in the future in the built environment and service provision [eg energy efficiency, land, water resources, flood defence, waste minimisation etc];
- living in a way that minimises the negative environmental impact and enhances the positive impact [eg recycling, walking, cycling];
- protecting and improving natural resources and biodiversity [eg air quality, noise, water quality]; and
- having due regard for the needs of future generations in current decisions and actions.

Economy—a flourishing and diverse local economy

- a wide range of jobs and training opportunities;
- sufficient land and buildings to support economic prosperity and change;
- dynamic job and business creation; and
- a strong business community with links into the wider economy.

<sup>3</sup> *The Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities*. ODPM. April 2004

11. Since the Egan report, the significance of these key components has been further emphasised by:

- the Leitch review of skills;
- the Eddington transport study;
- the Barker review of land use planning;
- the Stern review on the economics of climate change; and
- the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration.

12. These reviews have underlined the importance of planning, transportation, environment and economy issues, whilst Sir Michael Lyons inquiry into local government, focusing on the well being of citizens and their communities, emphasised the importance of economic, social and environmental sustainability. Clearly these issues are inter-related. The Review of Sub-national economic development and regeneration points out, for example, that there is clear evidence that a comprehensive and high-performing transport system is an important enabler of economic prosperity.

13. The Lyons inquiry highlighted “working to make the local economy more successful while being sensitive to pressures on the environment”<sup>4</sup> as a key component of local authority place-shaping. Subsequently, the Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration [“Sub-national Review”] issued as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 highlighted the growing importance of the local authority role in economic development.

14. The Sub-national Review states that “Local authorities need to play a central role in leading economic development and neighbourhood renewal”<sup>5</sup> and that “in the context of the broader power for local authorities to promote economic, social and environmental well-being, it is vital that local authorities’ strengthened role in promoting residents’ economic well-being is given due attention”. The Government has announced its intention to consult on the creation of a focused statutory economic duty for upper tier local authorities and to reform the local authority performance framework so that it includes a clear focus on economic development and neighbourhood renewal.

15. The government recognises that local authorities will need to respond to the challenge of this enhanced role in economic development and neighbourhood renewal and ensure they develop the capacity necessary to be effective. It acknowledges it will need to work with local authorities to improve their capacity to deliver on their new, enhanced role. The Sub-national Review states that the Government will ensure that capacity-building programmes are geared around an economic development role, including strengthening local authority leadership, and will provide support for improvements in neighbourhood renewal and regeneration capacity. It acknowledges that there will be a need for capacity support for local authorities, which do not have the necessary economic development capacity.

16. This need is likely to be intensified by the tightness of the Comprehensive Spending Review and the severe reduction in the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives Scheme.

## CONCLUSIONS

17. In conclusion, we believe the Committee’s inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities is vitally important but if it is to be effective, we believe that it that it must look wider than planning skills and recognise the importance of a range of other skills including specialisms in transport, environment and economic development. To achieve a proper understanding, we believe that this will require an audit of these skills and the identification of skills gaps and shortages. For our part, CEDOS and CSS will be pleased to participate in this.

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**Memorandum by Ann Hockey, Senior Lecturer in Spatial Planning, Anglia Ruskin University**

## INTRODUCTION

Anglia Ruskin University has been a provider of Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)-approved planning education since the 1960s, and currently offers both accredited undergraduate and postgraduate pathways. I am in general agreement with the submission made by Professor David Shaw, Chair of the Conference of the Heads of Planning Schools, on behalf of all the planning schools. In this submission, I would like to draw attention to specific aspects of planning education at Anglia Ruskin University.

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<sup>4</sup> *Place-shaping: A Shared Ambition for the Future of Local Government*. Sir Michael Lyons March 2007

<sup>5</sup> *Review of Sub-national Economic Development & Regeneration* HM Treasury, Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform & Department for Communities & Local Government July 2007

## WORKING WITH PARTNERS

As a provider of initial planning education, we work closely with national organisations including the RTPI, CLG, Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE), to ensure the curriculum we offer reflects current debate in planning education from both academic, professional and practice perspectives. We undertook a major review of all modules during 2005–06, for introduction in September 2006, and procedures are in place to allow realignment of modules on an annual basis when necessary. Whilst many of the skills identified by the Egan Review were already represented in our teaching, either as specific planning skills or via the University's own set of generic skills which all graduates are expected to be able to demonstrate, this review enabled us to introduce planning skills more comprehensively into the curriculum, and they are now a major component of several modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In all instances, they are contextualised, using real-life examples whenever possible. In order that students better appreciate their application in the profession.

Our strong links with regional organisations are a further important means of ensuring the currency of the pathways we offer. Staff are actively involved with the RTPI East of England region, RICS East of England, RIBA East, CIOB Eastern, CIH Eastern, InspireEast, the regional centre of excellence for sustainable communities, and many others. This enables us to reflect current debates and skills issues not only in planning per se, but in the wider built environment and sustainable communities professions. We have a very wide network of contacts in local government and private practice throughout the region, many of whom are pleased to participate in the delivery of our curriculum as guest speakers or field visit hosts. The RTPI East of England Region recognises the significant contribution we make to planning education in the region through the award of a prize for the outstanding planning graduate each year.

## RECRUITMENT

Recruitment to the postgraduate intensive MSc Town Planning is particularly buoyant, with part-time students, who study for two years on day-release from their employers, strongly represented. This pathway, which was first offered in September 2005, has been over-subscribed in each year, and recruitment shows no sign of slowing to date. Whilst the pathway is designed for students with good first degrees (at least second class honours) in subjects cognate to planning, we also have an entry route for those whose degrees are in non-cognate subjects but otherwise meet the entry requirements. This requires successful completion of a specially-developed module "Introduction to Town Planning Studies" prior to entry to the MSc. It has been followed by students with first degrees in subjects as diverse as Mathematics and Fine Art who are already working in planning and bring different knowledge, perspectives and skills mixes to their studies and their practice. Whilst attracting committed students with low drop-out rates, recruitment to the undergraduate pathway is more variable. For many years, our graduates have all been successful in securing posts in planning organisations either prior to receiving their award, or very soon afterwards, which is indicative of employers' recognition for the quality of education provided.

## RESEARCH

In terms of research, we are active in the area of planning skills, having been awarded a research grant under the Economic and Social Research Council/Academy for Sustainable Communities collaborative initiative on skills for sustainable communities. This research project, which I lead, is currently underway. We are researching the development of an online self-assessment and learning network for generic skills, focussing in the first instance on the local government community in the East of England. The project is due for completion in autumn 2008. An abstract is appended. We have also undertaken skills development research commissioned by the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership. These studies underline the importance of contextualised teaching and learning, particularly for generic skills.

## CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The University makes a strong contribution in terms of continuing professional development for practicing planners and councillors in the region. For the last five years, the University has run an annual series of half- and full-day workshops on planning delivery and development skills, designed in association with the Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA). These are intended for council planning officers, other council and public sector staff working on planning issues, private sector planning and development professionals, consultants and advisers, staff in housing associations, and other built environment professionals. The workshops are very well attended, and are also open to professionals from outside Essex. They adopt a participative, contextualised approach, including expert speakers, discussion sessions, best practice case studies, learning activities to engage participants and develop skills, and study visits. The 2007–08 programme can be viewed at [http://www.anglia.ac.uk/ruskin/en/home/faculties/fst/departments/builtenv/planning\\_skills\\_short/gaining\\_planning\\_delivery.html](http://www.anglia.ac.uk/ruskin/en/home/faculties/fst/departments/builtenv/planning_skills_short/gaining_planning_delivery.html). We also support the RTPI East of England Region's continuing professional development programme, by hosting, organising and providing speakers and facilitators for the region's annual conference series.

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## CONCLUSION

The RTPI's accredited planning schools have a vital part to play in equipping planning professionals with the knowledge and skills which they need in order to meet the challenges of the changing planning and sustainability agendas. We have embraced these challenges at Anglia Ruskin University, and, with the assistance of our partners, will continue to do so into the future. We are addressing the planning skills agenda in a proactive, participative and contextualised way which will equip our students with the knowledge and skills they need to become effective planning professionals, and beyond this we continue to support them through their professional practice.

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## Memorandum by the Planning Officers Society

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This response is on behalf of the Planning Officers Society. The Planning Officers Society represents the most senior professionals and managers of planning functions in the English local authorities. We set out to:

- Act as an advocate and promoter of Local Government planning.
- Assist and advise the Government and the Local Government Association on planning matters and related issues.
- Act as a centre of excellence, undertake research and promote best practice in planning matters.
- Promote all aspects of the built and green environment by working closely with other organisations and professions.

The Society's aim is to ensure that planning makes a major contribution to achieving sustainable developments, from national to local level, in ways which are fair and equitable and achieve the social, economic and environmental aspirations of all sectors of the community.

The following notes give the perception of chief and senior planning officers, and of consultants who work closely in support of them, gained from the experiences of those officers who are members of the Society's Management Committee and particularly the POS South East Region. It also takes into account work undertaken by consultants who work closely with the Society and with local authorities eg carrying out diagnostic evaluations of both the development management service (particularly major applications) and of the Local Development Framework process; undertaking training with both members and officers; and providing a role as critical friend.

If requested to present evidence to the select committee, a more comprehensive survey would be undertaken amongst all the Planning Officers Society's membership and more evidence of the problems identified provided. The Egan Report found that it was the lack of generic skills among built environment professionals, rather than their professional and technical skills themselves, that made the difference between successful delivery of plans and failure. The POS agrees with this and with the definition of generic skills defined in Annex D to the Egan report. However, given the rapidly changing nature of planning there are an increasing range of professional and technical skills that are currently in short supply.

This response on the skills required and in short supply in relation to officers should be seen in the context not only of the Egan report but that by ARUP on behalf of the ASC indicating a current and growing shortage as well as the following:

- A substantial change in the scope, nature and role of planning in the last five to 10 years—eg spatial planning, housing delivery, infrastructure provision and coordination, climate change, links to the SCS, improving accessibility etc. to name but some.
- The resource restrictions on local authorities which are hampering authorities' ability to attract the right level and nature of skills as well as securing and retaining enough staff—see CLG reports on Planning Standards Authorities and Planning Delivery Grant.

Key recommendations from Egan from the perspective of planning skills which reinforce the above were:

- To make it clear that Local Development Frameworks, informed by the Sustainable Community Strategy, should be key delivery mechanisms for creating sustainable communities.
- The planning system must be reconnected with the central leadership and vision of the local authority.
- To develop an effective system of pre-application discussions for very significant development projects.
- To improve and clarify planning processes for all participants, including process mapping and re-engineering, and taking account of the developer's perspective.
- A review of planning targets, to produce a system that reflects the commitment to high quality and timely decision-making for all types of application, including both national and local targets.

- Successful up-skilling of professionals involves changing the behaviour, attitudes and knowledge of everyone involved, encouraging interaction and a holistic approach over the long term.

If these are the aspects that officers are dealing with the pressures on members are equally intense. The change in the nature of planning has left many members behind: they do not understand, nor necessarily want to, the new agenda. Member training in most authorities has been very limited and this continues to be a key issue as well as that of resources and willingness.

The brief report looks firstly at officers from the perspective of the skills and then the demands. It then considers the issue from a member's perspective and finally reviews briefly mitigation measures.

## 2. RECENT CHANGES TO NEEDS

In addition to, and as part of, the delivery of sustainable communities, major changes affecting the planning system have been:

- the move from development control towards development management, with emphasis on a proactive approach to achieving sustainable communities, including good design and responding to climate change, and less control over small-scale development;
- introduction of, and development of good practice in, Local Development Frameworks, with an emphasis on spatial planning, community and stakeholder engagement and robust evidence to ensure soundness, including a more rigorous approach to housing land availability, housing market assessment, the supply and demand of employment land and the implementation of plans; and
- an acceleration of the impetus for delivery of development, particularly for housing, with the publication of PPS3, Growth Point and eco-town initiatives and early reforms to the LDF system.

These have led to an increased need for skills and knowledge in the following, mainly generic, areas:

1. Project management in order to deliver a more complex development plan system in line with the Local Development Scheme and in order to manage the processing of major applications from pre-application stages to approval in line with government targets for speed of decision.
2. Process and change management in order to introduce new systems and time-consuming processes into already over-stretched departments with limited, if any, additional resources and these (such as PDG or planning fees) only available on a short term basis and not predictable for budget purposes.
3. Resource planning, of both the staff and finances, required to deliver LDF documents, master-plans and major development schemes and the justification of a different level of resourcing that that required in the past—undertaking for example activity based or zero based budgeting.
4. Management of contracts and consultants in order to maximise the use of external support for both DM and LDF work which has grown significantly with the need to implement e-planning and evidence based planning.
5. Partnership/ team working in order to develop LDFs corporately, within local authorities and increasingly jointly with adjoining authorities, and other public and private agencies, and to bring forward schemes which deliver the objectives on all sides, including working with Local Strategic Partnerships, mediation between different demands for “planning gain” and working on Planning Performance Agreements. This may include using existing partnerships and teams or developing complex new ones.
6. Development finance, for instance in order to understand and critically evaluate arguments about the viability of schemes either being proposed in planning applications, of sites which form part of Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments or of claims in sequential tests that sites are not viable.
7. Community engagement and stakeholder management in order to assist local residents to articulate how they want their area to develop, while helping them to understand the wider policy requirements and their potential impact on their local environment: this often means dealing with highly controversial issues in public with communities who do not accept the Government's agenda eg housing development.
8. Collaborative visioning—working with stakeholders to develop locally distinctive visions for a district, local area or individual site—a completely new area for many participants.
9. Master-planning and urban design—developing the vision into a more tangible framework and/or responding to schemes submitted.
10. Database design, maintenance and monitoring in order to produce Annual Monitoring Statements and to have evidence to support LDF Core Strategies and Allocations documents: includes ensuring that databases and monitoring is consistent across and within local authority boundaries and requires an understanding of the potential and complexities of the whole e-planning agenda.

11. Administrative and organisational support including administering consultation exercises and databases, arranging events and ensuring the recording of evidence and audit trails as well as operating the new validation requirements.
12. Infrastructure planning—working with statutory undertakers and developers to ensure that the appropriate physical and community infrastructure provision is identified at an early stage and that mechanisms are put in place to ensure its delivery at the appropriate time. Key areas are transport, sewage treatment, water supply, flood mitigation, renewable energy, education, health services, local shopping and other community buildings: these are complicated by the growing level of knowledge by specialists as to the opportunities for eg sustainable accessibility, sustainable construction, behavioural change requirements etc.
13. Implementation, including CPOs, overcoming constraints etc, coordinating delivery to time of a wide variety of agencies in both the public and private sector.
14. Policy development- taking the aspirations and objectives from Issues and Options and Preferred Options reports and translating them into clear, precise but concise and understandable policies for Core Strategies and other DPDs then ensuring their ownership and implementation.
15. Sustainability Appraisal—a growth area for consultants, many local authorities have benefited from the iterative process which can better be achieved with an in-house resource, and can justify this cost in terms of a more locally distinctive output and economies over a large range of EA type work, both for DC and LDFs.
16. Other specialist skills- depending on local circumstances, it may be more cost effective to develop in-house expertise in some areas which have traditionally gone to consultants, such a retail planning, or where reliance has previously been placed on a county level resource which is no longer available for economic or reorganisation reasons, eg conservation or ecology. These aspects are covered in more detail below.

### 3. AREAS WHERE LACK OF SKILLS IS MOST PRONOUNCED

As recognised by the Egan report, there are broadly two types of skill gap which need to be filled:

- technical and professional knowledge of and expertise in new areas of work such as technologies required to deliver carbon free development, or the computer skills to establish complicated databases and monitoring systems as well as those highlighted above;
- the generic and softer skills required, for instance, to engage with the community in order to articulate their vision, seek compromise solutions which maximise achievement of objectives, develop innovative but practical policy approaches and wording, make sensible judgements about the suitability and achievability of sites based on experience as well as analysis, and motivate teams to meet deadlines.

#### *Technical /professional skills*

The following areas are those where local planning authorities struggle to provide a service at all, or are reliant on expensive consultancy advice and so may benefit from in-house expertise (which could in many cases be shared between authorities):

- Strategic planning at sub-regional/regional level.
- Spatial planning and vision/objective led planning.
- Developing project and programme management plans for LDF implementation and development management.
- Conservation area appraisal.
- Urban design guidance and advice.
- Sustainability Appraisal.
- Retail expenditure forecasts and impact assessment.
- Sustainable transport assessment and travel planning.
- Development finance and viability assessment.
- Infrastructure planning and coordination.
- Master-planning.
- Database design, maintenance and monitoring.
- IT skills for e-planning.

*Generic skills*

Many of these generic skills are in the Egan report and are listed above, but the key areas which appear to be lacking in the light of the recent experience with LDFs and development management are:

- Project management.
- Partnership/ team working.
- Collaborative visioning.
- Resource planning.
- Community engagement.
- Process and change management.
- Management of contracts and consultants.
- Negotiation and facilitation of collaborative working.
- Administrative and technical support to LDF teams.
- Developing trust and ownership.
- Communicating difficult messages.
- Community engagement as distinct from consultation.

A number of the skills required and which are in short supply would benefit for more explanation.

*Consultation, engagement and public relations skills*

The Government's new agenda for planning (increased house-building, greater emphasis on the needs of the economy, etc) is going to involve some difficult and potentially controversial decisions, particularly in the more economically-favoured parts of the country like the South East, where the pressures on infrastructure and the quality of life are greatest. The implementation of these decisions will be considerably more difficult, if the Government and the planning authorities do not have the "hearts and minds" backing of the communities concerned. To date, neither of them has been conspicuously successful in winning the public over. One of the most important skills gaps for planning may therefore be the development of new skills in engaging with, and winning the support of, the communities they serve for the new agenda.

One of the key problems they face with this is that the groups who engage most with local government and the planning process tend to be those older, more settled households who are less likely to benefit from the new agenda and more likely to be sensitive to its negative impacts. The main beneficiaries (and therefore more likely supporters) of the new agenda, the younger age groups, are much less likely to be actively involved in the planning process. An important priority for local government planning should therefore be to find new ways of engaging with these groups and securing their understanding of, and support for, the new agenda.

*Strategic Planning*

If the Government is looking for an increase in sub-regional planning activity, this is likely to highlight shortages of strategic planning skills. The abolition of the structure plan tier in 2004 left county councils with no clearly-defined strategic planning role, and led to substantial numbers of strategic planners leaving (either their jobs, or the profession entirely) and the authorities concerned not replacing them. At the same time, Regional Assemblies tended not to be resourced to deliver the full strategic planning agenda independently, and remained heavily dependent upon their constituent local authorities for delivery. The extended period of uncertainty over strategic planning responsibilities that is likely to result from the current Sub-National Review can only exacerbate this problem. At the same time, such indications as we have seen suggest that the new Regional Development Agency bodies will be even less resourced for their planning function and will be looking to push more of it down to the local authority/sub-regional level. The net result is likely to be a shortage of strategic planning skills. The resolution of this depends not just upon training, but also on ensuring that there is a clear role and secure career path to encourage planners to enter this part of the profession.

*The need for evidence and the impact on skills*

Part of the problem currently being experienced by local authorities in relation to skills availability is being driven by the Government's requirement for a comprehensive evidence base for planning. Whilst the Society welcomes the principle of a sound evidence base, we believe the time has come to take overall stock of the scale and detail of evidence now required, the skills involved in gathering it and how it is being used. In the Society's response to draft PPS4 we set out some examples of what is now required. That list is reproduced below:

*Examples of evidence requirements*

PPS3 para. 11 and Annex C: Strategic Housing Market Assessments.

PPS3 para. 11 and Annex C: Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments.

PPS3 para. 29: Assessments of the economic viability of thresholds and proportions of affordable housing, including the impact on housing delivery and mixed communities.

PPS6 para. 2.32–2.33: Retail and Leisure Needs assessments.

PPS7 para. 24: Landscape Character Assessments.

PPS1 para. 27: refers also to Townscape Character.

PPS25 para. 6 and Annex E E5: Strategic Flood Risk Assessments.

ODPM Guidance Note Dec 2004: Employment Land Reviews.

Draft PPS4: para 18: A wide range of measures to monitor the local economy.

Other components of the evidence base mentioned by our members include those in PPG17, PPS9 (Appropriate Assessment), the Habitat Regulations, Sustainability Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments and Statements of Community Involvement.

These now represent a substantial cost and workload for both planning authorities and other key players in the planning system, and we need to satisfy ourselves that the requirements (in terms of both the range of information, the level of detail required and the skills that are required to collect and evaluate the information) are in every case proportional to the value they add to the planning process. We have suggested that case studies might be used to see how the evidence that is being gathered is being used and the extent to which it is influencing the outcomes from the planning process. This may suggest a need, either for changes to the evidence base, or to planning processes, to allow greater regard to be had to the evidence base. Such a process would help to inform your view of the skills gaps and their relative priority. These are three examples, as illustrations of parts of the evidence base, that it is suggested might warrant closer scrutiny:

1. Sustainability appraisal: This requires local authority officers to acquire new skills in what some see as a rather undeveloped and unscientific methodology. Members report that vast amounts of information are being gathered, but that little or no reference appears to be made to it when the strategy is examined, other than to establish that the procedural box of its completion has been ticked.
2. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment: Whilst our members understand and support the principle behind this part of the evidence base, it is felt that some of the detail required (and the demands on the skills needed to supply it) is excessive. In particular, paragraphs 39–41 of the guidance talk of carrying out residual valuations of sites to establish their viability. Whilst this may be possible with a small number of large sites, it would be quite impracticable for those many authorities whose land supply is made up of a host of small sites. Nonetheless, appellants at some S78 appeals—encouraged by this setting of standards—are now apparently trawling through sites in this level of minute detail.
3. Strategic Flood Risk Assessment: Local authorities, either individually or in small groups, are now expected to acquire—or buy in—the skills needed to carry out these assessments over relatively local areas. The assessments largely use data held by the Environment Agency, who also effectively sign off the studies. A far more efficient use of resources—and skills—could be had by the Environment Agency being resourced directly to carry out properly strategic flood risk assessments, which individual planning authorities could then pick up in a completed form and use to inform their plans.

#### 4. THE SKILLS REQUIRED BY OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN PLANNING

Apart from the above, given the demand for new housing provision and the need to create sustainable communities there is a substantial increase in the need for infrastructure planning. This is a completely new field for many planners and local authorities. Infrastructure planning is going to play an increasingly important role in the spatial planning of the future, and it will be important for planners to understand the processes, constraints and priorities of those who deliver different parts of the infrastructure, including the working of their regulatory bodies. They will need to know how and when to intervene in the infrastructure planning process for maximum effect. But the need for such understanding cuts both ways. If infrastructure provision is to be much more central to planning, then the infrastructure providers also need to have a much better appreciation of the purposes and processes of the spatial planning system.

This is particularly true if the utility providers are going to be looking to the Community Infrastructure Levy for funding. At present, the understanding of planning by utilities staff may be described as variable; one might encounter, at one extreme, a “gung ho” approach to the delivery of services that says “whatever you need, where and whenever you need it, we can deliver it” (an understandable position to take where it

is a statutory duty for them to do so, but possibly not very indicative of the realism of such a promise). At the other, there can be an approach that says that discussion of such matters is commercially confidential, and thus out of bounds to the planning authorities.

More generally, we suggest that any discussion of the skills needed for planning should not be restricted to those needed by planners themselves. It should look at the skills needed by all the key players, and in particular those who find themselves with an increasing role in the Government's new planning agenda. For example, with the needs of the economy rising up the planning agenda (draft PPS4, Sub-National Review) it is important that economic development officers and others representing the business community develop their skills as participants in planning. Traditionally, the business community has often been less than effective in representing itself in the planning process (perhaps understandably, given the very different timescales to which planning and business are accustomed to working).

More generally, the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy seems likely to open up the planning system to more active participation by significant groups of new players, such as the health authorities, emergency services and Government agencies. There is some evidence of a shortage of infrastructure planning skills across these bodies as well as in the planning profession—for example paragraph 3.1.3 of the study, commissioned from Buchannan's by Buckinghamshire County Council in relation to the expansion of Aylesbury Vale as part of the Milton Keynes area of growth (published January 2008):

“3.1.3 . . . planning for the level of growth proposed at Aylesbury, and over such a long time period, is a challenge that the majority of service providers have little or no experience of and are at present ill-equipped to meet. This is not surprising given the short-term nature of mainstream funding cycles and the lack of direct involvement of many service providers with the spatial planning process.”

Given that the demands for infrastructure are likely to far exceed what development can bear, the local authorities' planners, in turn, are likely to need access to a range of skilled and independent technical advice on a range of matters (such as travel planning, traffic modelling and transport engineering) if they are to be able properly to evaluate and prioritise the competing demands for resources. These various skills shortages are likely to result in increased competition for the same limited pool of infrastructure and related planners.

In addition to the question of how far these new participant bodies need to be equipped with the necessary skills set, and how it should be approached, the Committee might also want to consider whether the problem can be approached in other ways—for example, whether the planning system itself might evolve, to reduce the level of skills needed for other participants to play an effective role in it. Straightforward things like the simplification of processes and the removal of confusing jargon could do much to de-mystify, and facilitate participation in, the system.

There is one aspect of infrastructure planning where there may be a more fundamental skills gap; this is the area of demand management. Increasingly, with things like water consumption, waste management and the use of cars, the Government is looking to reduce demand, rather than build new infrastructure. To judge from such recent examples as the South East Plan Public Examination, the planning issues associated with it are a “black hole” to most participants. A possible agenda for the development of a skills syllabus in this area, could be based on the following extract from evidence given by the Berkshire Joint Strategic Planning Unit to the South East Plan Examination:

“How much demand management is required? It should be possible to work out broadly how much unfettered growth in demand there might be over the Plan period (for example, in water consumption or car use) and how much additional capacity any proposed new infrastructure will give us. The balance would be the contribution required from demand management and behavioural change;

Has this level been achieved elsewhere? The Lords' Committee investigating the water industry was able to gather valuable information, from Australia and elsewhere, about successful changes in behaviour in relation to water use. Where this is available, we are able to ask whether that experience would translate directly into our own context, or whether differences between the two might affect the outcome. Where change on this scale has not been achieved elsewhere, we believe there is at least a *prima facie* case for asking (without pre-judging the matter in either direction) whether the targets being set are realistic;

Whose job would it be to achieve those changes, and are they committed to doing so? In the case of water, this would seem to rest primarily with the water companies and their regulator, OFWAT. On the basis of the evidence we have submitted on matter 1E, we have doubts as to whether either of these parties is sufficiently committed to demand management, and whether the institutional structure of the water industry lends itself to such a radically different approach. Similarly, with regard to transport, it is far from clear that either Network Rail, the train operators or the Highways Agency are signed up to serving the transport demand that would be generated by the Government's housing growth agenda. If this analysis is correct, one of the first priorities should

be for the Government to revisit their rules of engagement and see whether changes are needed to them, to get those organisations signed up. In this event, the inquiry should send Government a clear signal about the need to do so;

What policy instruments do they have to achieve those changes, and what are their resource implications? Behavioural change is not a cost-free option. For example, the retro-fitting of water-saving devices to the existing housing stock has a price, as does the investment in public transport needed to give it the attractiveness and capacity to make a modal shift possible. The promotional costs alone of encouraging a significant change in behaviour are likely to be substantial. Where demand management/behavioural change forms part of the equation, it should be possible at this stage at least to identify the policy instruments by which the responsible organisations will achieve it, and to say where these will have cost implications (even if it is not possible to quantify them at this stage, it should be one of the future jobs of the evolving implementation plan to do so). If the policy instruments for change cannot be identified, there is again a *prima facie* case for questioning the realism of this as an approach;

What factors are working against such a policy? It has to be recognised that many of the behavioural changes the Plan is seeking go directly against the grain of what most of the public instinctively want (unlimited use of their cars, increased water consumption, etc.) In some cases, these desires are underpinned by some very strong commercial pressures (such as the £billion or so the motor industry spends each year to promote the sale of their products—but also, by inference, the desirability of motoring generally). One final test of the realism of a policy of behavioural change should therefore be to identify these countervailing forces, assess what their likely impact is and what, if anything, can or should be done to address them. This would inform your view as to whether the package of infrastructure measures to support growth is sound and evidence-based”.

The proposed introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy has thrown a spotlight on questions of economic viability, and the ability of planners in conjunction with other key participants to set levels of CIL that maximise the income generated, whilst not rendering development unviable. This may be a skill that is in short supply within the planning profession and beyond given the need to agree the CIL and project requirements. Unlike Section 106, CIL involves setting one, or at most a few rates for the local authority area, rather than looking at each site on an individual basis. The intention of CIL, it is understood, should not be set at such a high level that it is hard up against the margins of viability for a typical scheme. There should be some headroom built into it to allow for changes in market conditions without constantly needing to change the rate of CIL. This may suggest that absolute precision in setting the CIL rate may not be quite so essential but this will need to be considered against the total cost of the required infrastructure. This requirement will demand skills from all those engaged in assessing and costing requirements.

CIL will only ever pay part of the cost of the infrastructure required to support development, and it will be someone’s (presumably the planners’) responsibility to make sure that the full cost of it is met at the appropriate time. Planners will need to understand how any deficit in funding can be covered, and be adept at bringing these resources together: this will be extremely demanding and require substantial negotiation as well as other skills.

##### 5. DE-SKILLING IS ALSO UNDERWAY TO SOME EXTENT

The skills problem may not just relate to the demand for new skills within the profession. One issue the Committee might like to consider is the extent to which a target-driven culture within planning has led to a de-skilling of development control and other staff. Taking development control first, in order to meet targets for processing applications within set timescales, the attitude is often now taken that “if an application is not bad enough to refuse, it should be permitted”. Previously, there would have been scope for negotiation to improve the scheme. Today, such resources as are available for such negotiations tend to be reserved for the larger developments. However, by the time staff reach a point where they are allowed to take on such schemes, they should have developed core skills in such matters as negotiation and design through experience in dealing with smaller developments: in many cases this is not now happening. In addition to the impact this has on the quality of developments, it also affects the job satisfaction of junior development control staff and consequently the ability of local planning authorities to attract and retain staff (which itself exacerbates skills shortages).

Related to this is the de-skilling that has resulted from local planning authorities making increasing use of non-qualified staff to undertake basic development control and other work hitherto done by qualified planners. This is driven by a combination of budgetary constraints, shortages of qualified staff and the target-led, and sometimes mechanistic approach, to development control described above. If this process is to be accepted as a permanent part of planning, it may be that consideration should be given to the training needs of unqualified staff performing these roles and how junior planners will gain experience.

It is appreciated that there are proposed changes to the GDPO which are likely to affect the volume and nature of the household and minor applications that authorities receive. The Society is not convinced that this proposal will have the benefits currently being assumed by Government but it will affect the way that junior staff are trained. Any capacity released by this process will however not provide the skilled staff

needed as set out above, or at least not in the short term. In addition given that most authorities are under-resourced across the service (as evidenced by the Planning Standards and diagnostic work) it will not provide the additional staff needed to fulfil the current demands.

## 6. COUNCILLORS TRAINING

Egan recommended against compulsory training for members unless voluntary training does not work. There is some evidence that members either do not attend such training or fail to take on board what is offered. There may however be a case for re-considering this given the magnitude of the changes taking place in planning currently and the essential requirement that members understand the new planning regime and are able to play an active part in it.

Training so far and until recently has tended to concentrate on development control and has been for planning committees. It is now more important that training is made available to cabinet members and portfolio holders and to those members that sit on advisory boards developing LDFs, where these exist. However all members need to understand the new planning regime given the roles they need to play in the LDF process as well as development management. The IDeA and PAS have been undertaking some member training around these issues but it is clear from the LDF and DM diagnostic evaluations that are carried out that there are substantial gaps in members level of understanding and that it is extremely hard to get many to attend training sessions. Without members improving their knowledge and skills the planning process is likely to be unable to deliver the substantial agenda it has been set notwithstanding any officer training/skills development programme.

## 7. MITIGATION MEASURES

Apart from a reconsideration of the scale and nature of the evidence base required whilst retaining the principle, and ensuring that others are up-skilled as well as planners other mitigation measures could be considered. These include seeing how far the gaps in technical skills can be met by attracting and training some of the best graduates coming out of university, not always from planning schools, but instead from related fields such as geography and environmental science. Many local planning authorities are also pursuing a strategy of “growing their own” staff who may have come from university or may have worked their way up from administrative roles. This can be effective in the long-term because of ties and commitment to the local area but will not meet the urgent short term need for experienced staff. It may be possible for some people to be attracted into planning fields from other disciplines at a more senior level if faster conversion courses could be organised and pay levels adjusted—as happened with the teaching profession.

The softer, generic skills are more difficult to find and require a level of experience which is often not available in planning departments. In the longer term the measures included in the Egan report address this issue. In the short term, more could be done to establish registers of consultants or part-time planners (eg retired or bringing up children) who have the required experience, firstly by identifying such people and secondly by removing any obstacles to their involvement. On the latter, much has been done to encourage married women with young children to stay or come back (flexible working hours, job sharing etc.) but more could be done to help retired people (for instance advice on pension impacts, relaxation of IR 35 requirements etc).

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### **Memorandum by the Audit Commission**

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

## SUMMARY

### 1. This Audit Commission memorandum:

- explains that recent reforms of the planning system have changed the skills requirements of planning departments;
- highlights that, as well as core technical skills, planners now need wider, more generic skills and need to understand how to translate the sustainable community strategy into effective land use planning;

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- welcomes the work that the government and its agencies have done to address the shortage of planners;
  - argues that pressures on councils are still increasing and the numbers of additional planners entering the system will not be sufficient; and
  - highlights where councils have been successful in addressing their capacity gaps including role and business process re-engineering projects; engaging the private sector to carry out mainstream planning task; and working with other councils to share resources.

#### DETAILED RESPONSE

##### *Introduction*

2. In 2006, the Audit Commission published a report which compared the government's expectations of the planning system with its capacity to deliver. That report, *The planning system: managing expectations and capacity*, is attached at Appendix A and highlighted a number of issues that are pertinent to the Committee's current inquiry. This memorandum is based on that research, supplemented with findings from a national study currently underway on recruitment and retention in councils. It responds to three of the Committee's areas of interest.

##### *Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

3. Planning departments have been subject to continuous change in recent years, as the policy framework in which they operate has been reformed and new issues have surfaced. This has created challenges for planners who have traditionally received a technical training in planning policy and development control processes.

4. Research with councils, statutory consultees and applicants, as part of our 2006 study, suggests that new skills are now needed to complement these important core competencies. Specifically, stakeholders identified a lack of spatial planning skills, such as an understanding of how people use space and an ability to think in three dimensions. And they highlighted the need for planners to communicate, negotiate and lead. They recognised that, while planners were good at setting out the requirements linked to development, they often had greater difficulty resolving conflicting issues and finding solutions where some trade-off between objectives was required.

5. In summary, planners also now need:

- effectively to manage projects with many stakeholders and to tight deadlines;
- to be effective communicators, with officers members and the public;
- to understand the basics of development finance;
- to have an awareness of, and ideally skills in, using compulsory purchase powers; and
- to have a good understanding of a range of other policy areas, including the principles of urban design, the regeneration process, and current environmental standards.

6. These new requirements reflect the central role that planning now plays in helping councils to realise their sustainable community strategies. This is a positive development and creates opportunities for planning departments and planning professionals. But it does call for a new range of both technical and generic skills.

##### *The role and effectiveness of agencies*

7. The government and its agencies have responded to the shortage of planners and planning skills in recent years by launching a range of initiatives, including a far reaching culture change programme designed to make the profession more attractive to school leavers and graduates. More places on planning courses have also been funded. These efforts have gone some way to reverse the shortage of planners and, according to the Labour Force Survey 2007, the numbers of qualified planners entering the workforce have risen from 14,000 in 2001 to 21,000 in 2007. However, this rate of change will not be fast enough to keep up with the increased pressures facing planning departments. Any successes in attracting more people to the profession will tend to be overtaken by the increasing workload on councils, for example, the scale of the house building programme, and the addition of further responsibilities on local authorities. It should, however, be borne in mind that the demand for planners is also to some extent dependent on the buoyancy of the economy.

*Long-term effectiveness of measures to mitigate skills gaps*

8. Councils and other employers have been living with a shortage of planners and planning skills for over ten years. They have had to become adept at filling their capacity gaps in order to continue to provide a good quality service and meet government targets. Making posts more attractive, by increasing salaries or offering golden handshakes, has become common but poaching staff from other authorities and escalating pay is not an effective, nor a long term, solution. Instead, those councils that have been more effective have turned to other strategies:

- Role re-engineering. Councils have been making more use of planning technicians to reduce the workload on qualified planners and to ensure they are able to focus on value added tasks. This follows a well trodden path in other services, for example, the increasing use of teaching assistants. A related activity is to seek the support of other local authority departments. As non-traditional skills, such as an ability to run effective community engagement, become more important, some councils are engaging with community development officers to give them expert advice and support.
- Wider transformation. Councils have adapted roles often as part of a wider transformation of their business processes. Business process re-engineering and process mapping have been successfully implemented by many councils to improve services, release efficiencies and reorganise roles. One of the benefits of these wider change programmes can be improved recruitment and retention, as highlighted by the Planning Advisory Service in its 2007 publication, *Finding the flow: re-engineering business processes for planning*.
- Role of the private sector. The use of private sector planning consultants clearly does not add to the pool of qualified planners. But in our 2006 study, we encouraged councils to use a mixed economy approach to planning services to make more efficient use of the existing planning resource. While there is an established track record of buying in consultancy services for specialist areas, councils have been slower to embrace that solution for mainstream planning tasks. However, we found evidence that it can dramatically improve services to users and can be a solution for councils struggling to resource appeals work, section 106 agreements and even development control.
- Joint provision of planning services. Increasingly councils are looking to work with neighbouring councils or even authorities further a field. Planning lends itself well to the shared services agenda and some councils have established shared posts, shared departments or created sub-regional skills banks to draw on to support their services. There can be significant benefits to increased joint working, including a more strategic approach, more efficient use of resources and more interesting jobs leading to improved recruitment and retention of planners.

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**Memorandum by the Regional Management Board for the RTPi South East Branch**

Please find below the response to your call for evidence. They are the combined responses of the Chair and members of the Regional Management Board for the RTPi South East Branch, based on research undertaken for other bodies and experience from public and private practice of our members.

The Communities and Local Government Committee, which is responsible for scrutinising the work and policy responsibilities of the Government Department of that name, has decided to conduct an inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities. The inquiry follows on from Sir John Egan's Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities. It will have particular reference to the following issues:

- recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments; These changes clearly require a step change in current knowledge and practice for planners. It's not just about the skill of existing planners, but the lack of trained skilled planners overall to deliver what has become a more complicated and time consuming local development framework process and development control process. As major influencers on the shape of development, this security of knowledge and skills is critical for informing developer negotiations and defending at appeal. Whilst the focus is on planners' skills, there are wider issues such as support from the Inspectorate and understanding of councillors of their role and relationship with planning staff that can undermine attempts to wholeheartedly embrace the challenges of sustainable communities;
- the main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced (examples, for illustration only, include: use and viability of carbon reduction technologies, economic prosperity, infrastructure planning and the viability of affordable housing within market housing developments); We concur with these illustrative areas of lack of skills, although arguably infrastructure planning is becoming better understood. There is a wider underlying problem of lack of understanding of design, particularly urban design and how places work. This concern is focused on the public sector, but also for private sector planners and architects that produce the development proposals. It is a critical problem as urban design and especially the aspects of poor layout and appropriate surveillance can be a key contributing factor in breaking the economic, social and environmental

viability of a new development. The subtle mechanics of rural economic prosperity need to be better understood by local authority planners and members in order to achieve sustainable new development in the countryside to maintain those communities and economies whilst protecting the environment;

- the skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies; The turnover of councillors ensures an ongoing need for regular training. SEEDA's survey into the effectiveness of Design Champions found they wanted more targeted training on topical issues and wanted to develop their generic skills to enable them to be more effective. We are concerned to hear that the financial support through the Academy for Sustainable Communities to the Regional Centres of Excellence is to be withdrawn, moving to self-financing, and that the RDAs will find it difficult to substitute the funding. The events offered by the South East Centre for Excellence were affordable, but may now become as expensive as the commercially-run events;
- the role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments; RTPI SE Branch operates a Regional Activities Committee and CPD sub-group that sets the agenda and delivers reasonably priced CPD events that respond to current topics and are held at easily accessible locations across the region. Whilst attendance was previously patchy, our events are becoming more and more well attended, demonstrating the demand amongst south eastern public and private sector planners to build their knowledge. This is in addition to planners attending seminars by major providers such as Haymarket and in-house seminars and organisations such as Planning Aid. Some districts and counties in the south east are pooling their resources to undertake jointly commissioned seminars and enabling advice for major projects—within the Thames Gateway—Kent Design Initiative Programme (formerly ODPM's DENK programme) and Essex Design Initiative and others, although this coverage is patchy. Other agencies such as the region's three Architecture and Built Environment Centres run on-demand short and longer courses targeted for planners and members primarily on topics of design and sustainability, in partnership with CABI and EH and SEEDA. Planning Schools of the region's three main universities of Westminster, South Bank and Oxford-Brookes (as well as Univ. West of England) run regular short and longer courses on a variety of topical subjects for staff and members;
- the effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them, and-Planners need to find time to digest this information as well as take time out from from busy caseloads to attend courses. These courses would be helpfully focused on delivery of day to day planning case load applications for specific topic areas. More resources need to be provided for training staff and members to attend the range of courses available and to be able to take time from day to day delivery. Chronic understaffing in some departments prohibits release for day courses; and
- the long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments. Some local authorities are filling posts with temporary staff, often overseas. They rarely stay, often moving back to their home country by the time they are trained up, thus starting the cycle all over again for remaining staff to train new colleagues. This is a poor use of resources and more resources are required to train and maintain experienced staff. Some local authorities are training up administrative staff as planning officers, some of whom already undertake a skilled technical role, and supporting them through day release RTPI recognised degree courses at the Planning Schools. At the last SE RAC Meeting an emphasis was put on the need to promote Planning as a career within schools and sixth forms. It was felt that if Planning and careers associated with planning were better promoted through career conventions/career advisors etc then more sixth form and college leavers would choose planning at an undergraduate level as opposed to humanity subjects such as Geography. It was highlighted that the Young Planners' Networks could play a key role in promoting planning as a career.

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#### **Memorandum by Lindsay Frost, Director of Planning and Environmental Services at Lewes District Council**

I am writing in response to the Select Committee's call for evidence on its inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities.

The following evidence is a personal view from me as Director of Planning & Environmental Services at Lewes District Council (LDC). It has not been formally endorsed by the Council. LDC is a local planning authority for a mixed urban and rural area in East Sussex, serving an area of 292 sq km and a population of 94,000. It includes the towns of Lewes, Seaford, Newhaven and Peacehaven/Telscombe and an extensive rural area, much of which is AONB and proposed South Downs National Park. We handle around 1,400 planning applications annually.

Like all other local planning authorities in South East England, LDC has difficulty in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced planning staff. The reasons for this national, and acute regional, shortage of planning staff have been well rehearsed in various documents over recent years and include:

- The “missing generation” of planners from the 1990s, when recruitment to university planning schools shrank and some undergraduate courses closed.
- The new system of Local Development Frameworks (created by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) “wrote off” much of the experience on structure and local plan work built up over the preceding 30 years and demanded a wide range of new skills.
- The seemingly endless round of legislative and policy changes from Government, which have had the overall effect of making the planning system more complicated, technically demanding, time consuming and expensive (not only for local planning authorities, but also for developers and third parties).
- The “bulge” of professional planners recruited with the expansion of planning in the late 1960s and early 1970s (especially related to the 1974 local government reorganisation) are now approaching retirement age and the wealth of experience they have will gradually be lost over the next few years.
- Recruitment and retention difficulties have led to the widespread use of agency staff, interim managers, temporary appointments and external consultants by many local planning authorities. This trend has been reinforced by drip-feed funding from Government in the form of Planning Delivery Grant. None of this is conducive to developing a stable, appropriately skilled, experienced and motivated work force who can deliver sustainable communities over the long term.
- In response to the specific matters on which your Select Committee is seeking evidence, I have the following comments:

(a) *Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

- Project Management (PPS12).
- Flood Risk Management (PPS25).
- Local Development Frameworks and all associated work, particularly sustainability appraisal (PPS12).
- Economic viability appraisal (PPS4, PPS12).
- Climate change and carbon reduction technologies (PPS1 supplement).
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Strategic Housing Land Availability Statements (PPS3).
- Retail and leisure needs assessments (PPS6).
- Infrastructure planning (PPS12 and proposals for Planning Gain Supplement and Community Levy Infrastructure).

Added together, the skills requirements arising from the above changes represent a huge increase in the professional knowledge and competence required of local authority planners.

(b) *The main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced*

I believe that all of the above areas represent skills shortages within the planning profession, with the gaps varying from council to council depending on their size and staff mix, qualifications, experience and nature of local planning issues.

The key problem is the incremental growth in requirements for a “robust and comprehensive evidence base” to support planning policies and individual planning applications. This requires either a huge increase in in-house skills, or expensive acquisition of such skills by buying in expertise from specialist consultancies. The requisite consultancy studies will frequently cost £20,000 or more, in addition to the staff resources required to commission and manage them. Over the course of preparing an LDF Core Strategy, the first piece of the evidence base “jigsaw” can become out of date by the time the last piece is on the board. The added value of such additional work is sometimes questionable, but is required to fulfil the “tick box”, process-driven, approach adopted in LDF legislation and used by Inspectors in applying “tests of soundness”.

*(c) Skills needed by, and the level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies*

Elected members need, at the very least, basic induction training before sitting on a planning committee making decisions on planning applications. This basic training needs to be supplemented by a regular programme of training events to build up a working knowledge of planning issues. At LDC, we expect our planning councillors to undertake at least 10 hours training per year and have a wide ranging programme with in-house and external presenters, design initiatives with RIBA, and an annual review tour to see how planning decisions are implemented “on the ground”.

The proposed new “local member review bodies” will generate new training needs for both councillors and officers, particularly given the rather confusing role of councils as the adjudicator on planning decisions it has previously made itself, only a few weeks before.

*(d) The role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments*

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Advisory Team on Large Applications (ATLAS) are playing a useful role, but they are small in size and their influence on planning authorities is, I believe, quite patchy. At LDC, we have worked closely with ATLAS on a large complex brownfield site and have found it a very rewarding experience, learning from the expertise ATLAS have drawn in and developing a framework for resolving some difficult planning issues.

However, from talking to other planning officers, I am aware that knowledge of the services offered by PAS and ATLAS varies considerably.

Other important players in the planning system (for example, the Environment Agency, Natural England, English Heritage) also have a patchy record in supporting local authorities in handling the additional demands of the reformed planning system. I have found some of these organisations to be very helpful indeed (for example, the Environment Agency on flood risk work), but others are hardly engaging with us. The commitment and ability of these external players (including the utility companies who will have a major role in infrastructure planning) to engage in the new planning system is far from clear.

The RTPI South East Branch provides a good annual programme of professional training events, which are competitively priced compared to those provided by commercial organisations, and which are usually directed to matters of current professional interest.

*(e) The effectiveness of the Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them*

The availability of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) since 2003 has been very welcome indeed in bringing additional resources to local planning authorities. However, the grant is made available on an annual “drip feed” and can be highly variable from year to year. These factors mitigate against balanced and sensible long term investment in the service, promoting for example, short term appointments and one-off additions to the evidence base which cannot be sustained into the future. Under PPS25, for instance, Strategic Flood Risk Assessments are meant to be updated and thoroughly reviewed every three years. For us (like many other local authorities outside the major growth areas), the prospects for receipt of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant are not as good as previously under PDG.

The prevailing “target culture” in planning makes it increasingly difficult for planners to find the time to digest new policy initiatives coming out from Government and to attend day training courses. This is exacerbated by the staffing problems referred to earlier.

The role of PAS and ATLAS has been discussed earlier.

*(f) The long term effectiveness of measures taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

At LDC, we are spending more time and money providing training for our planning staff. This embraces both young planners undertaking professional qualification courses and established professionals engaging in continuing professional development. However, the scale and pace of change arising from Government policies is making it difficult to keep up, for the reasons set out in (a) to (e) above.

A particular problem is that the investment in young planners is often lost after they have achieved professional qualification. Planners with five years plus experience are highly marketable and are particularly attractive to the expanding planning consultancy sector. Over the years we have seen many promising young planners lost to the public sector in this way. I expect this to continue in future, unless salaries for planners reflect market realities instead of rather rigid national pay structures.

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## Memorandum by the Royal Institute of British Architects

### INTRODUCTION

The RIBA is one of the most influential architectural institutions in the world, and has been promoting architecture and architects since being awarded its Royal Charter in 1837. The 30,000-strong professional institute is committed to serving the public interest through good design. It also represents 85% of registered architects in the UK through its regional structure as well as a significant number of international members. Our mission statement is simple—to advance architecture by demonstrating benefit to society and promoting excellence in the profession.

The RIBA has long been highlighting what we see as a chronic lack of planning skills within local government, and believes that the development of planning skills and resources within local planning authorities must be a priority. The RIBA's A Manifesto for Architecture in 2005 and subsequent mid-term report in 2007 called for investment in a planning system where planners are valued and equipped with a sound understanding of design. We believe that architects and other design professionals can play a valuable role in adding value to the important decisions that must ultimately be made by planning authorities.

### THE PROBLEM

The CLG Committee's acknowledgement of the lack of sufficient skills in planning is welcomed by the RIBA. We feel that this shortfall is particularly felt in the area of design. Design is about much more than aesthetics. It is functional, sustainable and gives pleasure. It attracts people, investment and activity to places, and brings social, environmental and health benefits. It must therefore be one of the most important considerations in the delivery of new development and should be entrenched within the planning decision-making process.

Many problems encountered by developers and architects alike arise out of a chronic lack of skills and resources within local planning authorities. Research by CABE has shown that only 49% of local authorities have a qualified urban designer in their planning department (and only 32% of planning departments contain a registered architect.)<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile developers and architects continue to find themselves at the sharp end of refusals on spurious design grounds while homebuyers also suffer as poorly-designed schemes are nodded through the planning process. There is also a lack of confidence among local planning authorities to refuse poor schemes on design grounds—in 2003 (the most recent year for which figures are available) only 26% of local authorities refused planning permission on design grounds in more than 20 instances.<sup>7</sup> The recommendations to come out of local design review panel meetings can give planning officers the confidence to refuse schemes that have unconvincing design quality.

Most local authorities except that there is a need for further design skills within their planning departments. In this often overstretched environment design matters can be overshadowed. The RIBA believes that local design review panels offer the kind of skills and expertise that many planning departments would otherwise be lacking.

### LOCAL DESIGN REVIEW: A VITAL SKILLS RESOURCE

Design review panels are panels made up of architects and other design professionals with the role of advising local planners during the planning process and, in many cases, during the pre-application process. During structured meetings they meet with developers and their design teams to examine the design elements of the planning proposals.

If used well in the planning process, far from becoming another layer of planning bureaucracy, design review can speed up the process, give certainty to developers and avoid the mistakes of poor design.

Many local authorities have been successfully running a local design review panel for number of years, the RIBA has been closely involved in setting many of these up in response to a demand that is certainly there: 86% of local planning authorities state there is a need for further design skills within their planning departments while 62% of RTPI members agree. While 29% of local authorities have access to a design review panel, 69% of authorities which do not have access to one have said that they would prefer to have such access.<sup>8</sup>

The costs of establishing such panels are far outweighed by the costs of fighting planning appeals that arise out of poor-quality planning decisions.

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<sup>6</sup> CABE, Review of local authority planning departments, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

The benefits of using local design review panels include:

- raising the standard of design through informed criticism of proposals;
- encouraging a productive and informed dialogue between applicants, local authority decision-makers and design experts; and
- fewer appeals as better decisions are made based on objective advice from experts.

#### ENTRENCHING GOOD DESIGN IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Both the Barker Review of Land Use Planning (which informed the Planning White Paper leading to the Planning Bill) and the more recent Calcutt Review of Housebuilding Delivery endorsed recommendations by the RIBA for the systematic use of design review within the planning process. We want an assurance that the Government will take these recommendations forward. In doing so, we call upon the Government to make local design review panels available to all local planning authorities for all types of new development.

The RIBA has called for increased investment in the training of councilors in vital planning skills. We feel that understanding of design issues amongst many councilors is poor. We have seen how a local design review panel can inform and advise a planning committee with the kind of design expertise that elected members cannot be expected to have.

#### CONCLUSION

The RIBA therefore proposes that:

- Local design review panels should be made available to each local planning authority to advise planning officers and councilors on the design merits of development proposals.
- Local panels should include not only architects, but also other relevant professionals such as conservationists, landscape architects and public arts specialists where appropriate.
- Local planning authorities should retain the final say on whether consent should be granted. But where a design review panel is satisfied with the design aspects of a planning proposal that is subsequently rejected on design grounds by the planning authority, their findings should carry weight at any subsequent appeal.
- Design review should be open and transparent, and panels should find ways in which they can engage with local communities and consider local people's views about proposed development.
- Design review panels should operate against robust, clear and consistent criteria. The development of design criteria would be a suitable role for CABE, working in partnership with other organisations such as the RIBA, Royal Town Planning Institute and the Local Government Association.

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### **Memorandum by the British Property Federation**

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The British Property Federation (BPF) represents companies owning, managing and investing in property. This includes a broad range of businesses comprising commercial property owners, the financial institutions and pension funds, corporate landlords, local private landlords, as well as all those professions that support the industry.

2. We welcome the select committee's inquiry into planning skills. This is a timely inquiry as the government seeks to improve the planning process through a number of different initiatives such as the introduction of the Planning Bill through to the updating and revision of several Planning Policy Statements. Now is the time to be considering whether the planning system is fit for purpose and whether planners have the adequate skills to bring to fruition the government's commitment to creating sustainable communities.

#### DETAIL

##### *Understanding commercial development*

3. Our primary concern about planning skills is that both planning officers and planning committee members in local authorities are not being provided with sufficient training to help them understand the realities of commercial development.

4. The commercial development model is different from other types of development models. It is important that those charged with advising on, or taking planning decisions, understand a typical commercial development appraisal.

5. Two general areas where the private sector's view is that local planning authorities do not fully understand the perspective of a commercial developer are the financial costs of delay to a scheme and the level of profit that is required to make a scheme financially viable.

6. The cost of delay to a developer is highlighted by an example given to us by one of our members, which is typical of a wider experience of many commercial developers. The developer was seeking planning permission for a scheme but the local planning authority continuously delayed taking a decision for no clear reason. The delay was costing the developer in excess of £15,000 a month, money which seemingly could have been spent on a Section 106 agreement. Clearly adequate time must be taken to either accept or reject a planning application but local planning authorities who take an inordinate amount of time to reach decisions often fail to understand the effects of their non-action.

7. The BPF previously helped to fund and support an educational project called "Financing the Urban Renaissance" (FUR) in conjunction with The Planning Advisory Service, the Academy for Sustainable Communities, the regional Government Offices and ContinYou. The project was designed to educate council officers and members about how commercial development works, using a fictional development appraisal as the basis for a one day training programme. The FUR programme has now come to an end and we have started to explore with the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Planning Advisory Service, new ways to institutionalise a better understanding of commercial development within the public sector.

8. We are also exploring ways in which the private sector can help to improve planning skills within local authorities and likewise the private sector can benefit from the knowledge of local authority planners. Perhaps one way to do this would be to encourage some form of private sector secondment/work experience for those seeking to obtain planning qualifications and subsequently work in the public sector and vice versa for those directly entering the private sector.

#### *Compulsory training for councillors sitting on planning committees*

9. It is essential that councillors who sit on planning committees are adequately trained in land use planning skills. The training should be well-rounded and provide councillors with a good understanding of the key issues. Whilst we recognise that many councillors do already receive some planning-related training, it seems sensible to ask whether this training should be made compulsory before members are allowed to sit on a planning committee.

#### MISSING GENERATION OF PLANNERS AND USE OF RESOURCES

10. Anecdotal evidence that we have gained through speaking to senior local planners and our own members suggests that there is a shortage of senior planners in the public sector. Whilst graduate recruitment has improved in recent years, we are led to believe that there is a missing generation of planners with many authorities finding it difficult to fill senior positions. In some circumstances this means that junior planners are being placed into complex negotiations they are not sufficiently experienced to deal with.

11. Given the shortage of senior planners, there needs to be a greater emphasis placed on using such highly trained planning personnel in the most effective way. We need to ensure that senior planners spend their time pre-and post-application on schemes that have the greatest capacity to transform areas and create sustainable communities, rather than on determining minor planning eg householder applications, which could be adequately processed by their more junior colleagues.

#### *Major developments*

12. Local authorities often lack the skills required when it comes to coping with major developments. We accept that it is not feasible for many authorities to maintain all the skills they may need in-house. This means that the role of agencies such as the Planning Advisory Service, English Partnerships (soon to be the Homes and Communities Agency) and Regional Development Agencies can be crucial in meeting the skills gap, although local authorities should also be encouraged to draw on private sector expertise, where this is possible.

13. It is crucial that appropriate skills are deployed at the outset of major projects—eg in drawing up any area action plan or supplementary planning document for the site, getting the procurement process right and entering in to any planning performance agreement etc. If not, the whole viability of the project could easily unravel.

14. The involvement of English Partnerships on a number of major projects has been highly valued. There is concern, however, that English Partnerships is constrained by the modest level of resources available to it and that its move into the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) may restrict its ability to facilitate or actively engage in schemes in the future. There is a particular concern that the HCA's emphasis on a housing-orientated agenda could prevent the new agency from playing the wider regeneration role that is needed in town centres and elsewhere.

15. One option that may be worth exploring in further detail would be new measures to encourage local planning authorities to create regional centres of expertise with regard to certain skills. For example, one authority building up expertise in a particular discipline such as the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders and sharing it with other authorities as required.

#### *Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)*

16. We welcome the government's drive to encourage the use of PPAs. Pre-application negotiations between developers and local planning authorities are an important element of successful schemes, but the quality of service offered by different authorities varies greatly and needs to be improved. We hope that the government's further guidance on PPAs will help to achieve this.

17. The shortage of planners (as identified above) means that opportunities for pre-application discussion can be limited, which can lead to needless resubmissions of applications.

18. Larger local planning authorities are better experienced in negotiating with developers and minimising delays, which helps to maintain the confidence of applicants. However, smaller and medium sized local planning authorities often lack such skills and fail to appreciate the impact that delay and uncertainty can have on the developers' confidence and project viability. It is important, therefore, as we have emphasised above (understanding commercial development) that local planning authorities gain a better understanding of developers' perspectives, including their perception and anticipation of risk and how they seek to make returns. Such knowledge would help local planning authorities and prospective applicants together to structure more mutually beneficial development and planning obligations.

#### *Community Infrastructure Levy and spatial planning*

19. The BPF strongly supports the introduction of CIL, although we have specific concerns regarding the wording of the CIL Clauses in the Planning Bill.

20. CIL will require local authorities to assess the amount of infrastructure required to support the amount of development envisaged in the development plan. Many local authorities have already demonstrated that they possess the skills to assess what infrastructure is required in their local areas. It is something that they are already required to do, and this requirement has been re-emphasised in draft planning policy statement 12 on local development frameworks.

21. It will be hard, however, for local planning authorities to engage with other parts of the local authority that will necessarily have to feed into the process of working out the CIL. Spatial planning is fundamental to assessing the needs of the community and therefore, in turn, what infrastructure is required in the CIL. The different parts of the local authority that deal with housing, education, health, recreation etc. will have to engage with the CIL process; they must be able to forward plan their infrastructure requirements. This kind of integrated approach needed within local authorities and between local authorities and other service providers is often lacking and will require a significant effort to install.

22. It would seem sensible for government to offer assistance to those local authorities that may not be as advanced as others in this process. Training seminars, best practise information and possibly regional/central assistance teams could help local authorities with the CIL process.

23. Apportioning the level of CIL will be a new challenge for planners to address. For whilst the CIL will be based upon the amount of infrastructure required to support the amount of development envisaged in the development plan, it must be apportioned to different use classes and then tempered by local area viability ie what developers can afford to pay. This apportionment and assessment of viability will be a difficult task and one that many planners may not yet have sufficient experience of.

24. This is as much a concern for the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) as it is for local planning authorities, if as we envisage (and the government has said would ideally be the case), the level of CIL is set through the development plan process. PINS' role will be crucial and it is one that needs to be explored thoroughly as part of this skills inquiry.

#### *Sustainability*

25. Both the public and private sectors have to acquire the skills that will be needed to work towards delivering carbon neutral development and to increase the sustainability of the existing building stock. Local planning authorities will need to be active in developing sustainability strategies for their areas—ensuring that development is focused in the most sustainable locations (eg around transport nodes).

26. The planning system must be able to deliver the sort of renewable and decentralised energy solutions (such as combined heat and power plants) that will be increasingly in demand. The proposed new eco-towns might provide a good opportunity to help develop the skill sets that will be required to deliver sustainable communities.

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**Memorandum by Department of Planning, School of the Built Environment,  
Oxford Brookes University**

1. *Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University*

1.1 The Department of Planning based in the School of the Built Environment at Oxford Brookes University is a major centre for planning education and research. The Department has over 30 academic and research staff, over 40 doctoral students and over 300 postgraduate students. It has an outstanding reputation for the quality of its teaching and research achieving grade 4 in 2001 RAE.

1.2 Staff within the Department have undertaken a number of empirical studies on skills and knowledge development in local planning officers and in training for councillors which are relevant to the work of this inquiry. This memorandum identifies relevant points from those studies which will inform the work of the inquiry and also draws on the Department's experience as a provider of initial education and continuing professional development for local authority planning officers and elected members.

2. *Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

2.1 The following observations are drawn from the findings of a study into knowledge development in planning professionals in 2006.<sup>9</sup> The study involved collecting data using a number of techniques including the use of reflective diaries over a one month period. The diaries show:

- planners have a busy and often diverse workload. Some of the respondents saw themselves as more experts/specialists in a particular activity (eg economic development; Inspectorate; development control) but most carried out a wide range of activities over the reporting month. Recent changes in the planning system, with the introduction for example of LDFs and SEA/SA (sustainability appraisal), have tended to widen the scope even more.
- For some, the diversity and especially the workload pressures were a source of considerable frustration.
- There were many examples in the diaries of “experts” needing to learn new skills (eg in putting together bids, preparing terms of reference for outsourced work, and assessing proposals) and, in a fast-moving policy environment, in new areas of practice (eg SA and LDFs).
- Several of the responses from more senior staff highlighted the importance of generic skills, such as brokering, communication, diplomacy, negotiation and team leadership. These were acquired on the job, by learning from past mistakes, but also from post-initial training in management/generic skills.

2.2 Most respondents, and especially the ones new to practice, appeared to make considerable use of the Internet as an important, and often first, source of information—after their own personal knowledge. The Internet covered a multitude of sources:

- Google is often used as a starting point. Other important sources referred to included Government sites (eg ODPM/DCLG), other LPAs and Planning Matters.
- Some sources were found to be more problematic, including some Government statistical sites. There was concern about the reliability of some web-based information, and the marketing nature of Google.

2.3 This increased use of the internet is confirmed in other findings in the report and has only become apparent over the last 10 years.

2.4 The study also showed that the focus on sustainable communities and engaging in partnership with different disciplines often requires the planner to have an understanding of the “vocabulary” of that discipline and this can cause problems if the local authority staff do not have that. The study highlighted the case of an officer who needed to discuss energy efficiency provision in new developments but did not feel confidently conversant with terminology to be sure that the most appropriate provision was being included.

3. *Main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced*

3.1 A study published in 2004<sup>10</sup> of skills in LPAs in England showed that the “top” three discipline based skills shortages were design, development control, and conservation heritage. A more recent study of skills shortages in Scottish planning authorities<sup>11</sup> in 2006 showed that the top three skills requirements were IT skills, urban/rural design, and planning law/legislation.

<sup>9</sup> Durning, B, Carpenter, J, Glasson J and Butina Watson G. “Professional Knowledge Development for Sustainable Communities”. An unpublished report produced by Oxford Brookes University for Royal Town Planning Institute and Academy for Sustainable Communities in 2006–07

<sup>10</sup> Durning, B and Glasson J (2004) Skills Base in the Planning System. LGA/EO/ODPM. report refs 9/04 and 21/04

<sup>11</sup> Higgins, M, Brown, C, Prior, A, McCarthy, J, Hachman, V and Durning, B (2007) *Scottish Planning Authorities Skills Assessment*. Improvement Service. Available from <http://www.eukn.org/binaries/greatbritain/bulk/research/2007/8/scottish-planning-skills-assessment.doc> accessed 20 Feb 2008

3.2 Another study in 2004 by a consortium of three Universities in the South East for SEEDA<sup>12</sup> undertook a review into the supply and demand for built environment professionals in relation to sustainable communities. It concluded:

- There is a broad consensus that there are key generic skills that are in very short supply. It was felt that they are urgently needed to enable generally well-skilled professionals to operate effectively to achieve the aims and objectives of the sustainable communities agenda (thus supporting the conclusions of the Egan Review).
- In terms of generic skills, “working with others” is generally given the highest priority. This ranges from the “softer” skills of communication and team-working, across the all important leadership, to the more operational stakeholder management and project management.
- These, in turn are supported by a high level of concern about the need for more analytical, financial and decision-making skills.
- In relation to key professional skills, all employers in the research were concerned about gaps in the availability of built environment professionals. Many identified the problem of a lack of good quality planners, although this was felt more keenly by local authorities than in private practice. However, there were also other professionals cited by employers as being in short supply, including; cultural heritage and listed building specialists, building surveyors (RICS members), as well as ecologists and archaeologists.
- Within the planning profession, it was also felt that there was a shortage of specialist planners, with retail planning, transport planning, development planning and planners with EIA skills being cited as problem areas. It was felt that, traditionally, planners have been trained as generalists, but increasingly, they are needed to take up specialist roles, and this is an area where it is hard to fill posts.

#### 4. *Skills needed by and level of training provided to councillors*

4.1 Oxford Brookes Planning Department has been providing training to councillors since 1994.<sup>13</sup> A review of this training shows that over the last ten years the key issues that promote discussion amongst councillor delegates to the courses are: probity in decision-making; officer-member relationships; enforcement; and the use of S106 planning obligations.

4.2 Demand for training for councillors is increasing with courses on “Introduction to the Planning Process”, “Development Control”, “An Overview of the Planning System” and “Screening, Scoping and ES Review” being steadily consistent over this period. Recently we have seen increasing demand for courses in “Environmental Impact Assessment”, “Planning Law”, “Enforcement Issues for Planning Officers”, “Development Control”, “Introduction to the Planning Process” and sustainability and design, all of which we can and do tailor to the specific requirements of the local authority.

#### 5. *The role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officers and councillors and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments*

5.1 As a provider of initial education for planning officers, the introduction of a one year Masters course has seen a dramatic increase in the number of students who undertake a postgraduate planning course. At Oxford Brookes we regularly recruit over 100 students pa. As 70% take the course part-time (over two years)—thereby gaining valuable experience in planning practice at the same time as studying—it does mean we have 170 students in any one year.

5.2 We have also introduced a Certificate Course in Spatial Planning (1-year part-time) designed for planning technicians who then go onto the MSc in Spatial Planning (subject to gaining a mark of 50% plus in their work). We recruit between six to 10 students per year to this course. We also run an in-house certificate in Urban Design, which is a part-time course for local authority officers

5.3 Our has most popular courses continue to be short courses and CPD provision for officers, elected members and administrative offices as well as other practioners.

<sup>12</sup> Report to SEEDA on “The demand for built environment professionals to meet the challenge of a sustainable renaissance”, prepared by University of Greenwich, Oxford Brookes University and University of Brighton, 2005

<sup>13</sup> Weston J and Darke R (2004) Reflections on 10 years of councillor training. *Planning Practice and Research* 19 (4) pp427–433

## 6. Effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities

6.1 The 2006 study on knowledge development in planners<sup>14</sup> has shown:

- Regardless of the level of experience, all use the internet to identify sources of information (although this reliance has only built up over the last six years). This has made information searching quicker, although in terms of the impact on sense-making practices, it has made this harder, due to the overload of information obtained and the poor navigability of websites. The reliance or weight of these websites is also important and Government (national and local) websites tend to be considered the most reliable sources of information.
- The overload of information in terms of advice, best practice and guidance and the lack of clear Government policy were identified by the study as a limitation to practice.

## 7. Long-term effectiveness of measure being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments

7.1 The following is an extract from the conclusions to a paper<sup>15</sup> on the impact of the skills capacity constraints in LPAs and of measure being employed to deal with them:

- “The UK planning system has been encountering skills capacity constraints for many years, and these are being exacerbated by the rapid changes and increasing demands from a system which is very much in a state of flux. Such constraints need to be addressed if the planning system is to meet the important demands required of it over the coming decades.
- Yet, our research shows that there does not appear to be the appropriate capacity to deliver the current and anticipated future planning agenda. There is a shortage of planning officers, with the appropriate skills, and this is affecting the delivery of service. Skills in development control are clearly in short supply as are specialisations such as urban design and conservation. Increasingly there is focus on the need to have key generic skills such as negotiation and working with the community. Graduate entrants into local government now tend to come particularly from the undergraduate courses, with those on postgraduate tending to go into private practice or to a range of other employers (eg regional development agencies). Those who do go into LPA are selective of where they go, preferring challenging/exciting authorities usually in urban city areas. Experienced LPA officers are finding there is a wealth of vacancies in the profession and can move easily between authorities. LPAs find it hard to fill all their vacancies as there are simply not enough qualified and experienced planners to go around: the impact from a downturn in the property market nearly 20 years ago which resulted in graduate planners going into other careers is still being felt. On average, in 2004, local authorities were 15% down on their establishments.
- Responses are emerging to try and address these issues. Changes to the education system are seeking to increase the supply of graduates, although this currently focuses on the postgraduate supply and there is concern that this might not provide the supply of graduates needed by LPAs. There is also a focus on the up-skilling of those in practice, by providing opportunities for training, although the research has shown that many authorities have small budgets for training. LPAs themselves are also looking at ways to address the issues. Our research, however, suggests that there are many issues underlying the lack of capacity in skills, some of long standing origin, and that long term solutions will be needed to resolve them.”

7.2 The following is the conclusion to a paper<sup>16</sup> which aimed to demonstrate the nature and cause of challenges in the recruitment and retention of planning officers in LPAs which had been reported widely by local authorities but which had not before been quantified. The results of an empirical study<sup>17</sup> which informed the paper had shown that all types of authorities and regions were experiencing difficulties, whilst a brief consideration of the situation in other countries showed that the challenges were not unique to England. What was clear from the study is that the problem was deep rooted in recent history, with the impact of political decisions made over 20 years ago still being felt:

- “The paper shows that whilst recognition of this problem has started to surface, slow changes are being made to try to relieve this problem and it is possible that the situation will worsen before it

<sup>14</sup> Durning, B, Carpenter, J Glasson J and Butina Watson G. “Professional Knowledge Development for Sustainable Communities”. An unpublished report produced by Oxford Brookes University for Royal Town Planning Institute and Academy for Sustainable Communities in 2006–07

<sup>15</sup> Durning B and Glasson J (2007) “Delivering the planning system—skills capacity constraints” *Town Planning Review* 77(4) 457–484

<sup>16</sup> Durning B (2007) “Challenges in the recruitment and retention of professional planners in English planning authorities” *Planning, Practice and Research* 22(1) 95–110

<sup>17</sup> Durning, B and Glasson J (2004) Skills Base in the Planning System. LGA/EO/ODPM. report refs 9/04 and 21/04

improves. The survey of all English authorities has shown that London is in some ways unique in its problems (especially in relation to the use of agency staff). The London boroughs have also been subject to specific studies by others<sup>18,19</sup> which show a worsening of the situation in recruitment, especially in relation to experienced planners, over the last few years.

- In contrast, anecdotal evidence from authorities in the South East collected in 2007 suggests a possible easing of the situation outside of London, especially at county level. However, it should be noted that in the empirical study the County Councils did not appear to experience quite the same degree of difficulties as other types of authorities in recruitment and retention and whether this apparent “easing” is limited to the counties is not known. Similarly, due to the methodology and timescale of the study, it was not possible to follow up with the questionnaire respondents from the County Councils (and Unitary Authorities) who indicated it had become easier to recruit in the 12 months prior to the survey in order to understand the factors that were influential in bringing about this situation.
- It is possible that one answer may be that problems of recruitment are not consistent across the range of roles that are undertaken by planning professionals, with some more “popular” roles attracting a larger field of applicants than less popular but highly specialized roles. As one . . . [research participant] . . . reported: “Some posts are more attractive/easier to fill than others—for example 40 applicants for a regeneration post, but only six for a minerals planning post.” Students . . . [questioned for the study] . . . also indicated a preference for some types of authorities and regions, which may indicate selectivity in their applications and why some regions/authorities are finding it easier to recruit staff than others.
- The results from this cross-England study have shown that local authorities are themselves developing other ways of increasing the number of planning staff, through initiatives such as “grow your own”, where technical staff undertake planning education, or through organizational developments that, for example, give rise to enhanced roles for support staff”.

Evidence compiled by Dr Bridget Durning with input by Dr Juliet Carpenter, Prof John Glasson, Prof Georgia Butina Watson (Head of Department) and Mrs Karen Hughes of Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University.

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**Memorandum by Tim Edmundson, Head of Department of Urban Development and Regeneration,  
University of Westminster**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

I set out below my evidence to the inquiry. This is based largely on my knowledge of the skills capacity problems facing local planning authorities (LPAs) in London and the South-East. However, these problems are not unique to these areas and the evidence is of relevance to LPAS in many other parts of England and Wales.

I am submitting evidence to the inquiry as the issues being examined are directly relevant to the activities of the University Department I manage, and because I feel I have developed considerable knowledge of the issues from my research into staff issues in local planning authorities<sup>20</sup> and my links with local planning authorities. The evidence is submitted in a personal capacity and does not necessarily represent the view of the University as a whole.

The Department of Urban Development and Regeneration at the University of Westminster delivers a professionally (RTPI) accredited part- and full-time postgraduate planning course with an annual intake of 50 students. In addition, the Department has delivered short courses for planning practitioners for many years, and has recently developed an innovative training partnership with local planning authorities and

<sup>18</sup> Edmundson, T. (2004) Recruitment and Retention of Planners: Towards Addressing the Need for Planners in London, Report for ALG, RTPI and ALBPO, [Online] Available at: <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/309/RRResearchReportWEBFINAL.pdf> (accessed 20 Feb 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Edmundson, T. & Rawson, E. (2006) Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London: A Report for London Councils, [Online] Available at: [http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/958/061122\\_Recruitment\\_Retention\\_London\\_Planners.pdf](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/958/061122_Recruitment_Retention_London_Planners.pdf) (accessed 20 Feb 2008).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Edmundson, T. (2004) The potential role of planning technicians and planning support staff in enhancing service delivery in a reformed statutory planning system. London: ODPM <http://www.planning-resnet.org.uk/outputs/edmundson.pdf>; Edmundson, T. and Rawson, L. (2006) Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London. London: London Councils.

other public sector agencies intended to help address the skill capacity problems of London Planning agencies. The Department also delivers postgraduate courses and training courses in the related disciplines of Urban Design, Urban Regeneration and Housing.

I understand that the inquiry is focussing on skills capacity issues rather than investigating the problems of staff shortages resulting from recruitment and retention problems. However, the issue of staff shortages cannot be separated from that of the skills capacity of local planning authorities. The adequacy of the skills of internal staff to meet changing work demands is, in part, and directly and indirectly the result of the mismatch between the supply of and demand for suitably qualified planning staff over a number of years.

My submission firstly summarises the two most important elements of my evidence. My evidence then addresses in turn the issues set out in the call for evidence.

## 2. SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

My main points relate to; the problem of shortages of planning staff and the link between this and the skills capacity of LPAs; and, the availability of, and ability of LPAs to provide, effective training for their staff.

### 2.1 *Staff shortages*

- The current problems of staff shortages in planning, and experienced by local planning authorities in particular, have been widely documented.<sup>21</sup>

#### The causes of shortages

- Demand for planners at all levels of experience has outstripped supply for a number of years as a result of a combination of many factors:
  - the economic downturn of the 80s and 90s reduced the number of jobs available and caused many planners to leave the profession—the origin of the so-called generation gap;
  - the decline in the number of students on planning courses between 1995 and 2001;
  - a lengthy period of economic growth from the late 90s to the present which has increased applications and hence workloads in local planning authorities;
  - the dramatic growth of the private sector over the last 10 years—in 1997, the largest employer of planners had only 40 planners; by 2007 16 firms employed over 40 planners, and four employ more than a hundred<sup>22</sup>; and
  - the increased workloads and demand for planners in the public and private sectors resulting from changes to the planning system and the increase in the complexity of the system over several years<sup>23</sup> eg the increased list of supporting documents and evidence to accompany development plans and applications.

#### Current problems

- The supply of graduates has increased in recent years, largely at postgraduate level. However, the declining take-up of geography at GCSE, A Level and Degree level could threaten this growth. Geography A Level is the main subject taken by applicants to undergraduate planning courses and Geography is the degree subject most commonly taken by applicants to postgraduate planning courses (>60% at the University of Westminster).
- Even if the recent growth in planning graduates continues this is not immediately addressing the problem of the shortage of more experienced staff in local planning authorities, and will take some time to do so particularly if demand for planners from the private sector continues to grow as expected.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See for example: Arup Economics & Planning with the Bailey Consultancy (2002) *Resourcing of Local Planning Authorities*. London: DTLR; ODPM (2004) *The Egan Review Skills for Sustainable Communities*. London: ODPM; Durning, B and Glasson, J (2004) *Skills Base in the Planning System, Volume 2, Survey Results*. London: LGA; Audit Commission (2006), *The planning system: matching expectations and capacity*. London: Audit Commission; Edmundson, T and Rawson, L. (2006) *Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London*. London: London Councils. ASC (2007) *Mind the Skills Gap*. Leeds: ASC <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=19067&cat=2674>

<sup>22</sup> Johnston, B & Carnell, P. (2007) *Planning Consultancy Survey 2007*. Planning 30 November. Pp 15–39

<sup>23</sup> Arup Economics & Planning with the Bailey Consultancy (2002) *Resourcing of Local Planning Authorities*. London: DTLR; Johnston, B & Carnell, P. (2007) *Planning Consultancy Survey 2007*. Planning 30 November. Pp 15–39

<sup>24</sup> Johnston, B & Carnell, P. (2007) *Planning Consultancy Survey 2007*. Planning 30 November. Pp 15–39

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- The private sector is recruiting an increasing number of planning graduates and is also recruiting experienced staff from local planning authorities. The growth has resulted in there being there are now more RTPI members working in the private sector than in the public sector in London.
  - Even with such recruitment, in a recent report private sector planners repeatedly complained about chronic skills shortages as a major problem.
  - The growth in demand from the private sector is being fuelled by “an ever more complex list of regulatory requirements in the preparation of strategies and applications, greater emphasis on combating climate change and the long-term demand for homes, jobs and community facilities.”<sup>25</sup>

#### Effect on skills capacity of LPAs

- The shortages of experienced staff are often more severe in LPAs, and many authorities are left with polarised workforces, with inadequate numbers of experienced officers having to supervise disproportionate numbers of inexperienced staff. Junior staff have not had the experience or the training to develop many of the skills required.
- This puts pressure on both sets of staff and lessens their opportunities to undertake training to develop a knowledge and understanding of some of the changes to the planning system, and the skills and knowledge of techniques required to evaluate the statements and assessments now required in development planning and development management.
- Staff shortages have forced LPAs to recruit non-planning graduates and send them on part-time initial planning education courses. This places heavy demands on limited training budgets and reduces the funding available to train other staff.
- The net result of these staff shortages, and particularly the acute shortages of experienced staff, is that local authorities are suffering severe skills capacity problems affecting their ability to deliver the sustainable communities agenda.

## 2.2 Training

One of the most important of the many<sup>26</sup> measures that can be taken to address the skills capacity problems caused directly and indirectly by labour shortages, is training. I believe that there is a need to take measures to increase the availability, effectiveness and take-up of training utilised by LPAs. The following comments do not relate to initial planning education, which is discussed below (3.4.1).

#### Types of training available

- There has been a massive growth of training provision in the last few years but this has, seemingly, had a limited effect on staff shortages or the skills capacity of many LPAs.
- The different types of training available include:
  - Mentoring and guidance in the workplace.
  - External training comprising single events eg conferences, seminars & workshops.
  - In-house training by external providers.
  - In-house training by internal staff.
  - Opportunities for self-directed or directed learning—eg web based material.
  - Courses intended to develop deeper learning, reflective practice and skills development using a range of interactive techniques and delivered over several sessions.
- The market is dominated by forms of provision useful for imparting information—eg single events such as conferences and seminars—but less effective at achieving deeper learning to embed knowledge and understanding of issues and develop the skills and techniques necessary for practice (see 3.4.3 below).

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> See Section 4 of Edmundson, T and Rawson, L. (2006) *Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London*. London: London Councils.

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### Access to training

- The capacity of LPAs to identify and utilise effective training for their staff is limited by:
  - staff shortages, lack of experienced staff, high turnover and heavy workloads which mean many LPAs lack the time and resources to:
    - identify what is available;
    - assess the effectiveness of courses;
    - undertake training needs analysis linked to staff appraisals. (Appraisals are often related primarily to short-term targets)
    - develop training programmes in partnership with other LPAs;
  - small training budgets (in London the average is £650 per head per year, but the majority of LPAs have much less) of which a large proportion is often devoted to initial planning education courses needed for non-planning graduates recruited as a result of the mismatch between the supply of and demand for planning graduates; and
  - the need to deliver the service which means that LPAs adopt measures expedient in the short-term such as the employment of temporary staff and consultants, often using PDG, to the detriment of the longer-term development of the skills capacity of the organisation.
- Some attempts have been made to improve training provision:
  - bodies such as ASC, London Energy Partnership, PAS have developed and made available materials that can be adapted and delivered as training courses/modules by trainers. In my view these organisations need to be more pro-active in promoting such resources.
  - In London the Regional Centre for Excellence—Urban Design London—has taken the lead in commissioning and coordinating urban design training in the capital. It does not, however, have any role in the provision of training in other aspects of spatial planning.
  - Groups of LPAs have worked together to procure training which is available to the members of the group.
  - In London the University of Westminster and several London Boroughs are working together to develop and deliver a series of innovative interactive training courses designed to deliver deep learning.

### Future needs

- In my view there is an urgent need for the various agencies responsible for developing the skills necessary to deliver sustainable communities to encourage and facilitate the development of partnerships between Boroughs, and between Boroughs and training providers including Universities, to develop and deliver new and more effective forms of training to increase the skills capacity of LPAs.
- I believe there is a need for a body in each region, which might be the Regional Centre of Excellence, to:
  - encourage and facilitate the development of partnerships between Boroughs, and between Boroughs and training providers including Universities, to develop and deliver effective forms of training;
  - collect and collate information on the availability of planning training courses and advise on the effectiveness of different forms of provision;
  - commission and coordinate the provision of courses;
  - accredit training providers;
  - work more closely with employers, the Universities and other educational establishments to utilise more fully the expertise in these organisations; and
  - develop materials that can be utilised in training.

## 3. ISSUES ON WHICH COMMENTS ARE INVITED

### 3.1 *Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

A wide range of reports state that the planning system has increased in complexity over the last decade, with an increasing number of regulatory requirements in the preparation and assessment of strategies, policy documents and applications.<sup>27</sup> These include housing needs and capacity studies, sustainability appraisals, environmental impact assessments, transport assessments, retail impact assessments, design and access statements and flood risk assessments.

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<sup>27</sup> See for example Arup Economics & Planning with the Bailey Consultancy (2002) *Resourcing of Local Planning Authorities*. London: DTLR; Johnston, B & Carnell, P. (2007) *Planning Consultancy Survey 2007*. Planning 30 November. Pp 15–39

Setting the rate for the proposed Community Infrastructure Levies and assessing the weight to be given to proposed Competition Assessments may also become a requirement of LPAs. The former will require generic financial skills which many planners do not have, and the latter will require some knowledge of issues relating to retail competition for planners to assess the weight to be given to any assessment in determining applications.

The increased use of S106 agreements, increased partnership working, increased community involvement and moves towards more proactive development management require improved generic skills such as negotiation, communication and project management. Staff also need a knowledge and understanding of the development process and development finance, urban design and a range of technical assessments to enable the successful application of these generic skills.

Many of the generic and specific skills needed to deliver spatial planning are described in a recent RTPI report.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst some of this work may be undertaken by experts outside the authority, the planners need to have an understanding of the techniques to procure the consultants undertaking them, or to evaluate assessments submitted by applicants.

3.2 The main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced (examples, for illustration only, include: use and viability of carbon reduction technologies, economic prosperity, infrastructure planning and the viability of affordable housing within market housing developments)

There is a need for improvements to a range of generic cross cutting skills such as negotiation and project management, as well as improved understanding of the issues and the techniques related to the above areas. To the above illustrative examples could be added—an understanding of the methodologies used in retail impact assessments, transport assessments, flood risk assessments etc. A recent report claimed that there was a serious shortage of skills relevant to the negotiation of S106 agreements.<sup>29</sup> Whilst some of the aforementioned work may be undertaken by expert consultants for an applicant, and may be evaluated for the LPA by another consultant, it is important that officers within an authority understand the methodologies and assumptions used, and can critically evaluate the assessments even if there is not the skills capacity to undertake the work.

3.3 *the skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies*

PAS has developed training modules for use by trainers. However, it would be helpful for LPAs to have available a list of accredited trainers to deliver such training, or for Regional Centres of Excellence to accredit trainers.

3.4 *the role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments*

My comments below set out the role of the Universities in responding to changing demands. I then discuss issues concerning the effectiveness of what is currently available to LPAs and suggest measures to improve its effectiveness.

3.4.1 University provision—initial planning education

The broad response of the University Planning Schools to the changing planning agenda and to staff shortages through initial planning education has been outlined in the submission by Professor Dave Shaw, the Head of the Conference of Planning Schools. Essentially, Schools have: continued to alter the content and delivery of courses to respond to the need for understanding of new issues such as climate change; reduced the length of their postgraduate courses to respond to the RTPI Education Commission recommendation; and, expanded their intake to courses in response to demands from employers. The Planning Bursaries provided by CLG have been instrumental in increasing the applications to full-time postgraduate courses and improving the quality of the graduates.

Many universities have responded to changes, and have made effective use of visiting lecturers from practice to explain the implications of the changes to the planning system. Use has been made of case studies and project work to explore the links between theory and practice, and annual monitoring of courses by RTPI Partnership Boards has improved links with practice. Despite these measures it would be helpful if there was funding available to support such provision and for more teaching material, and particularly case studies, to be made available for use in courses. CEBE and ASC has undertaken some useful work in this area, but it would be helpful if this work was disseminated more pro-actively to Universities.

<sup>28</sup> UCL & Deloitte (2007) *Shaping and Delivering Tomorrow's Places*. London: RTPI

<sup>29</sup> London Assembly (2008) *Who gains? The operation of section 106 planning agreements in London* London: London Assembly

It is important for vocational education courses to respond to changes in practice and for students to develop knowledge of the reasons for the changes, the main issues and an understanding of the skills and techniques necessary to deliver spatial planning. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that “it is the duty of universities to educate their students, not to produce fully-trained planners...it is their primary duty to enhance the intellectual and reflective capacity of their students, to develop their analytical and critical skills and to develop their capacity for further development.”<sup>30</sup> To turn students who have studied planning on a one year full-time or two year part-time postgraduate course into an effective planning practitioner requires an on-going programme of learning undertaken in or from the workplace. This is not always available/provided.

For those seeking professional accreditation, this further development takes place during a period of Licentiatehip which culminates in the RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence, and then throughout their career as lifelong learning pursued through various forms of training and education.

In addition to the changes to initial planning education courses, several universities have been involved in research to investigate the needs of local authorities and developed educational and training initiatives to meet some of these needs. Oxford Brookes University<sup>31</sup> and the University of Westminster<sup>32</sup> have undertaken research to explore the problems and, in the latter case, to identify measures that have been taken to address the problems.

### 3.4.2 Other educational initiatives

With CLG funding, the University of West of England has developed a postgraduate distance learning course in Spatial Planning to address the need of experienced professionals to understand the changing planning agenda. UWE has also developed a Foundation Degree in Development Management which it is delivering in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Westminster. Sheffield Hallam has developed a Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities.

For such courses to be successful, I believe there needs to be greater efforts by Government Agencies and the Professional bodies to promote such courses to LPAs. My impression is that the relevance of the courses to the changing planning agenda is not always clear to LPAs. The courses are seen as being promoted by Universities and consequently sometimes seen as of limited relevance or practical value by LPAs. Staff shortages, the pursuit of short-term targets and limited training budgets also discourage the take-up of such courses.

### 3.4.3 Training—traditional forms of training provision

In addition to professionally accredited and other credit-rated educational courses, there is a vast array of CPD and training courses available. The provision ranges from conferences and seminars to bespoke in-house courses to reference material available electronically. Some of these are designed to address the changing demands placed on LPAs, and some have been developed with funding from a range of public agencies.

Conferences and other one-day events such as seminars and workshops provide a helpful way of achieving some learning outcomes. They can be useful means of imparting information—for example about new policies or legislation—and for raising awareness of different practices through the explanation of case studies.

Such events are often expensive, however, (eg £400–£700 for a one-day conference or seminar). In addition, provide limited opportunities for dialogue and reflection. The problems of embedding the learning from such events are notorious,<sup>33</sup> and their effectiveness as learning vehicles is cast into doubt by much of the educational literature on the subject. For example, the work of Glasser<sup>34</sup> is often quoted to support this view:

“Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else”.

Material available online, such as the Planning Matters modules, is useful for reference purposes or to support in-house training events, but is less effective as a means of developing deeper learning or the skills and techniques needed in development planning and development management.

<sup>30</sup> Grant, M. (1999) Planning as Learned Profession quoted in Bailey, N & Walker, H. (2001) Managing the Transition to Work; The Role of the Planning Network in British Town Planning Education. Planning Practice & Research Vol. 16 No.1 pp 71–78.

<sup>31</sup> Durning, B and Glasson, J (2004) *Skills Base in the Planning System*, Oxford: Oxford Brookes University

<sup>32</sup> Eg Edmundson, T and Rawson, L. (2006) Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London. London: LondonCouncils. <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=19067&cat=2674>

<sup>33</sup> Knight, P, Tait, J & Yorke, M. (2006) The professional learning of teachers in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*. Vol 31, No.3. pp 319–339

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Biggs, J B (1999) Teaching for quality learning at university: what the student does. Society for Research into Higher Education: Buckingham: Open University Press.

In spite of their limitations, the aforementioned types of provision can be useful as one element in staff training provision. However, a major problem with such provision for those responsible for training in LPAs is discovering what is available and assessing its quality and appropriateness. A useful role for Regional Centres of Excellence would be to provide a repository for training courses and training materials. This would provide or single point of reference for LPAs in their efforts to identify and procure suitable training.

#### 3.4.4 The need for new types of training provision

Because of the cost and limitations of the above types of provision, many LPAs are turning to other sorts of provision. In-house courses delivered over several sessions can be much more effective at embedding learning and teaching techniques. They can be tailored to the needs of staff and outcomes can also be measured by building in methods of assessing learning. Research in London suggested that a number of authorities are turning to this form of provision as they consider it more cost effective than external courses and because they can exert control over content, delivery and attendance. Delivery of such training may be by internal staff as well as external providers.

Such training can be used for information dissemination—for example to update staff on changes in law, policy and procedures—or to develop skills, techniques and understanding of issues. This form of training can enable staff from different sections to share ideas and expertise, and can be linked to mentoring schemes and work shadowing. It is internal to the authority, however, and one disadvantage is that it provides no opportunities to share ideas with staff working in other authorities. A recent report argued that with relation to spatial planning a “folklore” has built up about what is required, how difficult it all is and this is being regularly reinforced through peer group discussions.<sup>35</sup>

A variation on such training is for several authorities to deliver training in collaboration with one another. This has benefits of sharing knowledge and practices between authorities, and drawing on a larger pool of in-house expertise or reducing the cost of external providers. Those trained in such courses can disseminate their knowledge within their own Boroughs.

The University of Westminster is developing such a model in collaboration with several London Boroughs. Two pilot courses were run in 2007, and proved popular and effective in developing knowledge and understanding of issues relating to the new planning agenda—these courses explored methods of calculating and negotiating renewable energy requirements and health provision requirements in plans and developments.

#### 3.4.5 Barriers to the development and utilisation of new forms of training

There are many barriers facing local authorities and staff wishing to undertake effective forms of training provision. Staff shortages place considerable pressures on staff and discourage managers and staff from attempts to identify and undertake many types of course. Instead, one-off events requiring the minimum amount of staff input and absence from the office are often sought. There is a lack of time and resources to develop initiatives in partnership with other authorities and training providers.

My investigations suggest that although some authorities link staff appraisal to training needs analysis and identify suitable courses for staff to attend, many authorities have a more ad hoc approach to training provision. In many cases staff are asked to identify suitable courses to attend, and often do so with little research into the effectiveness of courses and on the basis of advertisements in the trade press. This makes it difficult to persuade LPAs to develop new forms of provision and to attract staff to such courses once developed.

Training budgets present another barrier. They are often very small. Surveys of London LPAs revealed an average annual training budget of £620 per person. However, many authorities reported lower sums per head, and many spent a large proportion of the budget on part-time postgraduate courses—there were an estimated 100 staff across the 33 Boroughs taking such courses in 2006 at a cost of approximately £2000 per head.

Several authorities expressed a reluctance to invest in training for temporary staff, as the turnover of such staff was rapid. One respondent even expressed a reluctance to pay for permanent staff to attend more expensive educational or training courses, as they felt that this increased the likelihood that a staff member would leave the Borough for another job.

In my view there is an urgent need for the various agencies responsible for developing the skills necessary to deliver sustainable communities to encourage and facilitate the development of partnerships between Boroughs, and between Boroughs and training providers including Universities, to develop and deliver new and more effective forms of training to increase the skills capacity of LPAs.

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<sup>35</sup> UCL & Deloitte (2007) *Shaping and Delivering Tomorrow's Places*. London: RTPI

### 3.5 *The effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them, and*

The Government has invested in a range of initiatives designed to support local planning authorities. The provision of bursaries for postgraduate planning students has increased dramatically the demand for places on such courses and increased the intake to such courses. It has increased the number of planning graduates available in the market and improved the quality of such graduates. Not only has this initiative increased the supply of graduates to LPAs, it has also increased the income and improved the stability of University Planning Schools. Other educational initiatives have been mentioned above, and provide an important resource for LPAs seeking to develop in their staff the skills necessary to deliver sustainable communities agenda. These initiatives should gradually grow in importance over the next few years as LPAs become more aware of them.

The Planning Delivery Grant has provided resources for LPAs that have been essential to the continued delivery of their services. The resources have been used to introduce IT systems and increase staffing levels. It is unfortunate that only approximately 1% has been used for training (2005–06).<sup>36</sup>

The Academy for Sustainable Communities and the Planning Advisory Service (& ATLAS), were set up to support LPAs, and these bodies have undertaken a range of initiatives to support local authorities. PAS has provided particularly valuable advice directly and indirectly—through best practice guidance—to LPAs in relation to restructuring, improved management and a range of measures to help them adjust to the reforms to the planning system.

### 3.6 *The long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

Local authorities are adopting a range of measures to address the staff shortages and skills gaps in their authorities. My research into London LPAs revealed that the measures to address the problems arising from the shortage of planning staff fall into three main overlapping categories:

- Measures to increase the competitiveness of LPAs in the job market (pay and conditions, key worker housing, flexible working, improving the working environment, improving recruitment processes).
- Measures to increase the supply of planners available and improve the skills capacity of LPAs (increasing full-time undergraduates and postgraduates, grow your own initiatives—involving non-planning graduates, school leavers and administrative staff, various training measures).
- Measures to increase the capacity of LPAs without investing in existing and new permanent staff (outsourcing, temporary staff, re-structuring, increased use of technicians, joint provision of services).

Some of the issues relating to training provision are discussed above in section 3.4 above. The full range of measures that have been adopted by LPAs in London is explained in detail, and their effectiveness discussed, in Section 4 of the attached report.<sup>37</sup> Some of the conclusions to this Section are summarised briefly below.

London LPAs have introduced a range of measures to address the problems of staff shortages and skills capacity problems.

#### 3.6.1 Of temporary staff and consultants

The use of temporary staff and consultants—provide flexibility and a short-term solution to the problems. The quality of temporary staff and consultants is often very high, and consultants may offer staff with specialist skills needed infrequently by a LPA. Without such measures some authorities would not have been able to deliver an adequate level of service. However, they do nothing to address the longer-term skills capacity of LPAs and have a number of disadvantages.

Temporary staff cost significantly more than permanent staff in direct wages (20%) and indirect training costs. In addition, although some staff stay with an employer for a considerable period, most remain for only a short period of time. This means that they do not develop knowledge of the local area and cause a loss of continuity in the consideration of longer-term issues and cases. Also, temporary staff require initial training and on-going supervision, the benefits of which are lost if they leave after a short period. Finally, filling posts with temporary rather than permanent staff reduces the number of staff that might potentially progress to more senior posts.

Consultants are significantly more expensive than permanent staff, and reliance on their skills may discourage the development of the skills of permanent staff, and create a spiral of decline in the longer-term skills capacity of the LPA's workforce.

<sup>36</sup> Addison associates with Arup (2006) *Evaluation of the Planning Delivery Grant 2005–06*. London: DCLG

<sup>37</sup> Edmundson, T and Rawson, L. (2006) *Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London*. London: LondonCouncils.

Costs of using temporary staff could be reduced, and the quality of service improved, by using a not for profit agency or other means of procurement. However, in a situation of scarce labour, using temporary staff and outsourcing to consultants will do little to ease the longer term problems of staff shortages or increase the skills capacity of the LPA.

### 3.6.2 Restructuring and technological measures

Measures such as restructuring and better use of IT and support staff have reduced the workloads of planners and may provide them with more time to undertake staff development and training.

### 3.6.3 Pay and conditions

Many authorities have introduced pay supplements or increases to attract and retain staff—“golden handshakes or handcuffs.” These measures are intended to improve individual LPAs’ abilities to compete for the limited pool of planners in the market. Whilst these measures may, in combination, help authorities to retain staff and compete more effectively for staff with the private sector and other employers, an unintended effect of supplements and pay increases—in London and (anecdotally) elsewhere—has been to increase the competition between LPAs for a limited number of available staff. It appears to have increased staff turnover. Again this can prove detrimental to the development of the skills capacity of a LPA.

Attempts to standardise pay and conditions could help to reduce movement between boroughs, whilst the introduction of work/life balance policies and other measures to improve the nature of jobs and the working environment could improve the competitive position of LPAs relative to the private sector. Increasing the availability of low cost housing could also help LPAs compete more successfully with employers outside London, whilst better advertising and recruitment measures—and better promotion of the benefits of LPA jobs could also help LPAs to recruit and retain staff more successfully.

### 3.6.4 Increasing the supply of planning graduates

In order to address the central problem of a shortage of staff, and particularly of experienced staff, much greater efforts are needed to increase awareness of planning amongst young people and attract them into jobs and courses. The ASC has undertaken some initiatives in this area—including work with the Geographical Association to produce changes to the school curriculum. Increases in applications to University courses would need to be met by increases in the resources available to Universities to teach increased numbers.

### 3.6.5 Training

Increased investment in management training and in new forms of technical training could enable staff to progress more quickly and increase the supply of staff capable of taking on more senior roles. This would also help to retain staff, if linked to schemes for personal and professional development and appraisal. LPAs will need to work more closely with universities, training providers, the RTPI and bodies such as the ASC to implement strategies and to develop appropriate training provision to supplement what is already available.

### 3.6.6 Resources

The Planning Delivery Grant of over £17 million in 2006–07 has been used to implement some of the above measures, and reduce recruitment and retention problems. But its potential impact on the problems will be lessened by the uncertainty surrounding its future: “for many authorities the end of PDG will potentially create a funding crisis, particularly in relation to future funding of staff.”<sup>38</sup>

An evaluation of PDG stated that there is still a lack of resources in the planning service; this view was echoed by the private sector in the DCLG research and by the CBI.<sup>39</sup> Any reduction of resources in future would prevent many of the aforementioned measures from being implemented.

The limited training budgets of many LPAs are a major barrier to improvements in training of staff.

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<sup>38</sup> Addison Associates with Arup (2006) Evaluation of Planning Delivery Grant 2005–06. London: DCLG

<sup>39</sup> CBI (2005) Planning reform: Delivering for business? Planning Brief. London: CBI

### 3.6.7 Coordination and cooperation

There is also a need for coordination of efforts. Many of the current measures introduced by LPAs to address the problems caused by staff shortages, have been introduced by individual LPAs on an ad hoc basis. They may succeed in helping that LPA in the short term, but often have adverse effects on other LPAs. Many do little to address the longer term problems afflicting London LPAs as a whole. Similar criticisms could be made of other bodies working to increase the skills capacity of LPAs. Measures have not always been coordinated, and some potentially valuable initiatives have not been promoted effectively to LPAs.

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#### **Memorandum by Planning Advisory Service and the Improvement and Development Agency**

##### SUMMARY

This evidence is submitted by IDeA Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and is based on information collected and observed since the inception of PAS in late 2004. The evidence submitted is focussed on planning skills in the local government sector and cannot be read across to other public agencies or to planning undertaken in the private sector. Key issues presented in this submission:

- The working world of planners and politicians in local government has changed and will continue to change substantially over the coming years. Not only has the system framework fundamentally altered, and continues to incrementally change, but the issues that are being addressed through the planning system have increased in complexity and profile. The expectations on planners, politicians and the system itself to deliver have never been higher.
- Those occupying a management role in planning will not always have invested in the necessary skills. The new integrated environment that planners work within requires a broader range of competencies, including partnership working, resource management, teamwork, procurement and project management skills which are not commonly found.
- Additional skills around understanding development economics and infrastructure valuation will be required with the introduction of an infrastructure levy.
- Councillor skills are immensely variable and in the absence of a consistent approach to training and development across the country this situation is unlikely to change. If the proposal to introduce Local Member Review Boards is pursued then the capability of councillors will need to be addressed.
- The current approach to planning is a shared enterprise needing the engagement of leaders and senior managers in local government and partner organisations, delivery bodies and the private sector to understand the nature of the changes taking place and to develop their own roles. Planners will not be able to do this in isolation.
- PAS is funded until 2011 and will work closely with partner organisations to deliver a range of support that meets the changing needs of planners in the public sector.

##### BACKGROUND TO PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE (PAS)

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) was launched in December 2004. It is part of the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA) and shares the same approach as the IDeA to the improvement of local government. Governance of PAS is carried out through a Steering Group made up of cross sectoral representatives and chaired by CLG, meeting quarterly. This group has scrutinised both activities and the strategy of PAS.

The focus of PAS is improvement—helping those in local government planning services deliver more for their customers, to do “better planning” and in turn to create better outcomes for communities and places. The PAS approach is based on building capacity in the sector so that improvement is driven from within rather than imposed externally through a consultancy model. The work of PAS focuses on process improvement and not on the content of what planners do—making sure that systems are in place to deliver good plans and decisions but not whether the plans or decisions are the best for their locality.

We do this through a variety of activities:

- Highly skilled advice working 1:1 with authorities
- Tailored support tools based on use of diagnostic approaches
- Action learning workshops
- Planning peer reviews based on a sector benchmark

- Councillor development—both strategic and detailed
- Best practice case studies
- One-stop-shop website [www.pas.gov.uk](http://www.pas.gov.uk)

PAS has extensive interaction with councillors, planners and senior managers in the course of our work. To give some scale, during 2007 over 1,700 officers and councillors attended events run by PAS. Over 80 authorities have been receiving diagnostic and direct support. The PAS website has 2,800 registered users with in excess of 12,000 visits in any month. The evidence submitted is based on the information and intelligence gained from these experiences.

PAS works on its own but also in partnership with other organisations to ensure that there is limited duplication and opportunities to build capacity are exploited. This partnership approach also helps PAS get its messages and support to different parts of the same audience base. Key partnerships are with ATLAS (located within English Partnerships), Planning Officers Society (POS), Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC). PAS is also an active member of the National Planning Forum (NPF) a cross sector representative body.

Within the IDeA is a CLG funded work programme focussed on building capacity in the local authority strategic housing function. PAS works very closely with the strategic housing programme. Within this programme, which was informed by a skills audit, there is a strand focussed on broadening the professional skill base to develop a more capable and flexible senior management capacity within the strategic housing function in local government. There are very strong overlaps with the planning function and within the IDeA these links are clearly made. The audience for the strategic housing programme has included many planners and planning politicians and has been successful in making the links between these activities.

#### *1. Recent changes to range and detail of knowledge and skills needed*

Planning is both an activity and also a legislative system leading to outputs and outcomes. When discussing skills in this context we are describing the skills needed to discharge the planning function in local government.

The public profile and expectations for local government planning services have shifted fundamentally in the past 20 years. Planning was for a considerable period perceived as a purely regulatory activity with plan-making as a subsidiary and rule based approach. The absolute focus on speed of decision making (as a proxy for a good quality planning service) for a long period developed a short term target culture at the expense of the creative and integrative role of plan making. In addition the private sector planning market grew considerably during this period providing competition for local government in recruiting and retaining the most skilled staff. The result of these different influences is now being felt throughout the local government planning sector both in terms of the skills of those who have remained in the sector and those that entered it during this period.

The language of cultural change is frequently used when describing the changes that are taking place within local government planning. The cultural shift can be characterised by a move from a largely regulatory, corporately disconnected function with the focus on process and speed to an integrative activity, a key tool for delivery with public sector partners, at the heart of achieving change in localities and communities. This change can be best understood with the emergence of development management, which is the end to end management of the planning process—from developer/landowner proposal to buildings on the ground. This is the bringing together of plan making, decision making and implementation.

This language of cultural change, and consequently the discussion about skills, tends to focus on those people who are responsible for planning services in local government, both politicians and officers. However, it must be recognised that to achieve this change is not something that planners can do in isolation. It also requires others; senior managers, community leaders, partners to understand the scale and implications of the changes taking place and to develop their roles within this. Skills will need to be built within this wider population as well as within planners and their politicians.

Change in the context in which planners carry out their role is incremental and at times, implicit. These changes often require integration into current working practice and priorities. The current move towards an increasing emphasis, indeed reliance, on the planning system and spatial plans to deliver ambitious housing targets and economic prosperity is a good example of how the change in the external world directly impacts on the priorities, and necessary skills of planners and councillors in local government. Other examples include using the planning system to tackle climate change and the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy. This incremental, continuing change is challenging previous priorities for skills development and exposing skills and knowledge gaps.

## 2. Main areas of skill deficiencies

### Overview and background

The last comprehensive overview of the skills in planning was undertaken in the period 2001–03 and published by the LGA in 2004 (Skills Base in the Planning System; LGA; 2004). The document provides a useful distinction when discussing skills:

- Skills shortage is a lack of staff possessing the relevant skills and is generally a supply and demand problem.
- Skills gap is where the existing workforce has lower (or absent) skill levels than necessary to meet organisational objectives.

The experience reported in 2004 was of skills shortages and gaps in very specific discipline areas eg design, transport, development control and with regional variations. The report recommended that future skills needs “would be in the wider range of ‘personal’ or ‘management’ skills, such as negotiation, facilitation, working with the community” (ibid). The report also showed the longer term need for inter-disciplinary and inter-professional working. This was the issue also highlighted by the Egan Review into skills for sustainable communities.

The latest local government pay and workforce survey (*Local Government Pay and Workforce strategy—survey 2006; LGAR; 2006*) indicates that local authorities continue to experience recruitment and retention problems with planners. However, although there has been a trend of improvement since 2004 planners remain one the top five professional groups where recruitment is difficult.

### PAS experience

The evidence presented in this and the following section is drawn from the broad range of work that PAS has been undertaking over the last three years and to an extent updates the LGA study. The sources of this evidence include diagnostic work in individual authorities, peer reviews, reports from action learning workshops and a range of other interactions that PAS has with its users and audience. The focus of PAS has largely been on process improvement and the evidence supports that, however we frequently come across skills and knowledge gaps in specific discipline areas such as climate change, renewable energy, development economics.

The early emphasis on work for PAS was supporting performance improvement in development control and focussing on achievement of targets (Best Value Performance Indicator 109 a/b/c). The overall improvement in performance across local government had started around 2000 but there were a significant number of authorities who were not improving or whose performance was declining. The public identification of authorities as “Planning Standards Authorities” brought with it a commitment of support from PAS. It was through this work that a clear understanding of the barriers to change were identified.

A report on an evaluation of the planning standards authorities (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/148592>) identified some key contributory factors : staff numbers and under-resourcing; lack of experienced staff, proactive performance management, planning and implementing improvement strategies, ICT implementation and corporate awareness.

It was evident from this work that key skills gaps were project management and performance management. There was limited understanding of the benefits of business improvement techniques, reflecting a gulf between the approach to the management of planning services and the management of a business. Linked to this was the absence or low level of performance management of both case load and staff within the planning function. PAS continues to provide a programme of support in these areas for planning services although as it has become evident that the improvements that have been made are sustainable, the focus has gradually shifted to other parts of the system.

It has become apparent that the implementation of the “new” planning system (2004 Act) has been slow and the submission for examination of LDF documents has slipped significantly against commitments made by local authorities in their Local Development Schemes. Similarly the focus of the work of PAS has therefore shifted to support for LDF delivery.

Since 2007 PAS has undertaken diagnostic work leading to recommendations for support and improvement in the spatial planning function in nearly 70 councils. The table below sets out the range of support needs identified and the number of authorities needing the support.

<i>LDF diagnostic summary</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>%age</i>
Common vision and collaborative working—working with the LSP	50	75%
Member Training	47	70%
Project Management	43	64%
Resource Planning	36	54%
Community engagement	34	51%

<i>LDF diagnostic summary</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>%age</i>
Evidence / Monitoring	26	39%
Spatial Policy Guidance	22	33%
Sustainability Appraisal	22	33%
Options Appraisal	21	31%
Critical Friend	18	27%
Sub-regional working	16	24%

Some of the diagnostic recommendations relate clearly to skills gaps—for example member training and project management. Others need to be unpacked. For example common vision and collaborative working encompasses strategic thinking, partnership working, negotiation and detailed knowledge of the machinery of partnerships and local government. The messages from this extensive diagnostic work are clear about the key areas requiring support and there are some consistent themes. Working in partnerships, capacity and capability of councillors, project, resource and performance management are all found in this diagnostic work but are consistent with the evidence from the work with Planning Standards Authorities and are indicative of a deep skills gap.

The themes identified in the diagnostic work are echoed within the recommendations for improvement following a peer review. Of 16 reviews carried out during 2007 the most commonly cited recommendations were:

- Ensure members understand the LDF and know how to lead the process.
- Member training for competent involvement on the planning committee.
- Ensure corporate leaders understand the importance of planning in achieving the council vision/objectives.
- Improving stakeholder engagement.
- Better understanding of business issues in service delivery eg developing a workforce strategy, understand resource needs, improve communications with internal colleagues and staff in planning.

Reports from recent action learning workshops also reinforce these key messages and identify clearly the need to build understanding and awareness more broadly. This need to build capacity within partnership bodies, particularly the LSP, is also recognised as being key to the ability of planners to take the opportunities that the new approach offers and demonstrate the contribution planning makes to sustainable outcomes.

As the range of skills and detailed knowledge that planners need increases, more authorities are using external consultants to provide capacity. One skill that is often evidently missing from planners is that of the “intelligent client”. To be able to specify, commission and complete the client side of a contractual relationship requires a combination of the skills that are already evidently in short supply—project management, performance management—combined with a clear view of what is required. As the commissioning role develops with the increasing complexity of issues that planners face, the need to become skilled at procurement and clienting will become more pressing.

To respond to these core skills gaps PAS has a wide range of tools, case studies and development modules. These materials are offered in a combination of on-site delivery (in particular cases), free downloadable tools from the PAS website and regionally delivered action learning events. PAS is not set up as a training organisation and the support available is not part of an academic/qualification process. The PAS website provides an easy access point to the support available and is both well used and well regarded.

### 3. *Councillor training and skills*

There is immense variation in the way in which councils train their members to undertake planning functions. The two extremes of this are:

- A political decision has been made that only adequately trained councillors can sit on planning committee, a curriculum of training is available for ongoing development of councillors and councillors attend national and regional training opportunities.
- No training is given at all other than an induction session for newly elected councillors and training is undertaken by choice. There is limited interest amongst members in their training and development.

Between these two extremes there is enormous variety of approach. From observation and the evidence of PAS it is clear that there exists a deficit of skills suitable for discharging the planning function amongst councillors.

PAS recognised that councillors also need to understand the skills that they require to undertake their planning roles effectively. PAS has produced a Planning Member skills framework based on the national councillor skills framework produced by the IDeA. This has been publicised extensively and used at national conferences and events— weblink—(<http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/aio/40020>).

Both IDeA and PAS undertake a range of member development activities in spatial planning. PAS works directly with portfolio holders and committee chairs through a specialised IDeA Leadership Academy module on planning, providing on site training through Local Leadership Academy and providing bespoke training via the PAS direct support programme.

There is a continuing demand for training, with anecdotal evidence that councillors can find it difficult to access good training within their authorities. There is a wide variation in the development needs of councillors and there is no formally agreed core curriculum for member training. However as part of the PAS direct support provided to authorities there is a programme of member training modules that is freely available and could be used for this purpose. These focus both on development management and plan making responsibilities. Weblink - (<http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=37914>). Evidence from 16 planning peer reviews carried out in 2007 indicates member training is a recurring recommendation for improvement. The recommendations cover both improving the understanding of the spatial planning process and competency training for members of planning committees. It is clear from the diagnostic work that members are not always able or willing to engage with the complexity of the strategic planning process or with the performance improvement agenda in development control.

The current proposal within the Planning Bill for Local Member Review Boards (LMRB), if enacted, will highlight the need for a national standard of member skills. From the evidence of PAS it will be a considerable step change for member training necessary to ensure the consistency and rigour of the decision making required to make the LMRB work.

#### 4. *Role and effectiveness of PAS*

An impact assessment of the work of PAS has been carried in parallel to the delivery of the programme for the last three years and there is much evidence of the impact of the work of PAS on its target audience. The following is an extract from the most recent report for the last three months of 2007:

- Levels of awareness and use have remained constant at 90% and 62% (councillors) respectively. PAS are effective at reaching their target market of senior LPA managers; awareness amongst this group is 98% whilst use is at 81%. Frequency of accessing PAS services has also remained constant.
- Satisfaction with PAS information content, tools, and the service overall is very high at 91%.
- In this quarter, particular attention was paid to PAS events. In every aspect of the events, over three quarters of attendees were satisfied. When comparing to other providers, more attendees preferred the PAS events than vice versa; this was due to their national focus, reliability of information, interactive workshops, and provision of networking opportunities.
- On LDF direct support users felt PAS had saved them a total of around 150 working days in demystifying the process and pointing out relevant best practice. PAS has also saved users money through helping them to avoid resubmission costs, avoid unnecessary studies and consultancy fees, and raising the LDF profile to secure more council funding.
- 65% of PAS user managers had made changes (in their service area). Of these, 57% attributed assistance on implementing the change to PAS, most commonly in the area of giving ideas on the types of changes that could be made. PAS has saved LPAs both time and money in putting ideas into action.
- When respondents were asked where they felt PAS should focus their efforts in 2008, many recommended that PAS focus on issues which are heavily related to the recent White Paper— sustainability, delivery of housing capacity growth, and continuing support on LDF production and implementation.

Databuild; Planning Advisory Service Impact Assessment Q3 (December 2007)

#### 5. *Effectiveness of government support to local authorities*

There are a range of bodies and a variety of other initiatives that are focussed on addressing both the shortage of planners and the skill set in local government which are funded by government. PAS convenes a group that attempts to undertake a gap analysis through the involvement of other key players some of whom are funded by government including CABB, ATLAS, PAS, ASC, on a regular basis. However anecdotally there is confusion amongst planners and councillors as to who is providing what support, what is available and who can access it. This is confusion is compounded by regional initiatives such as the SE Centre for the Built Environment (SECBE) funded by SEEDA, Inspire East which has joint funding and a number of other examples. The picture may become further confused for councils as the regional improvement partnerships (RIEP's) enter this arena.

## 6. *Effectiveness of local government's own measures*

Planners generally come to work in local government with a degree and professional training in planning. The link with Planning Schools is crucial to ensuring that new entrants to the sector and profession are adequately skilled. Further on the job training is dependent on funding being available. It is widely recognised that training budgets are often cut in the need to make savings. For members of the RTPI there is a requirement for continuing professional development but not all practising planners are members and therefore there is no obligation to keep skills and knowledge up to date.

In response to the shortage of planners over the recent past a large number of authorities have been developing a "grow your own" approach. This approach involves either training existing administrative/technical staff or recruiting graduates with any relevant degree. There is a significant cost to this approach and no guarantee that the "home grown" planners will stay with their training host authorities. There is much anecdotal evidence about the significant numbers of planners who move from local government to the private sector when training has been completed. However, where "home grown" approach has been taken there is a great deal of enthusiasm for it.

The wide range of skills needed by planners are often overlooked when job evaluation exercises are undertaken in local authorities. There are particular skills that lead to an evaluation that is competitive between authorities and with the private sector. One particular skill is that of budget holding. Generally, even senior planners do not hold large budgets although their overall responsibility for the value of development or the value of S106 payments is not considered in the evaluation process. Without competitive salaries it is not possible to attract capable staff and existing staff are frequently demoralised. There are examples of authorities who have lost whole teams of planners, or cannot fill key roles as a result of job evaluation and its impact on salary levels.

One way in which authorities have been addressing skills shortages and gaps has been through greater collaborative working with neighbouring authorities. PAS has actively supported the development and shared learning of collaborative experiences. These are well documented on the PAS website. (<http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=46132>) This work is being developed in the context of the new unitary authorities where it will be used to support the new authorities to bring their existing services together as well as develop a high quality new planning function.

## 7. *Conclusion*

The expectations on the planning system and on planners to deliver economic prosperity, high levels of housing growth, high quality and sustainable communities, have never been higher. But this is a shared enterprise needing the engagement of partner organisations, delivery bodies and the private sector to all play their part.

PAS work has been focussed on providing tools, techniques and direct support to build the capacity within local government planning services to meet these high expectations. Recognised as successful in doing this since 2004, PAS has reviewed its strategy for the period to 2011 to meet the wider challenges now being posed. Over the next three years PAS will continue to work in active partnership and will also seek out new opportunities to spread the learning and insight gained to a wider audience including partnership and local delivery partners.

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### **Memorandum submitted by the Town and Country Planning Association**

#### 1. ABOUT THE TCPA

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) campaigns for the reform of the UK's planning system to make it more responsive to people's needs and aspirations and to promote sustainable development. We put social justice and the environment at the heart of policy debate.

We seek to inspire government, industry and campaigners to take a fresh perspective on major issues, including planning policy, housing, regeneration and climate change. Our objectives are to:

- Secure a decent, well designed home for everyone, in a human-scale environment combining the best features of town and country.
- Empower people and communities to influence decisions that affect them.
- Improve the planning system in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

## 2. SUMMARY

2.1 There is an expectation of a level of competence by the public and central government from a local authority when deciding planning issues. Local authorities know that failure to address the well-being of the community can impact on its long-term economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability. This planning responsibility for planners extends to elected members of planning committees and community stakeholders.

2.2 The TCPA takes an opportunistic view to identifying the need to help local authorities obtain the additional knowledge and skills to meet its responsibilities. We believe that a new proactive professionalism within the public sector needs to be developed. This should reflect continuing transformations in the planning system based on managing change for, and delivering, sustainable development.

2.3 However the responsibility and skills for delivering sustainable communities should not be assigned to just one profession. There needs to be greater professional and community collaborative partnerships to harness knowledge and skills synergies.

2.4 We envisage opportunities to diversify existing planning education and professional development. We believe in strengthening planning decision-making by building stakeholder capacity. We also believe in raising the status of planning by the statutory establishment of a post of Chief Planning Officer within all local planning authorities. We think that this will support the line of accountability and responsibility of planning departments in delivering sustainable communities.

## 3. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

### 3.1 *Introducing New Skills and Attitudes*

There are genuine concerns for the quality of skills within local government to deliver the sustainable communities agenda. Local governments continue to play a leading role in guiding local developments through strategic and development control planning. Therefore enhancing their capacity to undertake their responsibilities effectively is paramount in an era of rising challenges and opportunities.

3.1.1 There are three areas that require action:

- strengthening generic skills,
- developing technical skills, and
- acquiring new attitudes.

The Egan Review identified 13 broad categories of generic skills required to ensure success in delivering sustainable communities. The TCPA believes it is important that the list of generic skills identified by the Egan Review continues to be introduced as foundation skills through training and education of local authority planners—planning, development control, monitoring and enforcement—and elected members of planning committees (TCPA, 1999).

The TCPA supports findings from skills surveys undertaken by the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC 2007) and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI 2005) which continue to emphasise the importance of planners having these generic skills to successfully deliver sustainable communities.

3.1.2 The TCPA also believes it is important to develop and adapt discipline knowledge/ technical skills in parallel with the emergence of the climate change agenda and proposed changes to the planning system in the pipeline.

3.1.3 Community consultation skills also need to be developed to be more specialized to reflect emerging views about citizens' rights and expectations as stakeholders in governmental processes. This reflects the fact that it is local rather than central government that is at the direct point at which governmental processes and affected citizens interface.

3.1.4 There must be an emphasis on skilled multi-disciplinary teams of specialized planners comparable to the structure of private sector consultancies. It is imperative that these teams have a high level of proficiency and competency to facilitate productive engagements with private sector stakeholders and to inform elected members on taking planning decisions. We consider the opportunities exist to strengthen council capacity in the following areas:

- developer contributions/ agreement negotiations as part of:
  - (1) undertaking pre-application dialogue with respective stakeholders;
  - (2) drafting and negotiating section 106 agreements;
  - (3) collaborative working under public-private partnership initiatives; and

(4) technical skills in contribution calculations for the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy or similar tariffs-system.

to deliver the sustainable communities agenda. The latter is particular relevant and urgent given that local authorities are beginning to prepare or adopt their developer contributions supplementary planning document,

- urban design to assess the design quality of developments, in particular of affordable housing when interpreting design and access statements,
- environmental impact assessment/ energy assessment/ sustainability appraisal to deliver the climate change, sustainability by design and renewable energy agendas, and
- community planning to deliver local government promises for greater collaborative and inclusive plan-making and planning application consultation processes as set out in the statements of community involvement (England) or community involvement statements (Wales).

### 3.2 *Diversifying Planning Education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)*

3.2.1 It is important for foundation and postgraduate planning education to be founded on a clearer understanding of the changing role of planning in the public sector. Strengthening generic skills and incorporating new technical skills, as identified in Section 3.1 of this response, in existing courses should be introduced by planning schools as soon as practicable. There are concerns that there will be a shortfall of planners with key skills arising from current changes in the near future. Greater inter-disciplinary interaction and stimulation through a mixed lecture system with other disciplines must also be encouraged.

For example Urban Regeneration with International Planning or Project Management with Urban Design. This level of cross-disciplinary education will enable students to be introduced to, and to appreciate, the range of technical skills required. It will also nurture a team-working ethic with an appreciation of other professional disciplines.

3.2.2 The TCPA believes obtaining professional qualifications is an important and necessary milestone to a new professionalism in the public sector. Becoming a chartered member to the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Royal Institute of British Architects or the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has continuing professional development (CPD) obligations. This will undoubtedly benefit the skills development of practitioners.

3.2.3 Unfortunately a significant proportion of public sector practitioners, including elected members and qualified overseas planners, are not members of, or eligible for, these professional institutions. There is an opportunity to implement “in-kind” development programmes within local authorities, accredited by professional institutions, to establish minimum CPD requirements and so raise skill levels.

### 3.3 *Embracing Work Experience and Work Exchange*

3.3.1 Strengthening cross-sectoral relationships and harnessing the opportunities for positive skills and knowledge transfer must be explored. The TCPA’s own inquiry into the future of planning encourages continuous learning through experience.

3.3.2 There is also an urgent need to build a cadre of specialists in local planning authorities skilled in better understanding the commercial issues of development economics, especially where it relates to complex, mixed use regeneration schemes.

Not every local planning authority would need to be up-skilled in such detail, but all should have access to the network of specialists. They should not have to rely on the level of expertise that currently exists, nor on the employment of consultants each time they conduct a negotiation.

3.3.3 The TCPA recognizes the merits of English Partnership’s graduate programme which allows a practical insight into the many areas of the regeneration sector with short work placements in regional development agencies, housing associations or private sector organisations.

3.3.4 The TCPA also recognizes the benefits of work placements or “year out” for undergraduate architectural students to gain work experience within the UK or overseas before entering full time employment. There should be opportunities to undertake such exchange programmes throughout the different career levels of public sector planners.

### 3.4 *Supporting Local Authority Delivery Capacity—the statutory recognition of a Senior Planning Officer*

3.4.1 The TCPA believes that statutory recognition should be given to a senior officer with responsibility within a local authority for the planning function. This was recommended in our 2005 report “Putting Planning First”. The TCPA believes that this enhanced status would be a positive contribution to increasing skills capacity (TCPA/PwC, 2006).

A small number of key chief officers of local authorities (such as for education and social services) enjoy statutory recognition, such as the post of Chief Education Officer reaffirmed in the Education Act 1996 (section 532). The rationale for such statutory establishments of senior positions accountable in planning policy and service delivery areas should be extended to planning departments. It will also raise the profile of planning and strengthen its legitimacy as an accountable decision-making function within local government.

3.4.2 The role of a planning officer includes the creation and removal of millions of pounds of land value by the stroke of a pen, and the awesome responsibility for delivery of sustainable development, as set out by the current government planning and housing agenda. This Inquiry offers an important opportunity to ensure the commitment to delivering integrated, positive planning at the highest level.

3.4.3 The TCPA also recommends the Inquiry should explore the implications of funding from the proposed Housing and Planning Delivery Grant as part of its terms of reference. It should address the quality of outcomes and the proportions of funding utilised by local planning authorities to training and up-skilling of planners and elected members.

### 3.5 *Strengthening Elected Members and Community Stakeholders Capacity*

3.5.1 The TCPA sees the opportunity to strengthen key decision-makers' skills capacity to continue to lead the delivery of quality environments that will benefit future generations. The TCPA believes that the skills capacity of local government encompasses the capacity of all stakeholders involved throughout the planning process—in both plan-making and planning applications.

3.5.2 Councillors and selected community organisations, as part of local strategic partnerships, take on leadership roles within their communities with an emphasis on improving their collective well-being. Every day they tackle issues by:

- weighing up the advice given by planning officers,
- the perceived benefits, the views, and
- the priorities of the community.

As a result they sometimes have to come to an unpopular decision for the well-being of the community as a whole. This responsibility becomes greater in light of recent planning system reforms with uncertainties about how the new system would have a positive or negative effect on the ability to delivery sustainable communities.

3.5.3 Therefore we support the “Member Training” recommendations put forward by Communities and Local Government’s report “Councillor Involvement in Planning Decisions”. We believe this should be mandatory for all elected members serving on the planning committee and all other stakeholders (voluntary and community organization leaders) as part requirements for continuing eligibility to be involved in planning decisions. These recommendations are: (CLG, 2007, pp.68)

- all Members of the Council should receive training in planning matters, especially where there is a structure in place to allow decisions to be referred up to full Council or any possibility that they will be asked to stand in for a Member on the Planning Committee,
- Members should be encouraged to keep their skills and knowledge up to date by attending training sessions on at least an annual basis,
- Member training initiatives should include a variety of activities; actual site visits / tours of the authority area seem to be especially informative, if focused on topical issues or locations, and
- Policy training should be offered to all Members, and should be compulsory for all those on the Planning Committee.

#### TCPA REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

ASC, September 2007, Mind the Skills Gap—The skills we need for sustainable communities

CLG, January 2007, Councilor Involvement in Planning Decisions. Final Report

RTPI, November 2005, A Survey of Discipline Knowledge and Generic Skills of RTPI Corporate Members

Baker, M, Jeffrey, P, Roberts, P and Wright, A, 2005, Putting Planning First. A report on the TCPA Putting Planning First Initiative, London, TCPA

TCPA, October 1999, Your place and mine: Re-inventing planning. The Report of the TCPA inquiry into the future of planning

TCPA and PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006, Permission to Plan?

## Memorandum by Sheffield Hallam University (PS 21)

### INTRODUCTION

Sheffield Hallam University, formerly Sheffield City Polytechnic, has been delivering town planning courses accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for some 40 years. Until the early 1990s this was wholly to part-time students, but subsequently the University has developed full time courses, delivered jointly with the part-time ones, at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. The planning courses have developed “planning and transport” derivatives over the past 10 years too.

The University has also been delivering courses in the environmental management area for over 10 years and has a developing portfolio of undergraduate and post-graduate courses in that area. We are one of the few universities offering undergraduate and post-graduate awards in housing management, focusing broadly on the social housing sector. We were the first university to offer, some 10 years ago, a specialist masters award in urban regeneration. In order to satisfy accrediting professional bodies each of these courses has a subject specific set of knowledge and skills. However, the growing emphasis on generic skills and the overarching nature of the sustainable communities agenda, means that they also have much in common and opportunities are provided for inter-disciplinary learning.

Along with our partners Leeds Metropolitan University and the Yorkshire Branch of the RTPI, we have been delivering one of the Institute’s most successful regionally based CPD conference series for some 10 years. These provide opportunities for planning practitioners to engage with new issues and opportunities for our members of staff to engage with practitioners. More recently we have worked with the Academy for Sustainable Communities in exploring the market for and then launching, a part-time foundation degree in sustainable communities. All these activities are delivered by a single, large multi-disciplinary team of staff which facilitates the development of inter-disciplinary and inter-professional perspectives within our various products and other activities.

The wider context for these activities is one of the HE sector experiencing a process of marketisation with intense pressure on budgets and resource availability. There is competition between universities and within universities which means that the resourcing of capacity to deliver products in any subject area is subject to intense scrutiny as to the strength of the business case, going forward.

### OUR MAIN POINTS

1. As far as town and country planning is concerned, the numbers of students enrolled on courses has increased, especially at the postgraduate level. This has resulted from the provision of funds for bursaries for full time students and, especially, the funds that have been supplied by Planning Delivery Grant (now the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant) that have allowed local authorities to support staff on part-time courses. Our experience is that the real growth has been in part-time students, at undergraduate and, especially, postgraduate levels.

2. This buoyancy in student numbers has facilitated the maintenance of capacity in the university to deliver planning courses through succession planning. The HE lecturing workforce is skewed towards the older age band and the strength of markets, going forward, is an important issue with regard to the case for recruiting and training new staff, as this is a long term process. It is also competitive between subject areas and universities will invest where they perceive markets to be strong in the medium term. It is therefore highly desirable that Government should continue to support planning in these ways.

3. Most planning schools are multi-disciplinary to some degree. At Sheffield Hallam planning is delivered by a large multi-disciplinary team (some 45 staff) which also delivers courses in regeneration, housing, transport and the environment. The issues about strength of markets referred to above are magnified when managing succession and staff training with such a large group, but this is what is required to address training for the sustainable communities agenda which is multi-disciplinary. There is a case therefore for considering extension of the support currently given to planning into other subject areas to train local authority staff, and staff in associated agencies, and to retain and develop the necessary university teaching capacity. For example, employers and professional bodies refer to shortage of qualified staff in the broad “environment” area, but this doesn’t currently translate into high demand for courses.

4. Hallam is involved in delivering CPD to planners as part of the partnership which delivers the RTPI Yorkshire Conference CPD series. Although this is successful, attracting just over 1000 delegates per annum to the 10 conferences, this depends upon keeping costs very low. This partly stems from the fact that local planning authority staff training budgets are small, but it would also seem that the overall management of the staffing resource in many local authorities is poorly developed with little priority given to structured and strategic staff development. This fact was reinforced by employer representatives in discussion at the recent CEBE/RTPI Planning Education to Planning Practice workshop on Jan 15 2008. It is very desirable therefore that that this whole question of training for sustainable communities is addressed strategically through such vehicles as the proposed Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships. It could also be useful to focus support into non-traditional CPD type activity which could extend existing professionals in

this area—providing more opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement. We are already discussing this with the Regional Centre for Excellence (Integreat Yorkshire), but more support for this approach would be welcome.

5. There has been a plethora of studies of the skills necessary for sustainable communities. The subject has been viewed from a variety of different backgrounds, including neighbourhood management, design and transport as well as planning. The general implication is that students and practitioners should acquire a mix of general skills, for example in communications and business management and various specialist skills that vary between different professions. It is unlikely, however, that any single “super-profession” will emerge. The range of technical and general skills is exceptionally diverse. Uncertainties associated with predicting the precise nature of professional demands in the future, for example in the light of changing policy priorities, is a further constraint on departing from the current range of professional disciplines. Skills are, perhaps, best added and updated as new requirements are identified, much as was envisaged in the Egan report.

6. Finally, the use of skills in practice is as important as their acquisition. Some general skills such as those concerned with communication have long been a central theme in professional education in planning. It is often not so much that new skills are required, but new ways of organisational working bringing different professionals and different agencies together.

7. We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that, in 2007, the Academy for Sustainable Communities commissioned SHU to undertake market research with regard to the potential creation of a foundation degree in sustainable communities. This work concluded that:

- There is a clear and growing need for an entry level qualification in Sustainable Communities. The research highlighted growing skills gaps and difficulties with recruitment across the sector.
- The award should allow and encourage progression to further qualifications to allow specialisation.
- The award should extend and enhance generic skills, but in a professional context. Employers were keen to support work based learning and provide relevant case studies. All stakeholders were keen to continue an involvement in the development of the course.
- The award should introduce technical skills (with a view to further specialisation at higher levels). There should be an emphasis on cross-disciplinary working, both within an expanded list of core occupations, and outside the relevant professions.
- Generic skills and technical skills requirements continue to evolve—eg growing “climate change” agenda; quality of life (including health); green issues.
- The award should provide for flexible learning approaches—short, block weeks with some on-going regular support. Also an emphasis on delivery at a community level—gearing to meet the needs of those already working in a professional or voluntary capacity.

The research also highlighted some issues which need further exploration and which were kept in mind when the foundation award was developed:

- There was concern over the terminology of “sustainable communities”—would people know what it means? Would young people be attracted to careers in this field? The career branding of Sustainable Communities remains potentially confused and fragmented. Therefore the next stage should include the broadening of understanding and definition of the Sustainable Communities field in order to facilitate recruitment.
- The funding for training available to both potential individual students and employers is limited. Larger organisations express support for training and lifelong learning—but funds within the public sector for training remain very scarce. Smaller organisations find this even more difficult. A sliding scale has been suggested, supported with bursaries from agencies such as the ASC.
- Concern was also expressed about the need to attract non-traditional students, and the significant resources (both finance and time) which this would require. Close working between partnership institutions and the Academy of Sustainable Communities will be required to address these issues.

The foundation degree has subsequently been validated by Sheffield Hallam and has enrolled its first cohort of students.

## Memorandum by the Department for Communities and Local Government (PS 23)

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This memorandum should be read in conjunction with the evidence which will be supplied by our partner bodies Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe), Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC), Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and Advisory Team on Large Scale Applications (ATLAS); it sets out progress made by the Department and others to promote skills and capacity within local authorities under the themes identified by the committee:

- recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments;
- the main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced;
- the effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them;
- the skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies;
- the role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their responses to changes to the demands placed on planning departments; and
- the long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments.

2. The Government has been aware of the risks posed by a lack of planning skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities, and has made good progress over the past four years in addressing these issues.

3. The Department has also established a number of bodies to address different aspects of this agenda, to build capacity and promote the skills needed to deliver sustainable communities. These are the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe); Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC); Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Advisory Team on Large Scale Applications (ATLAS).

4. The Department has also directly delivered a number of projects to promote skills capacity within in local government for example:

- commissioning research into planning skills capacity issues;
- financing post graduate planning bursaries to bring more people into the planning profession;
- funding the creation and operation of two distance learning planning courses; delivered by the University of the West of England at Bristol; and
- made one off capacity building grants to individual universities.

### BACKGROUND

5. The delivery of sustainable communities is a very challenging agenda for local authorities and their partners in the public and private sector. This in turn has presented challenges to local government in terms of building capacity and equipping its staff with the skills to deliver the required outcomes. The shortage of planning capacity is historically rooted and stems from the under investment during the 1980s and early 1990s by both central and local government.

6. The early 1990s also witnessed a down turn in the economy and the rate of development which in turn meant that the size of local government planning departments were reduced and the recruitment of newly qualified planners into local government was scaled back. It is for this reason that local government now faces a particular shortage of experienced and qualified planners to take up middle management posts. This phenomenon was labelled the “missing generation” in the Department’s sponsored research undertaken by Oxford Brookes University in 2004.

7. In 2001 the Government published a Green Paper titled “Planning: delivering a fundamental change” which set out a series of far reaching reforms to the planning system. It also highlighted the need to tackle planning skills shortages in local government, if those reforms were to be implemented successfully.

8. In order to address these issues the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) initiated a project called “Changing the Culture of Planning” which ran in parallel with the implementation of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). This initiative consisted of a number of projects delivered under the following headings:

- Mainstreaming planning: Its purpose was to move planning to the centre stage of local government, promoting planning as a positive tool which should be actively used to shape places, not just passively regulate them.

- Creating a sense of place, empowering inclusive participation: Which focussed on promoting community engagement in the planning process, the funding of a Planning Aid service which covers every region in the country is an outcome of this area of work.
- Delivering Capacity through Education and Training: Highlighted the need to address the lack of planning capacity within local government planning departments.

9. The Department also commissioned two important pieces of research into the current situation on skills and capacity. The first was funded jointly with the Local Government Association (LGA) and commissioned Oxford Brookes University to draw up a Skills and Vacancy Survey of all English Local Planning Authorities (2004). In addition Sir John Egan was commissioned to do a Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities (2004) which looked at the whole array of skills required to deliver sustainable communities, not just those required by planners.

10. The publication of the Egan Review and the passing of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004); set the context which led to the Department's strategy to positively promote planning skills and capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities.

*Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

11. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004); resulted in a shift in the statutory planning system from one focused on the regulatory aspects of "land use" to a much more forward looking and proactive "spatial" planning system. This is a major paradigm shift in planning and means that local government planning departments need to enhance their structures, ways of working as well as skills and knowledge, so that they can fully exploit the potential of the spatial planning system.

12. Planning Policy Statement 1 (Delivering Sustainable Development) states that "Planning shapes the places where people live and work and the country we live in. It plays a key role in supporting the Government's wider social, environmental and economic objectives and for sustainable communities." This means a shift in planning to a process that promotes:

- a positive and pro-active approach to delivering sustainable forms of development;
- creative and innovative solutions to improve the quality of life;
- enjoys public confidence by being transparent and accessible and is valued and supported; and
- a system that has the tools, resources and skills to deliver.

13. It is the emergence of a spatial approach to planning which forms the background to the new array of planning skills and knowledge that planning practitioners require.

14. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) which promotes the art and science of planning and the planning profession recognises that there needs to be a culture of life-long learning promoted amongst the planning profession. The Department has contributed to this by funding the creation of a web-based distance learning course in Spatial Planning which is delivered by the University of the West of England at Bristol with a grant of £250,000.

15. This course has been designed to meet the Continual Professional Development (CPD) needs of planners and is accredited by the RTPI. The curriculum content provides planners with the most up to date planning skills and knowledge required to practice spatial planning. It has been in operation since November 2005 and consists of a curriculum of 72 topics grouped into eight modules. Planners can take this course as a CPD option or pursue a post graduate qualification through undertaking this course. To date 151 planning practitioners have accessed this course and this number will grow as the profile and reputation of the course as a CPD option spreads amongst the planning community.

*The main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced*

16. There have been a number of research exercise projects implemented to look at the skills gaps in planning. These two were directly funded by the Department.

- Oxford Brookes University Skills and Vacancy Survey of all English Local Planning Authorities (2004). This provided a snap shot in 2004 of the planning skills and planning staff shortages faced by English local governments. Its main findings were that there were both technical skills gaps (design, project management, development control, transport, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and financial appraisal of developments) and generic skills gaps (working with the community, community engagement, communication, mediation and negotiation skills).

- The Sir John Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities (2004). It identified the broad set of skills required to deliver sustainable communities including:
  - inclusive visioning;
  - project management;
  - leadership in sustainable communities;
  - breakthrough thinking/brokerage;
  - team/partnership working within and between teams based on a shared sense of purpose;
  - process management/change management;
  - financial management and appraisal;
  - stakeholder management; and
  - analysis, decision making, learning from mistakes, evaluation.

17. The Government agreed with the Egan Review's analysis of the generic skills required to deliver sustainable communities and set up the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) to promote these generic skills.

18. Since then the ASC have produced a further report, *Mind the Skills Gap: The skills we need for sustainable communities (2007)* which has provided additional evidence on the change in the range and detail of skills required by staff in planning departments. Particular issues they raised were:

- Labour market issues: Although there are some 30,000 people working as planners (public and private sectors) current supply does not meet demand. There are supply and retention problems across the planning industry with high turnovers in many posts and many vacant posts. There is a particular shortage of middle management level planners. Local authorities find it most difficult to recruit experienced development control planners, followed by forward planners. Agency personnel are increasingly being used to fill these skills gaps in local governments.
- Forecast gaps in labour market: Due to the age structure of the planning profession the shortage of planners, despite the rise in the number of new entrants to the profession is set to intensify over the period up to 2012, due to the number of experienced planners retiring.
- Skills gaps: Improvement is needed in both technical and generic skills such as development appraisal skills so as to negotiate S106 agreements, climate change mitigation and how to use evidence-based approaches to inform forward planning as well as financial and project management skills, decision-making, analytical/evaluation skills.

19. The ASC's report states that: "There needs to be continued efforts to increase the supply of planners, to enable continuous improvements and updates of technical knowledge, and to promote leadership and communication skills across the profession."

*The effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them*

#### Establishing Bodies to support Local Authorities

20. The Department has also established a number of bodies to address different aspects of the skills and capacity building agenda. These are the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe); Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC); Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Advisory Team on Large Scale Applications (ATLAS).

#### PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE

21. PAS is hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and was launched in December 2004. PAS has been funded with grants of £11 million and its role has been to:

- to support all local planning authorities in England in continuous improvement of their services and adoption of best practice, in both plan-making and development management;
- to provide tailored services to assist under-performing local authorities in the development and implementation of their improvement plans; and
- to promote a culture of change, learning and improvement among local authorities.

22. PAS works with councillors and senior planning officers to improve the planning service they offer and use a range of techniques including:

- advice working one to one with local authorities;
- tailored support tools based on the use of a self diagnostic approach;
- running action learning workshops;
- planning peer reviews based on a sector benchmark;

- councillor development—both strategic and detailed;
- best practice case studies; and
- one-stop-shop website.

23. In 2007 PAS engaged with 1,700 councillors and senior officers and some 80 local authorities have been receiving diagnostic and direct support from PAS. In 2007 the focus of PAS's activities shifted from improving the development management function to supporting the delivery of local Development Frameworks (LDFs). In 2007 PAS worked with some 70 authorities to improve their spatial planning functions.

#### ADVISORY TEAM ON LARGE APPLICATIONS

24. ATLAS is an arm of PAS and is hosted by English Partnerships and has been funded with Grants totalling £6.5 million. ATLAS works with local authorities facing large scale development for example those with over 500 housing units. They promote a "development management" as oppose to a "development control" approach. Since its launch in December 2004 ATLAS has worked with individual local authorities in London and the wider South East:

- to facilitate and build capacity to handle large housing-focussed proposals and applications;
- to secure that applications are dealt with efficiently and effectively, including at the pre-application stage; and
- to ensure that schemes are thoroughly examined against the background of Government objectives on sustainable development.

25. ATLAS has brought forward 40 developments and is currently involved in a further 30 developments, with a combined potential to unlock 55,000 housing units. It seeks to imbed the planning skills and knowledge it brings to the local authorities it works with when the projects come to an end. In addition ATLAS has been able:

- to extend its remit from April 2006 to cover the whole East of England region ie incorporating major growth points such as Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Ipswich and Norwich;
- and to extend again to the South West, Easy Midlands and West Midlands regions in 2007, and
- in all the areas identified above to work with public sector landowners to advise them on the process of brokering relationships with local local authorities and to identify good practice approaches to securing large housing-focussed planning consents on public sector land.

#### COMMISSION FOR ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

26. Cabe which is sponsored by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department was set up in 1999 to advice on architecture, urban design and public spaces. Cabe has received £19.95 million from the Department since 2005 which makes up 65% of its funding, the remaining 45% it receives from DCMS. Cabe has worked with local government to enhance design skills in local authorities by:

- improving the delivery of good design;
- developing the evidence base and research on barriers and solutions to good design; and
- contributing to the Department's policy development on design.

27. Since its inception Cabe has made good progress in helping to mainstream a change in attitudes to design by communicating the significant benefits and value for money that good design can bring. Cabe has worked with councillors so that they can act as design champions within their local authorities.

#### ACADEMY FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

28. ACS was set up following the recommendations of the Egan Review (2004) and since it was set up in 2005 has received £13 million from CLG. One of the ASC's roles is to attract people into and address skills shortages amongst built environment professionals by helping practitioners to work more effectively and efficiently by focussing on generic skills such as project management, visioning, communication, partnership working and community engagement.

29. ASC's priorities for 2007–08 are to become a recognised "kitemarking" body for skills and knowledge related to place-making and sustainable communities; establishing programmes for professionals; improving the understanding between the private and public sectors; continuing to influence positively the work of other bodies; providing active, practical learning through national action projects and regional learning laboratories.

#### BOOSTING THE OVERALL SUPPLY OF PLANNERS

30. Since 2004 building upon the work of the RTPI's Education Commission, the Egan Review and the advent of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Department has implemented a number of capacity building initiatives to promote planning capacity in local government. These initiatives were developed in response in particular to two pieces of research commissioned by the Department:

- Skills and Vacancy Survey of all English LPAs, undertaken by Oxford Brookes University (2004); and
- Role of Planning Technicians and Planning Support Staff, undertaken by University of Westminster (2004).

#### COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S POST GRADUATE PLANNING BURSARY SCHEME

31. Since 2004–05 CLG has offered bursaries to high calibre graduate students who want to enter the planning profession. From 2008–09 the bursaries will be distributed in quotas of seven divided amongst the 15 universities in England which offer full-time RTPI accredited post graduate planning courses. The bursaries cover the student's tuition fees and a maintenance grant of £6,000 for the year of full-time study. The scheme is administered on behalf of the Department by the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC). Since 2004–05 513 students have benefited from the scheme at a cost of £4.8 million.

32. The bursary scheme has attracted a high quality and good mix of students, 470 (92%) bursary holders held 1st or 2.1 degrees and the majority (55%) have been awarded to women. In addition 9% of bursaries were awarded to black and ethnic minority students.

33. From the exit surveys undertaken for the first two years we have established that 99% of students completed their studies. On graduating 36% had taken up employment in local government, 34% in private planning consultancies and the remaining students went to the voluntary sector, public bodies like the National Health Service, and research posts in universities or were still seeking employment at the time of the exit surveys. In future students awarded bursaries will have to enter into public service contracts in line with the policy set out in the Planning White Paper (2007), they will be expected to work for three years in the public service within the first five years of employment following graduation.

34. In addition to the benefit from the increased number of planners entering the profession the scheme has also raised the profile of planning as a profession for students and raised the profile in the universities and helped to secure the planning schools position in a highly competitive higher education environment.

#### FUNDED THE CREATION AND OPERATION OF TWO DISTANCE LEARNING PLANNING COURSES

35. These courses were developed by the University of the West of England at Bristol with a combined grant of £375,000 from the Department and consist of:

- MA in Spatial Planning, designed as a CPD option for planning practitioners.
- Foundation Degree in Planning, designed to provide an initial professional planning qualification for planning support staff.

36. The curriculum offers the most up to date skills and knowledge required by planning practitioners both professional and support planning staff to equip them to deliver sustainable communities. To date some 151 planning practitioners from local government planning departments have accessed the MA in Spatial Planning.

37. The Foundation Degree in Planning is aimed at planning support staff in local government and is accredited by the RTPI, which will provide a qualification ladder for support staff leading to professional status. It was launched in June 2007 and is being delivered by the University of the West of England in conjunction with the University of Westminster and Sheffield Hallam University.

#### ONE OFF CAPACITY BUILDING GRANTS TO INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSITIES

38. Three grants with a total value of £110,000 have been awarded to universities located in regions where there is a high level of development activity and thus a demand for planners.

- Anglia Ruskin University, grant of £40,000 to finance an access course and a minerals and waste planning course aimed at increasing the number of employees of local government in the East of England region coming forward to train as planners.
- University of Lincoln, grant of £30,000 to finance the creation of a post graduate planning course aimed at providing training opportunities for employees of local government in the East Midlands region.
- University of Brighton, grant of £40,000 to finance the creation of a post graduate planning course aimed at providing training opportunities for employees of local governments along the South Coast and East and West Sussex.

## PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR PLANNING TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

39. It is important that local authorities also invest in the future of their planning services and the Government has made significant levels of resources available to them through both grants and planning fees.

### PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT

40. Since 2003–04 a total of £605 million has been allocated to local authorities as Planning Delivery Grant (PDG). This was an incentive-based grant regime to support and improve the speed and quality of planning services and to increase the available resources for their planning functions. This has resulted in significant improvements in overall performances and resourcing of the planning service.

41. Local planning authorities have used resources from PDG to train their staff and promote their planning capacity, for example in 2005–06 1.6 million from the PDG had been spent by planning departments on training their planning staff.

42. In 2005–06 PDG allocations were the largest awards yet under this grant regime, with a total of £155 million distributed to local authorities and county councils. The Department's surveys have established the high retention of PDG within planning services with 94% in local planning authorities and 91% in county councils. Key investments were in IT £13 million, staff £28 million and commissioning external consultants £9 million.

43. In future the PDG will be replaced by the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) and the amount has been increased with £510 million allocated over the CSR07 period (2008–09 to 2010–11).

### PLANNING FEES

44. Local authorities receive approximately £233 million in planning fees which is designed to cover the cost of those elements of the planning service that benefit individuals (planning applications) as opposed to the wider community (plan making, enforcement etc). In recent years planning fees have been increased significantly to ensure that resources for planning in local authorities keep up with the costs and allow the building of capacity and training. In 2005 they were increased by an average of 25%, with the maximum fees cap on applications rising to £50,000.

45. In 2007 we consulted on a further increase and confirmed our intention to increase fees by a further 23% from April 2008 with again the fees for the largest applications going up from a maximum of £50,000 to £250,000.

*The skills needed by and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies*

46. The Department acknowledged that there is a need to work with councillors who are responsible for the operation of the planning system at the regional and local tiers of the planning system. The Department sponsored bodies such as PAS, Cabe and ASC have all worked with councillors to build up their knowledge and skills, these bodies will expand on the work they have undertaken in this area, in their own proofs of evidence.

### PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE

- In 2007 some 1,700 councillors and senior planning officers attended PAS capacity building events.
- Run peer group reviews for councillors responsible for planning services.
- Run one to one and learning action workshops.
- Disseminated best practice case studies.

### COMMISSION FOR ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- Produced a councillors Guide to Urban Design and run associated workshops.
- Disseminated good case studies of how councillors and partners have promoted good design.
- Promoted a scheme where councillors act as design champions in their areas.

ACADEMY FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

- The ASC has implemented a number of projects which promote community leadership, which councillors play a key role.
- Developed a strategic alliance with the new National Empowerment Network to promote skills for community engagement and empowerment.
- Developed a strategic alliance with local government improvement agencies.
- Re-launched the Leaders Network, recruiting more than 60 senior cross-sector decision-makers.

*The role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their responses to changes to the demands placed on planning departments*

47. Surveys demonstrated that PAS has had a positive impact, 62% of councillors and 90% of senior planning officers know of the existences of PAS, 91% of clients have expressed satisfaction with the service PAS offers, 65% of PAS clients have introduced changes to the operation of their planning departments following engagement with PAS.

48. ATLAS is independently monitored every three months. The effectiveness of ATLAS in terms of promoting capacity within planning departments it has engaged with is measured by examining seven measurable impacts such as speeding up process, saving time and money etc. ATLAS's latest quarterly report has described ATLAS as having a high level of impact. Some 87% of responses from planning departments which ATLAS had engaged with stated it had had a positive impact upon their organisation.

49. Cabe and ASC will illustrated the impact they have had on capacity building in local government planning departments in their evidence.

*The long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

50. The array of planning capacity building projects sponsored by the Department along with those from bodies sponsored by the Department such as Cabe, ASC, PAS and ATLAS has been well received by the planning community. These projects have had a tangible impact in terms of training new planners, increasing the capacity of the planning schools in the universities and providing CPD opportunities for existing planning practitioners and planning support staff.

51. However the gap in the planning skills and knowledge faced by local authorities, as illustrated by the research commissioned by the Department and the ASC, is a long term issue and will therefore require the Department, its partners, the profession and local government to continue to implement capacity building projects going forward.

52. The Department will continue to operate the Communities and Local Government Post Graduate Planning Bursary Scheme for a further three academic years from 2008–09 onwards, this will result in the funding of an additional 315 bursaries being distributed over this period at a cost of £3 million. We will also continue to fund those bodies delivering skills and capacity building on the ground. We also hope to be in a position to increase the funding available for this work through the CSR07 period.

53. It is important to ensure that there is proper coordination between bodies who are working to help local authorities and ensure that there is not duplication and overlaps. Firstly the fact that the Academy for Sustainable Communities and the Advisory Team for Large Applications will both be located in the new Homes and Communities Agency will help ensure that there is better coordination. In addition the establishment of Regional Improvement Partnerships are designed to ensure that capacity building across local authorities is coordinated and the Planning Advisory Service will be running pilots in a couple of regions to establish how this will operate in practice.

54. The Government believes that spatial planning is an exciting, creative, positive activity, which should act to promote a shared vision for the future development of our communities. It is for this reason that the Government has implemented the projects illustrated in this submission of evidence to promote planning skills and knowledge in local government planning departments.

Department of Communities and Local Government

February 2008

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## Memorandum by the Royal Town Planning Institute<sup>40</sup>

### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Skills development is a continuous requirement. It is underpinned by education, which provides the capacity to respond to changes (paragraphs 1 to 5).
- One of the greatest problems lies not in the supply of appropriate training but in the lack of demand from local authorities—pressures on time and financial resources often mean that training opportunities are not used (paragraphs 9 to 13).
- Individuals are more committed to ongoing professional development if they are part of a membership body with mandatory CPD requirements. Encouraging or requiring planning staff to take up professional membership is in the employer's interest. Training needs should be determined between employers and individuals (paragraphs 14 to 15).
- Both changes in the planning system and developments in knowledge and techniques are driving rapid changes in skills requirements. Managerial competences are equally significant (paragraphs 16 to 22).
- Key areas for developing skills include urban design, sustainable development, climate change, economic development, enforcement and community engagement (paragraphs 23 to 31).
- Elected member training should be a requirement, including ongoing training. Formal training should be backed up by opportunities for mutual learning. The focus should not just be on development control but on what effective spatial planning can achieve (paragraphs 32 to 35).
- Elected Member Review Bodies are a bad idea—but if they do go ahead then such bodies will need access to independent professional advice (paragraph 36).
- Central government needs to lead the way in culture change, shifting to a focus on outcomes rather than inputs. A key requirement for the sustainable communities agenda is leadership skills. There needs to be research into the skills we shall need for the future, not just for now (paragraphs 37 to 46).
- The government must take a long-term view on capacity-building so that we can respond to continuous change (paragraphs 47 to 50).
- Local authorities are in many cases not able to meet existing skills needs, let alone longer term developmental needs. The replacement of Planning Delivery Grant by Housing and Planning Delivery Grant may make this worse (paragraphs 51 to 55).

### INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL POINTS

1. Changes in skills requirements are continuous. This is a function of changes in policy, legislation, techniques and our social, economic and environmental requirements. Professional planners will need to learn new sets of skills several times over in the course of their careers.

2. So thinking about skills needs is essentially a long-term requirement. But there are some basic necessary constants for ensuring that changing skills and knowledge needs can be met.

*An education which covers the “why” as well as the “what” and the “how”—because if we understand the why then we can develop the what and the how as conditions change. All skills are underpinned by education*

3. Initial professional education is and should be primarily a matter between the university and the professional body. RTPI and planning schools have made significant progress in recent years in making accredited courses<sup>41</sup> more accessible, affordable and relevant; and in making it easier to introduce new courses. [see Annex A: Accredited courses and Student Numbers]. In the last three years four “new” universities (Glasgow, Kingston, Strathclyde and Cork) have found it possible to enter the planning education market.

4. The role of the postgraduate student bursaries offered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and subsequently the Department for communities and local Government has been highly effective in supporting this effort, attracting a very high calibre of students into planning: to date 92% of recipients hold a first or upper-second undergraduate degree. The RTPI obviously recommends that this should continue for as long as possible<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> The Royal Town Planning Committee is a charity which exists to advance the science and art of spatial planning for the benefit of the public. It has a professional membership of 20,000. It operates the Planning Aid service in England.

<sup>41</sup> ie, courses from which successful graduates can proceed via the Assessment of Professional Competence direct to full corporate membership [MRTPI]

<sup>42</sup> For the academic year 2006–07, CLG paid a standard rate of student fees (£3,168) and a stipend of £6,000 (£500 per month living costs) for 136 post graduate students. Totalling £9,168 per student. Since its inception CLG has funded 513 students at a cost of £4.8 million.

5. We are aware that there is some concern that around half of the bursary recipients proceed straight into the private sector. In so far as (a) the bursary scheme increases the overall pool, and (b) most new entrants understand that career paths now frequently mean service in both public and private sectors, we do not see grounds for panic. There is also strong anecdotal evidence from planning schools, backed up now by the Academy for Sustainable Communities' report *Mind the Skills Gap*<sup>43</sup>, that the private sector secures first choice by smarter, earlier recruiting.

*The availability of suitable training or developmental courses which allow planners to acquire new skills*

6. We think that this is probably the least significant of the factors in the training problem.

7. There is a well-developed and competitive market place for training, with courses provided by universities, companies and professional bodies, not least the RTPI itself. The RTPI seeks to provide a full range of training opportunities throughout England and the devolved nations, including low-cost events [see Annex B], making full use of its matrix of regions and sectoral networks.

8. The market has shown that it can respond to changing conditions. Web-based material is increasing. Planning Matters, the on-line learning and support system sponsored by the RTPI, is a good example of this, and has even achieved a (so far modest) global market. Initiatives such as the RTPI's pilot Collaborative Working Groups based on action learning models illustrate a further broadening of the offer.

*The resources of time and money to support in service training, and the commitment of the employer to see that staff do develop their professional and other skills*

9. We believe this to be the single most critical factor in the overall training problem, and particularly serious in relation to local government. The best training in the world has little chance of success if the intended beneficiaries cannot access it.

10. We think the most obvious manifestation of this is the lack of money made available by or to local authorities to support an adequate programme of training as part of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Hard evidence for this is difficult to acquire—and worthy of proper investigation. What there is suggests quite wide variations [see Annex C], but those at a low level are apparently frequently at a desperately low level. In these circumstances professional will be hard-pressed to maintain current skill levels, let alone improve them.

11. Another very significant factor in the problem, although even harder to substantiate evidentially, is the lack of time available to professional staff in local authorities to undertake training<sup>44</sup>. In many authorities particularly in the southern part of the country, this is exacerbated by recruitment difficulties, or retention difficulties in areas facing local government re-organisation<sup>45</sup>. A partial solution to this would be to ensure that local authorities do not use scarce resources of professional staff to do administrative work.

12. We believe that achieving an adequate long-term solution to this problem requires that professional development and training should be an integral part of performance management regimes required by either the National Audit Office or CLG itself.

13. RTPI seeks to encourage employers to support training and professional development through its "Learning Partners" programme, which kite-marks good employers who make and maintain this commitment, which includes active discussion between the employer and the individual about their development needs. This new initiative (since 2007) has already been taken up by several local authorities [see Annex D].

*The commitment of the individual to developing skills and knowledge*

14. Individual commitment to developing professional knowledge, and maintaining professional standards, is evidenced only when the person is a member of a professional body which, like the RTPI, has a mandatory CPD requirement. A mandatory requirement does not necessarily mean being specific about what the individual should study<sup>46</sup>; it does mean in the case of the RTPI that the individual is subject to sanction for failing to provide proof of CPD work.

15. In times of shortages of qualified planners (but not in all parts of the country) local authorities are understandably diffident about insisting on full professional qualifications. Nevertheless they could help themselves if they required any employee who represented themselves as "eligible for RTPI [or other professional] membership" to actually acquire it. A claimed "eligibility" simply does not equate with the fact

<sup>43</sup> Page 5, point 7

<sup>44</sup> This is particularly problematic in relation to in-service training to develop urban design skills, which is usually associated with studio work. Using funding from the former DfES, RTPI has led a programme to develop a programme which make maximum use of distance-learning techniques.

<sup>45</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that these pressures are also a significant factor in the low morale attributed to many local authority planning offices.

<sup>46</sup> RTPI CPD policy is under review to consider whether there should be some mandatory elements such as, for example, professional ethics

of membership. This is even more the case now that the RTPI has introduced its Assessment of Professional Competence, which requires individuals to undertake structured Continuing Professional Development with the assistance of a mentor before they can be admitted to Corporate Membership.

#### RECENT CHANGES TO THE RANGE AND DETAIL OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NEEDED BY STAFF WITHIN PLANNING DEPARTMENTS

16. These are best grouped into three broad categories:
- a) The changing requirements of the planning system.
  - b) The changing requirements around technical skills.
  - c) Managerial and generic skills and competences.

##### *Changing requirements of the planning system*

17. The planning system has been in a state of flux since 2004, and this continues, with legislative change (the Planning Reform Bill, the Housing and Regeneration Bill and ultimately the Sub National Review), policy changes (new planning Policy Statements), and the legal case-work that emerges from this. This is why “legal updates” are always amongst the most popular training events—in our most recent survey 60% of members identified this as an important area for their CPD programmes. Staying “current” and not exposing the local authority to legal challenge is a major concern for local government planners.

18. We do think that both the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) and Government Offices could potentially do more to support the development of planners. For example, there is real nervousness in many local authorities around the requirements of the “test of soundness” which is a key element in the examination of Local Development Frameworks. CLG intends to issue revised guidance on this very shortly, which is welcome, but if PINS were simply to produce an annual report specifically on the test of soundness, using examples of cases upheld or rejected, then that would be a very powerful and cost-effective learning tool.

##### *Changing requirements for technical skills*

19. A key point is that the field of spatial planning is so wide that no individual could ever have all the skills necessary to cover all facets—so being able to bring in specialist knowledge from outside [eg for environmental work] is an integral part of “capacity”.

20. In general the areas of most rapid change are around:
- Environmental and climate change issues.
  - Effective spatial planning practices, which focus on integrated local strategies, including infrastructure provision—as identified in a recent joint CLG, RTPI, Mayor of London and Joseph Rowntree Fund project<sup>47</sup>.
  - Community engagement.

The effective practice in spatial planning initiative covers a wide range of skills, reflecting its holistic and outcomes-focused nature [see Annex E]. We believe that this goes to the heart of what the sustainable communities agenda seeks to achieve. We intend to promote it very actively to chief executives, elected members and planners in local government, and hope to have some government support to do so.

21. There is obviously some cross-over between the areas of system change and technical change: for example, if the Planning Bill introduces the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy, that will undoubtedly create a new training requirement. So would the Competition Commission’s proposed ‘competition test’ for supermarkets, although it is not clear whether this would be part of the planning system or a separate regulatory regime.

##### *Managerial and generic skills and competences*

22. Planning departments have complex functions, and operate in an increasingly complex environment. Generic management skills which enable them to handle work-flow and knowledge-flow efficiently are thus a key part of the overall equation. As useful initiatives like Multi Area Agreements become a more significant part of their work, the demand for such skills will increase. The RTPI’s Collaborative Working Groups, which form part of the Planners in the Workplace Programme, are designed to assist with this through shared action learning.

<sup>47</sup> *Shaping and Delivering Tomorrow’s Places: Effective Practices in Spatial Planning* UCL and Deloitte, 2007—see—<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/281>

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 THE MAIN AREAS WHERE A LACK OF SKILLS IS MOST PRONOUNCED

23. Our most recent survey of members dates to 2005.

24. Areas in which members express the greatest need for training are not necessarily those where a lack of skills is most pronounced. Evidence suggests that by virtue of entering a specialist area, planners become more aware of the wide range of knowledge and skill that could be acquired, and then wish to develop their specialism. Nevertheless, the anecdotal evidence suggests that the issues identified in paragraphs 27 and 29 below are still the areas of greatest concern.

25. There is a distinction to be drawn also between basic levels of “awareness” and specialist knowledge and skill. This is particularly true of urban design: many planners are anxious to develop skills of appreciation of urban design issues; many fewer want or believe they have the aptitude to develop actual urban design skills.

26. Urban design is of quite critical importance in relation to the government’s aspirations for housing delivery. Encouraging or requiring volume house-builders to achieve high standards of urban design remains one of the most intractable problems in planning. Unless and until we can make real progress here, together with the issue of delivering infrastructure, the common public view that new development is more likely to be bad than good will continue to frustrate housing programmes.

*Planning-related knowledge and skills*

27. Figures for areas of planning/technical skill identified as areas for development<sup>48</sup>:

- Urban design training (63%).
- Sustainable development (68%).
- Economic development (44%).
- Transport planning (36%).
- Climate change and environmental planning (48%).
- Regional/strategic spatial strategies (42%).
- Enforcement training (24%).
- Minerals and waste planning (15% and 18%).

28. Enforcement training now has a sponsor in the RTPI’s National Association for Planning Enforcement (NAPE). This has been an unfashionable, but vital, area for skills development. There is huge value in having a body such as NAPE to focus the expertise of “users” on how to develop and deliver training programmes. The RTPI’s other networks (eg transport planning, urban design, development management) increasingly fulfil this role in their own areas<sup>49</sup>.

*Managerial and generic skills and competences*

29. Leading topics here are:

- Project management (65%).
- Public speaking and presentation (60%).
- Leadership and motivation (59%).
- Financial appraisal (55%).
- Community engagement (54%).
- Strategic thinking (52%).
- Change management (51%).

30. These are relatively high-level management and leadership skills: as such they are unlikely to be present to any great extent in more junior professionals, but do point up the need for management and leadership skills to be developed in local authorities. With its focus on Management and Leadership skills, the RTPI Planners in the Workplace Programme should also be able to assist in this area.

31. Community engagement skills are increasingly important as the true value of participatory democracy is recognised. Not all planners can develop in-depth community engagement skills, but all should have a proper level of awareness of what constitutes effective community engagement. The RTPI’s Planning Aid programme is a very cost-effective means of making such skills and awareness training available. The RTPI allows its members to count Planning Aid work towards their CPD requirements in recognition of this.

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<sup>48</sup> % figure equals % of planners surveyed who indicated each topic as an area for development

<sup>49</sup> see [http://www.rtpi.org.uk/events\\_awards\\_and\\_networking/networks\\_and\\_associations](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/events_awards_and_networking/networks_and_associations) for full list

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THE SKILLS NEEDED BY, AND LEVEL OF TRAINING PROVIDED TO, COUNCILLORS WHO MAKE PLANNING DECISIONS, INCLUDING ON THE PROPOSED LOCAL MEMBER REVIEW BODIES

32. The RTPI believes that all councillors who are members of bodies which have powers of decision in planning should be required to undertake some basic training in planning.

33. Training should cover the basic concepts (eg land-use not land user), the policy and statutory framework, key procedures which involve councillors, the probity dimension, and enforcement. About three days is required initially plus at least a day annually to maintain and develop skills and knowledge.

34. Beyond the basic, formal and refresher training we believe that elected members develop their knowledge best through a process of briefings and updates, and the opportunity to share experiences. Many local councillors become very knowledgeable about planning through long years of experience, and many seek enthusiastically to develop their knowledge through membership of the RTPI's Planners in Politics Network (PIPA) (now with approximately 225 members and growing rapidly) and the Elected Members School of the annual Planning Summer School (which attracts about 400 delegates annually).

35. But the focus should not just be on development control. There is an imperative need to help elected members understand and embrace what can be done through effective practices of spatial planning to help their communities achieve the infrastructure, the quality of environment, the quality of development and the services which they need (see paragraph 20).

36. As regards Local Member Review Bodies, the RTPI advises against this idea strongly: appellate functions should not be carried out by the body responsible for the first decision. But if they are to be set up, then (a) the elected members must have access to appropriate professional advice—they cannot be subject to the jeopardy of dealing with appeals without such advice; (b) that advice cannot come from the department which made the original decision; so (c) it must either be provided by the Inspectorate or by being bought in from outside. This will inevitably be a less efficient, more costly and less well-regarded arrangement than currently obtains.

THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF AGENCIES INVOLVED IN MONITORING, DEVELOPING AND PROVIDING SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR PLANNING OFFICIALS AND COUNCILLORS, AND THEIR RESPONSE TO CHANGES TO THE DEMANDS PLACED ON PLANNING DEPARTMENTS

37. There is a plethora of such bodies now—the CLG itself, the Academy for Sustainable Communities, the Asset Skills Council, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, the Local Government Association, the Planning Advisory Service, Planning Summer School, Regional Centres of Excellence, Regional Development Authorities, the Urban Design Alliance, various planning schools and private sector bodies—and not least the RTPI.

38. In these circumstances there is inevitably some duplication of effort; and some reinventing of wheels. Co-ordination of effort is difficult, not least because some of these bodies perceive themselves to be in competition rather than in alliance. Some conventions on sharing data—an “open method of co-ordination”—would be helpful.

39. Perhaps the single biggest problem, although by its nature it is almost impossible to quantify, however, has been the “target culture”, which until now has equated local authority performance in planning with a crude and incomplete set of essentially input (not outcome) indicators.

40. When the 2004 Act was introduced Government said correctly that “changing the culture” was as important as revising the legislation. That change, to a culture focused on how integrated and inclusive practices of spatial planning can help make better places, has been achieved to only a very limited extent: and a large part of the problem is within central government itself, where planning is still seen primarily as a “blueprint-regulatory” function rather than a collaborative and creative activity focused on outcomes and delivery<sup>50</sup>.

41. This is not helped at all by the confusion around the role of the Government Offices in planning—whether they are counsellors or constables—which makes some of them ineffective in either role.

42. This is a difficult area. There is and should be scope for a plurality of approaches to developing skills. Indeed the very last thing that we need is another new central agency seeking to define its own unique authority and territory. If more of the money which has been spent on institutions had passed direct to training and education programmes, we should probably have seen more results on the ground.

43. There is also a particular danger in seeking to turn what may be quite acceptable as political shorthand or rhetoric—the term “sustainable communities” itself, for example—into functional training programmes. In reality there are no special sustainable communities skills: there is instead a vast range of knowledge and expertise, both formal and informal, which can and does contribute to making better places.

44. The real purchase in the term sustainable communities lies not in the identification of a specific range of skill-sets, although it is helpful to the extent that it encourages thinking across disciplinary boundaries. It lies instead in a focus on how communities can develop as much of a shared vision as is possible (because

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<sup>50</sup> CLG and RTPI have commissioned jointly a study into “Measuring the Outcomes of Spatial Planning in England”, which is due to complete shortly. We hope that this will help to make that shift.

there will always be some dissent) about what that abstract notion means in practice in relation to their circumstances, their needs, their resources and their responsibilities to other or broader communities. The missing skills which this calls for are to a very large extent leadership skills.

45. Because our present development standards are ultimately unsustainable, we need to focus forwards: there should be an integrated research programme involving all stakeholders which analyses performance (real performance, ie outcomes) with a view specifically to identifying areas of priority for innovation in policy or practice—in other words, to develop new skills and expertise beyond those we currently have. This could be led jointly by CLG and DEFRA; alternatively it could be led by the Planning Education and Research Network which the RTPI is launching this year.

46. From this analysis five recommendations flow:

- a) No new agencies, but a co-ordinated effort to establish needs and deficiencies in local government though shared survey and data analysis.
- b) Open discussion about the implications of such data, and likely future requirements, so that providers can respond to the signals effectively and in good time.
- c) As government develops new Planning Policy Statements or other policy documents with implications for planning, it should give explicit consideration to the likely training and skills implications of the change, advised by its stakeholders—a form of skills or training impact assessment.
- d) A “top leaders” programme for elected members and senior officials from both central and local government to share experience and ideas about what it really means to seek to deliver sustainable communities.
- e) A joint research effort focused on identifying new skills and expertise that we shall need in the future.

#### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES AS THEY RESPOND TO CHANGES IN THE DEMANDS PLACED ON THEM

47. The change process is and will be continuous. It is possible to anticipate some changes, as priorities shift: an increasing urgency about reducing carbon and other emissions, requiring better understanding of the requirements of carbon-neutral development, the further development of techniques such as the Merton Rule, the need to explore the potential of Live-Work quarters or clusters to raise sustainability targets, the need to re-use wherever possible rather than build new.

48. But the point is that central government needs to have a long-term view on this—not one which rises and falls with three-year spending programmes. Defining the programmes needed now is actually less important than defining how the capacity to respond to continuous change will be developed and sustained over the long-run.

49. There are three necessary elements to this:

- a) Central government needs to make it very clear to local authorities that they have a duty to seek to ensure that both elected members and professional officers are given the resources of time and money necessary to develop their knowledge and expertise.
- b) If it wills the end, it must will the means: central government must be clear about how this should be financed.
- c) The role of the Government Offices in the regions needs to be clarified: if they have a support role, then it needs to be articulated more clearly, and the planning staff there need to be strengthened and up-skilled to fulfil that role properly.

50. There are also some short-term initiatives which the government or its agencies could take. PINS should have a more overt role in education and skills. For example, and in line with the proposal in paragraph 18 in relation to the test of soundness, an annual report by PINS focusing specifically on cases involving urban design and volume house-builders, setting out where appeals were upheld and why, or not, would be another very powerful learning tool for local authorities.

#### *The long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

51. A significant number of local authorities have made very effective use of their allocations of Planning Delivery Grant to recruit internally and place these staff on part-time or other blended delivery planning education programmes. By this means they bring on staff who are known to them, already committed to local government and who can work while they learn.

52. It is not clear yet exactly how the new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant will work. CLG has said that “. . . HPDG will be unringfenced and so can be used according to local priorities,” but nevertheless its clearly stated purpose is “. . . to incentivise increased housing delivery and improved plan-making to address

local needs. On that basis our proposed allocation mechanism for consists of two elements, one for housing delivery and one for planning.”<sup>51</sup> This seems likely to discourage the focus on long-term investment in education and training, and that is regrettable.

53. There is overall no shortage of courses offering skills-development to planners, or elected members. There is a significant amount of capacity in some (not all) planning schools to develop new courses to meet new demand. There is the capacity to carry out the research to establish shifts in, and likely new, demand, although it needs better co-ordination (see paragraph 45).

54. Again, the single greatest problem is on the demand side rather than the supply side. Local government is either not a sufficiently willing or a sufficiently able customer for continuing professional or other skills development. For this there is a variety of reasons, ranging from shortage of resources to recruit staff, inability to retain permanent staff, lack of funds to support skills development or simply a set of priorities which does not recognise the need to allocate resources to this.

55. So far from a programme of effective long-term measures, the general picture is of a failure to meet any more than the most immediate needs. There is no reason for any general optimism unless and until we can change that.

## Annex A

### ACCREDITED QUALIFICATIONS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

#### ACCREDITED PLANNING SCHOOLS

25 Planning Schools currently offer qualifications accredited by the RTPI, and two Schools have provisional accreditation.

Accredited and provisionally accredited planning schools are distributed in England (20 schools), Scotland (5), Wales (1), Northern Ireland (1), the Irish Republic (2) and Hong Kong (1).

#### 2. ACCREDITED QUALIFICATIONS

The following qualifications are accredited by the RTPI:

##### *Undergraduate*

**38** undergraduate route qualifications. This includes routes which are accredited as four year integrated routes (or five years, including a placement year), and three year qualifications which must be taken with a specialist Masters degree (see below) in order to be fully accredited.

##### *Postgraduate*

**29** 180 credit intensive Masters degrees (“combined” qualifications, so completion of this qualification in one year full time or two years part-time allows the holder to continue to Chartered Membership through the APC).

**3** (including one provisional) 240 credit Masters degrees (completed over two years full time).

**5** postgraduate “spatial” qualifications (must be completed with a “specialist” qualification in order to hold a fully accredited route).

**34** (including one provisional) postgraduate “specialist” qualifications (must be completed with a “specialist” qualification at either undergraduate or postgraduate level in order to hold a fully accredited route).

**1** MPhil

**1** PhD

**Total: 111**

#### 3. NUMBER OF STUDENTS (2006–07 ACADEMIC YEAR)

Extracted from “Annual statistical returns from planning schools: results for the 2006–07 academic year”, RTPI August 2007.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Housing & Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) Consultation on allocation mechanism* (CLG 2007)—para 10 and introduction to Part B

<sup>52</sup> This data is incomplete through failure of some schools to make returns. It therefore represents an under-assessment of the full picture.

**Table 1**  
 STUDENT ENTRY TO FIRST YEAR OF RTP1-ACCREDITED COURSES IN THE 2006-07 ACADEMIC YEAR

<i>Type of course</i>	<i>Number of courses</i>	<i>Full-time</i>		<i>Part-time</i>		<i>Distance</i>		<i>Other modes</i>		<i>Total number</i>
		<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	
Intensive one-year Masters	17	405	50	405	50	–	–	2	<1	812
Other combined Masters	6	9	10	10	11	72	79	–	–	91
Spatial/specialistMasters	11	72	71	29	29	–	–	–	–	101
All postgraduate courses	34	486	48	444	44	72	7	2	<1	1,004
Undergraduate courses	21	500	97	18	3	–	–	–	–	518
<b>All courses</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>1,522</b>

**Table 2**

TOTAL ENROLMENT FOR ALL YEARS, INCLUDING YEAR 1, ON RTP1-ACCREDITED COURSES IN THE 2006-07 ACADEMIC YEAR

<i>Type of course</i>	<i>Number of courses</i>	<i>Full-time</i>		<i>Part-time</i>		<i>Distance</i>		<i>Other modes</i>		<i>Total number</i>
		<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	
Intensive one-year Masters	17	422	33	843	66	–	–	18	1	1,283
Other combined Masters	10	97	27	45	12	221	60	3	1	366
Spatial/specialistMasters	11	72	53	56	42	–	–	7	5	135
All postgraduate courses	38	591	33	944	53	221	12	28	2	1,784
Undergraduate courses	28	1,633	94	105	6	–	–	2	<1	1,741
<b>All courses</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>2,224</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1,049</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3,525</b>

## RTPI CONFERENCE TOPICS OFFERED IN 2007

## RTPI CONFERENCES MOST POPULAR CONFERENCES AND CLASSES 2007

*Planning*

<i>Conference</i>	<i>Delegates</i>	<i>Outings per year</i>
Planning Convention <sup>53</sup>	722	1
Planning law update	248	2
Current issues in planning	151	1
Design in the planning process	128	1
Renewable energy	127	1
Local Development Frameworks	125	1

*Personal Management Skills*

<i>Course</i>	<i>Delegates</i>	<i>Outings per year</i>
Negotiation skills	99	4
Results focused time management	55	4
Project management for everyone	53	3
Introduction to management	45	2
Effective report writing	32	2

*Masterclass*

<i>Course</i>	<i>Delegates</i>	<i>Outings per year</i>
Giving evidence at inquiries	65	2
Making development happen	59	2
Urban design	48	3
Strategic environmental assessments	42	2
Local development frameworks	38	2
Introduction to design appraisal	34	2

(occurrence, where more than once, in brackets)

## SELECTED TOPICS—PLANNING

Affordable housing  
 Appeals and LDFs  
 Built environment conservation  
 Current approaches to open space  
 Design in the planning process  
 Development management  
 Economic development: The new PPS4  
 Engaging communities  
 Enforcement update  
 E-planning  
 From planning gain to infrastructure funding  
 Getting the best development on the site  
 Housing design  
 Housing pressures  
 Inner city renewal  
 Key planning issues 2008

<sup>53</sup> Major event, with international and Ministerial speakers covering wide range of topics

Leisure and tourism  
Local development frameworks  
Mixed use developments  
Planning and health in the community  
Planning for climate change: implications of PPS26  
Planning for the natural environment  
Planning law update  
Regional spatial strategies  
Renewable energy  
Retail and town centres (2)  
Rural regeneration  
Successful delivery—successful regeneration  
Sustainable communities—a tool kit  
Transport  
Underpinning sustainable communities  
Understanding development finance  
Understanding the design appraisal process  
Urban design  
Waste management

#### PERSONAL SKILLS

Effective report writing  
Effective talent management  
Introduction to management  
Negotiation skills  
Perfect presentations  
Project management for everyone  
Results focused time management

#### MASTERCLASSES

An introduction to design appraisal  
Delivering good developments  
Giving evidence at inquiries  
Local development frameworks  
Making development happen  
Renewable energy  
Strategic environmental assessments  
Urban design: the art of making successful places

#### FREE AND LOW COST EVENTS FROM RTPI REGIONS, NATIONS, NETWORKS AND EVENTS 2008

This a representative selection of events scheduled for 2008 which are provided either free or at low cost to respond to local requirements.

Design and access statements  
Life after decent homes  
Planning law update  
Planning performance agreements  
Planning the South East's future  
Working together to deliver housing targets  
LDFs—where are we, and where are we heading?

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Renewable energy and energy efficiency—making it happen  
 Planning law—new directions  
 Developments with development plans  
 Housing: modern living or changing fashion?  
 The Scottish housing challenge: can planners deliver?  
 The historic environment  
 Regional spatial strategy  
 Planning and climate change  
 RTPI Networks Conference  
 Planning for housing—three million extra homes by 2020!  
 Planning and transport  
 Miscellany of planning law  
 Development Control  
 Development Management  
 AAP's in practice: study tour of Birmingham  
 Rural land use: debating the future  
 Economic development  
 Rural planning update  
 Planning administrators' workshop  
 Planning and climate change  
 Wales planning conference  
 1948 to 2008—How far have we come and where are we going?  
 Masterplanning in an historic environment  
 Planning and economic development  
 Planning and sustainable design  
 Street planning design  
 Preparing to win planning inquiries  
 Tourism—can a tourist attraction really achieve 'economic renaissance'?  
 Development plans update 2008  
 Employment planning policy for the 21st century  
 LDFs and emerging best practice  
 Promoting sustainable transport  
 Planning law update 2008  
 Conservation—design  
 Development management  
 Development control update  
 Making development happen  
 Retail planning  
 Brushing up on planning skills: preparing and giving evidence  
 Spatial strategic planning

**Annex C****TRAINING BUDGETS IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

Information on budget expenditure per head of planning staff is difficult to procure, not least because budgets are held in very different ways across authorities.

A survey of twenty local authorities by RTPI and its agents showed that:

- Training budgets vary significantly, with a small sample showing a range from £100–£500 per head per year.

- Smaller district councils are unlikely to have annual training budgets in excess of £5k for between 10 and 15 staff. Larger authorities, including unitaries and counties, understandably generally have larger and more flexible budgets.
- Practice varies whether training budgets also cover sponsorship of initial professional education, or the payment of subscriptions. Where these are included in training budgets larger figures can mask a low spend on ongoing professional development for mid-career planners.
- In some authorities, the above costs and any “loyalty payments” are allocated out of salary budgets, which therefore supports the training budget.
- Many LAs have drawn down on PDG into the training budget, and now express concerns at how they will be able to continue to deliver training following the demise of PDG.
- Many LA planners have seen or are anticipating significant cuts in their training budgets.
- Undeniably, LAs are finding it difficult to recruit at the level of experienced planners. It is therefore not at all unusual to find two or three Chartered planners working alongside and supporting five or six unqualified planners working towards Chartered status and at various stages of their planning education. This also puts pressure on the Chartered planners’ time in terms of undertaking their own CPD.

**Annex E**

**SKILL REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN SPATIAL PLANNING**

- Updating on the role and direction of public service reform
- Collection and use of evidence
- Visioning
- Scenario building
- Scoping
- Modelling alternative outcomes
- Evaluative methods
- Decision and resolution techniques
- Benefits realisation from IT systems for business processes, monitoring and performance
- Networking
- Partnership working
- Facilitation
- Modern consultation techniques
- Management of people and resources
- Cultural change
- Organisational sensitivity
- Business process reengineering
- Positive public sector strategy development skills
- Programme management skills
- Project management
- Financial appraisal
- Achieving successful community leadership
- (Para 6.3.8 Developing new skills—some specific tools and approaches)

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**Memorandum by Advisory Team for Large Applications**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 ATLAS (Advisory Team for Large Applications) provides an independent advisory service to local authorities that are experiencing the pressure of increased development activity. ATLAS works with local authorities and the private sector to facilitate the efficient delivery of high quality large scale developments (generally over 500 homes and likely to include a mix of uses). It has recently expanded its geographical area from South East, South West, East of England and London to include East and West Midlands. The original core objective of ATLAS was to engage in large scale projects to assist delivery. As the team has developed

and grown, the scope of its activity has broadened to respond to the various complex issues that are involved in achieving delivery and ATLAS now provides a thorough and holistic service based on a model of project working, learning, dissemination and influencing.

1.2 This paper sets out our evidence on the capacity of planning skills in local government based on ATLAS's experience, together with an outline of ATLAS's involvement and effectiveness in raising skills levels across the planning profession.

## 2. OUR EVIDENCE

2.1 This evidence to the Select Committee is structured under four overarching workstreams through which ATLAS is delivering its service and engaging with the planning community in practice:

- Project development and delivery.
- Research and dissemination.
- Planning system development.
- Collaboration.

### *Project development and delivery*

2.2 Since its establishment in 2004, ATLAS has supported almost 50 local authorities in bringing forward large scale development projects involving over of 90,000 residential units. We therefore have a significant body of experience from which to draw some conclusions on the skills capacity within local government to deliver large scale development and sustainable communities. However, ATLAS experience thus far has been limited to the South East, South West and East of England and may not reflect skills and capacity issues elsewhere in the country. It is also important to recognise that ATLAS is only involved in a proportion of Local Planning Authorities across its area of operation (currently approximately 25%) and thus are only exposed to those issues where support has specifically been requested. This may be down to limited awareness of what ATLAS can offer, no large scale projects requiring ATLAS assistance in other Local Planning Authority areas, or a true (or at least perceived) no need for ATLAS support in these areas.

2.3 From ATLAS's experience, many of the local authorities we work with (particularly those that have not previously experienced substantive growth on a large scale) have struggled to make the step change needed to bring forward large scale and complex projects in a comprehensive, inclusive and managed way. Good corporate leadership and strong collaboration skills within local authorities can be highly variable and this influences the overall approach to management and delivery of large scale projects within the organisation. Particular skills gaps that ATLAS has been requested by local authorities to provide assistance with in respect of delivering projects include:

- vision and objective setting;
- project management & process;
- master planning process;
- technical issues including transport advice, urban design and sustainable construction;
- planning obligations—objective setting, process for negotiating, and technical advice on areas like affordable housing and social infrastructure;
- project viability and development finance; and
- consultation and communication techniques.

2.4 With respect to the specific tasks that ATLAS has engaged in to date, the greatest proportion have related to providing advice and assistance on project management and delivery; followed by advice on master-planning and urban design; and then in relation to scoping, evidencing and negotiating planning obligations.

2.5 The above information clearly indicates that there continues to be a critical skills gap both in generic and technical skills in managing large scale projects to secure well-planned, sustainable new development. ATLAS is well-placed to help address these gaps in that it can focus on specific projects and essentially act as a “critical friend” to a local authority during the life of a development proposal providing targeted assistance where required, often in tandem with other bodies such as CABE.

2.6 In terms of how ATLAS operates, we include a thorough inception stage for any new project that we engage with. This is critical in helping us identify with the Local Planning Authority the nature of the project and identify the resources and skills available or lacking to help progress it. Following the inception stage, ATLAS provides advice, examples of good practice, assistance and support in dealing with negotiations and third parties. A key aspect of our engagement with a local authority is that we are very clear that any “learning” that arises from our engagement should be disseminated throughout the authority and applied to other projects in order to maximize impacts across as broad an audience as possible.

2.7 ATLAS strongly believes that responsibility for bringing forward major development within a Local Authority goes well beyond the planning department. It needs high level corporate support, and a range of skills and competencies that are both technical and generic. There must be a recognition that the Development Team for a particular project stretches across departmental boundaries to include technical skills found in housing, corporate policy, leisure, environment, legal and transport functions and that all must work collaboratively to understand the issues in the round and agree a way forward in an efficient manner. This regularly stretches beyond a single authority, for example in two tier locations, where functions such as transport and education lie with the county, and where developments straddle authority boundaries. Difficult decisions are likely to be required, eg where objectives are incompatible or priorities need to be identified, to achieve the best planning balance. This relies on corporate competencies at a high level including leadership, clear decision-making, confidence, relationship building, risk-taking and good communication.

2.8 In ATLAS experience both strong collaboration and good corporate leadership within a Local Authority can be highly variable. Often planning as a function is given low priority, buried deep in the corporate structure. There is often little recognition of the scale and breadth of resources that will be required to handle a major project, or indeed the need for the overall process to be managed holistically.

2.9 In assisting local authorities on projects, ATLAS focuses on building capacity and confidence in those local planning authorities with which it is engaged, enabling them to improve their abilities and use their resources most effectively to manage and deliver large scale development proposals. Collaboration is key to the ATLAS approach and local authorities are strongly encouraged to build positive relationships with developers and other stakeholders.

2.10 ATLAS believes that planners cannot be experts in all technical issues but that a basic level of understanding across multiple issues is necessary, coupled with generic skills in communication, evaluation and negotiation. Levels of project management skills generally appear to be low, and often project management is perceived to be or made overly complicated, such as through a reliance on over-complex technical software not well suited to the needs of a particular project.

2.11 In ATLAS experience authorities often also lack the visioning and leadership skills to articulate to a developer what it is seeking to achieve on a site (a vision and objectives), and its response to a proposal is often a reactive one. ATLAS shares CABE's view that there is a deficit of skills in creating good places, and that authorities need assistance to focus on the quality of the outcomes, and to reintroduce greater challenge, creativity and innovation into planning. This should move the process away from being a reactive, often adversarial mentality focussed on "control" and "them and us" to a more collaborative and participative system embodying greater trust and understanding.

2.12 The problem that many authorities face is simply a lack of officers, particularly those with adequate experience and knowledge of local context. There are many reasons for this—stretched budgets, difficulties in retaining staff—which have been analysed and written up extensively elsewhere, including research by Academy for Sustainable Communities (Mind the Skills Gap report, 2007) and Planning Advisory Service (PAS). Some authorities are embracing the problem by investing in young staff with limited experience who can be trained up.

2.13 In addition, the skills debate is not restricted to officers within the Local Planning Authority. ATLAS project experience suggests that private sector generic and technical skills and attitudes can also be highly variable. The change in working practices to a more structured and collaborative process is also proving challenging to the development industry as a whole, including developers, consultants and other key third parties. Addressing established working practices takes time and culture change will undoubtedly take some time to achieve.

#### ATLAS Effectiveness

2.14 The ATLAS service is independently evaluated and monitored every 3 months in relation to those projects it is actively engaged with. This aims to ensure that those individuals across the planning community that are working with ATLAS benefit from that engagement, and surveys them directly as to the value we may be adding to their work. The latest quarterly report illustrates a high level of impact among local authorities, with 87% of responses attributing some positive effects across a range of indicators illustrating that more often than not ATLAS has raised the skills and confidence in the authority for future work.

2.15 Interviewee responses are confidential, but the evaluation provides a useful commentary as to areas needing further work or identification of where we are being most successful. The reports contain useful quotes help to give a flavour of feedback such as "they put in place a good practice process for dealing with large applications; it's a model we will look to replicate at earlier stages in future" and "they provide practical, pragmatic, well considered advice".

### *Research and dissemination*

2.16 With its hands-on contact with local authorities, ATLAS is well placed to identify knowledge and skills gaps and respond accordingly. In ATLAS's experience, knowledge gaps among local authority officers can arise for a number of reasons—an inability or lack of political will to apply emerging or new guidance to local circumstances, lack of knowledge of good practice used elsewhere, lack of time or resource to research solutions to problems that may arise through the course of dealing with a large scale development proposal.

2.17 From its experience to date, ATLAS has identified a number of areas in which it could usefully provide guidance for planners including:

- the approach to managing large scale development;
- how to secure true collaborative working between the public and private sectors;
- what makes a sustainable high quality place and how to achieve it—in physical, environmental and social terms; and
- testing viability and in particular the relationship with delivering affordable housing.

2.18 ATLAS has adopted the general approach that dissemination should largely be based upon the knowledge gathered from direct project experience, to ensure that any guidance is both practical and useful to the planning community. This area of work has therefore been limited in the early years to enable a body of evidence and learning to be established, but is now becoming more important to ensure that good practice is communicated to as wide an audience as possible.

2.19 To date, dissemination of research and information by ATLAS has largely been achieved by the:

- creation of the “ATLAS Guide : Planning for Large Scale Development” website;
- preparation of research and guidance reports; and
- organisation of and presentation at workshops and events.

### ATLAS Guide: Planning for Large Scale Development

2.20 The ATLAS web-based Guide has been created to provide advice and help steer local authorities, other public sector bodies and private stakeholders through the town planning process in relation to large, complex or strategic development projects. ([www.atlasplanning.com](http://www.atlasplanning.com)). It draws upon the experience of the team of projects across a variety of locations and contexts. The Guide was launched in 2007 and is intended to be a live resource that will be updated regularly. Current usage averages over 1,000 visits per month and further awareness-raising initiatives will occur through 2008 to increase this considerably.

2.21 The Guide has evolved in close collaboration with a number of external stakeholders to ensure that its content is accurate and relevant. It contains an extensive range of topic papers and links to other research documents developed in partnership with a range of external stakeholders. By way of illustration, the topic paper on Heritage evolved with English Heritage, on Design Quality with CABE and on Engagement with CLG directly. The site is fully linked in to other web based planning initiatives such as the Planning Portal, CLG website, PAS website and Planning Officers Society. General feedback is positive with endorsements received such as:

2.22 “The ATLAS Guide contains a huge amount of well researched and comprehensive information and I'm sure it will become an invaluable, independent and authoritative source of advice and guidance for all involved in dealing with large scale planning projects.” Leonora Rozee OBE, Deputy Chief Exec & Director of Policy at PINS.

### Research and guidance reports

2.23 ATLAS will continue to develop guidance on areas where it has undertaken unique research based on its own intelligence. To date it has worked with PAS on researching Planning Delivery Agreements and more recently produced guidance for CLG on Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs—see below). ATLAS has also produced a report on the use of Cascades for affordable housing (in partnership with English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation), fed in to the evolution of the Urban Design Compendium (English Partnerships), and is working on a number of projects with external partners including ASC, Culture East Midlands, South East Excellence, the RTPI and others.

### Workshops and events

2.24 To date ATLAS has hosted or facilitated a number of events as well as taking part in dissemination events organised by others.

2.25 At the national level, in the latter half of 2007, ATLAS ran a series of nine conference events around the country on Planning Performance Agreements. Over 400 delegates attended, mainly from local authorities and statutory agencies and approximately 80% of attendees rated the events as good or excellent.

Two separate events were run jointly with PAS to provide training on facilitating the inception stage of PPAs, and ATLAS also assisted in the delivery of a separate PAS organised series of events focussed on Pre Application working and Design & Access Statements.

2.26 At a more local level, ATLAS facilitates workshops for local authorities covering specific issues such as vision and objective setting, design and master planning, affordable housing, and viability. Such workshops are tailor-made for the relevant local authority and have proved to be an effective way of disseminating knowledge and learning about issues relevant to a local project.

#### *Planning system development*

2.27 The new planning system is based on concepts of spatial planning and development management. Both of these require a planning system underpinned by collaboration and good communication. Effective development management and collaboration are central to the ATLAS approach. To support this approach ATLAS has been actively leading on promoting Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs). This concept has evolved from early research undertaken by ATLAS jointly with PAS in 2006 that explored the concept of Planning Delivery Agreements and led directly to a pilot project to test their use in practice. The outcome has been the formal introduction of PPAs into the planning system.

2.28 Given its involvement in project-based work with local authorities, ATLAS is well-placed to play a key role in the promotion, providing training and assisting in the roll-out of PPAs. It considers that PPAs will be an effective mechanism in raising the skills sets among local authority officers by providing an appropriate framework for managing large scale developments through a simple structure of defining objectives, issues and tasks.

2.29 However, PPAs are as much about a way of working as a project management tool. This requires a culture change that for many may take some time to materialise. Many authorities (and indeed developers) handling large scale sites remain focussed on a planning application and negotiation based on an adversarial approach rather than considering a major project from inception to delivery, and working collaboratively. PPAs should also encourage an authority and development partners to focus more on what it is trying to achieve for a site through shared vision and objective setting.

2.30 From ATLAS's experience, success can often be down to attitude and not necessarily by a lack of skills. Those who have the ability to act pro-actively, are committed and want to make things happen will often drive a project forward where others fail to. Some individuals have grown into the challenge if the corporate culture and the qualities of the individual allow. This is very variable across authorities.

2.31 Other partner organisations have undertaken valuable work on planning system development, such as PAS and Planning Officers Society Enterprises work on development management. ATLAS has and continues to contribute to a number of studies into the planning system and has positively contributed to steering groups eg CABE planning forum, PAS, National Planning Forum, Planning Officers Society, etc.

#### *Collaboration and partnership*

2.32 In considering the effectiveness of government in supporting Local Planning Authorities to respond to the challenges of delivering high quality and sustainable new communities, ATLAS recognises the need for central government and other public sector bodies to practice what they preach in providing a service that is joined-up, collaborative and comprehensive. It supports PAS objective of ensuring clarity on the role and purpose of each advisory organisation. It aims to achieve these ends by:

- Working in partnership with PAS on initiatives where we have a shared interest eg PPAs.
- Working with other agencies and organisations: with direct links to RTPI, Planning Officers Society and RIBA. This ensures we are complementing and supporting others rather than duplicating work.
- Creating “Memorandum of Understandings” with external partners to set out the principles of joint working. For example, ATLAS evolved an MoU with CABE, recognising that we are likely to increasingly be involved in the same areas, eg growth points, and need to provide and promote each other as complementary services. ATLAS promotes the CABE national and regional design review panels where appropriate for its projects.

2.33 ATLAS has also prepared an internal Communications Strategy which sets out in some detail how it intends to communicate and collaborate with a broad range of partners, to ensure that the overall offer of public sector support ATLAS makes is consistent and complementary to the services offered by other agencies.

### 3. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

3.1 ATLAS is well placed to comment on the practical difficulties being faced by planners in relation to the evolution, appraisal and delivery of planning proposals for large scale growth. Our services are tailored to respond to these difficulties, both on a project by project basis, and also in the way in which ATLAS disseminates guidance. The core areas ATLAS tends to provide support relate to:

- Project management and ensuring an effective, collaborative planning process.
- How to approach and secure high quality urban design through a structured masterplanning process.
- Understanding and appreciating the concept of spatial planning drawing in other influences into the process such as transport, movement, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, etc.
- Bridging the gap between the public and private sectors, for example by securing shared project objectives, appreciating the positions of alternative stakeholders, and building trust between the partners.
- Ensuring a holistic view is maintained, not least involving the appreciation of development economics, viability and risk.

3.2 The team is focussed on working with all those involved in large scale growth—including Local Planning Authority officers together with applicants, consultants and important third parties to help build capacity and enable them to work collaboratively to improve the quality of planning process. An improved process should lead directly to improvements to the quality of decision making and final development outcomes. ATLAS is not the final decision maker, but empowers others to take this role with confidence.

3.3 ATLAS is accessible to and committed to working positively with all involved in the planning process across both the public and private sectors, and is proactively working with other public sector support agencies and services to ensure the services it provides are practical, effective and complementary to other available support.

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## Memorandum by the South East England Development Agency

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) was established by the Government in April 1999 to take the strategic lead in promoting the sustainable economic development of the South East region of England.

1.2 SEEDA's mission is to work with its partners to make the South East of England a World Class region, achieving sustainable development and enhanced quality of life, as measured by:

- economic prosperity;
- environmental quality; and
- social inclusion, ensuring opportunities and meaningful employment for all.

1.3 The SEEDA region contains 74 local authorities and covers the county and unitary authority areas within the South East region—Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex. The region includes 12 unitary authorities and 55 district / borough councils.

1.4 SEEDA welcomes the decision by the CLG Select Committee to seek evidence on the broader range of planning skills required by local authority staff and elected members. In submitting evidence to the Committee SEEDA is drawing on research and experience gained from its South East Excellence initiative. South East Excellence is the brand name for the Regional Centre of Excellence for sustainable communities (RCE) in the South East region, launched in September 2005. Its mission is to “create opportunities to develop skills to build sustainable communities—quality places where people want to live, work and enjoy their leisure”. South East Excellence works to support the renaissance of towns and cities by encouraging individuals and organisations to learn new skills. Part of its task is to bring together organisations which want to establish methods of best practice for the built environment.

SEEDA / South East Excellence wishes to submit evidence on the following items identified for consideration by the CLG Select Committee.

## 2. SKILLS GAPS AND EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 The Inquiry is timely as Local authorities have a redefined role in the delivery of the Government's sustainable communities agenda; a shift confirmed by the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government and the White Papers on Strong and Prosperous Communities and Planning for a Sustainable Future. In addition to the existing (and substantial) local planning authority role, the challenges of these new responsibilities and of the Government's regional housing targets, New Growth Points and proposed Eco-Towns, demands a new, broader set of professional skills.

2.2 In 2007 under the banner of "South East Excellence" SEEDA commissioned research into the skills required by local authorities and others for delivery of these new emerging agendas<sup>1</sup>. Both reports confirm the findings of The Egan Review, published some three years earlier and previous regional research<sup>2</sup>, which identified the deficit in local authority staff's technical skills and experience, but critically also revealed important gaps in a set of generic skills for example, leadership, strategic vision and project management. The more recent research has also confirmed variable knowledge and experience in spatial, scenario and infrastructural planning, and in understanding of development and housing market finance.

### *Inter-relationships between agencies*

2.3 Our research has clearly indicated that the debate about skills to deliver sustainable communities cannot be restricted to the planning profession alone. As much as planners now need to understand the roles and contributions of agencies identified as having a role in the planning process, these agencies also need to be clear about the mechanisms by which they engage in the planning and development process. Local authorities have reported a lack of synergy between the expectations, including financial expectations and expectations of community involvement, of non-traditional partners in delivery such as police and PCT. Differences in approach were also reported in terms of project management, time/risk management, and spatial approach and more broadly around different working definitions of quality and sustainability.

### *Economic analysis*

2.4 In addition to the areas of skill deficit identified in our recent research, we are also mindful of the requirement proposed in the Government's *Review of Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration* (2007) (SNR) that local authorities should address more effectively the needs of their local economy through assessments of local economic wellbeing and the development of local economic evidence bases. While the consultation paper on the implementation of the SNR is awaited, there is regional evidence that the ability of local authorities to take up these responsibilities will be very limited.

2.5 As a statutory consultee for planning purposes SEEDA is consulted on the LDFs as they emerge. SEEDA's advice to local authorities encourages them to consult the Agency on components of their evidence base, particularly employment land reviews and strategic housing market assessments. Our experience is that many local authorities are starting from a low base understanding the evidence available and how it can be used. Few have specialists and rely extensively on consultants with standard templates and research reports. Such datasets do not necessarily take account of regional priorities as identified in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the impact that the implementation of such policies may have on the data.

## 3. COUNCILLOR SKILLS AND SUPPORT

3.1 In the current South East Excellence Action Plan, SEEDA identifies local authority elected members as key to the delivery of sustainable communities: "South East Excellence will work with councillors to inspire and help their understanding of the complex issues involved in developing the built environment and creation of sustainable communities"<sup>3</sup>.

3.2 Research commissioned by South East Excellence in 2007<sup>4</sup> sought to identify barriers to delivery and as part of this evaluated the skills required by councillors involved in major planning decisions. Two important elements identified as potential barriers (where variability in the skills and approach of local authority elected members may result in inconsistent decision making and impede delivery) were:

### i. Skills and attribute barriers:

- Variably quality of vision and leadership leading to uncertainty and lack of direction in the development process, impacting on consistent decision making.
- The variable (and often conservative) quality of local authority legal advice and approaches concerning "rules of engagement" between councillors and developers. This is despite the range of guidance for local authorities available from LGA and PAS.

### ii. Technical barriers:

The research report identifies several areas where the low knowledge base of councillors impacts on the quality of decision making. Specific areas of concern identified are:

- Understanding the development processes and finance.

- Understanding and interpretation of design.
- Knowledge of sustainability principles and how they apply to planning.

#### 4. AGENCIES RESPONSES

4.1 The Making Places Report<sup>5</sup> underlined the impact of the continued shortfall of suitably qualified and experienced built environment professionals on the quality of advice and briefings provided by officers to councillors. SEEDA through initiatives such as South East Excellence is working through an influencing model with key decision makers and those leading innovation and good practice. Our approach is to be an enabler and only incidentally a direct deliverer but we do seek to broker and be a catalyst for new activity. Case study examples of this work are attached as Appendix 1.

##### *Technical Training programmes and Resources*

4.2 There are many examples of training and advice agencies responding to the new planning agenda. Higher Education Institutes, such as Kingston University have recently developed masters' qualifications in planning with strong sustainability components; the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development is leading an industry funded project to develop a toolkit for the UK Code for Sustainable Homes and works closely with both industry and local authorities on a range of research and training programmes. The region's Architecture and Built Environment Centres (ABECs) are also developing specific support programmes for authorities, for example the Solent Centre for Architecture + Design has a sustainable development course (complementing an urban design course) aimed at Council officers and members. There are also a number of environmental not for profit organisations able to offer advice and guidance.

4.3 The issues are more associated with facilitating access to information on provision and giving confidence on quality and regional specificity.

##### *Support for Councillors*

4.4 While programmes designed to induct councillors into the planning role exist, there is very limited national provision of learning aimed specifically at developing the higher level understanding required by local authority elected members to support delivery of sustainable communities, and in particular, regional housing targets and the development requirements of New Growth Points and proposed Eco-Towns. Only a handful of such programmes are offered each year by IDeA, LGIU and TCPA; some support is provided through PIPA—the Politicians in Planning Network, managed by RTPI.

##### *Collaboration between Agencies and Institutions*

4.5 South East Excellence is working at the regional level with other national, CLG sponsored, providers of learning programmes: Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE), Planning Advisory Service (PAS), Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and English Partnerships (EP)(The Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) was also invited to participate). The agencies were approached with a view to building collective understanding of the capacity and support needs of the region and use this distinctive regional intelligence to 1) target existing support most effectively and 2) explore collaborative solutions to the barriers identified in sections 2 and 3 above.

4.6 SEEDA strongly believes that this exercise applied nationally could ensure benchmarking of learning provision and has the potential to reduce resource-costly overlap in public sector programme delivery. If then complemented by regional intelligence and associated delivery, using the approach being brokered by SEEDA, CLG would have a powerful mechanism to respond to regionally distinct needs.

4.7 SEEDA is also working with CIC and RIBA South East to build a similar collaborative approach amongst the built environment professional institutions to establish coherent and co-ordinated provision of CPD at the regional level, particularly in the provision of technical knowledge and expertise in delivery of sustainable communities. This would draw on the established models in the East of England and the North West. Again there remains the need for this process to be replicated at the national level to ensure agreed standards of provision and requirements in CPD.

#### 5. LOCAL AUTHORITY RESPONSES

5.1 SEEDA's research into the skills required by local authorities found both continuing absolute shortages of planning staff and the requirement to up-skill those currently in work (however, the precise scale of the problem in terms of the number of staff requiring support is still not known). In response local authorities have changed their management systems and internal structures to meet knowledge and skills priorities, there are various examples of this including the formulation of major applications development

project teams and “home-growing” junior staff. Whilst use of consultants remains a common method, Local Planning Authorities are increasingly seeking to meet the knowledge and skill priorities through collaborative working often with neighbouring Local Authorities.

5.2 As with the supply side, there are many individual examples of successful practice but what is less clear is 1) the scale of the true skills and knowledge gaps within local government in terms of the number of staff to be supported 2) the extent to which demands of the new planning requirements are part of broader Human Resource strategies within local authorities and 3) the extent to which local government is brokering suitable regional skills packages as a sector.

5.3 As set out in the White Paper, the Government is committed to working to ensure coordinated support for improvement in local government and has put Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) at the heart of local arrangements for support, with resources anticipated to support this role. This provides a real opportunity to build on the emerging trend for collaboration amongst local authorities. The RIEPs, in partnership with the regional local government employer organisations, should be encouraged to broker collaborative training and support programmes on their members’ behalf.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 *Making Places: Working together for effective delivery*, (2007), and *Knowledge and Skills: Priorities and barriers to delivery of quality sustainable development of the built environment in the South East Region*, (2007), South East Excellence
- 2 *The demand for built environment professionals to meet the challenge of a sustainable renaissance*. A report prepared for SEEDA by a collaborative team : University of Greenwich, Oxford Brookes University, University of Brighton. February 2005
- 3 *Action Plan—2007*, South East Excellence (2007)
- 4 *Making Places: Working together for effective delivery*, (2007), South East Excellence
- 5 Ibid

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#### **Memorandum by The Planning Inspectorate**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit evidence to the inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities. To assist the inquiry, I firstly set out below some contextual background on the Planning Inspectorate before responding on those areas most relevant to our work and then briefly discussing what else might be done to improve skills.

#### BACKGROUND

The Planning Inspectorate has been an Executive Agency since 1992. We report to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Assembly Government. We serve CLG and the Assembly Government by dealing with Local Development Frameworks in England and Local Development Plans in Wales and other casework such as appeals under planning, housing, environment and allied legislation. We also carry out similar work for other government departments, particularly the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on Access, Rights of Way and Environmental appeals, the Department for Transport (DfT) on Highway Orders and other related work, DBERR on energy proposals and DCMS on heritage matters.

Our mission is to use our impartial expertise in planning and land use to help shape well-planned environments and deliver sustainable development. We seek to achieve our mission by ensuring that in dealing with planning and other casework we follow the principles of fairness, openness and impartiality. In preparing our decisions and reports we will take account of:

- published national, regional and local policies;
- relevant planning issues and material considerations; and
- the views of all the parties.

We, like other agencies, departments and our customers, operate in a planning environment that increasingly is facing new challenges that need to be addressed across the range of our casework. For example, planning practitioners need to be alive to issues arising from European biodiversity legislation, climate change, the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and changes to the procedural processes. From the Committee’s terms of reference there are two issues, discussed below, where we are able to contribute.

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## THE MAIN AREAS WHERE A LACK OF SKILLS IS MOST PRONOUNCED

From our experience, there are key skills shortages in five areas.

Firstly, a lack of a general understanding around *site assembly and finance*. This is not just in terms of planning applications but also in terms of understanding whether the policies and proposals in Development Plan Documents (DPDs) are viable or deliverable. This is a particularly crucial area with the need to deliver infrastructure and affordable housing. An inadequate understanding here can lead to onerous requirements causing schemes to become unviable and for example frustrating the delivery of both market and affordable housing. It can mean that if a submitted DPD's preferred location for growth was on land that was at best only on the margins of viability then there would be a high risk that it would be found unsound. It can also mean that delays in obtaining planning permission either to meet planning obligations or to amend schemes can have an adverse impact on viability.

Secondly, a thorough *understanding of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations*. The main issue from our perspective is the failure of LPAs to recognise when proposals should be screened and when a screening opinion (SO) should be issued. This occurs regularly even in relation to applications for housing developments. Proposals that are caught by the regulations should be screened by LPAs and SOs issued. The Planning Inspectorate should only have to check that this has been done, satisfy itself that it agrees with any issued SO and only issue a screening direction (SD) if it disagrees with the LPA's SO. However, in reality, we often have to consider the EIA question from scratch and issue SDs in the absence of the LPA issuing a SO. Most of the proposals that are caught by the regulations do not require an Environmental Statement (ES), but a few do, and the failure of LPAs to pick these up can result in significant delays at appeal stage. Adequate skilled resources in LPAs would avoid unnecessary delays for appellants.

Thirdly, *renewable energy and climate change targets* in relation to major housing development. It is right that where appropriate LPAs should encourage earlier take up before 2016 of zero or reduced carbon homes. However, they need to have a real understanding of the feasibility and viability of this before either including policies in their DPDs or applying them in relation to planning applications. They also need to understand feasibility and viability before promoting the achievement of renewable energy targets. Our experience in examining DPDs and handling appeals is that LPAs are struggling to put together a robust evidence base.

Fourthly, *an appreciation of spatial planning* and the changes involved in moving from old style local plans to the Local Development Framework (LDF) system.

The Planning Inspectorate is very aware of how great the culture change needs to be for the LDF system to be successfully implemented. We are also very conscious of the fact that we are all still learning about the LDF system. All our efforts are being directed towards learning from experience with a view to making the LDF system successful, and more DPDs are now being found "sound" by Inspectors. However, it is clear from our experience that despite our efforts LPAs and other stakeholders are still coming to terms with spatial planning and LDFs. Also, some LPAs continue to produce their planning documents in an illogical sequence and a greater appreciation by them of spatial planning would avoid this. Furthermore non-engagement by stakeholders at the correct stage (or engagement at an inappropriately late stage) leads to complexities at the examination stage for the parties and to inefficient expenditure by LPAs on this process.

Fifthly, *interpretation and understanding of Design and Access Statements (DASs)*. The purpose of the DAS is to explain and justify the design and access principles and concepts on which a development proposal is based, and how these will be reflected in individual aspects of the scheme. We are finding that some LPAs are refusing to register applications because they claim the DAS is inadequate. In some cases they are requiring very substantial detail and explanation disproportionate to the nature/scale of the proposal, and/or arguing about the content and opinions expressed in the DAS at the point of registration. This is resulting in an increase in the number of appeals PINS is having to deal with against the failure of the LPA to determine a planning application. A greater understanding by LPAs of the role of the DAS and what should be expected for different types of schemes would lead to more applications being registered by LPAs, thereby avoiding unnecessary delays for those seeking planning permission.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Apart from CLG playing its part in advising LPAs and providing better practice guidance to them, the Planning Inspectorate has increasingly played its part in helping to spread expertise and knowledge by feeding back its experience of how the planning system is operating from our perspective. We publish a regular electronic newsletter and material on our website—for example, on the operation of the new LDF system. Our Director of Policy and other senior experienced Inspector Managers regularly speak at conferences and other events—for example, on the role of the Planning Inspectorate and on what we have learned from our unique position as a national appellate body. We provide free training to LPA staff and other practitioners—for example, on hearing and inquiry good practice. And we have been working closely with the regional Government Offices to help to develop their expertise in supporting LPAs to deliver the LDF system. We will continue to provide appropriate support to LPAs and to work with other statutory and private bodies to disseminate the knowledge we gain from the work we do.

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 WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE DONE TO IMPROVE SKILLS

From the experiences of our staff who are undertaking part-time courses leading to planning qualifications while courses do teach spatial planning and development finance, there is more that should be done. For example, we are aware that on one course students were asked to assess whether two old style local plans were “spatial”. The LPA representatives who did the presentations concluded that they were “spatial”. However, they were not sufficiently challenged on this and it is clear to us from our experience of the spatial planning system that they were not “spatial”. Clearly, on full-time courses there is likely to be more time available to teach spatial planning and development finance but it is important that part-time courses cover these areas in sufficient depth.

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**Memorandum by Trevor Roberts Associates**

Trevor Roberts Associates specialises in providing training and procedural consultancy advice to planning departments in England, Scotland and Wales. We provide training for planning professionals, support staff and councillors. Our procedural consultancy work includes reviews of performance, development control procedures, management, staff structures and resources with a view to improving efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore we believe we are in a unique position and it is in that capacity that we make the following comments. You can find out more information about us via our website [www.tra-ltd.co.uk](http://www.tra-ltd.co.uk).

Given our experience we are fully aware of the difficulties involved in training staff and councillors to meet the varied statutory and best practice requirements and the difficulties involved in retaining them. We therefore welcome the fact that the Committee is looking at the important issues of Planning Skills.

*Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

In our experience recent changes to the planning system have not altered the basic skills needed by planners. Changes introduced by the new planning system have of course required planners to take on a greater level of detail and knowledge on different topics and issues. Planners dealing with applications and policy formulation must now have a greater knowledge about a whole range of new subjects such as sustainability issues (from SEA/Sustainability Appraisals through to transport routes and carbon dioxide emissions through to site waste management plans and eco-friendly building materials), new technologies, housing delivery, accessibility and wider socio-economic factors as planning evolves from being a purely land use discipline to a more spatial discipline. Policy planners must encapsulate many of these new “ideas” in documents which must be examined for their “soundness”. The skills and knowledge required in the preparation of these new style development plan documents is still emerging and even Planning Inspectors who must now run Examinations into the “soundness” of plans are feeling their way. We have developed a training initiative with the Planning Inspectorate on training planning staff for Development Plan Examinations and the feedback emphasises the lack of knowledge both in the procedural processes and the technical knowledge to achieve “soundness”.

In most authorities it is not practical to employ a number of specialist personnel to deal with these new topics and whilst there is clearly a place for training that provides an introduction to a subject and helps develop basic skills there will remain gaps in local authorities’ skills and knowledge that cannot be easily bridged. To overcome this gap there are examples of authorities working collectively to fund specialist posts or employ specialist consultants. However, the fact remains that in running projects and employing consultants, most planning departments lack the project management, financial management and contract management skills to achieve the best results for their authority. If as seems likely, the use of consultants is set to continue then the need for project management and similar training will become much greater.

As a reflection of the changing nature of planning, development control is starting to move toward development management. The Scottish planning system seems to have a clearer understanding of what this means and entails and the inter-relationship between all the different factors. What is clear is that if it is to be successful it must entail a significant change in the culture and way planning departments are managed. Without sufficient support and training both in this new approach to planning and more widely in general management training, planners in managerial positions will struggle to get their staff to meet these new demands.

The new planning system calls on planners to work more closely with other services and partners and to develop better relations with the public and stakeholders. Whilst such new relationships will not change the basic planning knowledge required by planners, it may well result in a need to develop skills in areas such as mediation, communications and partnership working.

The e-government agenda has undoubtedly improved the use of IT in planning departments and made the dissemination of information easier. However, planners are not IT specialist and there has often been a split in authorities between what the planning department wishes to achieve, what the IT specialists will accept and what the authority can afford to spend. Therefore there is still much work to be done in terms

of getting planners up to speed both in terms of understanding the wider functionality of their IT systems and how best they can be integrated to improve procedures and performance. There also remains a need to ensure that there is better training in the use of IT by planners on a day-to-day basis.

Undoubtedly the planning schools are and will respond to some of these changes so that postgraduates entering the profession will become more familiar and better trained on issues such as sustainability. And whilst planning is a constantly evolving field, the changes which have been introduced over recent years, now need time to bed down. Further wholesale changes to the planning regime will do nothing to assist this process.

*The main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced (examples, for illustration only, include: use and viability of carbon reduction technologies, economic prosperity, infrastructure planning and the viability of affordable housing within market housing developments)*

We would agree that “new” areas/technologies such as those mentioned above do not fall within the traditional areas of planning education and experience and therefore skills will undoubtedly be lacking. However, there are more fundamental areas of planning which have been a part of the system for many years and where there is still a lack of knowledge and experience. For example, being able to negotiate s106 agreements and understand the issues surrounding land and development calculations. This is not just limited to understanding the viability of affordable housing although this does now account for most s106 agreements. A recent report by the London Assembly noted that there were not the skills within planning departments to negotiate the best deals and that the full potential of s106 agreements is not being achieved. TRA is currently undertaking training for the Royal Town Planning Institute Wales on this very subject. The programme of training is taking place across the country and further exemplifies the fact that there is a growing recognition that the skills to undertake what may be seen a key planning tasks are not always available or understood in planning departments.

There are many other fundamental areas of the planning system such as design issues, trees, appeal work and Environmental Impact Assessment which are still not always fully understood by planners. We run courses on these topics, as well as many others, and they are always very popular, with the feedback suggesting that in many cases this is the first time the participants have had any practical training on the subject.

As an organisation TRA has long campaigned for better training and a higher profile for the enforcement element of the planning system. Again, we would argue that this is still an area where there is much ignorance and lack of experience. In conjunction with the University of Cambridge we run a Certificated course on Planning Enforcement, which is recognised by the RTPI as meeting its educational requirements for Technical Membership of the Institute. The course has a waiting list and many of the committee members of the National Association for Planning Enforcement have achieved this qualification, yet when a recent DCLG review of enforcement suggested that there should be a qualification in planning enforcement, they failed to have regard to this course. This, in our view, perfectly illustrated the lack of wider understanding and knowledge about planning enforcement.

Of course a number of areas discussed under the previous heading can equally be applied to the area as well: Project management; working with communities and stakeholders; process and change management, IT etc.

*The skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies*

We provide training to councillors on a range of planning subjects although we do not subscribe to the view that councillor training should be compulsory. It is for each authority to decide for itself whether it wishes to take that step but at the very least training should be available for councillors, whether this is training by the authority’s own officers, training by outside providers such as ourselves or a combination of the two. In many cases an outside provider can say things in a manner that officers cannot and feedback from officers to our councillor training sessions indicates that they often find it useful having an independent voice reaffirming some of the messages which they themselves have been imparting to the members.

Our two most popular training courses are a Briefing on Planning, which provides a basic understanding of how the system operates, and the Role of Councillors, which covers in detail the day-to-day planning issues which councillors will find themselves involved with and how they should deal with the various issues. Course such as these are important in that they provide councillors with a level of knowledge and understanding which enables them to take part in planning committee meetings. They also provide important updates and refreshers to more experienced councillors. At a time when the planning system is constantly changing, it is important that councillors are kept up to date with the changes and how it affects their role.

Training such as this provides councillors with an understanding of how the system operates and explains to them the limits of the system and there various things they can do within those limits. This is different to the training provided to planners, which is more technical and designed to build upon a firm foundation of planning knowledge. The role of the planning officer is to provide an objective analysis of the issues in a

clear and succinct way, so that the decision maker can make an informed decision. In many cases the decision maker is also a professional planner but in all authorities there are a range of applications which are deemed necessary to be determined by councillors. In these circumstances the councillor needs to be able to have an appreciation of what is proposed but also be able to ask difficult questions in order to test the robustness of the recommendation. They must also be aware of how they should behave when forming part of the planning committee. The system rests on the basis that the technical specialist can be challenged by a non-specialist, so that there are checks and balances and that the decisions being made reflect the needs and desires of the wider community. (Of course the appeal system provides a separate mechanism for independent assessment of the authority's decision, regardless of whether the decision was taken by a senior officer or the planning committee.)

One area of councillor training where there appears to be a growing recognition by authorities that there is a need for separate training is that given to the chair of the planning committee. This role requires a range of interpersonal/management skills as well as knowledge of procedural and statutory requirements. The planning committee is a decision making mechanism which is open to public inspection and the way the committee is managed and led has an important role in how the decision making process works and is seen to work. Too many decisions have been challenged in the courts because of poor committee procedures and management which have led people involved to question the integrity and transparency of the decision making process.

Although the introduction of local members review bodies would potentially be an area of work for us, we do have some reservations about it. The right of appeal to an independent body is a fundamental part of the current system and such an element should not be lightly discarded. For most appellants, the chance to have their case heard by an independent expert from outside the local authority is seen as crucial and helps to emphasise the transparency of the process. Aside from the procedural and probity issues surrounding the operation of such bodies, there would need to be a significant amount of training given to the councillors who were review to serve on them. This would need to be of a high standard and to a detailed level, given that they would be replacing experienced Planning Inspectors and would be the final arbiter and thus any challenge to their decision would be to the High Court and so any decision would need to be robust.

Such a system of local member review bodies would also open up the arguments as to whether training should be compulsory for those serving on them, whether there should be an on-going requirement for training, similar to compulsory professional development undertaken by qualified planners and whether that training should in any way be subject to independent verification and/or assessment.

*The role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments*

We have found in our procedural reviews of local authority departments that time and time again there is a lack of knowledge about planning in the responses received from consultees. In many cases a lack of personnel can be a reason for a delay but often the level of response is of limited benefit to the authority because of a lack of understanding about what the planning system can achieve and the statutory limitations. In many cases the issue is one of funding and prioritisation for the agency, with the upshot often being that planning comes down the list of their priorities.

Whilst this can cause problems for smaller scale applications, perhaps a greater concern arises in relation to larger projects and the provision of infrastructure to support such projects. This, together with the introduction of a Community Infrastructure Levy, means that not only will planners need to gain a greater understanding of the technical requirements and programmes of the traditional infrastructure providers but there will also be a need to engage with less "traditional" providers such as health authorities and emergency services. There will of course need to be a level of learning and understanding on both sides but the onus will undoubtedly be on the planners, as the co-ordinator in many cases, to be able to intervene as necessary in order to achieve the optimum result for the community. Once again the new skills will not only need to be technical but also ones of project management, something planners have not traditionally needed to take on board.

*The effectiveness of Government in supporting local authorities as they respond to changes in the demands placed on them*

The government has supported the introduction and development of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to help implement and oversee a change in culture in planning departments. The introduction of a body such as PAS has demonstrated the government's commitment to improving planning services and developing ideas on best practice, something which is to be applauded. However, we along with some other commercial and non-commercial organisations have at times been unsure as to the extent of their remit particularly in cases where they appear to specify to local authorities what they should do in terms of improvement work/training and who they should use to do it. Clearly, we have a commercial interest in such matters but the

committee may wish to consider if there is a contradiction or any harm in one organisation being responsible for helping to set the improvement agenda and at the same time providing skills and services, at little or no cost, to meet that agenda.

Whilst the drive towards greater use of IT was laudable, the government has not always provided practical support in how to implement this. The result has been the provision of funding through Planning Delivery Grants to help meet e-government targets but the investment in new technology has been to meet targets (known as the “Pendleton Criteria”), without due regard as to how this would integrate with the existing knowledge and procedures. Despite initiatives such as PARSOL a lot of authorities have “bolted on” technology to their existing procedures without really looking to develop and adapt their service to fully take advantage of new ways of working. Authorities are now having to re-visit their IT systems and requirements and are looking at their working practices and procedures to see how the two can be better integrated. In many cases the IT and process review skills are lacking in planning departments.

A constant complaint of the government’s changes and target driven culture is that the quality of decisions is overlooked. In many authorities they have been able to make high quality decisions within the allotted time and we would not argue that good decisions cannot be made within eight or 13 weeks. However, there has developed a culture that proposals which are not “bad enough to refuse” are approved rather than being subject to negotiation and amendment because this is time which can be better spent elsewhere. Whilst time management and personal effectiveness training would be beneficial to many planners, the government’s perceived support for speed over quality is part of the wider picture which has seen a loss of skills by planners in areas such as design and negotiation.

In many authorities, the difficulty in attracting new staff coupled with the demands from government have meant that as experienced and skilled planners leave and retire the skills gap grows even wider. Whilst salary incentives and other life-work initiatives can help to retain some staff, the government should be encouraged to consider other options. For example many retired planners return to work for their previous authorities on a part time basis but tax laws prevent them from taking on too much work without losing pension rights. Incentives in this area perhaps allied to a mentoring role towards inexperienced staff would help bridge the skills gap and pass on skills/experience which would otherwise be lost.

*The long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

Many authorities are now going down the route of employing graduates from other disciplines and educating them themselves via courses such as ours and attendance on day release courses to gain a formal planning qualification. This can be effective if managed correctly and if there is a career path open to these graduates.

In our experience, many planning managers are too wedded to the idea that there are certain pieces of work which must be undertaken by qualified planners. We have long argued that many of the front-end and back-end processes concerned with planning applications can be undertaken with suitably trained support staff, leaving the planning officers free to concentrate on considering proposals and formulating recommendations. However, too often when we review the workings of a planning department we see qualified planners being required to things which they do not need to be doing. We believe that many authorities could benefit from creating posts (or redeploying existing support staff from within the planning department), who with appropriate training could handle many of the enquiries which would otherwise interrupt planning officers dealing with applications or support staff involved with the validation of applications. We have direct experience of recommending such approaches and the success this can bring. Many authorities are now moving towards customer service centres, and this can help to divert the simplest calls away from planning staff, but again training is required for these members of staff if they are to provide an effective customer service although as they usually cover all the authority’s services they cannot provide a sufficiently knowledgeable planning service, which is why more dedicated planning personnel is usually a more effective way forward.

Similarly, there are perfectly able enforcement officers who have achieved the University of Cambridge/Trevor Roberts Associates Certificate in Planning Enforcement but who cannot progress to Team Leader positions because they are not qualified planners, despite the fact that most qualified planners do not want to take up Enforcement Team Leader posts.

In many cases therefore, there are the personnel with the ability but they are not being given sufficient opportunity to show what they can do. Planners in management positions undoubtedly benefit from appropriate management training and it is again an area where we have experience and have seen the practical benefits that this can have on a planning department.

Training budgets are limited and are often one of the first budgets to be cut. Whilst financial pressures dictate that limits must be imposed, the knock on effects of this must be appreciated. In many cases the demands on meeting performance targets and employing staff on short term contracts, using consultants to undertake specialist areas of work and taking outside legal advice on a more regular basis all have to be paid for some from somewhere. In many instances it is the training budget which suffers. Therefore, in trying to mitigate the skills gap money is spent which in turn prevents existing staff receiving training and so creating

a wider skills gap. For many authorities training is not given a high enough priority. One way of overcoming this is for authorities to work collectively in buying in training from providers such as ourselves, which can be cost effective and tailored to meet their specific requirements.

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**Memorandum by Professor David Shaw, Head of the Department of Civic Design,  
University of Liverpool**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Department of Civic Design is the oldest planning school in the world, founded in 1909. It has a strong commitment to professional planning education with a curriculum enlivened and enriched through the academic staff's research and outreach activities. As a research lead institution it is part of the University's mission that the curriculum is research lead. The Department's research has a strong applied policy focus and we believe that by actively engaging with practice we are able to deliver high quality planning education which is critical, reflective and prepares our graduates for a professional planning career.

For over 60 years we have been providing a postgraduate professional planning programme, which leads to a degree with the unique title of Master of Civic Design (MCD). We consider that we have been, and continue to be, a pioneering Department when it comes to shaping planning education and we have embraced the one-year postgraduate planning degree with enthusiasm. In designing this programme in 2004, we were very aware of the Egan Review with its emphasis on the generic and technical skills for the delivery of sustainable communities, and the role of planning within this agenda. Other frameworks, notably RTPI's Policy Statement on Initial Planning Education re-iterated these messages. More recently in 1997 we introduced a number of undergraduate programmes, with the MPlan also achieving RTPI recognition.

In this brief report we demonstrate how we are seeking to contribute to the "skills for sustainable communities agenda" by increasing both the quantity and the quality of our education programmes to meet the challenges of practice. Our primary focus is initial professional planning education.

#### EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY

There are a number of characteristics that shape our curriculum design and are intended to ensure that we deliver a quality curriculum which meets the needs of our students and the market:

- As a research led University it is important that our curriculum is informed and enlivened by the research activities of the Department. Currently we have two broad foci for our research, Institutionalised Capacity Building for Modernised Planning and Methods for Analysis, Evaluation and Impact Assessment. These two themes provide a core rationale for what we do with a focus on methods for planning, which must be applied within the rapidly changing context of planning.
- We engage positively with practice, for example Professor Batey is the government appointed Chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign; Professor Lloyd is the Independent Ministerial Advisor to the Northern Ireland Assembly and member of the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework Advisory Group; Sue Kidd chairs the North West Coastal Forum; and, Deborah Peel engages proactively with the Royal Town Planning Institute, working on the Marine Planning Task Force and helping in the organisation of the RTPI Summer School (both the members and practitioners events). Such research and professional practice links provide excellent networks that we are able to use in our programmes, inviting practitioners in to teach our students, organising field study visits and also engaging practice in client-based student projects.
- The programmes are designed to develop students' knowledge of planning and tools for planning and this is combined with a problem solving focus with students, especially in the latter part of the programme, working in teams on real life client-based projects. Within the MCD, our intensive professional planning programme, the highlight is Spatial Planning in Action whereby the students go through a plan-making exercise for a client. This year the students are working with the Morecambe Bay Partnership. Other clients have included Peel Holdings on the Bridgewater Canal, Cheshire County Council in the Weaver Valley Regional Park and the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park.
- We are keen to engage practitioners in delivering the programme. We employ part-time practitioners in delivering certain parts of the curriculum, for example in the delivery of urban design teaching and in Spatial Planning in Action we engage recently retired practitioners to help students work through a good plan making process.

- We are keen to develop students as critical and reflective learners recognising that they will continually need to refresh their skills and knowledge base. Within the undergraduate programme all students undertake Personal Development Planning.
- We believe we will continually need to review and refresh the curriculum to meet changing professional planning needs and challenges. Currently for example we are seeking to place more emphasis on the economics of planning and property development to enable students to critically assess the economic viability of different development proposals and with infrastructural implications of development proposals and plans.
- We will also need to refresh and enhance the curriculum to meet the changing needs and demands of higher education within its institutional context. Currently the focus of our work will be in promoting reflective learning through the Personal Development Planning for students (see above), which enables students to record and reflect on the personal and academic development, with strong links to employability. Also we will be looking to develop opportunities for blended learning to enhance student learning.

Hence it is important to recognise that our curriculum has been refreshed over the last few years to reflect changing internal and external pressures and opportunities and that this is an ongoing process.

#### STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY

Using 2004 as a benchmark, when planning schools were first able to offer one-year professionally accredited planning programmes, we have seen a significant increase in the number of students entering postgraduate planning education. There is also evidence to suggest, that the calibre of new students entering our programmes, their level of engagement and performance and subsequently the calibre of new entrants to the profession is rising. We would hope that this trend will continue, although following a peak in 2005–06 with a significant number of part-time students joining the programme, we anticipate intake figures will stabilise around 35–40 students (full and part-time) (see Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1**

#### ENTRY TO THE MCD PROGRAMME

<i>Session</i>	<i>Full-Time</i>	<i>Part-Time</i>
2003–04	8	5
2004–05	31	23
2005–06	23	24
2006–07	33	14
2007–08	23	15

**Table 2**

#### OUTPUTS FROM THE MCD PROGRAMME

<i>Session</i>	<i>Passes</i>	<i>Passes with Distinction</i>
2003–04	8	2
2004–05	28	5
2005–06	33	7
2006–07	47	15

A similarly buoyant pattern is also evident with undergraduate recruitment with increased numbers of students applying to Liverpool and subsequently joining the Department (Table 3 and 4). One indicator of this improved demand for planning at Liverpool is that we have not recruited any students through clearing in the last three years and we anticipate this trend will continue. Unpicking the reasons for the shift is difficult and include factors such as the revival of Liverpool as a place to study, bolstered by the Capital of Culture accolade, the reputation of the University and renewed interest in the positive and critical contributions that planning has to make in addressing the challenges we currently face. As the demand for places increases, it is also worth noting that the quality of the applicants is also improving (Table 5).

**Table 3**

## APPLICATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVIC DESIGN

<i>Session</i>	<i>Number of Applications</i>
2003–04	78
2004–05	146
2005–06	144
2006–07	178
2007–08*	180

(Applications in 2007–08 were exactly the same as in 2006–07 even though the UCAS choices were reduced from six to five, and this figure does not take into account late applications.)

**Table 4**

## ENTRY OF STUDENTS BY PROGRAMME\*

<i>Session</i>	<i>BAEnvn&amp;Plng</i>	<i>BAUrbReg&amp;Plng</i>	<i>MPlan</i>	<i>Total</i>
2003–04	15	4	11	30
2004–05	4	12	20	36
2005–06	4	10	15	29
2006–07	2	13	13	28
2007–08	3	18	17	38

\* Please note the first two years of the BA programmes and the MPlan are exactly the same as the professionally accredited MPlan programme and many students will switch to the MPlan.

**Table 5**

## AVERAGE STUDENT TARIFF POINT SCORE

<i>Session</i>	<i>BAEnvn&amp;Plng</i>	<i>BAUrbReg&amp;Plng</i>	<i>MPlan</i>	<i>Total</i>
2003–04	238	250	284	264
2004–05	320	272	296	290
2005–06	353	248	317	303
2006–07	280	314	343	325
2007–08	260	306	334	318

Hence we would argue that certainly in recent years we are slowly beginning to redress the acute shortages in planning that have been well recorded. However it will take many years before these shortages are effectively addressed. It is also worth noting that more of our best graduating students are being attracted to private work in the private sector, often attracted by more dynamic marketing, better career prospects and a perception of a more interesting and varied work load.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

As a small Department in a research lead University the focus of our activities have been to ensure that our initial professional planning programmes meet the needs of the market and are research informed. Employability rates among our graduates are very high. However, we do contribute to wider professional and other academic activities whereby some of our knowledge can be transferred to professional practice. We believe that this is a symbiotic relationship which helps to keep our programmes contemporary. Examples of our outreach activities would include:

- Writing for professional journals.
- Serving in a professional capacity on various local, regional and national committees.
- Engaging in various continuing professional activities, presenting and organising conferences.

Although from a business perspective this aspect of our activities remains under-developed. We have for many years contributed to the North West Branch of the RTPI's continuing professional development programme, for six years we ran the whole programme and for the last three years it has been organised in

conjunction with the other planning schools in the region. Whilst we understand the importance of life-long learning and seek to our students recognise the importance of this agenda, we are not convinced that effective structured and strategic staff development is taking place within the work place.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We are encouraged by the prominent role that planning has as a co-ordinating or orchestrating process to balance a range of competing interests in delivering sustainable communities. We believe that there are some positive signs of change particularly in terms of attracting more high calibre students into professional planning education. Nevertheless, the cultural change required to realise the government expectation is enormous and we are willing to play our part in this change agenda, by working in partnership with other key stakeholders.

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### Memorandum by the Environment Agency

#### SUMMARY

The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee in the planning process. We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into "Planning Skills" as planning skills are vital to delivering an effective spatial planning system that promotes sustainable development and protects and enhances the environment.

We employ a significant number of planners and we interact with every local planning authority in England and Wales as well as with many planners in other organisations, agencies and companies. Our response is focussed on our experience of the skills needs and training of local authority planners, our experience in trying to recruit planning personnel with appropriate skills and our own attempts to develop skills in our planning staff.

#### KEY ISSUES

- The Environment Agency continues to experience difficulties in the recruitment of qualified and experienced planning staff due to the relative scarcity of planners in the market place. We have committed to "growing our own" planners and have developed our own structured training and development programme.
- The Communities and Local Government (CLG) bursary scheme to encourage planning students has been very successful and it appears to have both raised the profile of planning as a degree and career option and the intake of planning students.
- An understanding of all three elements of sustainable development (economy, social progress and the environment), how they are interconnected, and the relevance of sustainable development to planning is an essential component of initial education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all those involved in planning.
- With planning increasingly being asked to deal with complex technical issues it is essential that planners understand the relevant policy background and that they have a basic understanding of the issues involved. However, planners should not be expected to be experts in everything and consequently they should know how and where to access further advice when required.
- We believe that initial planning education does not provide enough coverage of all environmental planning issues. All planners should have a background understanding of environmental planning as it impinges on all aspects of planning work.
- In particular, with both the Barker Review of Planning and the Planning White Paper identifying climate change as one of the big challenges facing planning in the future it is essential that planning is used to adapt to the climate change England and Wales is already locked into and to help ensure mitigating carbon emissions forms a core part of planning training and development in the future.
- Councillors are the people ultimately charged with taking planning decisions and it is important that they receive an appropriate level of training in planning policy and legislation, and environmental and sustainable development issues. This needs to be kept up to date through a continuing professional development-type process. Some local authorities have established excellent training regimes and this lead should be followed by other councils.
- If Local Member Review Bodies are established for the determination of minor appeals, as per the proposals in the Planning Bill, then it is important that elected Members are fully trained in the quasi-judicial nature of this role, which is different to the role they normally play in planning committee decisions. This quasi-judicial role should be supported by independent planning law advice in the form of a person qualified in planning law and process who is independently responsible for review proceedings and not managed within the planning department.

- Greater understanding amongst LPA planners of the role of the statutory agencies within the planning system would be beneficial. Training comes in many forms and job swaps or shadowing should be considered amongst public sector planners to increase understanding of each other's roles and so improve the planning process.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Environment Agency welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into "Planning Skills". We are charged with protecting and improving the environment and making an appropriate contribution to achieving sustainable development. We work across all levels of government. We have a key role to play as a technical adviser (consultee) to local planning authorities (LPAs) on a range of issues such as flood risk, contaminated land, biodiversity, water resources, water quality, navigation, fisheries, water-based recreation, waste and minerals. We are a "specific consultation body" for Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), and a "consultation body" for Sustainability Appraisal of plans. We are also a "statutory consultee" under Article 10 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Procedure Order for many types of development application and for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of plans and programmes and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of projects.

1.2 LPAs (and applicants) consult us on approximately 50,000 planning applications and pre application enquiries annually. To carry out this work the Environment Agency employs approximately 250 dedicated planning staff located at national, regional and local levels throughout England and Wales. They in turn call upon technical experts in the Environment Agency to provide comments on development. Many of our staff are young planners starting out on their planning careers augmented by more senior planners with many years experience. 10% of our staff are fully qualified "chartered" planners (Members of the Royal Town Planning Institute, MRTPI), with a further 23% of our staff either currently attending an accredited RTPI course or being graduates waiting to qualify.

1.3 In addition to accredited RTPI training we organise a range of in-house training courses aimed at improving and keeping up to date the technical planning skills of our staff, particularly in relation to environmental planning and sustainable development, and also the wider people skills required for our planners to influence plans, planning applications and individual developments effectively.

1.4 On occasions some of our area teams organise training courses for LPA staff on policy issues of particular importance to us, such as when new Planning Policy Statements, such as that on "Development and Flood Risk" (PPS 25), are published and on associated technical issues such as Strategic Flood Risk Assessments and Flood Risk Assessments for individual developments.

## 2. OUR RESPONSE TO THE ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMITTEE

### *Recent changes to the range and detail of knowledge and skills needed by staff within planning departments*

2.1 There have been major changes in the planning system in recent years, such as the move to spatial planning—an approach that aims for a greater degree of partnership to agree a plan for an area that co-ordinates the actions of many public and private bodies in that area. Planners now require a wide skills and knowledge base. With planning increasingly being asked to deal with complex technical issues it is essential that planners understand the relevant policy background under which they operate. The Barker Review of Land Use Planning recommended the need to "improve skills, including through . . . training for members and officers, and wider use of business process reviews".<sup>54</sup> 2.2 Planners need a basic understanding of the issues involved. However, it would be difficult for individual planners to obtain and keep up to date in all of the skills and knowledge required to deliver successful development schemes. Thus in many cases LPAs will need to establish specialists in certain subject areas. This is not a new solution, as subjects such as minerals and waste planning have been dealt with as specialisms for many years.

2.3 Even where individual planners have specialisms, they cannot be expected to be experts in everything and consequently they should know where to access further advice when it is required. For example they may need to call on expert advice on issues such as sustainable construction, Environmental Impact Assessment or Flood Risk Assessment. This might be from an in house expert, or an expert shared between local authorities, or retained consultants or planning consultees. The Barker Review of Planning noted the potential for local authorities to work together more often in partnership on planning applications "there should be increased use of joint-working with private sector providers, greater use of shared services with other authorities, and the use of accredited consultants to undertake technical assessments".<sup>55</sup> The sharing of technical expertise and training is an area to which this recommendation could usefully be applied.

<sup>54</sup> Barker Review (Dec 2006), Barker Review of Land Use Planning, Final Report—Recommendations, The Stationery Office.

<sup>55</sup> Barker Review of Land Use Planning, paragraph 23.

2.4 Due to the ever widening scope of planning, the broad range of skills/knowledge required is more of a problem for LPAs who, unless they choose to hire a specialist consultant, have to be able to provide a planning response on any issue. For other bodies, and agencies such as the Environment Agency, this is less of a problem, as our field of interest in the planning system is more restricted. Even so, we find it increasingly difficult to appoint staff with the skills and knowledge we require.

2.5 Following the publication of PPS1 “Delivering Sustainable Development”,<sup>56</sup> sustainable development is now the core principle underpinning planning. We believe that a sound understanding of sustainable development and its relevance to planning should be a foundation component of all planning education. This includes an understanding of key concepts such as the Code for Sustainable Homes, adaptation to climate change, water neutrality, carbon reduction, etc. Because of the interconnection of sustainable development a further essential skill is that of encouraging a holistic approach (eg systems thinking) to determine impacts on the environment, society, and the economy.

2.6 In particular, there is a need for the planning profession and elected members to develop their skills on climate change and planning—both its role in adapting to climate change already in train and in mitigating potential future climate change. The PPS1 supplement “Planning and Climate Change”<sup>57</sup> emphasises the important role that planning should play in both these areas. This issue will loom large in future plans and the careers of most planners now starting their professional lives. It is essential that planners have a sound understanding of the issues involved and that their skills anticipate future needs. Training based on the PPS1 supplement and the accompanying practice guide would be a good starting point for CPD for current planners and higher education courses for future planners.

2.7 With the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy in the Planning Bill, planners will also need to develop a better understanding of development economics and the range of infrastructure required by new development. Many LPA planners think of infrastructure simply in terms of roads and schools, others will consider the need for health facilities, but few fully take into account the environmental, or “hidden”, infrastructure that is often essential for development to take place, such as the provision of adequate water supply, effective waste reduction and management, waste water treatment, flood management, biodiversity and green space.

*The main areas where a lack of skills is most pronounced*

2.8 We believe that initial planning education does not provide enough coverage of all environmental planning issues. Many planning staff commence employment with the Environment Agency with core generic planning skills, but require further specialist training in environmental planning. This covers an understanding of issues such as land contamination, flood risk, water quality, waste planning etc. We believe these skills/knowledge are generally in short supply within LPAs and in many cases technical experts are now less prevalent than they were in the past, for example the numbers of drainage engineers within local authorities has fallen. As a consequence many LPAs now increasingly rely on advice from the Environment Agency on fluvial and coastal flood risk matters. The summer 2007 floods demonstrated the need to also take surface water drainage into account in planning decisions.

2.9 We believe that all planners should have some background understanding of environmental planning, which impinges on all aspects of planning work—for instance, taking account of issues like contaminated land, flood risk, the availability of water resources and sewage treatment and discharges to water courses when considering planning proposals for major developments such as sustainable communities. In particular, with both the Barker Review of Planning and the Planning White Paper<sup>58</sup> identifying climate change as one of the big challenges facing planning in the future it is essential that we use planning to adapt to the climate change we are already locked into and to help ensure mitigating carbon emissions forms a core part of planning training and development in the future.

2.10 In addition planners need to be aware of new legislation in other fields that have an impact upon spatial planning. The EU Water Framework Directive (2000), the most substantial piece of European water legislation to date, is such a case. It applies to all surface and ground water bodies in the UK, and has significant implications for both spatial and development control or management. As of December 2006, new modifications to the physical characteristics of surface water bodies, or alterations to the levels of groundwater bodies, must be in compliance with the Water Framework Directive. Lack of compliance can result in a breach of Directive requirements, and the potential for legal proceedings, and yet few LPA planners have any understanding of the Directive, its implications, or how they should take it into account in their day to day planning work. The Environment Agency in conjunction with the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Local Government Association has produced initial advice for planners on the Water Framework Directive.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) Delivering Sustainable Development’, The Stationery Office.

<sup>57</sup> Communities and Local Government et al (December 2006) PPS1 Supplement Planning and Climate Change, The Stationery Office.

<sup>58</sup> Communities and Local Government et al (May 2007) Planning for a Sustainable Future, The Stationery Office.

<sup>59</sup> Environment Agency, et al (February 2006) The Water Framework Directive and Planning—initial advice to planning authorities in England and Wales, Environment Agency.

*The skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies*

2.11 Policy and legislation on planning, the environment and sustainable development is continually changing, as is best practice. Often the pace of change is rapid. Through our monitoring of LPA planning decisions, we are aware of decisions where both officers and members do not appear to have fully understood the latest planning legislation/policy changes, and/or the environmental implications of their decisions. For example, PPS25 requires the developer in certain instances to provide a flood risk assessment (FRA) to accompany an application and inform the decision making process. However, on occasions, members have approved an application without having had the benefit of seeing a FRA to inform their decision, but have imposed a condition requiring one to be prepared later. But this is “after the event” and is not, in our view, a correct interpretation of PPS25. It is essential that such simple misunderstandings of policy are avoided and it is important, therefore, that those councillors required to make planning decisions, receive an appropriate level of training in planning policy and legislation, environmental and sustainable development issues, and that this is continually kept up to date through a continuing professional development (CPD)-type process.

2.12 In particular, if Local Member Review Bodies are established as per the proposals in the Planning Bill, allowing minor appeals to be determined by members where decisions have been made by LPA officers under delegated powers, it will be important that elected Members are fully conversant with new planning policy. They must also be trained in the quasi-judicial nature of this role, which is different to the role they normally play in planning committee decisions. This quasi-judicial role should be supported by independent planning law advice. An analogy is that of the role of the Clerk to the Magistrates’ Courts. We would suggest that each LPA retain or employ a person qualified in planning law and process independently responsible for review proceedings and not managed within the planning department.

*The role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their response to changes in the demands placed upon planning departments*

2.13 There sometimes appears to be a lack of understanding of the role of statutory agencies, such as the Environment Agency, amongst LPA planners. Some LPAs think our responsibilities are much wider than they actually are, resulting in us being consulted on applications that we do not wish to see. Greater understanding of the role of statutory consultees within the spatial planning system and of the development applications we should be consulted on would be beneficial. This could be addressed as part of the proposed review of the Town and Country Planning General Development Procedure Order by Communities and Local Government.

2.14 Existing planning legislation and policy requires the Environment Agency to provide LPAs with specialist advice in a number of important policy areas related to our expertise. An example is the assessment of flood risk. The Environment Agency undertakes extensive modelling, provides LPAs (and developers and the public) with maps indicating the probability of flood risk, and advises on strategic and individual flood risk assessments covering both the magnitude and consequences of flood risk, to assist planning officers and councillors in planning decisions involving flood risk. The Environment Agency has provided LPAs with a tool, Flood Risk Standing Advice, to assist LPAs in dealing with minor applications where there is a low risk of flooding.

2.15 The Environment Agency regularly updates its maps and tools, incorporating the latest information from eg flood events such as the summer floods of 2007, to ensure that planning officers and councillors have the very latest information before them when making decisions.

2.16 The Environment Agency takes very seriously its duty to respond to planning consultations from LPAs in a timely manner. We are consulted by LPAs (and developers) on approximately 50,000 planning applications and pre-application enquiries per annum which require our specialist knowledge. The Environment Agency has a duty to respond to all planning consultations from LPAs within 21 days, or such other period as may be agreed in writing. In 2006–07 we responded to 88% within 21 days, or such other period as may be agreed in writing (89% for application consultations and 83% for pre-application enquiries).

2.17 In recent years, following major changes in the planning system, we have carried out reviews of our planning resource, to ensure that we have sufficient planning staff in the locations where they are most needed. As a result we have increased the size of our planning resource within our Area teams from 220 in 2007 to 250 in 2008.

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*The long term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments*

2.18 In response to the difficulties experienced with recruitment and retention of planning staff, the Environment Agency has for the past year been running a “Workforce Planning Project” to consider possible solutions to these issues. We are currently experiencing a high turnover of planning staff (18.5% over the past year) and 13.5% of our planning posts are currently vacant. Research has identified that we have a relatively inexperienced workforce (two thirds of staff have been in post for less than three years) so both recruitment and training are identified priorities.

2.19 Nationally, we experience problems recruiting to the posts that require a high level of knowledge and planning experience. The approach we are taking is to “grow our own” ie recruit less experienced staff and train them up to be fully qualified. To this end, we have developed a structured training and development programme (a “Technical Development Framework”) for our planning staff which will be piloted during March and April 2008 and rolled out nationally by the end of September. This training programme covers all the technical aspects of planning and environmental issues that we expect our Area planning staff to acquire from induction at an administrative level right through to the highest technical level. We also intend applying for RTPI “Learning Partners” accreditation when this training programme has been rolled out. Our training programme will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure any new legislation or training requirements are fully incorporated.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The Environment Agency welcomes the establishment of the inquiry into the “skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities”, and more particularly this inquiry into Planning Skills. We believe that an understanding of sustainable development, and its relevance to planning, should be a central component of all planning education and training. In addition, all planners should have some background knowledge of environmental planning as it impinges on all aspects of planning work.

*February 2008*

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## **Memorandum by the Academy for Sustainable Communities**

### BRIEFING ON THE ACADEMY FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES (ASC)

1. ASC is the national centre for delivering the skills and knowledge needed to make better places. Our remit is to foster a shared understanding of what it takes to make sustainable communities and encourage an integrated, cross sector approach to ensuring there are enough people equipped with the skills and knowledge to develop and maintain them. ASC was established as a result of the recommendations set out in the Egan Review, “Skills for Sustainable Communities” which concluded that key factors hampering the delivery of sustainable communities were:

- A combination of a lack of generic skills (such as community engagement, visioning, project management) and labour shortages in the core built environment professions—eg town planners, transport planners, civil and structural engineers, landscape architects and surveyors.
- A lack of opportunities for cross-sector, cross-professional learning.

2. ASC’s role involves increasing the skills base of the sector as a whole by promoting generic, technical and specialist skills amongst planners and other professions and by encouraging them to work more effectively in multidisciplinary, cross sector teams. The focus is on building capacity and changing working practices on the ground.

3. Our strategic objectives are focussed on continuing to strengthen the nation’s capacity to develop and maintain sustainable communities achieving the maximum impact in the shortest time. Specifically, we aim to:

- Build the skills, knowledge and capacity of individuals in the public, private and third sectors responsible for creating sustainable communities.
- To champion a shared understanding of sustainable communities and provide practical knowledge to support delivery.

## SUMMARY

4. The Academy for Sustainable Communities is pleased to submit evidence to the Inquiry on the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities and we would like the opportunity to present oral evidence in due course.

5. Evidence from ASC's Mind the Skills Gap (MSG) research, conducted in 2007 on the skills gaps facing the sustainable communities professions, suggested that labour shortages and skills gaps (generic, specialist and technical) are set to continue widening to 2012 and will hamper delivery of the government's ambitious targets if further action is not taken to build skills and capacity across the sector. The planning profession is one of the professions projected to experience the most significant labour shortages, despite the action that has been taken by the government to encourage more entrants into university planning schools, and the profession has significant gaps in the skills of practising planners.

6. Key findings from the Mind the Skills Gap research included:

- Sustainable communities workforce accounts for 3.2% of England's workforce as a whole, a relatively high proportion compared to other professions.
- There has been significant growth in the workforce but experience and forecasts suggest a significant shortfall in supply of suitably qualified professionals of between 6% and 91% depending on profession.
- The labour shortage for planning by 2012 is projected to be 46% if no action is taken.
- Organisations expect to have particular difficulties recruiting landscape architects, urban designers and planners, particularly in the public sector.
- Multi disciplinary and cross sector working are essential to successful delivery.

7. ASC works across the professions and across the public, private and third sectors. It has no specific remit for the planning profession or for the local authority elected members involved in planning per se, although these are clearly a core part of ASC's wider remit. ASC works closely with a range of key partners to encourage a more joined up approach to skills and capacity building across the wider sector. These key partners include professional bodies such as the RTPI, relevant sector skills councils and the local government improvement bodies (including the IDeA and PAS).

8. The model ASC works to is that the education, training and development of a single professional group such as planners should not be carried out in isolation. That steps should be taken to encourage a more cross-disciplinary approach across the range of professions that need to work together to make successful places (this includes planners, landscape architects, urban designers, surveyors, neighbourhood workers etc). This shared understanding of the agenda also needs to be fostered across the public and private sectors to ensure an integrated approach to placemaking is encouraged. Though there are good working relationships between the key bodies involved in building capacity in the planning sector there is room for further improvement in delivering skills and capacity building especially at a regional level.

## ASC'S IMPACT TO DATE

9. The impact ASC has on the market is directly linked to the resources it can lever from other organisations as well as its own core funding. ASC's role in influencing others to deliver is key. From a standing start in 2006 with a budget of £12.739 million over our first two years of operation, ASC has influenced the learning of 10,000 professionals. This amounts to 1.3% of the sustainable communities workforce. In this set up phase resources have been directed towards developing and piloting skills and capacity building programmes, and products. We have built relationships with key partners and stakeholders and got them to work together. We have focussed on attracting new entrants into the sector and worked with community leaders and professional institutes to build capacity. Most importantly we have significantly increased the understanding of the scale and nature of the skills and capacity issues across the sector.

10. ASC has made strong progress in delivering targeted outcomes across key markets. We have:

- Promoted much stronger cross disciplinary working. This is important as it encourages practitioners, including planners, to work together to achieve common objectives through cross sector and cross profession learning including Continuous Professional Development.
- Developed and implemented a number of strategic learning programmes to deliver generic skills. This has provided new opportunities for people to train for jobs in the sector and embrace a wider understanding of sustainable communities and the roles of different professions in creating and maintaining them.

11. Our work has begun to increase skills and capacity within the sector, it has given the tools and knowledge to practitioners to enable them to work in and lead multidisciplinary teams, and change behaviours and practice on the ground. ASC has engaged with:

- 10,000 professionals involved in the sustainable communities sector.

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- 20,000 young people and 680 teachers through curriculum making activities, raising their awareness of sustainable communities, the role they personally can play and careers opportunities in our sector.
  - Nearly 65,000 young people on careers activities, encouraging them to take up careers in the sustainable communities professions.
12. ASC has delivered new learning programmes and resources to meet clear market gaps:
- A new Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities with the first cohort starting in January 2008. This will be rolled out to two universities in 2009. This provides a pathway into careers in planning and housing as well as other professional areas.
  - A new Generic Module on Sustainable Communities has been piloted successfully at undergraduate, postgraduate and CPD levels. A further 10 HE institutions have signed up to pilot the module from January 2008. The student and tutor feedback has been exceptional.
  - A cross-disciplinary, accredited professional development programme for managers, “Raising Our Game”, with a variety of qualifications at NQF Level 7 and Level 5 in 6 regions involving 139 practitioners, with further roll out planned in Spring 2008. Feedback has been extremely strong from participants and employers.
  - The first national Sustainable Communities Awards. The second awards will take place in June 2008.
  - Seven quality learning resources have been produced (on course to meet the target of 10 by year end), including a Citizenship Toolkit and an e-learning CPD module, “In a Nutshell”, a training resource for trainers, has been requested by 8,000 people to date.
13. ASC has also:
- Re-launched the Leaders’ Network for Sustainable Communities with 70 network members at CE level in regeneration vehicles, local authorities, Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders.
  - Communicated extensively via its website, with more than 200,000 visits (exceeding the year end target of 150,000 visits).
  - Developed the “ASK: What If” dedicated careers website which has had more than 26,000 visits to date.
  - Investigated the skills gaps in the sector and produced the research report “Mind The Skills Gap” which highlighted the need to continue and accelerate efforts to address labour shortages and skills gaps in the sector.
14. Of particular relevance to the planning sector, ASC has:
- Supported the development of case studies and wider dissemination activities for Community Planning.net—a website for community planning.
  - Worked collaboratively with PAS and IDeA to finance Urban Renaissance—a programme for local authority officers and members aimed at improving each others understanding of their role in the planning process, including how to engage with developers and the community.
  - Developed a Masterclass programme with TCPA addressing the skills needs of multi disciplinary teams.
  - Piloted with RCEs in the South East and East Midlands workshops targeted at practitioners and community leaders to debate and action plan delivery on growth areas.
  - Developed a pilot with Kirklees Council and partners “Planning for non planners”—delivery planned for June 2008.
  - Produced a guide detailing how to engage with multi cultural groups and communities to support the planning process through improved community engagement. This has been distributed to at least 300 authorities and we continue to get requests for this.
  - Undertaken a project together with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and English Partnerships (EP) which brought together private and public sector partners to develop an inclusive community engagement strategy for the development of the town centre and surrounding areas which included the integration of cohesion objectives in the procurement process.

#### HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY

15. ASC welcomes the formation of the HCA which will become operational on or before 1st April 2009. ASC will become part of the HCA and our priorities will inevitably shift in order to support its strategic objectives. The move will provide the opportunity to join up common skills agendas with Atlas, currently part of EP. We envisage working hand in hand with Atlas. This will go some way to facilitating the “one stop shop” approach HCA is aiming for with local authorities and will address the needs of these stakeholders in a more coordinated way.

16. More widely, ASC sees the benefits in moving into the HCA in terms of increasing ASC's leverage and influence in sectors such as local government and contractors. This leverage is critical; ASC is a small organisation with limited resources, operating in the face of growing skills and capacity gaps. The way ASC maximises its impact is via leverage over others.

17. It is not yet clear what form ASC will take within HCA and discussions are ongoing to determine the relationship. The options range from a subsidiary company limited by guarantee to a fully embedded programme. Each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. In a recent consultation exercise looking at the options for ASC going into HCA, ASC stakeholders expressed the view that they want to see ASC continuing as an independently branded entity operating with a degree of independence within the HCA and felt that this would continue to give skills and capacity building a clear focus.

18. The way in which ASC will work with the strong regional offices of the HCA needs mapping out over the coming months. Establishing a robust regional delivery model is a key priority for ASC. We currently work with Regional Centres of Excellence (RCEs) and other partners to deliver at the regional and local level. Variations in capacity across the RCE network and the withdrawal of core funding from some RDAs to their RCEs does not allow for consistency of delivery capability across the regions.

19. Over the coming period, ASC will be commissioning work with partners to look at how best to develop robust regional delivery mechanisms for skills and capacity building for sustainable communities. This will examine (i) the resources available for building skills and capacity across the sector set against the scale of the skills shortages and the risk involved to delivery if the workforce is not upskilled (ii) how best government resources from capacity building funds can be directed towards this agenda (iii) the potential for consolidating skills and capacity building provision under a single brand in order to remove confusion from the market place and achieve economies of scale and clarity of purpose and impact and (iv) what delivery structures should look like in the future.

#### THE EVIDENCE: SKILLS SHORTAGES IN THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SECTOR

20. The 2005 Labour Force Survey data suggests that the sustainable communities sector workforce consists of some 750,000 employees, this figure has grown significantly over the past few years and now amounts to approximately 3.2% of the total workforce of England.<sup>60</sup> This is a significant proportion compared to other professional groups. Engineers make up the largest proportion of the workforce with 26% of the total followed by neighbourhood workers (16%), developers and surveys (12%) and planners (2%).

21. "Mind the Skills Gap" confirmed that there are significant and growing generic and technical skills gaps nationwide with a "missing generation" of key professionals in the mid 30's to mid 40's age range due to a dip in the numbers entering the profession in the early 1990s. It highlighted the lack of leadership and generic skills and emphasised the gap in specialist knowledge areas eg low carbon and cohesion. It concluded that we face a significant shortage of qualified practitioners with the skills to deliver between now and 2012.<sup>61</sup>

#### SKILLS DEFICITS ACROSS THE SECTOR

22. These shortages and skills deficits, if not addressed, will hamper the delivery of the sustainable communities agenda. The ambitious targets for new homes, for regeneration in growth areas, growth points and eco towns, as well as increased economic prosperity as a whole, mean that people with the right skills, knowledge and leadership capability will be in high demand. Indeed, success will depend significantly on the capacity of local and regional delivery partners. Key findings included:

- Sustainable communities workforce accounts for 3.2% of England's workforce as a whole.
- There has been significant growth in the workforce but experience and forecasts suggest a significant shortfall in supply of suitably qualified professionals.
- Organisations expect to have particular difficulties recruiting landscape architects, urban designers and planners, particularly in the public sector.

23. The Mind the Skills Gap report involved undertaking a survey of 146 organisations and 763 individuals, involved in the delivery of sustainable communities, as well as case study audits of specific sustainable community organisations and specific projects to establish their workloads, and a modelling exercise to provide forecasts of the current and future scale of gaps in labour supply. Gap forecasts were modelled before the CSR07 settlement and the full implications of the Housing Green Paper were appreciated. ASC has commissioned a further piece of work, in which the model will be re-run to take into account these two factors. Early indications are that the overall skills and labour shortages will increase further. The revised research results will be available by May 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Includes those architects, landscape architects, urban designers, surveyors, developers, regeneration/economic development officers, community development officers, engineers, environmental specialists, planners, transport planners and housing and welfare officers involved in the delivery of sustainable communities. This is based on LFS data from 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Mind the Skills Gap ASC 2007. Further research has been commissioned to quantify the additional impact on this picture of the Housing Green Paper (2007) and the effect of the CSR 07 settlement.

24. The table below shows the shortages by occupation and the top three skills gaps affecting each occupation:

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Labour shortages 2007</i>	<i>Labour shortages 2012</i>	<i>Top three skills gaps</i>
Developers	6%	17%	Communication Customer/client handling Process and change management
Engineers	5%	17%	Project, process and financial management Leadership Sustainable communities knowledge
Environmental specialists	2%	8% surplus	Project and stakeholder management Leadership Conflict resolution
Housing and Welfare Officers	7% surplus	25% surplus	Breakthrough thinking Inclusive visioning Financial and stakeholder management
Landscape Architects	11%	91%	Financial and project management Inclusive visioning Conflict resolution
Neighbourhood and community development specialists	6% surplus	23% surplus	Breakthrough thinking Inclusive visioning Financial and stakeholder management
<b>Planners</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>Financial management Analysis</b> <b>Decision-making</b>
Regeneration and economic development specialists	17%	73%	Project management Community engagement Conflict resolution
Sustainable development specialists	17%	74%	Conflict resolution Project management
Surveyors	4%	6%	Communication Customer/client handling Process and change management
<b>Transport planners</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>Financial</b> <b>Project and change management</b> <b>Sustainable communities knowledge</b>

Source: Mind the Skills Gap, 2007

#### EVIDENCE OF SKILLS GAPS AND LABOUR SHORTAGES FOR PLANNERS

25. Recent evidence suggests that there are now some 17,000 planners within local government planning departments. Evidence from York Consulting<sup>62</sup> indicates that the proportions of public and private sector planners are approximately the same, suggesting that there are more than 30,000 working in planning in England.

26. With expected increases in public spending (not including the housing green paper) the labour shortage in the planning profession is forecast to increase to 46% by 2012 if no action is taken to resolve the skills gap.<sup>63</sup> This number may well increase when the model is re-run. ASC will be able to provide an update on this in May 2008. The table below shows the current year on year forecasted gaps from the Mind the Skills Gap research:

<i>Year</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
Planning profession deficit	-9%	-18%	-25%	-32%	-38%	-42%	-46%

Source: Mind the Skills Gap, 2007

(A full analysis of the skills and labour shortages of planners from the Mind the Skills Gap research can be found at Annex A).

<sup>62</sup> Academy for Sustainable Communities Gap Analysis for Sustainable Communities Professionals (York Consulting, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> The forecast model for Mind the Skills gap predicts the scale of labour shortages to 2012 across England by region and by profession. The model is structured around a supply forecast and a demand forecast from 2006 onwards. The forecasts are based on assumptions based on the Labour Force Survey, online surveys (which formed part of the MSG evidence base) and public sector expenditure plans.

27. In addition to the absolute shortage of planners, some 10% of organisations surveyed identified the need for planners to improve their technical skills. Compared to other professions this was relatively high. Of those individuals surveyed, 30% identified knowledge of relevant procedures and 50% identified specialist areas as requiring improvement. Specialist areas included development appraisal skills (necessary to inform negotiations on affordable housing and S106 agreements, etc), climate change “mitigation” and “adaptation” and others related to the use of evidence-based approaches to forward planning.

28. Deficits in technical skills gaps are closely related to those in generic skills gaps, for example, in negotiation with developers and stakeholder engagement. Evidence in the report suggested that planners would be more confident in negotiations if their underlying technical skills were better.

29. The planning system and planners have received increasing attention in recent years with the acknowledgement of the importance of planning in delivering a range of policy objectives, from the provision of housing to mitigating and adapting to climate change. The lack of resources faced by the sector, alongside the diminution of professional status, the need for culture change, and sometimes individual and organisation demoralisation have also been widely recognised.

30. “Mind the Skills Gap” highlighted financial management skills as a key area of weakness, this reinforced a survey conducted by the RTPI (2005) as an area where skills were significantly lacking.<sup>64</sup> Other areas of weakness include analysis, decision-making, evaluation and inclusive visioning as well as staff appraisal and change management. Both surveys identified commitment amongst planners to developing their project and financial management skills. The significance of these gaps is clear, generic skills are as important as technical skills. When individuals were asked which professions with generic skills should be employed more in their organisation, planners were ranked third.<sup>65</sup> In the Audit Commission’s report on planning, stakeholders questioned “the ability of planners to communicate, negotiate and lead” and also stated that there was difficulty in resolving conflicting issues and balancing trade-offs.<sup>66</sup>

31. Regional analysis of labour shortages and skills gaps formed part of the MSG study. This included modelling that forecasted labour shortages by profession. Please see the full report for further details. The analysis highlighted planning shortages were growing at a faster than the national average in most regions. The table below illustrates this point:

FORECAST LABOUR SHORTAGES IN PLANNING BY REGION

	<i>Slower than the national average</i>	<i>Faster than average</i>
Labour shortages decreasing/surplus		Y&H, WM
Labour shortages increasing/deficit	SE	NE, EM, E London SW NW

Source: Mind the Skills Gap, 2007

32. The evidence points to an absolute shortage of planners in coming years as well as to shortages in technical, specialist and generic skills across professionals working in both the public and private sectors. Forecasts suggest that these skills and labour shortage gaps will widen. It is important that planners get the technical skills required to do their jobs properly but it is equally important that they have the generic skills to enable them to work in multidisciplinary teams across sectors.

33. The “Mind the Skills Gap” research built on work ASC commissioned from York Consulting in 2006 which was based on the existing literature and evidence base. This report drew attention to the difficulties faced by the public sector in recruiting. It reported for example that some 93% of public sector organisations reported some difficulty in recruitment particularly in planning, and cited the Local Government Pay and Workforce Strategy Survey 2006 as key evidence. Over half (55%) of local authorities surveyed said that they faced recruitment difficulties for Planning Development Control managers and professionals (50% for other managerial and professional roles in planning), with over one third offering marketing supplements as an inducement to successful candidates. The table below shows these recruitment and retention difficulties. These are some of the highest rates among built environment occupations. Similarly, retention issues also scored highly, with one third of authorities saying that they faced retention problems within Planning Development Control (28% for other planning roles).

34. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION DIFFICULTIES

	<i>Planning development control*</i>	<i>Other planning*</i>
Recruitment difficulties	55%	50%
Use of market supplements	35%	26%
Retention difficulties	33%	28%

\* % of local authorities managers and professional posts only

Source: Local Government Pay and Workforce Strategy Survey 2006

<sup>64</sup> A Survey of Discipline Knowledge and Generic Skills of RTPI Corporate Members (RTPI, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> Mind the Skills Gap, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> The Planning System—Matching Expectations and Realities (Audit Commission, 2006).

35. Since MSG, ASC has developed a Brownfield skills strategy on behalf of English Partnerships. Consultation on the strategy will be launched on 4th March 2008 and copies will be available from ASC's website thereafter. Responses to the Brownfield scoping consultation confirmed that shortages in the profession were already causing problems. Local authorities reported high staff turn over, competition between the public and private sectors for experienced staff and poor quality technical reports putting undue pressure on planning staff to meet published turnaround times. The strategy supports the growing gaps in technical, specialist and generic skills highlighted in MSG.

36. ASC recognises the importance of providing support for local authorities and elected members within the sustainable communities context. As the recent IDeA report (2008) on local government performance states, elected members will "increasingly need to be able to communicate a clear vision and influence and inspire partners to work towards it". This has come about as local politicians have become more involved in place shaping, however, many "are not yet equipped to make the most of the current agenda and self improvement, peer learning, support and organisational development will all play a part in enabling this to happen".

37. The Mind the Skills Gap research also examined transport planners, who perform an associated but different role from town planners. Transport planners are concerned with the provision and management of a sustainable transport infrastructure, at a national, regional and local level. There is also a very wide range of areas from highway designers through to regional land use and transport modelling.

38. Forecasts of future skills gaps, relative to the current position, suggest an increasing shortage of transport planners available. The skills gap, in the absence of appropriate action, is forecast to increase to over 10 percent by 2012. Over 10% of organisational respondents to the survey anticipated shortages in this area.

39. Amongst sustainable communities professionals, individual transport planners and organisations are relatively confident regarding the level of technical skills in this area. Transport planners are also relatively confident about the level of their generic skills. In common with those across the sector, financial, project and change management are most likely to be identified as areas requiring improvement. There is some evidence that transport planners are not always as engaged in the sustainable communities agenda as they could be.

## RESOURCES

40. Over the next three years ASC expects to receive core funding of £5.5 million per annum from CLG as part of the CSR 07 settlement. These resources are clearly limited given the scale of the current and projected future challenges. In order to maximise our resources in the future ASC will be targeting a proportion of its resources spatially into areas undergoing the greatest transformation and with significant problems in delivering change. ASC also intends to devote fewer of its resources over the coming years to careers focused work and more to working on the skills needs of those currently working in the sustainable communities sector and those who work with communities, especially elected members.

## ASC'S FUTURE WORK PRIORITIES

41. In response to the key recommendation of MSG, ASC is leading a coordinated response to the skills challenges facing the sector by agreeing a sector wide skills action plan, bringing partners and stakeholders together to deliver skills for sustainable communities. A major element of this work involves influencing partners to deliver against the skills agenda and monitoring progress towards closing the gap in generic, specialist and technical skills. In addition to the action plan, specific work programmes will be targeted at building skills and capacity across the sector.

42. ASC will continue to encourage cross professional and cross sector learning.

ASC will accelerate the roll out of programmes and courses and develop new ones to meet market need. This will include influencing the professional institutes to promote master classes and adopt CPD modules. The following programmes will be rolled out:

- Raising Our Game Certificate in Leading Sustainable Communities.
- Certificate in Creating Sustainable Communities.
- An online self-applied and self-analysing diagnostic tool to help assess and address sustainable communities skills gaps. The tool, aimed at sustainable community professionals and practitioners in the private and public sectors, will help individuals and organisations recognise generic skills gaps and provide advice on how to bridge them.

43. ASC will promote leadership as a core theme in future. We will:

- Develop a "Leadership of Place" programme to build the capacity of both existing and future leaders in the public, private and community sectors involved in delivering sustainable communities. This will include developing a new model of leadership tailored to the sustainable communities context. We will roll out our "Taking the Lead" programme and continue to provide support and development to leaders through our Leaders' Network.

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44. ASC will aim to encourage more people to enter career pathways into the sector through:
- The delivery of the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities (one pilot delivered at Sheffield Hallam University with another planned for 2008–09).
  - Managing the “Ask:WhatIf?” careers website to promote careers in the sustainable communities sector.
  - Continuing to work with the professional institutes to encourage a joined up approach to training, CPD and career pathways.
45. ASC will also support key specialist and technical skills development:
- The Brownfield skills strategy to help deliver the government’s housing targets is on course to begin rolling out skills programmes next year. The strategy’s key recommendation was for ASC to take the lead on the development of a Town Planning, Land Contamination and Public Health Skills Development Framework for local authorities and other public sector bodies involved in the reuse of Brownfield land. This work will be delivered against the conclusions of the report *Future Planners: Propositions for the next age of Planning* (February 2007 DEMOS) which looks at the evolving role of planners in wider place making and the new approaches, skills set and competencies that implies. Once developed, the Skills Development Framework will be trialled by those local authorities developing Local Brownfield Strategies through the support of English Partnerships. Ultimately, we would like to see it being adopted across the sector as a whole.
  - As a result of the need for information on climate change mitigation and adaptation, ASC has developed an online resource specifically for the sustainable communities sector. Information includes key facts and figures, and frequently asked questions and answers to key issues in this complex subject. The information resource also provides signposts to further, more detailed information resources to enable users to develop their knowledge independently. This will be rolled out from April 2008 onwards.
  - In response to the needs of sustainable communities professionals for specific technical skills, ASC has also developed an evidence based learning resource which can be used by sustainable communities professionals to enable them to understand the concept of community cohesion and the critical steps that can help them address this challenge. We are working with CLG to see how this can be rolled out in the context of their new Regeneration Framework and the Department’s community empowerment work.

## CONCLUSIONS

46. The Planning Inquiry comes at a crucial time. Planners are facing demands to do more: to meet the Government’s housing and environmental ambitions; to respond to the desires and aspirations of communities for better places and spaces to live, work and play; and to satisfy the needs of the economy for places and an infrastructure supportive to business. Increasingly, this includes tackling the complexity inherent in bringing Brownfield land back into use. However, as this submission has illustrated, there is strong evidence—despite the efforts of Government and a range of stakeholders—of both a current shortage of planners and of severe, potentially acute, shortages further down the line.

47. As we have explained, the introduction of ASC’s new Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities will help, as will our work to encourage more young people to consider a career in sustainable communities occupations. But these are new initiatives and will not tackle the immediate pressures facing the sector. Moreover, the size of the task appears to be getting larger rather than smaller since, taking the new Government housing targets into account, the deficit in planners could be as great as 80% by 2012. That’s not to say that simply expanding the number of students studying planning will tackle the problem. ASC has established that the days of the traditional, old style planner are well and truly numbered. For the 21st century they must have a wider skills-set of core and generic skills, including programme and project management and risk assessment; competence with legal and policy issues eg relating to the reuse of Brownfield land; health and safety issues; data and information management skills; financial control; sustainable development; communication skills—including negotiation, mediation and brokering, especially when working with developers and with local communities.

48. ASC’s new generic module for Higher Education institutions and our cross disciplinary professional development programmes are playing a part in developing the practitioners of the future. But more needs to be done. In particular, there needs to be greater national co-ordination and coherence in the approach adopted to developing the workforce of the future, with buy in from all stakeholders to developing the wider skills-sets that the modern role requires, and a willingness to work together to address the issues head on.

49. As part of the drive to develop a wider understanding of the role of planners within sustainable communities, it will be essential to provide development opportunities for elected members. These will ensure that they can play a full part in implementing and supporting planners in their work, including helping their constituents to get the best out of planning system.

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## Memorandum by the Sustainable Communities Excellence Network

### SUMMARY

- The nine Regional Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Communities (RCEs) that make up the Excellence Network work to equip people, partnerships and leaders with the skills and knowledge to enable the practical delivery of regeneration and sustainable communities.
- The Network endorses this Inquiry as an acknowledgement of the crucial role that generic skills and the sustainable communities agenda play in the delivery of regeneration.
- RCEs most strongly and collectively support cross-sector, peer-centred learning and have led numerous such projects and programmes (please see Appendix).
- They have significant experience in learning provision to local authorities and planning departments (please see Appendix).
- Assessing demand for learning provision is difficult when looking at reskilling/upskilling those currently in work—in several regions, RCEs have done work to assemble a regional picture regarding current demand and supply (please see section D of the Network response).
- RCEs feel that employers need to clearly articulate demand and then directly start to address the budget implications of this. RCEs do and can continue to act as brokers and collaborate (for instance with Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships) to put together appropriate packages of support.
- Whilst there are specialist areas in which skills gaps are emerging, RCEs feel that the generic skills gaps are still the most pronounced, including: leadership and negotiation skills, an understanding of the sustainability/placeshaping agenda and a better understanding of the planning and development process generally—RCEs are making good progress in this area but need continued support and acknowledgment of the importance and long-term nature of their work.
- There is also a continued need for shared understanding among professionals of different roles and processes across sectors—again, this is best addressed through cross-sector, peer-centred learning. RCEs facilitate many such networks and encourage continued acknowledgement of their importance thereof.

### INTRODUCTION

1. The Sustainable Communities Excellence Network is an alliance of the nine Regional Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Communities (RCEs) established throughout England. They equip people, partnerships and leaders with the skills and knowledge to enable the practical delivery of regeneration and sustainable communities.

2. The nine RCEs are:

- Creating Excellence (South West).
- Design for London/Urban Design London.
- Ignite North East.
- Inspire East (East of England).
- Integreat Yorkshire (Yorkshire and Humber).
- Regeneration East Midlands.
- RegenWM (West Midlands).
- RENEW Northwest.
- South East Excellence.

3. Set up by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) at the request of Central Government, the RCEs work across rural and urban issues through:

- Peer-based learning.
- Design review and enabling services.
- Cross-sector and cross-professional networks.
- Training programmes.
- Tools and resources.

## INQUIRY RESPONSE

*A. The link between generic skills and sustainability is crucial*

1. The Network has considered the Parliamentary inquiry into the skills capacity within local government to deliver sustainable communities and hereby submits a collective response. At least three of the Regional Centres of Excellence for Sustainable Communities are also submitting individual responses.

2. The Network endorses the inquiry as a positive sign that Communities and Local Government (CLG) acknowledges the crucial role that generic skills and the sustainable communities agenda play in the delivery of regeneration, healthy communities and thriving economies. The RCEs strongly encourage the Committee and its stakeholders to retain this focus. The link between generic skills and sustainability must re-emerge as a priority at all levels of government and within all sectors as key to the success or failure of any placeshaping endeavour.

*B. RCEs are embedded in the cross-sector regional placeshaping agenda*

1. RCEs work primarily as catalysts, influencers and brokers and only as direct deliverers when needed to “bridge a gap” in the market. They are distinct from one another, but share an ability to work across the sustainable communities/placeshaping agenda, across rural and urban themes, looking at the skills and knowledge needed for each element of regeneration—from good services, to an inclusive social culture, from health and well-being to well governed local communities.

2. This unique ability of the RCEs to broker and deliver training from a broad regeneration perspective is one of their greatest strengths. Their work at the regional level has brought them into contact with countless numbers of local practitioners as well as regional and national bodies. Through thousands of learning opportunities brokered or delivered in the past four years, they have a solid base of local and regional contacts that number well into the millions.

3. While nearly all of their projects are pan-professional, the regional centres have significant experience in learning provision to local authorities and planning departments through numerous projects and programmes which provide them with essential support (please see the Appendix).

*C. Cross-sector, peer-centred learning is best brokered at regional level*

1. Through this experience the RCEs have witnessed a growing awareness of the need for sustainability training/support for planners. They also perceive a growing awareness and response to this gap among providers.

2. Regional centres most strongly and collectively support cross-sector, peer-centred learning and have led numerous such projects and programmes (see Appendix). The RCEs deliver or facilitate this kind of learning and also work to influence others responsible for such training (key local authority decision makers) and the organisations—Higher Education (HE)/FE—that are well-placed to provide it. They are directly delivering where they see gaps in the market, and each acts as a clearinghouse of resources (toolkits, peer learning networks, advisory services).

3. Assessing demand is difficult when looking at reskilling/upskilling those currently in work. Here the complexities of local authority training budgets and HEI structural problems in delivering flexible programmes come into play, not to mention the sensitivities of pointing out the need for further staff development to existing employees.

*D. A regional picture of supply and demand*

1. In several regions, RCEs have done work to assemble a regional picture regarding demand and supply—for instance, in the East of England, Inspire East, the regional RCE, conducted a skills audit with Regional Cities East (the six medium sized cities in the East of England). This audit examined the generic skills shortages and deficiencies in the local authorities among other regeneration professionals—the results are included in Inspire East’s individual submission and also incorporated into this response.

2. In 2006, Urban Design London conducted an analysis of the learning needs in the field of urban design and built environment quality of Borough and TfL staff across London. Integreat Yorkshire, the RCE in Yorkshire and Humber, is currently conducting a regional skills audit which seeks to build on the Academy for Sustainable Communities’ (ASC) recent “Mind the Gap” research by providing a more substantial regional picture of skills gaps in the delivery of regeneration in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

3. In 2007 SEEDA, through South East Excellence, commissioned a report which recommended that the compatibility of councillors and developers needs encouraging by: understanding the different agendas these sectors work to; strengthening the leadership role of local authorities; improving the process of community engagement; and carrying out areas of technical training such as Urban Design. South East Excellence is taking forward the recommendations of this report as a basis for their work programmes.

4. In other regions, to the Network's knowledge, a coherent regional picture of demand and supply is still outstanding. This could be a crucial first step as learning providers often work across local, city, conurban and rural village boundaries. To all such information-gathering endeavours RCEs offer their comprehensive regional relationships with, and knowledge and understanding of both learning providers and potential users, and are happy to dialogue further with all potential stakeholders to that end.

5. In addition, RCEs feel that employers need to clearly articulate demand and then directly start to address the budget implications of this. Then brokers—and the Regional Centres of Excellence are well-placed here—can collaborate (such as with Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships) to put together appropriate packages of support. In this, RCEs once again provide a comprehensive understanding of and a direct connection to trainers and potential clients who are or who should be engaged in the placeshaping/sustainable communities agenda.

#### E. *Network answers to specific questions*

When asked about the main areas where a lack of skills was most pronounced, some of the Regional Centres pointed out specialist areas:

- Urban architectural design.
- Economic appraisal.
- Low carbon design.

While most concentrated on more generic skills gaps:

- Lack of leadership skills among councillors.
- Lack of understanding of the sustainability agenda among councillors.
- Lack of understanding of the planning and development process among councillors.
- Inter-relationships between agencies.
- Delivering through effective teams.
- Managing external partners.
- Performance management.
- Financial control.
- Understanding the application of social capital to their area of work.
- Risk taking vs a bureaucratic approach.
- Communication/engagement.
- Development economics.
- Managing commitment.

These generic skills, as shown in the Egan findings, remain a key area in need of continued attention. RCEs have done significant work in this area (please see Appendix) and request continued endorsement and support due to the long-term nature of this work.

In addressing the skills needed by, and level of training provided to, councillors who make planning decisions, including on the proposed local member review bodies, the RCEs felt that councillors needed training in wider sustainable development issues as well as in key leadership skills such as advanced partnership working. They did not feel that training in highly technical areas was necessary for councillors unless there was a strategic element involved, such as national policy being a barrier to local innovations in sustainable drainage for example. RCEs often differentiate their clients into leaders and practitioners, and broker or deliver training appropriately.

RCEs also felt that councillors needed a better understanding of the planning and development process generally. RCEs are already working in these areas and encourage continued acknowledgement and support of their engagement thereof.

Regarding the role and effectiveness of agencies involved in monitoring, developing and providing specialist knowledge and skills for planning officials and councillors, and their response to changes to the demands placed on planning departments, members of the Network generally responded that for planners to be upskilled they need improved understanding of other professions and disciplines and working with other sectors—especially the private sector. The RCEs' programmes explicitly promote this cross-sector/cross-disciplinary understanding (please see Appendix)—and while a few are exclusive to planners—even these quite often bring in members as well.

This ability to bring professionals from different sectors and disciplines into the same room has been acknowledged as an area of the RCEs' greatest impact, and it is vital that their work here is acknowledged, promoted and fully resourced.

The Network and the RCEs pointed again to The Egan Skills agenda in answering the Committee's question about the long-term effectiveness of measures being taken by local authorities and others to mitigate gaps in the skills and knowledge within planning departments. Published in 2004, the Egan Skills

Agenda has only in grown in relevance—never before has the world community acknowledged sustainability as being so great of import, and never before have experts cited skills and knowledge as key to economic well-being with as much frequency.

Yet somehow this crucial link between skills and sustainability—key to the success or failure of any placeshaping endeavour—does not appear with nearly enough force in recommendations for delivery of recent policy that have come out of Central Government.

#### CONCLUSION

The Network urges CLG and its stakeholders to call for a renewed commitment, made explicit in relevant delivery plans, to this vital link between generic skills and sustainability. The need for such training for local government and all regeneration professionals was confirmed by Egan and continues in all research through to our present time.

Resources and support must continue to endorse a cross-sector, peer-centred learning approach focused at regional and local level. To this approach, the RCEs offer their cross-sector and cross-disciplinary networks, their local and regional contacts, their rich resource clearinghouses, and their general knowledge of the skills and sustainability landscape in the regions.

Measuring “long-term” effectiveness is challenging in regeneration skills for a variety of reasons, including the long-term nature of regeneration itself, the high turnover of those working in the sector and the number of learning providers offering skills and knowledge in different ways to different people.

It is for this reason that RCEs—and their understanding of and contacts within the cross-sector/cross-disciplinary regeneration arena in each region—are also key to the success of regional placeshaping endeavors.

*Melissa Riches*

Network Development Officer

Sustainable Communities Excellence Network

#### Appendix

### CURRENT WORK WITH PLANNERS AND THE PLANNING PROCESS: REGIONAL CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

#### PEER-BASED LEARNING/CROSS-SECTOR AND CROSS-PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

##### *East of England—Inspire East*

###### *Design and Historic Environment Champions Network*

Delivered with ABECs and funded by CABE and English Heritage, Inspire East has facilitated this network since 2004 to address the need for “champions” to promote design quality in local authorities.

###### *Local Delivery Vehicle (LDV) Network*

Inspire East facilitates this network which aims to share best practice within LDVs and their partners on issues of common interest. Events have included: “Education and Planning” and “Health and Planning”.

##### *North East—Ignite North East*

###### *Design Champions Network*

Ignite supports the Design Champions Network in conjunction with the regional ABEC. It aims to raise quality standards of placemaking and focuses on the two different types of planners involved in regeneration: the DC and the Policy and Implementation teams.

###### *Quality Places Forum*

This forum is being established by Ignite in the North East in partnership with English Partnerships and the Chartered Institute of Housing. It will address the implementation of quality standards to achieve the sustainability and housing agendas.

##### *South East—South East Excellence*

###### *Design Champions Club*

As the first region to run a Design Champions Club, South East Excellence has run several events and conferences for Design Champions which have examined sustainability from a variety of angles.

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## DESIGN REVIEW AND ENABLING SERVICES

### *East Midlands—Regeneration East Midlands*

#### *Regional Design Review*

The East Midlands Design Review panel, run by Opun ABEC which is part of Regeneration East Midlands, is a strong panel that has run for several years, supported by CABE.

### *North West—RENEW Northwest*

#### *Regional Design Review*

The Design Review project facilitated by RENEW Northwest as part of their Places Matter! programme positively welcomes planning officers from the relevant local authority (and others relevant professionals) to attend and contribute, and Design Review reports on each scheme are sent to the respective planning authority as a non-statutory consultee.

### *South East—South East Excellence*

#### *Regional Design Review*

Where regional design review started—the South East has now run Regional Design Review Panels for 6 years and review 70 schemes a year.

### *South West—Creating Excellence*

#### *Regional Design Review*

The Panel is a partnership between Creating Excellence and the ABEC, Bristol. Since the Panel first met in October 2005, it has undertaken 81 reviews involving 70 schemes, most seen once but 11 seen more than once at different stages.

## TRAINING PROGRAMMES

### *East of England—Inspire East*

#### *Introduction to Urban Design/Introduction to Architecture*

Working with ABECs, Inspire East delivered multiple events focused on different places to address the lack of understanding of urban design by planners and councillors, with each session attracting 30–40 professionals.

#### *Low Carbon Growth, Training for Planners*

These training sessions aim to give planners a basic understanding of the policy and principles related to low carbon growth.

#### *South Beds Project*

A pilot project with Planning Aid to engage community activists and encourage them to become planning technicians—this is a first step to address the shortage of planners in local authorities.

### *London—Urban Design London*

#### *UDL training programme*

This training programme, which has engaged nearly 500 planners since January 2007, helps planning officers and councillors understand what urban design is and its importance to creating good, practical, lasting and valued places. It also engages traffic engineers, housing officers, police liaison officers, access officers, etc.

### *North West—RENEW Northwest*

#### *Pan-Professional CPD events*

RENEW has jointly organised pan-professional events with RIBA and RTPI for their members on the proposed reforms to planning processes, with speakers from the Government Office for the Region along with policy staff from both institutes. The outcome has been a better understanding by architects and planners on the pressures and drivers affecting their colleagues.

*South West—Creating Excellence**Design Action Programme*

Run jointly with CABE, Creating Excellence facilitates this programme which addresses urban and architectural design skills which has engaged approximately 1000 planners.

*West Midlands—RegenWM**Building for Life workshops*

Building for Life has been adopted nationally as the standard for quality in new housing developments. RegenWM, West Midlands Regional Assembly, and CABE have worked with planners and other regional partners to adopt this principle of quality. The West Midlands Regional Assembly, RegenWM and CABE have scheduled a series of free workshops offering training in using Building for Life—each will include a site visit to conduct an assessment of a housing project using the Building for Life standard criteria. These events are aimed at local authority planning officers, councillors and urban designers as well as house builders, housing associations and representatives from regional organisations.

*Yorkshire and Humber—Integreat Yorkshire**Planning for Non Planners*

Integreat Yorkshire funded a highly successful “Planning for non Planners” training, designed and facilitated by Yorkshire Planning Aid. This one-day session was aimed specifically at Community Development Workers and other community workers. Fully booked at all four venues, the day included presentations, interactive sessions and speakers. Delegates felt an increased awareness of the development plans/development control system, as well as increased confidence to interact with the planning system.

*Planning for BME communities* Integreat Yorkshire has commissioned a pioneering two year project helping people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities across the region to understand and engage with the planning system. Yorkshire Planning Aid, which provides independent planning advice and assistance for individuals and community groups in the Yorkshire and Humber region, will be the delivery partner. The work will focus on awareness training sessions in the local authorities that are developing framework documents in their area, followed by an end of project conference. The project is aimed at helping people from BME communities get involved with the future development of their area that reflect their needs and aspirations.

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

*East Midlands—Regeneration East Midlands (REM)**Growth Points Learning Laboratory (in collaboration with the ASC)*

Recognising that recent policy places considerable emphasis on the need for local authorities, planners, developers and other partners to work collaboratively across sectors, REM is working on a new initiative which seeks to understand those issues that are not currently addressed by existing programmes; the project will include the following:

- Assess and map regional aspirations/processes of agencies working around housing growth points.
- Identify common themes of skills needs, issues preventing dialogue, sharing of agenda and linking priorities.
- Raise awareness of partnership working and collaboration in the growth agenda.
- Capture knowledge/lesson for dissemination through a programme of events.
- Work towards developing a best practice model of partnership/cross sector working.

*North East—Ignite North East**Web enabled Design and Access Statement Writing Tool*

Ignite offers a Design and Access Statement Writing Tool on its website, which addresses the new skills required to write and interpret design statements. The use of a common format enables a coherent statement to be written and interpreted by planners. Over 100 statements have been generated by the web tool so far and it receives over 500 hits/month.

*South East—South East Excellence**Checklist South East*

South East Excellence has created several tools to help both developers and local authorities assess the sustainability of major developments against regional standards. They offer 19 toolkits that specifically address elements of sustainability practice.

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**Memorandum by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment**

**INTRODUCTION**

Set up in 1999, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment works for an improvement in people's quality of life through good design. CABE champions well-designed buildings and public space, running public campaigns and providing expert, practical advice. We work directly with planners, designers, clients and architects, offering them guidance on projects that will shape all our lives. CABE is a statutory executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and funded by DCMS and Communities and Local Government.

CABE's statutory function is to improve the standard of the design, management and maintenance of the built environment, and to advise government on how best to do this. This extends to skills and education. At present, CABE's ability to raise standards is hindered by the skills gaps which exist in planning.

**BACKGROUND**

One of the biggest challenges for the planning system is how to cope with the big increase in the number of residential applications that are coming forward to meet the commitment to build three million new homes by 2020. Managing proposals to ensure that what gets built makes a positive contribution to the local area, in accordance with national policies, requires a big increase in the skills capacity of planning departments.

CABE has well-known concerns about the current quality of housing, neighbourhoods and places being produced—and the legacy this will leave for future generations. CABE's Housing Audit—the first complete picture of housing design quality in England—reveals the serious shortfall in the current quality of new homes, with more than four out of five housing schemes failing to meet quality standards.<sup>67</sup> The housing produced in the first few years of this century is simply not up to the standard which the government is demanding and which residents have a right to expect.

The reasons for this are complex and multiple, but the planning system has a pivotal role to play in influencing the quality of local neighbourhoods through its power to refuse permission for poor quality development, and thereby promote good. Equipping decision makers with the skills to make well-informed, robust decisions on developments in their local area is crucial. Today's planning decisions will leave a legacy for the quality of the neighbourhoods future generations will live in.

**HIGH QUALITY DESIGN IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM**

The economic and social benefits of high quality design are commonly accepted<sup>68</sup>. Through PPS1 and PPS3, national planning policy now requires high quality design as a fundamental consideration in planning. PPS 1 states that “design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted”.

The introduction of the spatial planning system has meant that a new way of working is required by planners and, indeed local authorities as a whole. Local planning authorities have a growing list of roles and responsibilities to meet the place making agenda, and ensuring high quality design is fundamental to achieving attractive, healthy, enduring and sustainable communities.

There is a major problem, however, of inconsistency with regards to decision-making on quality of design in the planning system. In the course of its work CABE speaks to parties involved at all stages of the development process, and around the country there are large variations in the consistency of decisions at planning on the grounds of quality. CABE's housing audit showed that volume housebuilders can provide high quality design for one development, whilst simultaneously producing very poor design on another<sup>69</sup>. Anecdotal evidence shows that when high quality is demanded by local authorities, it is usually delivered.

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<sup>67</sup> *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West* (CABE, 2007)

<sup>68</sup> *The value of good design: how buildings and spaces create economic and social value* (CABE 2002)

<sup>69</sup> *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West* (CABE, 2007)

But in order to be able to demand high quality, local authorities need the skills capacity to do so. Lack of training and expertise in design issues is the factor most frequently cited when explaining why local authorities are reluctant to refuse on design grounds.<sup>70</sup>

#### THE PROBLEM—CURRENT SKILLS GAPS IN PLANNING

Skills gaps exist at both a technical level, working on individual applications, and at the broader level of other departments who need to work with planning teams (such as highways), as well as councillors and the executive, all of whom have a direct or indirect influence on decision-making.

##### *Planning departments*

The majority of planning departments do not possess staff who are trained on the principles of good design and how to assess the quality of developments using established criteria to fulfil the requirements of national policies. A skills survey carried out in 2004 by the Local Government Association identified that design was the generic/professional skill most lacking, with 52% of Local Planning Authorities identifying that they had a lack of design skills<sup>71</sup>.

Applications are often considered in isolation because of a shortage of both time and the necessary skills, with the result that often only minor amendments are made when a development may be completely inappropriate. Given the right skills planners would be more able to assess applications more quickly and effectively than at present. Establishing a conversation early on with the applicant before a formal application is submitted is also an important way of easing the burden.

To supplement core design skills, the new framework requires planners to be well-versed in more “non-traditional” planning skills such as monitoring and evaluation, relationship building, negotiation and partnership working. Well-designed places result when these skills can be applied early on in the process, and they are often lacking.

##### *Highways*

Creating high-quality places requires all those involved in handling an application to work together with a clear objective in mind. Many developments are let down by poor highways design. A survey of Institute of Highways and Transportation members revealed that 85% had received no formal urban design training<sup>72</sup>. This also extends to colleagues who highway engineers need to work with at planning stage, such as transport planners, regeneration and traffic management officers, which showed that that 62.4% of respondents had had no urban design training either.<sup>73</sup>

##### *Councillors*

Councillors who sit on planning committees play a pivotal role in the system, but very few have received training on how to address decisions on individual applications with regard to their quality<sup>74</sup>. It is crucial that councillors have an understanding about the principles of good design and how to recognise these in a planning application. The intention in the draft Planning Bill to introduce Local Member Review Boards places makes it imperative that councillors possess an understanding of design when they make decisions affecting their local area.

##### *Local planning policies*

It is evident from emerging Local Development Framework documents that these wider considerations of spatial planning are not currently being delivered. Many Core Strategies lack a genuine vision for the area, a robust evidence base, and fail to integrate other policies and programmes that influence the nature of places and how they function. They are often not realistic or deliverable.

Spatial planning requires planners to work partnership with the whole of the local authority—including the community, Local Strategic Partnerships, developers, utilities providers and other external stakeholders. This is crucial to creating a robust evidence base and articulate a clear and deliverable vision for the area.

<sup>70</sup> *Review of local authority planning departments* (CABE, 2003)

<sup>71</sup> *Delivering the planning system in England* (Durning and Glasson, 2006)

<sup>72</sup> *Designing Streets for People* (CABE, English Heritage, IHT, 2004)

<sup>73</sup> *Streets and well designed neighbourhoods: what do you think?* (RTP/CABE, 2007)

<sup>74</sup> *Review of local authority planning departments* (CABE, 2003)

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### *The Planning Inspectorate*

There is a common perception in local authorities that the Planning Inspectorate will not support refusal on design grounds<sup>75</sup>. While there are an increasing number of appeal cases that demonstrate that design grounds are supported at appeal, the role and influence that the Inspectorate has demands that all planning inspectors should have the design skills to ensure that poor quality designs are dismissed at appeal.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

As the Government's advisor on the design quality of the built environment, CABI works on a number of initiatives to raise standards of decision-making through the planning system. But to produce material and long lasting effects this needs to be backed up by a sustained drive to raise the level of skills.

### *Building for Life*

CABI's assessment of well-designed homes and neighbourhoods centres on the Building for Life criteria—established as the national standard for design quality in new housing developments.<sup>76</sup> Building for Life promotes and enables developments which are functional, attractive and sustainable, with an emphasis on the importance of place-making. A partnership initiative, Building for Life is led by CABI and the Home Builders Federation, and actively supported by the two main constituent parts of the new Homes and Communities Agency, English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation.

The Building for Life criteria can be used as a tool to evaluate the quality of planning applications, identifying the type of evidence that can demonstrate a commitment to good design. Training in the use of the criteria would enable planners to systematically assess applications in accordance with national policies, and judge the design quality of applications on a consistent basis.

Providing this training to planning officers in local authorities would have gone a long way to addressing one of the major skills gaps which exist. In addition, we have recently produced a guidance tool that can be used by planners to demonstrate the kinds of evidence that should be provided to address the criteria at planning stage.

**Recommendation:** A national programme of training on the use of the Building for Life criteria by planning officers to assess planning applications should be rolled out. This should be supplemented by introductory-level training on design issues, including Building for Life, for elected members serving on planning committees. Given the right level of support, CABI stands ready to lead on the implementation of a programme of training on how to use the tool effectively, and is in the process of establishing a model training package.

### *Highways*

CABI Space and English Heritage are working with the Institution of Highways & Transportation to offer a new programme of urban design training for highways and transportation professionals. CABI was also heavily involved in drawing up the Department for Transport's guidance document *Manual for Streets* which addresses a significant gap in the role of highway engineers in delivering attractive and sustainable places.

We are embarking upon the delivery of a programme of training for its use by highway engineers around the country, which should address some of the issues associated with the wider dimension of skills needed. However, it is essential that this is taken up and carried forward.

**Recommendation:** *Manual for Streets* should be adopted as guidance for highway engineers in all local authorities and training provided on its use.

### *A common approach*

CABI believes that there is scope to pull together coalitions at a regional and/or sub-regional level to develop and implement skills strategies. CABI would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with the ASC, RTPI, ATLAS, Planning Advisory Service and Regional Centres of Excellence to influence training programmes and resources for local planning authorities and planners and ensure that design is included and promoted.

A common curriculum which incorporated design skills would address for the future many of the areas in which skills gaps have been identified as needing to be rectified now.

**Recommendation:** A common curriculum should be established for planning which incorporates design so that the skills necessary to assess the quality of applications are embedded from an early stage.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> The criteria are outlined in detail in the guide *Delivering Great Places to Live* (CABI and HBF, 2005; updated 2007). See [www.buildingforlife.org](http://www.buildingforlife.org)

CABE would welcome collaborating with partners to work across boundaries and building consensus to develop a national skills framework/competencies/curricula to reinforce the complementary nature of support and signpost learners to resources and training provision.

### *Leadership*

Executive “buy in” to design to ensure the whole of the local authority is working towards a common goal is essential—ensuring high quality places and spaces. Around 65% of local authorities have appointed design champions, but it is essential that they have the power and skills to foster real culture change.

Recommendation: Every local authority should appoint a design champion trained to have a basic understanding of design issues.

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## **Memorandum by London Councils**

### INTRODUCTION

1. London Councils represents all 32 London boroughs, the City of London, the Metropolitan Police Authority and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. We are committed to fighting for resources for London and getting the best possible deal for London’s 33 Councils. We lobby on our members’ behalf, develop policy and do all we can to help boroughs improve the services they offer. We also run a range of services ourselves designed to make life better for Londoners.

2. The main points that London Councils would like to highlight in our evidence to this inquiry are as follows:

- Planning policy has changed significantly in recent years and is becoming more complex, particularly in London, where the Mayor also has some planning responsibilities. This is having a major impact on the skills required by those involved in planning in local authorities (both as officers and elected members).
- There remains a shortage of planners in London at middle and senior levels with the appropriate skills and experience. Local authorities’ difficulties in recruiting experienced staff have been getting worse in recent years.<sup>77</sup> The problems with recruitment and retention mean that local authority planners often have little time available to devote to the development of new skills.
- All boroughs already provide some form of training for councillors. The content varies but a range of procedural issues, such as scrutiny procedures and specific topics, such as urban design, are offered.
- There has not been any detailed analysis of specialist skills shortages in planning in either the national or the London Skills Need Assessment undertaken by the Sector Skills Council (SSC) responsible for planning. London Councils is concerned that this fact and the underrepresentation of local government in the SSC structure will mean that the skills needs of planning departments will not be given sufficient priority.
- A lack of financial resources is a major barrier to local authorities providing more training for their planning staff. This situation will not be helped by recent government policy on the way in which planning departments are resourced, such as the introduction of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and the decision on the level of increase for planning fees.
- Local authorities need stability in their funding arrangements to enable them to take a longer-term approach to improving skills and knowledge gaps in their planning departments.

3. Further details on these and other issues can be found in London Councils’ evidence below. Our evidence draws on two pieces of recent research supported by London Councils—on the recruitment and retention of staff in planning departments and the involvement of councillors in planning. Copies of both of these can be made available to the Committee if required. We have also included some information provided by the boroughs.

### RECENT CHANGES IN PLANNING

4. There have been a significant number of policy changes in recent years, which have had an impact on the skills required by those involved in planning in local authorities (both as officers and elected members). The nature of planning is becoming more complex, particularly in London, where the Mayor also has responsibilities for some aspects of planning. At the same time, there is a new emphasis on local authorities’ responsibilities in place shaping and in tackling climate change, both of which are areas where planning obviously has a crucial role to play.

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<sup>77</sup> London Councils Recruitment & Retention Barometer number three—2001 To 2007, May 2007

5. In addition to the technical and legal knowledge that has always been an important requirement, planners are now increasingly expected to be involved in a range of activities, such as public engagement and the development of effective partnerships with external stakeholders. The Planning Bill currently before Parliament will result in further changes to the planning system and will, no doubt, require planners to develop additional new skills. At the same time, there is a significant problem with recruitment and retention of qualified planners, particularly in London, meaning that local authority planners often have little time available to devote to the development of new skills.

#### SKILLS SHORTAGES AMONG PLANNING STAFF

6. Whilst this inquiry is about skills shortages rather than recruitment issues, the two issues are clearly linked and it would also be useful for the Committee to consider some of the evidence relating to the latter. There is a shortage generally of planners in London, and particularly in London's local authorities. Whilst there has been an increase in newly qualified planners recently and more junior posts can also be filled using temporary or agency staff, often from overseas, there remains a shortage of planners at middle and senior levels with the appropriate skills and experience.

7. Research undertaken for London Councils<sup>78</sup> has found that recruitment and retention problems have been getting worse in recent years, particularly with regard to experienced planners. In 2003, 66% of boroughs reported difficulties recruiting such staff, by 2005, 93% reported problems and two-thirds of boroughs thought the problems had got worse since 2003. Although boroughs have generally adopted strategies such as the use of temporary staff to fill vacancies, there is some evidence that skills shortages are affecting service delivery. A survey by Oxford Brookes University<sup>79</sup> found that in London "The lack of design, transport and negotiation skills is considered to be having a significant effect on provision of service". In some cases, this can mean, for example, that boroughs are not being as effective as they could be in negotiating Section 106 agreements with developers.

8. Borough officers have identified the following as being the key areas where there are skills' gaps as a result of the changing nature of planning work:

- Project management—The nature of the work that planners undertake on a daily basis, warrants in depth project management skills. This should perhaps be reflected in accredited planning courses. There is also a concern about the project management skills of London and Government Agencies who often have difficulty providing advice within the required deadlines.
- Sustainability (and issues relating to Sustainable Communities)—There is a general lack of a holistic understanding of sustainability issues, making links between carbon reduction techniques, waste, biodiversity and socio-economic issues and prioritising these. There is also a more specific lack of knowledge for example on carbon reduction techniques, the biodiversity duty and further Legislation that may change the way in which sustainability is viewed and supported at the local level.
- Economic Viability—Given the importance of affordable housing and sustainability, being aware of the implications for economic viability is becoming more important—particularly in terms of negotiating around policy objectives—eg uses, residential density—and S106 priorities. Officers need a basic understanding of economics and the property market in order to ensure they address the correct issues in negotiations and know when to ask for more specialist advice.

#### TRAINING FOR COUNCILLORS

9. London Councils together with London First and the Government Office for London commissioned research by Arup<sup>80</sup> last year on councillors' involvement in planning, including the level of training available to them. This research found that the need for councillor training is most acute after local elections, when there is likely to be a significant change in planning committee members. Councillor training is also an ongoing requirement, especially in an era of significant planning reform. In addition to changes in planning policy at a national level, councillors in London will also have to deal with changes as a result of the commencement of the Mayor's new planning powers.

10. All boroughs who were interviewed by Arup for this study reported that they offer some form of councillor training, on several planning-related subjects. The topics covered are typically agreed between councillors and officers, although some are considered "non-negotiable"—especially those relating to internal procedures.

11. Training on the following procedural issues is currently offered by at least one borough:

- Planning Protocol / Code of Conduct.
- Probity.

<sup>78</sup> Recruitment and Retention of Planners in London, A report for London Councils by Tim Edmundson and Elizabeth Rawson, November 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Durning, B and Glasson, J (2004) Skills Base in the Planning System, Volume 2, Survey Results. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University

<sup>80</sup> (available at: <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?docId=21328>)

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- Scrutiny procedures.
  - New councillor induction.
  - Policy basis for DC decisions: what constitutes a “material consideration”.
  - Planning Law / Role of Ombudsman—in association with Borough Solicitor.
  - Standards / Appeals.
  - LDFs / new planning system / introduction to planning.
  - London Plan / Mayor’s powers.
  - Planning Conditions.
  - Permitted Development Rights.
  - Introduction to Building Control.
  - Enforcement / Licensing.
12. The following topic-based training is currently offered by at least one borough:
- Urban design, eg design quality, tall buildings, daylight / shading.
  - E-planning / IT.
  - Development finance.
  - Telecoms.
  - Sustainability.
  - Housing / affordable housing / housing targets / housing design quality.
  - Regeneration / economic regeneration.
  - Transport and parking—in association with Highways/Transportation colleagues.
  - Conservation.

13. Organised tours around the borough, and to other boroughs, to see good and bad examples of development are both useful and popular with councillors. As well as in-house training courses many boroughs use external trainers when this shows a clear advantage, for example, asking Urban Design London, to provide training on urban design.

14. Some of those interviewed for this research had concerns about some of the training currently offered by national or London-wide providers. For example, the RTPI annual conference was considered to be suitable for Cabinet Members but not for all councillors as it is too long and does not present enough practical details for it to be worthwhile for the typical Planning Committee Member.

15. This research resulted in the publication of a good practice guide on connecting councillors with planning. This has recommendations on training including that councillors should be specifically training in how to engage with applicants to ensure they get the most from the process without prejudicing themselves eg asking factual questions.

#### AGENCIES INVOLVED IN PROVIDING SKILLS FOR PLANNING

16. Planning skills fall within the remit of the Asset Skills Sector Skills Council (SSC), but to date there has been very little specific reference to planning in their work. As one out of 32 occupations covered by the SSC, this is perhaps understandable. However, in neither the national, nor, more worryingly, the London Skills Need Assessment<sup>81</sup> is there any detailed analysis of specialist skills shortages in this professional field. While the recommended priorities for action for London will do no harm to the planning profession, they will arguably miss the deeper skills development needs of officials (and thereby also councillors, who often receive specialist training from their officers) within local authority planning departments, particularly in relation to the place-shaping role.

17. The Academy for Sustainable Communities is taking up some of the slack on the place-shaping agenda and generic skills for senior managers in this field, and again this is welcome, but, here too, there appears to be a lack of targeted, profession-specific training.

18. The central role of SSCs in the allocation of training funding and development, continues to be a major cause for concern. The under-representation of local government within the SSC structure poses a real danger that skills relating to rapidly changing demands on planning departments will not be identified or funded in a coordinated and prioritised way. Funding of training continues to be a challenge for the majority of boroughs. London Councils would therefore ask that special consideration should be given to how this key role can be fulfilled in the absence of an effective mechanism via the SSCs, particularly in London where skills shortages at all levels in authorities are an on-going and serious problem.

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<sup>81</sup> <http://www.assetskills.org/site/tabid/211/default.aspx>

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#### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES

19. London Councils is concerned that Government policy on the way in which planning departments are resourced may limit local authorities' ability to respond to changes in the demands placed on them. Government has recently made changes in the way in which it allocates the grant available for planning delivery. The new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) will not offer any support for development control activities. In addition, although the recent announcement of a 25% increase in planning fees is welcome, this is not sufficient for full cost recovery for planning departments. London Councils supports local determination of fee levels so that London boroughs can charge realistic fees that directly reflect the cost of development control services.

20. These two issues combined mean that planning departments will have very limited resources available to provide appropriate training or retraining for their staff in the increasingly complex range of skills that they are expected to have. In its response to the consultation on HPDG earlier this year, London Councils asked Government to reconsider the proposal to remove Central Government funding for development control activities.

#### THE LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS OF MEASURES BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHERS

21. Several London boroughs are members of the Planning Training Partnership run in conjunction with the University of Westminster. This partnership has identified a series of topics for further training and the boroughs are also involved in providing this training. The take-up of some of the courses has been lower than anticipated and it is likely that cost is a significant barrier to boroughs participating in this and other training given the limited training budgets most of them have.

22. London Councils also plays a role in sharing good practice between boroughs and ensuring that they are kept up to date on significant new developments in planning, for example, London Councils runs a S106 Practitioners group which meets quarterly to ensure that relevant skills and knowledge are shared between the boroughs. Boroughs have commented positively on the value of this group. London Councils will also be running a seminar to provide borough planning officers with an overview of the changes as a result of the Mayor's new planning powers. However, we are a small organisation and do not have the resources (either financial or staffing) to address all the gaps in skills and knowledge in borough planning departments.

23. Local authorities need stability in their funding arrangements to enable them to take a longer-term approach to improving skills and knowledge gaps in their planning departments. London's settlement under CSR 2007 will undoubtedly place real strains on training budgets generally, as these are not seen to affect service delivery in the short to medium term. With an ageing population of staff, and heavy reliance on agency workers and private consultants, planning in local authorities over the long-term faces real challenges. Whilst attempts have been made to provide training and attract more (and younger) people into the profession, the service and financial pressures on authorities have made this a marginal activity, rather than one seen as central to the function and its future. There is a need for an effective long-term strategy for the maintenance and development of planning skills in London, to which all authorities are willing and able to contribute. This may be something which can be addressed via the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for London under the new arrangements, if boroughs indicate it is a priority.

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### **Memorandum by the Home Builders Federation**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Home Builders Federation is the trade association representing private sector home builders in England and Wales. Its members are responsible for about 80% of the new homes built each year in England and Wales and range from large national companies to regional and smaller, local firms.

The Federation believes that, while there are, of course, many skilled and committed planners within local authorities there are also significant skills and capacity shortfalls affecting the ability of local authorities to achieve successful planning for sustainable communities. The increasing diversity of issues planners are being asked to incorporate in local development plans and in day to day decision making when determining planning applications is also undoubtedly a challenge for planning professionals. This challenge is, however, made more difficult in practice by some more systemic issues facing the planning system.

## SYSTEMIC ISSUES

i. *Spatial Planning Skills*

A fundamental issue affecting the quality and effectiveness of local authority planning is that the visionary skills required for spatial planning are not nurtured in the right way. For example, new entrants joining local authorities from university planning courses are all too often asked to work on small householder planning applications and similar scale tasks.

Understandably such assignments are de-motivating for young professionals whose higher education courses will have focused on the rationale and ability for spatial planning to change things for the better. Without sufficient positive career development, many of the most able new recruits leave to join the private sector with the result that the local authority planning team is under-equipped to formulate and deliver strategic spatial plans.

In consequence there are very few people in local authority planning teams who actually possess the ability and track record to develop and deliver properly thought through and substantive strategic plans employing spatial vision. We have seen particular evidence of this shortcoming in the tendency of local authorities to concentrate on producing lots of Supplementary Planning Documents on detailed individual issues but none are producing successful Core Strategies.

Most strikingly about 50% of proposed local authority core strategies have been found unsound by the inspector following examination in public because they lack a credible vision. Indeed, just 22 Core Strategies have been adopted since their inception in 2004. Unless this position is improved there must be a real concern that the planning system's capacity to deliver sustainable communities is insufficient.

ii. *Leadership, policy integration and Cabinet style government*

It is also the case that planning does not currently have the consistent support it needs from local authority leaders.

The delivery of successful residential development as part of sustainable communities—in particular where this is part of the significant regeneration of an existing urban area—is critically dependent on effective political leadership from authorities. The benefits of such leadership are clear in current best practice examples such as the strategic vision for the regeneration and growth of Plymouth and Birmingham.

Where effective political leadership and vision is present it ensures that the array of local authority functions is integrated effectively in policy-making and delivery. In cases where it is absent or insufficient, the effectiveness of policy-making suffers with the objectives of planning, housing, highways and other teams tending to remain within their own silos and reaching sub-optimal compromises between their areas of responsibility.

One piece of evidence that bears out the adverse consequences of insufficient policy integration in local authorities is the CABA housing design quality audits carried out across the English regions. The audits have all shown that lack of sufficient urban design capacity in local authorities, coupled with fragmented policy emanating from different teams, is one of the key factors contributing to results which the CABA assessors concluded needed improvement.

Another hallmark of good local authority political leadership is that it values and empowers planning professionals, enabling individuals with spatial planning ability and vision to deliver strategic objectives. We have seen this undermined over the past few years as planning issues become politicised rather than seen as a technical or professional analysis and assessment of development projects.

The Federation also considers that in recent years the Cabinet style of local government organisation has unintentionally become an additional potential obstacle to effective spatial planning.

Under the Cabinet style of government, planning, with its quasi-judicial role, sits outside the Cabinet itself. This has the effect of devaluing planning, making it more likely that planning receives less resource and less political support. That, in turn, discourages recruitment and retention of talented planning staff. The Federation considers therefore that the impact of Cabinet-style local government on the effectiveness of planning should be reviewed with the objective of correcting this situation.

## SPECIFIC SKILLS AND CAPACITY ISSUES

Underlying the systemic issues, there are a number of specific areas in which the Federation believes there are currently skills gaps or shortfalls affecting local authority planning.

i. *Understanding of development economics*

An understanding of development economics is critical to successful planning for sustainable communities. A great deal of planning is based on tests of reasonableness and viability and any vision for sustainable development, including regeneration, is therefore necessarily dependent on understanding commercial drivers that determine the level and nature of development—including the willingness of landowners to sell land for development.

Overall the Federation and its members find that many officers and elected members lack a sufficient understanding of development economics with the result that there can be a mismatch between proposed policy objectives and the feasibility of their delivery by developers. Such mismatches clearly undermine success in seeking to create sustainable communities given the important role of the private sector in delivery.

One means of trying to manage this skills shortfall can be to use consultants or standard toolkits—for example, for determining levels of affordable housing provision or infrastructure requirements. In the Federation's experience, however, the skills can be lacking in officers to make proper and effective use of such resources.

Overall therefore the Federation considers that a major effort is required to provide training for members and officers to assist them in formulating and implementing successful policies for sustainable communities taking full account of development economics. These are points we made in our submission to Sir John Egon's Review of skills for sustainable communities. In the interim the need to foster such skills has grown given the increasingly sophisticated view of policy-making in this field.

ii. *Carbon reduction and climate change*

The arrival of an important new set of national planning policy requirements under the recent PPS on climate change is a further major skills challenge for local authority officers and members.

The PPS's focus on the ways in which planning policy can facilitate the provision of new low and zero carbon energy supply and achieve development that helps mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change will require the acquisition of much new knowledge by planners.

Such requirements will include an understanding of the capabilities and implications of different technologies and forms of energy supply, their economics and the possibilities and issues presented by the regulatory rules for the energy market. These, in turn, will raise a new set of issues in terms of development economics—both for new energy systems themselves and their potential use as part of new development.

There will also be a need to build knowledge and understanding of the wide range of issues related to mitigating and managing the effects of climate change as a whole. The need is extensive—ranging from successfully integrating climate change issues in urban design through flooding and biodiversity to questions of strategic vision on future land use.

These climate change related skills requirements will also mean a greater need to work in partnerships with a wider group of companies and other bodies. Climate change will therefore increase the need for leadership skills and the ability of members and officers to possess skills that enable them to run multi-stakeholder processes successfully. There is no denying that planners are embracing the concept of mitigation for and strategies to avoid climate change. However, few of these are grounded in the reality of delivery stemming from a lack of technical knowledge of the implications of high level policy at the delivery end of development. This lack of skill is critical to any successful implementation of government strategy.

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**Memorandum by Musgrave Retail Partners GB**

1.0 MUSGRAVE

1.1 Musgrave is partner to entrepreneurial food retailers and foodservice professionals. In Great Britain we partner more than 2,000 independent Budgens and Londis retailers.

2.0 THE MUSGRAVE WAY OF WORKING

2.1 We are proud of our record of supporting independent retailers and we are committed to our values of long-term stable relationships, not being greedy, honesty, working hard and achievement. Our approach is to equip the entrepreneurial retailers associated with our brands with the sales, marketing, IT, finance and logistical expertise that come with the most advanced retail business practice. We also leverage our scale to help them compete with multiples on quality and price and work with local suppliers to satisfy growing demand for locally sourced products. This way of working with our retail partners allows local, family run businesses to meet the needs and demands of their customers.

2.2 Throughout recent years, as more out-of-town superstores have developed and high streets have been abandoned by many of the major multiples, Budgens and Londis retailers have continued to open stores serving the local community and to offer their customers the opportunity to purchase excellent quality, well-priced, foods within the convenience of their local neighbourhood.

### 3.0 BUDGENS AND LONDIS

3.1 There are currently Budgens stores in over 25 counties in England, all of which are independently owned and operated. With stores ranging from 2,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet, we believe these independent retailers can offer their customers a range and service that meets their specific location and lifestyle requirements and contributes to the vibrancy of local communities.

3.2 There are over 2,200 Londis stores throughout the country, all of which are run as family businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises. They stock a wide range of products sourced from local suppliers, offering great service and a warm and welcoming atmosphere that provides a genuine alternative place to shop for daily top-up needs.

### 4.0 SERVING THE COMMUNITY

4.1 Serving the community goes to the heart of how we operate. Our network of retailers plays a valuable social and economic role in their local environments. The Musgrave Community Pledge is “working with our local partners we are committed to helping people participate in building vibrant communities”.

4.2 We were an active supporter of Nick Hurd MP’s Sustainable Communities Bill which since passing onto the statute book has given local communities increased power to drive forward government policy and consequently tackle local economic, social and environmental issues. When the Bill became an Act of Law in November 2007, we were extremely proud to host a parliamentary reception to celebrate the Bill’s success and the important contribution it will make in allowing local communities to prosper.

### 5.0 RETAIL PLANNING

5.1 Retail development often forms a significant component and trigger in promoting new sustainable communities. This importance has increased over the last 20 years with the emergence of the Government’s town centre first policy. Also, with the significant expansion of new retail floorspace throughout the country, both within town centres and on out-of-centre sites. The latter has been in response to the continuing growth in consumer spending (both on convenience (food) and comparison (non-food) goods). The sensitivity and controversy surrounding retail development at both the local and national level has also increased significantly.

5.2 Retail planning has as a consequence become a very specialist field and has led to the emergence of a number of planning consultancies that solely concentrate or specialise in this area of planning. They have recruited extensively from local government and committed significant resources to training staff in the range of skills and level of knowledge required to advise on and assist with the promotion of often very complex and detailed retail planning submissions. This level of resources and training has not been available to local government staff and local authorities have as a consequence become increasingly dependent for specialist retail advice on those same planning consultancies. Most local authorities when faced with a complex retail planning submission now instruct independent private retail consultants to advise and appraise the retail merits of those submissions.

5.3 With no in-house retail expertise to even test or assess the robustness and soundness of the advice being provided, most local authorities have become entirely reliant on those retail planning consultancies to advise them on all aspects of retail submissions, including retail planning policy, retail impact, need (capacity), accessibility (sustainability) as well as sequential issues. In some cases where the advice of those consultants has been challenged or undermined by other evidence, local authorities have been forced to commission a new retail consultancy to effectively reappraise not only the submission but also the original consultants’ advice.

5.4 This over-reliance on retail consultancies is costly, results in extensive delays through the introduction of effectively a further external consultee and is often controversial in that the robustness, independence and soundness of the advice given is increasingly being questioned by councillors, third parties and other stakeholders particularly when that work is undertaken by retail planning consultancies that regularly advise both the private and public sectors: thereby acting as both “poacher” and “gamekeeper”, by working for local planning authorities and for example the major supermarket operators, resulting in potential conflicts of interest.

5.4 A possible solution, which could be promoted as part of the Government's review of PPS6 "Planning for Town Centres", is that a Regional (or County) body of planning officers specialising in the retail planning field is established which the local authorities could then call on when required to advise and assist with the determination of complex retail planning submissions.

### **Supplementary memorandum by the Academy for Sustainable Communities**

Following the Select Committee hearing on Monday 19 May, you invited ASC to write to you to provide further information. We are pleased to submit this supplementary evidence.

At the outset, it may be useful to remind the Committee of ASC's purpose. As you are aware, the creation of ASC was one of the main recommendations made by Sir John Egan in his review—Skills for Sustainable Communities. The new approach he advocated recognised that while professional skills are vitally important, simply upgrading them in isolation will not achieve the outcomes the Government is seeking in terms of sustainable communities. Significantly, and reflected in our central mission, the Egan Review identified the need for all professionals working in the sector, including planners, to be educated and trained both in specialist (professional) skills and in a broad range of generic skills, including strategic visioning, project management, leadership, partnership working and community-focused communication.

ASC was created in order to deliver this culture change across the full range of sustainable communities core occupations. This culture change entails reforming the ways in which professionals and others are educated and trained, with great emphasis placed on team working and generic skills. Such a culture change requires a considerable shift in attitudes and priorities.

ASC's remit is to work across the entire sector in order to provide strategic direction and leadership. Our guiding principle is that we only get involved in the commissioning and delivery of specific learning programmes when there is a clear market gap that no other body is able or willing to fill. ASC was not established as a direct training provider, nor was ASC given the remit to focus on the specialist skills of any single profession. Indeed, although ASC delivers a number of discrete and direct projects and programmes, the operating model it was set by ODPM (now CLG) was chiefly one of "leading and influencing", recognising that a direct delivery model would require substantial financial resources and might result in ASC competing with organisations who should be key partners.

Since becoming fully operational in spring 2006, everything ASC has done has been about tackling the issues raised by Egan head on. Key achievements include:

- Developing, piloting and delivering learning programmes, materials, best practice and events that more than 24,000 professionals have accessed in the last two years and which we are rolling out nationally over the next three years (a summary of ASC's suite of programmes is attached).
- Fostering a common approach across the sector to improving generic skills through our Joint Commitments with 12 organisations, including several major professional institutes, including the RTPI, RIBA, CIH and Asset Skills, the Sector Skills Council with lead responsibility for town planners.
- Partnering these major professional institutes and other professional and skills bodies to ensure that an understanding of sustainable communities and generic skills is integral to the learning and ongoing professional development of at least 100,000 professionals.
- Developing, piloting and launching the UK's first Foundation Degree in sustainable communities. This is running now, and we expect the programme to be available in at least one university in every region by 2010. This degree opens access to those who may not have been considered as traditional Higher Education entrants, and successful students can gain access into planning or housing careers by taking a fourth year of study and gaining an Honours Degree in Planning Studies or Housing Studies.
- Developing, piloting and launching a Generic Module on sustainable communities that can be incorporated into the education and training of emerging practitioners. The module, an Egan recommendation, will ensure future practitioners are equipped with generic skills and understand sustainable communities. It is currently being used by two universities and is due to come on stream in seven more universities by 2010. It has also been used as a stand-alone short course.
- Developing curriculum support materials that more than 74,000 young people in schools and more than 3,000 teachers have accessed, building on a successful programme with schools in Milton Keynes. This motivates school students to gain an interest in their communities and encourages them to consider careers in the sector.
- Providing access to careers advice to more than 60,000 young people and 900 careers advisers through innovative materials, including using current professionals as ambassadors for the different professions.

It is important to appreciate that some of the above programmes are innovative and have required considerable effort to develop and deliver. ASC has had to commission, validate and develop courses and we are proud of our delivery record in respect of this. For example, the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities was planned, developed, and delivered in nine months; such a procedure typically takes 18 months in a university.

Turning to other questions from the Select Committee:

- The lack of the business plan on the ASC website. The new 2008–09 business plan was discussed at the April meeting of the Steering Board and the covering report explaining the key points from this discussion are available on our website as part of the Board Papers. The new business plan will be discussed with Iain Wright MP, our sponsor Minister, on 25 June, after which it will be published on the ASC website. If the Committee would like a draft copy we would, of course, be happy to supply this promptly.
- ASC’s work on carbon and climate change. We are about to publish a new, detailed section on our website that signposts practitioners to information about climate change. This accessible resource was developed in conjunction with a range of bodies, including the Sustainable Development Foundation, the Landscape Institute and the Housing Corporation. We also recently partnered the TCPA to deliver national and regional events examining the Government’s eco towns and housing growth policies. We are currently examining how environmental awareness can be incorporated into generic skills. A member of ASC’s steering board is chairing the UK Green Building Council’s Skills Task Force, which aims to identify the carbon management skills landscape and gaps in knowledge and provision. The UKGBC feeds into the 2016 Task force.
- “Raising Our Game”. The cross-professional course for senior staff to which Professor Roberts referred in the Hearing is run in conjunction with the Institute of Leadership and Development as the accrediting body. To March 2008, there have been 137 participants enrolled on the programme, drawn from the public, private and third sectors and from a range of professional disciplines (including planning) and we are on track for a further 200 participants for the current financial year.

A brief summary of our wider suite of programmes is enclosed over the page. It is worth noting that our focus now is on accelerating delivery of programmes which we have been developing and piloting.

Finally, we would like to bring to your attention some of the programmes specifically aimed at the planning profession. We have always recognised the central role of the planning sector in the delivery of sustainable communities and have focused extra resources to improve the skills and knowledge of those involved in planning. To date, ASC have:

- Expanded the [www.communityplanning.net](http://www.communityplanning.net) website, in partnership with RTPI, to improve feedback facilities and promote case studies.
- Developed and piloted “Planning for Non Planners”, together with BURA, which demystifies the planning process for non-planners, including elected members.
- Developed “Financing the Urban Renaissance” with the BPR and PAS to help elected members, planning officers and developers learn from large regeneration projects.
- Worked with RTPI to understand how planners prefer to learn and how knowledge is used to change the way people work. This has helped to ensure that CPD is delivered in the most effective way.
- Developed “Sustainable Communities: The Skills to Deliver” with TCPA to give leaders and decision-makers a high-level understanding of issues such as community leadership, consultation, master planning.
- ASC have also worked with South East Excellence to equip councillors, elected members and developers in the five towns’ network with the generic skills needed to better understand the planning process.

To summarise, success for ASC lies in changing the behaviour, attitudes and knowledge of the many professions involved in sustainable communities. Our impact is twofold. Primarily, it is on how practitioners work by delivering generic skills to support multidisciplinary and cross sectoral working. Secondly, it is about the influence ASC has on others to encourage delivery against labour shortages and skills gaps across the sector.

ASC's programmes and tools have been designed to fill gaps in the career pathways available to potential and current sustainable communities professionals. The table below represents a selection of key programmes and products:

<i>Pathway</i>	<i>ASC programme</i>
Education	Making Places: teacher resource for Key Stage 3 (11–14). Ask about place?: teacher resources, in partnership with the Geographical Association, to explore sustainable communities within the context of the geography curriculum. Citizenship toolkit: teacher resources, in partnership with CSV, to explore sustainable communities within the context of the citizenship curriculum.
Careers	Ask:What If?: interactive website and careers adviser materials that promote 33 related professions, including town planning, transport planning and surveying. Future Vision Awards: national award scheme for students that promotes sustainable communities and offers high-profile work placements.
Entry routes	Foundation Degree: three-year programme that develops an understanding of sustainable communities and improves generic skills and can lead to a fourth year Honours degree in planning or housing studies and on to professional accreditation. Generic Module: flexible suite of materials that embed cross-disciplinary learning and generic skills development into higher education curricula.
Vocational	Community development: sustainable communities unit incorporated into the City and Guilds Higher Professional Diploma in Community Development.
Continuing Professional Development	In a Nutshell: series of online facilitated workshops that improve understanding of skills, sustainable communities and the policy context. Raising our Game: six-month, accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management to Levels 5 and 7, multi-disciplinary programme that promotes a common understanding of sustainable communities and develops generic skills. Diagnostic tool: online resource that helps individuals to identify skills gaps and signposts them to national and regional training and support. Train&Sustain: toolkit that provides trainers with resources to deliver a strong understanding of the sustainable communities agenda to their chosen audience. This will be piloted shortly.
Best practice	Creating the Future: Government's national awards for sustainable communities, succeeding the Deputy Prime Minister's Award. Showcase: online case study website that promotes best practice in achieving sustainable communities and developing generic skills. There are currently 38 live case studies available. Learning Laboratories: live learning projects, which pilot different approaches to tackling skills issues on a local and regional level. The Learning Labs help to identify learning that can be disseminated and replicated in other regions. Recent projects have included a design led project in the North West, and one aimed at elected members and developers in the South East.
Specialist skills	Brownfield Skills Strategy: launched the government's national strategy to improve skills to develop Brownfield land jointly with English Partnerships. The consultation period ends on 10 June. Demystifying climate change: online resources that help non-specialists integrate green issues into delivery of sustainable communities. Community Cohesion: research into potential learning module for adapting cohesion into delivery of sustainable communities. This is currently being piloted.
Networks	Leaders' Network: ASC-run national network of more than 60 chief executives of regeneration bodies and other leaders that provides an expert sounding board for HCA, CLG and major projects and promotes shared learning.