

Resourcing the Planning Service: Key Trends and Findings 2021

RTPI Scotland research briefing

Context

This research has been published to inform discussion on the future resourcing of the planning system in Scotland aims to provide context for the newly elected government, MSPs and wider built environment stakeholders responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Planning has a vital role to play in moving towards a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery through accelerating progress to a zero carbon economy, increasing resilience to risk, and through creating fair, healthy and prosperous communities.¹

The planning system facilitates economic growth and innovation by bringing together people, activities, and resources². Limited resources and ambition for planning to deliver quality outcomes can create a vicious cycle of low-quality development and reduced confidence in the planning system and local authorities.

The need to effectively resource the planning systems has been called for by a number of business groups in their Scottish Parliamentary election 2021 manifestos, including CBI Scotland, Scottish Chambers of Commerce and Scottish Renewables.

Key findings

The key findings are:

- The planning service is the one of the most severely affected of all local government services in terms of budgets with a reduction of 42% since 2009
- Nearly a third of planning department staff have been cut since 2009
- Planning application fees do not cover the costs of processing planning applications
- The new Planning Act has introduced 91 unfunded duties which could cost between £12.1m and £59.1m over 10 years to implement
- It is estimated that over the next 10 to - 15 years the planning sector will have demand for an additional 680 - 730 entrants into the sector
- The planning workforce has both demographic and succession challenges in the short, medium and long term

Given this, if we want to ensure that the planning system meets its fullest potential to support the post COVID recovery there is a need to:

- re-invest in planning services, and in the immediate term introduce emergency grants to support post-COVID green, economic recovery
- ensure planning fees are ringfenced used to support planning purposes

¹ RTPI (2020) Plan The World We Need. June. Available here: <http://bit.ly/2OvMyaf>

² RTPI (2020) Invest and Prosper – A Business Case for Investing in Planning. October. Available here: <https://bit.ly/2SBksMC>

- provide the resources to undertake the new duties from the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019
- increase planning fees to ensure they meet their costs, or introduce a subsidy for planning authorities to overcome this shortfall
- invest in initiatives such as planning apprenticeships to improve the supply of planners in the face of increased demand for their services

Budgets

Planning services have been severely impacted due to budget cuts.



In 2020 local authorities only spent 0.38% of their total net revenue budgets on planning services

There have been major reductions in planning authorities' budgets. Figures from Scottish Governments Local Government Finance Statistics 2019-20 show that only 0.38% of total net revenue budgets in local authorities were spent on development management and development planning.



Gross expenditure to planning authorities has diminished in real terms by 42% since 2009

The trend has been downwards. Scottish Local Government Financial Statistics 2009/10 and 2019/20 shown gross expenditure to planning authorities' decreasing in real terms by 42% since 2009.

The planning service has seen some of the largest reductions in expenditure of all local government service areas. The National Benchmarking Overview Report 2019-20 published by the Improvement Service showing a 26% reduction in planning spending since 2010/11, including a further 6% in 2019/20³.

Staff

Nearly a third of planning department staff have been cut since 2009



There have been 32% staffing cuts in planning departments since 2009

Budget cuts are impacting on staffing numbers. A comparison between the Planning Workforce Survey 2010 and the Planning Performance Frameworks for 2017/18 highlight that there has been a 32% loss of staff in planning departments since 2009.

³ Improvement Service (2021) National Benchmarking Overview Report 2019-20. Available here: <https://bit.ly/2S5temc>



Income

Planning application fees only cover 66% of their processing costs



Planning application fees only cover 66% of their processing costs

Research published by Heads of Planning Scotland and CIPFA in 2017 and 2018 showed that planning application fees of only met 66% of development management costs.

Further research undertaken by Heads of Planning Scotland in 2018 looked at the impact on the planning fees for major scale applications being increased in June 2017. It showed that despite £4.2 million additional fee income was generated across Scotland the fee increase will not cover the disparity between income and expenditure nor provide full cost recovery.

Workload

The Planning (Scotland) Act will substantially increase the number of duties on planning authorities without providing new resources.



There are 91 new and unfunded duties in the Planning (Scotland) Act, which could cost between £12.1m and £59.1m over 10 years

Analysis by RTPI Scotland shows that the implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 will place up to 91 new duties and responsibilities on planners without resources required to undertake them: 66 new and unfunded duties will be put on planning departments with a further 25 responsibilities placed on Scottish Government⁴. This could cost between £12.1m and £59.1m over a ten-year period. This also means that despite demand for planners to support approaches to improving public health and community planning, a lack of resources is restricting their ability to do this.

Workforce

Planning has demographic and succession challenges with a limited pipeline



Only around 9% of staff in planning authorities are under 30. An estimated replacement demand of around 500 planners over the next 15 years is required

Data gathered from planning authorities' Planning Performance Frameworks indicate that that only around 9% of staff in planning authorities are under 30 whilst over 35% of are over 50 years old.

⁴ RTPI Scotland (2019) Financial Implications of Implementing the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. August. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3uRbtFT>



Research commissioned by Skills Development Scotland for Partners in Planning outlined this future demand and highlighted that the majority of planners needing replaced will be senior and more experienced planners, potentially creating a knowledge gap within the profession as this expertise and experience is lost. Over the next 10 to 15 years the planning sector will have demand for an additional 680 - 730 entrants into the sector (comprised of 550 - 600 replacement demand and 130 expansion demand)⁵.

There is a need to make sure that we have enough planners to process planning applications and publishing development plans to support post-COVID recovery. Given this there is a need to invest in initiatives to promote planning as a career; widen access to the profession through establishing apprenticeships; and invest in skills development and culture change programmes

Digital Planning

Investing in digital planning will make planning services more financially sustainable



Implementation of new digital planning initiatives could result in £20.4m in savings on costs of implementing the Planning Act

Scottish Government's recently launched digital planning strategy and transformation programme provides a clear opportunity to make planning services more financially sustainable. RTPI Scotland research has shown that investment in digital planning could transform the planning service over the next ten years by:

- £20.4m in savings on costs of implementing the Planning Act
- An average expected forecast daily time saving of 28%
- £200m generated in economic benefits to planning applicants
- £50.0m in economic benefits to the construction sector
- potential of generating £5.5m through service charging

The Royal Town Planning Institute

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit. We have around 2100 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of over 25,000.

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⁵ Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Partners in Planning & EKOS (2021) Skills in Planning Publication. February. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3pe8LrA>