



**Government Response to
the Communities and
Local Government
Committee's report:
Planning Matters – labour
shortages and skills gaps**



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*Presented to Parliament
by the Minister of State for Communities and Local Government,
by Command of Her Majesty
November 2008*

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ISBN: 978 0 10 174952 7

Government Response to the Communities and Local Government Committee's report: Planning Matters – labour shortages and skills gaps

Preface to Select Committee Response

1. The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee published its report on labour shortages and skills gaps in planning on 14 July 2008. We welcome the Committee's interest in this important area of work and are grateful for its helpful report which has been considered carefully.
2. The Government believes that planning in England is crucial to the economic prosperity of the country, and that it has a major role to play in delivering the government's climate change, housing and regeneration objectives. The Select Committee has raised some important and timely issues around both the numbers of planners working towards delivering sustainable communities, and around whether they have the appropriate skills. The Government agrees that having sufficient, appropriately skilled planners working in the planning system is essential.
3. The Planning Reforms introduced in 2004 (The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act) resulted in a fundamental change in approach from a planning system focused on the regulatory aspects of land use to a much more forward looking and pro-active spatial planning system. This change has meant that local government planning departments and their partners in the public and private sector need to adapt their structures, ways of working as well as skills and knowledge, so that they can fully exploit the potential of the spatial planning system to help deliver objectives. In some cases progress in this culture change has been slow, and we agree with the Select Committee that we need to do more to raise the profile of planning within local government and the population as a whole.
4. In response to the 2004 Egan Review of Skills some measures were put in place which sought to address skills and capacity issues in the sustainable communities professions, eg setting up of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, the Planning Advisory Service and the Advisory Team for Large Applications. More needs to be done to develop the way the organisations co-ordinate their activities to ensure the most effective methods of delivery and to give clarity to the sector. This approach is supported by these delivery agencies and others with responsibilities to the sector, such as the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

5. Addressing the identified shortages, in both numbers and skills, is a major challenge. The programmes which are either already underway or proposed are long-term measures and their impact will be seen over a period of years rather than instantly. It is not something that can be addressed by Communities and Local Government in isolation; success will only come about as a result of combined and co-ordinated efforts with local government, the profession, the private sector and academia – all of whom have a responsibility to addressing the issue and a role to play.

6. The new performance framework was set out in the Local Government White Paper: *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (October 2006). Part of the rationale for this is the recognition that local action is the most effective route to long term solutions for issues facing an area, that the ‘governing’ needs to be put back into local government, and that local leadership needs to be enhanced to facilitate local responsibility for the priorities and decisions within an area. It is within this context that the responses to the Select Committee need to be seen.

7. By carrying out the programmes identified below, and with the full support of the sectors mentioned above, the Government is confident that there will be both a greater supply of people to work in planning, and that professionals working in local government will have a more appropriate skill set to do the work which is necessary to deliver effective spatial planning and the place-shaping outcomes set by local authorities to deliver their local area agreement outcomes.

8. The Government has responded to each of the Select Committee’s recommendation in detail below.

Conclusions and recommendations

Planning matters

1. We welcome the assurance given by the Minister for Housing that the impact of the Egan review’s implementation will be measured, but we recommend that in future the Department for Communities and Local Government ensure as a matter of routine that proper mechanisms are in place to follow up the accepted recommendations of reviews carried out by it and by its predecessor, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. (Paragraph 11)

1.1 We agree that progress against the Egan Review recommendations and the responses to this Select Committee need to be monitored for evaluation and impact. It is already standard practice to follow up the implementation of reviews and an evaluation of progress against Egan’s recommendations has already been published. We will continue to evaluate the progress against the Egan recommendations through the ongoing work of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC).

The labour gap

2. We recommend that Communities and Local Government produce long-term annual assessments and analyses of the numbers of people employed in planning and other key sustainable communities professions and the labour shortages currently being suffered and likely to arise. The Homes and Communities Agency should be responsible for these surveys. (Paragraph 17)

2.1 The Government agrees that an understanding of existing and future numbers – and of the skill base and needs – of planners and other professionals involved in the delivery of sustainable communities is important. We propose to gather this information three-yearly rather than annually; the key issue here is long term trends which do not change fundamentally year-by-year and an annual survey would be an additional burden on the sector. Three yearly surveys would produce a well documented longitudinal evidence base on skills and the labour supply. The Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) are currently updating the 2007 Mind the Skills Gap report and will do a follow up survey in 2011.

2.2 The local government part of this data collection is already within the scope of the Local Government Association Group (LGAG) and is undertaken by Local Government Analysis and Research. Communities and Local Government will discuss with the LGAG and the ASC how a survey is best conducted utilising the most effective way of gathering the information from local government to avoid duplication of effort and minimise the burden on the sector. A joint approach would also enhance the concept of organisations working together across local government, working to their various strengths, expertise and developing synergies.

3. We recommend that Communities and Local Government seek to raise the general status of the planning profession through, for example, working with professional bodies on a co-ordinated approach to the promotion in schools of careers in planning, consideration of a national advertising campaign such as those conducted to fill labour gaps in teaching, and commissioning a study of salary levels of planners in local government, with a view to ensuring that pay reflects skills and demand levels. (Paragraph 20)

This recommendation relates to three areas, addressed in turn.

3.1 *Raising the general status of the planning profession.* The Government believes that all those involved in planning, at all levels, have a role to play in promoting its status and role, within central government, local government and externally. We will take every opportunity in the future to play our part in emphasising the importance of planning when engaging with the sector (and especially those who need to engage with the sector), through publications, attending and talking at events, and speeches and presentations by Ministers and senior officials.

3.2 *Having a co-ordinated approach to the promotion of careers in planning.* We will learn from the experience of other professions who have used advertising to recruit more people, such as teachers, and will assess the costs involved and, if satisfied that in this sector it would be value for money, will consider an appropriate programme for planners.

3.3 Some work on careers related activities is already carried out within schools by RTPI and by Asset Skills (Sector Skills Council), the IDeA, the ASC, and CABE – either directly or by providing teaching resources. These organisations are working on ways to encourage more people to see planning and other place-shaping activities as positive career choices. For example, The ASC has a careers section on its website, giving information to anybody interested in pursuing a career in one of the sustainable communities areas; this has provided access to careers information and advice to more than 60,000 young people and 900 careers advisers. The website features testimonials from those working in sustainable communities careers, so that those interested in becoming, for example, a planner, can see what the job entails. In addition, ASC have produced curriculum materials, such as Making Places, which helps to inform and influence the careers of school leavers. Communities and Local Government will work with all these organisations to co-ordinate products for use in/by schools and colleges to demonstrate the role of planning and encourage it as a career choice. We will also work with the DCFS and DIUS. The Chief Planner at Communities and Local Government is firmly committed to increasing the profile of planning and attracting able students into the profession.

3.4 The new Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment is being taught to 14-19 year olds from September 2008 and will teach students how the built environment is planned, designed and constructed. Diplomas combine academic and practical learning to ensure that young people have both the knowledge and skills to undertake more study at further or higher education level, enter an apprenticeship or join the labour force. Each Diploma has been developed by Diploma Development Partnerships and in the case of the Diploma for Construction and the Built Environment this was led by the Sector Skills, Council Construction Skills, and included employers, further and higher education institutions and awarding body representatives.

3.5 The bursaries scheme, which funds the tuition and college fees of around 105 people attending planning college each year, has successfully raised the profile of planning as a qualification and career path. Building on this success, we are proposing to increase this to 145 bursaries per year from September 2009.

3.6 We are also aware of the need in any strategies to increase the number of planners that only 2-3 per cent of the planning workforce comes from Black and Ethnic Minority groups (RTPI data). To encourage greater representation and diversity within planning we are supporting the Tomorrow's Planners initiative, run by Positive Action Training Highway (PATH), which seeks to address under-representation of black and minority ethnic groups in planning. PATH supports organisations that wish to create a workforce that reflects their

diverse communities, providing trainee planners who are supported in their training and career development. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) are also revisiting and updating its Minority Ethnic representation in the built environment professions research later this year.

Salary and skills

3.7 The Government firmly believes that people involved in planning in the public sector should receive a salary which reflects the importance of planning to the Council as a key delivery vehicle for its sustainable community objectives. Within the new performance framework context of emphasising leadership and visioning of place, we will continue to emphasise the major role of planning and planners to corporate leaders to help achieve local priorities. However Communities and Local Government does not believe it is appropriate for central government to tell local government what salary levels should be. The process of reviewing pay structures in local authorities is part of a national agreement that is designed to ensure that equal pay is awarded for work of equal value and that the relationship between pay levels for different jobs makes sense within the business requirements of the individual council. The pay of planning officers must be dealt with in this overall context.

4. It is clear that the planning process remains in a state of post-2004 flux as the culture shifts to encompass a greater role in spatial planning which takes into account the centrally set targets for making progress with applications. An adequate balance needs to be struck to achieve a process that delivers on target but retains the commitment to quality of skilled and dedicated planners while also achieving a primary purpose of the planning system, which is clear, quick and responsive service to the public whom local government exists to serve. (Paragraph 25)

4.1 The Government agrees that we need to ensure the right balance between targets and delivering outcomes. However we maintain the view that determining planning applications in a timely and efficient way is an important aspect of providing a good service, and that the targets have resulted in significant improvements in this (latest annualised data shows that 71 per cent of all major applications were determined within 13 weeks). Nevertheless we recognise that this target has diminishing returns and in this context the value of the target for dealing with major applications within 13 weeks needs to be reviewed.

4.2 We are awaiting the outcome of two reviews, both of which are expected to consider the role of targets. We are concerned to make sure that any targets are meaningful and drive effective spatial planning, and will carefully consider any recommendations made by these reviews. Firstly, the Killian-Pretty review (jointly commissioned by Communities and Local Government and BERR), has had a specific focus on what appropriate performance indicators could be. The recommendations – expected to be published in early November 2007 – on ways to improve the measurement of performance and outcomes will be carefully considered. This review also sought responses around removing low value work from the planning process to free up time for planners to do more satisfying planning work, rather than administrative tasks.

4.3 Secondly, the National Audit Office has also been looking at ‘Planning for Homes – speeding up planning applications for major housing developments in England’. Expected to report in November, we welcome any recommendations around improving the target regime to improve delivery and quality of developments.

4.4 We have recently introduced measures which have helped to shift the focus away from planning as a target focussed, regulatory activity towards a more holistic approach to spatial planning. We will continue with our commitment to these initiatives. For example:

- the Planning and Local Government Reform agenda and the move away from regulation and process to spatial planning
- the emphasis on development management as a process for the end to end management of the delivery chain for sustainable development; this approach signals a culture change, underlining the role of the local authority as a place shaper in partnership with others
- introduction of Planning Performance Agreements which encourage a partnership approach between applicant and local authority; within a PPA a jointly agreed target is set which means that the proposal is not part of the ‘13 week’ target regime
- the introduction of the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) which incentivises plan making, housing delivery and collaborative working, rather than speed of determining planning applications
- no longer designating authorities as ‘standards’ authorities.

4.5 We also believe that it is important for local authorities to monitor outcome based indicators (as opposed to just process indicators) so that they understand the impact of planning on the ground. We have recently worked with the RTPI to propose such indicators which local authorities can use in their annual monitoring reports.

5. We urge the Government to reconsider its rejection of Kate Barker’s recommendation to raise the status of planning within local government by making the Chief Planning Officer a statutorily protected senior local government official. (Paragraph 29)

5.1 The Government agrees that planning in local government needs effective leadership and that a council’s senior management team needs to understand the importance of planning in the delivery of the council’s long term vision; there need to be opportunities within an organisation’s structure to ensure that the ‘voice’ of planning is heard. Communities and Local Government considers that given the variety of structures within local government, it would be wrong to require a particular model without clear evidence on the benefits. More research needs to be done to ascertain how many authorities do not have planning represented at corporate level and the extent to which this impacts on delivery and performance. Communities and Local Government will continue to emphasise the important role of planners and raise the status of the profession and what it can achieve.

6. We urge local planning authorities, supported by the Local Government Association, to devise and implement schemes under which graduates entering planning departments are given a structured and mentored period of experience in all aspects of spatial planning within the relevant authority. (Paragraph 35)

6.1 Communities and Local Government, the LGAG and the RTPI support the recommendation that more structured graduate training on the part of local authorities will provide new graduates with a stronger base on which to build a career in the profession. The LGAG encourage all local authority services to set up career pathways to develop the staff they will need in the future, and authorities are increasingly doing this. The RTPI's Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) route to Chartered Membership, includes an assessment framework that graduate trainees will work to, and encourages mentoring as a way to build a strong profession. The RTPI Learning Partner scheme encourages employers to support their graduate employees in this. Experience suggests that graduates who have an opportunity to gain experience in different areas develop a wider perspective on planning. Part of our response to raising the profile of planning, and planners, is to emphasise to both potential employees and to local government leaders, the value of having a well-trained and developed workforce to aid delivery of priorities.

6.2 Individual local authorities and regions are also taking action eg Watford has developed a generic job description which allows planners to work in a variety of different roles without having to change jobs. In the East of England authorities undertook workforce planning and set up enough apprenticeship and trainee posts to address potential future gaps by working with the private sector and other local employers to develop enough skilled planners for all the sectors, and have practically eliminated shortages. Such an approach is encouraged by the LGA group.

7. A more flexible attitude towards ages—and wages—is required within local authorities if local government is to recruit and retain the planners it needs. (Paragraph 36)

7.1 We, along with the LGAG and the RTPI, will encourage local authorities to ensure that there is flexibility of movement within structures which is directly linked to proper performance management based on skills and competencies.

7.2 The Government endorses the idea that jobs should be made available to the best candidates for the job, and that this should be based on skills and competencies rather than number of years of experience or previous job roles. The RTPI also encourage a flexible approach to pay and progression structures as one of the ways to recruit and retain planners. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has produced a case study of good practice in this area, documenting how some local authorities have successfully adapted their recruitment and working practices to improve recruitment and retention ('Finders Keepers' www.pas.gov.uk). An example is in Sunderland, where pay scales and career grading is based on competency rather than job hierarchies based on an evolving competency set. Good practice examples from other sectors should be shared across profession and we will work with the RTPI and LGAG to ensure that information is shared and good practice encouraged.

8. Communities and Local Government must encourage increased joint working across local governmental boundaries to meet the needs of the planning system. It is not reasonable to expect every local authority to be able to respond to every new development in the skills required for 21st century planning, nor is it cost-effective to attempt to do so. The sharing of best practice between authorities is a responsibility of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, and Communities and Local Government should set specific targets for such information sharing, for more joint approaches to developments that affect contiguous areas and for overcoming inward-looking institutional 'turf wars' between authorities which should be focused on serving their communities. (Paragraph 37)

8.1 Communities and Local Government will encourage joint working across administrative boundaries, as an effective way of using scarce resources. This is an emerging area of practice between authorities and there is still some way to go to make sure that the perceived obstacles are overcome. Communities and Local Government will continue, with its partners, to support and encourage collaborative working.

8.2 There are many examples of where this is already happening:

- the production of joint core strategies eg the Black Country councils of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton; Central Lancashire councils of Chorley, Preston, South Ribble
- alignment of core strategy timescales to ensure co-ordination in delivery eg Blackpool, Fylde, Wyre Councils
- the production of joint waste development plan documents eg the Association of Greater Manchester authorities
- PAS case study 'Plan and Deliver: working in partnership to create better places (August 2008)
- collaborating on joint evidence gathering eg North Kesteven, Lincoln, West Lindsey and Lincolnshire County
- Surrey and Hampshire Collaboration projects, funded and managed by PAS eg Partners for Urban South Hampshire (11 Councils) collaborating on joint evidence gathering and aligning strategic policies of core strategies
- PAS case study 'Let's Stick Together' sharing best practice (July 2008)
- PAS publication 'Real Collaboration', a guide designed to help local authorities to develop and manage projects with other local authorities; events with planners on this held
- Manchester Multi-Area Agreement – which combines 10 local authorities in the Greater Manchester area and commits to joint planning by developing a spatial planning policy framework to be the spatial policy expression of the group's objectives, integrating, optimising and providing a common sound evidence base for the ten Greater Manchester district Local Development Frameworks

- HPDG – rewards local authorities who produce joint planning documents (worth £40,000 per authority)
- new unitary authorities eg all the Northumberland authorities involved in the new unitary council, collaborating on joint core strategy for the new unitary authority.

8.3 Over the next three years PAS will continue with its support to local authorities to share practice and collaborate in delivery. Best practice guidance that addresses experience of collaborative working has been published. PAS has developed a range of projects and tools that support authorities in working collaboratively across boundaries. PAS has also been working to support the implementation of the new Unitary Councils arising from the Local Government Review.

8.4 The RTPI have established Collaborative Working Groups (CWG), which are being established as part of the RTPI's Planners in the Workplace initiative to help share best practice across local authority boundaries. Communities and Local Government will discuss with the RTPI and PAS the potential for rolling out CWGs as a model to deliver greater joint working.

8.5 Given the above activity, Communities and Local Government does not agree that this area of work is best led by the ASC; the sharing of best practice between local authorities is more the responsibility of the LGA family, supported by Government, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships and others such as the ASC. Sharing of good practice between local authorities is a driving principle behind a lot of support and capacity building initiatives, but it is not an area within which targets could easily be set. The incentivisation via the HPDG is an important measure of support.

9. We agree that those who possess the highest skills should be charged with delivering the most significant development projects and that they should be rewarded adequately for doing so. We urge the Government to work with the Royal Town Planning Institute, as the professional body for planners, to develop clearer job roles within the profession for those who may deal with routine, functional planning applications and those who fill higher-level roles that require a broader mix of generic skills on top of the highly developed technical skills already possessed. (Paragraph 39)

9.1 Designing job roles that meet the needs of authorities is the responsibility of management in local government. However Communities and Local Government and the RTPI support an approach whereby planning technicians, appropriately trained, should be able to relieve some of the burden of the smaller scale and more process-led planning work from those planners who have the higher level skills more appropriately focused on more complicated issues. Some local authorities have already implemented schemes to make sure that planners have the opportunity to plan. PAS, in its role as facilitating sector led improvement, could collect and share examples of how authorities are configuring and defining jobs and structures to support authorities in learning from each other around this area.

10. The increasing use of external consultants, managed at arms length, highlights very clearly the need for increased ‘generic’ commissioning and management skills among senior public sector planners, particularly the need to negotiate value-for money contract rates, monitor and manage performance, and ensure that agreed goals are achieved. (Paragraph 43)

10.1 The Government recognises that the procurement and management of external consultants is one of the skills needed by senior planners. We will work with partners – the IDeA/PAS, the RTPI and the ASC to ensure that existing materials and resources already developed remain fit for purpose, and that the awareness and use of these existing tools amongst practitioners is increased (for example the Audit Commission’s ‘Do’s and Don’ts of buying planning services’ toolkit). We will also encourage local authorities to share knowledge and experience between departments, as skills elsewhere may exist, as well as between authorities.

11. Only 25 universities offer RTPI-accredited qualifications in planning. We recommend that Communities and Local Government fund a public sector recruitment drive targeted at those universities to attract more of the highest-achieving graduates and postgraduates into local government planning. (Paragraph 46)

11.1 Communities and Local Government will work with the IDeA and the RTPI to develop appropriate recruitment literature and some marketing strategies to increase the awareness and attractiveness of a career in the public sector to planning students looking for work, and encourage local authorities to engage with the universities to promote planning in the public sector as an attractive career choice.

11.2 We agree that action is needed in this area as competition between employers for the highest achieving graduates in planning and related professions is intense. We agree with the Committee that many local authorities do not take positive steps to publicise themselves as a good career choice. Communities and Local Government supports the RTPI’s view that a more co-ordinated approach from the public sector could assist with this without putting extra burden on individual local authorities. The IDeA also provides support and advice to authorities around recruitment, including running the Local Government Talent Website that promotes local government careers and jobs.

12. We are glad that the Government has finally accepted the need to guarantee a return on the substantial sums being spent on its postgraduate bursary scheme following its initial resistance to requiring students to work in the public sector. The fact that nearly half the students whose courses have been publicly funded have gone straight into the private sector with no requirement to provide a public return on their learning represents a missed opportunity to expand the range and talent available to local government planning departments. (Paragraph 50)

12.1 Communities and Local Government welcomes the support from the Committee for the bursaries and the public sector contracts, which are being introduced for all those in receipt of a bursary from this academic year onwards. As mentioned above, the number of bursaries is proposed to increase from September 2009.

13. We recommend that Communities and Local Government explore, through the Academy for Sustainable Communities, the potential for a conversion course for mid-life professionals who may wish to switch careers to planning, on the model used in teaching and the legal profession. (Paragraph 51)

13.1 We agree that encouraging people to enter planning from other closely aligned professions is a good way to increase the supply of planners. This would particularly help to address the 'hour glass' situation whereby some of the biggest gaps are amongst planners at 'mid-career' stage working at middle management level.

13.2 Mid career professionals do have a route into the planning profession through the intensive planning Masters degrees (one year of full time or two years part-time), supported by Communities and Local Government through the provision of bursaries. For those whom full or part-time study is not an option, a distance learning route is also available comprising just over three years of study. For more experienced professionals, the accreditation of prior learning processes within higher education, and the opportunity to use professional planning experience already undertaken towards the Assessment of Professional Competence, could reduce this time. However Communities and Local Government will review, with the RTPI and the education providers, the publicity and uptake surrounding these courses to see if they are reaching the target audience and if more needs to be done.

13.3 The ASC's role is to focus on promoting skills that enable an interdisciplinary approach to creating and maintaining sustainable communities, rather than to concentrate on any one particular profession. ASC is doing this through programmes such as the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities which is being delivered by Sheffield Hallam University and Northumbria University. The aim is to roll out this degree to every region by 2012. Other programmes, such as Raising Our Game, are influencing the continuing professional development of professionals in the sustainable communities sector.

14. New graduates and postgraduates and those who might consider changing course might find a career in planning more appealing if they understood what it meant. Communities and Local Government and, in particular, the Academy for Sustainable Communities should work rigorously to eliminate the kind of jargon that acts as a barrier to understanding, particularly in materials aimed at schools. (Paragraph 53)

14.1 This is agreed; all materials used should be to Plain English standards. All agencies and organisations involved in raising the profile of planning should ensure that appropriate, jargon-free language is used to engage with the audience in order to publicise the opportunities which a career in planning would offer.

14.2 ASC works in a number of ways to achieve a shared understanding of what creating places in which people want to live, work and play means in practice. Materials (developed to Plain English standards) created to promote awareness and understanding of sustainable communities for young people

and schools, are designed for use as part of the national curriculum for geography, art, drama, religious education, culture, information technology and citizenship. Other products and associated materials developed by ASC are written in plain English and aim to demystify the subject for the learner. Such products include the Planning for Non-Planners course, which aims to give a basic understanding of the planning process to those who need to understand how planning works, but don't directly work in the planning sector. Other products include In a Nutshell, which was developed to give anyone in the Sustainable Communities sector an overview of the skills and knowledge required to work in the sector, and the Leadership of Place programme.

The skills gap

15. The point is that planners well versed in the techniques of their trade need wider leadership, management and negotiation skills if they are to shape their areas fully, using their strategic skills to drive local regeneration. These skills need in turn to be built on a new confidence among planners themselves in their own power to design and follow through on a vision for their localities following the 2004 shift towards spatial planning. (Paragraph 56)

15.1 Communities and Local Government is aware that the introduction of the spatial planning system and of development management does require some different skills and understanding – by officers and councillors – plus renewed confidence by planners in their ability to plan. We recognise that much of this is also about changing behaviours and will work with others on the best way to achieve this. There is already a great deal of material in the sector on the development of generic management skills such as leadership, partnership working and negotiation, which is being taken up and is beginning to have an impact, as evidenced in the Local Development Frameworks which have so far been found to be 'sound'.

15.2 The ASC and partners, in their work on developing a Skills Action Plan, will also pick up these generic areas and will develop a response as to how, and who, is best placed to provide support to fill the gaps.

16. Communities and Local Government needs to provide support to those authorities that have struggled to produce their Local Development Frameworks on time or to the standard required by the Planning Inspectorate and to ensure in future that any such wide-ranging shift is backed by the resources necessary to train officers adequately in what is being required of them. (Paragraph 65)

16.1 Communities and Local Government is developing a programme of support for local authorities in delivering the LDFs. This is in addition to the ongoing funding and work of PAS. Examples of support initiatives underway include:

- funding of a 'critical friend' support programme from the Planning Inspectorate to help local authorities who have progressed their local development framework and need some scrutiny prior to formally submitting the document

- Spatial Planning Peer support
- Spatial Plans in Practice project – support for a three year programme working with a group of local authorities to develop an understanding of what effective spatial planning means for an authority
- PAS support and engagement: programme of diagnostic assessment of the foundations in place for delivery of an effective spatial plan and subsequent direct support from a menu of: project management, councillor training, working with the LSP, developing options, sustainability appraisal, spatial planning module for councillors, corporate directors and delivery partners, evidence base
- PAS twice yearly regional events – focussing on particular aspects of LDF production eg infrastructure planning, options generation, working with the LSP
- PAS case studies eg Delivering the Vision (Plymouth); Letting the Light Shine In (Beacon authorities), Plan and Deliver (partnership working)
- development of exemplar authorities in particular aspects of LDF work
- development of support for planners involved in government agencies or utilities to build their capacity to contribute effectively to the LDF process
- development of a support package around economic development
- plan making manual – on-line information and best practice to support the recent revision to PPS12

16.2 The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) also have a programme of working with local authorities on ensuring that good design principles are embedded into the plan making process to help deliver the vision for an area.

16.3 In recognition of its achievements, we have agreed to fund the PAS for an additional three years, to 2011. Over the past three years, PAS has been consistently and effectively increasing the capacity of local government and its partners to embrace the change to spatial planning through a range of projects, including: regional action learning events, sharing best practice, promoting innovation and direct 1:1 support. The impact of PAS activity indicates 93 per cent awareness of PAS amongst its target audience, 83 per cent satisfaction with PAS services and 92 per cent of respondents stating that PAS improved the quality of their LDF work in Quarter 1, 2008/2009.

17. The Government has put significant funding into Planning Delivery Grant to local authorities. Given the skills shortages across the planning sector, there may be a case for tying some of that funding to raising skills levels by requiring increased training and development opportunities among those authorities who receive it. (Paragraph 66)

17.1 Part of the PDG allocation – £15m since 2004/5, has been used directly to fund the establishment of the PAS and Advisory Team for Large Applications; these bodies have been effective in reaching practitioners and in improving practices. This was considered to be a more effective mechanism for

increasing capacity than requiring each local authority directly to organise and deliver training and capacity building themselves. This remains our position and funding for both bodies is being expanded. In addition, we know that many authorities did use PDG to fund training and development. The Housing, Planning Delivery Grant has now replaced PDG and is not ring fenced. It remains Communities and Local Government's view that the local authorities themselves are best placed to identify how best to spend the funds to improve the planning service.

Agents for delivery

18. The fact that the Academy for Sustainable Communities—the national centre responsible for skills in the field—has, at a time of substantial labour and skills shortages, reached only three per cent of the sustainable communities workforce in three years' work at a cost of more than £13 million does not appear to match the objective set by the Egan Review of achieving a “high-profile national focus for sustainable community skills development and research”. We recommend that Communities and Local Government undertake and publish an impact assessment of the ASC's first three years' work programme. (Paragraph 74)

18.1 The ASC has been tackling the issues raised by Egan since it became fully operational in spring 2006. Building capacity, skills and knowledge across the sector and developing a shared understanding with partners of what a sustainable community is and providing practical support to encourage delivery. It has some notable successes, for example the introduction of the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Communities offered through Sheffield Hallam University and to be rolled out across the country over the next few years.

18.2 In the two years that the ASC has been fully operational, 10,000 professionals have utilised its services in one way or the other; although this may only be a small proportion of the overall workforce, it remains a significant number.

18.3 Over the past few years the work of the ASC has been audited on an annual basis by the National Audit Office and by Yorkshire Forward's internal auditors. Evaluation of impact has been part of this. This is in addition to regular reporting to an independent Steering Board and Communities and Local Government. In addition, to date ASC has been subject to two separate annual evaluations of business performance and impact which have been undertaken by independent consultants. Of course there is more work that the Academy can do and from this December, when it will become part of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), this will help the ASC to deliver its objectives more effectively by allowing the ASC to exert greater leverage and reach in the HCA's core areas of activity. This will enable the ASC to accelerate the pace of rollout of many of its activities. The regional structure of the agency will also provide an opportunity to enhance the ASC's capacity building programmes in the regions.

18.4 As part of the HCA from December 2008 ASC's performance will be subject to the monitoring and evaluation framework and National Audit Office review of the wider organisation. Communities and Local Government will ensure, with the HCA, that the impact, as well as performance, is independently assessed, in line with the model adopted by PAS and ATLAS.

19. The Academy has been more successful in fulfilling its role as an identifier of skills gaps across the Sustainable Communities workforce. We urge Communities and Local Government to use the Academy's forthcoming revision of its data on the skills gap among planners and other sustainable communities professions to establish a detailed action plan to fill those gaps. (Paragraph 75)

19.1 This is in hand. ASC is working with partners across the sustainable communities sector to develop a sector-wide skills action plan to help address short, medium and longer terms labour shortages and skills gaps, including those which are most relevant to planners. This work will continue when ASC becomes part of the HCA. The aim is to launch the action plan later in the year.

20. We agree with what appears to be a clear implication from Communities and Local Government and the new head of the Homes and Communities Agency that the Academy for Sustainable Communities should focus its attention more clearly on what can be done to address shortages of personnel as well as on improving skills. We recommend that such a shift of emphasis be confirmed in the terms under which the ASC becomes part of the HCA in the near future. (Paragraph 81)

20.1 This will be part of the ASC's remit. Working with partners across the sector they aim to raise the profile of planning and other sustainable communities professions and increase entry into those industries. This work includes promoting the Foundation Degree and increasing entry routes to the professions.

21. We believe that greater co-ordination is required of the various agencies created in the wake of the Egan Review to improve the performance of local planning authorities. The ASC, PAS and ATLAS currently perform different but overlapping roles, leading to some confusion about who, precisely, is responsible for skills in the sector. We recommend that the Homes and Communities Agency—itsself being created to co-ordinate the different but overlapping roles of English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation—be charged with co-ordinating this work and establishing a single agency—in effect a sector skills council for planning—tasked with delivering the required number of planners with the required skills. (Paragraph 84)

21.1 The Government recognises that greater co-ordination is needed between the various agencies created in the wake of the Egan Review, and with other organisations such as the professional institutes, to provide clarity around who is responsible for what, who is best placed to deliver skills and capacity building support, and to improve awareness amongst the audience around what is available. Communities and Local Government is proposing that a co-ordinating role is taken by the Chief Planner, who would oversee

a programme board comprising people from the HCA (including ATLAS and ASC), PAS, CABE and the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to ensure that programmes and projects relating to planning and place-shaping are being appropriately focussed and carried out by those best placed to do so. This would be supplemented by enhanced co-ordination between those at Communities and Local Government with responsibility for the individual organisations and between the programme managers of the organisations themselves. This would not affect the governance and performance management arrangements which exist, or are under review, between the individual organisations and their 'parent' bodies.

21.2 It is not considered appropriate for the HCA to oversee co-ordination of all the work or that there is a need for a single agency to do this. It is important that the groups are able to maintain their 'unique selling points' and remits. A 'sector skills council for planning' based in the HCA, would be unnecessary as a sector skills council covering the planning sector already exists (Asset Skills, licensed by government, through the DIUS and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills).

21.3 The agencies have distinct remits. The PAS is very much about sector-led improvement and capacity building within councils and is appropriately located within the local government family. The Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) is more about on the ground delivery via the planning process. The ASC has a much wider remit than planning and place-shaping and is about influencing skills across the sustainable communities sector rather than specifically building local government capacity or doing direct delivery of support themselves. CABE, in existence prior to the Egan Review, works cross-sector and is focussed on the quality of the design of buildings and spaces. There are some overlaps in terms of work and audiences, but dialogue between the groups to manage this and avoid duplication has always existed but needs to improve.

21.4 In terms of clarity of offers to the professionals working within the planning and place-making sector, a proposal from the LGA group for a web-based single point of contact 'menu' of support that local authorities can use to direct them to the correct organisation based on their self-identified needs could be developed to assist in this area and could follow on from the work currently being done around the Skills Action Plan.

Councillors

22. We agree with the principle that councillors should be as well informed as they can be in order to perform their tasks freely, fairly and properly. We profoundly disagree, however, with the idea that compulsory training for councillors is either essential or necessary. (Paragraph 97)

22.1 Communities and Local Government advocate that for councillors to take a proactive role in shaping their communities, delivering the objectives of the sustainable communities strategy via both the LDF and on decisions on planning applications, they need to understand their role and contribution.

But it is not considered that making councillor training mandatory is the most effective way of ensuring that the right people get the right training. Any training provided should be tailored to the needs of particular councillors and their roles within the council, rather than a mandatory training course for all. PAS produces a suite of member training modules and materials freely available which are designed to be used by authorities as a core curriculum. Direct councillor training is provided as part of the PAS 1:1 support programme for authorities around plan-making, visioning and decision making on applications. Via this programme PAS has delivered 56 councillor training events at 36 councils. The councillor training modules on the PAS website are downloaded over 400 times per month. The IDeA and PAS also provide developmental support for portfolio holders and Leaders around the spatial planning and place shaping agendas via its Leadership Academy development sessions. CABE is also updating its councillors guide to urban design.

22.2 Communities and Local Government sees its role as continuing to emphasise the importance of planning in delivering the outcomes which the authority wants, and that to do this effectively, local authorities should ensure that councillors are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out this role effectively.



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ISBN 978-0-10-174952-7



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