



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Neighbourhood Planning & Local Planning Service Redesign & Capacity Building

Pilot Programme for Local Authorities

Prospectus

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Neighbourhood Planning & Local Planning Service Redesign & Capacity Building

Pilot Programme for Local Authorities

Introduction

Localism and decentralisation are central to the work of the Department for Communities and Local Government. Giving power to local people and institutions and freeing up local government to act in the interests of its residents and provide real leadership in its areas has opened the door to a huge range of inspiring and innovative approaches.

Neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood planning was introduced in 2011 through the Localism Act. Neighbourhood planning allows local residents and businesses to have their own planning policies in a neighbourhood plan that reflect their priorities, deliver tangible local benefits and have real weight in planning decisions. A neighbourhood development order can give permission for certain types of development without the need for a subsequent planning application. Neighbourhood planning is making an important contribution to delivering housing and boosting local economic growth.

Over 80 communities have now progressed through the stages of neighbourhood planning and have a 'made' plan or order in place, and more than 1,650 communities have started the process. Over 8 million people live in an area designated for neighbourhood planning. We anticipate that the numbers of communities undertaking neighbourhood planning will continue to grow, and that local planning authorities will want to consider how neighbourhood planning can increasingly become a mainstream and integral aspect of their planning services.

Local authorities play a crucial role in neighbourhood planning, from designating areas, to advising or assisting on plan preparation, through to holding the referendums and 'making' and using the plan in planning decisions. The Housing & Planning Bill is introducing new powers to introduce time periods for key decisions made by the local planning authority in the neighbourhood planning process, aimed at ensuring that plans maintain momentum through the process.

Local Plans

In July 2015, the Government announced that in cases where no Local Plan has been produced by early 2017 it will intervene to arrange for the plan to be written, in consultation with local people, to accelerate production of a Local Plan. 65% of local planning authorities have an adopted plan and 83% have published a plan, but 17% of local planning authorities have not published a draft plan. Therefore

local planning authorities that do not have an up to date Local Plan in place will need to consider how they can achieve this, and may wish to consider re-designing their planning service to achieve this or consider how they can work more collaboratively with neighbourhood planners or their communities to put their Local Plan in place.

We want to build on the progress already made by local planning authorities and work with them to identify ways in which their service model can better support neighbourhood planning and integrate neighbourhood planning into the delivery of their wider planning services, particularly Local Plan-making. We also want to support local planning authorities who want to re-design their services to ensure an up to date Local Plan is in place by 2017, and to identify pilots for how neighbourhood planning communities can be better involved in planning decisions. We want local planning authorities to share these approaches through producing toolkits, resources or reports that can benefit other local authorities.

The purpose of the funding

An increasing number of neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders are progressing through the system and they are becoming more ambitious in nature, for example delivering housing and employment sites beyond, and in advance of, the local planning authority's Local Plan. We anticipate that number of communities taking up neighbourhood planning will continue to grow and that it will play an increasingly central role within a local planning authority's planning service.

The Government has been clear that the Local Plans that are brought forward should meet local needs by being produced in good time and being kept up to date. They should also be sufficiently clear and concise to be accessible to everyone with a local interest. The Government has committed to publishing league tables setting out local authorities' progress on their Local Plans. In cases where no Local Plan has been produced by early 2017, the Government will intervene to arrange for the plan to be written, in consultation with local people, to accelerate production of a Local Plan.

A pot of £600,000 resource grant funding is being made available in the 2015-16 financial year to be awarded to a series of pilot authorities to help them:

- better support neighbourhood planning by piloting ways of making neighbourhood planning an integral part of their planning service, for example in relation to Local Plan-making, or
- to identify ways of involving or delegating planning decisions to neighbourhood planning groups, or
- to make changes to their service to ensure that they have an up-to-date Local Plan in place by 2017,

Pilot authorities will also be expected to deliver resources, toolkits and reports that can assist other local authorities to better support neighbourhood and local planning, and to facilitate the dissemination of these products.

The support offer

We will provide unringfenced grants of up to £60k to successful authorities under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 and other appropriate grant-making powers. Funding is for 2015-16 only.

We envisage that grants will be made to a mixture of local planning authority areas, including some where there is a lot of neighbourhood planning activity and some where there is currently little activity but where there is an ambition for neighbourhood planning to play a more significant role in coming years. The fund would also be available to local planning authorities that can identify robust measures to help them ensure they have an up to date Local Plan in place..

Where there is a lot of neighbourhood planning activity, the fund could enable authorities to better support communities, to make faster decisions at key stages, and to incorporate neighbourhood planning into the wider planning services. For example, authorities may be able to share examples of tools and processes they develop to aid decisions at various stages of the process, or to align work on neighbourhood plans and Local Plans, and to share resources across neighbourhood and local planning functions. In areas of lower activity, the fund could be used to re-design services in a way that incorporates and promotes greater uptake of neighbourhood planning.

We are interested in proposals and ideas from local planning authorities about how they can best deliver their neighbourhood planning and Local Plan-making services. As a starting point, proposals could cover a range and combination of issues including: governance, resourcing, project planning, evidence gathering, commissioning research, policy making, collaborating and engaging with communities, and delegating decisions. This list is not prescriptive or exhaustive and local planning authorities should feel free to propose other relevant issues.

Each pilot would be asked to produce a toolkit, resources or report to demonstrate to other authorities how their service has been re-designed to better support neighbourhood planning and integrate neighbourhood planning into delivery of wider planning services, or to produce their Local Plan, which can be used to facilitate the re-design of services in other authorities.

We would expect authorities to achieve results by the end of March 2016 and we would welcome copies of, reports and toolkits by the end of June 2016.

Products would be published on relevant websites (such as My Community and the Planning Advisory Service). We would also expect authorities to facilitate the dissemination of the products they produce via relevant networks, and are asking for proposals to include a suggested approach to dissemination.

Who is eligible to apply?

Proposals are invited from any local planning authority in England.

How to submit a proposal

Authorities should submit a short proposal to decentralisation@communities.gsi.gov.uk by 18 December, setting out:

- An outline of their proposal along with a high-level breakdown of the costs for each element
- A short statement of how their proposal meets each of the assessment criteria
- Contact information for the lead officer and a deputy contact

Assessment Criteria

We will assess proposals against a range of criteria:

1. Reasons and benefits

- Clear reasons and benefits for each aspect of the proposal
- Clear relationships between transforming the delivery of neighbourhood planning and other planning services, or clear mechanisms for supporting the production of the Local Plan
- Any wider benefits – e.g. to delivering other authority objectives or across wider areas

2. Partnership Working

- Evidence that partnership working with neighbourhood planning groups will be improved or evidence of greater collaboration within or across local planning authorities

3. Innovation

- Innovative approaches that will provide better neighbourhood planning services as an integral part of planning services, or better support for production of the Local Plan
- Innovative approaches to sharing learning and resources

4. Commitment and resource

- Clear senior level commitment
- Evidence of resource committed to the project e.g. staff time, any additional finance

5. Learning

- Scope for outcomes and outputs to be utilised or replicated in other authorities
- Willingness and capacity to work with us, and our partners, to share learning

In making a final decision we will also try and ensure that projects are distributed across areas with high take up and low take up of neighbourhood planning. DCLG reserves the right to accept proposals in part or in full.

Timetable

Prospectus launched	20 November 2015
Deadline for proposals	18 December 2015
Assessment of proposals received	January 2016
Announcement of successful authorities	Mid January 2016
Allocation of grants	By end of January 2016
Completion date of work	31st March 2016

Please send any queries to decentralisation@communities.psi.gov.uk

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