



Planning
Inspectorate

Planning Inspectorate Strategic Plan 2024-27



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Introduction

Paul Morrison, Chief Executive

This strategy sets out the ambition of the Planning Inspectorate for the next three years. It starts by setting out the reason why we do what we do: we aim to maintain a fair planning system, support significant infrastructure development and help communities shape where they live. Whether supporting the new government's ambitions on house-building, accelerating infrastructure delivery or providing clarity and agency to local communities, there is no questioning the crucial role the Inspectorate plays in the nation's development.

At the heart of the strategy is a relentless focus on the things our users want us to do: provide consistently timely and high-quality decisions, recommendations and advice. This is a simple aspiration made challenging by a recent past in which we have been unable to keep pace with demand and seen backlogs grow. It is also made challenging by a future involving new responsibilities and ways of working, as we work to deliver the government's priorities to deliver a step change in house-building, achieve universal-plan coverage, implement a revised National Planning Policy Framework and further



digitalisation. Like all organisations, we will also need to continuously consider the environmental impact of how we work.

We do not launch into the three years from a standing start. We have built our capacity. Over the last five years we have increased the number of inspectors to record levels. We have made major capital investment in our digital infrastructure and services. Performance has improved in appeals dealt with by inquiry and hearing and we continue to meet our statutory targets for local plan examinations and dealing with applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects. The professional reputation and regard in which the Inspectorate is held is genuine and far-reaching.

“At the heart of the strategy is a relentless focus on the things our users want us to do”

Yet we must also acknowledge that our investment in people and systems has not yielded the productivity uplift that we are going to need if we are to reach our ambition of quicker services with no compromise on quality. We still have backlogs and are not hitting all the performance targets set for us by ministers. For that reason, this strategy will concentrate on improving the cost efficiency of our services. We cannot simply invest or grow our way out of our challenges; we must innovate and improve ourselves to overcome them.

The Inspectorate will only succeed if we meet a number of ambitions. Firstly, we must improve the processes and systems we operate to enable a step change in our productivity. This includes continuing to work with the sector to integrate our digital platforms (a crucial

step towards realising the further opportunities that rapidly evolving technology affords us) and other improvements to our scheduling and workflow planning. Secondly, by ensuring the Inspectorate is a great place to work, with motivated, engaged people with the right skills to do their jobs brilliantly. Both are critical to achieving our goals.

But success also means we have to achieve ambitions that relate to the wider planning system. While the strategy is focused it is not isolationist. The Inspectorate is a highly connected node in the complex network of actors that is the English and (for nationally significant infrastructure) Welsh planning system. We connect to every local planning authority across the country, multiple Departments of State and the wider economy. We are the largest employer of planners in the country. Our mission will only be realised if we use our position, influence and expertise for the benefit of the wider sector.

To this end, we want to be generous in sharing our insight and expertise to help develop operable policies that address emerging

issues. We want to approach recruitment and training of planning professionals in a way that benefits the whole system and not just the Inspectorate. We want to work with all users of our services in the public, private, not for profit and community sectors to ensure we are meeting their needs. And we want to work with local areas to ensure we keep decision making as local as possible and deal with the work where the Inspectorate adds the most value.

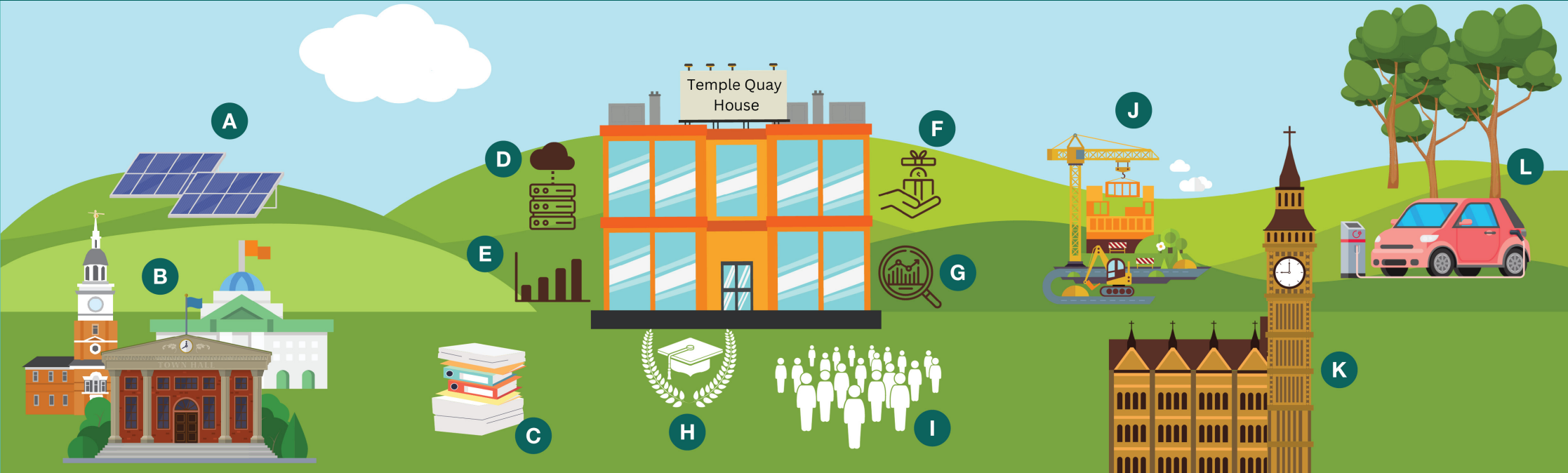
This is a stretching and ambitious Strategic Plan. It has a clear focus but an expansive outlook. It builds on the progress we have already made, the excellence of our people and the strength of our relationships across the planning system. I am passionately committed to taking it off these pages and working with you to deliver it.

Strategic Plan 2024-27

Ambition 1: A more efficient, proportionate and streamlined approach

Ambition 2: A leader in bringing the planning system together

Ambition 3: An even better place to work, that values and builds the expertise of its workforce



By 2027 we will have:

- A** Delivered NSIP services in line with new timescales and requirements.
- B** Implemented a programme of work with LPAs which sees more planning decisions determined at a local level.
- C** Seen a reduction in the amount of new evidence submitted at appeal for inspectors to consider.
- D** Developed our GOV.UK and back office case management services for the submission and management of all appeals and application casework, evidence and communications.
- E** Increased our productivity and reduced the unit cost of our decisions.
- F** Explored options to amend our pay and reward frameworks.
- G** Standardised and better categorised our appeals data to enable more forensic examination of appeal types and trends.
- H** Improved our Inspector Development Programme to build the expertise of our staff to deliver our services more consistently and efficiently.
- I** Reduced ethnicity and gender pay gaps at all levels in the organisation, to ensure the Inspectorate is a more inclusive workplace with equal opportunity for all.
- J** Met our performance targets for all casework areas in a consistent timely manner.
- K** Worked in partnership with government departments and agencies to help design and advise on the delivery of policy ambitions relevant to our activities.
- L** Reduced the environmental impact of our casework and processes.

The Planning Inspectorate

Our purpose is to maintain a fair planning system, support significant infrastructure development and help communities shape where they live.

What we do

The Planning Inspectorate is an executive agency of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), with responsibility for making decisions and providing recommendations on a range of land use planning-related issues across England. We make decisions and recommendations across our three public services: examinations, appeals and (also in Wales) applications.



We help communities in England shape where they live through examining local planning authorities' (LPAs) development plans (which set the framework for local economic, social and environmental priorities). We consider how well local plan proposals meet citizens' needs, adhere to legal requirements and follow national planning policy.



We maintain a fair planning system by providing an impartial appeals service, ensuring that all appeals are carefully considered to support sustainable development in line with national policy and local plans.



We support significant infrastructure development in England and Wales by advising on national infrastructure planning applications. In this role we consider future needs for the economy, environment and society and ensure communities' views are heard.



We employ a large proportion of the nation's planning experts and work alongside other parties to support the development of the wider planning sector.

Our Values

At the Inspectorate we have a long history of living by our values of openness, fairness and impartiality. Our roots stretch back to the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 and the birth of the UK planning system. For over a century we have upheld and promoted quality, assuring the checks and balances of the planning system; our decisions and recommendations have made a profound difference to the country we live in. We take this privilege, and its associated responsibility, as seriously as ever.

Our values shape our culture and ways of working and guide us in delivering a responsive and improvement-focused customer service. They define our strategic approach, are integral to our daily operations and help us to attract and retain the right people.

This is a period of significant change within the planning sector. Whilst our Strategic Plan responds to these opportunities and challenges with an eye on the future, our core purpose and values remain stable and unchanged.

Open



Impartial



Fair



Customer-focused



The Planning Inspectorate

This Strategic Plan 2024-27 sets out the Inspectorate's new mission for the period and the three ambitions that underpin it.

The plan explains the objectives under each ambition, which workstreams will achieve these objectives and how we will measure our success.

Our Purpose

To maintain a fair planning system, support significant infrastructure development and help communities shape where they live.

Our Mission

To provide consistently timely, high-quality and cost-effective decisions, recommendations and advice.

Ambitions



1. A more efficient, proportionate and streamlined approach

Develop our scheduling, casework and other digital systems and processes to increase our productivity, reduce our environmental impact and lay the foundation for future sustainable improvements.



2. A leader in bringing the planning system together

Use our unique, highly-connected position to influence the system and its actors to support both our service delivery and the design and implementation of planning policy.



3. An even better place to work, that values and builds the expertise of its workforce

Strengthen our offer as a modern and inclusive employer with a focus on professional standards to upskill, engage and motivate our staff to deliver.

The Case for Change

With the government's intentions to accelerate house and infrastructure delivery, get Britain building and kickstart economic growth, the planning system has never been under greater scrutiny. As one of the most connected and respected elements of the complex and interrelated system, we understand the need for the Inspectorate to play a leading role over the course of this Parliament in delivering on these ambitions.

Based on our current performance, there is more that we can do to play this central, leading role. Our users are diverse and their needs wide ranging but underpinning them all is the requirement for a consistently timely and high-quality service. Our users need to know when they can expect our services to be delivered and to receive open communication through the duration of their involvement with us. Failure to make this happen results in the householder with a builder on hold, the large infrastructure developer unable to plan resources and communities uncertain about the future development of their locality and the delivery of required housing.

We published our last Strategic Plan in the autumn of 2021. Since then, we have made progress in several areas. We have invested in our people and expanded our workforce: we now employ a larger number of planning inspectors than at any time in our recent history. We have improved our service delivery, speeding up our processing of hearings and inquiries and, over the last twelve months, deciding more casework than we have received.¹ And we have developed our digital capability, starting to integrate and improve the ways we work with LPAs across the country through the roll out of our new digital appeals and applications services. As a result, our people and the work we do continues to be highly regarded.

However, whilst we continue to meet high standards on the quality of our decision-making, we recognise that the timeliness of our services, specifically our appeals casework, has not been good enough. This has remained the case for many years.

Our appellants rightly value consistency so that they can plan with certainty, yet currently we do not provide this certainty as often as we should. This puts us at risk of losing the confidence of our service users and means we may act as a lag on the development and investment needed to kickstart the country's economic growth. The currently high proportion of our casework that falls outside of timeliness ambitions also limits our ability to take on a more significant leadership role in the wider sector, as we must target more of our specialist resources to processing casework rather than outreach, education and information-sharing.

Therefore, to deliver on the government's ambitions and to instil confidence in our users, we must do more to meet their requirement for a timely and consistent service, ensuring they know when they can expect our decisions and recommendations to be issued. The improvements we create in this area must be sustainable, building a solid foundation for the Inspectorate's future work.

Our determination to put this right is at the heart of our Strategic Plan for 2024-2027, centred on our new mission:

To provide consistently timely, high-quality and cost-effective decisions, recommendations and advice.

¹ Refer to published statistics ([Statistics at the Planning Inspectorate](#)) for year on year comparisons of average decision-times and case numbers decided.

The Strategic Context

Our approach to achieving our mission is informed by the strategic context in which we operate. When developing this Strategic Plan we listened to a variety of views, including those of our service users, experts from across the planning sector, horizon-scanning specialists, colleagues in central and local government and, of course, our people. This helped us build up a picture of the challenges facing the sector, as well as the different priorities our stakeholders would like our organisation to address.

While we aim through this Strategic Plan to provide greater certainty to those who use our services, the pace and degree of change in our external environment means our approach to providing that certainty must be dynamic. Societal trends, increasing digitalisation and the state of the economy will all affect our casework, our performance and our people in the coming years. These are changes to which we must respond quickly and confidently.

At the same time, the policy context for planning continues to evolve as work to accelerate infrastructure development, meet the country's housing need and address the consequences of the climate and nature crisis becomes more urgent, affecting the way our services are designed and prioritised. These are complex policy areas requiring significant expertise and cannot be progressed by any single agency or department. As we set out below, our response will be to work across organisational boundaries to maximise the effectiveness of the planning system as a whole.

Our view of the main features of our current and future strategic context is outlined below:

- A forecast gradual improvement to the recently challenging economic and fiscal environment, which may gradually stimulate enhanced activity in the planning sector.
- A world where almost all systems and services are at least partially digital, and an increasing number are digital only. This process of digitalisation will only accelerate as the spread of new and emerging technologies increases, with implications for how our services are designed, accessed and delivered.
- A significantly amended policy context characterised by infrastructure and planning reforms (particularly the implementation of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework) and new requirements placed on the sector relating to climate change and environmental sustainability (such as Biodiversity Net Gain, Environmental Outcome Reports and Local Nature Recovery Strategies). The Inspectorate will often sit as a 'first decision-maker' when it comes to implementation of these new obligations.
- A competitive labour market characterised by skills shortages and growing trends of hybrid and flexible working. The range of challenges this presents, from recruitment and retention to capacity and capability, will require us to rely less on external recruitment and more on developing our own people.
- A growing expectation for organisations to take meaningful steps to demonstrate their social and environmental credentials, particularly in relation to improving workforce representation, using new technologies ethically and minimising the impact of their work on the environment.

Our Core Assumptions

Precisely how the features of our external environment highlighted above will play out over the next three years is unpredictable. However, all organisations need to plan, based on some core assumptions, to ensure they are prepared for a range of possible outcomes. The core assumptions underpinning our Strategic Plan are set out below. We will review these regularly as we implement the plan and will consider how we respond to any changes.

- There is no fundamental change to our purpose or remit over the duration of the plan.
- Whilst our casework volumes are always fluctuating, there will be no significant or material change to the volume of the appeals and national infrastructure applications casework we receive, compared to that received in 2023/24. However, given the government's determination to accelerate local plan delivery and achieve universal local plan coverage, our examinations casework is likely to significantly increase in volume.
- The significant capital investment we have received in the last three years, which we have invested in digital enhancements and system upgrades, will improve our efficiency and productivity.
- As per our ongoing work in this area, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government will enact legislative and process changes to support local decision-making, which will in turn support our appeals service delivery.



- Changes to the planning system will introduce new requirements of our inspectors. We are likely to need to handle some new types of casework and we will need to adapt to new systems and processes, thus requiring more training for our staff. Our assumption is that any new obligations will be accompanied with appropriate new resource and realistic implementation timeframes.
- Increasing digitisation of our systems and the wider planning system will improve access to our services and increase our productivity.

This is a challenging set of assumptions. Without significant changes to how we operate, there is a clear risk that, operating in this context, we will not be able to realise the service improvements to which we aspire.

Ambition 1: A more efficient, proportionate and streamlined approach



Over the life of the Strategic Plan we will pursue the following

Objectives:

We will achieve a sustainably quicker and more consistent experience for users of our casework services whilst retaining our high quality standards

We will remove our casework backlog so that all of our casework meets the timeliness consistency ambitions set for us by ministers

We will increase our productivity and reduce the unit cost of our decisions

We will reduce our organisational impact on the environment when delivering our casework

Some of the activities that will realise our objectives:

- Develop our GOV.UK and back office case management services so that all our appeals and NSIP applications casework, evidence and communication is submitted and managed through them.
- Support the sector's transition to quicker and more focused examination processes for local plans and supporting plans to accelerate universal plan-coverage.
- Deliver NSIP services in line with new timescales and requirements, including the new fast track route to consenting and related work with early adopters.
- Take steps to reduce the amount of new evidence submitted at appeal for inspectors to consider.
- Trial the development of standard decision frameworks for use in some decision types to reduce the amount of time taken on those appeals.
- Develop new ways to schedule casework for inspectors and our casework teams, including through the use of modelling.
- Proactively explore opportunities for new technology to deliver service improvements.
- Reduce the environmental impact of site visits, including increasing our use of technology when gathering evidence to support our decision-making.

Some of the measures and targets against which we will measure our success:

- Number and age of open cases across all casework areas.
 - **By 2027, no more than 8,500 open cases across all casework types. This compares to our position of holding on average 13,000 to 14,000 open cases as of end of 2023/24.**
- Proportion of appeal decisions and recommendations which complete within 20 weeks for written representations cases, and 26 weeks for hearings and inquiries.
 - **By 2027, 98% of casework falls within these parameters. In 2023/24, 62.2% of written representations, 58.4% of hearings and 39.5% of inquiries casework fell within these timeframes.**
- Proportion of NSIP application statutory timeframes.
 - **By 2027, to continue meeting 100% of national infrastructure statutory timeframes annually. This will be made more challenging as we adapt to the new timescales and requirements being established for NSIPs.**
- Proportion of evidence and case communication being handled through the appeals and applications digital services.
 - **By 2027, 98% of incoming evidence and all case communication is handled through the appeals and applications digital services. This will involve transitioning from our current arrangements whereby we receive case information across a variety of media.**
- Unit cost per decision and employee productivity.
 - **By 2027, operational unit cost (financial and environmental) is trending downwards and employee productivity is increasing, against a baseline of 2023/24 averages.**
- Proportion of quality assured cases requiring corrective action.
 - **By 2027, proportion is the same as or lower than the 2023/24 baseline.**



Ambition 1: A more efficient, proportionate and streamlined approach

Develop our scheduling, casework and other digital systems and processes to increase our productivity, reduce our environmental impact and lay the foundation for future sustainable improvements.

Our operations are complex. Our inspectors work across multiple specialisms and significant geographical areas. Their casework is highly varied, detailed, incremental and difficult to plan ahead. And, of course, our inspectors' work does not occur in isolation: their casework is always changing, both individually and in totality, as are the needs, views and expectations of customers to whom they provide a service.

To improve our productivity, we must improve the way we manage this complexity. We need systems and processes which optimise our workflow and offer efficient support to our front-line. We need to complete the journey of digitalising all our operations, improving accessibility, enabling better interrogation of our work and opening up opportunities for further development. And we need to provide a proportionate service, removing aspects of our operations which do not add significant value to the eventual decision or recommendation. Laying this strong service platform will allow us to drive out inefficiencies, provide better levels of quality assurance and, crucially, provide improved visibility of our individual and collective performance.



We anticipate that the Inspectorate developing its scheduling, casework and other digital systems and processes will lead to:

- a more productive workforce
- higher quality services and better value to the taxpayer
- increased benefits to the economy, the environment and the communities we serve
- enhanced stakeholder confidence and more satisfied users of our services



Where we are now

In five of the seven previous years up to 2022/23 we received more casework than we were able to decide. This pattern has led to us taking too long to reach decisions and means that we have not provided the certainty our users require.

While we routinely meet our deadlines for NSIPs and local plans casework, thereby providing our service users with valuable certainty, this is not the case when it comes to our appeals service. In all areas of appeals casework we have a sizeable proportion of cases not meeting our current timeliness targets. This manifests in two ways. Firstly, too many of our appeal decisions are issued later than the upper limit of our ministerial ambitions of 20 weeks for written representations and 26 weeks for hearings and inquiries. Secondly, our timeliness is not consistent, with decisions being issued across too large a potential timeframe.

In the last two years we have started to make progress here. Implementing the recommendations contained in the Independent Review of Planning Inquiries (2019) led to significant improvements to our timeliness when deciding planning appeals determined by an inquiry or hearing (typically our largest, most complex planning cases). The decision times for appeals determined by a hearing have improved from 12% of cases decided within the ministerial ambition of under 26 weeks, to 40% of cases decided within this ambition as of end 2023/24². We brought about these improvements by concentrating our resources, amending our scheduling practices and making greater use of virtual events. At the same time, our new digital services, together with a number of other digital and data improvements set out in our current Business Plan (such as our new Operational Data Warehouse), are making us more efficient. We have also recruited and trained more inspectors.

However, our modelling, coupled with our experience of similar improvements in previous years, suggests that these improvements alone will only bring about a 5-10% improvement in our performance. Even if demand for our services remains static, this level of performance will fail to remove our backlog of cases and we will make little improvement to the ratio of cases that meet ministerial timeliness ambitions by 2027. Moreover, as set out in our strategic context, we anticipate that over the duration of this plan the complexity and range of our casework will increase, thus requiring more time and resource to be spent on training and quality assurance.

The government had been clear about the priority it places on the planning system as a driver of economic growth and has been bold about its ambitions in this area. Ministers are clearly focused on accelerating housing delivery and achieving universal plan coverage. With this in mind, in relation to our local plan service we are working with MHCLG to operationalise the quicker and more focused examinations processes anticipated by the LURA. On our NSIP applications service, we are working with government and relevant stakeholders to deliver the ambitions within the NSIP Reform Action Plan. We are already implementing measures to improve certainty of timescales and project outcomes with a new pre-application service that provides more helpful and proactive advice. We continue to develop the service's digital capabilities to streamline and simplify processes required in NSIP planning.

But there is much more to do, in partnership with other parts of government, before we can say we have realised the ambition of speeding up this crucial work. We know that we can find efficiencies in how we receive, analyse and present data, in how we allocate our expert resource, and in how we draw on and disseminate our knowledge of past cases.

² See [Statistics at the Planning Inspectorate](#).



Our ambition

Given our current position, it is clear that we will need a step change in our approach to eradicate our appeals backlog and achieve the quicker, more cost-effective services to which we aspire. Put simply, to achieve our ambition by 2027 we will need to increase our productivity in the high-volume casework areas by around 12-15%.

At the same time as realising this performance improvement, we must deliver the government's stretching ambitions on reforming and speeding up the NSIP and local plan processes to accelerate infrastructure delivery and achieve universal local plan coverage. And we must achieve these aims, as our new mission makes clear, without compromising the quality of our services upon which our good reputation stands. This means rigorous, systematic monitoring of the quality of what we produce, but also reviewing how we recruit, onboard, train and upskill our workforce.

There is no one single approach that can produce the productivity increases needed to achieve these stretching aims. Many incremental improvements to our services will be needed. But we must also be prepared to trial new and ambitious ways of delivering our casework which could bring about more fundamental increases to our productivity. This means thinking afresh about our services, including the fundamental aspects of how we receive information from our service users, how we gather the evidence to make our decisions, and how we communicate our decisions back to our customers³. Trialling such significant changes – some of which are set out on page 10 – is necessary and appropriate for an organisation that is seeking to establish a new status quo of consistently timely, high-quality and cost-effective services within a challenging strategic context and with no forecast uplift to our funding.

³ Our internal Skills and Flexible Resources Project, which concluded in spring 2023, reviewed practices at comparable organisations across planning and other sectors (including internationally) to consider a range of options to optimise our organisational capacity. The project made two recommendations to ensure user needs are met and to streamline casework: reviewing definitions of planning decisions, and increasing the level of standardisation in planning decision inputs and documentation.

This approach must be backed up by strategic use of our financial resources, and we must concentrate on realising the operational efficiencies we are committed to delivering. We will continue to deploy our available budget on the operational priorities of the organisation and will continue to invest in our capital programme of digital improvements. We will proactively consider any advantages that new technologies may offer.



Finally, in addition to improving our service we also recognise that we need to do more to reduce our environmental impact. The Inspectorate's primary contribution here is to implement successfully the government's policies on environmental protection and sustainability. But as with every individual, household, business and organisation, we also need to ensure that everything we do is as environmentally friendly as possible. To date, most of our time and effort here has been spent reacting to the Government's Greening Commitments 2021-2025, rather than proactively improving and managing our environmental performance. There is much more we can do to reduce our impact on the environment by making changes to the way we plan and carry out our work, maximising the opportunities afforded by technology and by supporting our people and contractors to make environmentally sound choices.



Ambition 2: A leader in bringing the planning system together

Over the life of the Strategic Plan we will pursue the following

Objectives:

We will provide expert advice to government to assist the development of operable policy that reflects and effects change in the planning system

We will play a co-ordinating role and provide regular feedback on what we are seeing to help the sector successfully implement the government's policies

We will work with MHCLG, LPAs and other key stakeholders to secure planning decisions at the right point in the system and reduce failure demand

We will increase the transparency of our operations and access to our data to support decision making by other actors

Some of the activities that will realise our objectives:

- Implement a structured programme of work for LPAs (either directly or with partners) to create mutual understanding of how planning applications can be kept away from the appeal system.
- Work in partnership with government departments and agencies to help design and to advise on the delivery of policy ambitions relevant to our activities, including accelerating towards universal local plan coverage and the ongoing digitisation of the planning system.
- Engage with and educate decision-makers and users in the application of new policy and regulation, either directly or in partnership with other bodies.
- Support MHCLG in understanding the operational impact of delivering policy implementation and associated risks and mitigations to our performance.
- Standardise and better categorise our appeals data, to enable more forensic examination of appeal types and trends.

Some of the measures and targets against which we will measure our success:

- Proportion of planning applications reaching appeal phase.
 - **Proportion to be reducing as planning reform is implemented and best practice disseminated across the system, measured against a baseline of previous years' averages.**
- Proportion of LPAs with sound and up to date local plans.
- Periodic qualitative feedback from MHCLG and other government departments on the value added by our involvement.
- Quantity and quality of external outreach sessions undertaken.
 - **By 2027, to have delivered a structured programme of targeted outreach and learning activity to LPAs, disseminating best-practice and coordinating the sector's implementation of planning reform.**
- 'Reach' of key datasets measured in terms of supply (frequency of publication and availability) and demand (internal e.g. MIPINS and external e.g. website views and downloads).
 - **By 2027, to have supported policy-makers across the country by increasing the 'reach' of our key datasets, measured against a baseline of April 2024.**



Ambition 2: A leader in bringing the planning system together

Use our unique, highly connected position to influence the system and its actors to support both our service delivery and the design and implementation of planning policy.

The Inspectorate holds a privileged position in the planning system, working regularly with other actors to implement policies which lead to a range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

We can use the insight this position gives us to help deliver policy which functions well, is consistently applied and, therefore, reduces demand for our services. This has a double benefit, freeing up our expertise to work in areas where it is most valuable, whilst also ensuring that decisions are taken at the right point in the system.

We anticipate that our work to maximise our position of influence within the planning system will lead to the following outcomes:

- greater certainty and consistency in LPA decision-making
- less failure demand for our services to process
- increased stakeholder trust and confidence
- improved policy design and delivery, leading to benefits to society, the economy and the natural environment



Where we are now

We were pleased to hear when developing this plan that there is substantial support for what we do and that other organisations in the sector value our input. Indeed, we encountered the widespread view that an effective and collaborative Inspectorate is needed now more than ever, and that we should ensure that our engagement and joint working with the wider planning sector is systematic and comprehensive.



We are operating in a period of constant change and deep uncertainty.

Many of the challenges facing the planning system, including the housing and climate crises, are complex and cannot be solved by any single agency or department. A healthy planning system that accelerates economic growth requires collective action taken across organisational boundaries.

In this context, we believe that we could do more to make our engagement and joint working with the wider planning sector more systematic and comprehensive. Failing to do this runs the risks of our service users adopting inconsistent approaches and missed opportunities to share and amplify best-practice across the system. This, in turn, both generates demand for the Inspectorate's services and hinders the social, economic and environmental benefits that come from timely, high-quality plan and decision-making.

Moreover, we recognise that we are a data rich organisation, with unparalleled visibility of actions and trends in the planning sector. We are generous with data, working across government to share our insights. But there is more that we could do here to categorise and systematise the information to which we are privy and make it accessible to other parties.

Our ambition

Over the life of this Strategic Plan, we want to become better connected to and integrated within the wider planning system, strengthening our role, sharing our insights and demonstrating our value to those we work alongside.

Our expertise and impartiality mean we are well placed to influence policy and behaviours, support decision-making by other actors and advise on improvements to the overall functioning of the system. These attributes have never been more important or beneficial than now, as the sector prepares to implement significant and wide-ranging changes brought about through the Levelling Up and Regeneration

Act and other planning reforms. Over the next three-year period we will use our knowledge and system-wide vantage-point for wider benefit, working with other parties to make sure the planning system works as well as it can. This will create benefits for years to come, supporting good planning outcomes nationwide, reducing incidences of mistakes or poor implementation and ultimately, therefore, reducing the demand for our services that would otherwise be generated.



Looking beyond current policy changes, we will dedicate time and resource to working with government to develop future policy which reflects and affects changes in the planning system. For instance, we will continue to explore possibilities for more appeals to be decided at a local level, as is the case in Scotland and other jurisdictions. We will also identify where prospective changes would affect service delivery and consider mitigations where necessary.

Finally, as part of our ambition to maximise our influence within the planning system, we will increase the transparency of our service delivery by improving how we categorise and enable access to our data. For instance, we will make it easier for external parties to see what categories of appeals casework we are processing and deciding, enabling policymakers and other system actors to track system-wide trends and patterns, supporting policymakers across government and bringing benefits to our service users and the wider economy.

Ambition 3: An even better place to work, that values and builds the expertise of its workforce



Over the life of the Strategic Plan we will pursue the following

Objectives:

We will bring about a step change on equity, diversity and inclusion, ensuring the Inspectorate is a more inclusive workplace with equal opportunity for all

We will build the expertise of our staff to deliver our services consistently and efficiently

We will benchmark and develop our employment offer to ensure we continue to attract and retain experienced and high-potential professionals across all areas of the business

We will create value for money and organisational flexibility through effective workforce planning

We will enhance our approach to social value and reduce our environmental impact

Some of the activities that will realise our objectives:

- Take steps to reduce ethnicity and gender pay gaps at all levels in the organisation.
- Explore options to amend our pay and reward frameworks to drive productivity and increase capability.
- Produce clear workforce plans, underpinned by use of workforce metrics and improved visibility of business-critical roles within the Inspectorate.
- Improve our Inspector Development Programme to provide a modern, inclusive learning environment and programme for all inspectors and case decision makers and simultaneously improve visibility of where our planning expertise sits within the organisation.
- Launch a Recruitment Policy and Procedure that bolsters our recruitment flexibilities and our employment brand, attracting and retaining the staff needed to deliver the strategy.
- Deliver on the recommendations set out in the 2023 Stress Project Group.

Some of the measures and targets against which we will measure our success:

- Gender and ethnicity pay gaps.
 - **By 2027, both pay gaps to be trending downwards, benchmarked against our 2023/24 published figure. In 2023, our gender pay gap was 14.6%.**
- Staff diversity.
 - **By 2027, our staff diversity to more closely match the diversity of the UK population, noting that we currently employ fewer women, fewer ethnic-minority colleagues, and fewer disabled colleagues than the Civil Service average.**
- PERMA Index score (measuring the extent to which employees are flourishing at work).
 - **By 2027, the score to be trending upwards against a baseline of the 2022-24 three-year rolling average.**
- Proportion of all employees including inspectors completing accredited training modules in the skills programme.
 - **By 2027, the proportion of inspectors and employees completing accredited Learning and Development to be trending upwards, against a baseline of April 2024.**
- Track productivity through use of workforce metrics.
 - **By 2027, the productivity of our people to be trending upwards, against a baseline of April 2024.**



Ambition 3: An even better place to work, that values and builds the expertise of its workforce

Strengthen our offer as a modern and inclusive employer with a focus on professional standards to upskill, engage and motivate our staff to deliver.

The Inspectorate is widely respected. That respect rests on the expertise, professionalism and authority of the people who work here. Their wellbeing and motivation are crucial to the delivery of our mission. It is, therefore, imperative that we benchmark and develop our employment offer to ensure we remain a modern employer that retains its people and attracts more high-quality professionals to the organisation.

Next, we must afford our people the best possible opportunity to perform. To do this, we must build their expertise effectively, consistently and efficiently. And we must reform the way in which knowledge and expertise is acquired, retained and shared within the Inspectorate, with a renewed focus on learning and development, the professional standards of our people and the quality assurance of our services. Finally, we need to make sure our pay and reward systems recognise and encourage the performance and capabilities we need to succeed.



We anticipate that taking steps to become a modern and inclusive employer that builds the expertise of its workforce would lead to the following outcomes:

- a more engaged and motivated workforce
- greater capacity to grow and maximise the potential of our people
- the improvement of our high-quality, professional decision-making and other services in a challenging organisational and policy context
- increased diversity and inclusivity within the organisation



Where we are now

The discipline of planning continues to grow increasingly complex, requiring more of our people to acquire specialist skills and knowledge in areas such as policy, technology, data and digital and the natural environment. This is leading to the need for more specialist skills and knowledge not only among inspectors, but also in all the supporting professions we need to operate our services. The availability of these specialisms in the labour market is scarce and we are competing with large organisations within both the public and private sectors. We have tried to address this challenge by developing skills in-house but have for too long relied on short-term contracted expertise in priority areas. In addition, our systems of workforce planning – identifying the challenges we need to address and efficiently shaping and deploying our resources to address them – are not as developed as they could be.

Although we have taken steps forward in our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) over the last three years, some of our EDI statistics show there is still room for improvement. Our gender pay gap is structural and entrenched due to the fact that inspectors, who have a higher average pay than other professions in the Inspectorate, also have greater male representation. In recent years we have taken steps to recruit a more diverse workforce, but the results of this will take time to show. Furthermore, the proportion of our workforce that has declared a disability or are from an ethnic minority group is stubbornly below the Civil Service averages.

Our ambition

As an organisation, we want people to be aware of what we do, why we do it and to choose a career with us because we are value-driven and forward-thinking. By becoming an employer of choice, we will ensure we can attract and develop the workforce we need to provide

a consistently timely and high-quality service to all our users.

To respond to the challenges set out in our strategic context, it is imperative that we build the expertise of our workforce, equipping our people with the skills, knowledge and experience they need to do their jobs. This upskilling and reskilling of our workforce must in turn be underpinned by a continued focus on the high quality of our professional standards and decision-making. The recent planning reforms – primarily set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act and a revised National Policy Planning Framework – will bring further challenges here, to which we need to adapt. We need to ensure that our professional standards keep pace with such developments and that the high-quality of our decision-making is not affected.

We will do this by establishing an Inspector Development Programme, improving the professional career development currently offered to inspectors. This approach will go hand in hand with the creation of the new learning and development framework for all our people, increasing motivation and driving the innovation and productivity needed to realise our mission. These actions, as well as improving our people, will simultaneously enhance our visibility of where expertise sits within the Inspectorate, making it easier to deploy this resource flexibly and as part of strategic and proactive workforce planning.

Finally, as an organisation (and a sector) that is less diverse than the population it serves, we need to make significant progress towards increasing our diversity and making an inclusive organisation with equal opportunities for all. Drawing on a wider range of perspectives and experiences will make us a more effective organisation. We will take all steps necessary to ensure that our workforce is increasingly reflective of the wider population, and that the Inspectorate is a workplace that provides equal opportunities for everyone.

Conclusion

By reading this plan it is our hope that you will understand the Inspectorate's Strategic Plan for 2024-2027 and how we plan to realise our mission of providing consistently timely, high-quality and cost-effective decisions, recommendations and advice. We will be reporting on the progress of this Strategic Plan throughout the reporting period both internally and externally.

Each year the Inspectorate's [Annual Report and Accounts](#) provides a comprehensive report on its performance in the previous financial year.

To learn more about the work of the Inspectorate please visit [About us - Planning Inspectorate - GOV.UK](#)

To read further about the Inspectorate's governance please visit [Our governance - Planning Inspectorate - GOV.UK](#)

Glossary

LPA - Local Planning Authority

LURA - Levelling Up and Regeneration Act

MHCLG - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

MiPINS - The Planning Inspectorate's internal Management Information database

NSIP - Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project

PERMA Index - This index measures the extent to which employees are 'flourishing' in the workplace. It is based around the five dimensions: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment.



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