



Plan, Prepare, Progress

A practical guide to the new local plans system

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Planning
Inspectorate



- Process, gateways and what you need to do
- Chapters indexed for easy navigation
- Live Q&A follows the presentation

Anything not covered today:
plans.admin@planninginspectorate.gov.uk



New system in force: March 2026

- LPAs already plan-making under the new regulations
- First Gateway 1 assessments
- First Gateway 2 assessments expected at PINS: early 2027
- Both systems running in parallel during 2026 - but they are not interchangeable
- The 'plumbing' has changed - the fundamentals have not



The new system: background and context

MHCLG's perspective

- Underpinned by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023
- Consulted on regulations, policy and guidance in July 2023; consultation response published February 2025 (search "plan-making consultation" on GOV.UK)
- First guidance published October 2025; new system regulations in force from 25 March 2026
- The new system is now up and running - local plans will be faster to prepare, more digital, more transparent and easier to engage with
- PAS road shows completed; MHCLG colleagues have met around 50 councils on getting started in the new system



- **Notice to Commence:** makes the start of plan-making transparent and certain; in the legacy system the start date can be unclear
- **Timetable:** LPAs must specify actual milestone dates and keep them up to date throughout plan-making
- **Scoping Consultation:** new additional consultation at the start of the process so key issues can be raised early by interested parties
- **Three formal Gateways:**
 - Gateway 1: project management self-assessment (no PINS involvement). Template and model answer published
 - Gateway 2: LPAs must seek formal observations from PINS. Opportunity for PINS to identify problems and suggest resolutions
 - Gateway 3: procedural and legal compliance check. Legal compliance no longer forms part of examination, which focuses solely on soundness

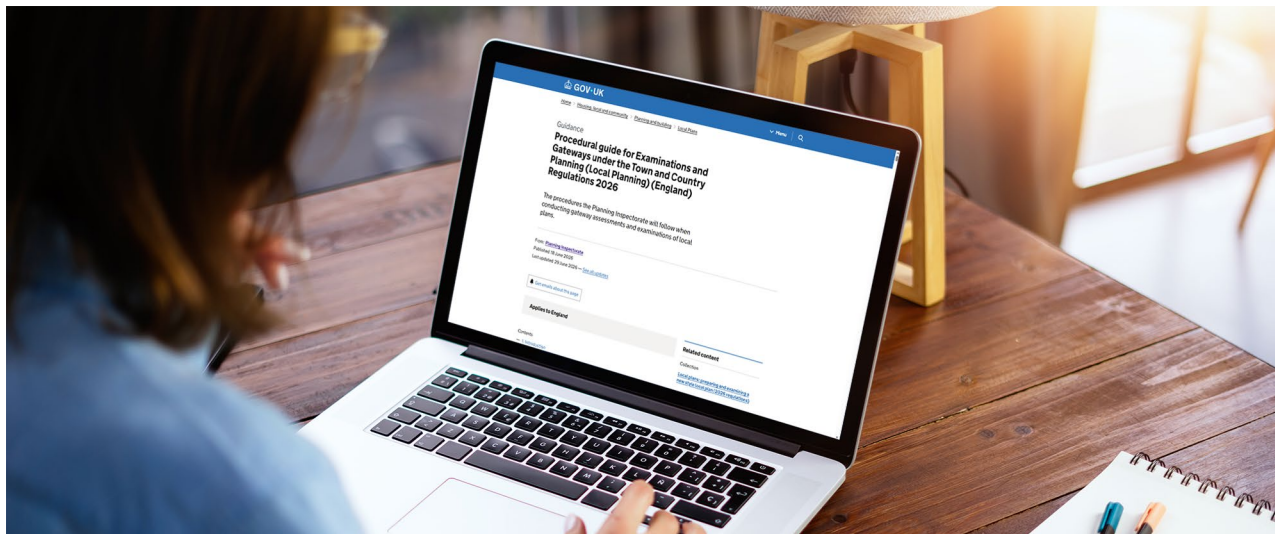


- **Mandatory Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs):** local plans sit within a wider strategic context; housing numbers and cross-cutting content provided by SDS
- **Digital reforms:** first data standards now live (timetables and housing requirements). Call-for-sites tool coming soon
- **Regular plan updates:** LPAs must begin updating plans within five years of adoption
- **Community engagement:** new best practice guidance published, building on proptech engagement fund learnings
- **Requirement to Assist:** new last-resort mechanism helping LPAs obtain information they need. Guidance now live
- **CULP guidance:** Create or Update a Local Plan pages on GOV.UK. User-tested content with a published roadmap including a model plan and updated strategic environmental assessment (SEA) guidance



About the new procedure guide

- First edition published June 2026
- Covers the Planning Inspectorate's involvement from Gateway 2 onwards
- High-level first edition - more detailed guidance will follow
- Will be updated to include digital systems guidance as service rolled out
- Available on GOV.UK - please check regularly for updated editions
- Your feedback welcome



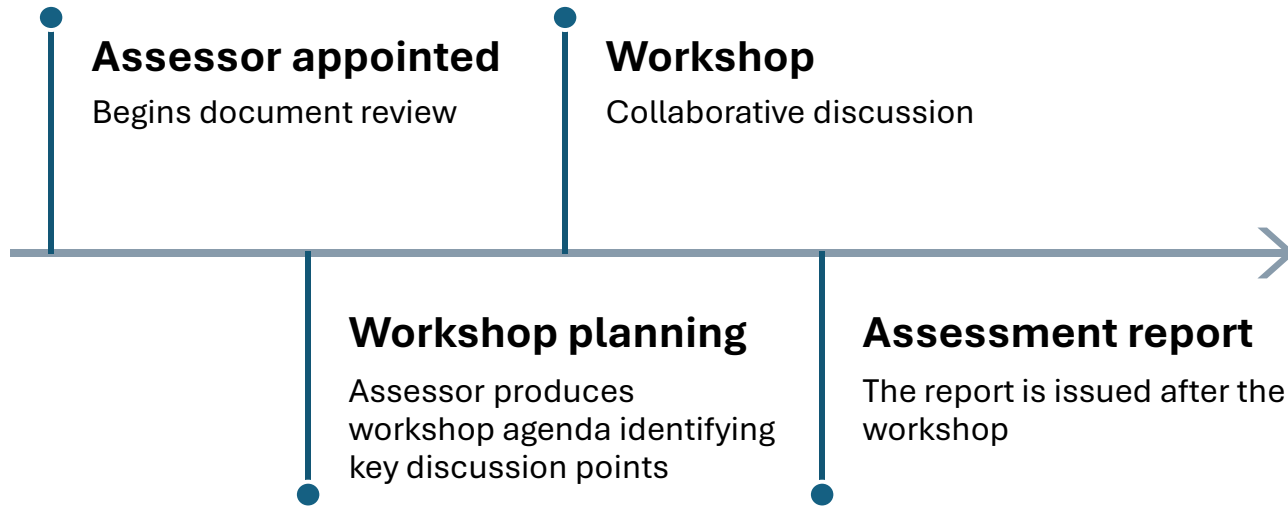


- After Gateway 1: minimum six-week consultation on plan content, evidence, and draft vision
- Gateway 2 is the mid-point, and the Inspectorate's formal entry point
- A planning inspector is appointed as assessor at this stage
- Timing is fixed. Unlike advisory visits, Gateway 2 happens at a specific regulatory point





- Gateway 2 happens once. You cannot go back and repeat it.
- Timing therefore matters enormously:
 - Too early: insufficient plan content to assess meaningfully; limited value to LPA
 - Too late: issues identified are costly and difficult to address; pressure on the 30-month clock
- The right timing: before your final consultation round, when the plan is substantially developed but still capable of being refined
- LPA leads on timing decisions
- Accurate timetables and early notice to the Planning Inspectorate are essential



- Total duration: 4-6 weeks
- The process is collaborative and supportive - not adversarial



Required:

- Gateway 2 cover letter
- Local plan timetable
- Project initiation document
- Evidence base documentation
- Record of consultation



Optional:

- Draft statement of compliance
- Draft statement of soundness
- Emerging draft plan or policies map



Gateway 2 comparison

Gateway 2 (new system) compared to advisory visits (legacy system)

	Advisory visit (legacy system)	Gateway 2 (new system)
Timing	Flexible - typically approaching Regulation 19	Fixed - after second mandatory consultation and before publication of proposed plan
Duration	No set period - inspector usually allocated 3 days total	4 - 6 weeks
Can it be repeated?	Yes, in principle	No
Format	Informal meeting	Document review + formal workshop
Outcome	Inspector's informal advice	Assessor's report setting out observations and advice
PINS involvement	Without prejudice, informal	Formal assessment process - LPA must have regard to assessor's observations in plan preparation
Publication	Inspector's written advice shared with LPA only; no requirement to publish	LPA required to publish both submitted documents and assessor's report



- Occurs immediately before submission for examination
- Purpose: to determine whether the plan has met prescribed requirements and whether the LPA is practically ready for examination
- Process: largely in writing; procedural meetings possible exceptionally and where needed
- Duration: 4 weeks (6 weeks in exceptional circumstances)
- It's a stop/go check:
 - If Gateway 3 is **passed**: the plan **must** be submitted for examination
 - If Gateway 3 is **not passed**: the LPA will need to rectify matters and repeat Gateway 3
- 3 months' notice requested to commence - as with Gateway 2
- Submission of the plan for examination, as soon as practicable after receiving Gateway 3 report - with a suggested target of three weeks.



Examination under the new system

What stays the same, what changes

What stays the same:

- Inquisitorial approach - inspector-led, asking questions, testing the plan
- Plans must still be sound
- Hearing sessions, written representations, procedural meetings, and modifications process all retained

What changes:

- Tighter, defined examination period - quality of submission matters more than ever
- Wider right to be heard - anyone who submitted representations at any consultation stage may request to be heard, not just those seeking changes
- Open Floor Hearings being developed to manage increased participation while maintaining a workable timetable



Programme officers in the new system

- PO role as central link between inspector, LPA, and participants is unchanged
- Appoint early - ideally well before Gateway 3
- High demand anticipated 2026 - 28 as both systems run concurrently
- Consider in-house options to widen your choices

Programme officer training

We offer free training for new and experienced officers.

Legacy system training dates for 2026:

Tuesday 6 October (London), Tuesday 3 November (Birmingham), Tuesday 1 December (Leeds).

Spaces are limited - book early at plans.admin@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

New system training coming in 2027.

A list of active independent programme officers is available on request from the same address.



Why we're building a new digital service

Current problems:

- Emails, spreadsheets, mixed formats, manual coordination
- Unclear submission requirements; constant chasing at every stage
- Doesn't meet the demands of a faster 30-month plan-making system

What we're building:

- Secure, accessible service with selective access for LPAs and inspectors
- Live status updates and automatic notifications
- Consistent formats and single version of truth for every plan
- Tools to support human decision-making - meeting modern service standards

Built collaboratively with LPAs and inspectors throughout development.
Significant benefits expected for local planning authorities.



Going live: ahead of first Gateway 2 assessments in early 2027

What you will have:

1. Clarity on what is required at each gateway and examination stage
2. Secure login for LPAs and Programme Officers, including for joint and strategic plans
3. Live status updates - no manual chasing
4. Automatic notifications from document upload confirmation to inspector decisions

Designed to be easy to use and accessible at every step.

Clear guidance will be provided well before your Gateway 2 date. To help shape what we build: plans.admin@planninginspectorate.gov.uk



- 1. The plumbing has changed; the fundamentals have not.** Good plan-making -robust evidence, genuine engagement, a clear and justified spatial strategy - is still what matters.
- 2. The 30-month clock is real.** Know where you are in the timetable. Keep it accurate. Keep PINS informed.
- 3. Gateway 2 happens once -time it well.** Not too early, not too late. Start your draft statements of compliance and soundness now. Give PINS 3 months' notice before you intend to enter Gateway 2.
- 4. This system requires more contact, not less.** The new system is more tightly orchestrated. All parties need to maintain closer, earlier, and more regular contact than the existing system required. This is by design -it is what makes the system work.
- 5. Use the resources available.** CULP. The procedure guide (and watch for updated editions). PAS materials. Our guidance on GOV.UK. And plans.admin@planninginspectorate.gov.uk for procedural queries.
- 6. Digital tools are coming.** Clear guidance and adequate notice before you need them. Engage with user research if you can.

Questions and Answers

Feedback

What did you think of this webinar?

Feedback on: Plan, Prepare,
Progress: A practical guide to the
new local plan system

