



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

LORDS New Clause: Chief Planners

RTPI Proposal

Introduce statutory Chief Planning Officers

Support new clauses to place a duty on local planning authorities to appoint a Chief Planning Officer to perform planning functions and require them to appoint sufficiently qualified persons to perform them with regard to guidance from the Secretary of State.

The public and other agencies need confidence that qualified professionals working to the highest standards can be relied on act in the public interest. However, there is currently no prerequisite for public sector planning officials to hold any formal qualifications.

Scotland legislated to make sure there is a chief planner in every local authority in 2019 and chief placemakers were also recommended by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's final report.

The RTPI suggest that outcomes would improve because of qualified planners' specialist expertise in creating places, skills to navigate political challenges and experience encouraging building partnerships across the public and private sector.

RTPI Rationale

- To assist with regeneration, the [Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's 21st Policy Proposition recommended](#) to “appoint a Chief Place-maker in all local authorities to champion beautiful placemaking. Championing good design and placemaking should come from the top in each council and should include an understanding of the whole place and what necessarily distinct silos (housing, highways and infrastructure) are trying to achieve.”
- **Without a place in council's senior leadership teams, planners are less able to deliver on the design and sustainability measures that were introduced in the 2020 Planning for the future consultation and have now begun implementation.** In 2020, Government deemed that senior-level support was an important enabler of the Office for Place's work and the operation of the National Model Design Code. It proposed to “ensure that each local planning authority has a chief officer for design and place-making, to help ensure there is the capacity and capability locally to raise design standards and the quality of development.” However, no further mention has been made of this requirement in subsequent policy documents.
- **Local planning authorities are required to fulfil duties but have no formal requirement to ensure that their staff are suitably qualified or bound by codes of professional standards, e.g. as with Chartered town planners**
- [RTPI research found](#) that 9% of local authorities had no clear ‘head of planning service’ employed, while only 23% of the local planning authorities we surveyed had a head of planning service that reported directly to the Chief Executive.
- [ESRC funded research](#) by the RTPI found that “Professional membership, as a formal recognition of and commitment to this, thus provides an important “backstop” that underpins their commitment to serving the public interest. Crucially, professional membership also legitimises their role in serving the public interest, especially when planners themselves struggle to define the concept”
- **Scotland legislated to make sure there is a chief planner in every local authority in 2019** and is currently working on guidance for its planning authorities.

The RTPI encourage peers to support the improvements outlined. To arrange a briefing please contact, Senior Public Affairs Officer, Joel Cohen: joel.cohen@rtpi.org.uk



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Draft wording

After Clause 123, insert the following new Clause —

“Chief Planning Officers

- (1) The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is amended as follows.
- (2) After section 1 insert—

“1A Planning authorities: chief planning officer

- (1) Each planning authority must have a chief planning officer.
- (2) The role of an authority’s chief planning officer is to advise the authority about the carrying out of—
 - (a) the functions conferred on them by virtue of the planning Acts, and (b) any function conferred on them by any other enactment, insofar as the function relate to development.
- (3) The Secretary of State must issue guidance to planning authorities concerning the role of an authority’s chief planning officer.
- (4) A planning authority may not appoint a person as their chief planning officer unless satisfied that the person has appropriate qualifications and experience for the role.
- (5) In deciding what constitutes appropriate qualifications and experience for the role of chief planning officer, a planning authority must have regard to any guidance on the matter issued by the Secretary of State.”

Explanatory statement

This new clause would place a duty on local planning authorities to appoint a Chief Planning Officer to perform planning functions and requires them to appoint sufficiently qualified persons to perform them with regard to guidance from the Secretary of State.