



RTPI Briefing Note

The Local Government White Paper and its effects on planning: Bringing together spatial planning with delivery

The RTPI welcomes the Local Government White Paper's statement of a clear role for local authorities as 'place shapers' and its references to the roles of spatial planning in achieving this. The RTPI is at the forefront of thinking and action on developing a new approach to spatial planning. This White Paper demonstrates the real potential for the new system. It is now up to local and central government, politicians at all levels and planners themselves to grasp the opportunities presented. To do this, we need a properly resourced system and we urge the DCLG to proceed with its promised review of the resourcing of planning as a matter of urgency.

However, the White paper leaves much unfinished business. We are particularly disappointed that the welcome emphasis on reducing the number of targets and moving to measures of outcomes appears not to have been applied to planning.

Part one of this analysis focuses on plan-making and development management. Part two focuses on the coordination and integration of Local Development Frameworks, Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements.

Part 1

All primary quotes can be attributed to Rynd Smith, RTPI Head of Policy and Practice. They are supported by topic citations and indented quotes from Volume 2 of the White Paper.

1. Much planning content has been deferred to Barker 2 report.

"The White paper contains limited detail on planning, this is not inherently a bad thing as Barker has had a real opportunity to take evidence and draw her own evidence-based conclusions."

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'Kate Barker's review of Land Use Planning will set out how, building on recent reforms, the planning system can better deliver for the economy and the Government's sustainable development goals.'

2. Welcome reinforcement for Chief Planners

"The RTPI welcomes the strengthening of the position of Chief Planners within Council executive teams. This is a positive acknowledgment that planning is centre stage. The acknowledgement that Chief Planners should be professionally qualified strongly reinforces the public's legitimate expectation that they should have a high quality planning service."

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It is vital, therefore, that local planning authorities have in place an experienced person who can knowledgeably advise the planning committee to secure the council's planning ambitions. For this reason, we encourage local authorities to make planning a prime responsibility of one of the corporate directors, who should be professionally qualified.

3. Housing and Infrastructure

"RTPI supports the White Paper's emphasis on the infrastructure co-ordinating role of local government. However, the next step is for Local Development Frameworks to also become Local Investment Frameworks."

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Local authorities are in a unique position to take an overview of the economic needs of their area and manage or ensure delivery of services and infrastructure. They are the local democratic body with statutory duties for planning and housing

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We are particularly concerned that local authorities should play a positive coordinating role in the delivery of infrastructure. This is a vital part of their statutory spatial planning responsibility.

4. Community Involvement

“RTPI has championed the principle of strong community involvement, particularly through our work with the DCLG on the soon to be launched, *‘Planning Together’*. However, care is needed to ensure that welcome community action tools do not become captured by interests seeking to oppose otherwise appropriate or policy-supported development”

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Community Calls for Action, [and] petitions

5. Development Management

5.1 Planning Fees

“RTPI urges the need for greater detail on new principles for planning fees. Locally set fees are canvassed as a possibility but care is needed as local fee setting may not be supported by the business community and may penalise those areas where the need for innovative planning is greatest but where development activity – generating fees – is low.”
The only clear commitment in the paper is to:

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exploring whether to make changes to the national planning fees system...

5.2. Appeals to a Panel of Councillors from delegated decisions

“This proposal is likely to be tested in Scotland, pursuant to section 16 of the Planning Bill, currently before the Scottish Parliament. The RTPI in Scotland supported the provisions of the Bill enabling this proposal. However, before such an approach is applied more generally, it would seem valuable to formally evaluate the Scottish experience. Some care will be needed to ensure that this proposal is perceived to offer an appropriately professionally supported means of independent review of decisions, to ensure that it does not become an instance of delay (for example by maintaining an effective second appeal to the Planning Inspectorate) and also a source of bad relations between Members and Officers.”

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We also wish to explore whether local authorities could be given the responsibility for hearing appeals in relation to planning decisions delegated to officers.

5.3 Executive determination of strategic planning applications.

“The RTPI can support executive determination, provided executive members receive similar training to planning committee members.”

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We want to enable local authorities, where they wish, to give power to their executive to determine those planning applications that are particularly significant in implementing the LDF. We will work with local government to clarify the circumstances in which this power might be used.

5.4 Executive portfolio member for planning can serve on the planning committee.

“Anyone who serves on the planning committee should undergo training similar to that of the planning committee members.”

5.5 No strong (ie compulsory) commitment to Councillor training in planning.

“RTPI believes training should be made compulsory for all members of the planning committee, be they executive members or councillors. Unfortunately the White Paper fails to make that commitment.”

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We also encourage the practice of the cabinet member with responsibility for the planning function being a member of the planning committee, in order to strengthen the relationship between planning policy and delivery. We believe that councillors are better equipped to perform their planning role with the right training, which should be refreshed as required.

5.6 The Code of Conduct.

“RTPI welcomes the review of the code of conduct for elected members (para. 3.49) but suggests that the emphasis should be on councillors taking a strategic view in, for example, helping to establish a clear line for discussions with applicants before applications are made.

6.0 Plan-making

6.1 Clarity of Local Development Frameworks in relation to Sustainable Community Strategies

“RTPI welcomes the proposed clear and broad role for Local Development Frameworks vis a vis Sustainable Community Strategies and the increased emphasis on partnership working. The RTPI has been at the forefront of work bringing these two strategies together and we look forward to the publication of DCLG guidance on this, drafted by the RTPI.”

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Each local authority is responsible for turning the vision for their area into the LDF plan, to guide and shape development over the next 15-20 years. The Core Strategy is the spatial expression of the Sustainable Community Strategy and covers a wide range of policies and programmes including housing, health, education, transport, waste management and environmental protection. We encourage local authorities to align and co-ordinate these strategies to maximise the benefits.

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We recognise that small district councils may struggle to find the necessary skills and capacity, for example, to develop housing strategies and

undertake infrastructure planning. We encourage authorities, wherever possible, to combine expertise at subregional level and draw on the expertise of partners.

6.2 Spatial planning and climate change

“The White Paper has recognised the key role of spatial planning as a means of achieving carbon reduction for climate change. Planning balances the needs of today with the pressures on tomorrow. We look to the forthcoming DCLG guidance on planning and climate change to put these words into challenging action.”

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...using spatial planning to achieve more sustainable development, and support the move towards low carbon living

7. Target culture

“Missing from the White Paper is any sense of how the pernicious target culture in planning will be addressed. Currently targets reflect quantity of output and not quality. If we intend to build sustainable communities we must also reflect positive outputs such as quality and infrastructure support.”

“The Housing and Planning Development Grant and Planning Development Grant consultations have given little sense of how this over-arching approach will be translated into better planning targets. The White Paper does not fill any of these gaps.”

Other sectors are promised:

- Fewer targets
- Locally and regionally defined priorities as well as national ones
- Qualitative and outcome focussed targets and well as quantitative and input focussed ones.

Part 2

All quotes can be attributed to Louise Waring, RTPI Community Planning Officer

This section refers exclusively to the references to Local Strategic Partnerships, Statements of Community Involvement, Local Area Agreements and the Sustainable Community Strategy with a view to how they might be integrated with each other and within wider Local Government reform.

Volume 1 of the White Paper

1. Clear strengthening/commitment to Local Strategic Partnerships

“The White Paper is real move towards making spatial planning a reality.”

2. Removed Independent examination of Statements of Community Involvement:

“Integrating the SCI across the local authority is a positive move forward as the SCI should be a corporate document, however Government needs to reinforce the message that community involvement is central to delivering effective spatial planning in order not to give the wrong message.”

3. Corporate approach to community involvement

“RTPI is pleased to see proposals that different components of local government, including the planning function, and those involved in preparing sustainable Community Strategies and the preparation of Local Area Agreements will use shared consultation processes and resources.”

4. Review of Government Offices

“RTPI is pleased to see a review of the Government Offices as they have an important role to play in making sense of SCS, LDFs and LAAs.”

5. Integrating Spatial Plans with Sustainable Community Strategies.

“The White Paper, by suggesting the integration of strategies, is making spatial planning a reality. *Planning Together*, written by the RTPI for the DCLG, will be published in December as guidance alongside the DCLG’s guidance on Local Strategic Partnerships.”

Volume 2 of the White Paper

1. Alignment of core strategies and SCS

“The RTPI welcomes the further integration of key strategies although the White Paper might have gone a step further by stating explicit links between neighbourhood planning and spatial planning.”

2. Empowerment of local people.

“More clarity is needed from Government as to what happens when national policy conflicts with local policy as established through strengthened local decision making powers.”

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