

THE ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE

Planning Delivery Grant 2006 – 2007 Allocations Criteria

A response to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on their proposals for PDG allocation 2006 - 2007

2005/36

September 2005

General Comments

For some time the RTPI has been vocal in its view that Local Authority Planning has been under-resourced for decades. The RTPI has been very encouraged by the introduction of Planning Delivery Grant as a recognition of this need for appropriate resources and has seen its introduction as an important tool for Local Authorities to cope with the demands of the Planning System.

The RTPI are therefore concerned by the reduction of £35 million in PDG for 2006-7. Further to this, there is no explanation of why this reduction has occurred, leading one to conclude that it may be connected to the proposed increase in planning application fees, or in some way the ongoing householder development consent review.

ODPM, earlier in the year, acknowledged that the increase in planning application fees would be part of an overall package, along with Planning Delivery Grant (PDG), to increase the resources available to the planning service and improve its quality for users.

The RTPI welcomes any proposal that seeks to address the long term decline in resourcing of the planning service. With this in mind the RTPI feels that whilst introducing the concept of a “true recovery” of planning application costs is a step forward, reducing PDG is a step back in addressing the very serious problem of under-resourced Local Authority Planning.

The RTPI would also like to comment on the importance of quality. The consultation paper advises that ODPM is to pursue options for rewarding an overall quality planning service. The RTPI is concerned that the emphasis that PDG places on speed and process may be detrimental to the fundamental quality issue of planning, that is quality of decisions and output. The RTPI encourages ODPM to consider options for rewarding LPAs for producing high quality decisions that deliver high quality output, that is to consider the importance of

what is delivered through the planning system as well as process.

Detailed Comments

Overview and breakdown

The consultation paper “suggests” that 25% of the grant should be used on ‘capital’ projects, yet the grant is, at present, not ring-fenced.

The RTPI is concerned that if this suggestion becomes a requirement, a number of planning posts, that are currently funded through PDG, would be in danger of disappearing, which would further worsen the already critical issue of a lack of qualified planners being available to LPA’s.

Development Control

The RTPI accepts that there is merit in adjusting weighting to improvement on major applications, however, care needs to be exercised so as not to convey the wrong message for minor applications, whose incremental impact may well be overlooked.

Plan-Making

The RTPI fully support the wish to reward plan preparation and programme management and its increased recognition within PDG allocation, and hope that local authorities will cooperate with the Audit Commission in necessary sampling.

Housing

In the case of housing, the RTPI appreciates the steps taken to support low demand areas and feel that it might be more in line with sustainability and strategic regional planning principles, to give stronger initial support for these areas alongside continued support for the growth areas.

E-Planning and Quality

Rewarding those planning authorities whose websites go beyond the minimum is important, yet, at the same time ODPM must ensure that all planning authorities have in place (at least) the minimum requirements.

The RTPI strongly endorse the concept ‘for rewarding an overall quality planning service, yet as previously mentioned, the issue of “quality” and its relationship with PDG needs to be further developed.

Topslices/Other allocations

The RTPI is encouraged by the continued Support for Regional Planning Bodies, The Planning Inspectorate and postgraduate planning bursaries, yet the RTPI is concerned by the reference to “some” planning bursaries. This seems to infer that not all accredited courses are equal in the eyes of the profession.

Further to this commitment to continue to support postgraduate bursaries, the RTPI believes that it would be of great value to encourage/continue monitoring of fast

track courses to ensure that they are delivering the kind of product that the planning profession needs, large numbers of highly qualified planners

Something which might be considered is to encourage the widest possible use of PPS/PPGs, since some of these do seem less well used by some planning authorities. The wider integration and use of biodiversity -PPS9 - is an example.

The RTPI strongly supports the need to encourage those planning authorities who need to improve most and this inclusion in PDG is long overdue.

Further Information

Although the RTPI understands the logic behind penalising those authorities whom perform poorly on appeals, there must be some concern over the impact this may have on LPA's. This action may lead to some planning authorities being encouraged to accept applications as acceptable that, without this dis-incentive to refuse, would otherwise be refused.