

Resourcing the Planning System: Key Trends and Findings 2019

RTPI Scotland research briefing

Context

This research has been published to inform discussion on the future resourcing of the planning system in Scotland. It has looked at a number of information sources and has explored the resources available in planning authorities, including budgets, staff, income, responsibilities and workforce. It provides useful context for consideration of the Planning (Scotland) Bill as it moves to Stage 3.

Key findings

The key findings are:

- The planning system has been severely impacted due to budget cuts
- Planning services are suffering most severely of all local government services due to budget cuts
- Over a quarter of planning department staff have been cut since 2009
- Planning application fees do not cover the costs of processing planning applications
- The current Planning Bill will substantially increase the number of duties on planning authorities without providing new resources
- The pipeline of new planners is limited

Given this, if we want to ensure that the planning system meets its fullest potential there is a need to:

- re-invest in planning services
- ensure planning fees are used to support planning purposes
- reduce the burdens included in the Planning Bill or provide the resources to undertake the new duties
- increase planning fees to ensure they meet their costs, or introduce a subsidy for planning authorities to overcome this shortfall
- invest in initiatives to promote planning as a career; to invest in skills development and culture change programmes; and to support the implementation of new digital platforms



Budgets

Planning services have been severely impacted due to budget cuts.



In 2018 local authorities only spent 0.38% of their total budget on planning

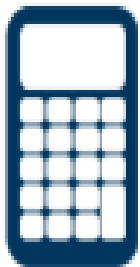
There have been major reductions in planning authorities' budgets. Figures from Scottish Local Government Provisional Outturn and Budget Estimates for 2018 show that only 0.38% of total revenue budgets in local authorities were spent on development management and development planning. This is reduction from 0.63% in 2015.



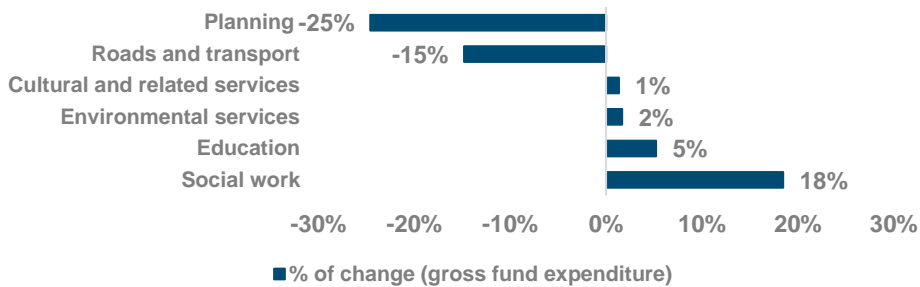
Planning authorities' budgets have diminished in real terms by 40.8% since 2009

The trend has been downwards. Scottish Local Government Financial Statistics 2009/10 and 2016/17 show planning authorities' budgets decreasing in real terms by 40.8% since 2009.

Planning services are suffering most severely of all local government services due to budget cuts.



% Change in Local Government Expenditure 2009/10 - 2016/17



Scottish Government figures show that between 2009/10 and 2016/17 expenditure on planning reduced by 25%, the highest of any local government service by a margin of 10%.



Staff

Over a quarter of planning department staff have been cut since 2009



25.7% staffing cuts in local authority planning departments since 2009

Budget cuts are impacting on staffing numbers. A comparison between the Planning Workforce Survey 2010 and the Planning Performance Frameworks for 2017/18 highlight that there has been a 25.7% loss of staff in planning departments since 2009.

Income

Planning application fees do not cover the costs of processing planning applications



Planning application fees only cover 66% of their processing costs

Research published by Heads of Planning Scotland and CIPFA in 2017 and 2018 showed that planning application fees of only met 66% of development management costs.

Further research undertaken by Heads of Planning Scotland in 2018 looked at the impact on the planning fees for major scale applications being increased in June 2017. It showed that despite £4.2 million additional fee income was generated across Scotland the fee increase will not cover the disparity between income and expenditure nor provide full cost recovery.



Workload

The current Planning Bill will substantially increase the number of duties on planning authorities without providing new resources.



**There are 91
new and
unfunded
duties in the
Planning Bill**

Analysis by RTPI Scotland shows that recent amendments made to the Planning Bill will place up to 91 new duties and responsibilities on planners without resources required to undertake them: 66 new and unfunded duties will be put on planning departments with a further 25 responsibilities placed on Scottish Government. The recently published Financial Memorandum sets out the following costs if all the new duties and responsibilities remain in the final version of the Bill

- for planning authorities: £18.84m to £74.33m
- for developers: £395.20m to £1,176.79m
- for communities: £11.96m

The new duties include the need planning authorities to ensure that Local Development Plans assess the need for public toilets, water refill points and for preserving disused railway infrastructure. We believe that the aims of the many of the new duties could be covered by existing processes and so are calling on MSPs to take step back to consider if they really need to be included within the Bill. The alternative would be to make sure that there is funding put in place to enable planning authorities to deal with them but this could cost hundreds of thousands of pounds.

This also means that despite demand for planners to support approaches to improving public health and community planning, a lack of resources is restricting their ability to do this

Workforce

The pipeline of new planners is limited.



**There are
approximately
100 planning
graduates per
annum in
Scotland**

The average number of graduate planners going through RTPI accredited courses each year in Scotland is around 100. Not all of these will go on to work in Scotland.



**Only around 9%
of staff in
planning
authorities are
under 30**

Data gathered from planning authorities' Planning Performance Frameworks indicate that that only around 9% of staff in planning authorities are under 30 whilst over 35% of are over 50 years old.

There is a need to make sure that we have enough planners to process planning applications and publish development plans to allow new homes to be built. Given this there is a need to:

- invest in initiatives to promote planning as a career
- widen access to the profession though, for example, apprenticeships
- invest in skills development and culture change programmes
- support the implementation of new digital platforms and initiatives that can make Scottish planning a world leading service

The Royal Town Planning Institute

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit. We have around 2100 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of over 25,000.

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