



# RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

## PROJECT BRIEF

# INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

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## 1. THE RTPi AND SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

The Scottish Government has commissioned the Royal Town Planning Institute to develop the infrastructure required to support the delivery of a digital skills development programme in 2023/24. This aims to

- Create a culture to empower planners and provide them with confidence to embed digital approaches into their work.
- Increase understanding, knowledge and skills to embed digital planning across the planning profession
- Create a better understanding of the digital capabilities of planners
- Help embed a culture of continuous improvement and create and maintain routes to support this happening
- Embed digital leadership across the planning profession
- Increase the recognition across the planning profession of the importance and potential of embedding digital planning in their work
- Support a planning profession that understands the benefits of embracing change

The programme will deliver:

- A Skills Development Programme, comprising:
  - Research to inform a skills development programme.
  - Skills Diagnostic Tool
- Knowledge Transfer Programme, comprising:
  - An Online Good Practice Portal.
  - An Introduction to Digital Planning Handbook
- A Champions and Innovation Programme, comprising
  - A Digital Planning Champions network
  - Digital Disruptors network

It is aimed to deliver the programme so that it is in place before the commencement of a digital skills development programme in 2023/24.

The broader programme is overseen by a Programme Board comprising representatives from:

- Scottish Government
- Heads of Planning Scotland
- Key Agencies Group
- COSLA
- Improvement Service
- Homes for Scotland
- Scottish Planning Consultants Forum

This project pertains to the development of a range of materials to introduce planners to digital planning and the opportunities that arise from it. This may include designing, developing and populating an easy-to-read, non-technical online book which pulls together background, rationale, operational details that set out the different digital skills required by different planning “actors.” This will build on previous research to establish the different levels of understanding, awareness of digital planning which will be used to inform the identification of content.

We will work with partners and stakeholders throughout the development and production of this.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

In November 2020 Scottish Government published [Transforming Places Together: digital strategy for planning](#). This strategy defines a long-term strategic direction for how Scotland's planning system will digitally transform, embracing the opportunities new digital technologies and data present. It sets out what they intend to deliver, why this is needed and the benefits this transformation will bring.

The strategy sets out Five Missions as priorities for delivery. Each mission has an identified overall objective, 5 Year Goals and the initial 18-24 month Priority Actions to start work on once the programme formally begins in spring 2021. The missions are:

- Mission 1: Data - Unlock the value of planning data
- Mission 2: Digital Technologies - Deliver an end-to-end digital planning experience
- Mission 3: Ways of working - Create the conditions for digital to flourish
- Mission 4: People - Use digital tools to drive collaboration and engagement
- Mission 5: Innovation - Embed a culture of digital innovation

An action plan is being developed to implement the strategy and a budget of £35m over 5 years has been allocated to it.

### **The Benefits of Investing in a Digital Planning Service research**

The strategy was informed by research undertaken by the RTPI. The Benefits of Investing in a Digital Planning Service research series is funded by Scottish Government. In commissioning RTPI to undertake this work Scottish Government aimed to explore the evidence base in implementing a Digital Planning Strategy through examining:

- The economic and societal benefits arising from digital transformation
- Efficiencies that accrue within the planning system from investment in new technology and validation of the estimated cost and time savings
- The costs (financial and other) of not taking forward digital approaches across the planning service.

For this research RTPI Scotland has coordinated a programme of work analysing the need, demand and impacts of supporting a digital planning strategy. This comprises:

- [An economic impact analysis](#), which was undertaken by KPMG, to assess the potential efficiencies that could be provided from a digital planning service
- [A user and customer impact analysis](#) setting out the benefits for planning authorities, planning applicants and communities
- [A policy impact analysis](#) setting out the range of policy ambitions that rely upon a digital planning service
- [Case studies](#), which have been written by KPMG, analysing the impact that digital planning could have on Scottish Government aspirations on its net zero carbon targets, in tackling health inequalities and as part of post Covid-19 recovery.
- [A summary document](#) setting out the key findings across the papers
- [An infographic](#)

### **A Digital Planning Skills Programme**

Building upon this work, RTPI Scotland was commissioned by Scottish Government to undertake research in two phases.

Phase 1 sought to provide a picture of the skills, knowledge and behaviour changes required to ensure that those working in the planning system can embed digital planning into their work, along with the opportunities and barriers faced in implementation. Key findings from this work were:

- There is clear support for greater use of digital technology within the planning system, but also some caution, and a plea to adopt a business needs led approach, rather than letting the technology take precedence
- There is a desire to retain some form of “human contact” and not offer a service where everything is online
- Most of those within the planning service are focused on the short-term, and on the here and now due to the pressure of simply doing their job
- There is a need to clearly demonstrate the value that digital could bring and clearly articulate the business benefits. This should include monetary as well as wider social/ community/ environmental benefits to identify where and how digital can improve practice and performance
- Some respondents are likely to have overestimated their digital abilities and underestimated that of colleagues
- Broadly, there is a sense that there is a real lack of understanding on what digital tools/ systems/ applications can do in practice and what will be needed. There is a need to identify practical illustrations of innovative digital practice from elsewhere
- All stakeholders (elected members/ developers/ investors/ general public) need to have a similar level of understanding and awareness
- There does not currently appear to be any consistent or ubiquitous training for digital in the planning profession, at least post-graduation. This is done through on-the-job mentoring or the staff appraisal process
- The approach should also reflect the need for different levels and types of skills to reflect different job types e.g. basic/ intermediate to highly technical
- While the HEIs/ Planning Schools are generally highly rated from an academic perspective, there is broad recognition that they all may not yet fully embrace the integration of digital into an already crowded curriculum
- It is also recognised that new entrants are only a small part of the challenge/ opportunity and that upskilling current practitioners will be the main challenge

Phase 2 comprised a set of further consultations with other (non-planning) organisations to learn from their experience of delivering digital change; desk research to identify some examples of other practice; and further focus groups with Planners and those working in the profession to test some of the initial findings and conclusions. It sets out broad principles for the skills plan:

- The Skills Plan will tie in with and support the wider planning skills work already underway, but we all need to know exactly what that is
- The skills plan will adopt a “co-design” approach and involve stakeholders from day one in the development of the detailed actions
- We will seek to use the plan to build assets among all stakeholders and the wider community
- There is a clear role for some form of national lead in further developing and delivering any new skills intervention
- There is broad consensus that there should be a manageable number of priority themes/ action areas as there is an inherent risk that if there are too many it will be difficult to

give each one sufficient attention – the key to success will be for partners to focus their time and efforts on delivering against key priorities

- As such, resourcing becomes a key issue, particularly for local authorities. It is not just about monetary inputs but also in time inputs
- It is important to draw on relevant actions from partners/ stakeholders, including Higher Education delivery; regional and sector specific skills plans; current education and training initiatives; partners current activity – future intervention should build on and not duplicate what is already in place
- Stakeholders were realistic in their views that actions should not focus on a single outcome, such as cost savings, but instead focus also on impact and effectiveness and community engagement
- Having some early deliverables and quick wins is considered crucial for longer term buy-in and success
- Commitment will need to be confirmed from key delivery organisations on actions before final sign-off, including ensuring clarity over roles and responsibilities
- The effectiveness of the skills plan must be monitored – considerations must be given to how partners measure success, and how partners know what has been achieved.

The research has identified those areas of digital activity that could benefit planning work. These include:

Theme	Digital Activity
Development management	Making applications
	Bespoke apps as information source
	Online info of progress of applications
	Information around enforcement orders
	Video streaming of committees
	Online portal of approvals
	Autogenerated reports to stakeholders
	Provision of open-source materials
	Virtual site visits
	Additional details/activities
Development Planning	Getting local views pre plan
	Online surveys on proposals
	Information to inform developers
	Presenting/communicating plans
	YouTube videos
	Podcasts
	Interactive maps/GIS
	Webinars
	AR/VR modelling
	Fly overs – drone technology
	Feedback on plans/updates/changes
	Digital training for elected members
Additional details/activities	
Operational Planning	Virtual meetings
	Payment acceptance and processing
	Information portal to all LA
	Shared practice portals
	Online sharing events/ seminars etc
	Online surgery - open access book
	Data sharing with stakeholders
	Additional details/activities

- It is planned to use this 'skeleton' to support planners to establish their skills, knowledge and behavioural needs and, given this, it is considered that they will be explored and explained in the handbook.

### **3. INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL PLANNING HANDBOOK**

The project will be to develop a range of online materials to introduce planners to digital planning outlining and explaining:

- the basic principles of digital planning including what it is and how it works
- the range of tools, applications and platforms that can be used to support planners
- the opportunities for planners to use digital planning to support different aspects of their work
- the implications and ethics of using digital planning for various purposes

This will comprise designing, developing and populating an easy-to-read non-technical online book, which pulls together background, rationale, operational details that set out the different digital skills required by different planning “actors.” This will build on previous research undertaken to establish the different levels of understanding, awareness of digital planning which will be used to inform the identification of content. The output and capital asset will be the Introduction to Digital Planning Handbook, which will sit on the Digital Portal, that is being developed currently. The handbook should also complement the digital planning portal which is currently being developed as part of tis broader programme to showcase good practice examples.

#### **Scoping and Design**

This will examine the design of the Handbook. It will explore, for example, but not limited to:

- The design, format, colour, of the handbook
- Technical requirements regarding web hosting, licensing, IP rights, data and information management
- Useability of the Handbook – for example search functions
- Accessibility of the Handbook – fitting in with standards
- The handbook should tie in with other parts of the projects (can be explained further)  
The relationship that the handbook should have with other resources highlighting and sharing good practice in digital planning

#### **Identifying Content and Populating the Handbook**

The consultant will:

- Identify sources of content
- Agree the format of the content
- Provide guidance and protocols to ensure quality control in identifying and agreeing what the handbook contains is best practice
- Provide content for the Handbook
- Provide advice on ways of ensuring that the Handbook can be kept relevant and up to date.



## Testing

The draft handbook should be tested with a number of key stakeholders from different background to gain feedback on, for example:

- Its useability
- Accessibility
- Appropriateness and usefulness of content for individuals and their organisations
- navigation through the Handbook to allow for easy search's, etc

## Management of the Handbook

The consultant will provide:

- A communication strategy outlining how the handbook should be marketed and publicised
- A delivery programme setting out responsibilities for the continuing development of the handbook
- Governance and oversight structure
- An indication of costs of continued hosting, maintenance, management and updating of the handbook

## 4. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The key roles and responsibilities for the Programme and Programme Board will be as follows:

### **Programme Sponsor – Director of Scotland, Ireland and English Regions, RTPI**

The Project sponsor is responsible for initiating the project and ensuring the successful delivery of the objectives, values and benefits of the project.

### **Programme Board**

The members of the Programme Board are to be agreed but will comprise representatives of RTPI and Scottish Government.

The Programme Board has the responsibility to set the direction for the project, support the Project Sponsor in decision-making and oversee the overall progress of the project. Members of the Project Board have the following responsibilities:

- Providing overall strategic direction for the project
- Approving and signing off the project scope, vision, and objectives
- Agreeing all major project plans
- Authorising change management requests above an agreed threshold
- Signing off the major project milestones
- Agreeing the communication of information about the project and progress to organisations and stakeholder groups
- Ensuring the required resources are available to deliver the Project
- Resolving conflicts between project and project teams, end users, suppliers and delivery agents or escalating when requested by the Project Leader
- Resolving deviations from plans
- Resolving any conflicts escalated by the Project Manager
- Ensuring risks are being managed effectively
- Ensure project outcomes meet the institute's EDI objectives

- Approving end-project reports including lessons learned reporting
- Ensuring that a post-project review is scheduled and takes place

Programme Board members should be able to:

- Understand project and project plans and monitor progress
- Own and communicate the project vision
- Understand and act on those factors that affect the successful delivery of the project and its projects
- Broker relationships with stakeholders within and outside the project
- Be aware of the broader perspective and how it affects the project
- Recognise the importance of achieving EDI goals and objectives

The Programme Board will meet regularly. All meetings will take place virtually.

This Programme Board will also be responsible for other projects taken forward as part of the broader digital planning skills programme.

**Programme Leader – RTPI Digital Planning Programme Manager**

The programme leader is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of specific activity that make up the project. This role has the following responsibilities:

- Maintains the technical oversight of the project
- Makes decisions on project priorities and make recommendations to the Project Board
- Manages the supplier relationships and contractual commitments
- Manages and reports on the progress of the Project to the Project Sponsor and other key stakeholders and stakeholder groups
- Liaises with senior stakeholders to manage day to day delivery of project benefits
- Alerts the Project Board of issues, barriers, and blockages together with recommended actions to overcome
- Manages project risks and report and escalates risks to the Project Board
- Supports the activity and working of the Project Board

**5. PROJECT PLAN**

Key milestones are:

<b>Week commencing</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
<b>31/07/2023</b>	Invitation to Tender for project published
15/08/2023	Closing date for tenders
23/08/2023	Tender interviews undertaken
28/08/2023	Consultant appointed
4/09/2023	Project Initiation meeting held
11/09/2023	Project commences
22/12/2023	Project completed

## 6. RISK ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION

The risk and mitigation framework set out for the Introduction to Digital Planning Handbook programme is:

Risk	Impact/ Likelihood	Mitigation
Financial overruns	High/ Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing monitoring of overall budget on regular basis</li> <li>• Clarity on resource available for each project</li> <li>• Clear contracting and budget arrangements contained in agreement with contractors</li> <li>• Early warning RAG system included in contracting arrangements on projects and on broader programme</li> <li>• Assessment of financial competence of potential contractors included as part of commissioning exercises</li> <li>• Stress testing of proposals with contractors and Scottish Government</li> <li>• Regular meetings and discussion with contractors on budget once appointed</li> <li>• Offer of grant includes provision for management and administration costs for RTPI of circa £25k</li> <li>• Keep ourselves and Scottish Government informed of spend and activities through using Contractor Compliance template</li> </ul>
Deterioration of relationship with Scottish Government	High/ Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director sits on broader Scottish Government Digital Planning Programme Board</li> <li>• Regular (likely 2 weekly meetings held with Scottish Government) on programme and projects</li> <li>• Regular 6 weekly meeting with Chief Planner</li> </ul>
Broader Stakeholder relationships	High/ Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory Group to be established containing all key stakeholders. 3 meetings scheduled.</li> <li>• Ongoing liaison and discussion with other stakeholder groups including Heads of Planning Scotland Executive Committee, Heads of Planning Practice and Performance Sub Committee, Partners in planning Group, Scottish Forum for Planning, Scottish Planning Consultants Forum, Key Agencies Group</li> <li>• Regular one to one updates with key individuals including Chair of HOPS, Planning representative from SOLACE.</li> <li>• Early warning RAG system included in contracting arrangements on projects and on broader programme</li> </ul>
Attracting staff resources with right	High/ Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore options for secondments, contracting as well as one year appointment</li> <li>• Build on expertise of commissioning within RTPI, including Director</li> </ul>

expertise		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use planning, learning and development and project management networks to source</li> </ul>
Project implement delays	High/ Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of fixed term Project Manager and Project Assistant to manage, coordinate and monitor the programme and projects</li> <li>• Clear project plan including timeframes</li> <li>• Early warning RAG system included in contracting arrangements on projects and on broader programme</li> <li>• Ongoing monitoring of overall project plan on regular basis</li> <li>• Clear contracting and timescales agreed with contractors and included in commissioning documentation</li> <li>• Stress testing of timescales with Scottish Government and contractors</li> <li>• Regular meetings and discussion with contractors on progress</li> <li>• Project plan timescales allows for projects to be started at different times, based upon time required and complexity</li> </ul>
Quality of assets developed	High/ Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear expectations set out and agreed in commissioning process</li> <li>• Discussion on quality of projects discussed at regular meetings held with Scottish Government on programme and projects</li> <li>• Regular monitoring and liaison with contractors by Project Manager and Project Assistant</li> <li>• Early warning RAG system included in contracting arrangements on projects and on broader programme</li> </ul>