



RTPI Northern Ireland
Royal Town Planning Institute

**RTPI
Research
Paper**

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THE BIG CONVERSATION:

The well-being of planners and the impact
on the planning system in Northern Ireland

RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities. We have over 27,000 members in the private, public, academic and voluntary sectors and over 750 members in Northern Ireland. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social environmental and cultural challenges.

Acknowledgements

RTPI NI is grateful to everyone who engaged in the NI Big Conversation and shared their views and experiences.

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Executive Summary

Planning plays a crucial role in delivering a wide range of valuable outcomes – addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies, supporting economic development and supporting communities across Northern Ireland. However, reports published in 2022 by the NI Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee both concluded there were significant shortfalls in the delivery of the planning service across Northern Ireland.

The Big Conversation is focused on the well-being of those working in and delivering the planning system; it is not a review of the planning system or its policies but does reflect on changes which could support the well-being issues identified and explore ways to alleviate pressures.

The survey found high levels of planners being overstretched, particularly by those working in the public sector and Development Management teams and this was having an impact on their well-being. 63% of all respondents reported being overstretched at least several times a week, rising to 83% of those working in a council planning department.

Investment in digital resources to support planning delivery had been focused on the introduction of the new Planning Portal, which was blamed for increasing the workload of planning officers through the need for administrative workarounds; there was also a lack of confidence in the information available through the Portal.

A lack of understanding by Planning Committees, and individual Councillors, of their role and the value of professional planning officers was highlighted throughout the responses.

Availability of other specialist officers including ecologists and highways officers, was also identified as having an impact on the ability to process planning applications, through a delay in consultations and poor quality responses. This was partly because they are employed by Government Departments including Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and remote from the Councils.

The survey reported high levels of abuse to those working in planning, partly facilitated through social media. Social media was also flagged as being responsible for spreading misinformation.

A range of solutions were proposed which in addition to increasing resources, focused on increasing access to training, addressing the operation of planning committees, and improving the responses from statutory consultees. A need to invest in public understanding of the planning process and encouraging upfront engagement on proposals were also suggested.

Although the Big Conversation was not a review of the planning system, there were some suggestions for amendments to the operation of the system to alleviate pressures.

This report of the NI Big Conversation will be provided to the Department for Infrastructure, the Planning Appeals Commission and the 11 Councils.

1. Introduction

Planning plays a crucial role in delivering a wide range of valuable outcomes – addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies, economic development and supporting communities across Northern Ireland.

The Big Conversation is focused on the well-being of those working in and delivering the planning system; it is not a review of the planning system or its policies but does reflect on changes which could support the well-being issues identified and explore ways to alleviate pressures.

2. Methodology / What we did

The principal source for investigating the issues has been through a survey. The survey explores the experiences of working in the planning system today and was aimed at the whole profession.

The aim was to have a wide response across Northern Ireland, different sectors and parts of the profession, including those who are not RTPI members. It was promoted to all RTPI members in Northern Ireland via e-mail, in our e-bulletins and on our website.

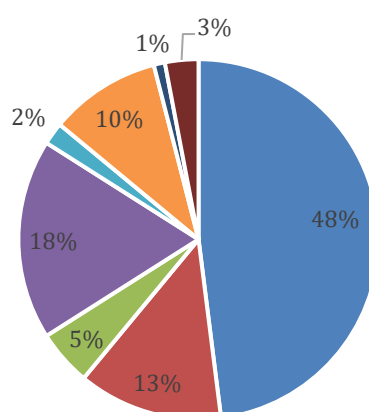
The survey ran from the beginning of September until the 15th October. We had a very good response to the survey and incredibly valuable information has been shared by respondents.

The response rate can be summarised as follows:

- Total of 90 responses
- 23% of respondents were not RTPI members (reaching beyond the RTPI membership)
- 10% of our members in Northern Ireland have responded – this is a reasonably high rate compared to other surveys we have run and other similar surveys
- This rises to 13%, if you take out those members not currently working, such as students and retired members (it is less relevant for them).
- 13% of respondents are in the private sector, 59% in Local Council Planning Departments, 26% in other public sector, and 2% in the third sector, which reflects the RTPI membership.

In terms of roles, the spread of respondents was as follows:

Respondents by work role



- Development Management Planner
- Policy Planner
- Marine Planner
- Consultancy
- Community Planner
- Regeneration
- Enforcement
- Management

The response rate gives us confidence that the survey results are reliable and representative.

3. Background

The planning system in Northern Ireland has been operating since April 2015, when responsibility for the majority of operational planning functions passed from the then Department for Environment (DoE) to the 11 new local councils. With the Department for Infrastructure (which replaced the DoE) retaining a central role with responsibility for preparing planning policy and legislation, and for monitoring and reporting on performance of the councils in their delivery of planning functions.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office undertook a review of the performance of the planning system and published its report in February 2022, concluding:

“Northern Ireland’s planning system is not working efficiently and, in many aspects, is failing to deliver for the economy, communities or the environment.”

www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/planning-northern-ireland

The Public Accounts Committee published its report Planning in Northern Ireland in March 2022 which considered the Northern Ireland Audit Office’s report. The report stated:

“... on the basis of the evidence presented to the Committee, it is clear that the system is failing on delivering its key functions - major applications take years to decide, plan-making is incredibly slow, and enforcement is inconsistent.”

[Public Accounts Committee - Planning in Northern Ireland \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](http://niassembly.gov.uk)

Both these reports point, for the planning system in Northern Ireland to fulfil its statutory duties and deliver quality placemaking, to a critical need for improvements to how the system is operating.

A number of responses pointed to the need for performance monitoring of the planning system to provide evidence for informing action.

“There is no oversight / review of how the planning system is performing.”

In response to the reports, the DfI has agreed a joint work programme – Planning Improvement Programme - working closely with local government and partners. Alongside this, an interim Regional Planning Commission has also been established with an advisory role in response to a Public Accounts Committee recommendation. www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/planning/planning-improvement-programme

3.1 Recent RTPI research outside Northern Ireland

3.1.1 Scotland

RTPI Scotland has published its analysis¹ of resourcing in the Scottish planning service in 2022. This reflects the position that planning authorities’ budgets have diminished in real terms by 38% since 2009. The key findings are:

- The planning service is one of the most severely affected of all local government services in terms of budgets with a reduction of 38% since 2010;
- A quarter of planning department staff have been cut since 2009;
- Planning application fees do not cover the costs of processing planning applications;
- The new Planning Act has introduced 49 unfunded duties to local authorities which could cost between £12.1m and £59.1m over ten years to implement;
- It is estimated that over the next 10 to 15 years the planning sector will have demand for an additional 680 - 730 entrants into the sector; and
- The planning workforce has both demographic and succession challenges in the short, medium and long term.

3.1.2 Enforcement in England

In England, at the request of the UK Government’s Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities the RTPI published research² in 2022, with the aim of attaining a clearer understanding of what is happening on the ground with planning enforcement.

The research highlighted a crisis in planning enforcement with unmanageable workloads and insufficient staff, leading to an inability to meet public demand.

3.1.3 Big Conversation in Wales

Identified by Audit Wales and Senedd Cymru’s Public Accounts Committee the workload of LPAs has increased alongside significant budget cuts. The Wales’ Big Conversation found high levels of planners being overstretched in their work and this was having an impact on their well-being. 61%

¹ www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2022/december/resourcing-the-planning-service-key-trends-and-findings-2022/

² www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2022/november/planning-enforcement-resourcing/

of all respondents reported being overstretched at least several times a week, 74% of LPA officers felt overstretched; a staggering 21% of all respondents felt they were overstretched all of the time.

A wide variety of issues were identified as the reason for the increase in workload. Reoccurring themes include staff resources and recruitment difficulties linked to pay and rewards, the expectations of developers, their agents, the public and politicians, the broadening of planning and process requirements.

3.2 Opportunities and Challenges

We asked what the greatest opportunities and challenges were for the profession and planners in Northern Ireland, we have summarised these below to help set the context for the Big Conversation.

6.1 Opportunities

Some highlighted the overarching ambitions of planning and planners, for example “To shape future development of our towns and cities through new LDPs for all council areas.” “There is a real opportunity to show that planning works and can be used as a betterment to the society we live in.” “To be seen as part of positive placemaking and a positive power for change.”

Others referred to the planners working in the profession in Northern Ireland: “Its members. Officers are so committed to making good decisions that encourage economic growth, promote sustainability whilst ensuring our environment is protected.” “Highly skilled and committed workforce...” and the future pipeline of planners: “Universities in NI are producing some very enthusiastic skilled people.”

There was reference by some to the economic potential offered by the “Investment opportunities that might arise from the Brexit deal.”

Some reflected on the problems experienced in the planning system currently and hoped for a positive turnaround: “That the issues with the planning system can be rectified and that change can happen with the right attitude.” “To be visionary and add value by creating quality places through protecting and reusing existing heritage buildings and supporting active/sustainable travel rather than the tickbox approach that is currently taken.”

6.2 Challenges

A range of fundamental challenges were raised by contributors. The most common challenges centred on:

“The public perception of the profession and being blamed for all aspects of development.” Which is closely linked to a “Lack of public awareness of what planning is.”

Many referenced the low morale across the profession: “Apathy and a lack of respect for ourselves as well as a lack of respect from others.” “Low morale in every area of the public sector / councils.” This is linked to the feeling that “Planning has been relegated to a not very favourable position in Councils. It’s not regarded as a professional job in Council.”

It was also felt that “NI Planning is a highly litigious work environment.”

Some reflected on their perspective of the system itself: “It is a rather broken system with a wide range of inter-related challenges as well described by the NI Audit Office Report.” “Delay in decision making.” “The greatest challenge is retaining experienced staff who are bleeding out of the organisation after RPA (Reform of Public Administration) out of frustration and disillusionment with the way politics now runs planning.”

There was also reference to the lack of an operating Stormont: “The lack of political leadership to drive forward the necessary legislative changes to improve the system.” A related issue raised is the need to update policy, particularly in relation to the Climate Act: “Embedding climate change into our longer term planning and policy.”

4. How is your well-being?

At the heart of the Big Conversation was the well-being of those delivering the planning system. Respondents shared with us their experiences and clearly set out the environment they are operating in.

“The Planning Department is totally under resourced and has been run into the ground.”

“Public sector local government planning is extremely difficult to work in.”

The survey found high levels of planners being overstretched in their work and this was having an impact on their well-being. 63% of all respondents reported being overstretched at least several times a week, 50% of officers in Planning Departments felt overstretched; a staggering 32% of all respondents felt they were overstretched all of the time. Just 4% of respondents do not feel overstretched and a further 3% who whilst overstretched, liked it that way.

5. Findings

5.1 Workload

“Caseloads are consistently high.”

The majority of respondents reported an increase in their workload and remit in the past two years. The survey reports to significant periods of time where most respondents are unable to carry out their work. The majority of respondents working in a local authority planning department (83%) feel overstretched several or more times a week. This is less of a case with those in other sectors, especially private consultancy respondents who mostly felt overstretched on an occasional basis.

The data clearly shows those working as Development Management Planners are most likely to feel overstretched all of the time (86%).

There seems to be a common pattern that the workload has increased over the past two years for about 47% of the respondents. This points towards the pandemic and the recovery, on top of public sector budget constraints.

A variety of issues have been raised regarding the reason for the increase in workload. The most common reason across all respondents was simply that the workload had increased.

Across the majority of responses, there was an overarching need identified for more resources to address the issues, along with an increase in training and access to such training.

“More training opportunities would be very beneficial, currently there is no investment in staff development professionally.”

Many private sector respondents felt that resourcing Council planning departments would be a solution to the issues they deal with.

“An improved and properly resourced Development Management section in local planning authorities will improve working conditions for all.”

There were also positive viewpoints, such as:

“NI has great people who are extremely capable, bright, intelligent and resourceful. We need to make much greater use of this pool of talent, empowering planners and giving them confidence to do their jobs effectively.”

5.2.1 Staffing pressures

Within Planning Departments there were issues highlighted about vacancies and covering for colleagues on sick leave, which added to pressure.

5.2.2 Pay and Rewards

Some employed in Councils reflected that they were on different conditions since transferring from the former Department for Environment and consequently they are now in limbo in terms of pay, as they no longer align with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) pay or the Council pay levels.

There was also a perception that planners were generally paid less compared to comparable other professions in Councils, such as Environmental Health Officers. Of the public sector respondents 70% felt that compared to people doing a similar job in other organisations did not feel their pay and benefits are reasonable.

5.2.3 Career Changes

33% of respondents said they were looking for a role outside planning. This compared to 60% looking to stay in their current role, and 18% were looking for a move within planning.

5.2.4 Management Support

In some responses from those working in Councils, there were a number of negative comments relating to the management of their departments.

“Senior management under pressure with less time to assist junior staff.”

“Management is currently firefighting as they are suffering from the staff shortages and having to cover this gap, as well as problems with the new Planning Portal.”

5.2.5 Training and development

Training was considered an issue for those working in the public sector and was raised by a number of respondents. In terms of topics it was felt that training in specialist areas was needed, particularly Biodiversity and Ecology, Impact Assessment, including Health and Habitats Regulations, and flooding. Some highlighted an issue with a lack of time to be able to attend training.

5.3 Understanding of Planning and its services

Better understanding that planning is not just a 'tick box' exercise by those outside the profession is essential. It was suggested there needs to be acknowledgement that planning is a profession with necessarily high standards and an appreciation of the complexity of its processes. Understanding of the wider beneficial impacts of good planning would bring benefits to local authorities, businesses and communities.

Some responses said:

“Better understanding by other professions and the public as to what a Planner does and the complexity of the job.”

“Harassment and bullying is experienced daily from interaction with applicants / agents / third parties via phone calls, emails and meetings.”

5.3.1 Corporate Public Sector understanding

Particularly in Council responses there was a need identified for wider appreciation and understanding of planning services by senior managers in Councils.

“Lack of appreciation for planning as a whole within council, seen as a problem rather than a solution.”

“... it is felt that seniors within Council do not really understand the complexities of the role of planning or the potential consequences of not making robust decisions.”

“I have gradually witnessed a progressive diminution of the role of planning in the Councils.”

One manager at a local authority said:

“There is a lack of understanding from Senior Management as to the difficulty and complexity of issues which Planning Officers face in the consideration of applications and the associated amount of time this takes.”

5.3.3 Public

The public's expectation of planners and the system is considered by many respondents (mainly Council respondents) to have risen and attitudes changed towards planners. The expectation from the public is that planners should / must respond immediately to any correspondence.

“Public perception of planning is very poor in Northern Ireland.”

5.3.4 Developers and other built environment professionals

There were many references to a lack of understanding of what planning aims to achieve by applicants and their agents, including other built environment professionals.

The lack of front-loading of information and the poor quality of applications was highlighted by a number of respondents, and that this was the reason for the slow determination of applications.

Some identified there was a need for clients to be advised their expectations and timescales are not always reasonable.

Some pointed to inappropriate behaviour:

“Abuse from architects is very commonplace and they are the most common planning agents.”

“Threatening behaviour in meetings from applicants.”

“... team members have been threatened on site.”

5.4 Planning Committees

Throughout the responses there was clear identification of an issue with how planning committees in Councils are operating.

“Councillors have not bought into planning and still view planning and development planning as 'us' and 'them'.”

“... if powers are to remain in local government then there needs to be more control / oversight in decision making at Planning Committees ...”

A lack of appreciation by Councillors of planning professionals and an understanding of planning were highlighted throughout the survey. A particular problem referred to is the common occurrence of taking party-lines in planning decisions and giving spurious reasons for planning decisions, not on planning grounds.

5.5 Delivering Planning Services

The Big Conversation is not intended as a review of the planning system or policy, but is concerned with finding opportunities for relieving pressures and enabling the system to work more efficiently and effectively to deliver outcomes and support those delivering the system.

“Sometimes you have the applicant, the agent, the objector and a local councillor all expecting updates.”

Comments on resources are closely linked with operational issues, such as ways of working and roles. Many of the operational issues are interlinked, impacting on each other and other areas. For the purposes of this ‘operational issues’ include planning administration, communication, ways of working, digital planning and IT i.e. the issues which impact on the day to day running of the service or business.

5.5.1 Development Management

The specialist issues highlighted as most difficult to resolve in development management were those related to biodiversity / ecology, with 52% of respondents highlighting this as an issue. This was followed by Impact Assessments (30%) and flooding and drainage (26%). The reasons highlighted for this relate to issues of statutory stakeholder responses and involvement.

“Statutory consultees are culturally too remote from the local planning authorities.”

One private sector respondent said:

“Piecemeal, slow and often unjustified consultation responses with very little regard to the expense and delay which results for the applicant.”

An issue which makes it difficult for planning officers to assess applications and advise planning committees appropriately is the ability for information / responses to be submitted up until a committee meeting:

“applicant/agents/third parties can submit information up until committee which requires endless written and verbal addenda.”

Administration

A common theme was the amount of administration being carried out by qualified planners. Administrative staff can be a more efficient way of undertaking the background checks, managing applications through the system and sending out communications etc.

The survey highlighted that the deletion of administrative posts has placed more pressure on officers and this may be part of the cause of the increase in workload for planning officers. Many respondents felt this has risen significantly, particularly in relation to the Planning Portal, which has markedly increased administrative requirements.

5.5.2 Policy

There is common trend amongst all sectors that a majority of respondents believe there are changes needed to be made to the Local Development Plan (LDP) process to bring forward efficiencies and speed up the production of LDPs.

Many comments were made reflecting the need for LDPs to focus on local policy and not to repeat Regional policy. However a number of comments indicated a need to update Regional policy:

“Proper review of the RDS and SPPS required to assist councils.”

Another perspective given was:

“Adequately resource government Departments to provide advice / support in the development of new policies to address the issues introduced through the SPPS or emerging in relation to Climate Change and the environment.”

There were also suggestions regarding the process for adoption, including:

“Remove the requirement to formally involve the Department for Infrastructure in the process. For example, the draft LDP should be sent straight to the PAC for examination.”

In terms of access to specialist policy areas where there is a lack of expertise, which leads to delays or issues in policy development, drainage / SuDS (30%) and retail (30%) were the highest, followed by ecology /landscape (28%).

5.7 Digital working

Responses highlighted a significant shortfall in the digital support for facilitating planning in Councils. There was widespread criticism of the Planning Portal and Mastergov.

In relation to MasterGov, one respondent commented:

“It was meant to make less work for planners but it has greatly increased the workflows and amount of tasks.”

The Planning Portal, introduced to ten of the 11 Councils (Mid Ulster introduced its own portal), faces much criticism across respondents, for example:

“While some of the initial issues have been resolved the system is still temperamental and not user friendly. Many tasks, even the most straightforward are now onerous, taking multiple actions to complete when previously this was not the case.”

“... it is difficult to trust that the information presented is the full picture.”

Although one private sector respondent positively commented:

“My work is digital reliant and the change of planning systems to digital in NI have streamlined the planning process and made it much easier to collate documentation for submission.”

A Council employee reflected that whilst the Planning Portal had problems, the

“online planning application submissions functionality has been a great success story with 80% plus applications in Belfast submitted online.”

The Planning Appeals Commission’s website was also highlighted as not user friendly by a number of respondents.

Reference was made to helpful digital resources including NIEA Map Viewer, DfI Rivers Flood Maps and the Historic Buildings and Monuments database.

5.8 Hybrid / office working

A cumulation of factors including technological advances and a desire to balance work and personal lives, accelerated by the pandemic, has led to a shift to working from home.

The majority of respondents reported working on a hybrid basis (83%). The reasons for this were principally based on personal choice to meet own preferences and needs, such as care responsibilities or to overcome long commutes.

From the Big Conversation responses, it is clear that morale is affected both ways, it all depends on the individual. The responses were clear that the preference to work in the office or from home is very personal.

“Working mostly in the office means better interaction with colleagues and clients.”

“Helps to be in the office to discuss issues. Helps to work from home to have peace and quiet to write reports.”

The hybrid approach being taken appears to be supported in the main.

5.9 Public engagement

A Community Planner pointed to the benefits which could come from engagement:

“Engagement with local people who the planning is intended to benefit i.e. better public outcomes.”

This topic drew out a considerable number of issues resulting in time spent dealing with negative engagement. A key factor underpinning this is a lack of public understanding of the scope and role of the planning system and is linked to the public’s expectation.

5.9.2 Social Media

Social media was highlighted as a useful tool to raise awareness, however it added a further complexity for planners.

“It has changed the way we are able to work and communicate as well as opening new doors for public engagement, especially for those with the likes of mobility issues etc. who would have otherwise been unable to attend.”

The survey reported the negative impact of social media, with 53% of respondents saying social media had, at least somewhat, had an effect on their well-being. Many regarded social media to have given the public the ability to express their opinions without any recourse (insults and abuse) which impacts planners’ wellbeing. It was reported that it creates an environment for misinformation and for negative campaigners and objectors to skew discussions.

“Misinformation is more easily spread through social media and difficult to halt or correct the spread of misinformation.”

“Commentary / criticism not accurate, over exaggerated and not put into context.”

“Not ideal to be in a profession where people feel they can judge or criticise when they don’t realise how it works.”

6. Suggested Solutions

The survey invited respondents to put forward solutions to issues raised and these are set out here. Inclusion here does not necessarily indicate agreement or ability to implement by the RTPI.

6.1 Public sector resources

The need for more resources for planning was raised by some respondents as the main solution to workload issues. The term resources will have different meanings for different respondents, for the purpose of this summary, ‘resources’ are taken to include staffing (recruitment and retention), training, funding, salaries, time to carry out the job properly, IT and digital planning.

6.1.1 Local Planning Authorities

More staff / resource-funding / capacity was the main suggestion set out by respondents across the board. This includes funding to adequately staff planning teams, recognising the desperate need for experienced planners and specialist planners and the need for these to be accessible.

The survey suggests that many Development Management officers are struggling to cope with the high level of caseloads, constant emails and sometimes difficult applicants. This is a desperate situation which requires attention before worsening and to address the shortfalls in delivering the system.

Linked to this, is the call from local authority planners for more respect for the role and the decisions, both from the public and also support internally within Councils.

The role of planning administration was raised in relation to this question and the opportunity for more support for planners on validation etc.

6.1.2 Other supporting specialisms and Statutory Consultees

Resources for statutory consultees and other services was also repeatedly raised, in particular the need for more highways officers and ecologists, and more resources for Government Departments. Improved and more timely responses were called for from statutory consultees.

“They as experts should be giving a rational response based on policy, which we then take as a material consideration.”

One suggestion was to introduce:

“Better consultation processes with statutory consultees, including statutory timescales ...”

In addition to problems with the length of time to respond, the quality of the responses was also highlighted as a problem, often shifting the onus back on planning officers to make decisions on ecology surveys and highways decisions.

Access to specialist and experienced staff was identified as a need. One Council employee suggested a help would be to employ “our own ecologist”.

6.4 Training

The need for training was repeatedly raised as a solution, including the regular provision of training for Councillors, as well as officers. Practices within some Councils need to change to allow officers to attend training.

A suggestion for management training was made, alongside more resources, to help managers support their staff in managing their workload and time more effectively moving forward.

6.5 Public engagement

Whilst there was acceptance that public engagement can be positive and should be pursued, however the problem with a lack of understanding and the spread of misinformation were highlighted as causing significant issues.

Improving public access to information on the planning process and upfront engagement on proposals to overcome issues relating to misinformation.

“A better educated general public ... in relation to planning matters.”

There was an identified need to create some form of accountability to manage social media. Best practice on managing abuse is needed and to be upheld by employers.

A number of respondents called for an end to advertisements in local newspapers of planning applications, as this was outdated and there were more effective and cost-efficient ways of publicising notice of applications.

6.6 Politicians and Planning Committees

There were some detailed suggestions for addressing the operation of planning committees and particularly a need to “address the political intervention that has crept into the decision making process.” There were some suggestions to remove Councillors from the development management process completely.

The need for training and support for members was raised to help Members understand complex issues relating to policy and development proposals.

“training for committee members to listen to/pass, before they are allowed to sit on planning committee.”

Training should enable:

“Improved understanding of decisions by Planning Committee members - in keeping with planning policy.”

There was a call for an effective Scheme of Delegation and a Protocol for Operation of Planning Committees to be adopted and for a six week planning committee cycle, moving from a monthly cycle.

6.7 Digital Planning

There were no radical suggestions for the use of digital planning in systems, but instead responses focused on the issues around the Planning Portal and ModernGov and a need to address these. One respondent called for better training on the systems.

6.8 Changes to Planning System

We are clear the Big Conversation is not a review of the planning system, except where it could offer a positive outcome to address the well-being of those working in it. There was a general call for the need to reform the planning system by some respondents. A number of broad solutions to workload were put forward in relation to regulations affecting the implementation of the planning system, and these are summarised below:

- Review legislation to increase quality of planning applications;
- Change in legislation to require at validation stage all relevant information required for the consideration of a planning application to be submitted;
- More realistic targets outlined in legislation for different forms of development; and
- Timescales for the cut off of responses and information to be received before a committee meeting.

7. What next?

The findings from the Big Conversation will be provided to the Department for Infrastructure, the Planning Appeals Commission and to the 11 Councils.

We appreciate that the issues raised are not solely for a single organisation to respond to. We will be sharing the findings more widely and encourage others to respond to the evidence from this work.

We recognise that many of the issues raised are experienced across the UK and Ireland and are not unique to Northern Ireland and so we will consider this in our response to this valuable evidence.

For more information about RTPI NI's policy work

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