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The Process for Developing Robust Housing Evidence for Local Development Plans

This briefing summarises research conducted for RTPI Cymru by Cardiff University School of Planning and Geography. The full report sets out to explore the use and interpretation of household projections in preparing Local Development Plans.

Since completion of this research in December 2015, the Welsh Government have issued Edition 8 of Planning Policy Wales which includes clarification on the assessment of household projections, in particular the weight to be given to projections and the range of issues to be considered as part of the evidence base for the housing requirement figures in Local Development Plans. RTPI Cymru welcomes the clarifications and further guidance on assessing household projections in principle.

We stress the urgent need for the development of skills to ensure LPAs have the technical knowledge and statistical ability to undertake the work outlined in PPW para 9.2.2, which includes modelling to provide alternative scenarios to the Welsh Government's projections. Resources for such training is a major concern for RTPI Cymru, given continued budget constraints for LPAs and we believe that the RTPI, Welsh Government and other stakeholders should work together to deliver further training and skills development opportunities on

interpreting, adapting and refining household projections data for land use planning purposes as set out in the recommendations of this research.

Who should read this?

Policy-makers, decision-makers and practitioners in planning in Wales, the UK and Ireland and internationally, especially researchers and commentators interested in planning and housing.

Key messages for policy and practice

The project makes several recommendations on the delivery of further training and skills so that local planning authorities and other stakeholders can interpret, refine and adapt household projections data; the preparation of a good practice guide on the use of household projections in preparing Local Development Plans; minor amendments and clarifications to Planning Policy Wales; and the preparation of a set of Welsh Government local authority level household projections, specifically for the purposes of land use planning that utilise longer-term trend data.

Some of the recommendations have a wider relevance beyond Wales, and are transferable across other nations and systems, in particular the recommendation



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to explore the development of local authority level household projections using longer-term trend data to better reflect the character and purposes of the planning system and the skills issue. This recommendation suggests that Welsh Government explores the practicality of preparing a set of Welsh Government local authority level household projections specifically for the purposes of land use planning that utilise longer-term trend data on which to base the projected figures and should include the possibility of developing household projections for National Park Authorities.

Welsh Government household projections are used for a variety of different purposes and activities, and land-use planning has some distinctive qualities that are not addressed through use of shorter-term trend projections. The 10 year migration trend is one example that has been incorporated into the Welsh Government household projections, and the recommendation requests that an extension of this practice be explored.

This in turn requires local planning authorities to share experience and skills to support this work and to continue to build and maintain skills in this area. There are various areas of the land use planning system where there is pressure to develop better skills and expertise. The ability to develop robust housing evidence, including through the capacity to adapt household projections data, is a key area where skills and expertise needs arise. The significance of assessing housing requirements in the preparation of a Local Development Plan suggests that this should be a priority for development of skills and expertise. A further recommendation of the research proposes the RTPI, Welsh Government and other stakeholders should work together to deliver further training and skills development opportunities on interpreting, adapting and refining household projections data for land use planning purposes.

About the research

This research has been informed by a desk based review of existing policy and literature, interviews with key stakeholders, written submissions by local planning authorities, case studies and a focus group to examine the initial findings of the project and develop conclusions and recommendations.

Main findings

Household projections

The Welsh Government local authority level household projections are a valuable mechanism for assessing housing requirements in Local Development Plans. Stakeholders understand the nature of household projections and some of the limitations in using them for the purpose of land-use planning. There is less use of variant household projections issued alongside the principal household projections. The variant household projections vary some of the assumptions about population and household change and can be useful for land-use planning. The research identifies that local planning authorities can deviate from the Welsh Government household projections where they can provide robust evidence that this is appropriate.

The Welsh Government and its planning policies

The Welsh Government has provided valuable support for local planning authorities with the task of preparing Local Development Plans. The content of Planning Policy Wales is generally fit for purpose and there is no need for an extension of national planning policy on household projections and their use in Local Development Plans. Some minor refinement of the content of Planning Policy Wales would be useful.

The Welsh Government clarified its planning policies on the use of household projections in a Policy Clarification Letter in 2014. This has resulted in some local planning authorities stating that there has been a



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change in emphasis on how household projections should now be used when preparing Local Development Plans.

Local data and refinement of the household projections

There is a wide range of easily accessible data available to local planning authorities and other stakeholders to interrogate and refine the Welsh Government household projections at local level. The development of a shared methodology for refining household projections and developing variant projection using different assumptions has been very useful. Some of the data, particularly data for migration and household size, can vary considerably over time. These variations can lead to widely differing household numbers when short-term trends are projected forward over longer timescales.

Skills, expertise and training

The research identifies that the skills and expertise to interpret and adapt household projections data varies considerably between local planning authorities. The availability of these skills within local planning authorities has declined over time. The limited skills and expertise in some local planning authorities means that household projections are not always applied to local circumstances in an appropriate way. The limited skills and expertise also mean that local planning authorities cannot always defend a plan's dwelling requirement that is above or below that initially implied by the Welsh Government household projections. Practical solutions to this skills deficit include sharing expertise and resources between local planning authorities and using planning or other consultants.

Examination of Local Development Plans

The Welsh Government household projections are given considerable weight in examination of Local Development Plans. A very wide range of different housing requirements are presented during

examination depending on the assumptions made by participants in the plan-making process. Examination processes are robust and allow an evidence-based approach to assessing housing requirements.

Examination processes are effective in identifying inconsistencies in the arguments and evidence presented at examination. The examination process also encourages the refinement of data and evidence as the process progresses. The challenge is for local planning authorities to keep their evidence up-to-date, although the examination process can deal with revised Welsh Government household projections data even at later stages of the process.

About the research

This briefing is based on research conducted for RTPI Cymru by Neil Harris, Bob Smith and Brian Webb at Cardiff University School of Planning and Geography.

The full report is available on the RTPI website at: <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/the-rtpi-near-you/rtpi-cymru/policy-in-wales/wales-planning-research-agenda/process-for-developing-housing-evidence-for-ldps/>

About the RTPI

The Royal Town Planning Institute holds a unique position in relation to planning as a professional membership body, a charity and a learned institute. We have a responsibility to promote the research needs of spatial planning in the UK, Ireland and internationally.

You are also welcome to email us at: wales@rtpi.org.uk