

Reference	ICN24/July/11
Date	11 July 2024

ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE

INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS NETWORK

ICN Steering Group Meeting

11 July 2024, 10am- 12pm

This meeting was held online.

In attendance:

- Claire Stafford (CS) (Policy and Practice Advisor)
- Dan Slade (DS) (Policy Manager)
- Pete Lloyd (PL)
- Alyn Nichols (AN)
- Andrew Metcalf (AM)
- Brian Water (BW)
- Jacqueline Veater (JV)

1. Welcome

PL welcomed all members to the meeting and confirmed his role as Chair for the rest of 2024.

CS sent apologies from RS.

2. Update on membership

CS provided an update on the current state of ICN membership: there are currently 900 active network members, with 294 members on the Forum. Forum activity is up from last year, with 664 messages sent in June 2023 compared to 812 this year.

PL commented on this positive trajectory and thanked BW and JV for attending this meeting and for all their support on the Steering Group to-date.

3. Update on minutes from the last meeting held on 8th December and matters arising

a) Update on the ICN mini-blog series

CS explained that the newly formed ICN newsletter will be the way in which members can contribute. CS encouraged Steering Group members to come forward with content ideas and to promote this within the network and forum, as there was less engagement for the previous newsletter.

CS suggested a newsletter post-election.

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AN noted that it might be too early at this point and that next month would be more realistic as there would be more to comment on.

BW mentioned his involvement with another topical newsletter, and confirmed that he would share this with Steering Group members with the intention that some content could potentially be used for the ICN newsletter.

AM suggested getting newsletter input from Barristers or signposting to external links on relevant content.

Action:

CS to look into the possibility of using external sources for the ICN newsletter and confirmed a deadline of Steering Group members to provide content for this next newsletter by the end of July.

b) Update on RTPI Award for Independent Consultant of the year proposal

CS confirmed that she is liaising with the Events Team on this matter and that the development of this idea is dependent on the Events Team's other commitments throughout the year.

AN queried how independent consultants would fit in with the current judging criteria and whether this award would be at the regional or national level.

PL questioned the exact definition of an independent consultant for the purposes of the network.

Action:

CS to report this feedback to the Events Team during an upcoming meeting. **CS** to confirm possible judging criteria and timescales for 2025.

4. Feedback from ICN Conference 2024

CS provided an update based on the post conference member survey, whereby 20 respondents provided their views. Overall, this feedback was very positive, with questions predominantly scoring 9/10. **CS** read out responses on possible future topics and speakers.

PL noted the positive feedback which matches the success of the conference on the day.

BW commented that it would be helpful to have a longer planning period for the 2025 Conference.

5. ICN Nominations Process for 2024 (with enclosed Paper)

CS explained the accompanying paper which sets out the process for nominations and timescales.

PL confirmed the proposed approach.

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BW confirmed that he is happy to re-stand.

JV noted she has other commitments so will need to stand down but that she would be happy to be involved with the planning of the 2025 conference.

PL welcomed **JV**'s offer for future help with conferences and suggested that this could be done via a Co-Opt to the Steering Group. **PL** confirmed that he would like to review the suitability of nomination entries.

AM questioned whether there is scope to add 2 additional Steering Group places, to a total of 8.

DS stated that we could increase the Steering Group number to 8, but this will depend on how many nominations are received.

Action:

CS to start the nomination process in line with the agreed Paper.

6. ICN Conference 2025 Planning

PL mentioned the Steering Group's preference for Birmingham as the chosen conference location, and that May 2025 is preferable (potentially the W/C 12th May).

CS mentioned that the conference location and date will need to be agreed in accordance with the Events Team and their existing commitments and timescales.

Action

CS to confirm with the Events Team whether a survey is necessary (with 3 potential locations to choose from) and on the potential date, and to report back to the Steering Group.

7. List of external resources for setting up Independent Consultancies

DS explained the background context to this proposal; as previously discussed, it is not possible for the Institute to publish its own professional guidance on issues beyond planning and the profession.

DS suggested an alternative solution in the form of creating a list of existing official external resources to offer structured support for Independent Consultants establishing a business. This would enable the original idea to be materialised, without putting the Institute at risk.

The Steering Group commented on how this guidance needs to be specific to planning and should cover topics such as how to charge and invoice and information on potential liabilities. It was suggested that these specific topics relating to planning might not be covered in more generic documents already in existence.

DS confirmed that **CS** will research whether the existing resources available would be relevant for Independent Consultants starting their own business.

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Action:

CS to do research on this and to liaise internally.

8. Networks Review

CS and **DS** gave an update on progress since the December meeting.

DS confirmed that the All Member Survey is scheduled for later this Summer and that he will be contacting PL around the Autumn about a meeting for all network chairs.

9. Any Other Business

a. ICN Network Survey

PL requested a Network Survey to gain info from within the network about particular areas of expertise/ type of business/ salaries/charging rates. Further information is welcomed in terms of the makeup of small consultancies consisting of 5 or less.

Action:

CS to produce a report from the CRM and report back to the Steering Group. **CS** to confirm internally whether the Institute would be able to collect data on salaries/charging rates and report back to the Steering Group.

b. Sharing other events in the Forum

AM questioned whether network members can share other external events within the Forum.

CS confirmed this is OK.

c. Having differing conference prices for ICN members

AM noted that it would be beneficial to create differing prices for ICN members to incentivise membership.

Action:

CS to look into this and report back.

d. All Institute Update

Action:

CS to share the RTPI-wide updates document to the Steering Group.

e. Next meeting to take place at the RTPI London Offices

CS noted that the preference is for mid September.

Action:

CS to send out doodle poll for potential meeting dates.