



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

LOCAL AUTHORITY DIRECT DELIVERY OF HOUSING

Advice for planners on how to support local
authority led housing delivery

**RTPI
Practice
Advice**

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Introduction

Local authorities are increasingly returning to housebuilding for a wide range of reasons. Planners should play a key role in this, both in terms of taking proactive roles in bringing development forward and scrutinising applications as they would for any other developer.

This practice advice note is for local authority planners who are supporting, or want to support local-authority led delivery. It outlines both how to pro-actively support delivery and how development management can best deal with scrutinising the local authority when it is the developer. It is both a best practice guide and a call to action as the RTPI believes planners can have a crucial leadership role in delivering new local authority led housing.

This note is largely based on [two pieces of research](#) published by the RTPI in 2017¹ and 2019². Both were conducted by Professor Janice Morphet and Dr Ben Clifford from the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London (UCL). These projects considered the motivations for and means by which local authorities directly deliver housing. The full research papers contain far more detail and we recommend the 2019 report in particular as a companion document to this advice. The findings of the research were supplemented by the review of additional research and testing drafts with planners involved in housing delivery. Case studies were also adapted from both RTPI reports.

The advice focuses on advice for planners in particular, however elements of this advice will be relevant to a wider range of local authority officers. The policy context is only applicable to England, although much of the learning will be valuable to planners in other nations.

Contents

1. Policy context	3
2. Why should planners engage in direct delivery?	4
3. Development management when the council is developer	7
4. Supporting council led development	10
5. Monitoring of resources, need, delivery, and outcomes	14
6. Leading internal collaboration	15
7. External collaboration	18
8. Other support and resources	19

¹ Morphet, J. and Clifford, B. (2017), [Local authority direct provision of housing](#), RTPI and the National Planning Forum.

² Morphet, J. and Clifford, B. (2019), [Local authority direct delivery of housing: continuation research](#), RTPI

1. Policy context

After years of relative inactivity, opportunities arose for local authorities to return to housebuilding following the Localism Act, 2011. Previously, a lack of grant funding, restrictions on borrowing through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the Right to Buy had made housebuilding unattractive to local authorities. However, the Localism Act added to the legal powers of local authorities for setting up wholly or partly owned housing companies, which enabled local authorities to build outside the restrictions imposed on the HRA³.

Since then local authority led delivery has accelerated for a number of reasons. First, momentum has built based on initial successes, with local authorities building up knowledge and confidence. Second, there have been further policy changes which have supported delivery, including the removal of the HRA borrowing cap. Third, it has become increasingly apparent to many authorities that the market alone will not meet their housing needs, in particular for sub-market and special needs housing. Finally, there has been clear political support from Government for local authorities to deliver housing.

Certain policy barriers continue to frustrate local authority led development, most prominently the Right to Buy. However, the 2019 RTPI research found that more than two thirds of local authorities are now involved in directly delivering housing and local authorities are delivering homes in numbers not seen for 20 years.

³ A full list of the powers being used to deliver housing is available on p.32 of Morphet and Clifford (2017), Local authority direct provision of housing, RTPI.

2. Why should planners engage in direct delivery?

This chapter highlights advantages of local authority planners engaging in direct delivery of housing. It can help make the case to colleagues and elected members that direct delivery can help meet planning and other strategic goals.

Generating income

As revenue support grant is removed from local authorities it becomes more important to generate new revenue streams. This may include building some housing for market rent or sale. The considerable cost of housing welfare benefit means there is also a strong case for new sub-market housing. Building new specialised, accessible housing may also be an efficient way to deliver social care.

Local authority led development can also generate planning income and help directly fund planning staff. Some local authority housing companies pay the planning department for pre-application advice, Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) and through charging the time of planners to the capital programme when they are involved in non-regulatory parts of the process or are providing an enhanced regulatory service such as fast-tracking. RTPI's 2019 research reported that in Birmingham City Council, three planning staff were directly funded by the council's housing company.

Demonstrating exemplar, policy compliant development

Through engaging in direct delivery local authorities have been able to demonstrate that it is possible to deliver high quality, policy compliant new housing developments. This provides an excellent reference point when negotiating with other developers. For many authorities direct delivery is motivated by perceived poor quality in existing new builds and some councils are building for market rent in an attempt to drive up standards. Others are focusing on delivering new homes with high energy standards as part of net zero carbon strategies. Many are also prioritising working with local small and medium enterprises, including architects and builders. Authorities such as Birmingham City Council have reported that through delivering high quality housing even with normal cost parameters they have been able to influence volume housebuilders.

Some local authorities, such as Slough Borough Council, are attempting to drive up standards in the private rental sector by setting up companies which provide high quality rental accommodation and act as exemplary private landlords.

Case study: County Durham

County Durham's wholly owned company, Chapter Homes, directly delivers new homes. Its primary motivation is income generation for the local authority, but it also works to provide better quality housing, including good design and space standards. Chapter Homes aims for 14% profit (compared to about 22% for private housebuilders), with the slightly lower margin due to building to better quality. Chapter Homes will look at sites of 30 units (many national volume housebuilders only look at 50 units plus sites). They are also looking at whether they can make 15-unit sites viable. The team try to ensure policy compliant schemes are being submitted, as a council wholly owned company must be beyond reproach.

Meeting needs not met by the market

Local authorities increasingly recognise that it is difficult to meet local housing needs without direct engagement in delivery. Councils are often held responsible for housing delivery despite having little control over the build out rates of developers⁴. In some areas local authority direct delivery has been in part a response to unimplemented permissions.

Even aside from overall housing numbers, many local authorities find the market does not respond to their broader set of housing needs around type and tenure of new housing. The pressing issue of homelessness also provides added impetus, particularly in responding to the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017. Local authorities are also stepping up to deliver housing for older people and key worker housing.

Councils are using direct delivery as part of wider regeneration schemes where they own land, which can also add value to other council assets. Some are using direct delivery to help change the demographic or economic profile of their population, taking an active role in reshaping places. This might for example include providing housing aimed at retaining graduates in the area or facilitating downsizing.

Local authorities have also been able to take on sites which private developers were not interested in. This includes small sites, or ones with issues around access or parking. Some councils are engaging in development in more deprived areas that the market is not interested in, in order to support their regeneration. As with housing associations, local authority development is useful during economic downturns as it is less affected by market shifts.

⁴ See discussion of this in National Audit Office (2019), [Planning for new homes](#)

Case study: Bournemouth Borough Council

Meeting the needs of homeless people, providing temporary accommodation, and regenerating more deprived areas have been key priorities for Bournemouth's housing companies. Officers feel that the Council's own development activity has helped stimulate more private sector development in the town. An active apprenticeship programme is also operating.

Case study: City of Wolverhampton Council

Wolverhampton is keen to extend the range of housing on offer in its area. The council has an active Arms Length Management Organisation with 22,000 homes that is building 400-500 properties in two areas and has 200 homes in the pipeline. The Council's company WV Living will build 1,200 homes in 4-5 years. The council is delivering more housing to deal with derelict sites and to support the economic regeneration of the city centre.

Case study: Eastbourne Borough Council

Eastbourne has directly delivered housing, acting as developer, through its HRA. It delivered 100 units and has acquired and refurbished existing properties to help with neighbourhood regeneration. They were one of the first local authority companies, with the Eastbourne Housing Investment Company founded in May 2015. The strategic objectives are income generation, place shaping, and meeting strategic housing targets. The private sector housing market locally has been described as 'dysfunctional', not delivering enough affordable housing and particularly not delivering enough for older people. The Company has a 400 unit investment pipeline, with 80 already delivered. Eastbourne were the 'new developer of the year' in the 2016 UK Housing Awards.

Enabling new opportunities which may aid staff retention

Our 2019 research found that in some areas engagement with direct delivery of housing had made it easier to recruit and retain officers, by providing the opportunity of a wider range of professional experience. Given that planners are the most challenging officers to recruit and retain (in district councils in particular)⁵, this could be a crucial way of attracting and retaining talent. The in-house development skills developed through this work can also be redeployed elsewhere in the council if necessary.

⁵ LGA (2019), [Local Government Workforce Survey 2017/18](#)

3. Development management when the council is developer

Local authority led housing delivery needs to manage the tension between a council's roles in both promoting development and development management. Another potential conflict is between the aims of local authority housing companies and other parts of the authority, particularly around the relative priority assigned to each department for meeting housing needs, generating income, and delivering quality. This section considers how planners can mediate these potential conflicts.

However, it is also worth noting that local planning authorities have a responsibility to “work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area” (as set out in paragraph 38 of the NPPF)⁶. This should often mean a responsibility to proactively support local authority led development. There should also be alignment between the objectives and detail of housing strategies and local plans. This means in practice there should not be any major conflict.

Scrutinising applications

Our research found that perceptions of potential conflicts of interest is a concern amongst planners and local authorities more generally. This is one of the core issues this advice is designed to provide support with. More information on negotiating conflict is also available in RTPI's [Code of Conduct](#) (2016) and practice advice on [Ethics and Professional Standards](#) (2017), [Probity and the Professional Planner](#) (2020).

However, it is worth saying from the outset that the UCL led research found a perception that council led projects were assessed on a level playing field to those from the private sector, with some housing officers even reporting they felt they were more keenly scrutinised. It also found that council applications were almost always policy compliant, with a desire to be beyond any reproach. Nevertheless, it is important to think about how to maintain an impartial approach as even the perception of the alternative could be damaging to public trust.

Key ways of avoiding conflict, or the perception of conflict include:

- **Governance** - local authorities and housing companies need to avoid governance risks, by ensuring that the housing company does not include elected members who are on the planning committee or officers who are involved in recommending on planning applications;

⁶ MHCLG (2019), [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

- **Clear separation** - there needs to be a red line separating the work of officers evaluating applications and officers advising the council in promoting the scheme and balance between useful engagement pre-application and impartial planning determination. This can be difficult so it is important to have a clear and unambiguous policy here;
- **Transparency** - full transparency is crucial when the council is acting as both developer and development manager. This is especially important where planners are giving advice to the team preparing the application;
- **Use of PPAs** - conflict can be avoided by use of a PPA setting out expected timeframes and relationships;
- **Working with councillors** - officers should keep elected members up to date to secure their buy in. This could involve full member briefings, especially for affected ward councillors;
- **Communications** - working with the council's communications team to provide a clear explanation of the process to the public. This may need to include some FAQs such as how the council can give itself planning permission, what the benefits of the scheme might be, any specific features that are worth noting, and what the council as promoter intends to do next in the event of a refusal. It may also be important to specify the role of the council's planning committee if it is making a decision.

It is worth noting that there is no route to appeal if the council itself is the applicant. Even if the applicant is a wholly or partly owned housing company rather than the council itself, some authorities will feel they are unable to appeal against refused permissions. In the rare cases where permissions have been refused, most have sought to redesign and resubmit rather than appeal.

Negotiating contributions

As with other developments there is a tension between scheme viability and maximising developer contributions. This is particularly the case where the council is taking on challenging sites, for example some smaller sites. However, council led development can also serve to demonstrate how high levels of contributions can be delivered as part of a viable development.

Local authorities cannot have Section 106 agreements with themselves. One solution to this is to introduce a planning condition specifying the obligations to be entered into.⁷ Our research found that planners at several councils have established PPAs with their in-house companies whether for the company programme or for individual schemes. Some councils are also using clawback provisions in local authority company schemes. Other issues are also emerging such as CIL wavers for councils on housing development, although these are not automatic⁸.

⁷ See MHCLG (2019), [Use of Planning Conditions](#), National Planning Practice guidance, Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 21a-010-20190723

⁸ Planning Portal (2019). '[Community Infrastructure Levy: Relief and Exemption](#)'

Case study: London Borough of Islington

The council has a team of 18 staff in its 'new build' team for direct delivery of housing, with an aim to deliver 1,900 genuinely affordable homes from 2018 to 2022. The Council's own new build housing developments go through the same open book viability process as a private development. The affordable housing contributions can be an issue regarding the viability of a scheme versus the Council's objective to provide very high percentages of affordable housing. There are some negotiations over the contributions to the public realm and community facilities. The planning department adopted a design review panel approach, which has improved the design quality of schemes and planning, and have been key in driving design standards up to support members' ambitions for the quality of new homes. The new build project currently funds two case officers in the planning team and is also looking to fund an urban design and a building control officer in the future as well, to better support its applications.

Mediating conflicting priorities

Rather than mediating between conflicting priorities during the application process, it is easier where possible, to deal with conflicts when establishing the housing venture. For example, the first thing to consider is the aims and objectives including whether the housing company is there to make a financial contribution to running the council's services or whether it is intended to be a direct provider to meet housing need.

When the council is the developer, work is required to manage internal expectations. Different parts of the authority can have varying expectations (e.g. design quality compared to finance concerns). It can be hard to negotiate council schemes, but equally a committee report saying a scheme is not policy compliant could be considered embarrassing so there is value to working things out internally from the start.

Once a council owned housing company has been established it will operate within the terms of the aims and objectives provided to it by the council and managed by the board. This means that it cannot be influenced in its day-to-day operation by councillors or officers, who are not on its board. This separation, and some of the tensions that it may give rise to, will take a time to work through the system.

It is also important for planning officers to develop strong relationships with local authority housing companies in order to ensure compatibility with the local plan⁹.

⁹ Smith institute (2017), [Delivering the renaissance in council-built homes: the rise of local housing companies](#)

4. Supporting council led development

The intense pressure on local planning authorities to focus on facilitating market-led development has meant that in some cases local authority planners do not even perceive themselves to have a role in council led development. However, our research identified many opportunities for planners.

Plan making

Planners can support pro-active delivery by laying foundations for delivery in the local plan and other planning documents. A key recommendation of the 2017 research was that councils should treat their local plan as a housing delivery document.

One way to force development is by progressing Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), and our research found that this is much easier if sites have been identified for housing in the local plan. This particularly includes cases where owners show no willingness to take forward development, even when they have planning permission. In many cases the CPOs are not eventually needed, as the threat of action encourages the landowners to implement the development or release the land voluntarily. If acquired, local authorities may decide to build out the developments themselves or take one of the other routes open to them including re-sale or partnership development. This approach was also included in the Housing White Paper, 2017.

It is also important to link housing and planning strategies. Our research found that more councils are linking local plans and housing strategies, but that more can be done. If local authorities are to scale up their own delivery much more of the land identified in a five year housing land supply will need to be intended for council led development. The 2019 research found that 61% of authorities who were delivering housing were accounting for this in their local plans (rising from only 12% in 2017). In Durham County Council the local plan and housing strategies were developed within the same team, which is attempting to align them. The public consultations for both were carried out in parallel and there has been planning input into the housing strategy.

There could also be a closer link between the housing needs assessment in the local plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Local plans can take into account existing housing stock and tackle wider needs as set out in housing and homelessness reduction strategies.

The research also found that in some cases Planning Inspectors have given more weight to the local plan housing needs assessments of authorities who are engaging in housing delivery. This can make the local plan examination period quicker. In Plymouth, the local plan examiner noted that the local plan had gone beyond meeting the full Objectively Assessed Housing Need to actively link housing delivery to the support of economic and environmental objectives.

Planners can also use the plan to link housing delivery with other strategic goals, for example by delivering housing in priority growth locations or to meet particular needs such as specialist housing for older people. Another frequently mentioned approach has been linking delivery with the local authority's extra care strategy and using this to identify specific types of accommodation and locations for development in the local plan.

Local plans are not the only opportunity to help local authority led delivery in meeting social goals. Area or site specific Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) can be used to tackle long vacant or stalled sites which are suitable for housing, including by indicating preferred users to the owners. If adopted council planning policies designate land as being required to meet local needs, this again makes it easier for the council to progress CPOs.

Case study: Bristol City Council

In Bristol, a key change to support housing delivery has been to revise the City Council's policy and guidance documents, including the local plan. This also includes the affordable housing funding policy, self-build/custom build guidance note, community-led housing guidance note and a Transport Development Management Guide.

Advice on suitable land and progressing applications

Private sector consultants and local authority planning officers play an important role in advising local authority housing companies and other vehicles. This includes identifying and securing suitable land, and providing advice on the progression of the application. As stated before, it is important to keep a clear separation between officers involved in scrutinising the application and those involved in advising the development team.

Planners have a key role to play in monitoring and identifying suitable sites for new housing developments. This includes both council owned land and other land. The understanding planners have of what land is available can be crucial to the early stages of local authority led delivery. They can also provide advice on the development potential of sites and on tenure requirements. They can also identify sites which might be suitable for local authority development in particular.

Almost all the councils who are building housing are at least in part using their own land. Housing delivery teams and housing companies can work directly with the council planners at the early stage of identifying sites. The research found that planning had a crucial role in the management of council assets and the assessment of sites for development.

In some local authorities there has been direct contact between the planning department and major land owners such as food retailers and owners of out of town retailing sites to explore whether some redevelopment would be possible.

From the start local authorities should have a clear strategy for progressing their application and desired outcomes which can be supported by a PPA. PPAs should include a clear statement on the expectation that council schemes will be policy compliant and meet defined quality standards. Council planners acting separately from the council led development can also proactively negotiate the delivery of affordable housing through planning obligations and agreements. Further down the line there may also be a need for an Environmental Impact Assessment. Once permission has been secured council planners must look at the correct timing to discharge conditions.

Case study: Harrogate Borough Council

Harrogate Borough Council has a longstanding commitment to building homes through the HRA. It retains a design and development capability in-house, which is used to support viability assessments. The officers have reviewed the range of Council owned sites open to them for development and have identified the smallest ones that might not be suitable for other developers or housing associations.

Case study: Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

Babergh and Mid-Suffolk and two neighbouring district councils now have one integrated body of staff. They are using their HRA capital and Right to Buy receipts to fund new builds, delivering 65 units between 2015-18 (11 of the units will be shared ownership as there is high demand for these locally). The strategy is for a further 300 homes between 2018-2021. They have used GIS to identify potential surplus District Council land, which could be used for housing development, with local planners assisting with the policy screening of these sites.

Securing finance

Planners can help secure finance for council led housing development, including by helping to prepare funding bids, for example to the Housing Infrastructure Fund, Growth Funds and lottery funds. In London, this also includes funding from the Greater London Authority. This may particularly involve providing estimates for needs around housing, infrastructure and remediation. Section 106 funding and Right to Buy receipts can also be used to support local authority led delivery.

Facilitating public engagement

Our research found that council led schemes are often subject to a higher level of public scrutiny than other developments, with communities feeling they should have a greater say. This is an issue for planners in both development management and development promotion. This becomes more of an issue when local authority housing development programmes build momentum and take on larger schemes. As described above, transparency and clear separations between applicants and development management help to secure public trust in the development management process.

When acting on behalf of the development, planners can play a core role in facilitating clear communications and engagement strategy. Key points for guiding this include:

- Robust and early consultation over the councils own developments. This includes including at the very earliest stage, relating to the form and roles of planned new housing companies. One option is to establish an ongoing public forum to obtain community views and feedback on progress;
- Constantly making the case for the benefits of council housebuilding;
- Remembering the requirement for estate ballots if the scheme involves regeneration of an existing council housing development;
- The development team meeting councillors regularly to manage expectations;
- Including the council's own confirmed schemes in local plan site allocations;
- Ensuring transparency;
- Bringing in the council's communications team at an early stage following meetings of the planners and development team; and
- Developing a clear public explanation of how the process works.

Councils need to have a clear narrative about their housing companies, explaining how they are related to, but different from, the council. Even with clear communications it must be anticipated that some community members will not make a distinction between the company and the council. Councils should be realistic about what can and can't be delivered through local authority led housing developments.

5. Monitoring of resources, need, delivery, and outcomes

A key part of planning is collecting evidence on what is needed and what is being delivered and this is certainly true for supporting council led housing delivery. Successful authorities recognise housing delivery as a key objective for the council as a whole, bringing together housing delivery objectives as part of the economic strategy and environmental objectives and using this to identify priority sites and delivery projects. This can include:

- Reviewing all council owned land e.g. identified through One Public Estate and its potential for council led development. Even small sites may be suitable, including for the self-build register, and can be built out more quickly;
- Keeping all housing sites under constant review and active monitoring to support more housing delivery through interventions (if necessary);
- Not relying on the five-year land supply in the local plan to provide the housing required and extending the period of supply;
- Using the council's own monitoring data and records of conversations on all housing sites to aid the assessment of specific sites in the local plan examination;
- Regarding the local plan as a continuous mechanism, not taking an episodic approach;
- Work within a single housing delivery database for the whole council area, monitor slippage and manage re-programming; and
- Ensuring plan policies are implemented.

Case study: South Lakeland District Council

Housing delivery in South Lakeland has been supported by the housing delivery and planning responsibilities being held by the same officer, although the council may separate these functions in the future. The existing approach has allowed for the work between the two services to be joined up. The main approach has been intensive monitoring of all sites. While there is a good market for housing delivery, this proactive approach has still been needed. This monitoring has also facilitated and supported other forms of housing supply intervention. If delivery appeared to be slightly under what is required to meet planning targets, then other action is taken following a midterm review. This may include the purchase of houses and then their conversion to create additional homes and this has helped to achieve the target figure.

6. Leading internal collaboration

While it is important to consider potential conflict, it is just as important that planners make the most of their skills in bringing people together to enable a strategic approach to housing delivery across the council. Both our research and other investigations¹⁰ have found effective relationships between officers and elected members and officers in different parts of the authority to be essential. This section considers how planners can help coordinate housing delivery across the council.

Leadership

A clear finding of the research was that councils with a corporate priority for housing are more successful in directly delivering new homes. Therefore, to support local authority led development planners need to secure buy-in from leadership both within and outside the planning department. One crucial way of achieving this is to highlight the benefits discussed in Chapter 2 – including the potential for income generation, demonstrating exemplar development, and meeting needs not met by the market. This can be linked to the aspirations set out in the council's corporate and local development plans.

Housing Delivery Boards can provide a helpful structure for promoting strategic governance and decision making. These can be comprised of elected members, representatives from relevant departments and other bodies associated with development. The Boards' job is to overcome barriers to delivery.

Councils can also think about bringing together the heads of Housing and Planning or housing strategy and planning policy. Bristol, Plymouth and South Lakeland local authorities each combined delivery of housing and planning functions under the same leadership.

Internal collaboration and housing delivery teams

Planners are in a unique position to help authorities recognise housing delivery as a key objective for the council as a whole, bringing together housing delivery objectives as part of the economic strategy and environmental objectives and using this to identify priority sites and delivery projects. This includes securing buy in from the whole council when making applications, by considering how they align with the various objectives. The research found that planning relationships have been regarded as very helpful for delivering sites, including through neighbourhood plans and by helping with community engagement.

¹⁰ See in particular, Smith institute (2017), [Delivering the renaissance in council-built homes: the rise of local housing companies](#)

Finding opportunities to interact with officers from other departments is an important way to develop a strong shared purpose. Several authorities delivering housing have reported that co-locating staff from housing, regeneration and planning teams can be helpful. Planning officers at the Isle of Wight council are also members of the council's wellbeing board and participate in the JSNA that provides evidence for special needs housing.

Our research recommended the establishment of housing delivery teams to oversee all parts of development. These are proactive governance and delivery arrangements that are focused on each housing site regardless of ownership or size. The teams can also develop applications for the council's own sites and oversee procurement.

Housing delivery teams have brought together housing and planning by including a range of officers with housing, planning, property, development, legal, transport and financial skills. Securing in-house development surveyors was seen as particularly important in our research. These teams can take a few years to build up and establish a strong approach. Just as the RTPI has argued Chief Planning Officers should be at the top table of local authority leadership¹¹, we see planners as natural leaders in housing delivery teams. Even with these multi-disciplinary teams it is likely that direct delivery of housing will require specialist advice from outside the authority.

Case study: Plymouth City Council

Plymouth's RTPI Award winning Plan for Homes is a delivery approach across all the means open to the council supported by a joint housing delivery team. The role of the housing delivery team is to monitor and engage with all housing sites in Plymouth regardless of tenure and ownership. It has a quasi-customer relationship management system so that each site has records of all interactions and brings it forward for regular review and action. The City Council also has a housing fund, which it has created to support sites that are delayed or have some infrastructure requirements. The City Council also supports bids to Homes England funding for these sites such as the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF), Accelerated Construction funding and Starter Homes Programme funding. As part of the Plan for Homes, Plymouth has released over 100 acres of council owned land. The council is part of Plymouth Housing Delivery Partnership, which includes registered providers active in the city and Homes England. Through the Partnership the council is able to influence what is delivered by partners on their sites, resulting in the delivery of over 1,600 homes on council owned land over 5 years with nearly 50% being affordable.

¹¹ RTPI (2017, 2019), [Chief Planning Officers research](#)

Case study: Bristol City Council

The council made the Director of Planning responsible for housing delivery and established a housing delivery team, which is working on a list of all housing sites in Bristol – public and private and looking at development and delivery. This is a total of 1,000 sites. The City Council has considered its approach to housing delivery strategically and has restructured the Council's internal organisation to establish a housing delivery team that comprises housing, planning, legal and finance officers. The City Council has also established a Housing Delivery Board (HDB) that is comprised of council departments and other bodies concerned with housing delivery including housing associations, developers and charities. The HDB considers progress on all the housing sites in the city and the constraints that are preventing delivery with a view to acting to overcome them. As part of the joint spatial framework, the council is also working to develop joint delivery mechanisms with the other local authorities involved.

7. External collaboration

The research identified pro-active relationships with external stakeholders as a critical factor in housing delivery. These relationships seem to be most effective when they are systematic and embedded within the whole housing and planning delivery system and also part of the council's corporate objectives. Our research recommended the establishment of a housing delivery forum, which meets regularly to bring together partners to discuss progress and problems.

This may include registered providers, charities, voluntary bodies, private landlords, developers, utilities and other infrastructure providers. Councils using this approach have described these groups as offering a means of providing two-way conversations. The housing providers can make their views known about delivery issues in a regular basis and the council can be clear about its own approach to delivery and what it is expecting from providers. The full research papers contain a range of findings on setting up joint vehicles and other partnership working which may be more relevant to housing officers.

One advantage of external collaboration is access to skills and knowledge. A number of authorities are taking a partnership approach to housing development to overcome skills shortages. This can involve sharing staff with other councils, either formally through a joint venture or otherwise. Some councils who have experience in delivery are raising income by selling their expertise to other councils. Some councils have developed joint strategic and spatial plans in order to support housing delivery.

Case study: Plymouth, West Devon and South Hams Joint Local Plan

The joint local plan was adopted by all three authorities in March 2019. Officers and members from each council collaborated closely on the development of the plan and its evidence at the examination hearings. This approach also sees planning as a joint issue across the three local authorities. It is a strategic plan and includes the role of housing in a wider sense, including health. The production of the joint local plan was overseen by an elected member steering group made up of two members from each local authority and equal voting rights so that no one local authority could outvote the others. The group met every month and had delegated authority for informal discussions and decisions. Now that the joint local plan has been adopted, the steering group has been replaced by a partnership board with the same number of members and voting rights, but which meets less frequently.

8. Other support and resources

The research reports on which this advice is primarily based are available at www.rtpi.org.uk/lahousing. A table of local authority delivery activities across England was published alongside the research.

- Morphet, J. and Clifford, B. (2017), [Local authority direct provision of housing](#), RTPI and the National Planning Forum.
- Morphet, J. and Clifford, B. (2019), [Local authority direct delivery of housing: continuation research](#), RTPI

Resources

LGA and Planning Advisory Service (2013), [Probity in planning](#)

Mark Baigent (2016), [How to set up a local housing company](#)

RTPI (2016), [Code of Conduct](#)

RTPI (2017), [Ethics and professional standards](#)

RTPI (2020), [Probity and the professional planner](#)

Smith Institute (2017), [Delivering the renaissance in council-built homes: the rise of local housing companies](#).

Tim Brown and Janis Bright (2018), [Innovation in council house building](#), Local Government Association

Support

Airey Miller's [Councils Building Homes Forum](#)

Future of London's [Council Led Housing Forum](#)

Greater London Authority's [Building Council Homes for Londoners](#)



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