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ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE

## **INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS NETWORK**

ICN Steering Group Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019, 12.00 to 14.30pm**

The Royal Town Planning Institute, 41 Botolph Lane, London, EC3R 8DL  
David Fryer Room

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies for Absence

In Attendance: Deirdre Wells (Network Chair), Helen Prangle, John Lynch, Max Tolley (RTPI), Jenny Divine (Network Manager)

Apologies: Derek McKenzie & Christopher Kendall

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 11/01/2019 and matters arising  
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DW commented that action had been taken on all items from last meeting.

Following on from these actions, the following actions should now be undertaken:

- DW to send further letter to the Planning Advisory Service to continue to push for release of a practice advice on consistency of LPA processes.
- The ICN will endeavour to maintain its contact and dialogue with PINs (further details at Item 5 below)
- The Survey which was put to ICN members earlier this year – DW would like to let it lie as no information was available as to its purpose or use. It was agreed that if the RTPI would like to conduct a survey in the future, that the purpose of the survey be clarified.
- JD to explore issue of a publicly available qualified planners list on the RTPI website with the RTPI Membership team.

3. Feedback/learning from October 2019 conference

Conference feedback was positive overall, with the following noted in particular:

- Evening networking event was favourably received, giving delegates an excellent opportunity to break the ice.
- Delegates have expressed a desire for climate change to be explored at the micro level with an examination of practical applications that can be implemented on a day-to-day basis.

DW's Conference article will appear in the Dec issue of The Planner magazine which is due to be released in the last week of Nov.

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4. Consideration of venue and rough date for next year's conference.

SG considered London perhaps not the best place to hold next year's conference – given the expense of accommodation, venue hire etc.

SG agreed that October is a good time of year to hold the conference – preferably before the clocks go back to maximise on daylight for the walking tour. This also reflected questionnaire feedback.

**ACTIONS**

JD & DW to explore alternative locations:

- Chester,
- Milton Keynes &
- Shrewsbury

DW to compile a list of speakers who (although unavailable to take part in the 2019 Conference) have expressed an interest in taking part next year. DW will provide list to JD.

5. Any further action re liaison with PINS/continued concerns re quality of decisions etc.

SG agreed that communication with PINs has been excellent but shouldn't just be about contact - also about achieving results.

JL commented that Graham's 'honeymoon' period must be coming to an end by now with opportunity for more pointed discussions to take place. DW suggested that she and JL contact Graham Stallwood and his colleagues on this point.

**ACTION**

DW to write to Graham Stallwood to:

- Suggest PINs put feedback form in place for a trial period of (say) 6 months to enable feedback after every appeal decision.
- Ask Graham to introduce us to his 'opposite number' at PINs to enhance ICN/PINs dialogue.

6. Production of a PAN for ICN members on dealing with the stresses of being a sole worker – to be discussed in principle

DW raised issue via a brief paper that there are very few resources to help isolated ICN members cope with stress. HP further commented that large companies typically have mental health helplines and support in place for staff, but this is not possible for independent consultants.

SG suggested that the 2016 ['Starting your own Private Practice'](#) PAN should have a wider reach than simply starting your own business and include issues

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which arise with the ongoing running of a business as well as the issues of mental health and wellbeing including:

- Finances
- Handling workload
- Taking out insurance/Dealing with sickness and family emergencies  
Mortgage protection etc.
- Planning for retirement
- Health

HP suggested renaming the PAN to '*Starting and Running your Own Private Practice*'.

### **ACTIONS**

JD to explore with policy team the best approach to take with respect to updating the existing 2016 PAN to widen its scope. JD to inquire whether RTPI had dedicated resources to assist members on stress issues.

DW and HP to flesh out some of the points in DW's handout and email it round to rest of SG and JD, Network Manager.

#### 7. Update on ICN membership/any action needed to stimulate

JD confirmed ICN numbers are up from May (from 791 to 834 members), with the ICF seeing an increase from 318 members in May to 333 members currently.

SG noted that the ICF continued to be very well used and expressed thanks to all those who contributed and assisted their colleagues.

### **ACTION**

DW asked to find out how many people attended the conference who are not in the forum. JD has since provided this info- 17 non forum members, 59 who are.

#### 8. Steering Group elections

It was suggested that the SG could be increased to 6 members (from 5), but should not be any bigger.

In terms of elections, SG agreed that:

- An email bulletin be prepared inviting expressions of interest from ICN Members to join the SG with a link included to an online form.
- SG to then have a further discussion (based on the level of interest) as to whether or not certain committee members would like to step down to allow other ICN members an opportunity to step up.

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## **ACTION**

JD to explore the above further having regard to current RTPI Network policies to conform with RTPI governance requirements and report back to the SG.

### 9. AOB (due notice having been given)

#### ICF

- DW commented that she has received positive comments from ICF members regarding her efforts to monitor the ICF and ensure that all members are treated fairly and with respect by other members within the forum in line with the Forum's protocol.

#### SG 2020 Meetings

- The following meeting times suggested:
  - Late Feb/early March;
  - Early to mid-June; and
  - Post-Conference (4-6 weeks after).

#### ICN Conference

The conference was judged to have been a success, and the feedback received was very useful in shaping future events

- DW raised concerns that Planning Portal have sponsored conference for the last three years and may be unwilling to sponsor it again if they feel they are not getting any commercial benefit from it.
- **ACTION** - JD to approach Planning Portal and see what they say.
- DW suggested that sponsors be chosen on basis of speakers rather than other way round. HP commented that if we select Shrewsbury, she knows a good speaker in Birmingham who we could approach.
- DW raised issue that barristers tend to allocate all sponsorship money in Jan/Feb so we will need to approach them very soon if looking for sponsorship.
- DW also commented that we should make an effort at the next conference to plan in advance what photos we would like to take to ensure we have a good range for media use.

#### Annual Report

#### **ACTIONS**

- DW to write ICN Annual Report.
- JD to advise DW deadline and word limit.