



Public Sector Planning Resources in Wales

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RTPI Cymru

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Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

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About this paper

This research was commissioned by the Welsh Government and undertaken by RTPI Cymru. It scopes the current resources and capacity within public sector planning services in Wales, providing an-up-to-date evidence base to inform and shape future interventions and solutions.

The research covers the 25 Local Planning Authorities, Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW), the Welsh Government's Planning Division and the planning-related functions of Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

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Further information

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Contents

About this paper	1
Report authors.....	1
Acknowledgements	2
Executive summary	5
Definitions	17
1. Introduction	19
Background and context.....	19
Purpose and aims.....	19
Methodology.....	20
2. Existing research and evidence.....	24
3. Budgets	33
Local Planning Authority budgets.....	33
Welsh Government Planning Division budget.....	52
PEDW budget.....	53
NRW budget.....	54
4. Current workforce	56
Local Planning Authority workforce.....	56
Welsh Government Planning Division workforce.....	66
PEDW workforce	69
NRW workforce	71
5. Recruitment.....	74
Recruitment and retention within LPAs	74
Job advertisement methods.....	80
PEDW recruitment and retention	84
6. Salaries	86
UK planning salaries.....	86
Planning salaries in Wales.....	88
Comparing public and private sector salaries	89
7. Future workforce and succession planning.....	91
Public sector age profile	93
NRW age profile	96
8. Skills and capacity	97
LPA skills and capacity	97
Identifying and addressing skills and capacity gaps.....	100
Spatial distribution of gaps in specialist skills and capacity	105

Existing use of shared services	133
Existing use of consultancy services.....	135
LPA: Training budgets	136
Resourcing the Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs).....	138
Welsh Government Planning Division skills and capacity	139
PEDW skills and capacity	140
NRW skills and capacity	143
Future skills gaps and training needs.....	145
9. Growing the profession	147
Planning schools	150
Apprenticeships and bursaries in Wales	153
10. An effective planning service: our conclusions	158
11. Recommendations	164
Recommendation 1: Establish a sounding board	164
Recommendation 2: Establish a Planning Improvement Service for Wales	164
Recommendation 3: Define the planning service	165
Recommendation 4: Collect and publish quality planning data	165
Recommendation 5: Develop a recruitment and retention strategy	166
Recommendation 6: Shared services	166
Recommendation 7: Digital Planning	167
Appendix 1: Data sources	169
Appendix 2a Welsh Government Survey	171
Appendix 2b PEDW Survey	177
Appendix 2c NRW Survey	183
Appendix 2d Local Planning Authorities Survey	190
Appendix 3: Survey respondents	197
Appendix 4: Interviewees	199
Appendix 5: Public sector average salary bands	200
Appendix 6: Age profile within LPA teams	202
Appendix 7: Scottish National Improvement function	206

Executive summary

- i. This project scopes the current resources and capacity within public sector planning services in Wales. It provides an-up-to-date evidence base to inform and shape interventions and solutions to support planners and the wider planning profession to unleash the full potential of the planning system in Wales as a force for positive change.
- ii. Our findings are based on:
 - A desk-based review of existing key reports and their findings along with a review of relevant data held by stakeholder organisations;
 - A survey of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW), the planning function of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Welsh Government's own Planning Division (WG Planning Division);
 - A series of follow-up interviews with survey respondents and key stakeholders; and
 - Discussion with the Wales Planning Consultants' Forum, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and RTP1 accredited university planning schools.
- iii. A properly resourced planning system is the Government's key mechanism for creating healthy, inclusive, economically and environmentally sustainable places. This research provides up-to-date evidence to inform and shape interventions and solutions to support planners and the wider planning profession to unleash the full potential of the planning system in Wales as a force for positive change.
- iv. This evidence report discusses current public sector resource and capacity gaps and challenges (financial and people), considers future workforce requirements, and suggests potential solutions that could help ease these pressures and support delivery of an effective and responsive planning service in Wales.

- v. Gathering and presenting the data and information in a way that fully accounts for the wide range of roles, contexts and circumstances across the public planning service has been challenging. As such, the data should be interpreted recognising its limitations and the variety of additional factors that sit outside the scope of this commission or beyond the direct remit of the planning system. Nevertheless, this report provides a valuable foundation on which further evidence can continue to be built and refined over the coming years.
- vi. This report concludes with seven recommendations derived from the evidence. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. We therefore recommend that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impacts of implementing the recommendations in this report (recommendation 1).
- vii. Over the past two decades, the public sector planning service has endured prolonged budget cuts and chronic underinvestment, at a time when additional duties have added to workloads. This has led to an erosion of capacity and skills, undermining the profession's impact and ability to deliver. Challenges persist, but the commitment of those working within the system remains evident and is applauded.
- viii. This research follows on from existing key research. Following the [Audit Wales report](#) on the Effectiveness of Planning Authorities in Wales, the Inquiry into the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#) by the Welsh Parliament Public Accounts Committee (June 2020) found that:

“Planning is critical but at present it is not able to deliver the aspirations of the Planning, Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts because of reductions in resources.”
- ix. Research on [Building capacity through collaboration and change](#) commissioned by RTPI Cymru (November 2023) found that:

“The resource and workload pressures in many planning organisations – and local planning authorities in particular - do not allow space for significant innovation and improvement – there is limited capacity to reflect, design and enact change.”

- x. Our research found that:

Wider context

- xi. Real term net expenditure on LPA planning services in Wales decreased by 43% (£21m) between 2009 and 2024. This reflects a slight improvement since 2022.
- xii. Most Local Planning Authorities report that planning fees cover only a fraction of actual service delivery. Looking at planning income as a proportion of whole planning service expenditure, our research has shown that the Wales-wide average level of cost recovery stood at 32% in 2009, increasing to 39% in 2024.
- xiii. Looking at cost recovery data for just the development management service, our research has shown that the Wales-wide average stood at 46% in 2009, increasing to 56% in 2024.
- xiv. Between April 2018 and April 2024, the number of planners (policy, development management and enforcement) recorded on LPA structures increased by 46 posts (11%) across Wales. However, it is only recently, in some areas, that we have started to see improvements in terms of budgets and staff recruitment, after drastic and prolonged cuts across planning in the public sector. A number of responses to the survey suggest that the change since 2022 has been due to a recognition that austerity cuts had gone too far, affecting performance, morale and staff retention.
- xv. Over this same period, business support teams reduced by 12 posts (12%). Although some of this will have been due to process efficiencies, it will also have meant already stretched planners are spending an increased proportion of their

time on administrative tasks, which reduces the time they can devote to their core planning responsibilities.

- xvi. The Welsh Government's Planning Division reduced in size from 60 officers in 2015 to 41 officers in 2018 and to 33 officers in 2024. This has had a tangible impact on the Planning Division's ability to provide timely and robust national policy updates or provide wider leadership for example by monitoring performance and driving improvement. It is only in recent months that steps have been taken to reverse some of these cuts with the welcome recruitment of much-needed planners. Likewise, NRW has faced a period of financial pressures and increasing workloads. PEDW continues to recruit additional Inspectors to deal with an increasingly complex caseload of infrastructure projects and Local Development Plan (LDP) examinations.

Recent activity

- xvii. Between September 2022 and March 2025, staff turnover and recruitment activity meant that 165 planning posts, 26 specialist posts and 14 business support posts were advertised.
- xviii. Despite this recruitment activity and the 46 additional planning officer posts shown on team structures since 2018, at the time of responding to our survey (May 2025), 37 planning officer posts were reported as being vacant, plus six specialist posts and five business support posts. Overall, 73% of LPAs were operating with one or more vacancies within their planning service. Importantly, 11 LPAs reported multiple vacancies, with some reporting as many as five vacancies. Consequently, despite recent efforts to resource LPAs, most of those posts have not been filled either due to difficulties recruiting or recruitment freezes.
- xix. The lack of capacity has stalled progress on putting in place the framework for a Plan-led system, affecting both the second tranche of LDPs and the commencement of Strategic Development Plans (SDP). It also affects an LPA's ability to provide timely or comprehensive pre-application advice or offer Planning

Performance Agreements (PPAs), which in turn reduces sources of additional income, creating further budget and service delivery pressures. Several respondents referred to a limited pool of ecologists, highways and heritage specialists. The knock-on effect is significant, impacting application determination times and service quality, sometimes resulting in poor responses and missed opportunities.

- xx. 100% of interviewees felt that these resource challenges, an expanding remit and growing stakeholder expectations meant their LPA did not currently have capacity to deliver planning ambitions or strategic goals, with the focus instead on surviving/fire-fighting. We therefore recommend that a Planning Improvement Service should be created, similar to the independent local government improvement service established in Scotland (recommendation 2). It would be headed up by newly created independent Planning Improvement Champion and would develop and promote best practice and efficiencies, support peer review and performance monitoring, serve as a central knowledge hub for the profession, and support innovation and shared services where appropriate. This service could be hosted by the WLGA but will require additional resource to be delivered.
- xxi. To ensure future service resilience and sustainability, further work is needed to reach an agreed definition of the extent of the planning service to which full cost recovery applies (recommendation 3).
- xxii. Recommendation 4 seeks a commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey), fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, performance and how increase fee income since December 2025 has been utilised to improve service delivery. This monitoring should use the findings in this report as a baseline, to support evidence-based decision-making and resilience in the long term as an extension to the recently recommenced national planning performance framework.

Looking ahead

- xxiii. There is potential to lose 17% (95 planners: those aged 55+) of public sector planners from the workforce within the next five to ten years due to retirement. This figure increases to 42% (234 planners: those aged 45+) when looking at a medium-term horizon of ten to 20 years. (These figures do not include NRW). Unless robust succession planning is in place, complemented by a strong pipeline of new planners, this loss of planning knowledge and leadership will have a significant impact on service delivery and planning outcomes.
- xxiv. In addition, by extrapolating from the two published SDP Delivery Agreements the data suggests we need 24 extra policy planners.
- xxv. In total, the short-term recruitment need is 161 extra planners, 15 specialist officers and five business support officers. This is simply to address known LPA vacancies (at May 2025) (37 planners), SDP needs (24 planners), PEDW capacity for SDP, LDP and infrastructure work (5 planning inspectors) and imminent retirement (95 planners including planning inspectors), plus 15 specialist officers (six known local authority vacancies and nine NRW vacancies at May 2025). This does not allow for reversing the deep and unsustainable cuts from over a decade of austerity.

“Officers do not have the time to invest in training or reading...it would be good to have a robust structure that allowed time for experienced planners to train younger planners. That has been lost as everyone has been firefighting for years and the tap of enquiries and applications keeps flowing.” (LPA respondent)

- xxvi. Our research findings highlight that the planning system urgently requires significant financial investment, at both a national and local level, to function effectively. This investment needs to extend beyond planning officers to include the wider supporting roles such as ecologists and highways officers. Workforce shortages are affecting performance, placing strain on existing staff and reducing resilience throughout the system. Planning cannot operate in isolation. Without

well-resourced services working alongside it, the system as a whole will fall short of achieving its full potential. Digital planning tools where ethical and appropriate have the potential to free up planners to plan, but they must be embedded at the core of the planning system, informed by the needs of planners and users and supported with strong leadership and co-ordination.

- xxvii. In June 2025, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Economy and Planning Rebecca Evans MS announced a £9m investment in resourcing NRW, PEDW and the Welsh Government's Planning Division.
- xxviii. In October 2025, Senedd Cymru passed regulations increasing planning application fees from 01 December 2025. This is a first but significant step towards full cost recovery for development management services, providing a desperately needed income boost. Strong leadership is needed by Heads of Planning, Chief Finance Officers, Chief Executives and politicians: the additional income arising from planning application fee increases **must** be reinvested in planning services in order to improve service delivery and achieve the outcomes our communities need.
- xxix. To address these issues, a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales. This will require significant financial investment and commitment by all parties in order to secure the essential increase in resource levels, including a commitment from LPAs to reinvest the additional application fee income arising from the December 2025 fee uplift (recommendation 5).
- xxx. Alongside recruitment, there is also a need for targeted up-skilling initiatives to support capability, encourage career progression and ensure staff are prepared to meet evolving demands. Building a stronger workforce will be critical to future resilience. Based on our findings, recommendation 6 sets out topic areas that should be explored further for delivery on a larger-than-local footprint. Recommendation 7 relates to the potential for use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, to free-up planners

to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise. This will require strong leadership and collaboration.

- xxxi. What the figures and data set out in this report do not reflect, is the wide-reaching societal benefit and [value that the planning system delivers](#). It is vital that the value of planning is recognised via a long-term resourcing plan to ensure the planning system can deliver in Wales. Isolated efforts are not sufficient to drive meaningful and lasting change. All key stakeholders must work collaboratively to support, promote, and champion the value of the planning service, recognising that capacity is an essential condition for future resilience within the planning system and co-ordinated action is both essential and urgently required.

Recommendation 1: Establish a sounding board

Due to their interlinked nature, it is vital that the impact of implementing the proposed recommendations or other solutions on the wider picture is fully understood. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. We therefore recommend that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impact of implementing the recommendations in this report. The sounding board should comprise the RTPI Cymru Planning Forum (which comprises representation from Cardiff University's planning school, PEDW, Planning Officers' Society for Wales (POSW), RTPI Cymru, the Wales Planning Consultants' Forum and WG Planning Division) with additional invitations to representatives of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), NRW and the WLGA.

RTPI Cymru should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Planning Improvement Service for Wales

A Planning Improvement Service similar to the independent local government improvement service established in Scotland (see Appendix 7). It would be headed up by newly created independent Planning Improvement Champion and would:

- Develop and promote best practice and efficiencies;
- Support peer review and performance monitoring;
- Serve as a central knowledge hub for the profession;
- Support innovation and shared services where appropriate.

WG Planning Division should be responsible for the development of this recommendation. This service could be hosted by the WLGA but will require additional resource to be delivered.

Recommendation 3: Define the planning service

A clear, agreed definition is needed of the extent of planning services, clarifying which aspects of planning service delivery are within scope for full cost recovery and which aspects should remain centrally-funded public services. This is essential if we are to properly address resourcing and capacity within planning services. This could also provide a foundation for future performance frameworks, making it possible to more accurately measure outcomes and impact, identify areas for improvement and demonstrate value. Without a clear definition, we risk inconsistent data as a result of varying approaches and contexts across Wales.

WG Planning Division and POSW should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Collect and publish quality planning data

A commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey) using the findings in this report as a baseline, as an extension to the recently recommended national planning performance framework to support evidence-based decision-making and long-term resilience. This should include reporting on fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, the amount of additional planning fee income since December 2025 and how this additional fee income has been reinvested to improve planning service delivery. This will develop a stronger and

more detailed evidence base over-time, supporting evidence-based decision-making and resilience in the long term. It will also ensure transparency and accountability for how increased application fee income is reinvested. This data should be reported on an annual basis and in an accessible digital format. It is essential that all parties submit the relevant data if we are to accurately measure the on-going health of the planning service.

WG Planning Division and LPAs should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 5: Develop a recruitment and retention strategy

A comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales. This will require significant financial investment and commitment by all parties in order to secure the essential increase in resource levels. This includes a commitment from LPAs to reinvest the additional application fee income arising from the December 2025 fee uplift.

The recruitment and retention strategy should include:

- Schools outreach to raise awareness of planning as a career and a review of the Built Environment GCSE to ensure planning is highlighted as a career route;
- Support for Wales's only planning school at Cardiff University including through partnership working on outreach, recruitment, placements, support for CPD initiatives on digital planning and other areas of skills development;
- Creation of a Level 7 apprenticeship route along the lines of the successful scheme operating in England (without an age cap), to supplement the Pathways to Planning scheme;
- Support opportunities for mid-career transitioning into planning via services such as Public Practice.

WLGA should be responsible for the development of this recommendation in partnership with Cardiff University's planning school, Local Planning Authorities and CJCs, NRW, PEDW, RTPi Cymru, Wales Planning Consultants' Forum and WG.

Recommendation 6: Shared services

The research found successful examples of shared skills operating across Welsh LPAs. These services have developed where there is a need and capacity for the service. To move forward, the concept of shared services must be set out through clear and fully costed options that set out requirements including capacity. Without this information questions will remain and opportunities for efficiency and collaboration may be missed. Initial services could include, but are not limited to:

- A Wales-wide viability assessment and review service. This will support robust decision-making using the new all-Wales viability tool kit, providing expertise and resilience on a topic that public sector planners say they feel they lack expertise in;
- Wales-wide leadership on digital planning to explore and roll out new technology and upskill planners, securing potential economies of scale, providing resilience, maximising use of expertise and providing consistency across Wales;
- Wales-wide expertise on assessing compliance with low carbon and net zero policies, and to establish Wales-wide policies or changes to Building Regulations;
- CJC footprint expertise on large scale infrastructure projects to help with Local Impact Reports for Significant Infrastructure Projects (SIP), as well as on ecology, landscape, legal services, and transport. The legal services element should include exploring the potential for standardised S.106 agreements, expertise on compulsory purchase orders, and drafting Enforcement Notices;
- Regional or larger than local services (sub-regional) if needed for heritage and SuDS;
- Nutrient neutrality/Nutrient Management Boards on a river catchment or marine SAC basis.

LPAs, CJs and WG should be responsible for developing this recommendation with support from the WLGA and NRW.

Recommendation 7: Digital Planning

The use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, has the potential to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise. It must be embedded at the core of the planning system in Wales, rather than approached as a supplementary element of service delivery. It should be prioritised and coordinated and should be informed by the needs of planners and service users. This will require strong leadership and collaboration.

WG (which from April 2026 will incorporate the Centre for Digital Public Services), RTPI Cymru, WLGA and Cardiff Uni should be responsible for developing this recommendation.

Definitions

Several terms used throughout this project were identified as potentially having different interpretations among various stakeholders. These terms are defined below:

The Planning Service

For the purposes of this research:

- The term 'planners' or 'planning officers' relates to those directly working in planning policy (for example writing Local Development Plans), development management (for example dealing with a caseload of applications for planning permission) or planning enforcement (for example investigating allegations of breaches of planning control);
- The term 'specialists' relates to those who provide advice to planners or whose duties relate to a specialist area for example, built heritage, trees, ecology, minerals and waste, archaeology, landscape, GIS;
- The term 'business support' relates to administrative or IT support roles;
- 'Technicians' have been counted as assistant/trainee planners unless they were specifically listed as business support by respondents.

Resources

The term 'resources' is used in its widest sense, including both financial and people, such as budgets, workforce numbers, capacity and skills, training and the pipeline of future planners.

Capacity

The term 'capacity' refers to what can be achieved by the planning workforce in terms of time and skills.

Public sector average salary bands

Public sector average salary bands were created from data collected from survey responses on jobs advertised between September 2022 and March 2025. Jobs of similar seniority and responsibility were grouped. This provided a lower and upper limit of the salary range, which was used to create an average salary band.

1. Introduction

Background and context

- 1.1. There has been extensive discussion over the past decade in relation to planning resource in Wales. We know from this discussion, previous research such as the Audit Wales report into the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#), the [Wales Parliament Public Accounts Committee \(June 2020\)](#), and RTPI Cymru's [Big Conversation \(January 2023\)](#) and [Building Capacity Through Collaboration and Change \(November 2023\)](#) reports, that one of the biggest challenges affecting the delivery of planning services in Wales is resources: financial and people. However, until now we have lacked the hard evidence and a complete overview to support the identification of the solutions needed to address this problem.
- 1.2. The Welsh Government Planning Division (WG Planning Division) has commissioned RTPI Cymru to gather evidence on current resources, capacity and future needs within public sector planning services in Wales. Our research covers Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW), the planning function of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Welsh Government's Planning Division. This report sets out our findings.

Purpose and aims

- 1.3. A properly resourced planning system is the Government's key mechanism for creating healthy, inclusive, economically and environmentally sustainable places. This research provides up-to-date evidence to inform and shape interventions and solutions to support planners and the wider planning profession to unleash the full potential of the planning system in Wales as a force for positive change.
- 1.4. Working with planners and stakeholders engaging in the planning system, this research identifies current funding and resource gaps and challenges, considers future workforce planning requirements and skills, and where possible, suggests potential solutions that could ease resourcing and capacity pressures to support the delivery of an effective and responsive planning service in Wales.

Methodology

Scope

- 1.5. The broad subject of resources within planning is broken down into the following topic areas. This research does not explore planning performance or targets: these will be covered by the resumed Annual Performance Reports.
- 1.6. **Planning service budgets:** Our research looks at planning budgets across the public sector planning service (within LPAs, WG Planning Division, PEDW and the land use planning function of NRW), exploring budget saving requirements and investment and highlighting innovative practices that sought to generate additional income or reduce service delivery costs, and noting the opportunities to re-invest increased planning application fees back into planning services.
- 1.7. **The planning workforce:** Our research provides valuable data on the public sector planning workforce (both planning officers and supporting roles) within each of the subject organisations, looking at how this has changed over time. This feeds into data collected on additional duties required of the planning system over the past five years. We sought data and views on succession planning and future recruitment challenges and opportunities, exploring the number and nature of planning vacancies alongside recruitment methods and salaries.
- 1.8. **Skills and capacity:** Our research maps the spatial distribution of specialist skills held within LPAs, as well as exploring skills and capacity gaps and training needs in all four subject organisations. We also explore predicted future specialisms, workstreams and demands, including Corporate Joint Committees at a regional level. We look at existing examples of sharing specialist skills and the potential for further enhancement, as well as looking at the pipeline of future planners including the demand for part-time students, year-out students and apprentices within Wales as well as current planning student numbers.

Timeframes

- 1.9. The research and analysis were carried out between February 2025 and November 2025.
- 1.10. The following timeframes were used to focus data collection:
- Planning budgets and workforce change over the five-year period spanning the financial years starting in April 2018 to April 2023 (using the 2019 Audit Wales report on the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#) as a benchmark);
 - Planning recruitment between September 2022 and March 2025 (due to the availability of job advertisement data from The Planner Jobs);
 - Predicted future planning needs and challenges over the next five years.

Limitations

- 1.11. Gathering, analysing and presenting information in a way that fully accounts for the wide range of roles, contexts and circumstances across the breadth of public sector planning services is challenging. As such, the evidence in this report should be interpreted recognising its limitations and the wide variety of additional factors that sit outside the scope of this work and the planning system. Nevertheless, this report provides a valuable foundation on which further evidence can continue to be built and refined over the coming years to enhance our understanding of the system's resilience. Combined with performance data, future research can monitor the success of interventions and changes.

Data sources

- 1.12. A number of data sources were used in the assembly of this evidence base, including national data sources, third party data and RTPi data. Further detail on the data sources is provided at Appendix 1.

Methods and approach

- 1.13. A Wales-wide approach provided the opportunity to engage at different scales and Governmental levels within the public sector, to gather data alongside opinions and potential solutions. The evidence was collated using the following methods:

Desk-based review

- 1.14. A desk-based review of existing key reports and their findings and recommendations including:
- The RTPI's 2014 and 2016 [‘The Value of Planning’](#) reports, the 2018 [Value of Planning Wales Toolkit](#), and most recent 2024 reports seek to promote and inform a more considered, balanced and evidenced debate on the relationship between planning and economic growth. Contrary to the views of some critics, planning can and does play a positive and proactive role in sustainable economic growth and development. The most recent research [‘The Planning Premium: The Value of Well-made Places \(2024\)’](#) examines the Return on Investment case for public sector investment in planning;
 - [The All-Wales Annual Performance Report](#) for the financial year starting April 2018;
 - The 2019 Audit Wales report on the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#);
 - The 2020 Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament Public Accounts Committee report on the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#);
 - [RTPI Cymru Big Conversation](#) (2023), [Building Capacity through Collaboration and Change](#), (2024) and [Scoping the potential for digital planning to ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes](#) (2025);
 - [RTPI State of the Profession 2023](#) and [RTPI State of the Profession 2025](#) reports;
 - [Responses to the 2024 Welsh Government consultation ‘Promoting a resilient and high performing planning service’](#).

- 1.15. A desk-based review of existing data, including data held by external sources including:
- Data on student numbers, held by the RTPI and approved for use in this report by relevant accredited planning schools;
 - Data on jobs advertised in [The Planner Jobs](#) between September 2022 and March 2025;
 - Carrington West Public Sector – Annual Salary survey [2025 Salary Survey & Guide for the UK Built Environment](#);
 - [Public Practice](#) is a not-for-profit organisation which aims to support the public sector in building capacity and developing capabilities. Through a UK wide survey and report, Public Practice examines workforce and resourcing challenges. However, due to the low response rate in Wales, we were unable to draw any meaningful data for Wales from their most recent report.

Survey

- 1.16. A survey was sent to the Head of Planning at each of the 25 LPAs across Wales. There were two elements to the survey: an online MS Forms questionnaire seeking detail and opinion on LPA budgets, workforce and skills, and a MS Word document seeking further data and statistics on the LPA workforce.
- 1.17. A similar survey was also sent to the Chief Planner at WG Planning Division, the Chief Planning Inspector at PEDW and Head of Development Planning and Marine at NRW.
- 1.18. A copy of the surveys sent to each of the participating organisations is included at Appendix 2. A list of survey respondents is included at Appendix 3.

Interviews

- 1.19. Survey respondents were invited to participate in an optional interview, following survey completion, to discuss the detail of their survey response and emerging ideas

from the research. Online interviews took place throughout April and May 2025. A list of interviewees is included at Appendix 4.

- 1.20. Informal discussions were held with representatives of three of the four Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) to understand identified resource requirements and skills gaps at a regional level, in addition to a desk-based review of the two published Delivery Agreements that currently exist.
- 1.21. Discussions were also held with several organisations and groups who sit outside the scope of the research, but who have a key role or interest in the effective functioning of the planning system. This included:
 - RTPI accredited planning schools in and around Wales, to understand the pipeline of planners coming through accredited planning schools and the role of planning schools in supporting resourcing and capacity within the planning system;
 - Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in relation to their Pathways to Planning Programme; and
 - RTPI Cymru's Wales Planning Consultants' Forum, to discuss public sector salaries, seeking a broad comparison with typical private sector salaries.
- 1.22. This report concludes with seven recommendations derived from the evidence. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. We therefore recommend that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impacts of implementing the recommendations in this report (recommendation 1).

2. Existing research and evidence

- 2.1. This chapter sets out the data gathered from a review of existing relevant literature and studies.

- 2.2. This section explores the key relevant research and reports from a Wales-wide perspective since April 2018, highlighting the primary issues discussed and summarising the findings.

Audit Wales - The Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales (2019)

- 2.3. In 2019, Audit Wales published its report into the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#). The report and its findings provide an important context for discussions and research on resourcing the planning system today, and provides a baseline for our research which looks in detail at resourcing over the subsequent five years.
- 2.4. The Audit Wales report considered existing literature, data, surveys and interview findings. with key stakeholders including LPAs, users of the service and national organisations such as the [Future Generations Commissioners Office](#). The focus was on performance, LPA income and expenditure, decision-making and stakeholder engagement, in assessing resilience within the system.
- 2.5. The report sets out the stark reality of LPA budget cuts over the ten-year period between 2009 – 2019, with budgets having fallen by £22m (50%) in real terms, confirming the challenging environment in which planners were working.
- 2.6. The Audit Wales report acknowledged a broad range of complex and interlinked, resource-related factors impacting on the resilience of the planning system, including:
- Capacity and skills: “With less money to fund services, planning officer capacity is stretched and skills are decreasing in key areas of work.” (paragraph 10)
 - Trainees entering the profession: “The number of trainees entering planning has fallen in recent years which raises concerns over the long-term sustainability of services.” (paragraph 10)
 - The cost of providing the planning service: “The charges made by local planning authorities for administering and approving planning applications and building works does not reflect the cost of providing these services.” (paragraph 10)

- Delays in the system: “In the last four years the number of planning applications made to local planning authorities has remained stable at around 24,000 per annum, but fewer planning applications are being processed on time.” (paragraph 11)
- Delivery: “There is a growing disconnect between what people want from their planning authority and what their planning authority is delivering.” (paragraph 8)
- Resilience: “Based on the findings of this audit, the Auditor General has concluded that planning authorities are not resilient enough to deliver long-term improvements because of their limited capacity and the challenge of managing a complex system.” (paragraph 15)

2.7. The report made several recommendations. Those directly relating to resourcing include:

R2: “To improve resilience, we recommend that local planning authorities...improve capacity by working regionally to:

- integrate services to address specialism gaps;
- develop joint supplementary planning guidance; and
- develop future local development plans regionally and in partnership with other local planning authorities.” (page 12)

R3: “We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- Reviews development control fees to ensure the levels set, better reflect the actual cost of providing these services; and
- Consider how to use the powers in the Planning (Wales) Act to support and improve local planning authority capacity and resilience.” (page 13)

Welsh Government Planning Service Performance Reports: Fifth All-Wales Annual Performance Report (April 2018 - March 2019) (published January 2020)

- 2.8. WG Planning Division has produced five All-Wales Annual Performance Reports covering the financial years starting April 2013 to April 2018. These reports are based on LPA Annual Performance Reports, submitted to WG Planning Division.
- 2.9. The All-Wales reports aim to provide an overview of the planning system, identifying good performance, best practice and areas where there is a need for future change. [The fifth all-Wales Annual Performance Report](#), covering the period April 2018 to March 2019, is the most recent report published. The report highlighted the resilience demonstrated by LPAs and statutory consultees during the reporting period, noting their "perseverance amidst austerity" (page 65), managing ongoing resourcing challenges in the context of increasing expectation from service users. While innovative methods for resourcing planning teams were being explored, it was acknowledged that many efficiency gains had already been lost after several years of public sector austerity.
- 2.10. At that time, the planning profession was seen to be declining in popularity as a career, further compounding resourcing issues. The potential for regional shared services was recognised as a way to optimise available expertise and improve resource efficiency. In particular, the shared minerals and waste services were identified as highly effective examples of this approach.
- 2.11. Succession planning emerged as a key concern, with significant difficulties in attracting candidates to junior and specialist roles, alongside a wave of experienced officers approaching retirement. The report also identified a tension between limited funding and increased individual workloads, which in turn reduced the capacity for staff to engage in upskilling or continuous professional development.
- 2.12. The report set out an ambition to move towards a more cost-neutral planning fees model. Planning fees were subsequently increased by approximately 20% in 2020.

Welsh Parliament: Public Accounts Committee – Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales (2020)

- 2.13. [The Senedd’s Public Accounts Committee inquiry into the effectiveness of LPAs in Wales](#) focused on performance and was based on the following four areas: resilience of planning services; dealing with and deciding on planning applications; community impact and involvement; and planning and well-being. Evidence was provided to the Committee by RTPI Cymru, LPAs, and other stakeholders engaging with the planning system.
- 2.14. In its inquiry report, the Committee welcomed the provisions set out in the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, noting the contribution to addressing the significant challenges facing Wales including globalisation, population growth, climate change and approaches to environmental issues. However, it also recognised the nature and scale of those challenges, concluding that, “added together they imply that the issues the planning system addresses will be getting more difficult.” (page 5)
- 2.15. The report set out several recommendations. Recommendation 1 proposed the Welsh Government address cuts to planning budgets through working collaboratively, to build resilience and capacity within the system. The Committee report concluded that “Planning is critical but at present it is not able to deliver the aspirations of the Planning, Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts because of reductions in resources.” (paragraph 12)

RTPI State of the Profession Report (2023)

- 2.16. [The RTPI’s State of the Profession Report](#) addressed resourcing the planning profession, on a UK basis, using data from the [Office for National Statistics](#), RTPI membership and additional sources. The findings of the report are referred to at the relevant sections of this report. (It should be noted that the State of the Professions research reported data quality and availability issues in some areas).

RTPI Cymru - 'The Big Conversation' (2023)

- 2.17. Through the ['Big Conversation'](#), RTPI Cymru sought to better understand the well-being of planners in Wales operating under challenging circumstances by exploring the issues, impacts, causes and potential solutions to supporting the planning profession. The principal method of data collection was an online survey, aimed at the whole profession. A total of 209 responses was received.
- 2.18. The research found high levels of planners being overstretched in their work and in turn this was impacting on their well-being. The survey found:
- 61% of respondents reported feeling overstretched at least several times a week;
 - 74% of LPA officers felt overstretched;
 - 21% of respondents felt overstretched all of the time.
- 2.19. The report identified the need for planning to become more resilient as a profession and particularly the resilience of planning officers in relation to handling difficult situations and high expectations. While the Big Conversation identified weaknesses in the system in this respect, it is also found that, despite operating within challenging circumstances, [“services continue to be delivered and planners take pride in their role, and they value what they are delivering.”](#) (page 4)

RTPI Cymru Building Capacity Report (2023 and 2024)

- 2.20. In November 2023, RTPI Cymru published [Building Capacity through Collaboration and Change](#). The report explored ideas for LPAs to make more efficient use of existing resources.
- 2.21. The scope of the project extended to the statutory planning system, including development management, planning policy, and planning support and administration. The project findings were based on a desk top study, a series of workshops and a survey which invited contributions from across Wales to raise innovative ideas that could help deliver an efficient and effective planning system.

- 2.22. The report found that, with fewer resources, growing expectations, and reduced capacity, LPAs alone cannot respond to the demand placed on them. The report set out various measures and initiatives that could be employed that would not take from existing resources. However, these opportunities were limited, and it was identified that most LPAs would require further investment into the planning system. A key issue raised in the research was the absence of a strategic body focused on promoting improvement in planning services in Wales.
- 2.23. A number of barriers to improving efficiency and effectiveness were identified, including that “the resource and workload pressures in many planning organisations – and local planning authorities in particular - do not allow space for significant innovation and improvement – there is limited capacity to reflect, design and enact change.” (page 24)
- 2.24. The report sets out several recommendations (pages 25-26) that are relevant to this research, including:
- R1 The need to re-establish a performance management and monitoring framework for the planning system in Wales.
 - R2. Exploring the establishment of a planning improvement service for Wales with the aim of sharing good practice, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system, and brokering common approaches and shared services.
 - R5. Identifying those areas of specialist expertise that are ‘at risk’ in terms of providing effective input to planning decisions and plan-making.
 - R8. Examining the potential for further fee-based, income-generating activities for planning services additional to existing services in development management.

Welsh Government: Promoting a resilient and high performing planning service consultation (2024)

- 2.25. In November 2024, the Welsh Government consulted on proposals for [Promoting a Resilient and High Performing Planning Service](#). This set out proposals to increase the financial resources available to LPAs through increases to planning application fees. The consultation gathered views on the practicalities of reinvesting fee income

back into the planning service. It also sought views on skills development and ways to support a pipeline of future planners.

- 2.26. The consultation recognised the findings of the Audit Wales report, along with RTPI Cymru research discussed above, stating, “the situation is anticipated to have deteriorated further since these reports were published” (paragraph 3), recognising “money on its own, however, is not sufficient to meet all the resource requirements of an effective service.” (paragraph 9). Calling for a determined and collective effort to make a measurable difference, Welsh Government said, “We must be bold and creative and not constrained by existing service delivery arrangements.” (paragraph 6)

Wales Planning Conference: The next 25 years for planning in Wales

- 2.27. Rebecca Evans MS, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning addressed attendees at the RTPI Cymru Wales Planning Conference in June 2025. In her keynote speech she recognised planners as “the backbone of our drive to create sustainable and thriving communities” and explained the recent direct investment of nearly £9m into planning services provided by PEDW, NRW and the WG Planning Directorate as well as funding for two posts focusing on infrastructure to expand the North Wales Shared Planning Service. The Cabinet Secretary urged other regions to come forward with proposals to maximise the benefits of sharing skills and expertise, “given the current resourcing and recruitment challenges”. She also announced £148,000 funding for planning bursaries via the Pathways to Planning programme, forthcoming increases in planning application fees leading in future years to full cost-recovery to enable Councils to resource their planning services, and the re-introduction of Annual Performance Reports to monitor progress.

RTPI Cymru Research: Scoping the potential for digital planning to ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes (2025)

- 2.28. RTPI Cymru commissioned Cardiff University to research the [current capacity of LPAs to engage in digital planning in Wales](#). The research focuses on how digital planning can ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes. The

research was carried out between January and June 2025. The research comprised an online survey and a series of focus groups exploring digital planning tools currently in use across Wales, digital skills and skills gaps within planning, along with good practice in Wales.

- 2.29. The research recognises the increasing momentum both in the UK and internationally around the use of technology to modernise planning systems. However, [pre-existing research](#) had shown while planners are eager to utilise digital planning tools, resourcing constraints are threatening to slow the potential institutionalisation of digital planning tools. This report highlighted a strong enthusiasm for digital transformation within the sector, but unlocking its full potential will require a coordinated Wales-wide action plan and strong leadership at a Welsh Government and local authority level. It recommends establishing a digital planning governance framework and a Wales-wide spatial data platform, alongside targeted training incentives. The report also calls for addressing the uneven digital capacity across LPAs promoting standardisation and developing a coherent policy framework. The report explains that by “implementing these measures, it is possible to enable the conditions for digital planning to ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes through consistent systems, empowered professionals, and a planning process that is more transparent, efficient, collaborative, and accessible. These actions are necessary not only for modernising planning practice but also for building a more resilient and future-ready planning system across Wales.” (page 8)

RTPI research: State of the profession - Wales (2025)

- 2.30. The RTPI’s [‘State of the profession report’ \(for Wales\)](#) explores planners experiences within Wales, giving insight into career experiences, career plans, wellbeing and demographics. The research consists of survey responses gathered from members of the planning profession across Wales.
- 2.31. The findings show that the Welsh planning profession faces significant challenges including shortages in staff and skills, retention and recruitment issues, increased duties e.g. marine planning and wellbeing concerns. However, the report identifies promise for the Welsh planning system, if these challenges can be resolved:

“The coming years therefore represent a pivotal moment for the Welsh planning system. If challenges around funding, recruitment and skills can be addressed, the sector is well placed to drive forward the transition to net-zero, delivering affordable homes, and embedding wellbeing at the heart of decision making. Realising this potential will depend on empowering planners to do what they are trained to do, and what they do best: creating thriving, sustainable, and well-designed places for future generations.” (page 20)

3. Budgets

Local Planning Authority budgets

LPA Planning income and expenditure 2009 to 2024

- 3.1. Since 2009, public investment in planning services in Wales has declined substantially, as reported by [Audit Wales in 2019](#). Audit Wales identified that, in the decade since 2009, LPA services (policy, development management (including enforcement) and building control) had “seen significant cuts in expenditure with budgets having fallen by 50% in real terms, considering inflation.” The Audit Wales report acknowledged these funding cuts occurred at a time of mounting pressure on the system, driven by legislation and increasing stakeholder expectation, meaning LPAs were struggling to deliver their statutory responsibilities.
- 3.2. Regrettably, little has changed. We have revisited the data set out in the Audit Wales report and updated the analysis of Welsh Local Authority revenue expenditure data (see Figures 1 and 2). This data shows real term (inflation adjusted) net expenditure (in other words the total amount spent by the Local Authority on planning services, minus any income generated from planning services (planning fees)). Net expenditure on planning services in the financial year starting April 2023 was 43% lower than in the April 2008 financial year (dropping from £48.5m in 2008 to £27.6m in 2023, adjusted for inflation). Net expenditure on planning services reached its lowest in the financial year starting April 2021, at 55% less than the financial year starting 2008, but has increased slightly since.

3.3. As per the findings in the Audit Wales [2019 report](#), development management remains the function which has taken the biggest real term cut: 45% between the April 2008 and April 2023 financial years. However, it is noteworthy that planning policy functions saw a sustained period of real term cuts between April 2008 and April 2020 financial years: a period during which both the first and second tranches of LDPs were being produced across Wales and SDPs were introduced.

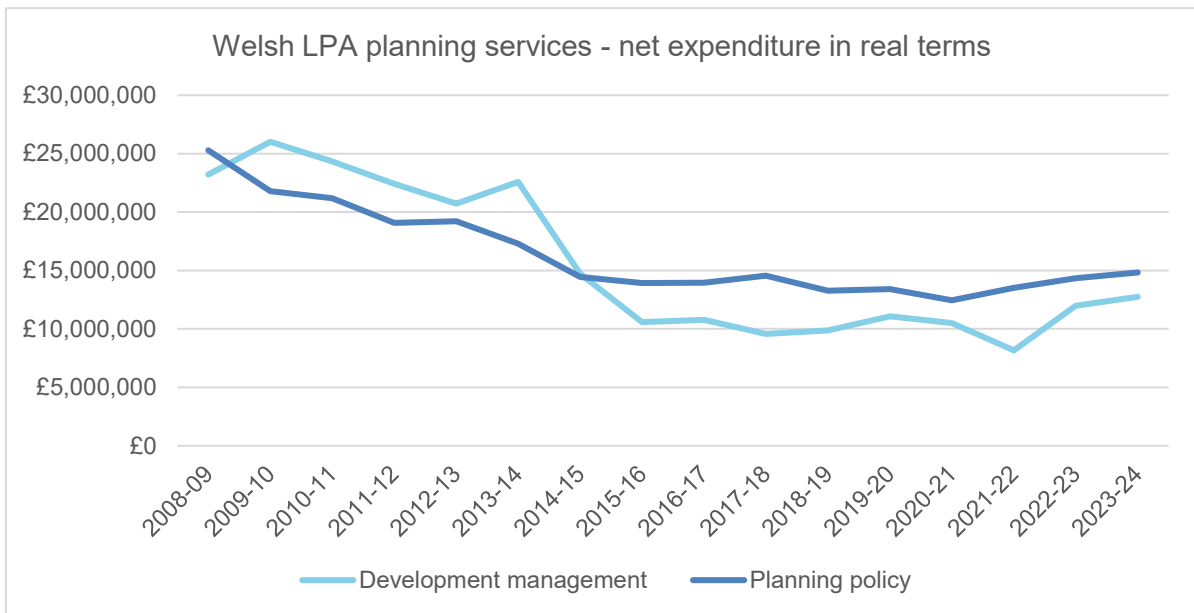


Figure 1: All Wales LPA net expenditure (financial year starting April 2008 compared to financial year starting April 2023). Data accessed via StatsWales, [Revenue Outturn Data](#) (May 2025). Analysis by RTPi.

3.4. The data in Figure 1 shows that:

- In April 2008, real term net expenditure for planning policy (dark blue) and development management (light blue) were both around £25m with planning policy being slightly higher;
- From the April 2008 to the April 2014 financial years, development management real term net expenditure saw a substantial decline. This reflects the period between the economic downturn caused by the 2008 banking crisis (and resultant drop in planning application fee income) and significant austerity measures biting in 2013 to reduce service delivery costs;
- Planning policy real term net expenditure has steadily declined from April 2008 to £12.4m in April 2021. This period reflects the adoption of many first tranche

LDPs and austerity biting, resulting in teams being shrunk. This trend started to change in 2020 when many LPAs meaningfully commenced tranche two LDPs.

Comparing LPA planning service budgets for the financial years starting April 2023 with April 2008

3.5. The following table and graphs set out the cumulative real term planning income and expenditure for all LPAs in Wales between the April 2008 and April 2023 financial years (inflation adjusted).

Expenditure / Income	Year starting April 2008	Year starting April 2023	Change
Gross expenditure	£70,854,000	£45,031,000	-£25,833,000 (-37%)
Total income	£22,336,000	£17,423,000	-£4,913,000 (-22%)
Net expenditure	£48,518,000	£27,608,000	-£20,910,000 (-43%)
Income as a proportion of planning service gross expenditure	32%	39%	

Figure 2: Table showing real term planning income and expenditure (years starting April 2008 – April 2023). Data accessed via StatsWales, [Revenue Outturn Data](#) (May 2025). Analysis by RTPI.

3.6. The headline findings from Figure 2 are that between the financial year starting April 2008 and the financial year starting April 2023:

- Gross expenditure for planning services in Wales decreased by 37%. The primary expenditure is staffing costs;
- Total income for planning services in Wales decreased by 22%. The primary source of income is planning application fees;

- Net expenditure for planning services in Wales decreased by 43%. By comparison, real term net expenditure on planning services in England decreased by 20% over the same period ([State of the Profession – England 2025 report](#)).

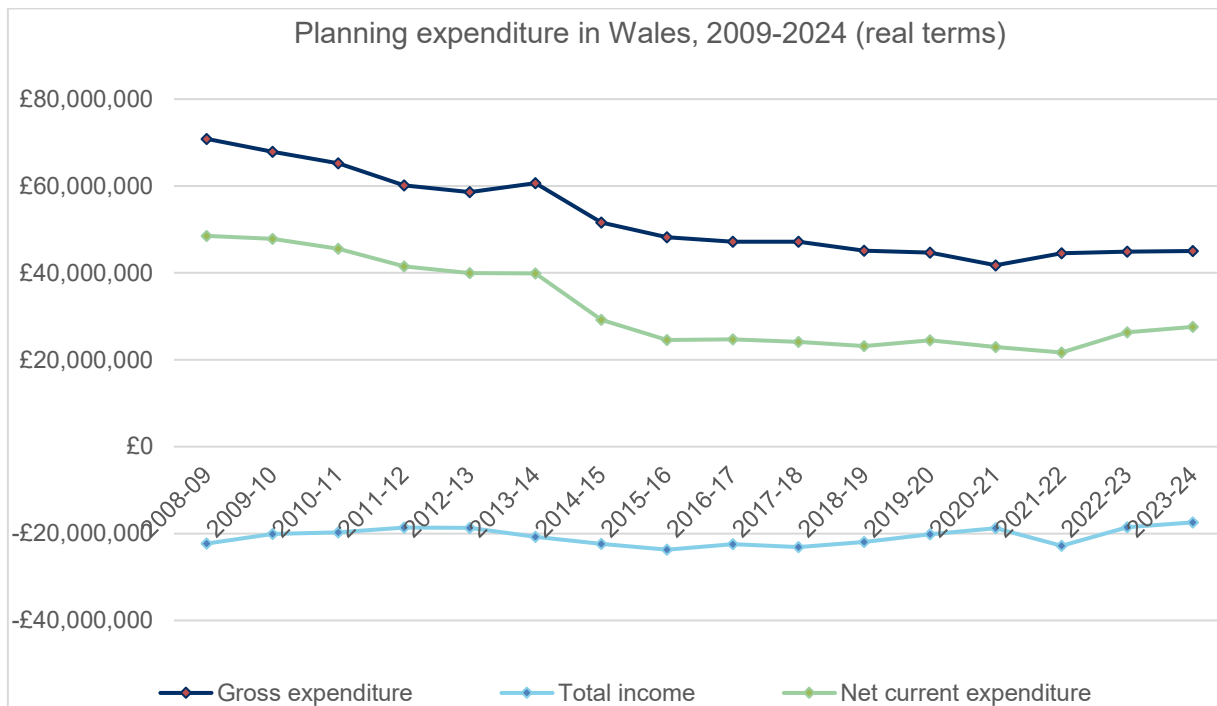


Figure 3: All Wales LPA (real terms) planning expenditure (financial year starting April 2008 to financial year starting in April 2023). Data accessed via StatsWales, [Revenue Outturn Data](#) (May 2025). Analysis by RTPI.

3.7. The data in Figure 3 shows that:

- Gross expenditure has fallen by £25m from roughly £70m in the financial year starting April 2008 to just over £45m in the financial year starting April 2023;
- Net expenditure fell from roughly £50m in the financial year starting April 2008 to just below £25m between the April 2015 and April 2021 financial years, before rising to roughly £28m in the April 2023 financial year;
- Total income has consistently stayed around £20m from the April 2008 to April 2023 financial years, ranging from a nearly £24m high in the April 2016 financial year to a low of £17m in the April 2023 financial year.

3.8. Planning service income comes primarily from statutory planning application fees set by the Welsh Government, with additional fee income in recent years from statutory

and discretionary pre-application advice services. The data shows that income slowly increased between the April 2013 and April 2016 financial years but has since seen a trend of slow decrease, in real terms, with the exception of the April 2021 financial year. Income peaked in the April 2016 financial year, exceeding April 2008 financial year income in real terms, but declined to its lowest level in the April 2023 financial year.

3.9. In addition to increases to statutory planning application fees set by WG, LPA income is influenced by a small number of core factors, including economic cycles (development booms and downturns), changes in building regulations that can prompt a surge or decline in planning applications, and the status of Local Development Plans (for example a newly adopted Plan with plenty of site allocations vs an older Plan that has been delivered). National policy or politics can also have an influence, for example increased support for renewable energy projects boosts market confidence to invest.

3.10. Of note during the period since April 2008:

- The UK entered a sustained period of economic recession following the 2008 financial crisis;
- Statutory planning application fees were increased by approximately 15% in October 2015 and by approximately 20% in August 2020;
- Building Regulations in Wales required the installation of fire sprinklers in dwellings from January 2016, with an influx of applications submitted to beat these changes coming into effect;
- Legislative change introduced Developments of National Significance in March 2016, meaning decision-making on medium size renewable energy projects moved from LPAs to the Welsh Government;
- Brexit in January 2020 and Covid lockdown in March 2020 are reported to have affected access to construction workers and building materials, affecting investment by the development industry;
- Technical Advice Note 1 was revoked in March 2020, increasing the link between LDP land supply and application fee income by removing the opportunity for sites

to be developed outside of the Plan-led system;

- In January 2021, new advice from NRW regarding nutrient neutrality brought development proposals to a halt overnight in nine SAC river catchments in Wales, until temporary solutions were found months later; and
- In July 2025, new advice was issued by NRW regarding nitrate levels in marine SACs. Within the catchment areas of Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Pembrokeshire and Neath Port Talbot, the delivery of nearly 12,000 homes as well as projects linked to the Celtic Freeport may also be affected ([11 December 2025 BBC Wales article](#)).

- 3.11. LPA expenditure is mostly on staffing, but occasional appeal costs and IT investment can also have a significant impact. LDP cycles affect income as well as expenditure: commencing an LDP initiates expenditure on the evidence base and team capacity to ensure delivery. Conversely, the period immediately before and after LDP adoption can trigger the submission of a greater number of major applications in response to new site allocations, which then tails off as an LDP ages and strategic sites are consented.
- 3.12. Income as a proportion of expenditure refers to the amount of income received by LPAs through planning fees and other charges (for example pre-application advice) in comparison to the amount that is spent on delivering the planning service. A higher percentage means that an LPA covers more of its planning costs through its own income, and is more self-sufficient, whereas a lower proportion indicates that the LPA is more reliant on funding from the central local authority budget.
- 3.13. Wales's total planning income as a proportion of its planning expenditure was higher in 2024 than in 2009, peaking at 51% in 2022. This is primarily due to reduced service delivery costs. However, figures fluctuate between individual LPAs.

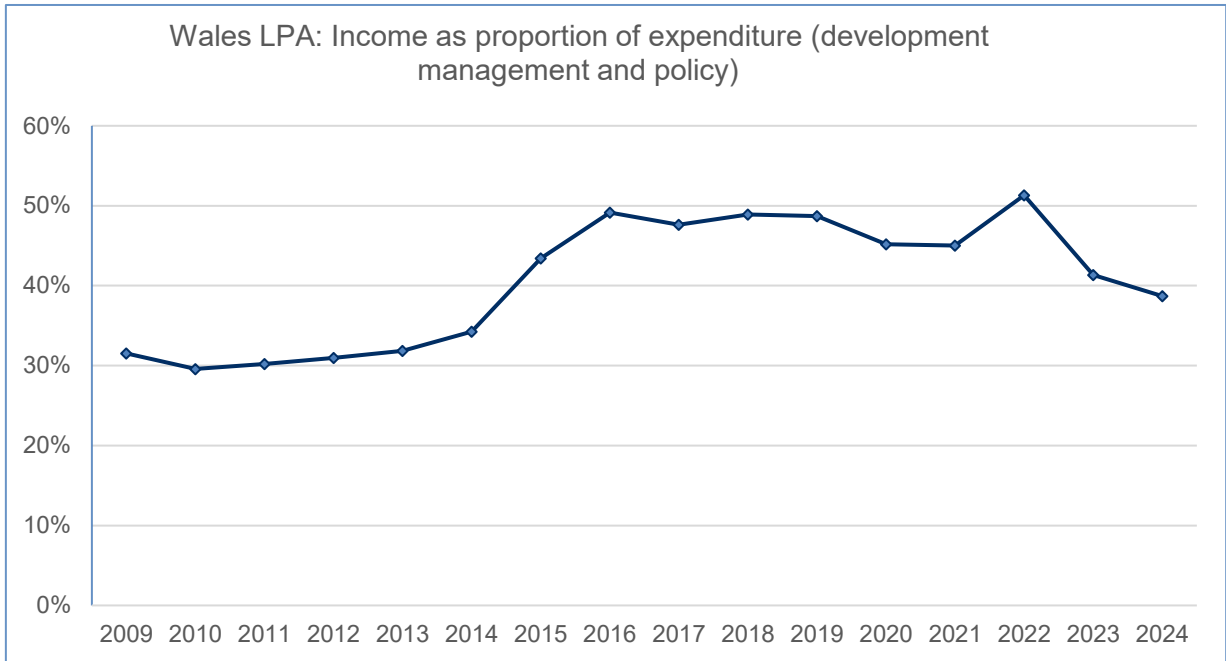


Figure 4: All Wales LPA income as a proportion of expenditure (development management and planning policy) (April 2008 to April 2023 financial years). Data accessed via StatsWales, [Revenue Outturn Data](#) (May 2025). Analysis by RTPi.

- 3.14. The data in Figure 4 shows that income as proportion of expenditure rose from roughly 30% from 2009 to 2013 up to 45-50% from 2016 to 2022 and has fallen to 40% in 2024.
- 3.15. A number of responses to the survey suggest that the change since 2022 has been due to a recognition that austerity cuts had gone too far, affecting performance, morale and staff retention. Addressing this requires reinvestment when commencing work on new LDPs, with recruitment activity starting to restore team capacity but adversely affecting net costs.

LPA commentary on budget changes between the financial years starting April 2018 and April 2023

- 3.16. Respondents were asked to explain any budget changes within their LPA between the financial years starting in April 2018 and in April 2023. This included providing information on significant corporate budget savings or investment in the planning service: 24 responses were received. One respondent highlighted that this timeframe

reflects a broader trend over the past decade, “where budgets overall have not kept up with inflationary costs.”

3.17. In some cases, restructuring within local authorities over several years has made budget saving and/or investment less visible or identifiable: “It is important to highlight that various restructures across the Council since 2018 make it difficult to analyse budget saving requirements specifically for the LPA.”

3.18. The majority of respondents primarily focused on corporate budget savings, highlighting the diverse circumstances and approaches across different LPAs:

“All departments across the corporate structure have been required to offer budget cuts and/or efficiency savings on an annual basis so that the Council can deliver a balanced budget. By way of an example, for the 2023/24 financial year all services were required to deliver 2% savings on their respective budgets. For 2025/26 all departments have had to deliver 5% cuts/efficiency savings. There has been no corporate investment into the planning service over the period 2018/19 to 2023/24.” (LPA respondent)

“Reductions to the Planning budget have occurred every year from 2018/19 to 2023/24, ranging from 10% to 35% reductions.” (LPA respondent)

“Efficiency savings required to meet corporate core budget constraint year on year since 2018 of c £70-100k per year.” (LPA respondent)

3.19. Half of respondents identified recruitment-related measures, such as job cuts, delaying recruitment, and vacancy freezes across the planning service as a means of contributing to budget saving:

“Recent job cuts in Planning support services (this of course still impacts upon the speed of the Planning Service and adds pressure to officers re timescales), rather than Planning Officer posts. Vacant posts have been held vacant due to budget needs, and income shortfalls.” (LPA respondent)

“The Planning Service budget has been relatively stable over the past five-year period and it has not been necessary to make significant cuts. However, that has not meant we have been entirely immune from needing to make savings. Savings have however been made through some recruitment freezes and reviews of non-statutory fees.” (LPA respondent)

3.20. Further analysis of vacancy levels is provided later in this report (paragraph 4.30 – 4.35).

3.21. One respondent highlighted a situation where corporate investment was needed to address a work backlog caused by budget-saving measures:

“We've had to increase vacancy lags (i.e. not recruiting to make a cost saving), we've reduced some roles from officer level to assistant when staff have moved on, however due to Audit Wales review and case backlogs (primarily as a result of recruitment issues) in 2022 the council provided a £250,000 investment for us to appoint consultants to clear some of the backlog”. (LPA respondent)

3.22. In some cases, recruitment freeze measures or restructures have merely shifted the challenge elsewhere, for example increasing workloads and pressure.

“Administration posts have been removed in the past, but this has transferred the workload onto planning officers.” (LPA respondent)

“Discretionary charges for certain pre-app work was started in 2018 but it became apparent that reducing staffing levels meant any minor income benefit was outweighed by the pressures placed on over stretched DM Officers dealing with increasing workloads on planning applications.” (LPA respondent)

LPA: Innovative practices generating income or reducing service delivery costs

3.23. LPAs were asked about innovative practices to generate income or reduce costs. A

total of 24 responses was received, outlining a breadth of ideas implemented by LPAs. This report does not explore the extent to which these were successful, other than noting the differing circumstances and contexts in which they were implemented.

3.24. Examples of income-generating practices included:

- Introduction of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs);
- Applications for UK / WG grant funding to undertake development work;
- Increasing offer of non-statutory planning fees/services;
- Promoting Lawful Development Certificates via enforcement work and permitted development enquiries;
- Enhanced pre-app advice services (e.g. face-to-face development team meetings, optional site meetings, faster service delivery);
- Fast track application services;
- Charging for compliance and completion certificates;
- Developing centres of excellence (e.g. biodiversity, minerals, nutrient management) and bringing externally contracted services in house;
- Service Level Agreements with neighbouring LPAs;
- Introduction of regionally agreed fees for the use of the 'Development Viability Toolkit'.

3.25. Cost saving practices listed by LPAs are:

- Holding posts vacant;
- Service restructuring;
- Staff restructuring to introduce feeder grades such as graduate and technician posts to achieve financial efficiencies;
- Reducing reliance on use of consultants;
- Working jointly with neighbouring authorities to create SPG/evidence base etc.;
- Reappraisal of financial reserves and release of reserves;

- Reviewing land assets for development or sale;
- Moving to agile working practices and rationalisation of office space;
- More efficient site visits to reduce mileage claims or use of pool cars;
- Seeking procedural efficiencies (streamlining processes, removing all paper/digitising systems/ review of back-office system/site visits etc.);
- Using digital services to increase automation and achieve efficiencies with a reduction in face-to-face contact and greater reliance on electronic communications.

3.26. One respondent stressed that many of the income generating practices reported “cannot be guaranteed in any given year” and therefore may not represent reliable, long-term, sources of income. This could also apply equally to some cost savings practices. Similarly, enhanced discretionary services such as fast-track applications or enhanced pre-applications advice are reliant on adequate staffing levels both within planning teams and within specialist services such as highways and ecology, who provide essential advice.

3.27. While one respondent reported that reviewing internal efficiencies had led to their LPA “improving its Development Management performance to the top quartile”, another respondent highlighted the adverse effects of efficiency initiatives, noting a negative impact on their LPA’s capacity, morale and performance:

“We have sought to increase non-statutory planning fees as a form of income generation, although this has yielded negligible results. The scale of developments within [the LPA] probably makes such services less important. We have lost officers for savings over the past ten years and have even merged the Policy and Development Management services. This was not deemed to be a success therefore the services have now been de-coupled. It was considered about five years ago that we had cut too deep and it was having a very negative impact on capacity, morale and wellbeing of staff. Some re-investment has taken place to try and address this.” (LPA respondent)

Some LPAs have been able to address budgetary pressures through additional income generation or cost saving measures however, others have faced constraints that limit their ability to do so: “We suspended non statutory pre-apps and scanning of historic files for a 9-month period to focus on cases. We haven't undertaken any income generation work.” (LPA respondent)

- 3.28. Responses indicate a mixed picture regarding the effectiveness of PPAs as a consistent and reliable income stream: “The use of PPAs have proved particularly successful and has enabled the service to reinvest an element of that income to increase capacity and resilience.” While others reported that “enhanced efforts to bring in fees for non-statutory pre-app and PPA has had limited success.”
- 3.29. Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) raise an interesting point in themselves. The concept of a PPA is that an applicant pays for a guaranteed enhanced service, for example meeting key deadline dates such as responses from consultees, a target Planning Committee meeting and signing of the S106 planning contributions agreement. The PPA fee is paid to provide a dedicated resource, for example by bringing in additional staff or by allocating a major PPA application to an existing planning officer and backfilling to cover some of their day-to-day casework. Consequently, PPAs should not generally be seen as additional income or a contribution to savings targets, because the payment received should be reinvested in additional capacity. In reality, however, PPA payments are often used to redirect existing resource to a particular project, with other day-to-day casework being de-prioritised.
- 3.30. Even with PPAs, the income doesn't always exceed or even fully cover the cost of service delivery. Some PPAs require high levels of service or specialist input that consume the entire fee, particularly if they necessitate use of external specialist consultants.

“We have only recently looked at this as an avenue for revenue however we have found opportunities are limited in this rural/small LPA and when a PPA is signed the level of service we are then tied into is substantial and has historically seen us employing external (expensive) planning consultants to deliver the

service. We have signed four PPAs and I think these will just about cover the costs of delivering the service in those applications.” (LPA respondent)

3.31. Moreover, without a steady flow of PPAs, LPAs do not have financial certainty to budget for employing additional permanent officers.

LPA: Income received from planning applications

3.32. LPAs were asked whether or not, since April 2018, income received from planning applications (including PPAs) exceeded the costs of delivering the development management service. Of the 24 responses, 75% answered ‘no’, with 12% noting income had surpassed cost in some (but not all) years, and 13% indicating this had occurred in only one year.

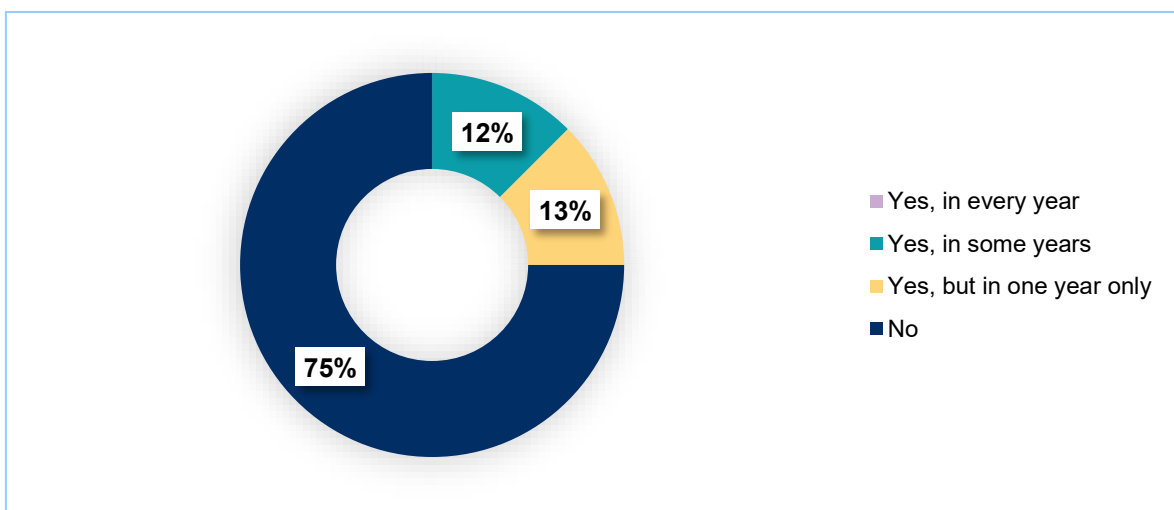


Figure 5: Income received from planning applications exceeding the costs of delivering the development management service. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

3.33. Among those who responded ‘yes’, 83% (five LPAs) stated that, rather than being reinvested in service improvements, the surplus funds were redirected to the central budget of the local authority to offset wider budget pressures. This highlights a key future risk that local authorities will fail to reinvest additional fee income arising from the December 2025 application fees increases in planning service improvements as intended.

Misalignment of income, workload and resources

- 3.34. Respondents provided additional context to service budgeting challenges. The key issues raised are summarised below.
- 3.35. Authorities frequently deal with high-input but low-fee planning applications, often incurring substantial additional costs and time, but with little or no extra income. This matter is explored via the Welsh Government's consultation, ['Promoting a resilient and high performing planning service'](#) and the subsequent decision to increase fees will go some way to help address this issue.
- 3.36. Most Local Authorities report that planning fees cover only a fraction of actual service costs. Looking at planning income as a proportion of whole planning service expenditure, our research has shown that the Wales-wide average level of cost recovery stood at 32% in 2009, increasing to 39% in 2024. In 2024, the lowest level of cost-recovery was 22% (Merthyr), while the highest was Wrexham (77%). However, this latter figure is considered an outlier given the very high proportion of vacant posts within that LPA, meaning its service delivery costs are artificially low. The second highest level of cost-recovery in 2024 was Flintshire (53%).
- 3.37. Looking at cost recovery data for just the development management service, our research has shown that the Wales-wide average stood at 46% in 2009, increasing to 56% in 2024. In 2024, the lowest level of cost-recovery was 31% (Monmouthshire), while the highest was Wrexham (126%). For the reasons stated above, this latter figure is considered an outlier. The second highest level of cost-recovery in 2024 was Cardiff (118%), meaning that income exceeded the costs of delivering the development management service. Of note, only Wrexham and Cardiff achieved full cost recovery.
- 3.38. It was recognised that occasional large applications may temporarily boost income, but for many these are seen as anomalies rather than the norm and are not a sustainable basis on which to build a staffing structure.

“Our primary source of income is from householder and single unit applications, the fees for such application in no way cover the costs of determination (excluding additional services ecology etc). Many are impacted by phosphates and require specialist advice. Many are 'called in' to committee whereby they are likely to go to Site Inspection or Cooling Off these are cost burdens not accounted for in fees”. (LPA respondent)

“...provision needs to be made to roll over fees into subsequent years (three minimum but five recommended) to enable peaks and troughs to be smoothed and enable effective forward planning to get more staff in when application fees allow. At the present time, large fees received in Feb/ March fall into the previous financial year from when the majority of the work is done.” (LPA respondent)

- 3.39. While largely welcomed, there was agreement among LPA respondents that the newly implemented fees increase “will be nowhere near sufficient to meet full cost recovery of delivering the service”. This response highlights a lack of clarity about what cost recovery would (or should) include. Recommendation 3 of this report seeks to address this lack of clarity.

The need for strengthened investment in planning

- 3.40. Fee income alone cannot sustainably fund the full scope of the planning service, and the wider services it relies on. The importance of retaining core public funding to ensure a fully functional and resilient planning service was stressed by respondents, in part due to the wider public value provided by the planning system. Although the applicant or landowner are widely recognised as the primary beneficiary of development management decisions, the LDP, as well as enforcement action, benefit the wider public and minimise harm. Equally, the input of specialist advice, including ecology, landscape, noise required by many applications, was recognised as not currently being directly offset by planning fees.

“It is important to ensure that the planning service as a key statutory function retains an element of core funding regardless of income generating potential.

Without a functioning planning service, the ability to deliver sustainable growth and S106 financial contributions for the wider community benefit will be severely hampered. The goal of FCR should not therefore negate the need for a local authority to also adequately fund the service.” (LPA respondent)

- 3.41. To ensure future service resilience and sustainability, further work is needed to reach an agreed definition of the extent of the planning service to which full cost recovery applies (recommendation 3).

Pre-application services

- 3.42. Pre-application services fall into two categories: statutory and discretionary services. The statutory service provides a minimal level of factual information, for example, site history and relevant planning policies, with a fee set by Welsh Government. This information is already in the public domain and offers limited value to the customer.
- 3.43. The value of pre-application advice to both the customer and LPA is when it shapes a development proposal and provides clarity and certainty to all stakeholders, resulting a streamlined process at the statutory planning application stage.
- 3.44. Most LPAs offer an enhanced discretionary pre-application advice service with a locally set fee: this enhanced service adds planning officer and consultee advice to help inform the customer on the likelihood of getting planning permission for their proposal. LPA respondents commented that officers and applicants could benefit from more detailed, consultee-informed pre-application advice responses, but that requires buy-in from specialists and statutory consultees that often sit outside of the LPA, and sometimes sit outside of the local authority, such as NWR. Fees for discretionary advice need to reflect the full extent of work involved and require regular review. Ideally, all key consultees would be included (and reimbursed).

NSIP and DNS processes

- 3.45. Some respondents expressed concerns about the level of work required to provide Local Impact Reports (LIRs) for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) or Developments of National Significance (DNS), for which a nominal fee is received.

“Producing LIRs and managing demand from locals/members for these projects is huge. A solution across Wales via a Shared Service managing the planning input and a consultancy dealing with the specialist input has to be found.” (LPA respondent)

Inadequate funding for enforcement

- 3.46. Planning enforcement is the vital backbone of an effective planning system but is often referred to as the Cinderella of the planning service, being under-resourced and therefore slow and perceived as ineffective. Most participants stated that they supported the proposal in the recent WG consultation to introduce a higher fee for retrospective applications as well as a fee for lodging an appeal, to reflect the additional costs incurred by the public purse. Neither of these changes is being taken forward at present as they require further thought.

Operational and resource constraints

- 3.47. Respondents were concerned that LPAs are understaffed, noting capacity issues with specialist advisors, senior and managerial roles, in particular. Further consideration of skills and specialisms is provided later in this report.
- 3.48. Recruitment and retention were considered challenging due to a range of issues, including in some cases uncompetitive salaries and a shortage of experienced planners. Salaries and recruitment are considered later in this report.

“[There is] a general shortage of skilled planners and knowledgeable technical officers across the sector. Therefore, despite an increase in income it will still be difficult to recruit and retain high quality staff. Junior and technician

placements are important but do not address the current shortage. Therefore, higher salaries are required in order to go some way in addressing immediate recruitment and retention.” (LPA respondent)

- 3.49. IT systems were reported as often outdated or underutilised and hindering productivity. This topic is considered further in the research by [Cardiff University](#), [commissioned by RTPI Cymru](#).

LPA: Reinvestment of fees into the planning system

- 3.50. In respect of longer term budgeting, planning application fee increases were introduced by the [Welsh Government on 01 December 2025](#). These fee increases mark a significant and welcome transition towards better resourced local planning authorities. [RTPI Cymru's response](#) to these proposals reflected our private sector members' support for fee increases on the proviso the additional fee income is reinvested into better resourced planning services and therefore better service delivery. It is now incumbent on Councils to ensure that additional funding is reinvested into improved planning services.
- 3.51. LPAs were asked whether they would support a requirement to reinvest additional application fee income, arising from the December 2025 fee increases, into improvements in the planning service: 22 respondents (92%) expressed support for this, while surprisingly, two (8%) responded 'no'.
- 3.52. Respondents were uncertain whether or not there would be corporate support within their organisation for such reinvestment: only eight respondents (33%) thought there would be support, 14 respondents (58%) were unsure, and two (8% - the same respondents who answered 'no' to the question above) answered 'no'.
- 3.53. Respondents were asked to identify their top priorities for investment, should additional fee income become available to support improvements in the planning service. A range of priorities was listed by the 24 respondents as summarised below:

3.54. In-house staff to support capacity and succession planning in the following areas:

- Development management
- Enforcement
- Policy staff to support LDP monitoring and SPG preparation
- Heritage
- Business Support (to strengthen areas including Freedom of Information requests/ICT liaison)

3.55. The following types of roles were raised:

- Hybrid officer
- Junior/trainee officers to support succession and creation of home-grown talent
- Experienced/Senior planners (considered a finite resource)
- Deputy Head of Planning, to allow more time for reviewing team performance and improvement measures
- DNS officer to provide Local Impact Reports

3.56. Other priorities included:

- Upskill existing Planning Assistants / trainee planners by funding day release to university
- Support apprenticeships to 'grow your own'
- Review technical specialists to better reflect the specialism of the role

3.57. Consultees:

- Seek to identify where consultees were having issues to identify ways to ease the burden and ensure timely feedback in an effective manner
- Focus on specialist services (ecology/heritage/nutrient neutrality) and consider potential for collaborative working

3.58. **Digital:**

- Consider the use of AI to support more efficient service delivery e.g. logging comments/ consultations and permitted development enquiries
- Investing in systems to digitally deliver registration and validation
- Upgrade IT system with training and development
- Digitising all historic files to increase public access and reduce staff time dealing with enquiries

3.59. **Different ways of working/wider ambitions:**

- Creating career-graded posts to support progression and retention
- Restructuring teams to focus on project managing large scale applications
- Review pay grading of some posts to support recruitment and retention and reflect workload pressures
- Recruit and fill roles that are currently held vacant due to recruitment freezes
- Seascape and landscape character assessment to support wider Article 4 ambitions (noting that this would create additional work without a fee income)

3.60. **Staff capacity and development:**

- Focus on training new Welsh-speaking planners
- Encouraging professionalism by LPAs paying RTPI membership fees
- Reinstating/increasing training budgets
- Upskilling staff in emerging agendas including climate change and net zero

Welsh Government Planning Division budget

3.61. In April 2018, the WG Planning Division budget was £5.2m, which included payments to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) for services in Wales. In April 2023, the budget was £2.1m, with a further £3m transferred to PEDW to meet their operating costs. In addition to this budget allocation, income is generated through fees for DNS applications in respect of Welsh Ministers' involvement in the process. There were no

significant budget changes affecting WG Planning Division between the financial year starting in April 2018 and the financial year starting in April 2023.

- 3.62. If additional income were available to be invested in improving planning service delivery within the Planning Division, the top priority identified would be the recruitment of the next generation of planners at graduate level.

PEDW budget

- 3.63. PEDW's baseline budget of £2.98m remained the same from 2021, when PEDW was established, until April 2023. The April 2025 financial year baseline budget has increased by £2.03m to £5.03m to support the increase in capacity to deal with infrastructure applications in a timely manner. It is intended that the additional funding will be spent on:

- Additional staff, including Planning Inspectors and Caseworkers, to respond to increased work pressures in priority casework including DNS applications and examination of LDPs
- Digital 'one-off' costs to complete the digital Casework Portal and to facilitate essential migration of PEDW's CRM system onto a new digital platform
- Inflationary cost pressures (e.g. pay awards and other essential running costs like travel and subsistence, postage, and IT licences).

- 3.64. In addition to fees paid by LPAs for LDP examinations, PEDW receives income for DNS applications and for other specialist casework e.g. environmental appeals, wayleaves etc. Figures were not available at time of writing, but income is estimated at £1.0m to £1.5m annually.

- 3.65. PEDW has experienced inflationary cost pressures (staff pay awards, travel and subsistence) since 2021, which has equated to £453,890 in the April 2024 financial year. These costs were covered by PEDW's income and savings made from temporary staff vacancies. PEDW has moved to virtual hearings and inquiries, by default, alongside a paperless work management system, which has reduced service delivery costs, however there are no figures available to quantify this saving.

- 3.66. In the April 2024 financial year, PEDW received an additional £137,000 investment: £80,000 to develop the Casework Portal software to enable appeals and representations to be submitted online, and £57,000 for additional DNS Casework staff. Digital transformation is a priority for PEDW as it introduces a streamlined appeals portal. PEDW is currently working with the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS), redesigning website content.
- 3.67. PEDW's budget should be considered against additional duties and requirements falling on the service and affecting its capacity, since October 2021. These include:
- New Chief Planning Inspector role to support Welsh Government and the planning profession in Wales, alongside additional resource needs as a result of moving from the Planning Inspectorate into Welsh Government e.g. loss of wider PINS resources, including human resources, finance, digital, training, knowledge, legal, communications;
 - Increased number of DNS applications;
 - Preparation for the new Infrastructure Consents Process, set out in the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024;
 - New casework areas including water abstraction appeals and, in coming years, coal tip safety, a potential new National Park inquiry and SDP examinations.
- 3.68. If additional income were available to be invested in improving planning service delivery within PEDW, it would be spent on additional staff to carry out casework and investing in digital systems across casework management platforms to improve customer service.

NRW budget

- 3.69. NRW went through a significant reorganisation in 2019 resulting in the formation of the National Development Planning and Marine Advice Service. Meaningful data has only been available from 2020.

- 3.70. NRW's net budget for the financial year starting April 2020 was £3.8m, with £3.3m for staff costs and £0.5m for non-staff costs. The total figure for the financial year starting April 2023 is £4.1m based on £3.7m staff costs and £0.4m non-staff costs.
- 3.71. NRW's Planning Advice Service is principally funded by WG grant. From 2025, NRW has been able to recover costs associated with its input into Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) and Wales Infrastructure Act Consents.
- 3.72. Since April 2018, NRW's Planning Team has implemented several practices aimed to deliver their planning services more efficiently against a backdrop of increased demand for services and increased case complexity:
- The introduction and embedding of a topic checklist successfully reduced demand by engaging with LPAs to focus the consultations referred to NRW, ensuring staff time is spent on cases with potentially significant environmental impact;
 - Development of a charged discretionary advice service to complement statutory preapplication services;
 - Increasing the provision of standing advice to applicants and LPAs, thus reducing the need for bespoke advice from NRW staff;
 - Developing internal guidance, templates and standard response paragraphs to drive consistency and reduce the time case managers spend preparing responses;
 - Improving management information that has enabled better workload distribution and work sharing across the four geographically located casework teams;
 - Engagement with sector-specific working groups to enable strategic alignment and saving time on individual cases.
- 3.73. NRW says that collectively, these measures have allowed it to maintain its service despite handling increasingly complex cases.
- 3.74. Looking forward, if additional income were available to be invested in service delivery, NRW's priorities would include:
- Maintaining service standards amidst a rise in large infrastructure projects;

- Implementing the new Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024;
- Significantly improving ICT systems such as the website, customer relationship management databases, and customer-facing digital platforms;
- Investigate setting up a placement scheme to aid workforce planning;
- Providing more targeted advice and guidance to help improve the quality of applications would also be a priority.

4. Current workforce

Local Planning Authority workforce

LPA: Officers employed within the planning service

- 4.1. The following table sets out the workforce data collected from 22 responding LPAs comparing the 2018 and 2023 financial years. This baseline data needs to be considered in the wider context of budgets cuts, vacant posts, career development needs for those at early stages of their career, and the additional duties placed on the planning system.

	Financial year starting in April 2018		Financial year starting in April 2023	
	LPA officer post numbers recorded	Full time equivalent recorded	LPA officer post numbers recorded	Full time equivalent recorded
Planning officers (including development management, enforcement and policy functions)	425	398.0 FTE	471	447.4 FTE
Business support officers	114	105.2 FTE	102	92.8 FTE
Total	539	503.2 FTE	573	540.2 FTE

Figure 6: The number of planners (policy, development management and enforcement) and business support officers recorded by the 22 responding LPAs.

- 4.2. Between the financial years starting in April 2018 and in April 2023, the number of planners (policy, development management and enforcement) recorded by the 22 responding LPAs has increased by 46 posts (11%) across Wales. Although this provides a positive headline, as discussed further at paragraph 4.30, 37 planner posts were actually vacant due to staff turnover, vacancies and recruitment freezes.
- 4.3. At the time of responding to our survey (May 2025), 73% of the 22 responding LPAs were operating with one or more vacancies within their planning service. 11 LPAs reported multiple vacancies, with some reporting as many as five vacancies at that time.
- 4.4. Business support staff numbers declined across responding LPAs by 12 posts (12%) over the same period. As a result, planners are spending more of their time on

administrative tasks, which reduces the time they can devote to their core planning responsibilities. Although it is acknowledged that this same period has seen the roll out of digital transformation projects for example paperless working, this has often resulted in different administrative work rather than reduced work. For example, compiling paper files has been replaced by filing, labelling and publishing electronic documents submitted with a planning application.

- 4.5. Several LPAs have seen their business support teams relocated within a centralised, local authority-wide business support team. One respondent explained that “key technical and admin posts were removed from the service to populate a corporate business support unit however, these posts had to be subsequently re-instated” due to the specialised nature of the work.
- 4.6. It is clear from the increased complexity of the planning system and increased service user demands that greater investment in the workforce is required. 100% of interviewees felt that their LPA did not currently have the capacity to deal with planning ambitions or strategic goals. Instead, they face a ‘hamster wheel’ of firefighting and delivering their statutory obligations, unable to focus on forward-thinking or growing capacity.

“Officers do not have the time to invest in training / reading...It would be good to have a robust structure that allowed time for experienced planners to train younger planners. That has been lost as everyone has been firefighting for years and the tap of enquiries and applications keeps flowing.” (LPA respondent)

- 4.7. With resources and capacity at breaking point, an independent role/body is needed that has the remit and capacity to work with LPAs and other public sector stakeholders as a critical friend, providing support to a sector under considerable strain. We therefore recommend that a Planning Improvement Service should be established, similar to the independent local government improvement service in Scotland (see Appendix 7). This links back to the [Building Capacity Through Collaboration and Change](#) report (see paragraph 2.24 above). The Planning Improvement Service should be headed up by newly created independent Planning

Improvement Champion who would develop and promote best practice and efficiencies, support peer review and performance monitoring, create a central knowledge hub for the profession, and support innovation and shared services where appropriate (recommendation 2).

Planning roles and seniority

4.8. The following three graphs show the average number of posts recorded by the 22 responding LPAs, at each level of seniority.

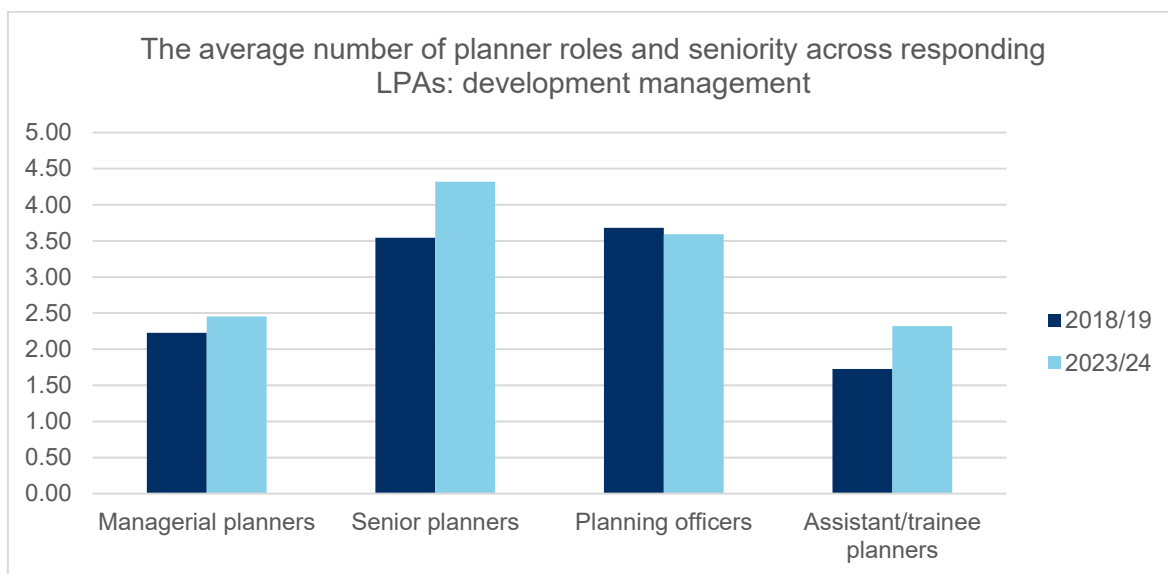


Figure 7: Average number of development management planner roles and seniority within responding LPAs (financial year starting April 2018 compared to financial year starting April 2023). Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025). Analysis by RTPi.

4.9. The data in Figure 7 shows that between the financial year starting April 2018 and the financial year starting April 2023, the average number of development management roles in LPAs has:

- Increased by 0.22 managerial planners;
- Increased by 0.77 senior planners;
- Fallen by 0.09 planning officers;
- Increased by 0.59 assistant/trainee planners.

4.10. The data in Figure 7 also shows that between the financial years starting in April 2018 and in April 2023 there has been a modest increase of 1.5 posts in development management teams (from an average of 11.2 to 12.7 posts per LPA). This increase was notably at senior officer level (3.6 to 4.3 senior DM planners per LPA) and assistant/trainee planner level (1.7 to 2.3 per LPA on average). This latter category reflects a positive move to grow the pipeline of planners and ensure future resilience and succession planning. However, it is important to recognise the significant time investment and guidance needed from more experienced officers.

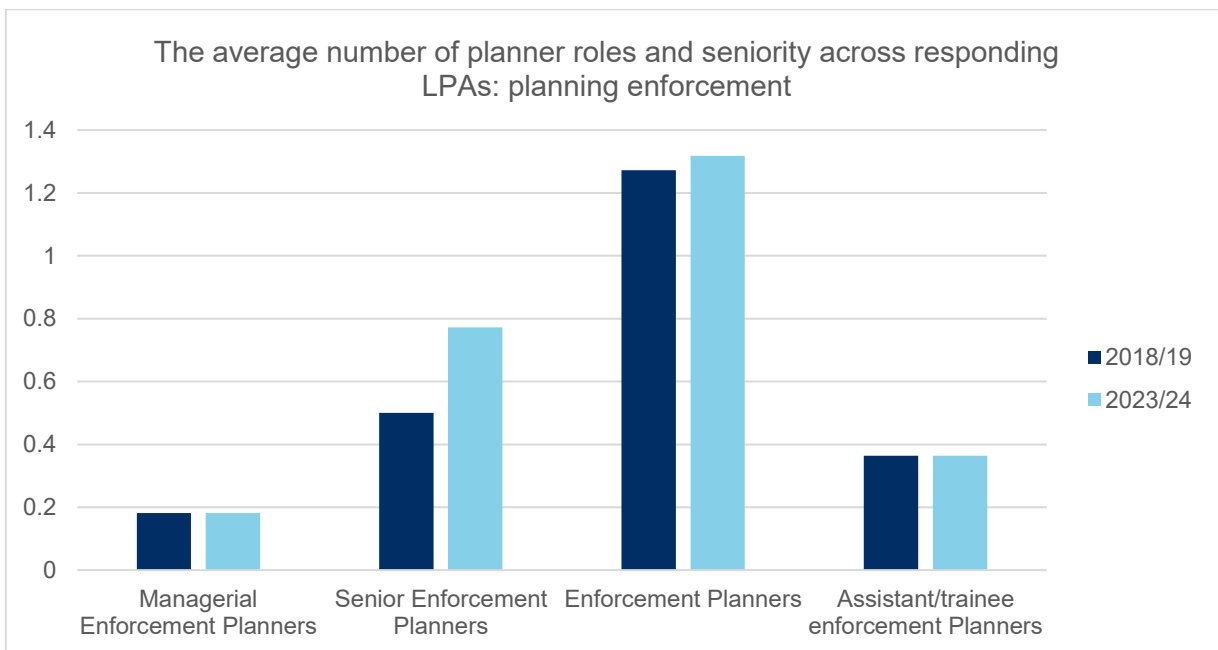


Figure 8: Average number of enforcement roles and seniority within responding LPAs (financial year starting April 2018 compared to financial year starting April 2023). Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025). Analysis by RTPi.

4.11. The data in Figure 8 shows that between the financial year starting April 2018 and the financial year starting April 2023 the average number of enforcement roles between LPAs has:

- Remained consistent at an average of 0.18 managerial enforcement planners;
- Increased by 0.27 senior enforcement planners;
- Increased by 0.05 enforcement planners;
- Remained consistent at 0.36 assistant/trainee enforcement planners.

4.12. The data in Figure 8 also shows that overall staffing levels for enforcement teams have remained low and with little change across all levels of seniority, increasing from an average of just 2.3 posts per LPA in the financial year starting April 2018 to 2.6 posts in the financial year starting April 2023. This slight change is due to an increase in senior enforcement officers. However, the overall picture is one of tiny, under-resourced enforcement services.

4.13. One LPA respondent commented, “Lack of investment in the planning enforcement function has increased pressure on a small team dealing with a large volume of planning enforcement investigations, some of which have been high profile and contentious.”

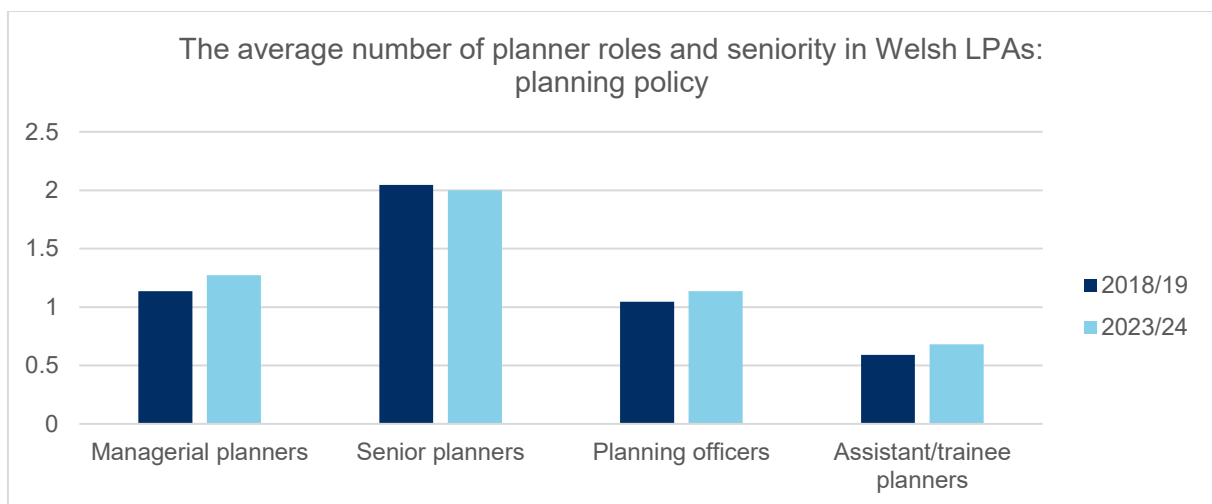


Figure 9: Average number of planning policy roles and seniority within responding LPAs (financial year starting April 2018 compared to financial year starting April 2023). Data accessed via RTPI research survey (May 2025). Analysis by RTPI.

4.14. The data in Figure 9 shows that between the financial year starting April 2018 and the financial year starting April 2023 the average number of planning policy roles between LPAs has:

- Increased by 0.13 managerial planners;
- Fallen by 0.05 senior policy planners;
- Increased by 0.09 planning policy officers;
- Increased by 0.09 assistant/trainee policy planners.

4.15. The data in Figure 9 also shows that policy staffing levels have remained stable between the financial year starting April 2018 and financial year starting April 2023, increasing by just 0.3 posts per LPA on average from 4.8 posts to 5.1 posts with only minor shifts within the differing levels of experience, likely reflecting a focus on maintaining core capacity. During this time period, most LPAs have commenced work on the second tranche of LDPs. Given the low numbers of additional posts there are no noteworthy trends to observe.

Local Authority officers supporting the planning function

- 4.16. Although discussions about resources often focus on the number of planning officers, equally important are the various supporting officers providing essential advice as internal consultees on matters such as ecology, flooding, highways or landscape.
- 4.17. [RTPI Cymru's Big Conversation](#) recognised the impact of consultee input on LPA planning performance, noting local authority departments, such as highways and ecology are “also struggling with resources and recruitment which means that they cannot respond quickly or in full and this impacts on LPA services both in terms of the ability to provide timely and informed decisions and the perception of the planning process by customers.”
- 4.18. Between the financial year starting April 2018 and the financial year starting April 2023, the full-time equivalent number of specialist advisors employed by local authorities whose primary role relates directly to the land-use planning system increased by just 5.1 FTE for the 22 LPAs that responded (from 114.3 FTE posts to 119.4 FTE posts for the whole of Wales). This April 2023 financial year figure equates to an average total workforce of just 5.4 FTE specialist posts per LPA.
- 4.19. It should be noted that several of the 22 respondents stressed that the information provided is an approximation due to their estimates of the proportion of these roles dedicated to planning. However, the limited capacity, even with the slight increase since April 2018, highlights the capacity pinch-points of delivering an effective planning service.

4.20. During this same period workload has increased significantly due to new issues, policies or legislation such as nutrient neutrality, SuDS and Llwybr Newydd. Respondents also reported that specialists had become increasingly pre-occupied with delivering grant-funded work to help fund their posts.

“We've noticed a difference over the last few years. It's notable that responses take longer. Sometimes we don't get any responses at all. It's difficult to get meetings and to discuss things further with them. Discharging conditions is becoming more difficult because capacity and resource is an issue for them. They've lost staff and they haven't been able to recruit either. They've had to lose posts for budgetary savings, and they've got so many other duties now.”
(LPA respondent)

LPA: Balance of experience within the planning service

4.21. When asked if they felt there was a good balance of experience in their current team, for example, between early career and more experienced planners, two thirds of respondents reported a good mix.

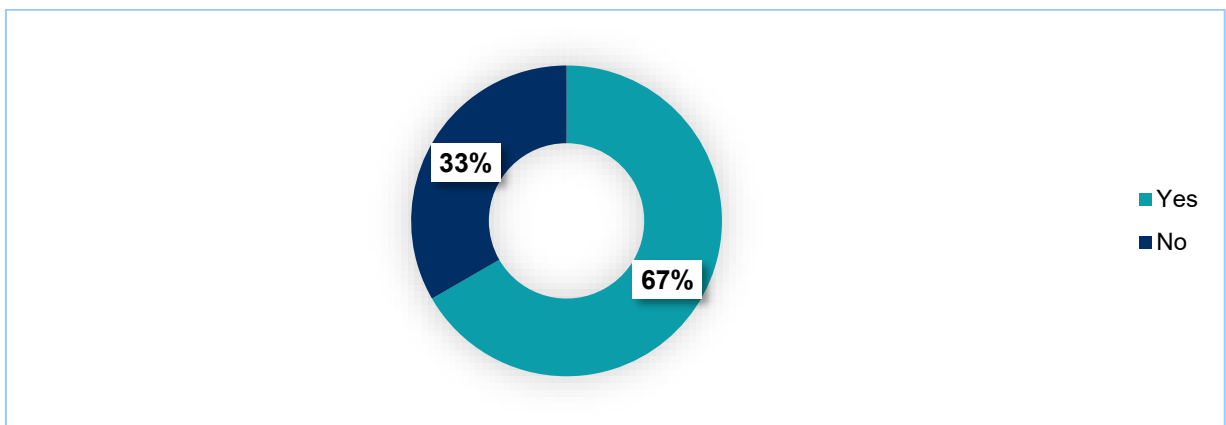


Figure 10: Balance of experience within responding LPAs. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

4.22. The remaining one-third expressed concerns ranging from a lack of experienced capacity to handle more complex projects to worries about succession-planning as older staff approach retirement. Workforce age profile data is discussed further later in this report.

4.23. LPA respondents were asked to explain their answer including what changes, if any, would create a better balance of experience in their planning service.

“In terms of DM there is a good balance, however in policy they are a very young team who have never done an LDP, and I worry about that for the future.” (LPA respondent)

4.24. A frequently cited issue throughout this research has been difficulty recruiting experienced professionals, exacerbated by perceptions of better pay and conditions in the private sector and the lack of career grades within LPAs. Conversely, the time needed to support and mentor new career professionals was highlighted by some as a barrier to growing the pipeline of future planners.

“Whilst we currently have a good balance, it is precarious. The 'gap' in experience between the early career and more experienced planners is significant. There is limited opportunity / capacity to effectively mentor and develop early career planners.” (LPA respondent)

4.25. There were examples of emerging good practice in this area, for example:

“Within the Authority we have undertaken a phased restructuring of department over the last 3 years to move from a fairly flat structure and ensure there are pathways to progression by the introduction of senior posts, feeder grades. We have also introduced a Planning Hwb to filter the approximately 7,000 items of correspondence each year. The Hwb is staffed by non-planners who receive training and support in answering standard queries and has become a pathway for staff who then wish to enter the profession.” (LPA respondent)

4.26. Overall, the restructuring of planning teams has often had mixed results: the removal of key roles and/or over-expansion of leadership portfolios has often undermined delivery. One authority reported expanding a Head of Planning's portfolio to include active travel and transport alongside planning, diluting capacity.

- 4.27. Suggestions for building a better long-term balance of experience across the profession included a more sustainable budget, improved salary structures, flexible retirement options, robust job descriptions, and enhanced career pathways and progression.
- 4.28. Several LPAs noted that a hybrid or roving officer model, moving between DM, policy and enforcement within their LPA, could allow workloads to be managed more flexibly.

LPA: Vacancies

- 4.29. Despite team structures showing 46 additional posts since 2018, as at May 2025, 37 planning officer posts were reported as being vacant by the 22 LPAs that responded, plus six specialist posts and five business support posts. In other words, most of the efforts to start to reinstate planning team capacity after over a decade of cuts was purely theoretical, with very little improvement on the ground.
- 4.30. Overall, 73% of LPAs were operating with vacant posts, with 11 of the 22 LPAs that responded reporting multiple vacancies (some reported as many as five vacancies). In interviews, rural and Welsh-speaking planning authorities suggested that they find it harder to recruit staff. However, our analysis of the data did not identify any pattern linking the distribution of vacancies to the rurality or geographical location of the planning authority.
- 4.31. All 24 respondents advertised at least one vacant post between September 2022 and March 2025, but only 21 LPAs provided data on the posts advertised. There were 165 planning posts (development management, enforcement and policy), 26 specialist posts and 14 business support advertised. It should be noted that some of these adverts were re-advertised posts, as well as covering maternity leave etc.
- 4.32. The dynamic nature of job vacancies poses challenges in accurately monitoring the scale and impact of vacancies over time. Strategies such as secondments, restructures, re-grading and the engagement of consultants have been used in many cases to address these gaps, however this can obscure the true extent of the issue.

- 4.33. Several LPAs reported that vacant posts were often left unfilled as a strategy to achieve necessary budget savings. While this approach allows LPAs flexibility to manage financial pressure, it places a significant strain on existing staff and the wider planning service capacity. Limited core staffing leaves authorities vulnerable to shocks, such as long-term sickness, retirement or resignations.
- 4.34. Many LPAs have baseline budgets that include a vacancy allowance, meaning that if they are lucky enough to retain a full complement of staff throughout the year, they have overspent on staffing.

Welsh Government Planning Division workforce

Number of planners employed in Welsh Government Planning Division

- 4.35. The table below provides a breakdown of the officers employed in the WG Planning Division by service/work area and level of seniority, in the financial years starting in April 2018 and starting in April 2023.
- 4.36. Over the past five years the WG Planning Directorate has seen a significant (20%) reduction in staff numbers, declining from 41 officers in the financial year starting April 2018 to 33 members of staff in the financial year starting April 2023. Five vacancies were recorded at the time of responding to the research survey (May 2025). During this period, career progression has seen existing planners secure promotions elsewhere in WG, but the recruitment freeze has resulted in an absence of early career planners. This has resulted in a top-heavy structure and creates significant challenges for future succession planning. It is worth noting that the Planning Division was a team of 60 officers at the time of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.

Job titles	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2018	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
Chief Planner / Head of Division	1	1
Head of Branch	5	6
Senior Planning Manager	11	7
Higher Planning Manager	17	16
Planning Manager	5	2
Team support	1	1
PA to Chief Planner	1	-
Total number of WG Planning Division staff	41	33

Figure 11: Table breakdown of planning officers employed by Welsh Government Planning Division 2018 and 2023

4.37. During this period of declining resources, the extent and complexity of work has increased due to greater devolution in addition to the wider complexities affecting all LPAs, such as flood risk, the climate and nature emergencies, and nutrient neutrality. Planning legislation including the Planning (Wales) Bill and the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024, is a significant draw on Planning Division resource, which diverts staff away from other areas. Delivering policy and legislative requirements set out in the programme for Government means that the Division must be agile in responding quickly to new or different work priorities.

- 4.38. Recruitment since April 2018 has been a challenge for the Division. External recruitment restrictions across Welsh Government have been a significant factor, making it difficult to replace professional staff who have retired or moved on to other non-planning roles in Welsh Government. Recruitment practices within the civil service support internal promotion and broadening of skills via departmental transfers. Planners have a breadth of transferable skills making them strong applicants for transfer, whereas the specific planning expertise required to work in the Planning Division means this internal transfer is rarely reciprocated. This type of general recruitment policy doesn't work well for specialised professions such as planning which is reliant on external recruitment, especially at junior levels, to maintain capacity and capability.
- 4.39. Moreover, the challenging workloads and political exposure can make the Planning Division less appealing for professional planners to work in than some other Divisions. Competition from UK Government and PEDW has also become significant factor both of which provide higher salaries for similar roles.
- 4.40. Over this period the Planning Division has operated flexibly, moving people around planning teams and this has helped in times of high pressure. It has equally helped to share skills, for example officers with policy experience involved in the development of legislation. Welsh Government has managed to fill all recently advertised posts (2025) with strong candidates, drawn from LPAs and within the private sector, despite noting a small pool of suitably qualified planners within Wales.
- 4.41. In terms of workforce composition, recent recruitment (2025) has contributed positively, with the addition of new Planning Manager roles, internal promotions to Senior Planning Manager posts and Heads of Branch, creating a strong mix across different levels of experience.

- 4.42. Succession planning for senior/managerial roles has been identified by the Chief Planner as an important focus over the next five years, alongside harmonising salaries with UK Government / PEDW for comparable positions and exploring career graded posts to retain planners within the Division. The loss of Planning Division staff to other WG teams has been a significant drain on the Division and highlights the transferable skills of planners and their value to other teams and sectors, potentially making it challenging to retain planners within the profession.
- 4.43. WG Planning Division currently employs a year out student and hopes to increase the number of trainee posts in the future. This currently works on a rotation basis with PEDW which may extend to NRW in the future.
- 4.44. WG Planning Division expressed concerns regarding the future availability of suitable candidates at a time of high demand and questioned how planning as a career can be made more attractive. Recognising the demand for planning professionals and the competitive nature of recruitment across wider sectors, WG Planning Division suggested there is a need to collectively define and promote the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales.

PEDW workforce

- 4.45. The table below presents staffing figures for PEDW for 2021 (when it was established) in comparison to the April 2023 financial year. Data is not available prior to that date, so it is not possible to monitor change over the same period as the other bodies in this report.

	Officer numbers recorded in 2021	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
Chief Inspector/Head of Wales	1	1
Deputy Chief Inspector	-	1
Planning Inspector Managers	2	2
Assistant Planning Inspector Managers	2	2
Planning Inspectors	15	16
Planning Officers	4	2
Business Support Officers	24	22
Total number of staff at PEDW	48	46
Full time equivalent	44.6	45.9

Figure 12: Table showing staffing figures for PEDW 2021-2023

- 4.46. As of May 2025, PEDW has 30 Business Support Officer posts (including two vacancies) and 20 Planning inspectors which includes the Chief Planning Inspector, Deputy Chief Planning Inspector, Planning Inspector Managers and Assistant Planning Inspector Managers.
- 4.47. There is currently a good balance of experience within PEDW, however more experienced Inspectors are needed to support high-pressure workload areas, including DNS, LDP examinations and enforcement work, as well as preparation for

the four new SDPs in future years, which will be followed by a flurry of new light-touch LDPs.

NRW workforce

- 4.48. Between the financial years starting in April 2020 and in April 2023, NRW's workforce has increased from 53.7FTE officers to 61.2 FTE officers (see Figure 13 below).
- 4.49. The NRW Development Planning Advice Service (DPAS) case management team benefits from a good overall balance of experience, with a deliberate structure encompassing a range of grades that supports clear career pathways. However, recruiting experienced staff directly into higher-grade positions has proven challenging, largely because the expertise required is highly specific to NRW's casework and advisory functions. To mitigate staffing shortages, NRW has used agency staff in lower-graded roles as well as seeking to develop staff internally, targeted recruitment campaigns and efforts to attract candidates from outside the traditional planning discipline who possess transferable skills. This approach has yielded mixed results: in some cases, staff have successfully progressed through the ranks, while in other situations, the alignment between organisational expectations and individual aspirations has been harder to achieve. Overall, getting experienced people into senior roles fundamentally relies on a pipeline of staff joining at junior levels and receiving robust training and mentorship.
- 4.50. NRW's Planning Casework teams draw in a huge range of specialist skills and technical knowledge from across NRW. Their planning work draws in specialist skills in subjects such as landscape, peat, geoscience, flood risk, ecology (terrestrial and marine protected species and designated sites), water quality and quantity, waste, coastal processes, air quality etc. as well as support from services such as finance and legal.

Development planning and marine function (NB On average the marine officers spend one-third of their time on planning work)

Section/Team	Job title	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2020	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
Operations	Head of DPAS & Marine	1	1
	DPAS Manager	1	1
	Senior Specialist	1	1
	DPAS Team Leader	4	4
	Senior DPAS Advisor	11	11 (2 posts vacant)
	DPAS Advisor (2)	21	24 (4 posts vacant)
	DPAS Advisor (1)	5	8 (1 post vacant)
	DPAS Assistant	4	4 (1 post vacant)
	Marine Manager	1	0
	Marine Area Advice & Management Team Leader	1	1
	Senior Marine Advisor	9 (8.1 FTE)	10 (c. 9.2 FTE)

Section/Team	Job title	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2020	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
	Marine Advisor (2)	2 (1.4 FTE)	2 (c.1.6 FTE)
	Assistant Marine Advisor	0	2 (1 post vacant)
Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate: Planning, Landscape, Climate Change and Decarbonisation, and Energy Team	Planning, Landscape, Climate Change and Decarbonisation, and Energy Team	1	1
	Lead Specialist Advisor: Planning	0	1
	Specialist Advisor: Planning	2	2
Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate: Marine and Coastal Policy and Planning	Lead Specialist Advisor: Marine Planning	2	2
NRW Planning function:	Total number of posts	66	75
	Full Time Equivalent	53.7	61.2

Figure 13: Table breakdown of NRW workforce April 2020 and April 2023

- 4.51. Public sector workforce challenges are equally present within NRW's planning function, including the competitiveness of the job market, a limited pool of suitable applicants, and a lack of individuals willing to step into management roles. NRW's status as a public sector employer offering flexible working, particularly in a post-Covid environment, has helped somewhat in recruitment and retention.
- 4.52. Looking ahead over the next five years, there are both challenges and opportunities. Additional funding arising from the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 could enable the creation of higher-graded roles, offering opportunities to retain and promote existing staff and attract new talent. However, there's an ongoing risk of staff gaining valuable experience only to leave for roles in other organisations, particularly in industries like energy, where public sector knowledge and transferable technical skills appear sought after. Recent internal pay parity work for other roles e.g. engineers and surveyors has shown that planning team pay and grading is competitive. NRW is currently considering a wide range of measures including early-career initiatives such as structured career frameworks and apprenticeships.
- 4.53. Recommendation 4 seeks a commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey), fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, performance and how increase fee income since December 2025 has been utilised to improve service delivery, using this report as a baseline. This monitoring will support evidence-based decision-making and long-term resilience, as an extension to the recently recommenced national planning performance framework.

5. Recruitment

Recruitment and retention within LPAs

- 5.1. LPAs were asked to comment on the key recruitment challenges, if any, they experienced between September 2022 and March 2025. There is clear recruitment strain in many LPAs, driven by low applicant numbers, poor quality job applications, financial issues, competition from other LPAs and the private sector, PEDW and the

energy sector, alongside other complex and interlinked demands. Senior level and specialist roles were highlighted as particularly challenging to recruit to.

5.2. It is noteworthy that all 24 respondents had advertised vacancies between September 2022 and March 2025. The key issues raised by the 24 respondents are summarised below.

5.3. **Lack of suitable applicants:**

- Lack of suitable applicants with the required qualifications and/or experience;
- Low numbers of applicants overall;
- Shortage of experienced planners. Generally harder to recruit to senior planner posts;
- Shortage of ecologists, highways officers, heritage specialists and other specialist support roles;
- Need to rely on external consultants due to lack of suitable candidates;
- Repeated recruitment drives often required to fill posts;
- Perception of difficulty recruiting due to rural or geographical location;
- Welsh language requirements pose an extra recruitment challenge in some areas;
- Difficulty filling temporary, part time or maternity cover posts.

5.4. **Operational factors:**

- Shift to remote work has helped broaden talent pools, but has not entirely solved shortages and has made it harder to train up new colleagues;
- Delays and gaps in recruitment have operational impacts;
- Moratorium on recruitment in some authorities due to budget cuts;
- High staff turnover places pressure on remaining staff and causes instability;
- Lack of budget for paid adverts, limiting reach;

- Limited flexibility to offer progression or incentives to retain staff or attract new applicants;
- Higher consultancy costs putting strain on budgets.

5.5. **Competition:**

- Experienced officers moving to other public sector roles (especially PEDW), private sector (especially energy planning) or other professions e.g. surveying, creating knowledge and capacity gaps;
- Local authority roles are seen as less attractive compared to private sector or some other public bodies;
- Private sector offering higher salaries;
- LPAs “poaching” staff from each other;
- Concern that CJsCs will soon be recruiting policy planners to produce SDPs.

5.6. **Nature of the role:**

- Limited career opportunities in small LPAs;
- Heavy training and mentoring burden to develop inexperienced officers;
- Public sector planning managers are required to do more budget, HR and IT project management due to shortages/cuts in other departments, which requires a broader skill set;
- Enforcement roles not attractive due to confrontational nature;
- Abusive behaviour making the public sector an increasingly unattractive place to work.

5.7. Most respondents described recruitment as a challenging process and highlighted issues with both the quantity and quality of applicants:

“We have the lowest rate of applicants per role of any team in the economy and regeneration service ... we get some applicants, on average three per role but at least two of them are not qualified.” (LPA respondent)

“Throughout this period we have found that we receive small numbers of applicants for roles, particularly more senior roles. In some cases, we have had no applicants for jobs and have had to advertise posts several times.” (LPA respondent)

5.8. Another respondent noted:

“With the perception of higher relative salaries in the private sector and other bodies and agencies such as NRW and PEDW and an increasingly challenging local government environment, both financially and politically it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain experienced staff and specialists.” (LPA respondent)

5.9. There’s widespread feeling that there is a shortage of skilled and experienced professionals. Many authorities report being able to fill business support roles, sometimes successfully recruiting internally from other teams, but face significant difficulties recruiting experienced planners, senior officers or specialist staff. Even where applications are received, the quality of candidates is often insufficient to meet the requirements of the role, leading to repeated advertisements or reliance on agency staff and consultants, further straining budgets.

5.10. The private sector was reported as ‘competition’ by several respondents. “While the reasons for the challenges around recruitment and in some cases the retention of staff may be many, a clear contributing factor is that the comparable rates of pay being offered by some councils has not proved to be competitive in the marketplace – certainly not to those in the private sector”. A loss of planners to related disciplines, seeking opportunities and less stressful roles, was also raised.

5.11. Some respondents reported difficulties training inexperienced recruits, given their current capacity issues: “taking on applicants with very little experience can be very

demanding and draining on staff resources providing the necessary training”. This challenge is further compounded in some authorities where a high turnover of newly trained up staff is reported.

- 5.12. Several respondents mentioned a limited pool of ecologists, highways and heritage specialists. This aligns with the findings of the [RTPI Big Conversation](#). One authority explained that the knock-on effect is significant, impacting application determination times and service quality, sometimes resulting in poor responses. This is further compounded where planning officer posts are vacant due to recruitment difficulties or recruitment freezes. A lack of capacity affects an LPA’s ability to provide timely or comprehensive pre-application advice or offer PPAs, which in turn reduces sources of additional income, creating further budget and service delivery pressures.
- 5.13. Another LPA noted while they had recently received funding for their enforcement team, they were concerned about recruitment and filling new posts. One LPA explained that it was particularly hard to fill maternity/short term posts, explaining that they had resorted to using consultants to fill the temporary vacancy because they had received no applicants with the required experience. The North Wales shared service has experienced difficulty recruiting fixed term Senior Planning Officers to utilise the recently awarded Welsh Government funding.
- 5.14. Some respondents considered that it becomes increasingly difficult to recruit the further away the employer is from an accredited planning school. It has not been possible to prove or disprove this theory from our analysis of the data due to the wide variety of factors including roles, salaries, personal connections such as family, friends, schools and wider preferences for living and working in urban vs rural locations.

Recruiting Welsh-speaking planners

- 5.15. These issues are often magnified when trying to recruit people with specialist skills, for example Welsh-speaking planners, due to the limited recruitment pool.

“The ability to recruit staff who are able to work in the Welsh language is challenging, this is relevant to planning officers, but also an issue in specialist fields, e.g. built heritage/conservation officers, ecologists etc. This is currently a serious challenge for [the LPA], where the ability of staff to work in Welsh is essential/important. It has affected recruitment, with increased use of consultancies to fill staffing gaps”. (RTPI member)

“The combination of a very rural area where opportunities don’t open up very often, along with a Welsh language requirement...makes recruitment extremely difficult.” (LPA respondent)

- 5.16. A reoccurring issue is the small pool of Welsh-speaking planners, which has highlighted the unsustainability of the current approaches to both recruitment and growing the pipeline of future planners, and a need to think more strategically.

“The truth is, with Welsh speaking posts, we almost know who our market is, and we end up shifting people around different organisations. This is not sustainable - and a strategic and different approach is required.” (LPA respondent)

- 5.17. Some LPAs reported a lack of confidence among bilingual staff to use Welsh in technical settings, highlighting the need for targeted training and support. One solution proposed was a planning-specific Welsh language dictionary or enhanced university provision. At the time of writing this report, Cardiff University planning school had recently recruited a Welsh speaking academic and the Welsh Government, CDPS and RTPI Cymru are producing a revised glossary of Welsh language planning terms.

Job advertisement methods

5.18. LPAs were asked to outline the different job advertisement methods they use. The table below sets out the responses from 24 LPAs.

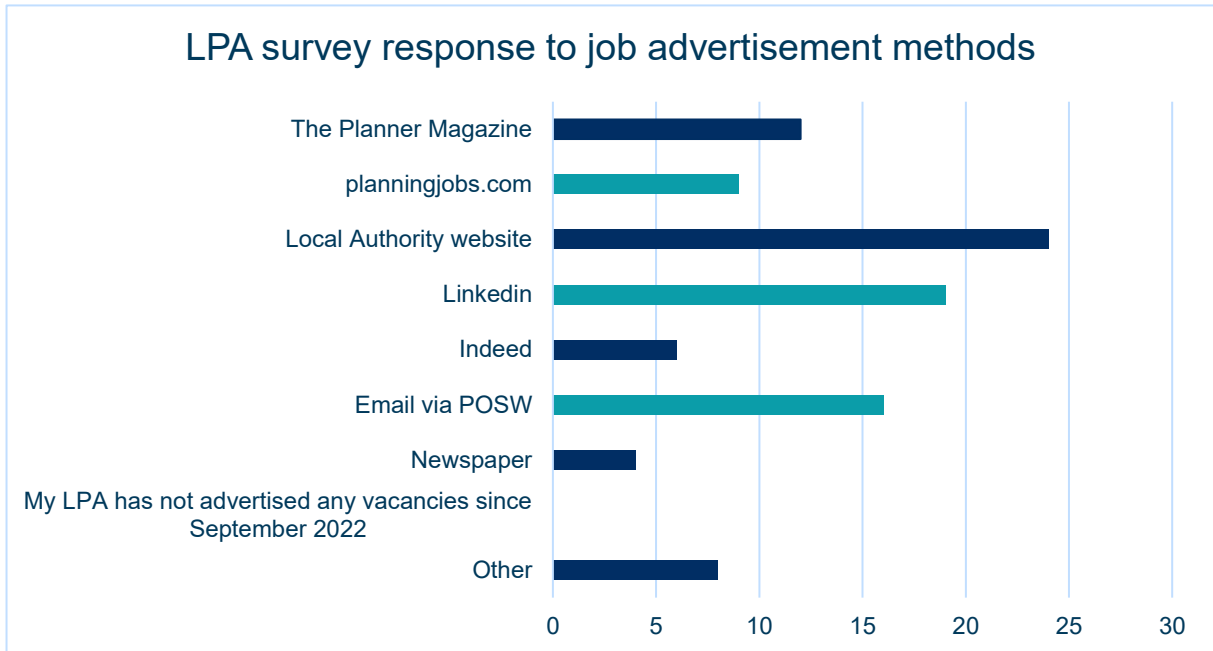


Figure 14: Job advertisement methods. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

5.19. The data in Figure 14 shows that out of the 24 respondents:

- 24 advertised through Local Authority websites;
- 19 advertised through LinkedIn;
- 16 advertised through email via POSW;
- 12 advertised through The Planner Jobs;
- 9 advertised through planningjobs.com;
- 6 advertised through Indeed;
- 4 advertised through a newspaper;
- 0 have not advertised any vacancies since September 2022;
- 8 advertised through other methods.

5.20. Respondents were asked why these methods were chosen and to what extent have they been successful: 22 answers were received. Affordability was the most frequently cited reason for particular choices, followed by coverage. Despite the recognised recruitment challenges, two of the three most frequently used methods (local authority website and email via the Planning Officers' Society Wales (POSW)) target the small pool of existing public sector workers or people seeking public sector work and actively checking a specific LPA website. In recruitment terms, the chances of an interested external candidate proactively checking the right LPA website at the right time seems slim.

“We have specifically avoided promotion of our jobs via POSW as this is adding to competition for scarce staff.” (LPA respondent)

5.21. Online advertising via The Planner Jobs and LinkedIn are reported as two of the more successful approaches, alongside word of mouth.

5.22. Despite some attempts to cast the net wider, including the use of specialist magazines for recruiting to roles such as ecologists, the return has been inconsistent, with some posts receiving few or no applicants.

5.23. Overall, although various recruitment methods have been trialled to attract experienced applicants, results have been mixed. Advertising cost remains a dominant concern along with the small pool of planners in Wales, in particular Welsh speaking planners and specialists.

5.24. In relation to hard to fill vacancies, LPAs were asked which, if any, of the following actions they have taken since September 2022. The following graph sets out the responses from 24 responding LPAs.

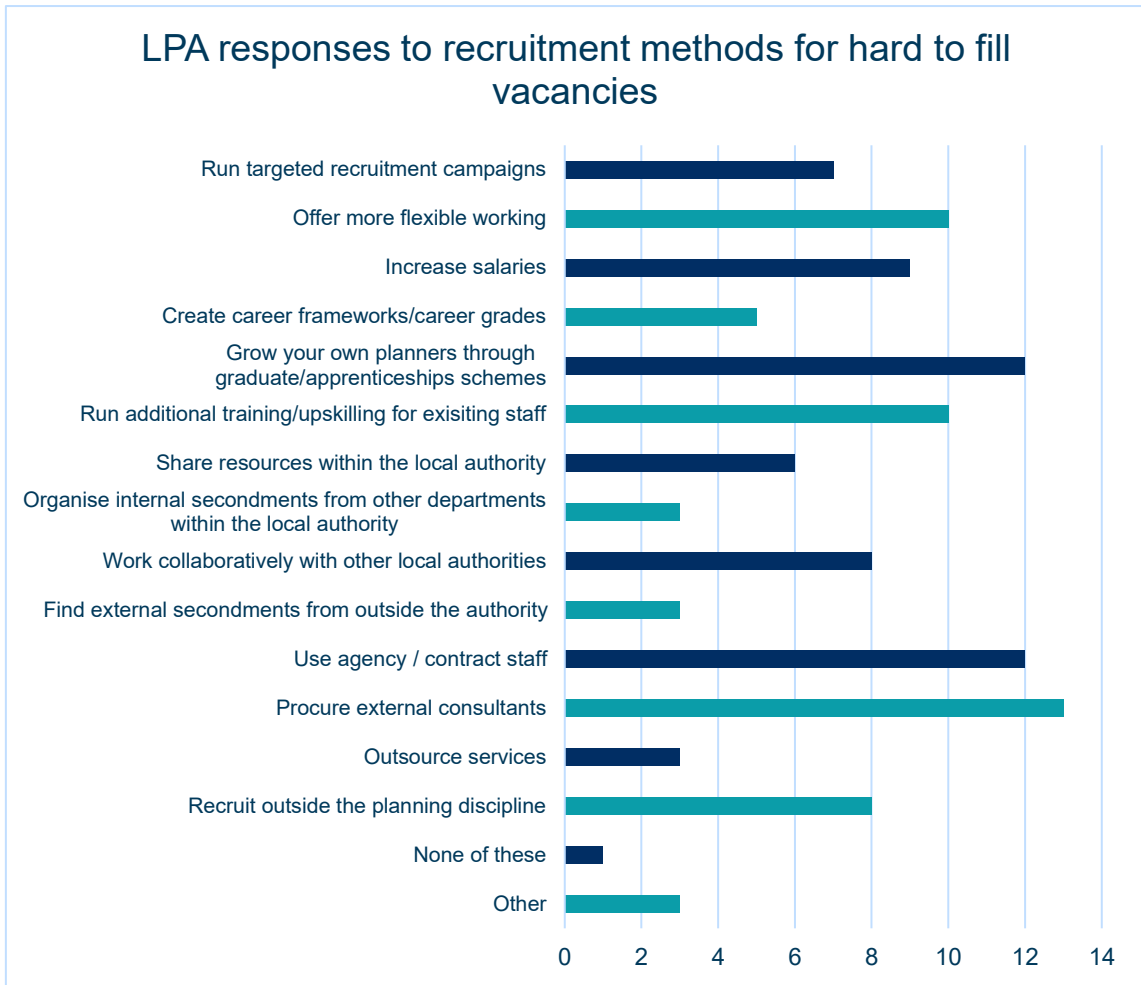


Figure 15: Recruiting to hard-to-fill vacancies. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

5.25. The data in Figure 15 shows that:

- 13 respondents have procured external consultants;
- 12 respondents have grown their own planners through graduate / apprenticeship schemes;
- 12 respondents have used agency / contract staff;
- 10 respondents have run additional training / upskilling for existing staff;
- 10 respondents have offered more flexible working;
- 9 respondents have increased salaries;
- 8 respondents have worked collaboratively with other local authorities;
- 8 respondents have recruited outside the planning profession;

- 7 respondents have run targeted recruitment campaigns;
- 6 respondents have shared resources within their local authority;
- 5 respondents have created career frameworks / career grades;
- 3 respondents have provided internal secondments from other departments within their local authority;
- 3 respondents have provided external secondments from outside the authority;
- 3 respondents have outsourced services;
- 1 respondent has done none of these;
- 3 respondents have used other methods.

5.26. LPAs have explored a wide range of methods in relation to hard to fill vacancies, with mixed results. Some have seen recent success by employing former students or early career planners through structured pathways, such as graduate traineeships and 'grow your own' programmes. These methods support staff development and offer longer term retention, particularly when candidates have a local connection. However, these approaches can place pressure on existing stretched teams, due to the setup of the programme and the time needed to train and support early career/trainee planners.

5.27. The use of external consultants and agency staff has provided quick relief in some cases, particularly where immediate capacity was required. This, however, is widely regarded as unsustainable due to high costs, especially amidst financial constraints and budget saving pressures.

5.28. In some instances, local government rules have had unintended consequences. Most authorities stopped offering career grade posts as part of the single status pay review process. This has hampered staff retention. Incentives like market pay supplements can only be offered when a post has been vacated and multiple attempts to recruit have been unsuccessful. Moreover, the market supplement is normally under annual review, so offers limited long-term certainty to applicants.

5.29. Overall, while most methods have delivered some level of success, none are without drawbacks. The most sustainable solutions, such as internal development, graduate recruitment and staff retention require investment, budget certainty and long-term strategic workforce planning.

LPA: Future recruitment issues

5.30. When asked to look ahead to the next five years, in addition to the recruitment and retention challenges detailed above, the 24 respondents highlighted the following issues:

- An ageing workforce and a decreasing pool of experienced planners;
- Insufficient numbers entering the profession, caused in part due to a lack of apprenticeship and bursary schemes in Wales;
- Ongoing Council-wide budget pressures, with planning services subsidising escalating costs in different service areas such as social care, homelessness and school transport. This subsidisation is occurring directly via extra planning application fee income being used to off-set budget gaps in other service areas, and indirectly by planning services being required to make annual budget cuts to offset budget pressures in other service areas;
- increased competition from the private sector, particularly in areas such as energy, where pay, progression opportunities and flexibility were considered to be a draw;
- volume and complexity of public sector work including to exposure to public criticism adversely affecting job satisfaction.

PEDW recruitment and retention

5.31. Due to the nature of PEDW's work, the Inspector roles require individuals with substantial experience. While it is rare for PEDW to recruit candidates who already have experience as an Inspector, the organisation generally receives strong applications from experienced planners and environmental specialists. There is, however, a lead-in time to train up newly appointed Inspectors before they can take

on the most complex casework (e.g. hearings and inquiries for major development). Training new Inspectors takes approximately 18–24 months, which necessitates careful planning of small recruitment cohorts. Increasing training capacity within PEDW would better support the service in the longer term, therefore PEDW is undertaking a review of its succession planning in leadership roles to ensure that their knowledge, training and quality assurance measures are fully resourced. Planning Inspector Managers are recruited internally, as the role requires individuals with prior experience in the field.

5.32. To assist recruitment, PEDW has employed several methods including:

- Offering more flexible working;
- Grow your own Planning Inspectors through training and development of planning officer roles in PEDW (three current Inspectors via this route);
- Increasing salaries – in October 2025 PEDW introduced a recruitment and retention allowance to compare with equivalent roles in the Planning Inspectorate (England);
- Finding external secondments from outside PEDW;
- Outsourcing services;
- Working collaboratively with PINS (England);
- Recruiting outside the planning discipline;
- Running additional training/upskilling for existing staff.

5.33. PEDW has used The Planner Jobs, LinkedIn, Indeed, email via POSW and the Welsh Government website to advertise jobs, but considered that LinkedIn has raised the profile of PEDW itself and the planning profession more widely. PEDW has a [recruitment pack](#) available on its website.

5.34. PEDW has generally been successful at filling advertised posts across the different levels of seniority within the service and has strong staff retention rates. It is not subject to WG recruitment freezes, as the Chief Planning Inspector has delegated responsibility for budget and staffing matters.

- 5.35. PEDW employs a year out student on an annual basis, shared with WG Planning Division. While there may be a demand for part-time students/year-out students and/or apprentices at PEDW within in the next five years, the need for experienced officers within PEDW impacts on recruitment at this junior level. This year out role does, however, provide a fantastic breadth of experience for a new planner and supports growing the pipeline of planners. PEDW plans to increase the number of year-out placements to two for the 2026/27 cohort.
- 5.36. In terms of staff retention, an extraordinarily low number of planning inspectors leave PEDW to work elsewhere.
- 5.37. To address the issues identified above, a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales. This will require significant financial investment and commitment by all parties in order to secure the essential increase in resource levels, including a commitment from LPAs to reinvest the additional application fee income arising from the December 2025 fee uplift (recommendation 5).

6. Salaries

- 6.1. Our research explored the topic of salaries in broad terms, identifying variations between different public sector bodies and influencing factors.

UK planning salaries

- 6.2. Throughout the UK, planners have experienced a significant real term pay cut since 2005. Coupled with shrinking teams, more complex work and greater public expectation and political scrutiny, there are several factors affecting public sector recruitment.

6.3. [The RTPI State of the Profession Report 2023](#) states:

“The Annual Survey on Hours and Earnings, part of the labour force survey, allows us to estimate how the median salaries of town planners have changed over time. Due to low sample sizes, we must be cautious about any individual data point. Furthermore, we should expect significant geographic and demographic variation, which current data sources capture poorly. However, the general point stands: on the whole, town planners are more poorly paid today than they were in 2005. The nominal median salary over the past 17 years has hovered around £33,000. That means that in today’s money, the median planner was making close to £50,000 a year in 2005.”

The real salary of planners has steeply declined

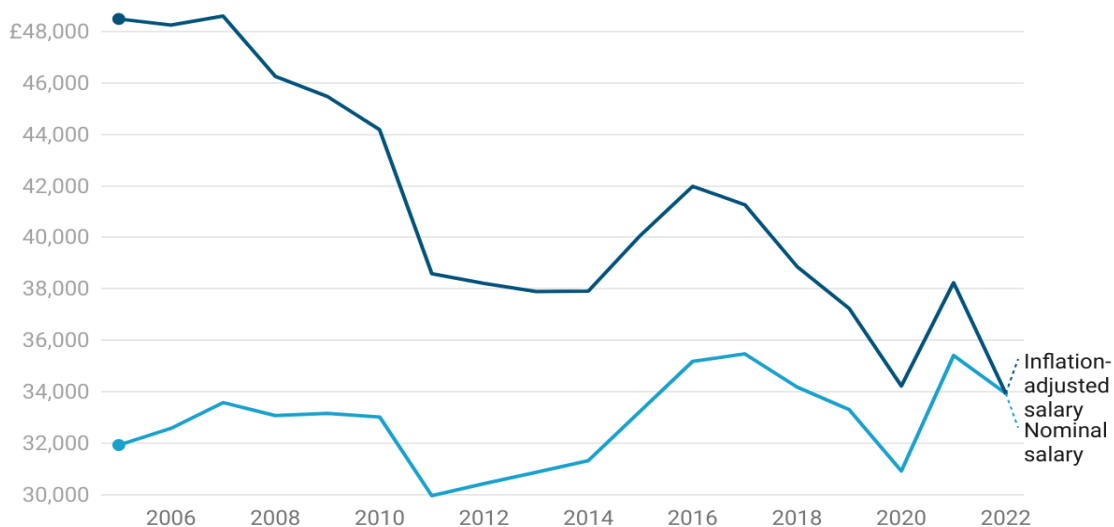


Chart: RTPI • Source: Annual Survey on Hours and Earnings • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 16: Planners’ salaries 2006-2022. Source: [RTPI State of the Profession Report 2023](#)

6.4. The graph in Figure 16 shows nominal and inflation-adjusted median salaries of planning officers between 2006 and 2022 (GBP). It shows that in 2006 the inflation-adjusted salary just over £48,000. In 2022 it was £34,000: a substantial real-term pay cut.

6.5. Survey responses displayed in the RTPI’s [State of the Profession \(2025\) report for Wales](#) showed a modal salary range for planners between £40,001 to £50,000.

However, there was a contrast in responses between salary satisfaction and career satisfaction as seen in Figure 17. Nearly 70% of Welsh planners were satisfied with their career progression, with 54% of respondents of this RTPI member survey in a senior, associate, or principal planner position. In contrast, only just over half (52%) were satisfied with their salary. This isn't a Wales specific pattern and is reflected across the other UK nations. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Wales doesn't fall behind the other UK nations in terms of salary distribution.

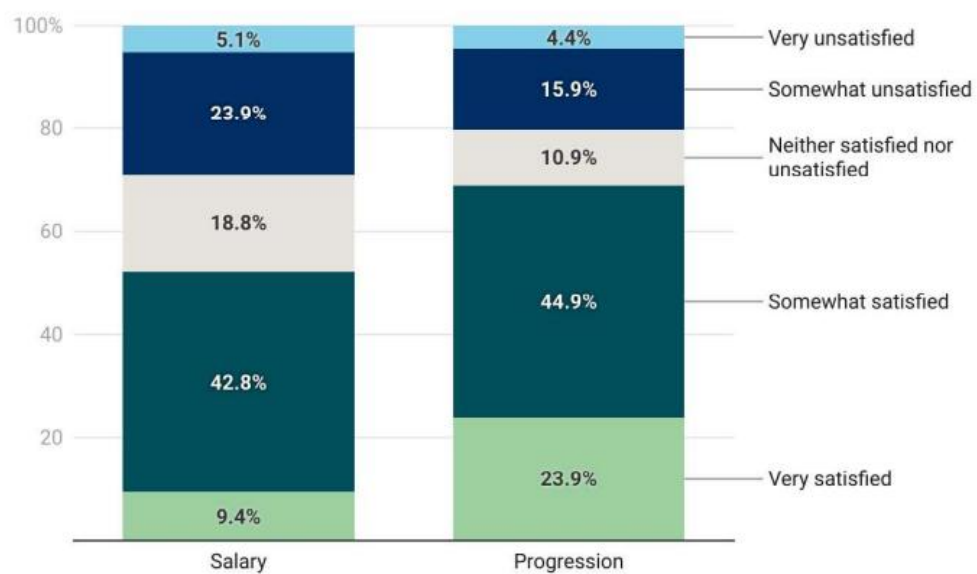


Chart: RTPI • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 17: Salary and career satisfaction in the planning profession in Wales (2025).

Source: [State of the Profession report 2025](#)

Planning salaries in Wales

- 6.6. Public sector average salary bands were created from data collected from jobs advertised between September 2022 and March 2025. The average salary bands for LPA's, NRW, PEDW and WG Planning Division are set out at Appendix 5.
- 6.7. In response to the research survey, 72% of LPAs thought their salaries were lower than private sector salaries. However, during discussions with the private sector, one

contributor suggested that the perception that private salaries are higher than public sector salaries is more of an historical view rather than reflecting current practice.

- 6.8. This data indicates that planning salaries at NRW are generally lower than LPAs, PEDW and WG Planning Division. Overall, salaries tend to be higher within WG Planning Division and PEDW. At senior and managerial levels, PEDW appears to offer higher salaries compared to the other public sector organisations. However, there are limitations regarding the data collected, due to the small number of Chief Planner/Director, managerial planners and business support posts advertised during the survey period (September 2022 to March 2025). For this reason, it has not been possible to identify any regional variations in salaries across the LPAs. The dataset used in this research requires strengthening moving forward to obtain a more accurate representation of average salaries in the public sector.

Comparing public and private sector salaries

- 6.9. The Wales Planning Consultants' Forum was asked to compare in broad terms private sector salaries with the data collected on public sector salaries. Unlike public sector salaries, the private sector rarely publicises salaries in job advertisements and culturally is generally reticent to discuss salaries. Only two individuals from the Forum, working for separate private sector companies, were willing to engage in this discussion. This provided only anecdotal evidence of the perceptions and realities of salaries across the sectors, albeit from a small number of contributors. This anecdotal feedback was supplemented by research published by Carrington West (see Appendix 5).
- 6.10. The two contributors felt it was important to be mindful of the wide variation of company sizes and operational scales in the private sector, when considering salaries. Both contributors considered salaries within the private sector to be broadly consistent with the average salary ranges for public sector roles set out in Appendix 5. One private sector contributor specifically noted, in their experience, private sector salaries aligned well with the WG Planning Division average salary ranges. Managerial level salaries in PEDW were considered to be higher than in the private sector, although they highlighted challenges in making direct comparisons due to

significant differences in the skill sets required at that level in the private sector versus PEDW. It must be recognised that Planning Inspectors are personally responsible for making decisions on behalf of the Welsh Ministers, without interference from any senior manager, whereas in LPAs that level of responsibility usually falls to a Chief Planning Officer and in the private sector client-related decisions ultimately fall to a director.

- 6.11. While there is some alignment in salary levels between the public and private sectors, notable differences remain in organisational culture, business practices, and broader employment conditions. Historical perceptions about salary disparities may no longer reflect the current environment.
- 6.12. Several factors influence salary differences across the sector. Pension schemes can vary significantly between sectors, with public sector pensions often cited as an attractive part of the overall pay package. Within LPAs, stereotypical views of 9-to-5 working hours are largely history, with many respondents reporting that they frequently work additional unpaid hours. That said, annual leave entitlement is typically more generous in the public sector, and non-management positions benefit from flexi time. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that many of the wider flexible working practices traditionally offered by the public sector such as flexible working hours, agile working or part time contracts are now widespread in the private sector too.
- 6.13. The private sector has a bonus culture and softer benefits such as private healthcare and gym membership, an established mentoring programme and attractive career prospects. The public sector is bound by rigid tiers and standardised pay scales whereas the private sector offers greater flexibility in salary negotiation, influenced by factors such as individual performance, demand or company profitability, ultimately leading to disparities in salaries between sectors.
- 6.14. In the private sector, Chartered status is needed to win commissions and secure promotion, and is funded by the employer. In contrast, Chartered status has been removed from some public sector job descriptions in response to recruitment challenges: surprisingly, not all of Wales's Chief Planners are Chartered. Many LPA employees must fund their own professional membership, and astonishingly, in some

cases must fund their own CPD due to a lack of training budget. This reflects a disappointing lack of appreciation of professions by some local authorities.

- 6.15. Carrington West published a [‘2025 Salary Survey & Guide For the UK Built Environment’](#): the booklet recognises the resourcing issues in most local authority planning departments and planning consultancies. In October, the Chancellor announced plans for £46m investment to help hire 300 graduates and apprentices to work in LPAs in England in response to a 20% real term reduction in budgets since 2008 ([State of the Profession – England 2025 report](#)). Notwithstanding a small amount of funding for the Pathways to Planning scheme (which has had limited take-up), there has been no comparable investment in recruitment or growing the pipeline of planners in Wales despite a far greater (43%) real term reduction in LPA budgets over the same period.
- 6.16. Another factor that might influence the attractiveness of the sectors is exposure to abuse and criticism. The 2025 RTPI membership survey [State of the Profession report for Wales](#) found that 79% of public sector planners in Wales had experienced work-related abuse compared to 50% of private sector workers.
- 6.17. A further focused study, that collects more data would be required to quantify, clarify and better understand these trends as well as exploring the drivers, other than salary, that influence planning practitioners’ choice of employment sector (see recommendation 5).

7. Future workforce and succession planning

- 7.1. The [RTPI’s State of the Profession report \(2023\)](#) estimated that in 2023 there were 1,500 planners in Wales (across all sectors). This is in comparison to an [estimated 800 planners in Northern Ireland, 1,600 in Scotland, and 18,100 in England](#). The State of the Profession report went on to explain, between 2009 and 2023 planners working in the private sector grew, while the number of planners working in the public sector declined. “Estimates in the Annual Population Survey suggest that in the

period 2013-2020 a quarter of planners could have left the public sector”, across the UK.

7.2. The RTPI’s [State of the Profession report for Wales \(2025\)](#) asked RTPI members living or working in Wales about their career plans in three years’ time (Figure 18):

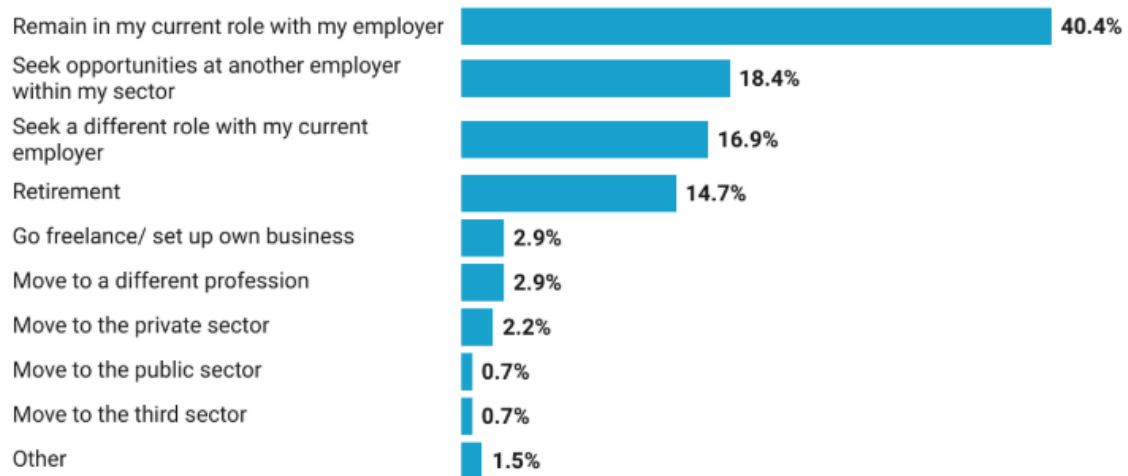


Chart: RTPI • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 18 Three-year career plan of RTPI member respondents in Wales

Source: [State of the Profession 2025: Wales](#)

7.3. The data behind the graph above shows that 38% of public sector planners anticipate staying where they are currently working (compared to 47% of private sector planners). A higher proportion of private sector planners (28%) planned to seek opportunities elsewhere in the private sector, while only 16% of public sector planners planned to move elsewhere in the public sector. Just 2.2% of public sector planners were likely to seek to move to the private sector, and a tiny 0.7% of private sector planners were likely to do the opposite. The key issue for the future of public sector planning, however, is an ageing workforce, with 16% of public sector planners looking to retire in the next three years:

“Overall, the sum of respondents wanting to leave the profession, and those intending to retire suggests that 17.6% will likely be leaving planning in the coming three years.”

7.4. This data aligns with our research on the age profile of the public sector planning workforce in Wales.

Public sector age profile

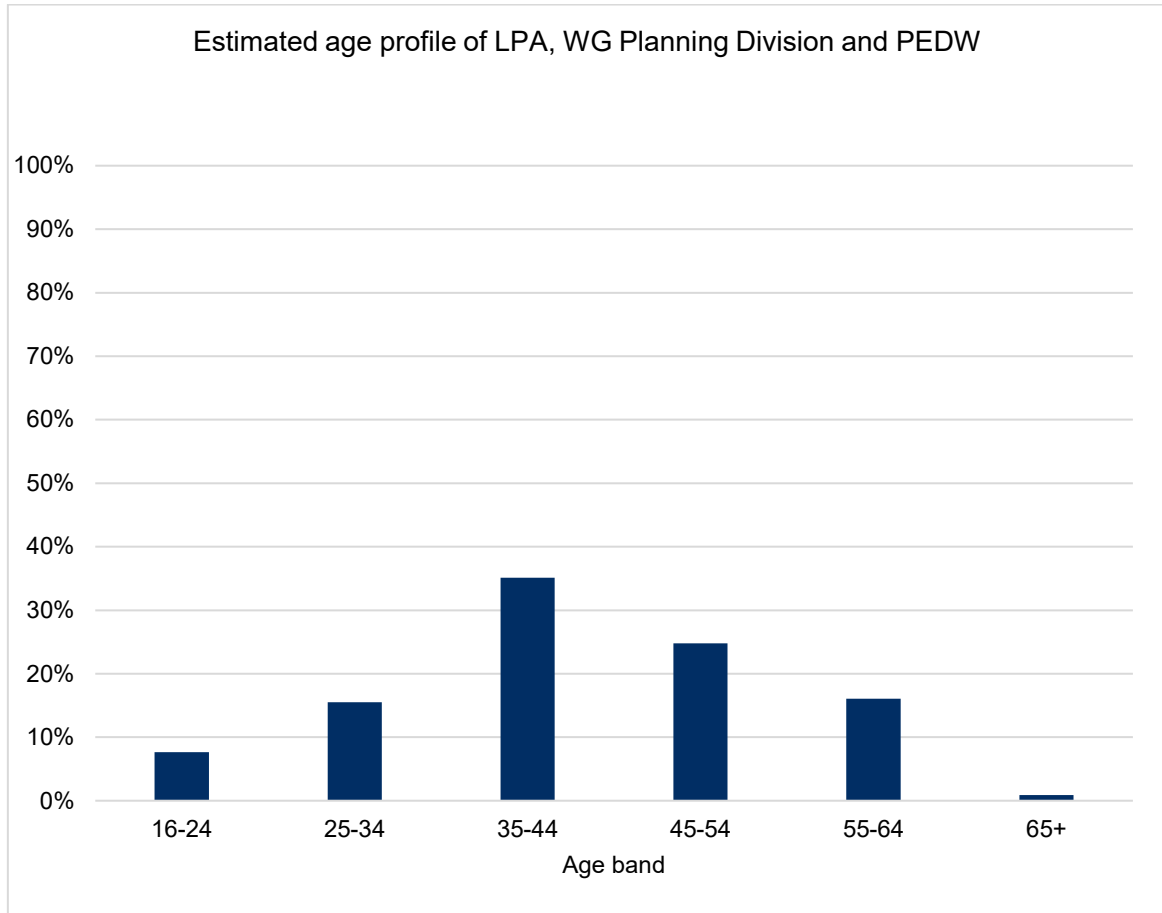


Figure 19: Estimated age profile of planners within responding LPAs, WG Planning Division and PEDW. Data accessed via RTPI research survey (May 2025).

7.5. The data in Figure 19 shows the age data for the planning public sector in Wales:

- 8% of the workforce is aged between 16-24;
- 16% of the workforce is aged between 25-34;
- 35% of the workforce is aged between 35-44;
- 25% of the workforce is aged between 45-54;
- 16% of the workforce is aged between 55-64;
- 1% of the workforce is aged 65+.

- 7.6. The above graph shows there is potential to lose 17% (95 planners: those aged 55+) of public sector planners from the workforce within the next five to ten years due to retirement. This figure increases to 42% (234 planners: those aged 45+) when looking at a medium-term horizon of ten to 20 years. Unless robust succession planning is in place complemented by a strong pipeline of new planners, this loss of planning knowledge and leadership will have a catastrophic impact on service delivery and planning outcomes.
- 7.7. Our research shows a concentration of mid-career planners (35-44 years), who may be well placed to progress into senior/managerial roles, however we also heard widespread concern that early career planners are reluctant to take on more senior roles. Further research is needed to understand and address this reluctance. Supporting mid-career planners must be a key priority. This requires time and resource that are currently lacking, in order to provide upskilling, management training, mentorship and knowledge transfer within teams.
- 7.8. Development of the workforce at this mid-career level, needs to go hand in hand with nurturing and enlarging the modest number of young planners that have entered the profession. The 16-24 age range makes up just 8% of the public sector workforce at responding LPAs, WG Planning Division and PEDW. These young planners represent the future of our profession and the leaders of tomorrow. Encouragement, training and knowledge transfer at this stage in their career will support their professional development. Practical strategies could include training, apprenticeships, internships and bursaries. Investing in personal skills, including communication and project management while developing technical skills and understanding can all help to retain young talent. This is discussed further at Section 9. The RTPPI has recently launched an [online mentoring platform](#) available to all members in addition to its Chief Planners of Tomorrow shadowing opportunity. The new mentoring programme focuses on general career development, regardless of career stage. This programme connects planners allowing them to share knowledge, skills and experience to help each other advance in their careers, transition into new areas, or navigate specific challenges.

- 7.9. The largest proportion of workforce (35%) is within the 35-44 age range, indicating a strong cohort of mid-career planners currently working within LPAs. This suggests a current strength of experienced planners who, with support, could be ready to step up to more senior and management roles. Just 16% of the workforce is aged 25-34, reflecting over a decade of austerity measures and reduced public sector recruitment.
- 7.10. A significant proportion of the workforce (42%) is over the age of 45, and 17% is over the age of 55. This raises concerns in the short- to medium-term around retirement, loss of experience, skills and institutional knowledge, especially given the low proportion of under 35s for longer-term succession planning. Although the statutory retirement age is increasing, it remains to be seen what proportion of the workforce chooses to work longer particularly given feelings of burnout from relentless pressure. The change to average salary pensions might enable some people to work reduced hours or switch to a more junior role to balance remaining in employment with reduced stress, therefore softening the impact of this ageing workforce.
- 7.11. The proportion of the workforce over the age of 45 increases to 50% when looking solely at planning enforcement teams (Appendix 6), highlighting a stark need for succession planning in this area.
- 7.12. Only 8% of the workforce falls within the 16-24 age range. The development of planning apprenticeships and growth in bursaries in Wales is essential to strengthen this age range in the future. Increased planning application fees provide additional income for reinvestment in service delivery, and Heads of Planning, Chief Finance Officers and politicians need to show strong leadership in securing this reinvestment. However, bursary and apprentice schemes take time to develop and require significant financial investment, plus time and capacity for mentoring.
- 7.13. The clear need for growth in the 16-24 and 25–34 age ranges requires consideration: these age cohorts must be strengthened to balance out the projected retirements within the higher age ranges over the next five to ten years. It signals a potential for greater collaborative working between stakeholders including the Welsh Government, WLGA, RTPi, universities and practitioners on early career recruitment

and strategies to strengthen these numbers. These age categories need a long-term commitment to apprenticeships and bursaries, skills development and the offer of future internal progression. This requires investing time to develop courses and to mentor participants, financial investment and capacity on accredited courses.

NRW age profile

7.14. NRW undertook its own workforce planning exercise in March 2024 and has provided that data. NRW's service age profile results are set out in Figure 20. This data includes a wider series of functions than just planning, but it provides a helpful picture. The average age in NRW's advisory/case management service is 41 years.

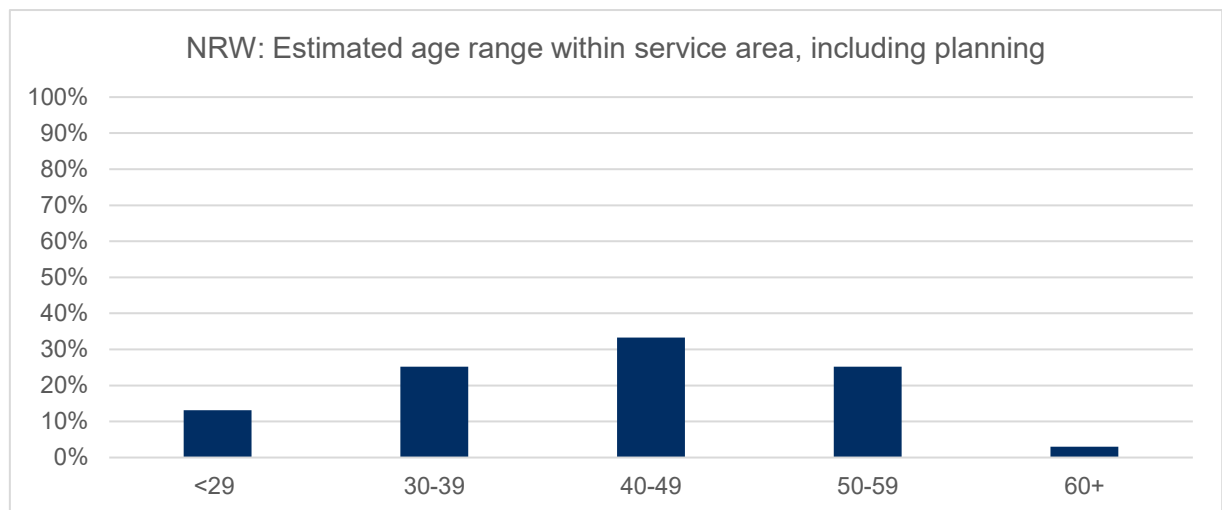


Figure 20: Estimated age distribution of NRW National Development Planning and Marine Advice Service, including planners. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

7.15. The data in Figure 20 shows the estimate age data for NRW:

- 13% of the workforce is under 29;
- 25% of the workforce is between 30-39;
- 33% of the workforce is between 40-49;
- 25% of the workforce is between 50-59;
- 3% of the workforce is over 60.

8. Skills and capacity

LPA skills and capacity

Additional duties affecting the planning system since April 2018

- 8.1. Over the last five years, the planning system has faced a growing range of additional duties, that have had a significant impact on capacity and delivery within the planning system. This report does not assess the value of the individual additional duties on the system; however, it does recognise the intention and ambition behind those changes, alongside an increased pressure on the system, due to the additional duties not being fully resourced or requiring upskilling of already stretched planners or specialist officers such as ecologists.
- 8.2. Each LPA was asked to provide an overview of additional duties directly relating to and affecting the capacity of the planning service since April 2018. Their responses are set out below.
- 8.3. **Additional duties**
- Greater burden of work with ecology/biodiversity;
 - Policy demands - affordable housing, viability, green infrastructure requirements, biodiversity enhancement, heritage impact assessments, landscape and visual impact assessments;
 - Regional planning agenda;
 - Increased legislative responsibilities and constraints such as NRW Phosphate guidance;
 - Increase in large scale renewable energy projects;
 - Impact of nutrient neutrality requirements including marine SACs;
 - Timescales for determination of applications within the SAC catchment;
 - Biodiversity enhancement, GI statements, drainage statements, SAB process, roads review, flooding and TAN15;

- DNS schemes and the required LIR are a significant drain on staff resource with very little time to do the work required and not sufficient fee remuneration compared with the fee kept by PEDW;
- New technologies e.g. hydrogen production, data centres;
- New considerations in terms of net zero and carbon reduction;
- Additional responsibilities and roles placed on senior staff who are now managing multiple teams and often other disciplines;
- Public scrutiny;
- The need to quickly upskill.

8.4. **Process**

- LDP drop dead dates;
- Poor quality applications;
- Litigious culture, risk aversion and longer reports;
- Customer expectations (since covid) including more FOIs;
- Greater weight of attention to placemaking and design;
- Increased complexity of dealing with minor and householder applications;
- More scrutiny and consultation in general on all applications;
- Cases are becoming more complex but the time frames for determination have not changed;
- The level of redaction of information now required;
- LDP frontloading / more complex LDP process;
- DNS applications impose additional pressure on LPAs without providing the necessary resources to support them (e.g. planning fees);
- Emerging SDP manual and the pressure from Welsh Government to focus on regional planning without additional resources has further distracted Authorities away from delivering LDPs.

8.5. **Lack of guidance**

- Changes in legislation with a lack of supporting practical guidance;
- The frequency of obtaining barristers advice due to inconsistent interpretation of legislation.

8.6. **Budgets**

- Income - changes to Welsh Government Planning legislation has resulted in large scale applications e.g. energy developments being determined by the Welsh Government as opposed to the local planning authority, with a consequent loss of fee income of £0.9m;
- Negative impact of refund of planning fees.

8.7. **Capacity**

- Staffing levels have reduced significantly over a prolonged period;
- More HRAs required - lack of ecologists to undertake them;
- Staff turnover is high.

"Many planning policy managers are now responsible for much more than planning policy and some have whole other specialisms of work." (LPA respondent)

"In broad terms, the Planning Service has over a prolonged period has had to deal with a perfect storm of challenges. In addition to the ever-increasing workload, these challenges include shortages in staff resources, recruitment difficulties linked to pay and rewards, the expectations of developers, their agents, the public and politicians, and the broadening of planning and process requirements (including legislation)." (LPA respondent)

- 8.8. If LPAs are to fully embrace and fully deliver on these additional duties, it is essential that support structures, adequate resourcing, sufficient time and training are all in place.

Identifying and addressing skills and capacity gaps

8.9. LPAs were asked in their opinion, if their team has enough people with the following skills to work effectively. The 24 responses received are set out at Figure 21.

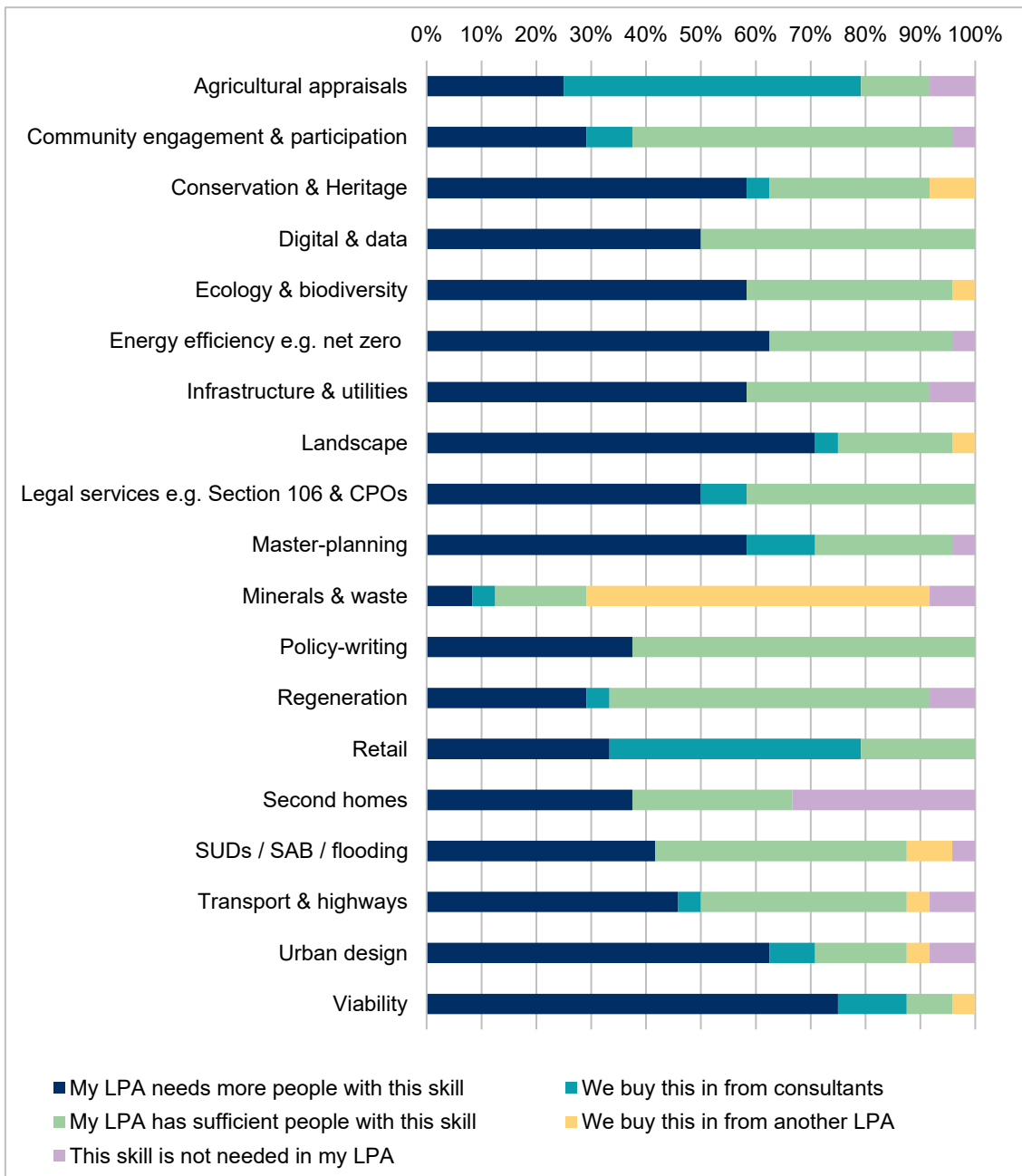


Figure 21: Skills and skills gaps within responding LPAs. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

8.10. The data in Figure 21 is explained below:

- First of all, in terms of agricultural appraisals, 25% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 54% said they buy this from consultants, 13% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of community engagement and participation, 29% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 8% said they buy this from consultants, 58% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of conservation and heritage, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4% said they buy this from consultants, 29% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 8% said they buy this from other LPAs;
- In terms of digital and data, 50% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, and 50% said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- In terms of ecology and biodiversity, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 38% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said they buy this from other LPAs;
- In terms of energy efficiency, 63% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 33% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of infrastructure and utilities, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 33% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 8% said that this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of landscape, 71% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4% said they buy this from consultants, 21% said they have sufficient people in this skill, and 4% said they buy this from another LPA;

- In terms of legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs, 50% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 8% said they buy this from consultants, and 42% said they have sufficient people in this skill;
- In terms of master-planning, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 13% said they buy this from consultants, 25% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of minerals and waste, 8% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4 % said they buy this from consultants, 17% said they have sufficient people in this skill, 63% said they buy this from another LPA, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of policy-writing, 38% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, and 63% said they have sufficient people in this skill;
- In terms of regeneration, 29% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4% said they buy this from consultants, 58% said they have sufficient people in this skill, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of retail, 33% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 46% said they buy this in from consultants, and 21% said they have sufficient people in this skill;
- In terms of second homes, 38% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 33% said they have sufficient people in this skill, and 29% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of SuDS / SAB / flooding, 42% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 46% said they have sufficient people in this skill, 8% said they buy this in from another LPA, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;

- In terms of transport and highways, 46% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 4% said they buy this in from consultants, 38% said they have sufficient people with this skill, 4% said they buy this in from another LPA, and 8.3% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- In terms of urban design, 63% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 8% said they buy this in from consultants, 17% said they have sufficient people with this skill, 4% said they buy this in from another LPA, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA;
- And finally, in terms of viability, 75% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 13% said they buy this in from consultants, 8% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said they buy this in from another LPA.

8.11. LPAs were also asked if any planning-related skills or services could be effectively delivered as a shared service, and on what footprint would that best work. LPAs were largely open to discussions around shared services. However, concerns were raised around governance, funding, and the risk of simply redistributing overstretched staff. From the research interviews, it was widely considered that shared services are most viable where local knowledge is less critical and where regional consistency, specialist expertise and resilience are beneficial. Even then, it was considered clear roles and funding are required. However, practical challenges remain, including travel requirements for site visits, salary differentials, and LPAs concerned that they lose the ability to influence work priorities.

8.12. Respondents were given the opportunity to expand on their skills and capacity. Six respondents took the opportunity to raise several issues, including:

“Most of the skills capacity lie outside the scope of the service and are subject to competing priorities and medium term financial strategy. We can sometimes overcome this by cross funding through PPAs etc. on an ad hoc basis but more resources may allow more permanent measures.” (LPA respondent)

“We would be interested in exploring shared services going forward particularly in hard to recruit specialist posts. We have successfully worked with Pembs NPA to assist up-skilling an internal person to become a tree officer. This was great.” (LPA respondent)

8.13. Moreover, the specialists providing essential input into planning decisions are rarely working solely on planning. As one LPA survey respondent noted, “ecologists, arborists, highways and drainage engineers are embedded within other service areas carrying out a range of other duties. It would be difficult to effectively peel these away into a shared service.”

8.14. The successful shared minerals and waste services, run on a North Wales and South Wales footprint, are often cited as a success, however this footprint is unlikely to work for most topic areas.

“In my view it would be very difficult to deliver planning related services on a shared basis with a particular/meaningful benefit, other than potentially reducing management costs. I am responsible for Public Rights of Way and there is potentially scope for regional working in my view but not really a planning related service.” (LPA respondent)

“Where skills require site visits then there is a maximum area that they can cover before the cost and time of travel tips the balance to being less efficient. Sub regional areas such as three to four local authority areas would be a good basis for specialist skills.” (LPA respondent)

“Collaborative working requires a buy in not just to see a reduction in costs, but to provide resilience, capacity, consistency and peer support in delivering specialist skills.” (LPA respondent)

“This approach may complicate workload prioritisation. Ensuring that LPAs are appropriately resourced would be more beneficial for delivering a quick and efficient service.” (LPA respondent)

Spatial distribution of gaps in specialist skills and capacity

- 8.15. Data from Figure 21 is broken down in the section below to display the percentage of LPAs within the four CJC regions that answered 'My LPA has sufficient people with this skill'. The maps below do not include data from National Park Authorities because two of the three National Parks straddle multiple regions.
- 8.16. PEDW and WG Planning Division were asked to provide their views on LPA skills and if they considered there to be widespread, localised or no skill gaps for different topics. Their opinions are included below. NRW added that there is a widespread gap in relation to nutrient neutrality and Habitats Regulations advice.
- 8.17. Based on these findings, recommendation 6 sets out topic areas that should be explored further for delivery on a larger-than-local footprint.

Agricultural appraisals

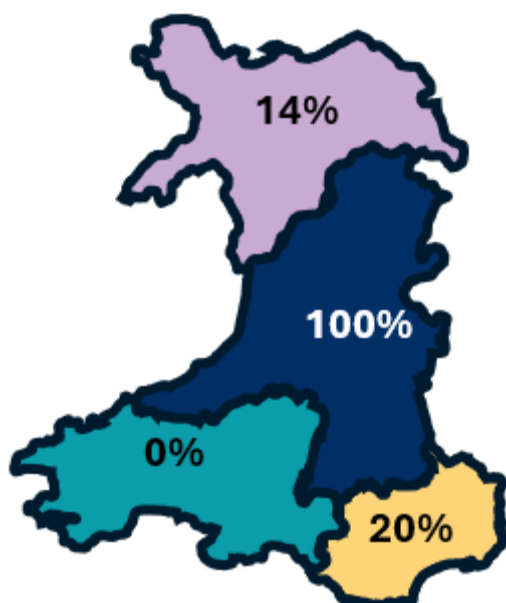


Figure 22: Map of agricultural appraisal skill sufficiency

- 8.18. The data from Figure 22 shows:
- 14% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 100% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.19. Responses to this topic area varied widely across Wales, from no LPA in the South West Wales region considering they have sufficient capacity to all LPAs in the Mid Wales region. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW consider there to be only localised skills gaps for this topic.

8.20. Of particular note, over half of LPAs buy in this expertise from consultancies. This established model has worked well for decades and there does not seem to be any appetite to bring the service in-house, for example via a regional service. Given that the current arrangement works, respondents were understandably focused on other topics with problematic skills and capacity gaps, with only one respondent commenting that agriculture could be considered as a shared service.

8.21. No change to the service delivery model is recommended for this topic.

Community engagement and participation

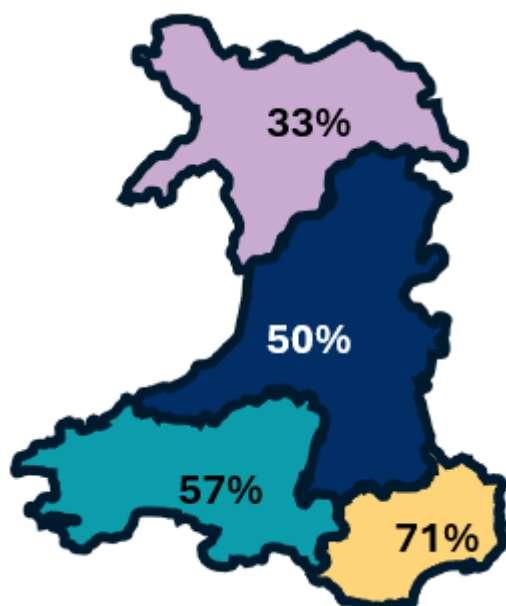


Figure 23: Map of community engagement and participation skill sufficiency

8.22. The data in Figure 23 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 57% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 71% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

- 8.23. Responses to this topic area varied significantly geographically, with 71% of LPAs in South East Wales considering themselves to have sufficient capacity and skills, dropping to 33% in North Wales. These figures broadly match the responses to the regeneration topic area, and there may be a growing link between Placemaking Plans undertaken by regeneration teams and other community engagement work. The Welsh Government Planning Division considers there to be localised skills gaps for this topic. Encouragingly, PEDW does not identify a skills gap for this topic area.
- 8.24. Given the need for community engagement to be delivered locally, there is no merit in seeking to deliver this via a larger-than-local footprint. Moreover, SDP adoption will trigger simultaneous pan-regional LDP reviews, meaning a regional service workload would have an unmanageable 'feast or famine' cycle.
- 8.25. It should, of course, be recognised that planning legislation sets out the statutory requirements for consultation on LDPs, SIP, planning applications and appeals. The extent to which such consultation represents effective community engagement is debatable. [Recent research](#) by the RTPI found that less than 14% of planners think the public understands the purpose of planning and 60% do not think the public understands when or how to engage with the planning process. Other recent research for the RTPI by Demos found that over 50% of people do not know how to take part in consultations about development in their local area.
- 8.26. The solution to the skills gap for community engagement is therefore training rather than a different service delivery model.

Conservation and heritage

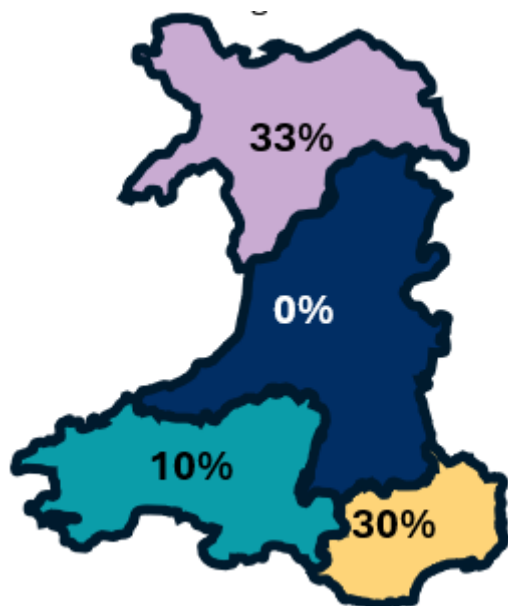


Figure 24: Map of conservation and heritage skill sufficiency

8.27. The data in Figure 24 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 10% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.28. Concerns about capacity for this topic area were widespread throughout Wales but greatest in the South West Wales and Mid Wales regions. PEDW considers there to be localised skills gaps, but WG Planning Division does not identify a skills gap in this topic area.

8.29. Several respondents suggested heritage and built conservation could be considered as a shared service. While the idea of operating on a larger-than-local footprint shows potential for addressing capacity issues for this specialism, there are concerns among some LPAs about the loss of local ownership in decision-making and whether the scale and volume of heritage work and the very site-specific level of detail means it could be effectively managed beyond the local level.

- 8.30. The North Wales shared services model provides a good example of how such specialist work can be delivered, with a case officer from the shared service team deployed to process the application and make a recommendation to the Head of Planning or Planning Committee. Consequently, decision-making remains at the local level.
- 8.31. There are existing examples of shared service provision, for example a trial with Monmouthshire Council providing heritage services to Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils. The extent of the shared service is a careful balance of capacity and economies of scale: for this reason, a conscious decision was made to not extend the shared service to Newport Council.
- 8.32. A sub-regional service delivery footprint is recommended for this topic where local circumstances require additional capacity and resilience.

Digital and data

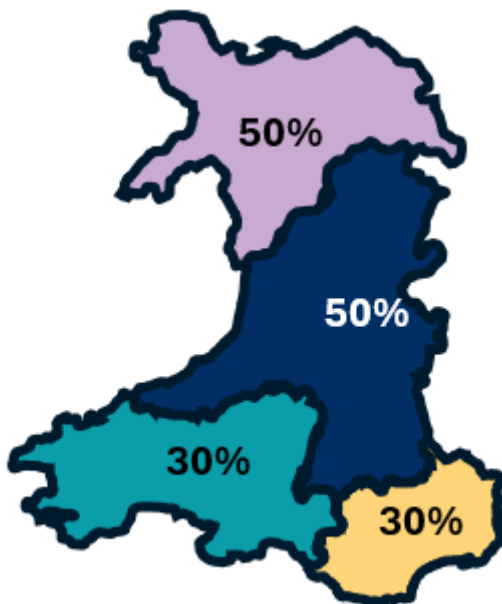


Figure 25: Map of digital and data skill sufficiency

- 8.33. The data in Figure 25 shows:
- 50% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 30% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

- 8.34. Due to the wording of the question, there is ambiguity about whether LPA responses were based on current digital and data activities or a forward-looking approach to future-proofing services and the opportunities and challenges of new digital and AI technology. Nevertheless, 54% of LPAs indicated a need for more personnel with digital and data skills, underlining a widespread capacity gap in this area. WG Planning Division identified this as a widespread skills gap.
- 8.35. Two respondents noted the potential for a digital shared service, with one raising IT systems to be streamlined between all LPAs and another noting the potential of shared back-office systems.
- 8.36. [Research commissioned by RTPI Cymru and undertaken by Cardiff University](#) shows that digital capacity is uneven across LPAs. The research found that most planners are confident using standard digital tools, however the adoption of more advanced technologies, such as GIS, AI, and digital engagement platforms, varies across authorities. Some LPAs are actively developing digital practices, while others remain reliant on hybrid/paper-based systems and legacy infrastructure.
- 8.37. The research identified standardisation, leadership, and collaboration as essential, calling for stronger national leadership and a coordinated governance framework to support consistent and scalable digital planning.
- 8.38. Recent work by CDPS has shown a clear lack of capacity to engage effectively in new digital projects.
- 8.39. An all-Wales model is recommended for this topic in the context of exploring and rolling out new technology and upskilling planners, potential economies of scale, providing resilience, maximising use of expertise and providing consistency across Wales. Recommendation 7 seeks further exploration of the potential for use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-

based human judgement and expertise. This will require strong leadership and collaboration.

Ecology and biodiversity

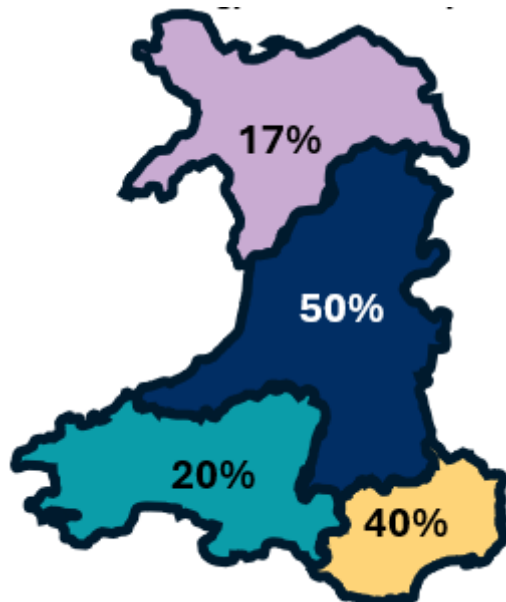


Figure 26: Map of ecology and biodiversity skill sufficiency

8.40. The data Figure 26 shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 40% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

“Increase in focus on water quality is triggering more work on Habitats Regulations Assessment and a need for more skills in this area.” (LPA respondent)

8.41. Notwithstanding the widespread concern about capacity expressed by LPAs, both WG Planning Division and PEDW identify only local gaps in terms of this skill set. Discussions suggest that the LPA concern is primarily about the delays to timely decision-making caused by a lack of capacity in ecology and biodiversity teams, whereas PEDW’s experience reflects the robust nature of evidence given on this

topic at appeal and at LDP examination. In other words, the outcomes are robust but too slow.

- 8.42. Several LPAs highlighted that even though the number of biodiversity / ecology experts had remained consistent, in order to fund retention of their posts and offset Council budget savings, their capacity had frequently been diverted to bidding for and then delivering a range of green infrastructure and ecological enhancement grant-funded projects rather than core planning work. This is just one example of how the data potentially masks some complex challenges facing planning authorities.
- 8.43. LPAs recognise ecology and biodiversity as being increasingly important planning considerations because of national planning policy, case law and nutrient neutrality considerations affecting nine SAC rivers in Wales, and, more recently, a number of marine SAC areas. NRW recognises this as a widespread skills and capacity gap across Wales, while affected LPAs expressed concern regarding the lack of guidance and leadership in identifying acceptable solutions.
- 8.44. Ceredigion Council hosts a Nutrient Management Board as a shared service and it is becoming clear that solutions to nutrient neutrality will require a regional or all-Wales approach, in particular to clarify what solutions are acceptable to NRW, how they will be delivered, funded and managed in the long term.
- 8.45. Ecology, trees and nature conservation were noted by several LPA respondents as a possible shared service, with joint (more-than-local), regional and Wales-wide footprints suggested.
- 8.46. A river catchment footprint would be the best footprint for nutrient neutrality and NMBs even though it adds yet another layer to the already complex geography of service delivery in Wales. A regional footprint would have the advantage of feeding directly into emerging SDPs but it doesn't reflect the geography of the issue in question. For example, for the Mid Wales region, Powys relates to parts of the South East Wales region and England for this topic while Ceredigion relates to parts of the South West Wales region.

Energy efficiency (e.g. net zero)

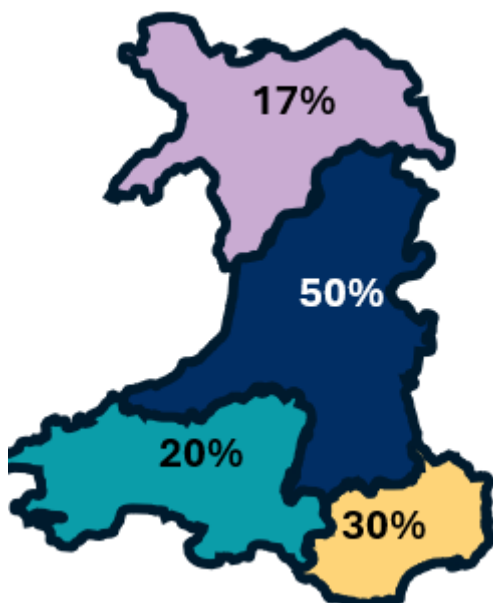


Figure 27: Map of energy efficiency skill sufficiency

8.47. The data in Figure 27 shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.48. A significant 63% of LPAs reported needing more capacity to support energy efficiency and net-zero initiatives. However, this need varies based on each authority's progress and policy direction. For instance, two LPAs that are actively developing LDPs policies focused on low-carbon and net-zero homes acknowledged the need for additional capacity. Conversely, an LPA that has not yet begun its Revised LDP process stated that this expertise is currently unnecessary.

8.49. One respondent suggested a shared service could be considered on a CJC footprint, focusing on specialist areas for development management, including energy.

8.50. Given the technical nature of evaluating compliance with low-carbon building standards, there is potential for this to be delivered through an all-Wales service, as the work is not inherently tied to specific geographies. Moreover, in terms of policy,

the development industry cannot function if every LPA in Wales has a different, low carbon policy requirement. National planning policy or, better still, Building Regulations should set this standard for the whole of Wales to provide consistency and certainty to all stakeholders, in particular housebuilders.

8.51. An all-Wales footprint is the recommended service delivery model for this topic.

Infrastructure and utilities

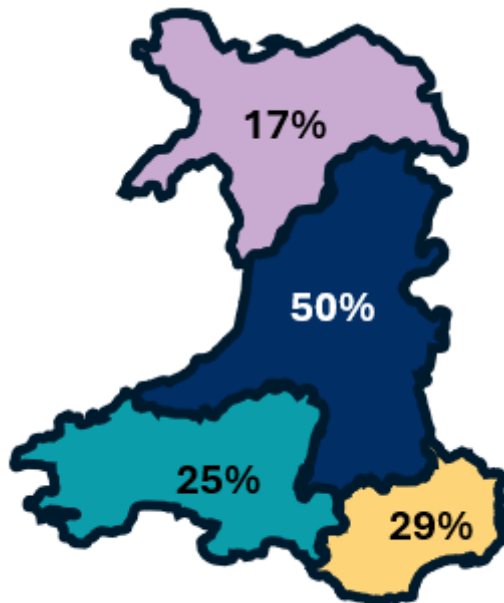


Figure 28: Map of infrastructure and utilities skill sufficiency

8.52. The data in Figure 28 shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 29% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.53. Concern regarding infrastructure delivery is an increasingly cited objection to LDPs and development proposals (specifically that existing infrastructure such as schools, health care and roads are at capacity and cannot accommodate new homes). However, only 54% of LPAs identified this as an area where additional capacity is needed, and 33% stated they have sufficient capacity. The picture was mixed

geographically, with the greatest concern raised in North Wales. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

- 8.54. In June 2025, the Welsh Government announced funding for two new regional posts to provide additional capacity for energy infrastructure projects on the same regional footprint as the minerals and waste services, hosted by Ambition North Wales.
- 8.55. One respondent suggested major/strategic developments would be better delivered on a north east Wales subregional basis or via the existing North Wales shared service. Another LPA suggested larger renewable energy projects (for example local impact reports for SIP) could be considered as a shared service. This model works well for minerals and waste, and allows expertise to be provided to LPAs, who retain decision-making powers (and do the administrative work).
- 8.56. It is recommended that multiple footprints are needed for the broad category of infrastructure: a North Wales and South Wales footprint is recommended for local impact reports on SIP-scale development, using the minerals and waste service delivery model; a regional footprint should be used for transport infrastructure to align with Regional Transport Plans and SDPs and also for assessing need and identifying locations for Gypsy Roma Traveller transit sites/stopping places; and a LPA footprint should be used for local-level infrastructure such as education and healthcare (noting that the current Health Board footprint does not align with any other geography).

Landscape

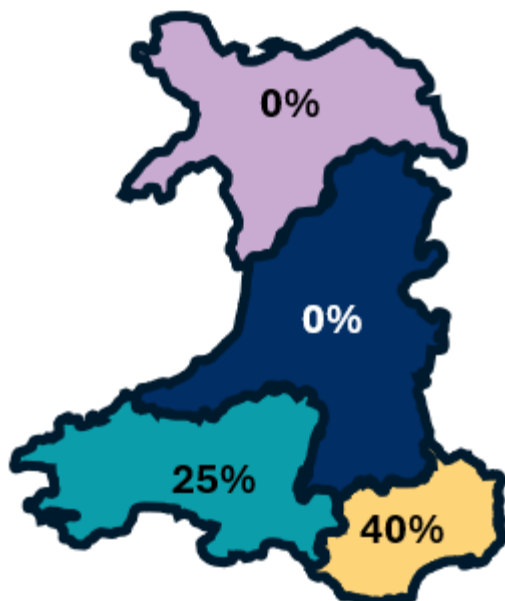


Figure 29: Map of landscape skill sufficiency

8.57. The data in Figure 29 shows:

- 0% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 40% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.58. Landscape was recognised as a necessary skill set by every LPA, yet 71% identified a lack of capacity within their LPA. This is potentially due to the increased emphasis on landscape and biodiversity in [national planning policy](#) and [Future Wales 2040](#), including recent introduction of the stepwise approach. Responses to ‘ecology and biodiversity’ were almost identical. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

“Increase in offshore wind proposals is generating a need for more landscape skills in this area.” (LPA respondent)

8.59. Six LPA respondents suggested that landscape could be considered on a shared services basis. One National Park respondent felt landscape specialists could be

helpful from a National Park perspective either across all three National Parks or across neighbouring LPAs.

8.60. Of note, one UK-wide planning consultancy advised RTPI Cymru that it has experienced difficulty recruiting landscape expertise in areas distant from an associated university course. It is understood that there is no such course offered in Wales, and that competition from employers in Bristol and the south west of England attracts most graduates from the degree course in Bristol University. The current challenges facing the higher education sector mean there is no appetite to establish new courses at present.

Legal services

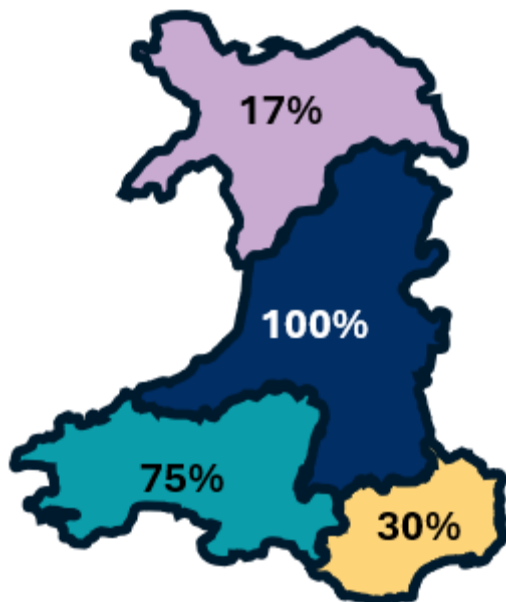


Figure 30: Map of legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs

8.61. The data in Figure 30 shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 100% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 75% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

- 8.62. Legal planning services typically involve preparing enforcement notices, S.106 planning contribution agreements, advising planning committees as required and compulsory purchase orders. Although the [Home Builders Federation \(HBF\) research](#) on S.106 delays focused on England, it highlighted significant bottlenecks in the process, albeit many of which are not solely attributable to LPAs due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders. It is worth noting in this respect, that the [Affordable Housing Task Force](#) recommends standardised S106 templates to streamline procedures. In November 2025, Town Legal LLP kickstarted this work by publishing [S.106 agreement template agreements](#).
- 8.63. Across Wales, 54% of LPAs report a lack of legal capacity, with 8% outsourcing these services to consultants. The remaining 38% report sufficient capacity: these were mostly rural authorities where the smaller scale of development proposals will mean there are fewer complex S.106 agreements. The Welsh Government Planning Division identifies legal expertise as a widespread skills and capacity gap.
- 8.64. A recurring training topic via the last three annual RTPI Cymru Planning Enforcement Conferences has been drafting Enforcement Notices. This training, delivered by PEDW, seeks to reduce the number of defective Enforcement Notices that come before PEDW Inspectors each year, and highlights a skills gap for both planning enforcement officers and planning legal officers in LPAs. When seeking to invite local authority planning legal officers to its Enforcement Conference or case law updates, RTPI Cymru has noted that there is not even a Wales-wide network of planning legal officers similar to POSW.
- 8.65. One LPA cited legal advice as a possible shared service. Given the need to service Planning Committees, a regional footprint is likely to be a better model. PEDW's experience suggests that legal planning support is fragmented and inconsistent across local authorities.
- 8.66. As suggested by PEDW, consideration should be given to regional legal planning teams who could specialise in planning on a full-time basis, offering greater efficiency and consistency, especially in specialist, or enforcement cases.

Master-planning

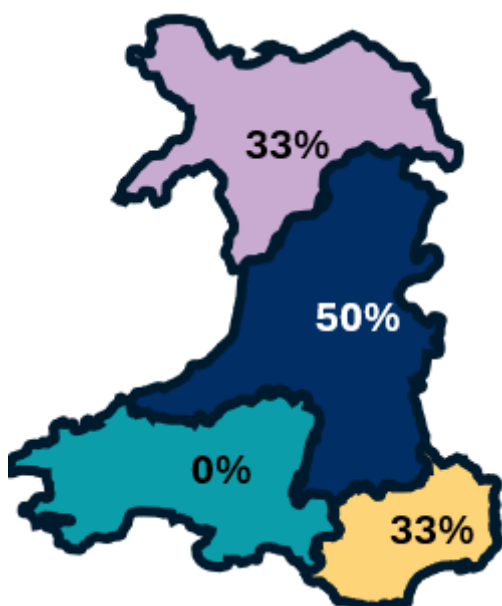


Figure 31: Map of master-planning skill sufficiency

8.67. The data in Figure 31 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 33% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.68. Master-planning was recognised by LPAs as a capacity and skills gap throughout Wales but less so in Mid Wales. This likely directly relates to the location of major and strategic scale applications which need master-planning. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.69. In some LPAs, master-planning is being increasingly used as part of LDP preparation in relation to strategic scale sites. This links to the second tranche LDPs being increasingly front-loaded and requiring greater certainty about infrastructure needs and means of providing it. Some LPAs have used the Design Commission for Wales (DCfW) for support in this regard.

8.70. One LPA respondent suggested some master-planning could be effectively delivered as a shared service, however noting funding as a key factor. At this stage, it is unclear to what extent master-planning strategic scale sites will become the remit of SDPs rather than LDPs, and therefore naturally fall to regional delivery.

Minerals and waste

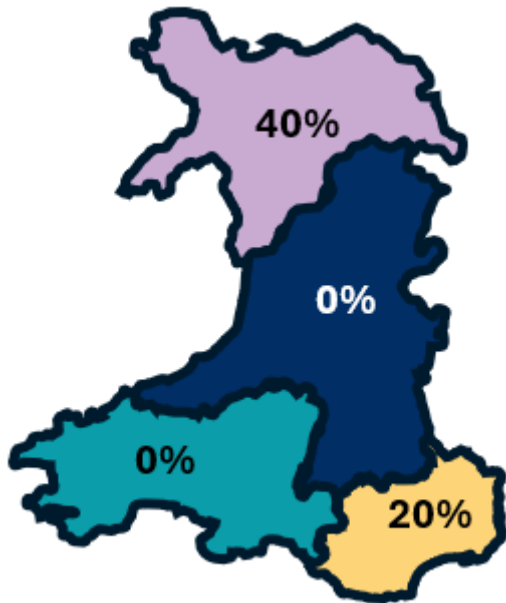


Figure 32: Map of Minerals and Waste skill sufficiency

8.71. The data in Figure 32 shows:

- 40% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.72. The minerals and waste function in Wales is already structured as two shared services: one in North Wales, hosted by Flintshire Council, and another in South Wales (in practice the South West, South East and Mid Wales regions), hosted by Carmarthenshire Council. Some LPAs fund the shared service via a Service Level Agreement while others (with lower service demand) operate on a 'pay as you go' model. 64% of LPAs recognised that they buy-in these skills from one of the two shared services, with one LPA referring to this model as buying from a consultancy

and one Council and one National Park Authority saying this skill is not needed in their area, presumably because it is covered in this way. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

- 8.73. This existing service delivery model offers significant efficiency, expertise and resilience benefits to all LPAs in relation to this complex and specialist topic area that touches each LPA relatively infrequently. It is often cited as a good practice model.
- 8.74. Despite the existing successful shared service model, six LPA respondents suggested that 'minerals' or 'minerals and waste' could be explored as a shared service on a regional/CJC footprint. It is unclear if this was an expression of support for the current model or a lack of awareness that it already exists. Only two respondents consider that they have sufficient capacity on this topic. Both utilise the shared services.
- 8.75. Although the shared service model works well, Carmarthenshire has indicated a need for additional resources to meet demand. This partly relates to existing capacity and partly to the team's age profile and the need for succession planning over coming years. The level of service required varies according to the distribution of mineral reserves and the location of active quarry operations. We would therefore suggest that replicating this model or footprint across other services may not be suitable. Likewise, the current footprint works well for minerals and waste, and there is no tangible benefit in splitting it up to match the four SDP regions as this simply dilutes the expertise and resilience currently offered.

Policy writing

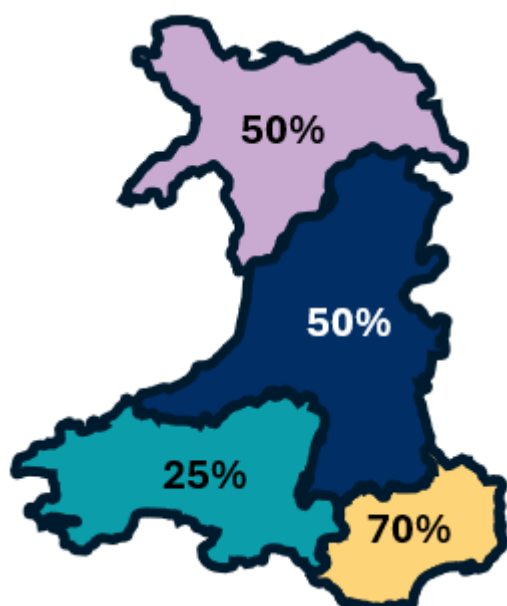


Figure 33: Map of policy-writing skill sufficiency

8.76. The data in Figure 33 shows:

- 50% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 70% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.77. Over half of LPAs consider that they have sufficient people with this skill, while others (mostly those at an advanced stage of working on a replacement LDP) state they need additional people with this skill. Responses appear to have overlooked the impact of emerging SDPs, although it is noted that, at the time of responding to the survey, only one CJC had produced a draft SDP delivery agreement. Moreover, three of the four CJCs envisage hosting an in-house SDP team and therefore LPA responses have consciously focused on their LDP remit rather than the wider planning system's needs. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.78. Future planning workloads are expected to escalate, beginning with the second tranche of LDPs, followed by the introduction of SDPs, and then preparation of 'light

touch' LDPs. These Plans will also require annual monitoring and the production of supplementary planning guidance, necessitating additional capacity in policy teams.

- 8.79. Although regulations allow for Councils to prepare joint LDPs, to date only one joint Plan has been adopted (Gwynedd and Ynys Môn) and work is starting on a joint LDP for Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils. This reflects the local political sensitivity and complexity of LDPs as well as the misalignment of timescales for second tranche LDPs. In the longer term, there may be scope for joint "light touch" LDPs, the triggering of which would be synchronised by adoption of the region's SDP. However, even if a good rationale exists for joint "light touch" LDPs, it will require a culture change politically, especially when local authorities will be coming to terms with the significant transfer of plan-making powers to the CJsCs. The adoption of SDPs will be challenging politically, due to the need for consensus across the region and between political parties on far reaching and controversial matters. These implications potentially become even more pronounced following the 2026 Senedd Cymru and 2027 local government elections.
- 8.80. No change is proposed for policy writing because the framework already exists for this to be done on different footprints. However, there is scope for lessons to be learnt as England introduces non-statutory national development management policies, albeit noting that in Wales, regionally consistent development management policies might naturally emerge as SDPs progress.

Regeneration

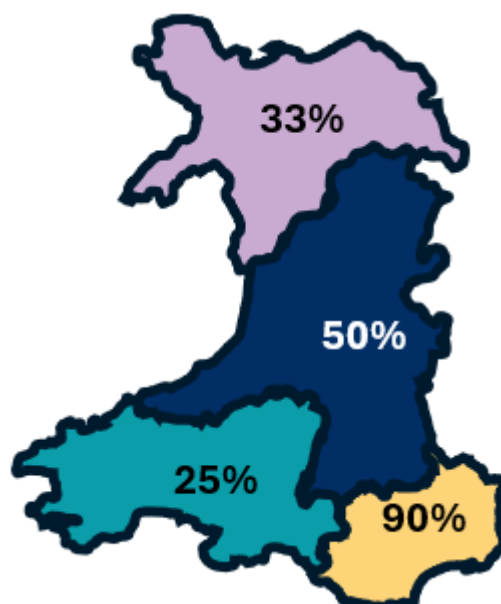


Figure 34: Map of regeneration skill sufficiency

8.81. The data in Figure 34 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 90% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.82. The responses for regeneration capacity paint a very mixed picture, ranging from 90% of LPAs in South East Wales considering that they have sufficient capacity to just 25% in South West Wales. This might reflect the historic link between urban deprivation indices and WG (and prior to that, EU) regeneration funding. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW do not identify any skills or capacity gaps for this topic.

8.83. Regeneration teams typically sit alongside planning departments and focus on submitting funding bids and submitting associated applications for planning permission, helping inform town centre LDP policies, and preparing town-based Placemaking Plans to draw down Transforming Towns grant funding. While playing a key role in wider placemaking work, their direct role in delivering planning services is limited which might explain why neither WG nor PEDW identify a skills gap in this

topic area. There could, however, be potential for upskilling regeneration officers to help in other areas, for example urban design or master-planning, which have been identified as a skill shortage area.

8.84. Only one LPA respondent noted regeneration as a possible shared service. It is noted that this could align with the CJC statutory function of economic wellbeing. The absence of strategic scale regeneration work once undertaken by the former Welsh Development Agency (WDA) did not arise via responses to this survey. However, discussions in other arenas have highlighted an appetite for some kind of Wales-wide land assembly and infrastructure coordination body to proactively support bringing forward stalled or complex development sites. Such a body could potentially assist with compulsory purchase when needed to bring development plan allocations forwards, supporting a Plan-led approach.

8.85. Although no change is proposed in terms of the footprint for current regeneration activity which is locally based, a new Wales-wide body to support site acquisition / land assembly and delivery is supported. This could be provided via the Welsh Government Land Division.

Retail

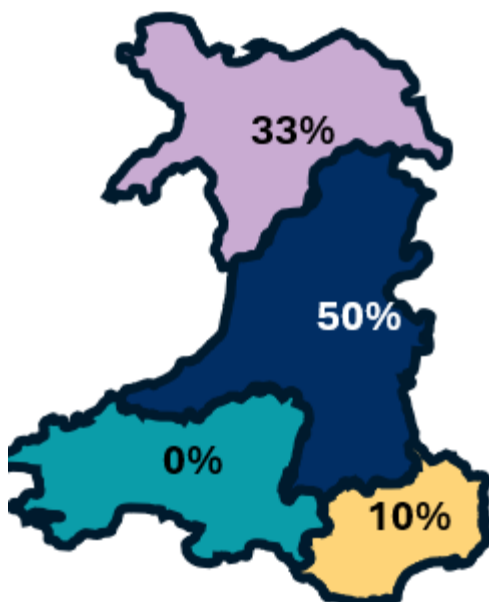


Figure 35: Map of retail skill sufficiency

8.86. The data in Figure 35 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 10% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.87. Retail planning is an area with notable in-house capacity shortfalls but with an established history of buying-in expertise from consultants: 79% of LPAs report lacking capacity, with 46% relying on consultants and 33% indicating a need for more staff. Only 21% of LPAs report sufficient capacity, primarily in areas with lower retail pressure, such as Mid Wales. Conversely, a cluster of urban LPAs in South East Wales, where demand is presumably higher, frequently procures services from external consultants. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.88. Several LPA respondents felt retail could be explored as a shared service, with one respondent specifying 'large retail'.

8.89. The reliance on consultants appears to work well for most LPAs. The current nature of the retail market and clear town centre first national planning policy means that applications for new out of centre retail are rare. Upskilling in-house officers is not efficient in such circumstances. In regions with high demand, such as South East Wales, this might be a topic area best delivered by the CJC for the region, perhaps linked to the CJC's economic wellbeing purpose.

8.90. Overall, the current model of buying in expertise from consultants when needed works well, and no change is recommended, allowing attention to be focused on more pressing skills challenges.

Second homes

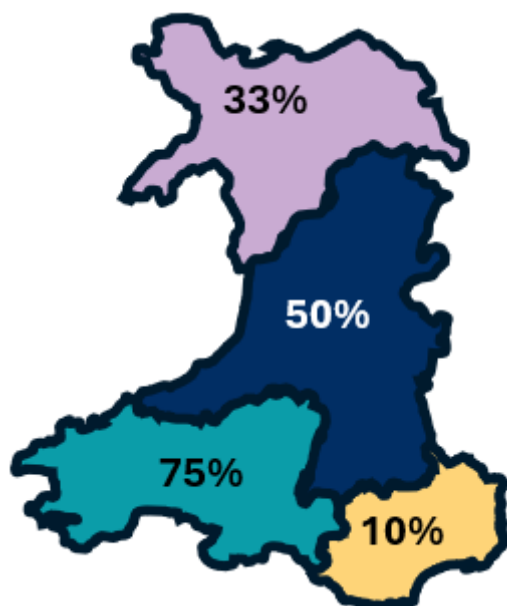


Figure 36: Map of second homes skill sufficiency

8.91. The data in Figure 36 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 75% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 10% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.92. Interestingly, the responses to this topic were very varied. The topic of tackling second homes is mostly focused on North and South West Wales, where LPAs such as Cyngor Gwynedd, Yr Eryri and Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks are pursuing Article 4 Directions and supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to tackle challenges caused by holiday homes and second homes on affordability. In North Wales, 33% of LPAs state they have sufficient capacity, with 75% in the South West (perhaps due to the issue being focused in a small part of the region). In contrast, just 10% of LPAs in South East Wales say they have sufficient capacity, yet none of these ten local authorities are known to be drafting Article 4 Directions or SPG on this topic.

8.93. PEDW does not identify any skills gap in this area, although that may be because it is a relatively new policy area and recently adopted SPG is yet to be extensively tested at appeal. Welsh Government Planning Division identifies localised skills gaps.

8.94. On this topic, there is no 'one size fits all' solution. A regional approach might be appropriate in North Wales, but elsewhere the topic is localised and is best addressed by increasing capacity on an LPA footprint.

Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and flooding

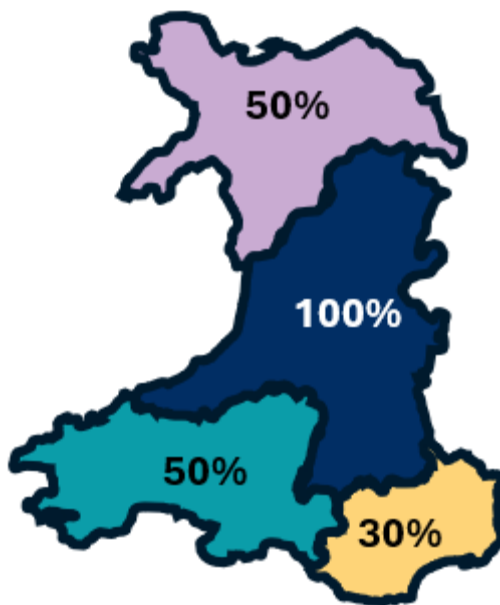


Figure 37: Map of SuDS/ SAB/ flooding skill sufficiency

8.95. The data in Figure 37 shows:

- 50% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 100% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.96. Only 46% of LPAs report having sufficient capacity to manage SuDS and flooding responsibilities, with 70% of LPAs in South East Wales responding that they do not have sufficient capacity. This higher proportion is likely to correlate with a higher number of SuDS Approval Board (SAB) applications in this region and might also

reflect the legacy of significant flooding events affecting this region since 2019 in addition to significant low-lying urban areas.

- 8.97. In contrast, WG identifies this topic area as having widespread skills gaps across Wales.
- 8.98. Some attempt has been made at regional delivery in South East Wales. Caerphilly Council provides the SAB service for Torfaen Council and Merthyr Tydfil Council provides the service for Blaenau Gwent Council.
- 8.99. This is a service area that might benefit from regional (CJC footprint) delivery to try and balance local knowledge and ‘boots on the ground’ with shared expertise, capacity, consistency and resilience. One LPA respondent commented that SuDS could be considered as a shared service on a CJC footprint, but funding would be a key factor.
- 8.100. The [Affordable Housing Taskforce report](#) addressed the current SAB/SuDS process and called for collaboration, tasking the Welsh Government and local authorities to identify areas where skills and capacity gaps can be alleviated by collaboration.

Transport and highways

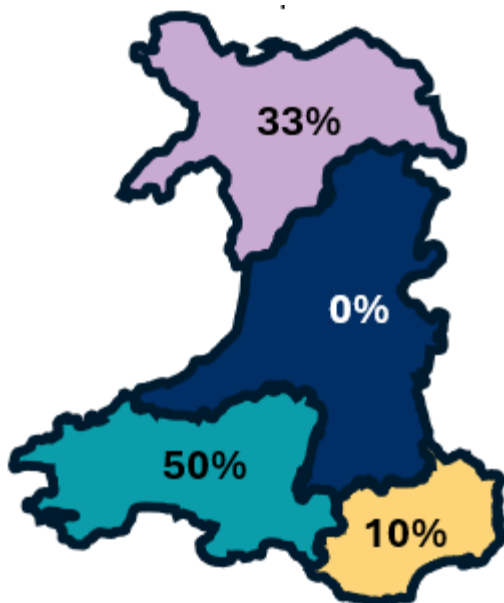


Figure 38: Map of transport skill sufficiency

8.101. The data in Figure 38 shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 10% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.102. Capacity challenges persist in transport and highways planning, with 46% of LPAs reporting a need for additional personnel. One LPA supplements its capacity by buying in consultancy services. In contrast, 33% of LPAs currently have sufficient in-house capacity to manage their workload. However, this is a very varied picture across Wales, ranging from 0% in Mid Wales to 50% in South West Wales.

8.103. Both WG and PEDW identify localised skills gaps within transport and highways.

8.104. Responses indicate two distinct areas of work: transport officers typically comment on LDPs and planning applications regarding public transport and active travel infrastructure, for example identifying additional needs and Section 106 planning contribution requests. Highways officers typically provide technical advice on planning applications for example regarding highway safety, parking provision and highway adoption agreements.

8.105. The more strategic and cross-boundary work of transport officers suggests that this could be a function delivered on a regional footprint. This would align with the CJC statutory function of producing a Regional Transport Plan. However, it is recognised that local authority transport officers do far more than just planning-related work, for example home-to-school transport and local bus service contracts. Arguably, those services could be more efficiently delivered on a regional footprint too, but such a change is a matter for wider local government reform rather than a recommendation arising from this research.

8.106. In contrast, the local site-specific input from highway officers means this role is best delivered at a local authority level alongside the development management service.

8.107. Sufficient capacity for statutory consultees is essential in delivering timely planning decisions: it is likely that the full extent of this problem of consultee capacity is currently masked by the lack of planning officer capacity. While responses focused on the direct input of transport and highways specialist input into planning decisions, these same officers are responsible for Section 38 and Section 278 Highways Act 1980 agreements meaning capacity gaps here stall the commencement of development even if planning permission has been issued.

Urban design

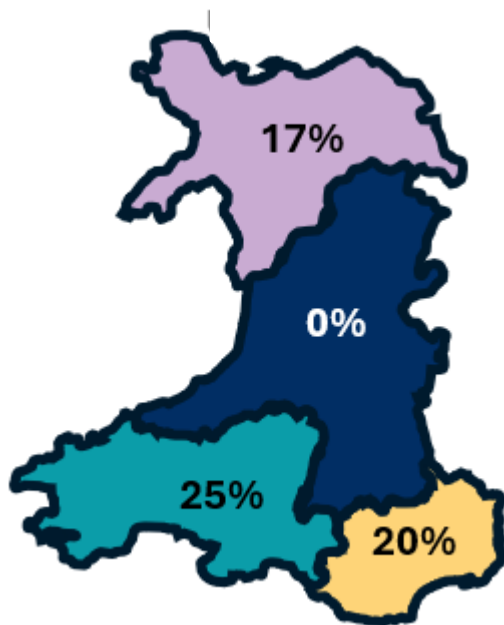


Figure 39: Map of urban design skill sufficiency

8.108. The data in Figure 39 shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.109. Twelve LPAs and all three National Park Authorities identified that they require more people with urban design skills. Two of the more rural LPAs stated it is not a skill they require, and one LPA buys-in this expertise. Some LPAs utilise the Design Commission for Wales for advice on significant or strategic projects.

8.110. WG recognises urban design as being a widespread skills gap across Wales, whereas PEDW recognises it as a localised gap.

8.111. Two LPA respondents suggested urban design could be considered as a shared service, “given the lack of people with necessary skills in LPAs in Wales, however access to the service and priority may be an issue”. (LPA respondent)

8.112. Notwithstanding the above, the Design Commission for Wales already offers a Wales-wide footprint for this expertise which could be utilised more widely. Consequently, no change is proposed.

Viability

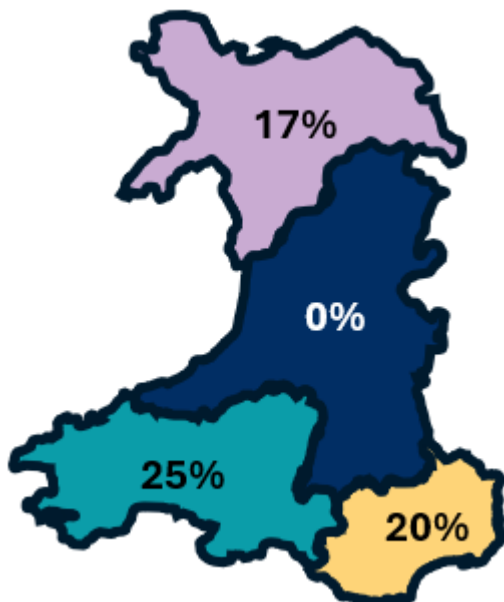


Figure 40: Map of viability skill sufficiency

8.113. The data in Figure 40 shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

- 8.114. Viability assessments present a significant area of need throughout Wales, with 75% of LPAs stating they require more capacity. This subject area is an important and highly contested one and links directly to public and political concerns about the pressures posed by new development on local infrastructure such as schools, health care and transport. There is also widespread concern that [planners feel outsmarted by the development industry](#), with a level of discomfort and at times distrust.
- 8.115. Only 8% of LPAs reported having sufficient internal resource, while 13% of LPAs rely on external consultants. The development of an all-Wales viability calculator supports the potential for this function to be provided at a national level, which could help address the widespread capacity issues in this area as well as providing consistency and certainty for all stakeholders. LPAs throughout Wales have collaborated to use one viability consultant which ensures consistency but does raise concerns regarding resilience.
- 8.116. PEDW identifies this skill as being one with localised gaps. LPAs have commissioned a pan-Wales viability toolkit supported by WG funding, and the author is producing guidance. However, there is a widespread feeling among planners that they are outsmarted in viability discussions. Several LPA survey respondents recognised viability as an area that could be explored on a shared service basis, with one respondent recognising the importance of working with local authority Chartered surveyors. There is merit in having a Wales-wide team of specialists to provide expertise, consistency of approach (whilst mindful of local viability characteristics) and resilience.

Existing use of shared services

Shared services: what do partner LPAs think?

- 8.117. LPA respondents were asked how satisfied they are with existing shared service arrangements, and if they foresee those arrangements continuing for the next five years.

- 8.118. The majority of responses expressed general satisfaction and a desire to continue shared service arrangements over the next five years. Several respondents noted the specialisms and wide range of expertise offered by the current shared services, with one respondent noting that this would not be viable to maintain in-house, due to the low number of relevant projects. One respondent highlighted the need for Service Level Agreements to be more performance driven and regularly reviewed.
- 8.119. Some LPAs also raised the associated risks, in particular the loss of the ability to manage local priorities or workload, a disconnect from local ownership, relationships and accountability, and vulnerability/lack of resilience when shared services end, and there is no in-house provision. One respondent shared concern regarding the widespread impact if shared services cannot retain or recruit staff.
- 8.120. There were also comments about the difficulty in setting up new shared services, especially in unfamiliar and evolving areas/specialisms. However, one person expressed a hope that existing shared services might be able to expand into other areas such as renewable energy.
- 8.121. While most feedback is positive and supportive of current shared services it is vital that the operational and strategic concerns are fully considered in developing future ideas.

Shared services: what do the hosts think?

- 8.122. The hosts of existing shared services were given the opportunity to comment on how satisfied they were with the current arrangement. Five responses were received from host LPAs. They were all satisfied with the current arrangements, however one host noted that despite working well, their service is not resilient when staff are absent for longer periods such as maternity leave. They have experienced problems recruiting to cover these periods. Another host explained they are looking to expand their shared service into large scale energy projects.

Existing use of consultancy services

- 8.123. Respondents were asked, if they currently buy in skills from consultancies, how satisfied are they with that arrangement, and do they see it continuing for the next five years.
- 8.124. The use of external services by LPAs is often essential, particularly where in-house capacity is limited or specialist expertise is required. Many respondents reported generally good levels of satisfaction, especially when services are delivered by trusted providers or those with local knowledge and connections. However, cost remains a major concern, frequently cited as overly high or disproportionate to the application fee, making it difficult for some teams to sustain the use of these services. Some LPAs have used consultancies to help with planning application or enforcement caseloads at peak times.

“We use an external consultant for agricultural appraisals. Demand is not high but the service provided is excellent and well above anything the Authority could provide.” (LPA respondent)

“It’s an essential service to keep our heads above water. Whilst the consultants we generally use are excellent, it’s not without problems - access to databases / laptops, understanding local context, more distant relationship with Members and with the Authority in general, sometimes missing eight-week target. Yes, I foresee this continuing for the next five years I’m afraid.” (LPA respondent)

“Satisfied with product but costly and disproportionate cost to application fee.” (LPA respondent)

- 8.125. The procurement process was seen as complex and time consuming, with added challenges around data access, IT provision and relationships with elected members.
- 8.126. The continued use of external services appeared to be driven by necessity, rather than choice. One respondent explained that they use consultants to fill gaps that

were left following restructuring nearly 10 years ago. Despite concerns, respondents indicated that external services were likely to remain a key part of delivery.

“It is time consuming and costly to manage procurement and consultants however we have so infrequent a need for the advice it is not economically viable to have it in house so I expect the situation to continue.” (LPA respondent)

LPA: Training budgets

8.127. LPA respondents were asked to provide details of their annual training budgets for the financial years starting April 2018 and April 2023. It was difficult to draw any meaningful insights from the 24 responses. Astonishingly, five LPAs confirm they had no training budget in either of these years. The training budget in other LPAs has risen slightly since 2018, while some have stayed the same (equating to a real term budget cut). Some training budgets are held centrally linked to corporate budgets, while others are part of the planning service budget.

8.128. One respondent noted their budget was “less than £1000, [with the] council budget in total only £30,000 for over 3000 staff and that includes mandatory training”. Two LPAs reported spending between £5,000 – £10,000 on part time Masters fees for staff. While such arrangements were once commonplace, a combination of increased University tuition fees and shrinking LPA training budgets has curtailed such initiatives. This has hampered opportunities to ‘grow your own’ planners.

LPA: Outlook for training budgets

8.129. LPAs were asked to think about the financial year starting April 2025, and if they thought their annual training budget will change? Only one respondent thinks their training budget would increase, 16 (67%) think it will remain the same, three think it will decrease and four don't know.

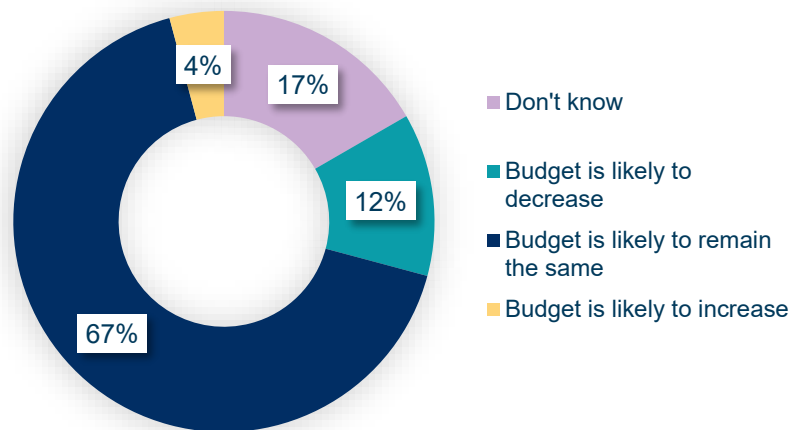


Figure 41: Changes to annual training budgets within responding LPAs. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

8.130. Respondents identified the importance of training in retaining and upskilling staff, valued for professional development and staff satisfaction. It is viewed as essential but underfunded.

8.131. LPA interviewees advocated for using unspent salary budgets to fund CPD or postgraduate courses, with several officers proposing to use the salary differential of lower grade posts to finance professional development within their teams. Suggestions included structured training programmes tied to workforce development, and learning exchanges. LPAs noted the benefit of using free training from professional bodies and peer networks.

8.132. Looking ahead, time and capacity are essential for integrating training into day-to-day work. Currently the sector lacks the time required for this. Capacity must also be acknowledged as an enabler of efficiency, resilience and overall effectiveness.

Resourcing the Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs)

- 8.133. To the frustration of many stakeholders, including LPAs, progress on the four new Statutory Development Plans has been glacial. However, this has been due to a number of factors, including the need to proceed with the second tranche of LDPs to maintain Plan coverage (a concern partially mitigated for some LPAs by the removal of the Plan expiry date for LDPs adopted before the 2015 Act came into effect) and the lack of financial and staffing resource to commence the SDPs. Perhaps most important, though, was the substantial groundwork that needed to be put in place for multiple autonomous and politically distinct Councils with different needs, priorities and outlooks to develop working relationships that can sustain sacrificing decision-making powers over far-reaching and contentious matters. Ironically, advanced progress in the Cardiff Capital Region to agree finances, resource needs and governance was unintentionally undermined by the introduction of statutory requirements mandating these topic areas.
- 8.134. As of November 2025, two of the four CJCs have formally appointed SDP lead planning officers. [Cardiff Capital Region](#) and [Ambition North Wales](#) have submitted their SDP Delivery Agreements to the Welsh Government for approval. Initial evidence base work has been commissioned in North Wales and South East Wales has commence a wider recruitment exercise to create an SDP team. The Welsh Government has offered additional funding to support those CJCs making meaningful progress.
- 8.135. The key challenges to progress continue to be resources, funding, and political consensus. In terms of resources, both Delivery Agreements recognise the need to grow SDP-specific teams to deliver the Plans. There has not been a tier of strategic plans in Wales since the 1990s Structure Plans were written, and the complexity of the planning system and required evidence base and examination process have all fundamentally changed since then. However, Wales has a strong (but problematically small) cohort of experienced policy planners. The key challenge is how the planning system in Wales can resource the simultaneous production of LDPs and the new SDPs. There is potential to recruit planners displaced by potential local government reorganisation in England, which could help. But clearly there will never be a perfect

time to undertake this work, as there will always be expiring LDPs and newly arising challenges.

- 8.136. Looking ahead, SDPs will mean regional alignment of timelines for the replacement 'light touch' LDPs, presenting opportunities for collaboration on evidence base, creation of regionally consistent LDP policies or the production of joint 'light touch' LDPs. However, this alignment will present a further resource challenge for both LPAs and PEDW, as multiple LDPs will simultaneously require replacement and examination at the same time. Meanwhile the newly adopted SDP will require annual monitoring, interpretation and implementation to inform decision-making by LPAs on development proposals, as well as a statutory review after six years.
- 8.137. To further add to the resource and policy alignment challenge, just as the SDPs are being produced, Future Wales 2040 will be reviewed and potentially revised, requiring its own resources and potentially shifting the foundations on which the SDPs and LDPs are being built.

Welsh Government Planning Division skills and capacity

- 8.138. Looking ahead over the next five years, the Planning Division plans to enhance its capacity to engage with development plan and planning casework.
- 8.139. The key skills gaps identified by WG Planning Division for the future of the profession include leadership skills, particularly in the context of succession planning and encouraging planners to take up senior/managerial roles. In addition, digital planning and AI are seen as widespread skill gaps.
- 8.140. There is a recognised need for more staff with digital and data knowledge and capabilities to ensure the Planning Division can work effectively and efficiently in the future.
- 8.141. In relation to shared services, there is desire within the Planning Division to discuss changes to the delivery of specialist areas such as heritage, ecology, landscape, large scale infrastructure, minerals and waste, SuDS / SAB / flooding on a CJC

footprint. However, there is a recognition that this should be based on LPAs preference alongside what makes a compelling business case. For example, some areas of planning benefit from local knowledge, including plan making and development management. A regional/CJC shared service could provide an advice service with decision-making remaining with the LPA, similar to how the shared minerals service works.

8.142. When asked what changes could improve resources across the planning system, WG Planning Division highlighted two key priorities:

- Increasing the uptake of technology to enhance customer experience; and
- Reduce workloads by promoting sharing of resources and expertise on a regional basis.

PEDW skills and capacity

Identifying and addressing skills and capacity gaps

8.143. While PEDW believes it will have sufficient capacity over the next five years for development management and enforcement appeals, it plans to increase capacity to manage known work pressures including future LDP examinations, minerals or energy projects. PEDW's capacity for SDP examinations remains uncertain until further information and clarification is provided.

8.144. PEDW has identified knowledge gaps concerning digital and data, and minerals and waste skills. This has led to PEDW buying in extra help from PINS (England) to cope with workload peaks due to a lack of capacity due to the volume of work or occasionally due to a conflict of interest.

Training within PEDW

- 8.145. While there is no specific training budget for PEDW staff, all staff receive a minimum eight days' training per year via quarterly Inspector Group Meetings, and a further two- to five-days additional training via Welsh Government Learning Lab, RTPI or similar events and topic specific learning/essential skills training (e.g. IT and legal updates).
- 8.146. PEDW maintains an Inspector Training Manual (ITM) with up-to-date guidance on how to approach casework on core topics. One day per month per Inspector is set aside for Inspector 'subject lead' work to support this. All Inspectors take responsibility for a core subject (e.g. flooding) ensuring they keep apprised of relevant legislative, case law or policy changes and disseminate that knowledge to the rest of PEDW. They keep the ITM updated and provide training as necessary.

Identifying training needs elsewhere

- 8.147. There is a clear need for more LPA staff at all levels. This additional capacity would help alleviate workload pressures, allow planners the time to deliver high-quality work, access necessary training, and offer an improved level of service. More planners are needed to engage earlier in the planning process, particularly at the pre-application stage, and to provide detailed input on planning applications and appeals. Expertise in specialist areas such as highways, ecology, heritage, design, landscape, and arboriculture are also lacking in some LPAs, limiting the quality and effectiveness of decision making.
- 8.148. Discussion with PEDW around the quality of future LDPs for examination, reflected a broader concern about the capacity, leadership, and consistency of the planning system in Wales. PEDW believes support is needed across public sector planning to support standards and strive for robust high quality planning delivery.
- 8.149. PEDW felt junior staff across the public sector require shadowing opportunities, with mentoring forming part of their professional development.

- 8.150. PEDW reported a need for national-level training on basics such as writing enforcement notices and officer reports. This could avoid problems at appeal. PEDW has provided training on enforcement notices for several successive years via annual the RTPI Cymru Enforcement Conference, which is free to attend for LPA officers.
- 8.151. PEDW felt there was a need to support and encourage planners to take on leadership roles across the public sector planning service in Wales. PEDW suggested the pipeline to senior/managerial roles requires strengthening and nurturing planners to take on formal management responsibilities and develop into more senior roles. There was a feeling that there was a reluctance amongst planners to progress into these roles. Causes for this may be, current lack of resourcing, limited pay progression between roles, increased political exposure or a general reluctance to take on management responsibilities, including HR and complaints, insufficient training, lack of time, and burnout.

Future skills gaps and training needs

- 8.152. Looking ahead, the next five years will present both workforce challenges and opportunities for PEDW. These include the need to increase the number of Inspectors to meet rising workloads, manage succession planning, and recruit and retain skilled professionals. Training will also remain a key priority, as new and existing staff will require resource-intensive development programmes to keep pace with the increasing complexity and volume of work.
- 8.153. In terms of digital transformation, PEDW would like to see future integration of digital planning systems across the public sector in Wales, to enable more efficient data sharing and reduce repetitive data entry, for example between LPA application and PEDW appeal. Realising these ambitions will require strong leadership, coordination, and the right resourcing. PEDW believes, if implemented successfully, digital solutions could significantly ease resource pressures by helping manage anticipated workload increases at PEDW more effectively. However, careful thought will be needed regarding the ethical and appropriate use of tools such as AI: matters of judgement will always require human input.

Improving service delivery in Wales

8.154. Finally, PEDW was asked what changes could be made to improve service delivery in Wales and make better use of existing resources. Suggestions included removing unnecessary small-scale applications, by reviewing permitted development rights, to free up planning capacity. Another key recommendation was the introduction of national development management policies. This would prevent the current duplication of effort, where the same policies are rewritten and examined multiple times across Wales, often with varying quality. A unified set of policies, developed once at a national level, would allow LDPs to focus solely on local matters. Similarly, a single, consistent set of Supplementary Planning Guidance would streamline planning processes and improve consistency across authorities.

NRW skills and capacity

8.155. While the NRW team does not necessarily require staff to be qualified planners, there's an ongoing need for people who can manage diverse information streams, analyse complex data, and produce high-quality responses. The team's skill needs have evolved due to the rising complexity of planning applications involving new technologies such as wind farms, carbon capture and battery storage. Critical skills gaps have been identified in areas such as nutrient neutrality, derogations under the Habitats Regulations and Water Framework Directive, flood risk management, strategic environmental compensation, and mitigation planning, all of which are increasingly important due to climate and nature emergencies.

8.156. NRW occasionally purchases external expertise through a framework contract, particularly for specialist areas like landscape advice when internal capacity is insufficient. However, this approach has its challenges, including avoiding conflicts of interest. Moreover, using external contractors requires robust contract management, which places an additional burden on both financial and human resources.

8.157. NRW noted that minerals advice is already successfully shared across LPAs and felt there could be potential for similar models in areas like ecology and biodiversity. However, significant skill gaps remain, particularly around environmental legislation

requirements such as the Environment Act, flood and water management, and contaminated land. Enhanced training, particularly around topics like nutrient neutrality and habitats regulations, could help address some of these gaps. Nevertheless, there's a broader desire for more consistent leadership and clearer application of planning policy to reduce ambiguity and support service delivery.

8.158. The NRW team has been under considerable pressure from increasing workloads and greater case complexity. Since April 2018, new responsibilities have arisen, including advising on SAC rivers nutrients and Habitats Regulations, maintaining flood maps, and responding to a surge in renewable energy applications, marine SAC nutrient issues, and the control of agricultural pollution regulations. There has also been a notable rise in public and third-party interest in planning applications, and more cases are proceeding through hearings and inquiries, increasing demands on the team's capacity.

8.159. The service delivery model allows for the workload to be redistributed across geographic teams. However, officers carry significant caseloads. There's a view that if all vacancies were filled, the team could deliver on its core workload. According to [NRW's Development Planning Advice Service: Annual Report to Welsh Ministers 2024-2025 \(July 2025\)](#), during the reporting period 01 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 7,607 minor, major and Development of National Significance (DNS) consultations were received requiring a substantive response. NRW responded to 7,513 consultations, with 7,466 (99%) of those submitted within statutory or an otherwise agreed deadline. Nonetheless, the increasing complexity of cases demands more detailed and specific advice will require careful management in the future.

Improving service delivery in Wales

8.160. NRW noted there is a low legislative threshold for what constitutes a 'valid' planning application, leading to repeated re-consultations where inadequate information is initially submitted. NRW identified the need for higher standards and better initial scrutiny by LPAs to avoid wasted effort reviewing incomplete or inadequate applications.

8.161. Looking forward, the anticipated funding from the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 presents a valuable opportunity to bolster capacity within NRW. Digital transformation, including a new customer platform currently under exploration, could also help improve efficiency and reduce manual workload, although these initiatives remain in early stages. NRW considers that its current model functions adequately, but recognises that rising demands and evolving legislative requirements mean NRW must continue to adapt to maintain service standards into the future.

Future skills gaps and training needs

8.162. Respondents were asked to comment on their anticipated skills gaps or training needs arising within LPAs, PEDW, NRW and Welsh Government Planning Division over the next five years due to new specialisms or workstreams, such as large-scale projects, SDPs, emerging technology and/or due to succession planning.

8.163. Respondents emphasised the importance of considering the wider picture related to skills and training. Examples include the effects of legislation or policy changes on capacity, as well as the loss of institutional knowledge resulting from staff retirement or changing jobs. They also acknowledged the growing need for skills beyond traditional professional expertise, such as project management, collaboration and leadership.

8.164. All public sector respondents were asked what they felt the skills gaps and training needs are likely to be over the next five years. A range of future skills and training needs were identified, with several key areas emerging repeatedly:

- Ecology is a significant concern for the future, driven by the emphasis in national policy and biodiversity requirements and the potential introduction of marine SAC targets;
- The need for more Welsh speaking professionals was raised as a future need. The recent recruitment by Cardiff University's planning school of a Welsh speaking member of teaching staff is welcomed and will increase opportunities to grow the supply chain of Welsh speaking planners;

- It is anticipated that large scale and complex projects, including offshore wind proposals and hydrogen developments, require officers to become experienced in specialist topic areas. The infrequent and dispersed nature of such projects mean it is unrealistic to expect each LPA to develop the necessary expertise;
- A need for more training was identified to include Landscape Impact Assessment, Habitat Regulations Assessment, nutrient neutrality and associated solutions, drainage and viability analysis;
- The skills gap in digital planning is widely acknowledged as planning becomes increasingly data driven and reliant on digital tools, while officers lack both the time and training to adapt;
- Legislative and policy changes are adding to further complexity, requiring better practical collaboration between organisations and creating confusion where planning overlaps with other regulatory areas. “[Practical collaboration between WG and local authorities leading up to the implementation of changes could be much better.](#)” (LPA respondent)
- The sector also faces significant challenges in relation to staff retention and the potential loss of experienced staff due to retirement. The loss of experienced planners to the private sector was raised as an issue. This is compounded by funding constraints and lengthy training times for new less experienced staff;
- Broader skills need to include management and leadership capability, project management, financial viability analysis, contract management with the private sector (PPAs) and knowledge of emerging technologies like AI.

8.165. Overall, there is widespread concern about future resilience and maintaining service quality amid growing demands, limited capacity and a general shortage of skilled professionals across Wales.

9. Growing the profession

- 9.1. Eleven LPAs reported that they currently employ trainee planners, which includes a combination of full-time year out placement students, employees on day release for part-time study, apprentices for example via Pathways to Planning, and bursary students.
- 9.2. WG Planning Division employs year out student(s), operating a rotation between the Planning Directorate and PEDW. As part of an initiative to employ graduate planners in the future, WG Planning Division hopes to replicate this arrangement, with the possibility of including NRW.
- 9.3. To better understand the likely future demand for early career planners, LPAs were asked, over the next five years, does your LPA plan to employ trainee planners (graduates/apprenticeships etc.).

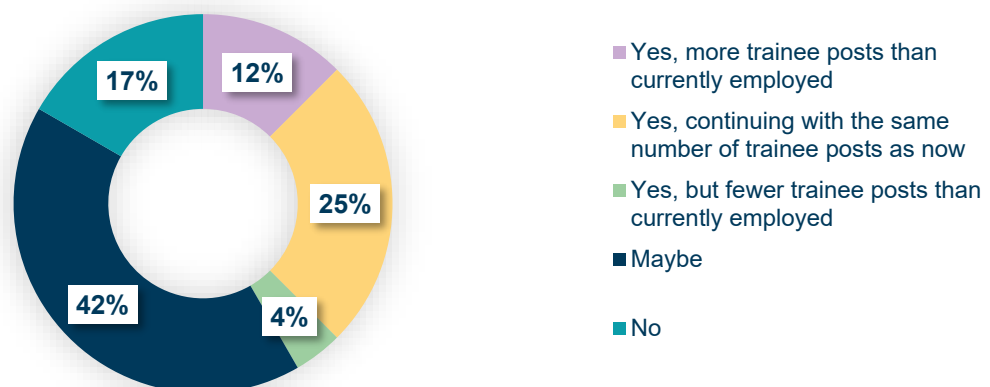


Figure 42: Responding LPAs future demand for trainee employment. Data accessed via RTPPI research survey (May 2025).

- 9.4. The data in Figure 42 shows:
- Most LPAs (42%) are unsure (answered maybe) as to whether they plan to employ trainee planners within the next five years;

- 41% of LPAs said they are likely to employ trainee planners over the next five years, with 12% of those wanting to employ more trainees than currently employed, compared to only 4% who want to employ less trainees than currently employed;
- 17% of respondents answered 'no' to the question.

- 9.5. WG Planning Division and PEDW intend to expand the number of trainee positions over the next five years. Given the specialised nature of the work at PEDW and the requirement for highly skilled and experienced planners their roles do not easily align with positions for trainees or individuals at the start of their careers.
- 9.6. Interviews with LPAs revealed that graduate and trainee programmes have largely yielded positive results. Initiatives like the Pathways to Planning programme are welcomed but interviewees cited financial constraints as a challenge in fully leveraging them.
- 9.7. There is support for targeted recruitment from non-planning degree backgrounds, provided there is structured training, funding and more general support for postgraduate qualifications in place. However, capacity to provide training and support for planning graduates was raised as a key issue, given current pressure on time and capacity, so that concern would be magnified for non-planning graduates.
- 9.8. Strengthening links with universities, attending career fairs, and offering placements were all seen as valuable. Interviewees also advocated for earlier engagement at GCSE or A-Level stages to raise awareness of planning as a profession. Partnerships between schools, universities and the wider sector can help to expose young people to planning as a career option. The [WJEC GCSE in the Built Environment](#) is approved by Qualifications Wales but contains limited content about planning, and planning is not identified in the career options section. The RTPi's relaunched [school ambassador programme](#) also has a role to play here.
- 9.9. All respondents were asked to share any good practice or ideas on integrating trainee planners into the workplace. The comments received are set out below:

- Overlap with students from the previous year to help transition;
- Weekly (at least) 121s with managers. This is especially important at the start;
- Work social prior to starting;
- Work together on a regional basis, to share costs and ensure a steady supply of newly qualified planners;
- Facilitate work experience, attend careers events to promote profession and LPAs;
- Offer career pathways with ability to progress to higher positions;
- Provide a bespoke training and development plan;
- Allocate a mentor to each trainee;
- Provide training and development budget;
- Sponsor trainees obtaining qualification in planning;
- Provide experience in all sections of the Planning Service to develop well rounded planners;
- Providing tiered rather than flat team structures as a clear pathway for progression;
- Creating space for learning and development;
- Encouraging staff at all grades to participate in delivering training;
- The integration of non-professional support service areas, into the wider planning team and colocation of those services with development management;
- Equip junior planners with no experience in the sector to deal with very minor applications. They have learnt the skills and understanding and subsequently the desire to train and qualify in planning. This gives people the opportunity to test out a career before investing in costly University fees, the prior experience also helps them during their formal training;
- Create a rota to ensure there are always staff in the office with students (we require them in five days a week) to ensure they have effective support at various levels;

- Although the Authority offers hybrid working most experienced officers within the Authority are office based most of the time by choice. This has enabled inexperienced staff to obtain face to face support and mentoring on a daily basis which has allowed them to develop quickly;
- Partnering with experienced officers and providing opportunities beyond their post;
- Providing a diverse workload, with good line management;
- Important to be in a "cohort" rather than an individual.

Planning schools

Student numbers on accredited Planning courses in Wales and surrounding areas of Wales

- 9.10. The School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University is the only planning school in Wales and is accredited by the RTPI. It celebrates its 60th anniversary of planning education in 2026. As part of this research, we engaged with the four closest planning schools located in Wales and England to provide a broad overview of student enrolment on accredited planning courses, to assess the potential pipeline of future planners in Wales.
- 9.11. The table below provides an overview of the number of student numbers enrolled on RTPI accredited planning courses in and close to Wales during the September 2023 academic year. The data shows a healthy number of planning students at universities within and close to Wales, but does not provide any certainty on where graduates will choose to work and therefore the impact on the desperately needed pipeline of public sector planners in Wales. There is a role here for public sector bodies, Cardiff University and RTPI Cymru to seek to promote the Welsh public sector as an attractive option, in addition to public sector employers actually creating new graduate level posts.

Course accreditation	Student numbers enrolled on course in the academic year starting September 2023
Students pursuing fully accredited planning courses	499
Students pursuing partially accredited planning courses	321
Total student numbers	820

Figure 43: Table breakdown of students on fully or partially RTPI accredited planning courses in and close to Wales

Undergraduate or postgraduate courses	Student numbers enrolled on course in the academic year starting September 2023
Students on postgraduate courses (14 courses on offer)	434
Students on undergraduate courses (6 courses on offer)	386

Figure 44: Table breakdown of postgraduate/ undergraduate students on fully and partially RTPI accredited planning courses in and close to Wales

*Note: The data set out above includes students on the Chartered Town Planner Degree Apprenticeship in England. The data provided has been approved for use by the relevant planning schools. Interviews took place with two accredited planning schools to gain a better understanding of the sector in general, the students currently pursuing planning courses and engagement between universities and other stakeholders.

The value of placements for students and employability

- 9.12. Placements are widely viewed as a positive experience. One Head of School confirmed that students who undertake a placement year at their university are statistically more likely to achieve a first-class honours degree. They emphasised the importance of collective effort in promoting placements, which helps give students a stronger foundation and better preparation for the workplace.
- 9.13. The Head of School noted that closer collaboration with placement providers could further enhance student preparedness. There's potential for building relationships earlier and improving the two-way engagement between universities and employers. Live projects and site visits are highly valued and help maintain strong industry connections. They commented, the sector is broad, diverse, and offers a range of specialist skills, attracting students from varied interests, noting "There's never been a more important time for the sector to work together."
- 9.14. Anecdotal evidence from the universities interviewed suggests that most graduates continue along the path of their studied discipline, indicating good alignment between education and employment. One interviewee explained that through their university, planning employability is exceptionally strong at 92%, with the majority of graduates moving into the private sector, often directly related to their field of study.

Trends observed by universities

- 9.15. Universities reported that the demand for planning courses remains healthy overall, with numbers either increasing slowly or holding steady. Specialist environmental sustainability programmes are currently attracting significant interest whilst accredited UG and PGT courses continue to be popular, with accreditation seen as a valuable asset by students. Interviewees highlighted the importance of regularly reviewing courses and where necessary refreshing them, including course name changes; content updates, marketing strategies or more flexible formats such as distance learning. Additionally, there is an increasing focus within universities on supporting existing professionals to upskill – through short courses or CPD options, often in collaboration with the RTPI.

Apprenticeships and bursaries in Wales

- 9.16. Unlike in England, other than the Pathways to Planning scheme, there are no planning apprenticeships in Wales supported by the Welsh Government. [RTPI Cymru continues to call for Planning apprenticeships in Wales](#). The highly successful Level 7 apprenticeship in England offers a good model to replicate (prior to the Westminster Government's recent decision to introduce an age cap of 21 years of age for entrants, which decimates this supply chain). The L7 apprenticeship runs alongside the Pathways to Planning programme in England with a significantly higher take-up of the L7 apprenticeship (over 200 apprenticeships per academic year prior to the age cap). Further discussion is needed to understand why take-up of the Pathways to Planning scheme is so low in Wales, even when new application fee increases provide certainty of additional income for the financial year starting April 2026.
- 9.17. The School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University is working with a number of private sector organisations to provide bursary opportunities for planning students enrolled on their courses, including bursaries funded by Bute Energy and Landsec. The British Chambers of Commerce offers one bursary place per year per accredited planning school, administered by the RTPI.

Case Studies: Bursaries with Cardiff University, School of Geography and Planning

Landsec's Futures Bursary

- 9.18. Landsec's Futures Bursary scheme provides cost of living expenses to enable students from under-represented backgrounds to study at university and be supported into a career in the property industry.
- 9.19. Landsec's Futures Bursary scheme offers a three-year (£10k cost of living contribution) to a suitably qualified applicant on the School of Geography and Planning's (Cardiff University) BSc Urban Planning and Development degree. The first student has been supported since Autumn 2024.

- The bursary has social mobility criteria based on the UK Social Mobility Commission criteria;
- A Landsec mentor offers careers support and industry networks for the student;
- There is an opportunity for Landsec to support the whole cohort with careers talks, site visits etc.

9.20. This bursary complements Cardiff University's widening participation agenda and aligns with the RTPI's strategic imperative to diversify the planning profession, to ensure that the profession reflects the diversity of the society it serves.

Bute Energy Bursary

9.21. The Bute Energy Bursary is an award to cover the fees of two eligible postgraduate taught students undertaking the MSc Spatial Planning and Development programme (September 2024 academic year fees are set at £10,700 per student).

- Eligible students must be Welsh domicile (lived continuously in Wales for at least three years. Including time spent in higher education) classed as a home student for the purposes of tuition fees and intend to pursue a career in Wales.
- Eligible students must intend to progress to Chartered membership of the RTPI and pursue a career in the field of planning and must commit to discussing their experiences on the programme and the ways that the scholarship supported them to pursue their career in planning for the purposes of promoting the bursary.

9.22. Gill Bristow, Head of the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University, said:

"These bursaries clearly align with the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)'s strategic imperatives to both grow and diversify the planning profession. There is an acute need to broaden the talent coming into the planning and property professions in Wales and to ensure that the profession better reflects the diversity of the society it serves. The School of Geography and Planning is the only Welsh

provider of accredited educational programmes which provide a route into the planning profession. These bursaries also complement Cardiff University's Widening Participation agenda for educational opportunities."

9.23. Cardiff University has been ranked in the UK's top ten universities for [Town and Country Planning and Landscape Design in the Complete University Guide 2026](#).

9.24. It is estimated by the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University that around 70% of planners in Wales have studied at Cardiff - a testament to the School's long standing contribution to the profession in Wales.

9.25. The School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University actively welcomes collaboration with organisations across the public and private sectors to expand bursary opportunities and support the next generation of planners.

Pathways to Planning bursaries

9.26. An interview took place with the WLGA to discuss the Pathways to Planning programme.

Case study: WLGA's Pathways to Planning Programme in Wales

9.27. The WLGA is keen to support LPAs in Wales and widen the pool of graduates entering planning roles in local authorities.

9.28. In 2023 the WLGA launched a pilot Pathways to Planning Programme, after securing monies from projected underspend and reserves. The pilot programme was modelled on the English collaboration between the local government Association and Planning Advisory Service that supports aspiring graduates into the planning sector.

9.29. Graduates from any degree background can apply and will work for their local authority's planning team alongside studying for an RTPI fully funded accredited master's programme or apprenticeship. To be eligible to join the programme, LPAs have to be able to prove they could meet the following criteria:

- £26k minimum salary;
- Three-year minimum contract;
- Varied work experience within the planning team;
- A plan of mentoring support;
- A fully funded place on an RTPI accredited Masters' degree course.

9.30. It was always the intention of the WLGA for the pilot to be used as an example of good practice to encourage investment in future iterations of the Programme. The Welsh Government has recently secured £143k for cohort 3. Unspent monies can be rolled into cohort 4.

9.31. In the absence of apprenticeships, bursaries are an effective route to grow the pipeline of planners. However, uptake by LPAs has been disappointing. We are optimistic that Welsh Government decision to increase planning application fees in a move towards cost-recovery will allow more LPAs to invest in the future pipeline of planners.

9.32. However, there are lessons to be learned from other nations where apprenticeships and bursaries have proven popular. In Scotland the Future Planners Bursary has been running for a couple of years. This is for students studying a planning degree (usually post-graduate degree). The Scottish Government has recently awarded 30 bursaries of £5k to students the September 2025 academic year.

9.33. Bursaries are important in encouraging those from underrepresented groups into the planning profession and those who cannot afford tuition fees. They need to be of a significant value to be a genuine enticement and support. Bursaries can also encourage those who have completed undergraduate degrees in other subjects to convert to planning at postgraduate level.

Barriers to providing trainee positions

- 9.34. All public sector participants were given the opportunity to expand more generally on the provision of trainee planners through the survey, including opinions on the barriers, if any to providing/securing training/trainee positions.
- 9.35. A range of significant barriers were considered to hinder the ability of organisations to provide trainee opportunities in the workplace. Foremost among these are financial constraints, with 65% of respondents citing funding as an issue in the provision of trainee planners. Two respondents referred to PPAs as a way of funding additional positions at this level. Even where a commitment to trainee planners exists, budgetary pressure over a prolonged period limits capacity. The recent decision to increase planning application fees presents a very tangible solution here, with Heads of Planning likely to secure additional income which is required to be reinvested in planning service improvements.
- 9.36. Organisations also highlighted practical issues, including the high level of support and supervision that trainee planners need, which stretches existing staff resources. Furthermore, there is concern that significant investment of time and money in training may be lost if trainees leave soon after qualifying.
- 9.37. In some areas recruitment challenges compound these problems. Some LPAs said they struggled to attract suitable candidates despite efforts through Pathways to Planning. There is a concern that there is a lack of awareness or interest in planning as a profession, particularly in the public sector. Specific needs, like recruiting Welsh speaking planners are recognised and require expansion of trainee pathways to meet local demand. Overall, there is a shared view that without substantial investment in this area the profession risks facing deeper capacity shortages and skills gaps in the future.

“I would like to offer additional placements that are for 12-24 months providing the student to gain experience in different parts of the planning department, for this to be effective each position should be at least six- to eight-months, for example experience in DM and Policy. Additional specialist placements for

skills such as ecology, landscape, flooding heritage etc. However, with additional budget constraints which are unlikely to improve this is not a viable option. Without the investment in the next generation of planners, we will feel the full cost of this sooner than anticipated.” (LPA respondent)

10. An effective planning service: our conclusions

- 10.1. This report provides an evidence base in relation to planning service budgets, workforce, and skills and capacity within LPAs, PEDW, the planning function of NRW and the Welsh Government's Planning Division. Our findings highlight a sector that has operated under significant strain for a prolonged period and continues to face challenges. Unless properly resourced, the Welsh planning system cannot achieve its full potential and deliver the Government's objectives. The challenges are two-fold: reversing previous cuts, and looking ahead based on the profession's age profile and growing system complexity.
- 10.2. This report concludes with seven recommendations derived from the evidence. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. We therefore recommend that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impacts of implementing the recommendations in this report (recommendation 1).
- 10.3. The evidence contained in this report reveals a backdrop of substantial cuts since 2008, with public sector budgets diminished across the whole of Wales. Between the April 2008 and April 2023 financial years, Local Planning Authority budgets reduced by 43% in real terms. Planning teams shrunk in size accordingly. Simultaneously, the complexity and breadth of planning considerations has increased. This has impacted on skills and capacity, morale and service delivery.
- 10.4. Between April 2018 and April 2024, 46 additional planning officer posts were shown on team structures. However, at the time of responding to our survey (May 2025), 37 planning officer posts were reported as being vacant, plus six specialist posts and

five business support posts. Overall, 73% of LPAs were operating with one or more vacancies within their planning service. Eleven LPAs reported multiple vacancies, with some reporting as many as five vacancies. Consequently, there has been minimal real improvement in resource levels in LPAs.

- 10.5. Since April 2015, the Welsh Government Planning Division reduced in size from 60 officers to 41 officers in 2018 to 33 officers in 2024. This has had a tangible impact on the Planning Division's ability to provide timely and robust national policy updates or provide wider leadership for example by monitoring performance and driving improvement. It is only in recent months that steps have been taken to start to reverse some of these cuts with the welcome recruitment of much-needed planners.
- 10.6. Likewise, NRW has faced a period of financial pressures and increasing workloads that is now starting to be addressed in part with additional funding from Welsh Government.
- 10.7. PEDW continues to recruit additional Inspectors to deal with an increasingly complex caseload of infrastructure projects and LDP examinations. Progress on SDPs and the resultant regional groupings of new 'light touch' LDPs will require significant additional resource.
- 10.8. In October 2025, Senedd Cymru passed regulations increasing planning application fees from 01 December 2025. This is a first but significant step towards full cost recovery for development management services, providing a desperately needed income boost. [RTPI Cymru's response](#) to these proposals reflected our private sector members support for the fee increases on the proviso that the additional fee income is reinvested into better resourced planning services and therefore better service delivery. While both announcements are welcomed, these will not be sufficient to address the challenges.
- 10.9. Strong leadership is needed by Heads of Planning, Chief Finance Officers, Chief Executives and politicians: the additional income arising from planning application fee increases **must** be reinvested in planning services in order to improve service delivery and achieve the outcomes our communities need: homes, jobs, green

spaces and infrastructure in a timely manner that provides certainty and confidence for investors. This investment in planning teams should include the wider planning service including plan-making, development management, enforcement and directly related consultees such as ecology and highways. Not only will this enable Local Authorities to tackle the issues affecting their communities, it is also only morally right that the customer receives an improved service if paying a significantly higher application fee.

- 10.10. Budget cuts, service delivery, workforce skills, capacity and training are intrinsically linked and must be considered together as part of a longer-term plan to ensure the planning profession can deliver on ambitions and objectives to its full potential.
- 10.11. LPA interviewees reported they do not have the capacity to focus on planning service ambitions or strategic goals. We therefore recommend that a Planning Improvement Service should be created to develop and promote best practice and efficiencies, support peer review and performance monitoring, serve as a central knowledge hub for the profession, and support innovation and shared services where appropriate (recommendation 2). To ensure future service resilience and sustainability, further work is needed to reach an agreed definition of the extent of the planning service to which full cost recovery applies (recommendation 3).
- 10.12. Recommendation 4 seeks a commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey), fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, performance and how increase fee income since December 2025 has been utilised to improve service delivery. This monitoring should use the findings in this report as a baseline, to support evidence-based decision-making and resilience in the long term as an extension to the recently recommenced national planning performance framework.
- 10.13. The findings of this research highlight that the planning system urgently requires significant financial investment to function effectively. This investment needs to extend beyond planning officers to include the wider supporting roles such as ecologists and highways officers. Workforce shortages are affecting performance, placing strain on existing staff and reducing resilience throughout the system.

Planning cannot operate in isolation, and without well-resourced services working alongside it, the system as a whole will fall short of achieving its full potential. Digital planning tools where ethical and appropriate have the potential to free up planners to plan, but they must be embedded at the core of the planning system, informed by the needs of planners and users and supported with strong leadership and co-ordination. There is a pressing need to increase staffing numbers across the full spectrum of roles within planning teams, specialist consultees such as ecologists and highways officers, as well as NRW, PEDW and the Welsh Government's Planning Division, from entry level through to leadership positions.

- 10.14. In the immediate term, filling vacant posts should be a priority. As at Spring 2025, this research recorded 37 vacant planning officer posts (across development management, planning policy and enforcement), six vacant specialist posts and five vacant business support posts across the responding LPAs.
- 10.15. The first two CJC Delivery Agreements for Cardiff Capital Region and Ambition North Wales identify a need for six planners per CJC. Assuming this is replicated for South West Wales and Mid Wales, this means there'll be a need for 24 strategic planners in the first two phases of recruitment. The published Delivery Agreements indicate this could potentially increase to eight per CJC plus graduates and admin support in the longer term.
- 10.16. This extra workforce will be required at least initially while SDPs and replacement LDPs are being developed in tandem to avoid a policy vacuum. Once adopted, LDPs require Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and annual monitoring. By 2035 there should be complete coverage of SDPs and 'light touch' LDPs. This should bring some efficiencies through shared evidence base, however LDP teams across Wales are already small, and going forward SDPs and 'light touch' LDPs will continue to require annual monitoring and SPG.
- 10.17. In the short term, 17% of public sector planners (excluding NRW) is aged 55+ and is therefore likely to will retire within 5 to 10 years. This equates to 95 planners.

- 10.18. Meanwhile only 8% of the surveyed workforce (excluding NRW) is aged 16-24 and 16% aged 25-34, which falls well below of the 35-44 age cohort they'll need to replace over time (35%).
- 10.19. A substantial 42% of the public sector planning workforce (excluding NRW) is aged 45+ (234 planners). Unless this potential loss is addressed through a strategic recruitment and retention strategy with appropriate funding, there will be a significant impact on service delivery in the medium term.
- 10.20. In total, the short-term recruitment need is 161 extra planners, 15 specialist officers and five business support officers. This is simply to address known LPA vacancies (at May 2025) (37 planners), SDP needs (24 planners), PEDW capacity for SDP, LDP and infrastructure work (5 planning inspectors) and imminent retirement (95 planners including planning inspectors), plus 15 specialist officers (six known local authority vacancies and nine NRW vacancies at May 2025). This does not allow for reversing the deep and unsustainable cuts from over a decade of austerity.
- 10.21. To address these issues, a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales. This will require significant financial investment and commitment by all parties in order to secure the essential increase in resource levels, including a commitment from LPAs to reinvest the additional application fee income arising from the December 2025 fee uplift (recommendation 5).
- 10.22. Alongside recruitment, there is also a need for targeted up-skilling initiatives to support capability, encourage career progression and ensure staff are prepared to meet evolving demands. Building a stronger workforce will be critical to future resilience. Leadership is critical to delivery and LPAs, WG Planning Division, NRW and PEDW all have a role to play, whether this be through maximising the opportunities presented by digital technology where it is ethical and appropriate, or through leading service delivery transformation with greater collaboration in the development and implementation of policy and guidance. Strong and visible leadership from the WG Planning Division and Heads of Planning is essential to

support the planning profession. However, leadership requires appropriately resourced and resilient teams.

- 10.23. Based on our findings, recommendation 6 sets out topic areas that should be explored further for delivery on a larger-than-local footprint. Recommendation 7 relates to the potential for use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise.
- 10.24. Despite the challenges reported through this work, the commitment, determination and perseverance of many key individuals has been clear. However, action by a single organisation resulting in short-term siloed projects is not enough to deliver long term resilience or create an effective planning system. Achieving this requires co-ordinated and structured long-term support and leadership. Establishing a dedicated body to champion for planning improvement could provide the co-ordination and focus needed to support an effective and resilient planning system.
- 10.25. While the figures and data set out in this report provide a detailed picture of the on-going pressure the planning system and those delivering it are under, what the figures do not reflect is the benefit and value that the planning system delivers. This research underscores the importance of recognising the value of, ensuring that planning is properly understood, prioritised, and funded as an essential public service. This includes recognition of planning as a cost-avoidance mechanism: by ensuring the timely delivery of affordable homes, rapidly rising costs of temporary accommodation are avoided. By enabling the sustainable growth of rural settlements, amenities remain viable and age-balanced communities can support each other, reducing the need for some low-level social services interventions. Only with sustained and targeted investment can planning deliver its full potential.
- 10.26. Unless addressed, the failure to properly resource planning services will result in social, economic and environmental costs for society.

“It is not the planning system that is at fault, the root of the issue is the chronic underfunding, under resourcing and under investment that requires immediate

attention. There is a need to tackle this underlying issue as a first step. Get this right and planning in Wales has a bright future.” (LPA respondent)

11. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a sounding board

Due to their interlinked nature, it is vital that the impact of implementing the proposed recommendations or other solutions on the wider picture is fully understood. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. We therefore recommend that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impact of implementing the recommendations in this report. The sounding board should comprise the RTPI Cymru Planning Forum (which comprises representation from Cardiff University’s planning school, PEDW, Planning Officers’ Society for Wales (POSW), RTPI Cymru, the Wales Planning Consultants’ Forum and WG Planning Division) with additional invitations to representatives of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), NRW and the WLGA.

RTPI Cymru should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Planning Improvement Service for Wales

A Planning Improvement Service similar to the independent local government improvement service established in Scotland (see Appendix 7). It would be headed up by newly created independent Planning Improvement Champion and would;

- Develop and promote best practice and efficiencies;
- Support peer review and performance monitoring;
- Serve as a central knowledge hub for the profession;
- Support innovation and shared services where appropriate.

WG Planning Division should be responsible for the development of this recommendation. This service could be hosted by the WLGA but will require additional resource to be delivered.

Recommendation 3: Define the planning service

A clear, agreed definition is needed of the extent of planning services, clarifying which aspects of planning service delivery are within scope for full cost recovery and which aspects should remain centrally-funded public services. This is essential if we are to properly address resourcing and capacity within planning services. This could also provide a foundation for future performance frameworks, making it possible to more accurately measure outcomes and impact, identify areas for improvement and demonstrate value. Without a clear definition, we risk inconsistent data as a result of varying approaches and contexts across Wales.

WG Planning Division and POSW should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Collect and publish quality planning data

A commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey) using the findings in this report as a baseline, as an extension to the recently recommended national planning performance framework to support evidence-based decision-making and long-term resilience. This should include reporting on fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, the amount of additional planning fee income since December 2025 and how this additional fee income has been reinvested to improve planning service delivery. This will develop a stronger and more detailed evidence base over-time, supporting evidence-based decision-making and resilience in the long term. It will also ensure transparency and accountability for how increased application fee income is reinvested. This data should be reported on an annual basis and in an accessible digital format. It is essential that all parties submit the relevant data if we are to accurately measure the on-going health of the planning service.

WG Planning Division and LPAs should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 5: Develop a recruitment and retention strategy

A comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales. This will require significant financial investment and commitment by all parties in order to secure the essential increase in resource levels. This includes a commitment from LPAs to reinvest the additional application fee income arising from the December 2025 fee uplift.

The recruitment and retention strategy should include:

- Schools outreach to raise awareness of planning as a career and a review of the Built Environment GCSE to ensure planning is highlighted as a career route;
- Support for Wales's only planning school at Cardiff University including through partnership working on outreach, recruitment, placements, support for CPD initiatives on digital planning and other areas of skills development;
- Creation of a Level 7 apprenticeship route along the lines of the successful scheme operating in England (without an age cap), to supplement the Pathways to Planning scheme;
- Support opportunities for mid-career transitioning into planning via services such as Public Practice.

WLGA should be responsible for the development of this recommendation in partnership with Cardiff University's planning school, Local Planning Authorities and CJsCs, NRW, PEDW, RTPI Cymru, Wales Planning Consultants' Forum and WG.

Recommendation 6: Shared services

The research found successful examples of shared skills operating across Welsh LPAs. These services have developed where there is a need and capacity for the

service. To move forward, the concept of shared services must be set out through clear and fully costed options that set out requirements including capacity. Without this information questions will remain and opportunities for efficiency and collaboration may be missed. Initial services could include, but are not limited to:

- A Wales-wide viability assessment and review service. This will support robust decision-making using the new all-Wales viability tool kit, providing expertise and resilience on a topic that public sector planners say they feel they lack expertise in;
- Wales-wide leadership on digital planning to explore and roll out new technology and upskill planners, securing potential economies of scale, providing resilience, maximising use of expertise and providing consistency across Wales;
- Wales-wide expertise on assessing compliance with low carbon and net zero policies, and to establish Wales-wide policies or changes to Building Regulations;
- CJC footprint expertise on large scale infrastructure projects to help with Local Impact Reports for SIPs, as well as on ecology, landscape, legal services, and transport. The legal services element should include exploring the potential for standardised S.106 agreements, expertise on compulsory purchase orders, and drafting Enforcement Notices;
- Regional or larger than local services (sub-regional) if needed for heritage and SuDS;
- Nutrient neutrality/Nutrient Management Boards on a river catchment or marine SAC basis.

LPA and CJC should be responsible for developing this recommendation with support from the WLGA and NRW.

Recommendation 7: Digital Planning

The use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, has the potential to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise. It must be embedded at the core of the planning system in Wales, rather than approached

as a supplementary element of service delivery. It should be prioritised and coordinated and should be informed by the needs of planners and service users. This will require strong leadership and collaboration.

WG (which from April 2026 will incorporate the Centre for Digital Public Services), RTPI Cymru, WLGA and Cardiff Uni should be responsible for developing this recommendation.

Appendix 1: Data sources

National data sources

Stats Wales

The Stats Wales platform provided national and authority wide budgetary data to inform this work. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue>

RTPI data

RTPI State of the Profession 2023: The UK planning profession in numbers

The [RTPI State of the Profession report](#) was published in November 2023. Its focus is the UK planning profession and uses the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2010 occupational classification system to identify Town Planning Officers.

“The purpose of this document is to provide an up-to-date, rigorous overview of the available evidence on the state of the UK planning profession (in the four nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). This includes demography, geography, employment relations, comparison to other built environment professions, education of future planners, and the size and international context of the RTPI as chartered membership organisation...It seeks to achieve this by collecting and synthesising the best available national and institutional data sources on its objects, while presenting this process through a transparent discussion of methodology and limitations.” A wide variety of data sources are used in the report, further information on data sources and their limitations are referred to the report.”

The RTPI State of the Profession 2025 Wales Report

Using a survey of working members of the RTPI, [the report](#) gives an insight into the career experiences, career plans, wellbeing and demographics of member respondents in Wales.

RTPI Education and Membership data

The RTPI Education and Membership departments provided this report with their independent analysis and data on apprenticeships and bursaries in Wales, and on the number of planning students studying at selected RTPI accredited Universities. This information has been approved for use by the relevant planning schools.

Third-party data

Survey responses and participant interviews with representatives from the four subject organisations (LPAs, PEDW, NRW's planning service and WG Planning Division).

Survey responses and data from RTPI accredited planning schools within/closest to Wales.

Job advertisements between September 2022 and March 2025 taken from The Planner Jobs ([The RTPI job board](#)), LinkedIn and the survey responses and websites of the four subject organisations, together with a comparison with data from the [Carrington West Public Sector – Annual Salary survey](#).

Appendix 2a Welsh Government Survey

1. Name
2. What was the gross and net budget for Welsh Government Planning Division in 2018/19?
3. What was the gross and net budget for Welsh Government Planning Division in 2023/24?
4. Beyond the Welsh Government Planning Division budget, do you have any other sources of income?
5. Please explain any key budget changes affecting Welsh Government Planning Division between 2018/19 and 2023/24 including details of any required budget savings or investment
6. Please provide details of any practices undertaken since 2018/19 that seek to either generate additional income for Welsh Government Planning Division or reduce service delivery costs. To what extent have those initiatives been successful?
7. If additional income were available to be reinvested in improvements to service delivery within Welsh Government Planning Division, what would be your top priorities for spending the money?
8. Please list additional duties and requirements falling on Welsh Government Planning Division, affecting its capacity, since 2018/19.
9. In your opinion, is there a good balance of experience in your current team - for example an appropriate mix of early career and more experienced planners?
 - Yes
 - No
10. Please explain your above answer including what changes, if any, you think would create a better balance of experience within Welsh Government Planning Division.
11. Looking ahead 5 years, in your opinion does WG Planning Division have too much capacity looking forward, sufficient capacity looking forward, do not have sufficient capacity looking forward, or are you unsure for the following caseload?
 - Consultations
 - WG planning policy review (TANs/Future Wales/PPW etc.)
 - Engaging in LDP development with LPAs

- Engaging in SDP development
- Development of legislation
- Call in/DNS/DCO caseload
- Ministerial/Senedd briefings
- Problem solving e.g. nutrient neutrality
- Monitoring/data analysis

12. In terms of recruitment, what are the key challenges, if any, experienced by Welsh Government Planning Division since September 2022 in relation to Planning Officers?

13. Please outline the different job advertisement methods used by the Welsh Government Planning Division since September 2022

- The Planner Magazine
- Planningjobs.com
- LinkedIn
- Indeed
- Email via POSW
- Newspaper
- Welsh Government website
- Not advertised since 2022
- Other

14. Why were these methods chosen and to what extent have they been successful?

15. In relation to hard-to-fill vacancies, which, if any, of the following actions have you taken since September 2022? Please select all that apply:

- Run targeted recruitment campaigns
- Offer more flexible working
- Increase salaries
- Create career frameworks/career grades
- Grow your own planners through graduate/apprenticeship schemes
- Run additional training/upskilling for existing staff

- Share resources within other planning bodies
- Organise internal secondments from other Divisions within Welsh Government
- Work collaboratively with others (UK Gov, Scottish Government etc.)
- Find external secondments
- Use agency/contract staff
- Procure external consultants
- Outsource services
- Recruit outside the planning discipline
- None of these
- Other

16. If you used any of these methods, to what extent were they successful? If you consciously discounted any of these methods, please explain why.

17. How do you think salaries within Welsh Government Planning Division compare to other employers (LPAs, Private sector, PEDW, Energy sector, Other MHCLG/DfI/Scottish Gov etc.

18. Looking ahead to the next 5 years, what (if any) potential future recruitment or retention challenges or opportunities are likely to impact on delivery of Welsh Government Planning Division functions?

19. Does your team have enough people with the following skills in order to work effectively with these options: This skill is not needed in our Planning Division, We need more people with this skill, We have sufficient people with this skill, We get this advice from NRW, We get this advice from an external source?

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape

- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
- Master planning
- Minerals and Waste
- Policy writing
- Regeneration
- Retail
- Second homes
- SuDS / SAB / flooding
- Transport and highways
- Urban design

20. If you currently buy in skills from outside of Welsh Government Planning Division, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years?

21. In the opinion of your Planning Officers, which, if any, skill gaps are prevalent in LPAs in Wales

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape
- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
- Master planning
- Minerals and Waste
- Policy writing
- Regeneration

- Retail
 - Second homes
 - SuDS / SAB / Flooding
 - Transport and Highways
 - Urban design
 - Other (please specify in the Question below)
22. Is there anything else you want to expand on in relation to your answer to questions 19 or 21 (skills capacity by topic area)?
23. In your opinion, which, if any, planning-related skills or services could be effectively delivered as a shared service, and on what footprint would that best work?
24. Thinking outside of Welsh Government Planning Division, what additional roles do you think are needed to offer an effective planning service in Wales within PEDW, LPAs, NRW, or others
25. Since September 2022, have you used agency staff or outsourced to a consultancy any part of your planning service or is this something you are considering in the future?
- We have used agency staff or outsourced part of our service in the past
 - We are considering using agency staff or outsourcing part of our service in the future
 - We have not used agency staff or outsourced any of our service in the past
 - We are not considering using agency staff or outsourcing any of our service in the future
26. Please feel free to expand
27. Over the next 5 years, what do you anticipate being the skills gaps or training needs arising within Welsh Government Planning Division, PEDW, LPAs, NRW, Other:
28. What was the annual training budget for Welsh Government Planning Division in 2018/19?
29. What was the annual training budget for Welsh Government Planning Division in 2023/24?

30. Thinking about the next financial year (2025/26), how do you think your annual training budget will change?
- Budget is likely to increase
 - Budget is likely to remain the same
 - Budget is likely to decrease
 - Don't know
31. If there were two things you could change about planning service delivery in Wales to make better use of resources or strip out waste, what would they be?
32. Do you currently employ
- Part-time student(s)
 - Year out student(s)
 - Apprentice(s)
 - Bursary students
33. Over the next five years, do you plan to employ trainee planners (graduates/apprenticeships etc.)?
- Yes, more trainee posts than currently employed
 - Yes, continuing with the same number of trainee posts as now
 - Yes, but fewer posts than currently employed
 - Maybe
 - No
34. Please feel free to expand, including your opinion on the barriers, if any to providing/securing training/trainee positions.
35. Please share any good practice or ideas on integrating trainee planners into the workplace utilised by Welsh Government Planning Division
36. If there are any other issues of concern, or ideas you have, relating to resources that this survey has not covered, please tell us below. If you'd prefer a conversation, please leave a couple of headings and your contact details.

Appendix 2b PEDW Survey

1. Name
2. What was the gross and net budget for PEDW in 2022/23?
3. What was the gross and net budget for PEDW in 2023/24?
4. Apart from fees paid by Local Planning Authorities for LOP examinations, does PEDW currently have any other sources of income?
5. Please explain any key budget changes affecting PEDW since October 2021 including details of any required budget savings or investment
6. Please provide details of any practices undertaken since October 2021 that seek to either generate additional income for PEDW or reduce service delivery costs. To what extent have those initiatives been successful?
7. If proposals to introduce a fee for planning appeals go ahead, will the additional fee income received by PEDW be invested in service delivery improvements or simply reduce the level of budget subsidy received from the Welsh Government?
 - Reinvested into service improvements
 - Reduce the level of budget subsidy required
8. If additional income were available to be reinvested in improvements to service delivery at PEDW, what would be your top priorities for spending the money?
9. Please list additional duties and requirements falling on PEDW, affecting its capacity, since October 2021.
10. In your opinion, is there a good balance of experience in your current team - for example an appropriate mix of early career and more experienced Inspectors?
 - Yes
 - No
11. Please explain your above answer including what changes, if any, you think would create a better balance of experience in PEDW.
12. Looking ahead 5 years, in your opinion, does PEDW have too much capacity looking forward, sufficient capacity looking forward, do not have the sufficient capacity looking forward, unsure for the following caseload? Choose one per caseload.

- LDP examinations
- SDP examinations
- DM appeals
- Enforcement appeals
- Minerals
- Energy DNS project

13. In terms of recruitment, what are the key challenges, if any, experienced by PEDW since September 2022 in relation to: Planning Inspectors, Planning Inspector Managers, Planning Officers, Business support staff/ administrators?

14. Please outline the different job advertisement methods used by the Welsh Government Planning Division since September 2022

- The Planner Magazine
- Planningjobs.com
- LinkedIn
- Indeed
- Email via POSW
- Newspaper
- Not advertised since 2022
- Other

15. Why were these methods chosen and to what extent have they been successful?

16. In relation to hard-to-fill vacancies, which, if any, of the following actions have you taken since September 2022? Please select all that apply:

- Offer more flexible working
- Run targeted recruitment campaigns
- Grow your own Planning Inspectors through graduate/apprenticeships schemes
- Increase salaries
- Use agency/ contract staff
- Procure external consultants
- Find external secondments from outside PEDW

- Outsource services
- Work collaboratively with PINS (England) or the Planning Appeals Commission (NI) or the PEAD (Scotland)
- Share resources within the Welsh Government
- Recruit outside the planning discipline
- Run additional training/upskilling for existing staff
- Create career frameworks/career grads
- None of these
- Other

17. If you used any of these methods, to what extent were they successful? If you consciously discounted any of these methods, please explain why.

18. How do you think salaries within PEDW compare to PINs/PAC/PEAD, Welsh Government, LPAs, Private sector planning consultants, Energy sector, Wider sector. Choose one for each employer.

- Salaries at my LPA are higher
- Salaries are about the same
- Salaries at my LPA are lower
- Don't know

19. Looking ahead to the next 5 years, what (if any) potential future recruitment or retention challenges or opportunities are likely to impact on delivery of PEDW's functions?

20. Does your team have enough people with the following skills in order to work effectively with these options: This skill is not needed in our Planning Division, We need more people with this skill, We have sufficient people with this skill, We get this advice from NRW or Welsh Government, We get this advice from an external source, We rely on the expert evidence submitted by Rule 6 parties?

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data
- Ecology and biodiversity

- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape
- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
- Master planning
- Minerals and Waste
- Policy writing
- Regeneration
- Retail
- Second homes
- SuDS / SAB / flooding
- Transport and Highways
- Urban design

21. If you currently buy in skills from outside of PEDW, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years?

22. In the opinion of your Planning Inspectors, which, if any, skills gaps are prevalent in Local Planning Authorities in Wales?

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape
- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
- Master planning

- Minerals and Waste
 - Policy writing
 - Regeneration
 - Retail
 - Second homes
 - SuDS / SAB / flooding
 - Transport and Highways
 - Urban design
23. is there anything else you want to expand on in relation to your answer to question 20 or 22 (skills capacity by topic areas)
24. Thinking outside of PEDW, what additional roles do you think are needed to offer an effective planning service in Wales within Welsh Government Planning Division, LPAs, NRW, or Others
25. Over the next 5 years, what do you anticipate being the skills gaps or training needs arising within PEDW, Welsh Government Planning Division, LPAs, NRW, or other planning bodies/sectors
26. What was the annual training budget for PEDW in 2022/23?
27. What was the annual training budget for PEDW in 2023/24?
28. Thinking about the next financial year (2025/26), how do you think your annual training budget will change?
- Budget is likely to increase
 - Budget is likely to remain the same
 - Budget is likely to decrease
 - Don't know
29. If there were two things you could change about planning service delivery in Wales to make better use of resources or strip out waste, what would they be?
30. Do you currently employ
- Part-time student(s)
 - Year out student(s)
 - Apprentice(s)

- Bursary students

31. Over the next *five* years, do you plan to employ trainee planners (graduates/apprenticeships etc.)?

- Yes, more trainee posts than currently employed
- Yes, continuing with the same number of trainee posts as now
- Yes, but fewer trainee posts than currently employed
- Maybe
- No

32. Please feel free to expand, including your opinion on the barriers, if any to providing/securing training/trainee positions

33. Please share any good practice or ideas on integrating trainee planners into the workplace utilised at PEDW

34. If there are any other issues of concern, or ideas you have, relating to resources that this survey has not covered, please tell us below. If you'd prefer a conversation, please leave a couple of headings and your contact details

Appendix 2c NRW Survey

1. Name
2. What was the gross and net budget for the NRW Planning Team in 2018/19?
3. What was the gross and net budget for the NRW Planning Team in 2023/24?
4. Beyond the NRW Planning Team budget, do you have any other sources of income?
5. Please explain any key budget changes affecting the NRW Planning Team between 2018/19 and 2023/24 including details of any required budget savings or investment
6. Please provide details of any practices undertaken since 2018/19 that seek to either generate additional income for NRW's Planning Team or reduce service delivery costs. To what extent have those initiatives been successful?
7. If additional income were available to be reinvested in improvements to service delivery within the NRW Planning Team, what would be your top priorities for spending the money?
8. Please list additional duties and requirements falling on the NRW Planning Team, affecting its capacity, since 2018/19.
9. In your opinion, is there a good balance of experience in your current team - for example an appropriate mix of early career and more experienced planners?
 - Yes
 - No
10. Please explain your above answer including what changes, if any, you think would create a better balance of experience within NRW's Planning Team
11. Looking ahead 5 years, in your opinion does the NRW Planning Team have too much capacity looking forward, sufficient capacity looking forward, do not have sufficient capacity looking forward or unsure for the following caseload?
 - Participating in pre application discussions
 - Commenting on planning applications
 - Commenting on LDP development
 - Engaging in SDP development

- Participating in national level policy development
- NRW briefings/planning advice
- Problem solving e.g. nutrient neutrality
- Monitoring/data analysis
- Participating in the development of legislation
- Participating in National Infrastructure Consenting

12. In terms of recruitment, what are the key challenges, if any, experienced by the NRW Planning Team since September 2022 in relation to Planning Officers and Business support staff/ administrators

13. Please outline the different job advertisement methods used by the NRW Planning Team since September 2022

- The Planner Magazine
- Planningjobs.com
- LinkedIn
- Indeed
- Email via POSW
- Newspaper
- Welsh Government website
- Not advertised since 2022
- Other

14. Why were these methods chosen and to what extent have they been successful?

15. In relation to hard-to-fill vacancies, which, if any, of the following actions have you taken since September 2022? Please select all that apply

- Run targeted recruitment campaigns
- Offer more flexible working
- Increase salaries
- Create career frameworks/career grades
- Grow your own planners through graduate/apprenticeships schemes
- Run additional training/upskilling for existing staff

- Share resources within other planning bodies
- Organise internal secondments from other Divisions within Welsh Government
- Work collaboratively with others (UK Gov, Scottish Government etc.)
- Find external secondments
- Use agency/contract staff
- Procure external consultants
- Outsource services
- Recruit outside the planning discipline
- None of these
- Other

16. If you used any of these methods, to what extent were they successful? If you consciously discounted any of these methods, please explain why.

17. How do you think salaries within the NRW Planning Team compare to LPAs, Private sector, PEDW, Energy sector, Other Natural England/ NatureScot etc., Welsh Government. Choose one for each employer.

- Salaries at my LPA are higher
- Salaries are about the same
- Salaries at my LPA are lower
- Don't know

18. Looking ahead to the next 5 years, what (if any) potential future recruitment or retention challenges or opportunities are likely to impact on delivery of the NRW Planning Team functions?

19. Does your team have enough people with the following skills in order to work effectively with these options: This skill is not needed in our Planning Division, We need more people with this skill, We have sufficient people with this skill, We get this advice from NRW or Welsh Government, We get this advice from an external source, We rely on the expert evidence submitted by Rule 6 parties?

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data

- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape
- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
- Master planning
- Minerals and Waste
- Policy writing
- Regeneration
- Retail
- Second homes
- SuDS / SAB / flooding
- Transport and Highways
- Urban design

20. If you currently buy in skills from outside of the NRW Planning Team, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years?

21. In the opinion of your NRW Planning Team Officers, which, if any, skills gaps are prevalent in Local Planning Authorities in Wales? (We recognise that some of these skills/areas may not align with the work of NRW's Planning Team, therefore feel free to leave those skills/areas unanswered)

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape

- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
 - Master planning
 - Minerals and Waste
 - Policy writing
 - Regeneration
 - Retail
 - Second homes
 - SuDS / SAB / flooding
 - Transport and Highways
 - Urban design
 - Other
22. Is there anything else you want to expand on in relation to your answer to questions 19 or 21 (skills capacity by topic area)?
23. In your opinion, which, if any, planning-related skills or services could be effectively delivered as a shared service, and on what footprint would that best work?
24. Thinking outside of the NRW Planning Team, what additional roles do you think are needed to offer an effective planning service in Wales within PEDW, LPAs, Welsh Government, or Others:
25. Since September 2022, have you used agency staff or outsourced to a consultancy any part of your planning functions or is this something you are considering in the future?
- We have used agency staff or outsourced part of our service in the past
 - We are considering using agency staff or outsourcing part of our service in the future
 - We have not used agency staff or outsourced any of our service in the past
 - We are not considering using agency staff or outsourcing any of our service in the future
26. Please feel free to expand:

27. Over the next 5 years, what do you anticipate being the skills gaps or training needs arising within the Welsh Government Planning Division, PEDW, LPAs, NRW, or other planning bodies/sectors (please specify)
28. What was the annual training budget for the NRW Planning Team in 2018/19?
29. What was the annual training budget for the NRW Planning Team in 2023/24?
30. Thinking about the next financial year (2025/26), how do you think your annual training budget will change?
- Budget is likely to increase
 - Budget is likely to remain the same
 - Budget is likely to decrease
 - Don't know
31. If there were two things you could change about planning service delivery in Wales to make better use of resources or strip out waste, what would they be?
32. Do you currently employ
- Part-time student(s)
 - Year out student(s)
 - Apprentice(s)
 - Bursary students
33. Over the next five years, do you plan to employ trainee planners (graduates/apprenticeships etc.)?
- Yes, more trainee posts than currently employed
 - Yes, continuing with the same number of trainee posts as now
 - Yes, but fewer posts than currently employed
 - Maybe
 - No
34. Please feel free to expand, including your opinion on the barriers, if any to providing/securing training/trainee positions.
35. Please share any good practice or ideas on integrating trainee planners into the workplace utilised by the NRW Planning Team

36. If there are any other issues of concern, or ideas you have, relating to resources that this survey has not covered, please tell us below. If you'd prefer a conversation, please leave a couple of headings and your contact details.

Appendix 2d Local Planning Authorities Survey

1. Name
2. What LPA are you representing
3. Since 2018/19, has the income received from planning applications (including PPAs) at your LPA exceeded the costs of delivering the development management service?
 - Yes, in every year
 - Yes, in some years
 - Yes, but in one year only
 - No
4. If yes, what happened to that additional money? Please select all that apply.
 - It was invested in improvements to the development management service/extra resource
 - It was invested in improvements to the wider planning service (e.g. Planning Policy)
 - It offset net costs in the wider planning service (e.g. Planning Policy)
 - It was directed to the central budget of the authority to offset spend elsewhere
 - Other
5. Please explain budget changes within your LPA, including details of noteworthy corporate budget saving requirements or corporate investment into the planning service, during the 5-year period between 2018/19 and 2023/24.
6. Please explain budget changes within your LPA, including details of noteworthy corporate budget saving requirements or corporate investment into the planning service, during the 5-year period between 2018/19 and 2023/24.
7. Please explain budget changes within your LPA, including details of noteworthy corporate budget saving requirements or corporate investment into the planning service, during the 5-year period between 2018/19 and 2023/24.
8. Please explain budget changes within your LPA, including details of noteworthy corporate budget saving requirements or corporate investment into the planning service, during the 5-year period between 2018/19 and 2023/24.

9. Please provide details of any practices undertaken within your LPA since 2018/19 that have sought to either generate additional income for the planning service or reduce service delivery costs. To what extent have those initiatives been successful?
10. As Head of Planning would you support a requirement to reinvest additional application fee income arising from the proposed fee increases in improvements in the planning service?
- Yes
 - No
11. Do you think there would be support corporately within your organisation to reinvest additional application fee income arising from the proposed fee increases in improvements in the planning service?
- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
12. If you were told you can keep additional application fee income to be reinvested in your planning service, what would be your top priorities for spending the money to secure improvement?
13. Please feel free to expand on any issues around the income received from planning applications (including PPAs) exceeding the costs of delivering the development management service.
14. Please outline changes to duties and requirements required of the planning service since 2018/19 that in your opinion have affected capacity or service delivery, either positively or negatively.
15. In your opinion, is there a good balance of experience in your LPA in your current team - for example an appropriate mix of early career and more experienced planners?
- Yes
 - No
16. Please explain your above answer including what changes, if any, you think would create a better balance of experience in your planning service.
17. What are the key challenges, if any, experienced by your Local Authority since September 2022 in terms of recruiting: Planning Officers, Business support staff and, Planning support services, such as ecologists and highway officers?

18. Please outline the different job advertisement methods used by your LPA since September 2022.

- The Planner Magazine
- Planningjobs.com
- LinkedIn
- Indeed
- Email via POSW
- Newspaper
- Local Authority website
- Not advertised since 2022
- Other

19. Why were these methods chosen and to what extent have they been successful?

20. In relation to hard-to-fill vacancies, which, if any, of the following actions have you taken since September 2022? Please select all that apply:

- Run targeted recruitment campaigns
- Offer more flexible working
- Increase salaries
- Create career frameworks/ career grades
- Grow your own planners through graduate/apprenticeship schemes
- Run additional training/upskilling for existing staff
- Share resources within the local authority
- Organize internal secondments from other departments within the local authority
- Work collaboratively with other local authorities
- Find external secondments from outside the authority
- Use agency/ contract staff
- Procure external consultants
- Outsource services
- Recruit outside the planning discipline

- None of these
- Other

21. If you used any of these methods, to what extent were they successful? If you consciously discounted any of these methods, please explain why.

22. How do you think salaries compare to neighbouring LPAs, Private sector, Welsh Government, PEDW, Energy sector. Choose one for each employer.

- Salaries at my LPA are higher
- Salaries are about the same
- Salaries at my LPA are lower
- Don't know

23. Looking ahead to the next 5 years, what (if any) potential future recruitment or retention challenges or opportunities are likely to impact on delivery of your planning service?

24. In your opinion, does your team have enough people with the following skills in order to work effectively?

- Agricultural appraisals
- Community engagement and participation
- Conservation and Heritage
- Digital and data
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy efficiency e.g. net zero
- Infrastructure and utilities
- Landscape
- Legal services e.g. Section 106 and CPOs
- Master planning
- Minerals and Waste
- Policy writing
- Regeneration
- Retail

- Second homes
 - SuDS / SAB / flooding
 - Transport and Highways
 - Urban design
 - Other
25. If you currently buy in skills from another LPA, which LPA hosts that service, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years?
26. If you currently buy in skills from consultancies, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years?
27. If you currently host a shared service, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years? Is there scope for the shared service to expand?
28. If you currently host a shared service, how satisfied are you with that arrangement, and do you foresee that arrangement continuing for the next 5 years? Is there scope for the shared service to expand?
29. In your opinion, which, if any, planning-related skills or services could be effectively delivered as a shared service, and on what footprint would that best work?
30. Thinking outside of your LPA, what additional roles do you think are needed to offer an effective planning service in Wales within the Welsh Government Planning Division, PEDW, NRW, or other
31. Since September 2022, have you used agency staff or outsourced to a consultancy any part of your planning service or is this something you are considering in the future?
- We have used agency staff or outsourced part of our service in the past
 - We are considering using agency staff or outsourcing part of our service in the future
 - We have not used agency staff or outsourced any of our service in the past
 - We are not considering using agency staff or outsourced any of our service in the future
32. Please feel free to expand:

33. Over the next 5 years, what do you anticipate being the skills gaps or training needs arising within LPAS, Welsh Government Planning Division, PEDW, NRW, or other planning bodies/sector (please specify)
34. What was the annual training budget for your planning department in 2018/19?
35. What was the annual training budget for your planning department in 2023/24?
36. Thinking about the next financial year (2025/26), how do you think your annual training budget will change?
- Budget is likely to increase
 - Budget is likely to remain the same
 - Budget is likely to decrease
 - Don't know
37. Do you currently employ
- Part-time student(s)
 - Year out student(s)
 - Apprentice(s)
 - Bursary students
38. Over the next five years, does your LPA plan to employ trainee planners (graduates/apprenticeships etc.)?
- Yes, more trainee posts than currently employed
 - Yes, continuing with the same number of trainee posts as now
 - Yes, but fewer trainee posts than currently employed
 - Maybe
 - No
39. Please feel free to expand, including your opinion on the barriers, if any to providing/securing training/trainee positions.
40. Please share any good practice or ideas on integrating trainee planners into the workplace.
41. If there were two things you could change about planning service delivery in Wales to make better use of resources or strip out waste, what would they be?

42. If there are any other issues of concern, or ideas you have, relating to resources that this survey has not covered, please tell us below. If you'd prefer a conversation, please leave a couple of headings and your contact details.

Appendix 3: Survey respondents

The list of survey respondents is set out below.

Organisation	Completed online survey	Completed written tables survey
Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority	X	X
Blaenau Gwent Local Planning Authority	X	X
Bridgend Local Planning Authority	X	X
Caerphilly Local Planning Authority	X	X
Cardiff Local Planning Authority	X	X
Carmarthenshire Local Planning Authority	X	-
Ceredigion Local Planning Authority	X	X
Conwy Local Planning Authority	-	X
Denbighshire Local Planning Authority	X	-
Eryri National Park Authority	X	X
Flintshire Local Planning Authority	X	X
Gwynedd Local Planning Authority	X	X
Merthyr Tydfil Local Planning Authority	X	X

Monmouthshire Local Planning Authority	X	X
Neath Port Talbot Local Planning Authority	X	X
Newport Local Planning Authority	X	X
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority	X	X
Pembrokeshire Local Planning Authority	X	X
Powys Local Planning Authority	X	-
Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Planning Authority	X	X
Swansea Local Planning Authority	X	X
Torfaen Local Planning Authority	X	X
Vale of Glamorgan Local Planning Authority	X	X
Wrexham Local Planning Authority	X	X
Ynys Môn Local Planning Authority	X	X
Natural Resources Wales planning function	X	X
Planning and Environment Decisions Wales	X	X
Welsh Government Planning Division	X	X

Figure 45: Table breakdown of list of survey responses from participants

Appendix 4: Interviewees

The list of organisations interviewed is set out below.

- Cardiff Local Planning Authority
- Ceredigion Local Planning Authority
- Eryri National Park Authority
- Flintshire Local Planning Authority
- Gwynedd Local Planning Authority
- Merthyr Tydfil Local Planning Authority
- Neath and Port Talbot Local Planning Authority
- Newport Local Planning Authority
- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
- Pembrokeshire Local Planning Authority
- Swansea Local Planning Authority
- Vale of Glamorgan Local Planning Authority
- Wrexham Local Planning Authority
- Ynys Môn Local Planning Authority
- Natural Resources Wales (planning related function)
- PEDW
- Planning Division of Welsh Government

Appendix 5: Public sector average salary bands

Public sector average (range) salary bands created by RTPI Cymru from data on job advertisements between September 2022 and March 2025 taken from The Planner Jobs, LinkedIn and the survey responses and websites of the four subject organisations, together with a comparison with data from the Carrington West Public Sector – Annual Salary survey

	Chief Planner / Head of Planning	Managerial Planners / Inspectors / Team Leaders	Principal / Senior Planners / Inspectors	Planning Officers	Assistant / Trainee / Graduate Planners	Specialisms	Business Support / Admin
LPA average salary range	£74,996 - £84,632	£47,323 - £51,421	£38,767 - £42,499	£34,417 - £37,748	£27,190 - £30,035	£34,830 - £39,570	£26,343 - £28,867
PEDW average salary range	£81,000 - £95,544	£73,978 - £84,882	£49,313 - £58,701	£33,727 - £40,683	£28,951 - £32,945	-	£27,729 - £31,905
NRW average salary range	-	£42,521 - £47,685	£38,051 - £41,646	£33,621 - £37,660	£23,000 - £24,000	£36,246 - £39,942	-

	Chief Planner / Head of Planning	Managerial Planners / Inspectors / Team Leaders	Principal / Senior Planners / Inspectors	Planning Officers	Assistant / Trainee / Graduate Planners	Specialisms	Business Support / Admin
WG Planning Division average salary range	£81,000 - £95,544	£58,918 - £70,450	£45,974 - £54,431	£35,787 - £43,759	£22,860 - £26,438	-	-
Carrington West Public Sector – Annual Salary survey*	£72,000 - £91,000	£50,000 - £74,000	£30,000 - £60,000	£32,000 - £42,000	-	-	

Figure 46: Salaries of planning roles between selected planning organisations

*Note – Carrington West’s figures are minimum to maximum ranges – not averages

Appendix 6: Age profile within LPA teams

The graph below sets out the estimated age profile of planners within the 22 responding LPAs. This is a snapshot of occupied posts as of May 2025.

LPA age profile

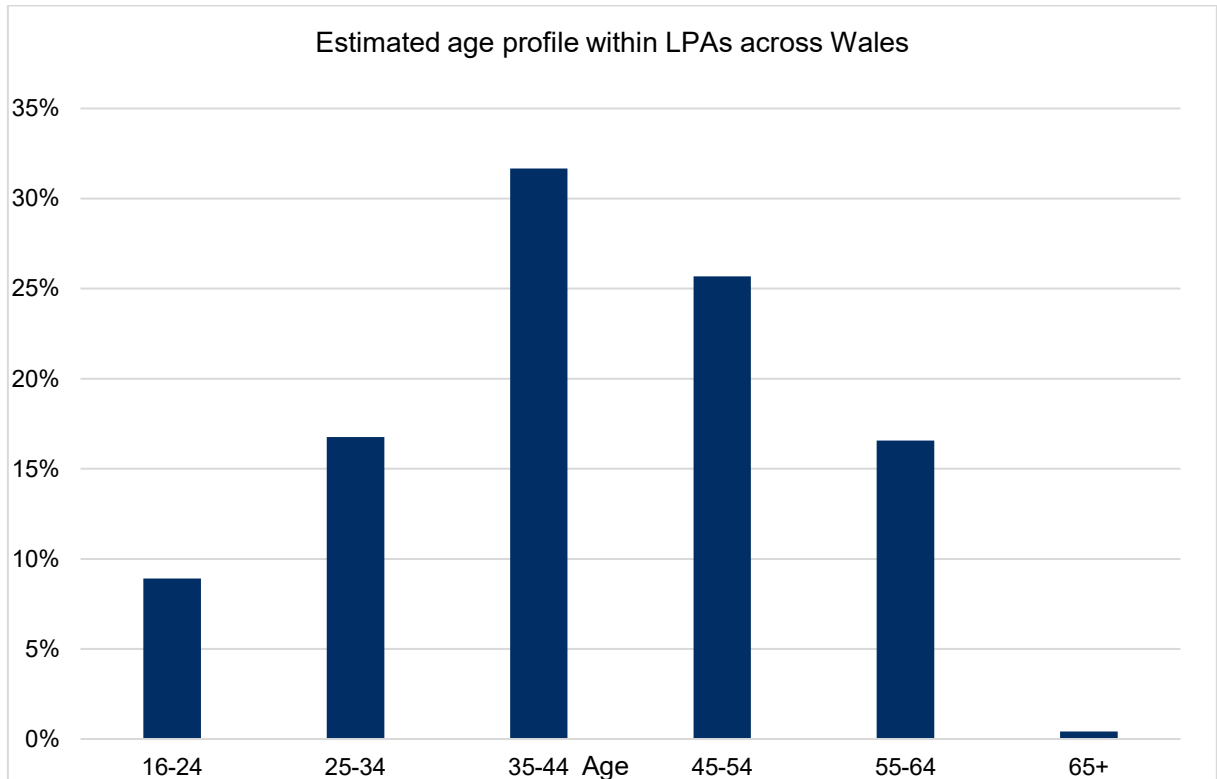


Figure 47: All Wales estimated ages of LPAs (2025) data accessed via RTPI research survey (May 2025). Analysis by RTPI.

The data in Figure 47 shows estimates that employees in LPAs across Wales:

- 9% are 16-24 years old;
- 17% are 25-34 years old;
- 32% are 35-44 years old;
- 26% are 45-54 years old;
- 17% are 55-64 years old;
- Less than 1% are 65+ years old.

The following graphs provide a breakdown of the estimated age profile of development management, enforcement and policy teams within responding LPAs.

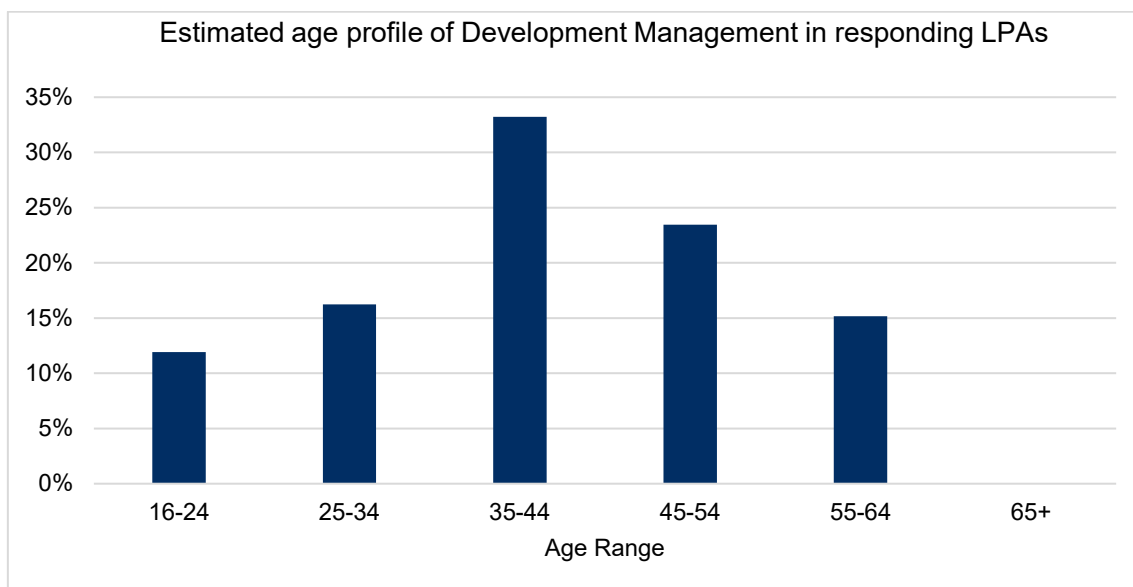


Figure 48: Estimated age profile of staff working in development management, within responding LPAs data accessed via RTPI research survey (May 2025).

The data in Figure 48 shows estimates that employees in Development Management across LPAs in Wales:

- 12% are 16-24 years old;
- 16% are 25-34 years old;
- 33% are 35-44 years old;
- 23% are 45-54 years old;
- 15% are 55-64 years old;
- 0% are 65+ years old.

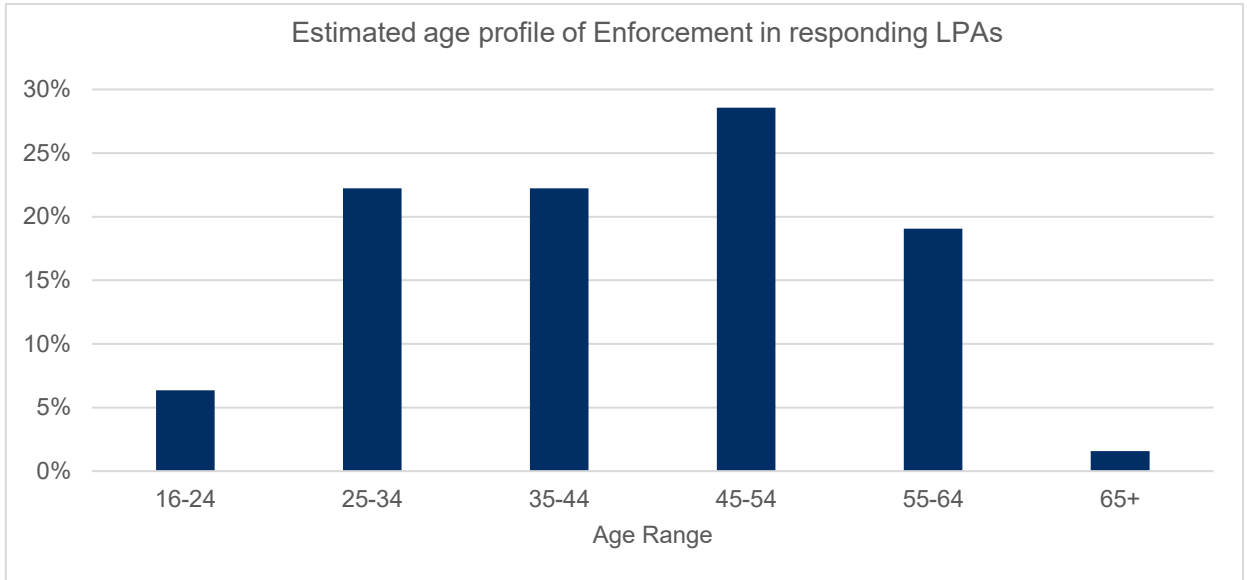


Figure 49: Estimated age profile of staff working in enforcement, within responding LPAs data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

The data in Figure 49 shows estimates that employees in Enforcement across LPAs in Wales:

- 6% are 16-24 years old;
- 22% are 25-34 years old;
- 22% are 35-44 years old;
- 29% are 45-54 years old;
- 19% are 55-64 years old;
- 2% are 65+ years old.

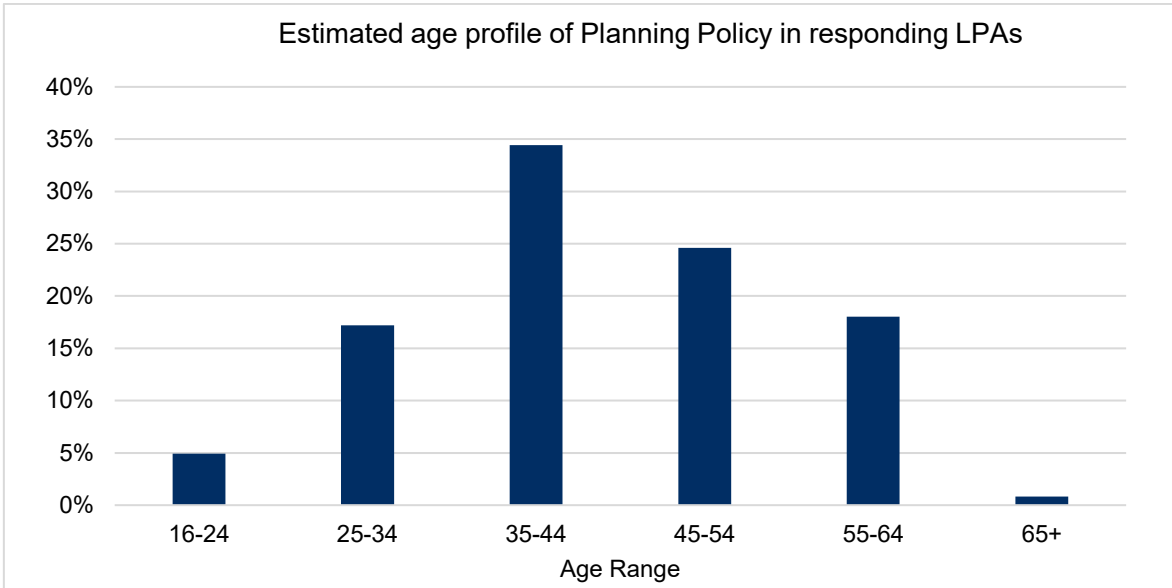


Figure 50: Estimated age distribution of staff working in planning policy, within responding LPAs data accessed via RTPI research survey (May 2025).

The data in Figure 50 shows estimates that employees in planning policy across LPAs in Wales:

- 5% are 16-24 years old;
- 17% are 25-34 years old;
- 34% are 35-44 years old;
- 25% are 45-54 years old;
- 18% are 55-64 years old;
- 1% are 65+ years old.

Appendix 7: Scottish National Improvement function

The National Planning Improvement function was established by the Scottish Government in September 2023. It sits within the Scottish Improvement Service and is funded by the Scottish Government. It has a remit to monitor the performance of planning authorities and provide advice to them, and other stakeholders, on how to improve.

The service has three key functions:

- Monitoring the performance of planning authorities, providing advice to them and other stakeholders on how to improve;
- Supporting planning authorities to identify and share good practice to tackle challenges in planning;
- Undertaking analysis and research to provide an evidence base on planning performance and improvement that can be shared with others to inform future approaches.

While the National Planning Improvement function does not have enforcing powers they provide a vital role in evidence provision, integration and communication.

They work closely with several partners, who together form the 'High Level Group on Planning Performance'. The Group includes:

- Scottish Government;
- Heads of Planning Scotland;
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives;
- Society of Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland;
- Royal Town Planning Institute;
- Key agencies group;

- Planning Aid Scotland;
- National Planning Improvement;
- Applicant Stakeholder Group.

A key output of National Planning Improvement is a National Planning Improvement Framework. This is a process that allows planning authorities to assess their performance across '12 attributes of a high performing planning authority'. This [assessment has been completed by 32 Scottish planning authorities](#) and the Service is working closely with the remaining two to help them finalise their assessment and identification of improvement actions. Year two of the framework is now underway where progress is being measured against the improvement actions that have been identified by planning authorities.

The National Planning Improvement Team also hosts the Scottish Government led National Planning Improvement Hub, which provides planning authorities with access to specialist expertise, to upskill their staff and to prepare their workforce for the future. While its initial priority will be to help planning authorities make quicker decisions on hydrogen planning applications, it now focuses on housing, renewable energy (including hydrogen, onshore wind and battery energy storage), and supporting local development plans.

Future outputs and outcomes of the National Planning Improvement team

Looking ahead, the Service has plans to:

- Work with planning authorities to complete year two of the National Planning Improvement Framework, to encourage the tracking of progress being made on improvement actions identified by planning authorities;

- Explore with Scottish Government and other key stakeholders how to take forward the National Planning Hub in the future, to help planning authorities tackle challenges in renewable energy, housing delivery and adopting local development plans in a timely manner;
- Develop a new improvement leads network to support planning authority staff to collaborate and seek solutions to challenges and issues they face;
- Continue to play a critical friend role to planning authorities taking forward the National Planning Improvement Framework, with the long-term goal of tackling strategic issues including the housing emergency, embedding customer care in planning services and providing strong leadership to promote confidence in planning officers;
- Undertake research to inform planning service improvement including an annual workforce and capacity survey and customer and stakeholder survey;
- Undertake 'rapid reviews', for example exploring how to embed customer care in planning services, ensure strong leadership and confidence in planning authorities;
- Deliver joined up programmes.

More detail can be found at [National Planning Improvement](#) and [National Planning Hub](#)