Reference	BOT19/FEB/9B
Date	Wednesday, 6th February 2019

RTPI
Royal Town Planning Institute

Board of Trustees

Planning Aid England (PAE) Update

Report from the Director, Wales and Northern Ireland

FOR INFORMATION

Board is asked to note the work of PAE since November 2018.

1. Summary

This report summarises aspects of PAE work from November 2018 to mid-January 2019. Key points are:

- PAE now has a total of 452 volunteers of which 223 (49%) are chartered members.
- The email advice service received a total of 366 requests for the support and our dedicated
- Advice and guidance website: www.planningaid.co.uk received over 19,000 hits.
  Laura Waterton has joined the team as Planning Advisor on a part time basis.
  Under the PAE consulting work stream we continue to work with EDFE to deliver community engagement support to local parish and town councils affected by the Sizewell C Stage 3 consultation which launched in December. A major programme of community workshops commenced on Friday 18th January supported by PAE staff and three other community engagement specialists.

2. Background

PAE staff and volunteers continue to works towards delivering the agreed work programme comprising three work streams:

- **PAE Direct**: to continue providing planning advice and guidance to the public in the form of e-mail advice, individual casework, web-based advice as well as workshops and training with the emphasis on expanding the range of activities which can be undertaken by PAE chartered volunteers;

- **PAE Support**: to work with regional PAE task groups to devise and deliver a more pro-active approach to helping communities in need engage with the planning system. This work stream will develop over time in line with different regional priorities but will in many cases involve an ongoing dialogue between PAE task groups and relevant local authorities over a programme of targeted planning engagement activities; and

- **PAE Consulting**: to include helping with bespoke community engagement exercises and bespoke training and workshops where these are consistent with RTPI/PAE objectives.

In line with strategic priorities, the 2019 service plan includes an additional work stream:

- **PAE Engagement:** using a range of formats (e.g. podcasts, videos) to promote wider engagement with PAE work programme outputs and learning - delivered in close collaboration with other teams

across the RTPI. This will include a range of accessible, engaging discussions covering the outputs from PAE Direct and PAE Support which are aimed at the general public but also relevant to planners, politicians and decision makers.

3. Work of Planning Aid England (PAE) in the period Nov 2018 – Mid Jan 2018

3.1 Regional activity

Events and research

North West

Five volunteers have completed updating research undertaken by the planning school at the University of Liverpool (commissioned in 2017 by PAE in the North West) concerning the status and progress of neighbourhood plans across the region. . The neighbourhood planning headlines from this research are that the rate of increase in the number of new plans appears to be slowing down and that over 40 plans designated in 2015 or earlier seem not to have progressed beyond designation. The task group is considering whether research into establishing the reasons for this should be pursued. The task group has also sent this updated information to local planning authorities across the North West for their comments with a reminder of the support services available through PAE.

North East

Two volunteers from the NE region are assisting with a series of mock interviews for third year Master of Planning (undergraduate) students at Newcastle University on 23rd January. The interviews are designed to give the students some practice for their forthcoming placement interviews, as they move from the academic environment to the world of planning practice.

South West

On 17th January planning students at the University of Plymouth presented the finding of their survey of town and parish councillors in deprived areas of the SW to members of the SW PAE Task Group (who have worked closely with staff and students on the MSC planning to develop this work). This research is intended to help identify where and how PAE volunteers in the region may be able to support communities to effectively engage with the planning system. Further to feedback on the presentations from the task group, individual reports will be written up and shared with the task group who will use it to shape future PAE activity in the region.

Yorkshire

The task group and Leeds City Council have put together an ongoing programme of support for Beeston neighbourhood forum, which is an area of Leeds facing significant deprivation, and four regional volunteers are involved in providing support. Several meetings of the project team have taken place and a workshop was held on Tuesday 15 January to look at shaping early policy intentions based on engagement work that's already been done and knowledge of the area.

East of England, London & South East

The East of England London and South East PAE regional representatives stood down in 2017 and we are currently seeking replacements to re-instigate PAE Task Group activity in each region.

Current casework

During the period between Nov 2018 and mid Jan 2019 volunteers have assisted with the following new planning casework across the regions:

East of England

Cromer (one of top 20% most deprived wards in England) – a volunteer is helping a client with autism who has been issued with a stop notice from their local authority regarding some work they have undertaken preparing a basement space for a garage. The volunteer has been appointed to help liaise between the client and North Norfolk District Council in order that the client can fully understand the situation as it stands and what is required with regard to planning permission.

3.2 PAE work programme: PAE Direct

E-mail advice service

As previously reported, a panel of 13 chartered PAE volunteers was recruited and trained to operate the PAE Advice Service in 2018. The panel spend up to 2.5 hours a week answering general planning enquires by e-mail from their own home or work computers during pre-arranged time slots. The panel responded to 366 requests between Nov 2018 and mid Jan 2019 and have averaged a satisfaction rating by service users of 85%.

Web pages

A volunteer panel comprising 20 chartered members from across the country, was set up in spring 2017 to review, update and expand the range of planning advice covered on the Planning Aid Direct pages of the RTPI website. Publication of the updated advice was completed in early 2018. However, following publication of the revised National Planning Policy Framework in July we intend to review and undertake these pages again over the next few months

PAE panel member training event
The 2019 PAE business plan includes a proposal to hold a training/celebration event for all the volunteers on the two panels mentioned above given their significant contribution to the outputs of the service as a whole. We will also invite PAE regional representatives to this event in recognition of their role in the delivery of PAE activities. This event is scheduled for 30th April2019 to be held in Birmingham – will enable panel members to share best practice with each other and discuss ideas for potential service improvements.

3.3 PAE work programme: PAE Support

Annual meeting of PAE Regional Representatives

The annual meeting of the PAE regional representatives, which took place on the 4th of July, encompassed a broader remit than in previous years. As well as updating colleagues on key achievements in each region and discussing potential priorities for next year, there were two other sessions during the day:

- **Approaches to planning aid**: this session explored different approaches to delivering planning aid outcomes and included presentations from the North West, particularly on how support for neighbourhood forums was being delivered in the region. This session also included a presentation from James Davies, CE of Planning Aid Wales (PAW) who provided an overview of how PAW operated and the challenges it faces. This session concluded with an excellent discussion on sharing good practice across both England and Wales.

- **Maximising links between PAE, planning schools and PAE regional task groups**: the second session focussed on how to maximise the links between the work of PAE, students at various planning schools and the activities of the PAE regional task groups. This session included contributions from Tom Kenny on the upcoming RTPI research priorities as well a presentation from Dr Stephen Essex from Plymouth University on a joint research project between the university and the PAE SW task group which explored opportunities for PAE activity amongst deprived communities in the SW. Those involved in this session are collaborating on

the idea of producing a good practice advice note on how to maximise effective links between PAE and planning schools to be published in due course.

Age-Friendly Communities

PAE staff continue supporting the University of Cambridge Institute of Public Health with a research project it is conducting this year on Neighbourhood Planning and Age-Friendly Rural Communities. Staff have provided initial information on neighbourhood planning processes and activity across the country. They are now participating in an advisory group comprising practitioners and academics in the health and planning fields, providing support and advice at its latest meeting in September and will continue to advise on project work as it proceeds during the rest of this year. Publication of a final report is anticipated in early 2019.

3.4 PAE work programme: PAE Consulting

NSIP project community support

PAE is in the (possibly unique) position of being able to act as "neutral facilitator" in support of local communities engaging with major projects which has resulted in a number of commissions:

- **Sizewell C**: following our involvement during the stage 2 consultation for Sizewell C concluding in early 2017 helping several parish and town councils to respond effectively to the consultation process, EDF Energy asked PAE to submit a proposal to deliver broadly the same package of support for their proposed Stage 3 consultation.

  This major commission, which has now been confirmed, includes delivering a series of about 20 workshops early next year for local parish and town councils to raise understanding and awareness of the scheme and to provide further support to facilitate effective responses to the consultation process. In order to deliver sufficient capacity for this project the in-house PAE staff will be joined by three other community engagement specialists, all of whom have worked for PAE in the past.

  A project inception meeting took place at EDF Energy's London offices on 31st October to discuss the format for the Stage 3 consultation and the role PAE is being asked to play and this will be followed up in late November with a briefing day for the team to see all the key locations within the Sizewell area which will be affected by the proposal. Work will then begin in earnest on preparing the material for the engagement workshops and organising the delivery of these events. This commission will take up a significant proportion of PAE staff resources during the early part of 2019.

- **Stonehenge**: consultants working for Highways England asked PAE to produce a short-list of potential candidates to chair the recently created community engagement board in relation to the NSIP project including the new A303 road tunnel near to Stonehenge. The PAE Manager provided a shortlist of candidates for the role of chair of the community engagement board. All these candidates were subsequently interviewed and one of this short-list has now been appointed.

- **A358**: Following the work on the Stonehenge NSIP project, PAE has been approached to undertake a similar search exercise to identify a shortlist of possible candidates to chair a community engagement forum for another part of the overall A303 corridor upgrade, this time for the A358 improvements from Taunton to Ilminster. The date for this project has yet to be finalised.

- **A27 south coast**: Request for a shortlist of candidates to be Independent Chair of the elected representative forum.

3.5 PAE statistics (CHI14)

Below is a table summarising PAE advice activity from 01 July – 31st Oct 2018

	Nov	Dec	Mid Jan	Total
Requests to e-mail advice service	150	112	104	**366**
PAE website hits	7755	5891	5506	**19152**
New and ongoing items of casework				**10**
Number of PAE volunteers				**452**
……of which number of chartered volunteers				**223**

4. Recommendation

Board is asked to note the work of PAE between July and end-Oct 2018.

5. Resource implications

The work programme agreed at the Board meeting in September 2017 aims to make the most effective use of the existing modest PAE staff resources which equates to 2.5 FTEs. Following recent changes the team now comprises one full time and three part time members of staff.

PAE have retained two contractors on (occasional working) contracts during 2018 in case they are required to help run the e-mail advice service, which is now operated by a panel of chartered volunteers. To date, given the continued resilience of the volunteer panel, the services of these two consultants has not been required.

The work programme can be accommodated within existing budgets.

6. Communications Implications

Products and services continue to be promoted through the Institute's member bulletin, website, The Planner and social media.

7. Legal implications

None.

8. Jurisdiction and devolution implications

The work of PAE applies solely to England, with English members only contributing as volunteers.

9. Equality and diversity implications

Some PAD services, particularly casework, are available to those meeting established criteria. Priority is given to enabling the participation of communities within deprived areas in the planning process, driven through regional engagement and outreach activity and supported where available by PAE's commercial work.