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General Assembly

# Chief Executive's Report

Report from the Chief Executive

**FOR INFORMATION**

The General Assembly are invited to:

- Note the contents of this report; and where relevant, feel free to provide feedback directly to the Chief Executive

## 1. Introduction

This paper sets out very high level deliverables in the period September – December 2020 the Chief Executive would like to appraise the General Assembly of. It is a snapshot of key highlights of activity undertaken by RTPI colleagues and volunteers during this period.

Given the continued lockdowns across the UK and Ireland, and extraordinary circumstances of the global pandemic, this report contains a brief update on the operations and budget planning for 2021.

The significant highlight is the news that the total number of members at the end of the year was 26,115. This the highest figure ever reached, representing an overall increase of 2.1% in 2020.

## 2. Delivering for Members – special COVID-19 update

### 2.1. Operational Assumptions for 2022 business planning

- Given the continued uncertainty of the global pandemic, and escalating / deterioration of many regions and nations who are experiencing a second wave, it is entirely appropriate that the RTPI continues with an abundance of caution in its financial planning for 2021.

- It is important the RTPI takes proactive control of its operations for 2021 with the pandemic considered in its operations, rather than having to react as uncertainties unfold. The executive has considered various scenarios and have planned on the the basis that social distancing requirements are likely to extend well into 2021.

- This assumption leaves no alternative other than to continue to plan on the basis that the majority of our core meetings, events and training will need to be held virtually for the first half of 2021. Service plans and budgets have been planned on that basis so as to minimise financial loss and deliver best value for members. It will be more financially prudent to add to the programme, should opportunities arise for additional in-person events, than it would be to cut aspects of our operations and incur losses, as was the case in 2020.

- In meeting with the nations in regions to plan ahead for 2021, the Chief Executive made it clear that this does not prevent small regional and national networking events taking place should then fall within respective national and / or regional restrictions, but they will be expected to be on a cost neutral basis so as to minimise financial impact in the event of short notice cancellations. A commitment has been made to review this position from 1 April.

- During 2020 the RTPI has been able to make impressive strides forward in digital services to members, supported by the launch of the new website in the spring. As the offer continues to be developed and refined in line with the vision set out in the Corporate Strategy, it is like that continued investment in digital will be required to enhance the membership offer and enable to RTPI to explore options to diversifying income.

- Whilst the economic outlook remains unpredictable as the pandemic and its impacts continue to unfold, the RTPI will need to continue to invocate and harness its potential to deliver more for members whilst maintaining a prudent budget. Translating the foundations set out in the corporate strategy into tangible action and results will be a priority for 2021, to maintain resilience and sustain the RTPI during this uncertain period.

## 3. Delivering for Members – September– December 2020

### 3.1. Membership team / APC

- The RTPI finished 2020 with a new membership record of just over 26,115 members. This represented a 2.1% increase over the year, which was above target and leaves a solid foundation to embark the current membership retention campaign.

- The 2021 APC assessor recruitment and registration process was launched at the beginning of October and closed mid-November. An increased number of assessors are required for 2021 to prepare for the new DA-APC route being implemented at the beginning of 2022.

- The planning has started for the 2021 annual APC assessor training days early in 2021. The training will be delivered online for 2021 due to pandemic.

- The Membership and Ethics Committee met for the fifth and final time in 2020. The Committee discussed the development of implementation plan for GROWPLAN, the International Strategy, membership KPIs, as well as the work of the reporting Panels (MAAP and C&D).

- A Process Review project was kick started in September, the project is being scoped with a scoping / discovery stage underway.

- Delivered sixteen APC events held so far in 2020 - fourteen webinars and two face-to face events.

- The implementation plan for GROWPLAN is being developed.

- The Membership Appeal Panel met to discuss three APC appeals, all of the appeals were dismissed.

- NURTURE was soft-launched on 3rd November, announcing our delivery specialist Women in Transport (utilising their experience of ADVANCE, a similar mentoring programme).

- The fourth and final APC resubmission assessment round for 2020 was held with the results due to be published for candidates in November.

## 3.2. Subscriptions

- Subscriptions income held steady in quarter 4 of 2020 compared to quarter 4 2019, with a comparable number of members with failed Direct Debit payments compared to same point last year, indicating that members are still as keen and able to pay their subscriptions. We continue to monitor the situation closely.

- The 2021 member retention campaign started in October with the launch of a pre-renewals engagement plan. The annual subscription renewals were sent to members in early November.

- Annual strike-offs (members not paying beyond final reminder) broadly comparable to last year

- Subscriptions Team's processes are now nearly 100% paperless and the team has adapted very well to home working. The team has been able to deliver a service to members which is near comparable before lockdown.

## 3.3. Conduct & Ethics

- The Conduct & Discipline Panel held their third and final meeting for 2020 to discuss two cases, both included multiple members. Three members were found in breach of the Code of Conduct. The first meeting of 2021 was held in early January.

- A review of the Complaints Procedure and Service has begun, the review will address issues of publicity and transparency, as well as ensuring there is a more joined up approach with other areas of the Institute.

## 3.4. Education & Careers

- Attendance at Planning Schools Forum meeting in September to commence discussions on Corporate Strategy project 'Education for Everyone', followed by an online Partnership and Accreditation Panel workshop to engage with volunteers on planning education content, skills and virtual Partnership Boards.

- Tenth university now approved for Degree Apprenticeship - University of Westminster.

- Survey of current Chartered Town Planner apprentices completed with 25% response rate, showing 51% from non-degree backgrounds, 10% non-white, 66% female. Scheme is supporting the public sector in new recruits, career changers and upskilling existing technical staff. Planning schools reporting employer interest for places.

- Employers' views were sought through a survey on a new Town Planning Assistant Apprenticeship. Assessment Plan. Scheme agreed by Trailblazer employer group. Submission to Department for Education early in 2021, and engagement with other jurisdictions.

- Data cleanse of RTPI Learn users taking place and testing for a new single sign-in process for members ready for 2021.

- New Climate Tools finder on RTPI Learn for all members.

- New virtual RTPI careers talk session recorded with President, Vice President, Young Planner of the Year, and Young Planner Network Chair - to go global to all planning schools on the RTPI YouTube and RTPI 'Become a Planner' YouTube channels.

- Commissioning of student and graduate data analysis as part of the last phase for 2020 pipeline research project. Delivery of draft conclusions, recommendation and consolidated research report on the supply and skills of planners remains on schedule. This will inform any future Corporate Strategy work on education policy and GROWPLAN actions over the next period and beyond.

- Annual student data returns out to planning schools for completion by end of the year, to detail student numbers and apprentice numbers.

- Learning Partner of Year Award - Optimis Consulting - announced by the President for excellent graduate support scheme, the education team coordinating the whole award process.

- Agent Plan-it Challenge for Change children's competition judged nationally by Ambassador volunteers and the President and winners announced: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_Qk6wuMRDw

- Annual WTPD #PlanTheWorldWeNeed secondary school competition launched, open globally, with other 150 entries received and winners to be announced imminently.

## 3.5. Training

- 2021 Training Masterclass programme of at least 40 courses confirmed, endorsed with the RTPI Core CPD badge, and with masterclasses hosted through RTPI Learn. Golden threads of climate action, and diversity and inclusivity. Meeting the Institute's CPD Framework knowledge and skills framework for members.

- CPD policy review underway with regards to an updated endorsement guidance for CPD opportunities with key partners and a new approach to the Core CPD badge that complements the emerging draft RTPI Events Strategy

- 2020 training delivery continues this autumn with 17 expert-led courses now planned. Good attendance on the SEA, viability, flooding & climate change, and heritage masterclasses that ran in Sept. At least five new Associate and Affiliate Members recruited as direct result of Training offer. Almost 100% of online masterclass attendees were brand new to RTPI Training, indicating new and emerging markets to follow-up and focus on in 2021.

- Launch of 2021 programme of events (currently all online) in November 2020 for January 2021. Courses built in CRM /CMS and project managed the advertising and rollout through LinkedIn calendar of events. The programme consists of masterclass courses - 12 week long modules built in RTPI Learn.

- Work on RTPI Learn single sign on project and integration with Training masterclasses to be completed, including testing and upgrades to support new features and content for RTPI members.

## 3.6. Communications, Marketing & Parliamentary Affairs

- Between September and the end of the year the RTPI was mentioned in the press on approximately 100 separate occasions.

- Highlights include Architectural Digest, our call in response to CSR announcement for £500 million to LPAs in England, and regional awards finalists being mentioned in regional news, Scottish Chief Planner being made a Fellow and Wales response to National Development Framework.

- In total in 2020 we received approximately 600 mentions in the press, and new media audiences include Farmers Weekly, Horticulture Week and Retail Times and mentions on Radio 6 Music.

- Social media engagement continues to grow with 21.6K Twitter followers, an increase of £1k since April and a steady increase in other channels such as YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram. All members of the RTPI, including BOT are asked to subscribe to the RTPI's YouTube channel so that they can receive instant notifications of new films as they 'go live'.

- The marketing team created an "engagement strategy" to encourage members to renew their subscriptions, including an article in the Planner Magazine outlining the successes of the Institute during 2020 and with a graphic to show our achievements in numbers (also shared with BOT and GA in November).

- The marketing team launched the RTPI Training offer for 2021 and launched the RTPI 2021 Online Webinar series to members in December.

- The marketing team successfully created all branding and assets for Young Planners conference.

- The Young Planners Conference Online was a major success, selling out within 24 hours, and 90% delegates who booked attended, with 400 delegates overall. Feedback has been very positive with many delegates and speakers saying that it was almost as good as the live event. Throughout the day engagement was high with very active delegate feedback channels.

- The Nathaniel Lichfield Conference held on 25 November and featured Professor Georgia Watson of Oxford Brookes University on Urban Design for Healthy Places.

- The emerging 'one institute' events strategy was presented to Nations and Regions Panel for discussion and their feedback has been taken on board as this important area of work continues. In response to the decision for all regional and national CPD events to remain online in Q1 and Q2 2021, a "one institute" online webinar calendar, free to members and with a small charge of £25 to non-members, was launched in first week of December.

- Ongoing meetings with MPs and Ministers and senior politicians across the nations. Engagement resulted in RTPI Deputy Head of Policy and Research being called as witness in High Streets select Committee and featured in Today in Parliament.

- The RTPI submitted a response to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Housing and Planning, and its first meeting was held behind closed doors on the White Paper response. The RTPI published its report which echoes much of RTPI's own response to White Paper.

- Ongoing engagement with key Parliamentarians resulted in the RTPI being called to a witness in the HCLG Select Committee on White Paper in late November.

### 3.7. Policy Research & Practice

- Planning White Paper response was delivered within deadline following an extensive engagement with members, alongside an RTPI Essay and associated press release.

- Changes (England) MHCLG consultation submitted to meet end of October deadline.

- Preparation and support on submissions and evidence to HCLG Select Committees on high streets and planning reform

- Delivered Design Value (CACHE) report late November.
- Play Gap research on Barnet complete and launched, shortly followed by Planning Outcomes research and toolkit. Other publication launches relating to infrastructure and climate change mitigation.
- Land (transparency) information consultation submitted to MHCLG, and RTPI submission to Comprehensive Spending Review and business case for planning Invest and Prosper published with associated media.

### 3.8. International

- International Strategy endorsed by International Committee and other Standing Committees.
- IC work programme for 2021 reflects the strategy's objectives.
- Successful events held for World Town Planning Day in the Regions and Nations, including joint statement with Global Planners Network and the President spoke at ISOCARP conference.
- International Committee responded to consultation from the ECTP on EU's urban policy post-COVID19.

### 3.9. RTPI Scotland & RTPI Ireland

- This year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference was transformed into The Scottish Planner Live comprising a series of shorter online events over the week 28 September to 2 October. It looked at a range of issues around health, planning and placemaking. Videos of all the sessions are now available to watch on the RTPI YouTube channel.
- "RTPI Scotland has published research on the benefits of Digital Planning comprising analysing the need, demand and possible impacts of supporting a digital planning strategy. This comprises an economic impact analysis, a user and customer impact analysis, a policy impact analysis, case studies, a summary document and an infographic. This was commissioned by Scottish Government ".
- RTPI has supported and stimulated the publication of research that has been published by Skills Development Scotland on approaches to increasing planner numbers and planning skills in Scotland. RTPI Scotland is leading on developing an action plan on the back of this
- The December issue of the Scottish Planner focussed on the future for our town centres.
- The Annual Irish Planning Law Lecture took place online on 7 October where Eamon Galligan, Senior Counsel specialising in planning and environmental law, outlined the key updates. The President also attended this and gave the vote of thanks.
- Virtual Presidential visit to Galway took place with hosts Galway County Council and Galway City Council.
- Briefing agreed on the Heads of the new Land Development Agency Bill to be provided to members of the Housing, Local Government and Heritage Committee who will lead on the scrutiny of the Bill once published.

## 3.10. RTPI Cymru

- In September the Welsh Government's National Development Framework: Wales 2040 was laid in the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) for scrutiny. We have bene developing our response on this and submitted written evidence to the Committee and the Director will be giving oral evidence in November.

- Following the launch of the Placemaking Wales Charter by the Minister in September, RTPI Cymru has been working with the partnership to embed the principles of the Charter and develop other initiatives.

- Work has been underway to develop the RTPI ‘asks’ for the 2021 Senedd Cymru elections.

- In October the Award judging panels were held for the RTPI Cymru Awards for Planning Excellence and the Welsh Planner of the Year.

## 3.11. RTPI NI

- The Policy and Research Forum has developed its work programme further, honing its priorities to increasing the profile of design and placemaking in Northern Ireland and encouraging the development of stronger rural policies.

- In October, RTPI NI hosted the President in a virtual visit to Rathlin Island - Northern Ireland's only inhabited island. Senior officials from the Department for Infrastructure hosted the event and we were joined by key community representatives from the Island to talk about the engagement and regeneration work which has taken place.

## 3.12. English Regions

- In excess of 100 regional members shared their knowledge and views at Roundtables held across all nine regions to inform RTPI's response to the White Paper. Led by the Policy Team, members in the NW will also be contributing to Roundtable sessions on the GMCA and Liverpool City Region.

- Young Planners have supported the Education Team to reach out to students in our Planning Schools - virtual visits have taken place to University of Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, Sheffield Hallam, ARU, Brighton, Oxford and Reading with more scheduled. Young Planners in the East of England have also supported ARU's Apprenticeship Week.

- Our Regional Awards in the English Regions were held as part of a week-long celebration, premiered on RTPI's YouTube channel on 16-20 November. Hosted by President Sue Manns, and our Regional Chairs, the virtual ceremonies also include 'selfie' videos from our inspiring Young Planners.

- For the first time ever, nominations to Regional and Nations committees was held using our online voting platform alongside elections to GA and Board of Trustees. Throughout December, volunteer inductions will be held for Incoming Chairs and new members of regional committees.

- In Quarter three, 26 webinars were hosted by Regions, with in excess of 5000 delegates registering to attend sessions. Additionally, 'virtual socials' were held - drops in sessions with regional chairs, bingo, 'articles club' and a Room 101. In Q4 another 30+ CPD webinars are scheduled, with current registrations at 4300. Young Planners have been hosting a series of 'Ask

an Expert' webinars on a range of topics including a recent session on 'How to get hired'. They have also held 'Bridging the Gap' between Planning Practice and Research sessions which aim to demonstrate how student and academia work can impact planning practice.

- Regions are working collaboratively with Nations and Events teams to curate the 2021 programme of CPD webinars. These will be launched before the end of the year and will be free to members.

- The NW Region's Local Authority 'Champions' met virtually, with the session hosted by President Sue Manns. The aim of the Champions network is to foster stronger relationships between RTPI and Local Authority Planners and leads on from work initiated in the Yorkshire Region. Presidential visits were also held in the North East, South East, East of England, South West and Yorkshire and can be accessed from our YouTube channel.

- Our Chief Planners of Tomorrow programme has resumed in a virtual format, initially with a handful of candidates so that we can monitor success.

### 3.13. Planning Aid England

- E-mail advice service is operating well; several volunteers have put themselves forward as part of a new recruitment process and training took place in December.

- Website advice is proving popular during lockdown; over 12,000 hits per month recorded for the first time during June and July.

- Casework continued throughout 2020, and PAE held the first virtual quarterly meeting with about a dozen key volunteers from across our activities to discuss service delivery. This went very well and will continue (and is a replacement for the annual awayday); particular focus on organising more virtual events and training.

- Preparation of Planning and Community Engagement on-line module is progressing but has been delayed in particular by our consultancy work.

- PAE now has a dedicated GoToMeeting platform; aiming to set up pilot support projects whereby volunteers act as neutral facilitators to advice on planning issues

- Lots of consultancy work has been taking place (virtually) with back to back community support projects for major national infrastructure projects; also one search exercise undertaken for a short list of candidates to be interviewed for the chair a community engagement forum.

### 3.14. Finance Team

- Following the recent departure of the Director of Finance, interim resource was secured to assist preparation of the management accounts and the 2021 budget. Recruitment of a new Head of Finance is underway and professing well.

- All Departments have undertaken detailed budget planning for 2021.

- A major upgrade of the financial accounts system was successfully delivered in September.

- Payroll year end and normal monthly payroll processing is on track and on timetable.

- Sales invoices and credit control is carrying on as normal. Monthly supplier statements issued.

- Monthly management accounts are being issued on time and additional on-line banking resilience has been added to support timely payments.

### 3.15. Governance

- Board portal continues to support digital operations of all Governance meetings and has been extended for use by the Audit Committee.

- Annual elections successfully held with a new standardised governance process that saw elections in the Nations and Regions coordinated and opened alongside the elections for the General Assembly and Board of Trustees.

- The governance function has remained resilient during the continued pandemic with a busy period of additional BOT and Finance Committee and NOMSUB meetings during the period, and the inaugural meeting of the Remuneration and Appointments Sub Committee (REMCOM), as well as the scheduled Finance Committee meeting, General Assembly and Audit Committee meetings

- The Governance Working Group have continued to meet and work effectively through the board effectiveness review recommendations, with relevant reports to this BOT meeting.

- Preparations continue for on-boarding new General Assembly and BOT members including financial training. The usual recruitment of for members to join RTPI committees has progressed well.

- Similarly, preparations for the first General Assembly meeting of 2021 and the first ever digital or virtual Presidential Inauguration in January 2021 have progressed well.

### 3.16. HR Update

- Supported establishment of the new REMCOM and new senior structure to support delivery of the Corporate Strategy, with following consultation and engagement with the senior team and impacted colleagues on the agreed new structure.

- Job descriptions amended and new positions drafted and advertised in November and recruitment completed.

- Held Head of Service Away Day held 18 November and All Staff Away Day held 24 November with focus on wellbeing and equality diversity and inclusivity, and look forward to 2021.

- Successfully recruited to Policy & Practice Officer RTPI Scotland, Membership Manager, Membership Assistant and EDI Manager. Remaining vacancies are frozen for first quarter 2021 until membership retention situation is clearer.

### 3.17. Office Services Update

- October trial period in offices postponed until April 2021 at the earliest but offices are prepared for the eventual partial return with social distancing requirements adhered to.

- Office Services continue to provide support for several departments and a virtual reception service.

- CCTV cameras and entry phones upgraded in November 2020 in London office to allow remote access to security footage for a 30-day period.

- Office maintenance tests and check are continuing to take place while the offices are closed in fulfillment of insurance requirements.

### 3.18. IT Team

- Continued focus on digital enhancements including network protection. To cope with increased technology demand, such as VoIP, video and desktop virtualisation, we upgraded all our network switches, routers and network cabling.

- The volume of data passing through our network continues to grow with the number of virtual meetings, conferences and webinars likely to continue. Bandwidth upgrades will offer better performance, reliability and security, and work with colleagues to maximise performance of home networks continues.

- With the increased amount of Cyber-attacks, the RTPI has adopted a Zero Trust security policy and has switched from the traditional login security to multifactor authentication (MFA). MFA helps with cyber security because it's a combination of authentication factors.

- The CRM/website projects have been closed out and the new digital transformation programme has commenced with a new project board and the new telephone system has now been delivered.

- The business continuity fund to support colleagues during the pandemic has been managed to secure the IT with the fund actively managed for maximum efficiency.

### 3.19. Core Corporate Strategy priorities

- Underpinning the 2020-2030 Corporate Strategy are three key strategies, the RTPI's growth strategy GROWPLAN, the RTPI's Climate Action Plan, and the RTPI's EDI action plan CHANGE. There are a number of key deliverables to note since the last BOT meeting, including:

    - **GROWPLAN:** as noted elsewhere the RTPI's growth strategy has been agreed by the BOT and sits with the Membership team to progress the implementation plan

    - The **Climate Action Plan** is progressing through service planning for 2021

    - **CHANGE:** the RTPI's EDI Manager joined in mid-November

*Victoria Hills MRTPI, FICE 11 January 2021*