

Planning Development Management
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Floor 3, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

12th February 2025

Planning Reform Working Paper: Modernising Planning Committees

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am pleased to set out DAC Planning's response to the above consultation.

About Us

DAC Planning is a professional planning consultancy which provides advice and support to local authorities, local communities and public sector bodies nationally. We are experts in supporting the production of Development Plans and are firm believers that growth should be plan-led wherever possible to ensure that developments are sustainable, deliverable and centred around the needs of the communities they serve.

Since 2019 we have provided Local Plan support to well over 100 local authorities nationally on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service and have developed a range of best practice to support local authorities in producing plans, including the widely used PAS Local Plan Route Mapper and Toolkit.

We are currently developing a dedicated new training service (**'the Planning Academy'**) to support and build capacity amongst planning professionals, local communities and other stakeholders involved in the planning process. Our programme of training will up-skill those engaged in planning and this will include modules on Introduction to Planning, Decision-making, Local Plan making and training for Members. This follows on from our work to develop on-line training last year on behalf of the LGA to support new graduates entering the profession through the Pathways to Planning scheme. The training will be provided through a blend of our on-line digital platform and in-person training.

We are well-placed to deliver the mandatory training for Planning Committee members as detailed in the Planning Reform Working Paper: Modernising Planning Committees and offer the following expert advice on the proposals.

DAC Planning Response

We welcome the proposals and commitment of Government to provide greater certainty and improve the efficacy of planning outcomes and the planning committee processes. Based on our experience, we believe that for the measures to have the required impact there is a need for greater focus and understanding of the role and influence of the Local Plan. We therefore suggest additional measures that could be added to this package of reforms.

DAC Planning support in principle a national scheme of delegation as this will simplify the process and make it easier for communities and developers to engage with proposals in different local authorities and to understand how the development is to be scrutinised, and a decision reached. We strongly agree with the need for Planning Committee members to receive mandatory training and suggest that this is delivered by a CPD accredited training body so that there can be confidence in the quality of training received. We agree in principle with the proposed coverage of the training offer (to cover planning legislation, the role of the development plan and national policy, the planning application process, enforcement and ethics and probity) and suggest an approach of a 'core training' offer plus additional 'bolt-ons' to cover more technical aspects or fill any specific knowledge gaps. This is the approach we are developing as part of The Planning Academy.

Furthermore, it is important that training is not considered as a 'one-off' but as part of a broader commitment to meeting and maintaining professional standards. There should be a requirement for refresher courses and additional training should be provided to update members of new legislative and policy positions as a result of further planning reform.

The working paper focuses on mandatory training for Members, however, it is important that planning officers in local authorities also have the required skills and knowledge. This is pertinent as the recently published Local Authority Planning Capacity and Skills Survey (MHCLG, 2025) reported widespread problems with recruitment, retention and skills gaps. We therefore recommend that MHCLG consider the need for additional training and support to be offered to Planning Officers as well as Members. As part of the Planning Academy, we can offer suitable training options.

The working paper recognises the importance of the Local Plan and its crucial role in the planning application process. Based on our extensive experience it is evident the role of the Local Plan is not always fully understood. For the proposed reforms to be most effective additional training and support will also be needed in this arena. We recommend mandatory training for those involved in the Local Plan process, including all Councillors as well as Members, so that its role, and importance, can be fully understood. This can cover the operation of the planning system, the Local Plan process (key stages, considerations and inputs), its role in decision-making as well as the Examination stages. Without this, there is a risk that the status of Local Plan allocations will not be fully recognised and a continued desire for applications on allocated sites to be considered in detail at the planning application stage. As part of the Planning Academy, we can offer suitable training options.

The working paper identifies the need for new burdens funding for local authorities should mandatory training be introduced. We firmly agree and suggest that the funding offer be extended further. The Skills and Capacity Study (MHCLG, 2025) identifies that the main barrier to addressing capacity and skills in local authorities is sufficient training budget and sufficient resourcing. For the planning system to operate efficiently individual proposals, such as changes to the operation of planning committees, cannot be considered in isolation. There is a clear need for officers within Councils to be up skilled in order to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently (both in terms of Local Plan making and decision-making) as well as for training to be offered to

Members. Additional funding will therefore be needed for Local Authorities to procure the necessary training and skills.

We recommend that the training is procured centrally and delivered by MHCLG via an approved training provider as this will enable quality assurance and instil confidence. This could then be supplemented by additional training tailored to local circumstances.

As previously stated, DAC Planning developed and delivered the "Introduction to Planning as a Career" training on behalf of the LGA and Pathways to Planning scheme. This training has been extremely well received. We are well-placed to deliver training to meet the needs of the sector through "The Planning Academy". This includes the mandatory training for Planning Committee members as detailed in the Planning Reform Working Paper as well as the other avenues suggested within this letter.

We hope that the above response is helpful to inform proposals for the modernisation of Planning Committees. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require further discussion on any of the points or suggestions that we have made in our response.

Yours faithfully



David Coleman

Managing Director

DAC Planning

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