

**HEADS OF PLANNING SCOTLAND (HOPS) SURVEY ON THE USE  
OF SHARED SERVICES AND PLANNING SKILLS ACROSS  
SCOTLAND**



**Report compiled for HOPS by Jim Birrell, HOPS Planning Review  
Manager, August 2018**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The survey questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1 and the detailed comments submitted by the Councils are attached as Appendix 2.

The key findings from the survey are summarised below,

- All 32 Local Planning Authorities, responded which provided a 100% return rate. In addition, 1 Strategic Development Planning Authority and the 2 National Park Authorities also responded to the survey.
- 28 authorities (80%) used a shared service/skill with another Council or Service
- 86% of survey respondents (30) paid for additional technical expertise in the last 3 calendar years
- None of the authorities surveyed has commissioned any joint work for EIA Environmental Reports.
- However, 30% (10) was spent money on specialist consultants to review EIA Environmental Reports.
  - The costs for this service ranged from £3K to £35K, although most authorities provided examples and not actual costs.
- The top skills shortages were identified as,
  - Development Economics/Appraisal/Viability
  - Design
  - Landscape Assessment/Capacity
  - Retail Impact
  - Archaeology
  - Conservation
  - Minerals/Waste
- In terms of the Planning Bill and wider implications the following skills areas were identified for particular focus,
  - Delivering the Infrastructure Levy and Development Viability
  - Community Engagement and Community Planning, in the context of Local Place Plans
  - Digital transformation and general GIS skills
  - Collaborative working at regional level
  - Strategic planning for the National Planning Framework
  - Housing Needs and Demand Assessments (due to the loss of SDPAs)
- 77% (27) of authorities have a dedicated budget for external staff training
- In-house training programmes for planning staff are provided by 52% (18) of authorities
- This compares with 80% (28) who provide in-house training for Planning Committee elected members

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 “The capacity and resilience of the planning profession in Scotland as a whole needs to be considered in view of the recommendations set out in the Independent Panel’s Review Report, “Empowering Planning to Deliver Great Places”, May, 2016, which recommended further work on skills development and shared services”.

1.2 “Given the many long - established relationships between planners in and across the public and private sectors, we believe we can greatly improve the way we exchange knowledge, skills and experience. However, we recognise that there may be a significant need for further training”.

1.3 “The immediate priorities include: leadership; project management; mediation and brokerage; development finance and economics; viability; costing and funding solutions; working with communities; and creativity and innovation”.

1.4 “The emphasis is on efficiency. Not every authority can be expected to have skills in every area. However, there is a need to ensure that they have access to specialist skills when necessary”.

1.5 “The Scottish Government recognised there would be challenges in terms of resources but said that much can be done to help authorities to help one another. This willingness to work together needs to be carefully balanced with the pressures on planners. Time away from desks to either assist others or improve personal skills is not always possible in the current climate”.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

2.1 In the Independent Review of Planning Report “Empowering Plan it set out a specific recommendation relating to shared services and the role of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS), working with other stakeholders and agencies, as set out below.

“Local authorities should pursue the establishment of Shared Services” and

“Radical solutions to resources need to be realised. Shared services would be particularly helpful in specialist areas such as minerals, aquaculture, GIS, environmental assessment and conservation areas where it is unrealistic to expect all local authorities to maintain a high level of expertise in-house. Arrangements for this should therefore be actively pursued and led by Heads of Planning Scotland in collaboration with the Scottish Government” and potentially with other bodies such as COSLA, RTPI, RICS, the Improvement Service and the key agencies”.

2.2 The Independent Review Report confirmed that there are some positive examples of shared services, but this appears to be fairly limited at present in Scotland. It was clear to the Panel that supporting a wide range of technical specialisms within a single authority was no longer a realistic option.

2.3 As planners cannot all specialise in all aspects of the planning process the Panel called for the profession to lead the way in public service reform through further innovation and collaboration.

***“The sharing of skills and services needs to move beyond good practice dissemination and benchmarking to provide firm and practical solutions to funding constraints”***

2.4 The Scottish Government in its response to the Review Report and Recommendations set out a series of Immediate Actions, including some with direct HOPS involvement, including, “working with HOPS and COSLA to establish shared services”. In addition, the Scottish Government in its Consultation Paper, “People, Places and Planning”, issued in January, 2017 reaffirmed this approach in asking Heads of Planning Scotland to “explore options for shared services”

2.5 RTPI Scotland, the Improvement Service and HOPS all submitted specialist Papers on Planning Skills and Shared Services as part of the consultation processes for the Planning Review. We agreed a range of recommendations and actions including, the need to further develop the Planning Skills Series, consideration of a national “Planning Portal” and the possibility of a national “pool” of specialist skills/expertise available to Local Planning Authorities to access.

2.6 This survey has to be seen in the context of these earlier studies and also recent work carried out by HOPS, including joint work with the Scottish Young Planners Network summarised below.

**Scottish Young Planners’ Network Graduate Progression Survey (2016)**

2.7 In 2016, the Scottish Young Planners’ Network and HOPS undertook a survey of young planners to explore their career ambitions, development needs and support they required. The survey showed that post-graduation young planners felt well prepared in terms of planning policy, legislation, community engagement and urban design but less so in terms of development management, transport planning, EIA/SEA, conservation and energy and climate change.

2.8 The survey also provided detail on the skills young planners thought they required conflict resolution/negotiation, leadership and project management all scoring above 60%.

2.9 Young planners also set out what technical skills they felt that they required. Conservation, Urban Design and Environmental Impact Assessment were seen as the most important.

**Improvement Service and Heads of Planning Scotland Survey 2017**

2.10 The recent survey undertaken by HOPS and the Improvement Service asked managers what were the learning priorities for their staff in the forthcoming year.

2.11 It showed that, based upon those needs identified as being priority or high priority have scores of 50% or over, managers were of the view the following activities were the most important:

- Outcomes from the planning review (84.9%)
- Elected member training (81.3%)
- Joint working with community planning (66%)
- Project management (51.5%)

- Benchmarking/performance management (50%)

2.12 We are aware from the most recent discussions on technical planning skills that authorities have said that they have experienced increasing costs associated with buying in technical expertise. The Scottish Government has committed to look at better ways and methods of sharing expertise.

2.13 Although there has been a great deal of material identified previously, to help consider how best to take this forward, we feel it would be really useful to gather some up to date evidence on what technical expertise authorities have had to pay for and approximate costs or estimates. We have also taken the opportunity to extend the survey in to areas about Environmental Assessments, and dedicated training areas for planning staff and also elected members sitting on Planning Committees.

2.14 The Scottish Government is committed to carrying out further work both in both these areas, which are obviously inter-linked and inter-related and in order to provide further input and focus so that matters can be taken forward we are in the process of preparing and updating a joint Paper on possible actions for the Scottish Government to consider.

2.15 The most recent HOPS survey was in 2016 and was about Learning Priorities. The top 5 requirements identified for that year were,

- Outcomes from the Planning Review
- Data monitoring
- Elected member training
- Joint work with community planning
- Benchmarking/performance management

2.16 Before we do any further work on the possible joint HOPS/RTPI/Improvement Service Paper outlined above we have agreed with the Scottish Government that it would be appropriate to carry out a short survey of all 32 Scottish Planning Authorities, the 4 Strategic Development Authorities and the 2 National Parks to find out the latest positions and issues arising from shared services and planning skills.

2.17 Appendix 1 sets out the survey questions which were jointly agreed by Scottish Government, HOPS, Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and the Improvement Service.

### 3.0 HOPS ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The joint HOPS/RTPI/Improvement Service Survey on Shared Services and Planning Skills carried out in 2018 attracted a 100% return rate from Scottish planning authorities. The results of the survey provide an up to date take on the need for shared services and where this has been adopted. In addition, planning skill sets before and after the Planning Bill highlight the critical areas of staff shortages as identified by the authorities themselves.

3.2 In relation to shared services there was adversity of responses across Scotland but two key areas were identified as, Archaeology (13) and Housing Needs and Demand Assessments (8). Other areas mentioned for services shared were,

- Developer Obligations
- Conservation
- Development Management
- Biodiversity
- Green Networks
- Design Advice
- GIS Support
- Landscape Capacity
- Minerals
- Marine Planning

3.3 In response to the survey question **about paying for** additional technical expertise in the last 3 years 86% of councils (30) confirmed expenditure had been incurred. The services which had been purchased included,

- District Valuer Valuations
- Economic Impact Assessments
- Retail Assessments
- Development Appraisal
- Landscape Capacity
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Flooding Advice
- Minerals Monitoring
- Transport Assessments
- Legal Advice
- Archaeology
- Noise Assessments
- Contaminated Land Assessments
- Bridge Surveys
- Design and Place Making
- Landscape Architect

- Open Space Audits
- Public Consultations/Charrettes

3.4 It is interesting to note that no councils had commissioned any joint work for EIA Environmental Reports in the last 3 calendar years but 29% (10) had spent money on specialist consultants. Although most authorities did not provide exact figures for the examples they provided, the costs incurred ranged from £3,000 to £35,000.

3.5 In the survey we wanted to find out what the top current areas of skills shortages were, which meant planning skills required by the planning authority but which are not available in-house. The survey provided a long list of skills shortages, summarised below in alphabetical order, with the top 5 mentions shown in **bold**.

- Arboriculture Work (3)
- **Archaeology (7)**
- Architecture (2)
- Biodiversity (4)
- Conservation (6)
- Climate Change (3)
- Contaminated Land (3)
- Data Sharing / Freedom of Information (1)
- Design, all (15)
- **Development Economics/Appraisal/Viability (31)**
- Digital Transformation (3)
- Engagement (3)
- Ecology (4)
- EIA (3)
- Elected Member Training (1)
- Facilitation (2)
- Flooding (3)
- Fracking (1)
- Project Management (1)
- GIS (2)
- Graphics and Marketing (1)
- Green Networks (1)
- Housing (2)
- **Landscape Assessments/Capacity (9)**
- Legal Issues (4)
- Major Applications (1)
- Marine Planning (3)
- Masterplans (4)

- **Minerals/Waste (6)**
- Natural Heritage (2)
- Noise Assessments (1)
- Processes/Project Management (4)
- **Retail Impact (8)**
- Risk Awareness (1)
- SEA (1)
- Simplified Development Zones (1)
- Statistical Analysis (1)
- Transport Planning/Appraisal (5)

3.6 We felt that it was particularly important to look ahead to the Planning Bill implications as far as we can determine them at this stage in the Parliamentary process and the related wider and ongoing planning review to find out if this is different scenario to the present and to identify what additional skills/shared services were considered to be required in the future, in addition to the existing skills shortages.

3.7 This was seen as a particularly important component in the survey as it would be in addition to current skills shortages and would highlight specific concerns of councils in relation to the likely Planning Bill requirements.

3.8 A range of additional areas of skills shortages were identified as set out below,

- Delivering the Infrastructure Levy and Development Viability
- Community engagement and community planning in the context of Local Place Plans
- Digital transformation and general GIS skills
- Collaborative working at a regional level
- Strategic planning for the NPF
- Housing Needs and Demands Assessment due to the loss of SDPAs
- Implementation of Strategic Development Zones
- Methods to let new planners enter the system through training
- Minerals and Wind Farm applications

3.9 It was important for the survey respondents to be able to provide any additional commentary they would like to be considered in the overall assessment of planning skills shortages. These comments are set out below, in no particular order.

- Staffing shortages
- Lack of planning graduates and planning courses
- Difficulties in recruiting staff due to job competition and lower pay scales in local government (in comparison to the private sector)
- Succession planning due to workforce age
- Relevance of content in RTPI accredited planning degree courses, especially in relation to rural planning
- Reductions in service capacity
- Need to be able to ring fence planning fees to ensure the retention of skills in house
- Unless shared over a number of authorities shared service staff may not be able to build up expertise in some specialist areas
- Several authorities are willing to engage in agreements to share expertise
- A particular difficulty for island authorities on training courses or sharing staff due to distance and costs
- Helpful to obtain further guidance/experience of others in developing shared services
- Digital planning
- If single national planning system for development plans is identified, then training will be required for authorities and other stakeholders for this to be most beneficial.

3.10 When asked about a dedicated budget for training planning staff externally 77% of councils (27) confirmed that they had a dedicated budget provision. This budget provision was further broken down to show that,

- 7 authorities noted that this was a decreasing planning budget
- 10 authorities noted that it was a stable planning budget
- 7 noted that this was a centralised budget

3.11 52% of authorities (18) confirmed that they had in place an in house training programme for planning staff, which means that 48% do not have any provision.

Ad hoc	9
< 5	6
5-10	4
10>	4

3.12 In contrast to the above figures, 80% (28) of authorities have an in-house training programme for Planning Committee Elected Members?

**Notes to be incorporated**

Training after election only 6

Further training sessions provided

<3 8

3-5 4

5> 6

On election then ad hoc basis 4

## 4.0 HOPS RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that,

1. The HOPS Executive Committee considers the report and its findings and, subject to any additional comments/adjustments agrees to the formal approval of the report.
2. The report is formally submitted to the Scottish Government as part of the agreed workstream with HOPS.
3. HOPS, RTPi and the Improvement Service continue to work together to ensure that the future arrangements for planning skills and training are tailored to the specific needs identified by the planning authorities.

4. The report be discussed further by the Performance and Practice Sub Committee to identify any specific matters to be targeted in developing future skills and shared services initiatives.

## APPENDIX 1 - SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. In the last 3 calendar years has your service used a shared service<sup>1</sup> /skill with another Council/Service? YES NO
2. If YES, can you provide a brief outline of what services /skills were involved and any relevant comments?
3. Has your service had to pay for additional technical expertise in the last 3 calendar years because it was not available in house? YES NO
4. If YES, can you outline the service purchased and the costs?
5. Has your service commissioned any joint work for EIA Environmental Reports in the last 3 calendar years?
6. If YES, who was this commissioned jointly with?
7. Has your service spent any money on specialist consultants to review EIA Environmental Reports in the last 3 calendar years? YES NO
8. IF YES, can you provide the costs involved?
9. Can you list your top 5 current areas of skills shortages for your service? E.g. planning skills that you require but are not available to you in-house
10. Looking ahead to the Planning Bill implications and the related wider and ongoing planning review what additional skills/shared services do you consider will be required in the future?
11. Any other comments on Shared Services or Skills shortages in planning which you would like to highlight for our consideration?
12. Do you have a dedicated budget for training staff externally?
13. If YES, can you provide the amount allocated and whether it is increasing/stable/decreasing over the past 3 years?
14. Do you have an in-house training programme for planning staff?
15. If YES, can you outline how many events per annum are run and the topics they have covered in the past year?
16. Do you have an in-house training programme for Planning Committee Elected Members?
17. If YES, can you outline how many events per annum are run and the topics they have covered in the past year?

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<sup>1</sup> Shared service is defined for the purposes of this survey as the shared use of another Skill/specialism from another service or council. It could involve secondment, joint contracting arrangements or joint purchasing/commissioning or job swapping.