



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

HELPING PLANNING SERVICES RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES AHEAD.

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As the Budget bites into local authorities and following the scrapping of Housing and Planning Delivery Grant, how can planners make the case that their contribution is central to local survival?

Planners may not fully realise the strength of the tools in their hands that can support the localist agenda, and the service they can provide both corporately and to service departments in helping them to operate more efficiently.

RTPI Trustee [Janice Morphet](#) outlines ten ideas to help planning services rise to the challenge:

Co-location of services

- Use the unique approach set out in PPS12 (para 2.7) to positively work with a locality based (rather than property led) solution to the co-location of local services. This can improve local services whilst helping to subsequently release and release use of assets

Use the Infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) process to support coordination of the lower amount of investment

- Not all investment is being removed and some may be newly allocated to the local authority e.g. from the RDA to the local economic partnership. Having a coordinated approach to investment will help to identify priority investment projects

Use the IDP as the context for preparing bids.

- Funding is ever more competitive and although there may be speculation about the future of some of the main funding post such as Single Conversation, they are still here now. By demonstrating how housing and regeneration schemes will work to achieve wider objectives (and with other actions) will strengthen bids. The Local Investment Plan is a subset of the IDP – but where are planners in the negotiations?

Use development management to take a proactive approach to investment

- By ensuring that DM teams have a clear idea of what is needed in any locality, not only can they bring this forward in negotiation when an application is being discussed, they also have the power to initiate discussions with landowners and providers about potential development solutions.

Provide good news about what is being delivered

- Working with the LSP and Councillors planners can provide some good news about what is being delivered locally including local public sector investment schemes, private and voluntary sector developmental and implementation of schemes funded through previously gained developers' contributions. We ask the community about what they want – we never tell them what has been delivered.

Publish annual programme of local investment – based on the IDP

- Good for investors, regeneration, local confidence and communities – and much needed at times of belt-tightening.

Offer to run the LSP evidence base

- This needs to be managed across the authority and include partners – is this something that you could take on?

Offer to take on corporate consultation responsibilities

- This needs to be led in one place in each local authority. Can you do it?

Offer to combine the LDF with the Sustainable Community Strategy

- This could save resources in process and consultation costs.

Offer a planning application checking service prior to submission

- A high proportion of planning applications are not fully correct when submitted – what about offering a paid for checking service similar to that provided by the Post Office for passports?

CAN YOU OPERATE YOUR PLANNING SERVICE MORE EFFICIENTLY?

You probably think that you have done all you can to reduce costs, but here are 12 ways that others do it:

Improve officer IT skills through short bursts of at-seat training or through local pairing to compare how different people use the system

- You invested in the system – how can you make sure that you get the efficiencies that were promised in the business case? Can you use workflow to allow applicants to check the progress of their application on line? Saves dealing with phone calls.

Consider introducing a fast track system for agents

- Which guarantees a six week turn around if the agent agrees to submit a quality checked and accurate application – with sanctions if the quality dips.

Use one stop shop staff to undertake more of the process

- Through training, many councils have developed the role of one stop shop staff to respond to potential applicants, answer phone calls, calculate fees and identify consultees. Could your staff do more?

Combine site visits with building control

- Whether checking on enforcement complaints or compliance with conditions, can working with building control achieve more?

Undertake process mapping

- Some use consultants but you can do in-house using the paper-roll process mapping method – do you have any redundant processes? How many filing systems do you have? Do you retain a separate planning counter and if so why? How much does it cost you?

Share expertise with neighbours

- Could be specialist officers, legal advice, even site visits in rural areas

Capitalise staff costs

- Where planners are working on infrastructure, land remodelling or large regeneration projects it may be possible to count their salaries against the capital costs of the project – speak to your capital accountant.
- **Identify whether invest to save approaches** would provide funding for a pro-active development management approach

If new housing completions attract a government bonus for the local authority

- How proactive can you be with developments with existing consents – seek meetings, project timetables, identify any hold ups e.g. in highways or in legal agreements and seek to overcome; put into project timetables.

Work with property

- On potential asset releases, identify which sites will benefit from planning consent before disposal and set a programme to achieve these prior to sale

Set up an internal improvement exchange

- Can things be done better? Have planners seen things done differently in other local authorities that might improve efficiency?

Set up a local planning improvement and efficiency network

- There are many excellent practises in planning but no one is doing them all – what can you learn from others, and what can they learn from you?

[Janice Morphet](#) is a Trustee of the RTPI.