



HEADS OF PLANNING SCOTLAND PAPER TO EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL TO ESTABLISH SHARED SERVICES.

“There are some challenges, mainly resources, however, much can be done to help authorities to help one another”

“SG believes we can greatly improve the way we exchange knowledge, skills and experience”

“We will therefore work with Heads of Planning Scotland, COSLA, the Improvement Service and RTPI Scotland to identify the priorities for shared services”.

Extracts from the Scottish Government Consultation Paper, “People, Places and Planning”, published in January,2017.

Report compiled for Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS)

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22nd FEBRUARY,2017.

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“EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL TO ESTABLISH SHARED SERVICES”

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In the recent report on the Independent Review of Planning, **“Empowering Planning to Deliver Great Places”**, May, 2016 the report contained a specific recommendation relating to shared services and the role of Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS), working with other stakeholders and agencies. 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 current 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”**. This Paper is an initial, outline HOPS response to both requests submitted as an initial basis for further discussions and development with the Scottish Government and other key agencies. It is not a comprehensive survey of shared services in planning in Scotland.

Independent Review of Planning Recommendation 41.

Local authorities should pursue the establishment of Shared Services.

“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”.

1.2 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 is no longer a realistic option. As planners cannot all specialise in all aspects of the planning process the Panel has 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.** HOPS recognises this aspect as a priority area for the future which will require much discussion and sharing of knowledge amongst the key players, identified as HOPS, Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland (RTPI), Improvement Service (IS), Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) working together with the Scottish Government.

1.3 Following on from the Independent Review the Scottish Government published its Consultation Paper on, “People, Places and Planning” in January,2017. It sets out the general context to options for shared services in planning, based on sharing the way knowledge, skills and experience are shared across planning authorities but also more widely across sectors and professional disciplines.

1.4 The Consultation Paper confirms that the Scottish Government will work with HOPS, COSLA, IS, RTPIS to, “**identify priorities for shared services**”. The Government says that there are challenges, including resources but, “**much can be done to help authorities to help one another**”. HOPS is looking forward to taking this work forward with Scottish Government and all the other interested parties, using this Paper as an initial starting point for future discussions, taken together with the separate RTPI Scotland workstream on Planning Skills.

1.5 HOPS is clear that some of the current challenges facing planning authorities are already being met through the innovative use of planning skills and knowledge already available within local authorities particularly using shared services and shared expertise. **Shared services are a key element of the public sector efficiency agenda and will be a critical part of the modernising agenda in the years ahead.**

1.6 Previous SG/HOPS workshops and consultations have highlighted that there is general support for the use of shared services in local planning authorities. They are considered extremely useful and can deliver economies of scale and maximise the opportunity to share skills and expertise and a greater use of these could be made. Shared services do however require careful and sensitive advance planning and managing to ensure the anticipated benefits are understood and delivered

1.7 In the 2011 Aileen Grant report, “**Resourcing a High-Quality Planning System**”, it was ascertained from consultation responses that there is a body of experience of shared services and the sharing of further services continues. Out of 42 responses from LPAs and Local Government, 21 supported the use of shared services. The related areas of Peer Review (16), Joint Commissioning (15) and Benchmarking/Best Practice were also identified as significant factors in sharing knowledge and services.

1.8 The main areas identified by LPAs where sharing took place at that time were,

- Archaeological services
- Planning gain
- Minerals
- Design Reviews
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Masterplanning
- Environmental Impact Assessments
- Renewables
- Aquaculture
- Validation Services

1.9 A more contemporary list for the 2017 context would include Leadership, Project Management, Mediation and Brokerage, Development Finance and Economics, Viability, Costing and Funding Solutions, as well as working with communities and creativity and innovation, as set out in the Consultation Paper. Neither of these lists is exhaustive however and other areas of required skills and experience can be identified depending on the precise circumstances of each local authority.

1.10 The use of shared services may be of particular merit in areas where several authorities only receive a small number of applications for specific development types per year, for example fish farming. Other areas could include accessing a shared expertise or where there are cross boundary issues, for example, the cumulative impact of wind farms affecting adjacent LPAs.

1.11 The use of shared services is becoming much more popular in local government, particularly in the context of reducing budgets and financial pressures. Other services such as education, social work and health have developed operating models for shared services and planning authorities can use this experience to assist in developing shared services for planning authorities.

1.12 Shared services can mean many things to different individuals and organisations. Traditionally it has been developed as “back office” improvements and efficiencies, which was a move away from self-contained departments each with their own independent expertise and skill sets.

2.0 HOPS OVERVIEW

2.1 HOPS believes that shared services are crucially important and will become critically important in the future, but it is only one aspect in the wider public sector improvement and efficiency agenda. Work on shared services requires to be integrated with and synchronised with other relevant activities and should not be developed in an isolated manner or be seen as the only option available to LPAs. Other related areas of joint working and collaboration which can also contribute to this modernising and improvement agenda include,

- Benchmarking and Peer Review
- Joint Commissioning and Purchasing
- Accredited Consultants
- Outsourcing
- National Standardised Services
- Best practice
- Shared Data Services

Benchmarking and Peer Review

2.2 There are clear benefits of identifying and sharing smarter working practices between all planning authorities. Systems of informal peer review are increasingly being used by planning authorities in addition to internal and cross-departmental reviews. Benchmarking groups have been established by the four major cities and four large rural authorities to share good practice. Benchmarking and peer review groups have been set up for the planning Performance Framework by HOPS. In addition, the HOPS Executive and sub-committee networks support authorities and enable dialogue with government, key agencies and the development industry on matters of mutual interest and where sharing knowledge/resources possibilities are evident.

2.3 SOLACE has also developed the national benchmarking groups which provides a managed collaboration for LPAs and this is currently utilised by HOPS for its performance benchmarking discussions and Planning Performance Framework feedback sessions.

2.4 There is a need for each LPA to co-ordinate such comparator activities at national and local level to achieve the best outcomes from the resources available to each LPA and to tie in with the identified gaps.

Joint commissioning

2.5 The Grant Report, 2011 referenced above found widespread support from LPAs but less experience in joint commissioning of discrete or specialist work areas. Some planning authorities already worked with developers in commissioning various impact assessments, or used private sector solicitors to draft and conclude section 75 agreements on their behalf. Joint commissioning of work by the developer and planning authority can ensure more effective use of resources in areas such as, transportation studies and modelling, windfarm visualisations, environmental and landscape impact assessments, or work areas for Local Development Plans where resource sharing is possible.

2.6 The real challenge here for the LPA is to ensure that neutrality and balance is maintained on behalf of the community and the other communities of interest to ensure that the democratic scrutiny element is transparent and that the impartial role of the LPA is not jeopardised in any way.

2.7 There are clear and particular benefits of sharing smarter working practices between individual authorities or groupings of similar authorities and especially the smaller LPAs e.g. rural authorities, city authorities, island authorities.

Accredited Consultants

2.8 The use of accredited consultants has often been raised in research reports on planning performance and by the private sector as a means of improving the quality of planning submissions for example. Another approach could include the development of a national or local scheme of accredited consultants for specific, specialist areas of research and survey. This type of scheme could be used in Development Management and could involve the applicant and the planning authority agreeing to the appointment of an independent consultant to prepare a specific assessment or appraisal, with the agreement that its findings would be accepted by both parties. That does not, of course, mean that the authority would be bound by the results of any appraisal in its decision making as other material considerations would invariably be required to be taken in to account.

2.9 It has also been suggested in the past that professional agents should be accredited in some way by planning authorities to ensure submitted applications are in accordance with the legislation and regulations and the overall quality of applications is enhanced. This suggests some type of nationally approved register to make it work across all LPAs but questions arise over who would approve it and what standards would be required to be met, and what penalties would be imposed for unacceptable performance levels.

Outsourcing

2.10 Planning authorities often use consultants or external solicitors to provide advice on specialist aspects of planning applications, agreements or appeals. Examples include transportation assessments, retail impact studies and landscape character assessments. In an earlier planning manifesto (published in September 2008), the British Property Federation advocated the practice of contracting private sector consultants to carry out certain planning functions. This view has also been reflected more recently in the Scottish Government's discussions with the Scottish Property Federation. This option

has been used by some local authorities in England where they have taken on both specialist functions as well as the processing of development management cases and case study examples are referred to later in this Paper. In such cases the planning authority remains the local authority but managerial and decision making arrangements are clearly set out to ensure that the democratic aspects of the planning system and the public interest is protected.

2.11 Outsourcing could be considered along with a range of shared service models to ensure that in discharging its duties as a planning authority, the council is also delivering best value. This is an area which the current Strategic Development Authorities can use to good advantage by pooling budgets and resources for specialist work and ensure the data is made available at aggregated strategic level and disaggregated to LPA area e.g. retail impact assessments. **Economies of scale also feature and the LPAs are in a good position to drive an acceptable contractual price as a “consortium”.**

National Standardised Services

2.12 E Planning and E Building Standards are current examples of national portals developed by the Scottish Government in consultation and collaboration with the local planning authorities. HOPS has a clear lead role to play in identifying such initiatives for the benefit of all LPAs. Other current examples include the Tellmesotland portal for statutory advertisement and the current HOPS workstream to produce a set of national validation standards for use across Scotland.

2.13 **HOPS believes that this whole area of national standardisation can be taken to the next level without any threat to local contexts or circumstances.** Suggestions identified previously have included, a set of national planning conditions to provide a consistency across Scotland and to avoid the use of 32 different variations and the related work this causes for both developers and LPAs. The DPEA operates a standardised list and this could be developed and enhanced as a national list of standard planning conditions. Work is also currently being carried out by the Scottish Government to assess the role of standardised S75 Legal Agreements.

Best Practice

2.14 The Scottish Government has established good practice forums for development planning, development management, local review bodies and strategic environment assessment to provide opportunities to discuss the new system and identify best practice. HOPS, COSLA and the Improvement Service work with the Scottish Government to identify and promote good practice case studies. Best practice across Scotland is also showcased successfully in events such as the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning and more needs to be done by Scottish Government and the LPAs to promote and share the “best in class” examples and experiences. HOPS is advocating such an approach in its current work on the reassessment of the PPF approach and considers that the individual PPFs provide a rich source of case studies and new ways of working for use in staff and team development days and similar. The main concern here is the organised ability to disseminate the work experiences and practices of others so that real benefits are realised. This may require the central registration of ideas and initiatives to be readily available to all LPAs.

Shared Data Services

2.15 Much research work has been published in the last few years relating to open data, shared data and shared services. These specialist areas can help to improve the planning application and development plan processes by making data easier to display, interrogate, interpret and analyse. It is particularly advantageous if spatial data is captured on a nationally consistent basis e.g. housing land

availability. Specific advantages to LPAs include the standardisation of data enabling benchmarking and public availability to be improved. Linked data sources can be jointly promoted, and planning visualisations can be consistent and vastly improved. This will also enable better community engagement processes to take place and sits well with the Scottish Government's stated ambitions for early and more effective involvement and participation in the development planning processes.

2.16 Current examples include, the ONS Scotland Green Map which identifies every green space available to the people of Scotland and Glasgow's 'Open Glasgow' initiative which has produced over 400 data sets, providing information on a range of topics from local services to electricity consumption. HOPS believes that this is an important area for further development and expansion.

2.17 HOPS considers that this whole area of "Data Civics" or "Public Data" is an important related area of work for the ITC Working Group/Digital Task Force to consider in more detail and will assist in the work to "embed IT and innovation to achieve a transformed planning system" as outlined by the Scottish Government in its response to the recommendations set out in the Independent Review.

3.0 SUMMARY OF SHARED SERVICES IN PLANNING IN SCOTLAND

3.1 It is important that we can identify across Scotland which LPAs are currently using shared services in some way and what their experience has been and this work needs to be undertaken as a matter of priority, jointly by HOPS and the Scottish Government. It will be more useful if this survey was widened across the sectors and the relevant professional interest groups to maximise the benefits available to all parties, and include the cross referencing to planning and environmental skill sets.

3.2 HOPS has not provided an exhaustive list of the shared services activities across Scotland, but rather a few examples of the past and current initiatives linked to shared services. Previous examples have included the three Ayrshire Councils who formed a joint planning unit to carry out research and provide specialist advice for the three individual authorities several years ago. At that time, they also looked at progressing the formation of a shared Regulatory Service serving the three Ayrshire Councils including Building Standards. For various reasons, these initial initiatives are no longer functioning. More recently the 3 Ayrshire authorities are working together to prepare a joint "growth deal" as a parallel process to the City Deals type approaches.

3.3 Aberdeenshire has created a highly successful joint planning gain service with Aberdeen City and Moray Council and will shortly extend the service to include Cairngorms National Park Authority. Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire also share services related to strategic environmental assessment. Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire also work jointly on their City Deal work streams and joint investment plans.

3.4 Aberdeenshire provides an Archaeology service to Aberdeen City, Moray, Angus and part of the Cairngorms National Park. Aberdeen City provides an Archivist service to Aberdeenshire.

3.5 The North East Biological Records Centre (NESBRec) is hosted by Aberdeenshire and serves Aberdeen City, Moray and Angus with part of CNPA.

3.6 In addition to progressing with the production of Strategic Development Plans, the Strategic Development Planning Authorities are also implementing new systems for sharing services and

specialist resources and the SESplan authorities, for example, have introduced reciprocal arrangements for providing advice to Local Review Bodies.

3.7 There are other examples of shared planning officers between authorities, including specialist officers covering ecology and nature conservation.

3.8 Other types of shared service include the secondment of a specialist conservation officer from Fife Council to the Fife Historic Buildings Trust to oversee Conservation Area Regeneration Schemes (CARS) and Townscape Heritage Initiatives (THIs). This enables the Trust to lever in money which the Council would not be able to access and it is a “win win” situation for both organisations.

3.9 Shared services are often “internalised” within a single authority and in the Scottish Government a range of shared services are provided across the core Directorates. (Information and Communications Technology, Finance, HR Services, Audit Services and Procurement). This solution has been the traditional approach to shared or centralised services. In previous, earlier years each Planning Department was “self-contained” regarding such services and this was obviously a drain on resources and finances.

3.10 As touched on above the area where joint working and sharing between Councils is becoming more focussed relates to City Deals. Whilst this is initially work towards a funding package for investment in infrastructure priorities it is also a basis for related joint working, commissioning and procurement. The most recent example of this partnership and shared working is the Tay Cities Deal. This is a partnership of Angus, Dundee, Fife and Perth and Kinross councils set up to create smarter, fairer economic growth across the wider region. It requires collaborative cross-council and cross-agency thinking and the sharing of services and resources. There is also the Scottish Cities Alliance where 7 cities collaborate on joint strategies.

3.11 The Islands Strategic Group represents the 6 local island authorities who work together on common interests and shared themes.

3.12 HOPS believes that all of these areas of joint working and collaboration can be extended across all authorities given the right context and circumstances.

4.0 SHARED SERVICES IN ENGLAND

4.1 Shared services are well developed in England and the latest shared services map produced by the Local Government Association, (LGA), (April,2016) identifies 50 LPAs in England who are implementing shared services. They are spread quite wide geographically but there are obvious clusters in the North West, London and the South West.

4.2 One related example in Building Standards is the Devon Borough Council partnership which provides the building control services for the 3 partner councils, Teignbridge District Council, West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council.

4.3 Anecdotal evidence from the Planning Officers Society (POS) and the LGA suggests that there are at least 15 council partnerships in which planning services are shared, ranging from fully integrated planning departments to joint heads of service. There is also at least one case in which two districts appointed a joint head of planning with a view to creating a shared service, only to abandon the project.

4.4 Recently, unitary authority Peterborough City Council and lower-tier neighbour Fenland Borough Council announced proposals to create a shared planning service, building on an existing planning policy partnership. The new arrangements, due to go live next January, target a combined £237,000 in annual savings. The Fenland–Peterborough model will see a shared management structure but dedicated planning officer teams for each authority. There will be a joint "front end" technical team providing customer services such as registration and validation, and joint conservation, enforcement, section 106 and environment teams. The model is expected to offer better development and learning opportunities for both planning teams.

4.5 In its “**Stronger Together – Shared Management in Local Government**”, November, 2016 paper the LGA confirms that 45 Councils across England share a Chief Executive and senior management team in about 20 different partnerships. These Councils have developed savings of at least £60million through greater efficiencies and the other benefits of joint collaboration.

4.6 The following case Studies have been summarised from a recent article in the Planner magazine, October, 2015.

STUDY 1 Some officers dedicated to one district

4.7 South Oxfordshire District Council and neighbouring Vale of White Horse District Council embarked on the creation of a shared management structure in 2008 that saw the establishment of a shared planning service over the next three years. They wanted to maintain separate offices in each district for public planning queries, as well as keeping separate development managers answerable to the respective planning committees. Joint teams were set up for planning registration, enforcement and building control. There is also a specialist team of conservation, tree, landscape, ecology and urban design officers to support development management and policy and a joint planning policy team has project teams developing key policies.

4.8 The pooled resources available allow expertise to be shared and give staff the opportunity to focus on particularly urgent areas of need. With development management demand growing since the end of the recession, the joint team has increased from 100 in 2011 to 135 in 2016. This has been achieved by reinvesting some earlier savings to provide a more proactive customer service as well as rising application fee income from increased workloads.

4.9 The key issues for successful service-sharing were identified as harmonising IT systems, human resources policies and internal planning processes, and clarifying governance arrangements and procedures for elected members.

CASE STUDY 2 All officers working across both districts

4.10 Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils took the decision in 2007 to share services across both districts. There was a merger of the planning departments, which started in earnest with the creation of joint administration and technology teams for the registration and validation of applications. The shared planning service has delivered savings of around ten per cent of the combined budgets, equating to roughly £100,000 a year.

4.11 The decision to use a single IT system was pivotal in unifying the planning services. This not only drove standardised approaches to work, but also contributed to significant efficiencies.

4.12 The shared planning service has no dedicated officers responsible for working with either council. Instead, three development management teams work across both local authority footprints, servicing the two councils’ planning committees. The new structure has given both councils more flexibility. While it has resulted in the loss of duplicated senior management posts, it has also created new roles, such as a dedicated major projects officer.

4.13 In November, 2015 Planning Minister Brandon Lewis urged more councils to share planning services when he answered questions in Parliament. “Local authorities should view their planning departments as the heartbeat of economic regeneration in their communities in terms of designing and building for businesses and homes. I would encourage local authorities to work together and to share services in the same way that some have shared chief executives and other parts of their management structure. They have not done that so much with planning yet, but that would be a good step towards building a strong resource.”

4.14 The Minister told MPs, “Planning authorities that have introduced new ways of delivering planning services have shown that performance can be improved while reducing costs. I hope that more will follow their lead. We have put support in place through funding the Planning Advisory Service, and we are open to supporting planning authorities to deliver ambitious proposals through devolution deals. **It is clear that local authorities that share services can make sure that they protect and improve front-line services, such as planning services, and can see savings of as much as 20 per cent on the work.**”

5.0 HOPS BENCHMARKING VISIT TO ENGLISH AND WELSH LPAs

5.1 Senior members of HOPS and the Improvement Service visited several LPAs in England and Wales in September, 2016. The visit included examples of areas of work where shared services were employed. These included the sharing of Minerals and Waste officers and an example in Greater Manchester where minerals, waste, archaeology and an ecologist were a shared resource. There were other examples of shared services in relation to plan making and the use of TerraQuest, a private sector partner who assists organisations to streamline their processes to realise time and cost savings and enhance quality by driving out efficiencies.

5.2 TerraQuest provides highly secure, accurate, efficient and effective front and back office business administrative services and business solutions to a range of public and private sector organisations. Delivered through the implementation of innovative technology, highly proficient processes and flexible resource models; providing excellent value for money. This service enables customers to meet and exceed service levels and increase their customer satisfaction. Their other services include,

- **Business Process Review and Improvement**

5.3 TerraQuest assists organisations in streamlining processes, improving quality, productivity and consistency, by applying a combination of Lean and Six Sigma tools and methodologies. This is backed up by principles and vision to enable cultural change and acceptance, which ultimately deliver effective and efficient business services.

- **Business Process Outsourcing**

5.4 Business Process Outsourcing improves an organisation's ability to deliver all of its services to its customers at a lower cost, through the application of innovative business processes and technology, by skilled resource through highly flexible business models and transactional pricing based on outcomes.

5.5 TerraQuest are also the joint venture partners with the UK Government in running the Planning Portal.

5.6 The key point made by the English and Welsh LPAs in all the discussions with HOPS on shared services was that the solution must fit the specific problem that you are trying to resolve. There is no single fix or quick fix but the advantages, efficiencies and savings can be substantial.

5.7 Appendix 1 summarises a study by the Planning Advisory Service in England, titled, “Out of the Box Thinking- Innovative approaches to maintain and enhance planning services “, September, 2015. This case study by PAS showcases some of the initiatives local planning authorities (LPAs) are taking to maintain, retain and enhance their planning service. This is set within the context of LPAs in England and Wales losing almost 50 per cent of their funding on average between 2009/10 and 2012/13. The case study includes a set of tips for councils that might be considering pursuing one of the models showcased.

6.0 IMPROVEMENT SERVICE INITIATIVES ON SHARED SERVICES

6.1 On its website the Improvement Service has an article on, “**What does the review of the planning system mean for you?**” and it includes work areas on Information Technology and Shared Services.

6.2 The Improvement Service has set out several existing work streams which already underpin the operational and transformational changes which will follow from the Review Panel’s recommendations. These include related matters such as, Place Standard Tool, Place-Based Research, the Public Service Improvement Framework, and Online Business Analysis Framework.

6.3 A particular focus of the Improvement Service is Information Technology and Shared Services and the use of online portals and the digitisation of data. This is one specific area of shared services, mentioned earlier in the Paper, which is capable of being expanded nationally to provide single source services. IS is currently working towards a National Spatial Hub which is an online resource for the sharing of map based datasets across all LPAs and the wider public sector. It can provide information from the national level disaggregated down to the local level, including housing land supply, local heritage and environmental designations, layers of the built environment and infrastructure.

6.4 A specific possible example cited by the Improvement Service is that the Spatial Hub could hold all Local Development Plan information individually by each council in one common data format. This would be an efficient method of enabling easy access to consistent information across Scotland.

6.5 The Public Access and Uniform casework management systems is a consolidated digital resource of planning applications, both current and historic. Work needs to be carried out at inter-governmental level to co-ordinate a common implementation standard and the flexibility for new software and mobile devices and planning specific apps to be introduced. This should be agreed nationally and the costs driven down to LPA level by the economies of scale as part of the contract negotiations with a single major supplier.

6.6 Another current example is the Tellmescotland portal which can be expanded to include consultation and engagement processes, publishing planning decisions and the provision of a more resource efficient way of communication casework with the wider public and public sector.

7.0 HOPS CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The Scottish Government has been a strong advocate for introducing shared services in the public sector and guidance was issued to all councils in 2007 and 2011. (An extract from the 2011 advice is provided in Appendix 2)

7.2 It is inevitable that shared services will become a more regular feature in local planning authorities in the future as budget challenges remain and we require to become better performers with less resources. The notion of 34 planning authorities of varying sizes, geographies, complexities and resources being set up in the same independent manner is no longer tenable. Specialist areas and unique areas of responsibility will require different solutions to be identified and the sharing of ideas, resources, best practice, funding and services will become the norm in due course.

7.3 HOPS agrees with the Scottish Government's observation in the Consultation Paper, "People, Places and Planning", that, **"the sharing of services, resources, ideas and joint working will all become an increasing part of the future work of all LPAs"**

7.4 It is clear from the implementation of shared services in England that there is no "one size fits all" approach to be adopted and any proposed arrangements require to be designed to satisfy the local circumstances and context.

7.5 For various reasons the take up in Scotland for shared planning services has been relatively slow and modest but shared services are well developed in England and are playing an increasingly important part in improving performance levels and reducing budgets at a time when all Council budgets are facing severe challenges.

7.6 The English examples and case studies summarised in this Paper, and the HOPS benchmarking visits, show that there are different ways in which to introduce and manage shared services but there is much practical and operational experience south of the border to be assessed and shared.

7.7 Crucially funding is available in England from the Planning Advisory Service for local councils who want to establish shared services and HOPS considers that this financial incentivisation needs to be matched in Scotland if the use of shared services here is to increase to the same extent as in England.

7.8 The drive towards shared services requires full political support and direction and the plan for shared services needs to be clearly set out and evidenced regarding the impact on current resources and posts, and the level of potential savings and efficiencies needs to be made clear at the outset.

7.9 The lessons from other services such as Finance, ITC and Human Resources all provide practical examples of what to do and what not to do and these models should also be assessed for any direct or indirect link in to shared planning services.

7.10 There are some financial risks attached to employing staff on behalf of partnerships which have been reported to HOPS and need to be factored in. For example, if the partner organisation decides to stop paying, or is not able to pay, the Council could be left with an unbudgeted member of staff with full rights including redundancy payments.

7.11 In HOPS view the potential of shared services is inextricably linked in to wider public sector reforms and the potential for further local government reorganisations and reductions in the number of councils and this must be acknowledged at the outset. Shared services thrive when resources are pulled together and tend to demonstrate the most efficiencies when operated at a scale which has involved mergers of smaller authorities or partnership working to gain the economies of scale. The link to and the logic of further aggregation of local authorities seems inevitable.

7.12 HOPS welcomes the references in the Independent Review to shared services and the specific areas which were set out in the Review. Further work requires to be undertaken and this should be

organised and co-ordinated by the Scottish Government and HOPS in the first instance, with close collaboration with, COSLA, RTPI, RICS, Improvement Service and other key agencies as suggested in the Review Report. There is a strong body of experience and research already available but it needs to be assessed and synthesised and brought to a Scottish and planning focus.

7.13 An essential early input to the work would be selective visits to authorities in England who are successfully operating shared services to demonstrate the advantages to be gained in Scotland and to recognise the lessons to be learned.

7.14 A critical area for shared services to gain maximum benefits is the whole area of open data and data civics which should be a key component of the separate Working Group on ITC being set up by the Scottish Government and the Digital Task Force, mentioned in the Scottish Government's current Consultation Paper, "People, Places and Plans".

8.0 HOPS RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 HOPS recommends that,

1. Further more detailed research work is carried out in to the advantages and disadvantages of shared services to complement the existing and established Scottish Government and Improvement Service work streams. This work would benefit from close collaboration and liaison with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) in England.
2. A joint delegation from Scottish Government, Heads of Planning Scotland, RTPI Scotland, Improvement Service and COSLA should visit key local planning authorities in England who are using shared planning services to assess the challenges and opportunities which are presented by adopting shared services.
3. A co-ordinated "Shared Services in Planning" (preferably with the addition of planning skills) website needs to be developed and placed on the Scottish Government website showcasing all aspects of shared services in planning, including the case studies in England and the funding incentives available in England. This should include updated guidance and advice which the Scottish Government is currently preparing.
4. The Scottish Government and Improvement Service require to consider and establish a funding stream, similar to the PAS model in England, to be made available to Scottish Councils wishing to consider and establish shared services.
5. The current use of shared planning services in Scotland should be comprehensively captured by a survey of all LPAs and the results should be showcased on the SG website and others to promote wider interest and take up.
6. HOPS also recommends that consideration should be given by the Scottish Government to include "Shared Planning Services" as a category in the annual Scottish Quality Awards in Planning to encourage innovation and implementation of shared services and to promote the concept to planning authorities.
7. The work of the ITC Working Group/ Digital Task Force being set up by the Scottish Government should provide a focus for the shared use of spatial data, open data and "data civics" across all LPAs as part of its remit. The Planning Service should continue to pioneer the digital transformation of public services as set out in the current Consultation Paper,

“People, Places and Plans” and HOPS sees this as a crucial area for future development and adoption.

8. A variety of different and separated work strands are taking place across different Scottish Government departments, the Improvement Service, the PAS and LGA in England and Wales and HOPS recommends that it would be of greater benefit to all LPAs if this work could be co-ordinated in some way by a joint panel or similar which disseminates the current working ideas and relevant case studies across all relevant bodies.
9. The separate work area on planning skills being carried out by the RTPi also needs to be linked in and co-ordinated with the ongoing work on shared services as there are clear linkages and synergies between the two areas of activity. HOPS considers that this is an area of fundamental importance to local planning authorities moving forward and requires effective and practical co-ordination and joint working with the many partner agencies involved.

APPENDIX 1- OUT OF THE BOX- INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE PLANNING SERVICES, PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE (PAS), SEPTEMBER, 2015.

This case study by PAS showcases some of the initiatives local planning authorities (LPAs) are taking to maintain, retain and enhance their planning service. This is within the context of LPAs in England and Wales losing almost 50 per cent of their funding on average between 2009/10 and 2012/13.

The case study includes a set of tips for councils that might be considering pursuing one of the models showcased here. These are:

- Identify what you are trying to achieve: each of the models set out here have their own strengths and weaknesses, and having a clear sense of where you want to get to will influence which ones may be right for your circumstances
- Play to your strengths: what are the skills that your team is highly regarded for? This will have a bearing on the models that will work best for you
- Assess officer attitudes: some of the models described here involve fundamental changes to the working environment of existing staff, and that will be challenging for many people
- Secure elected member support: all the case studies reported high levels of support from councillors – but it is important to involve them from the start because some models might be unacceptable in certain political circumstances
- Risk assess the preferred solution: you might think you've got a good idea, but will it work in practice? You will need to develop ways of finding out
- Ensure probity: your model will be above board, but is that clear to the outside world? Think about how to make your initiative transparent to residents, customers and users and other interested stakeholders

These are based on the experiences of five LPAs:

1. Essex County Council: non-statutory planning and land management and assessment functions transferred to Place Services, a publicly-owned environmental consultancy that established a trading account and is currently evaluating its final delivery model (for example, local authority trading company or another vehicle with company status).

2. London Borough of Southwark: established an internal consultancy service between planning and other departments and divisions such as regeneration and housing.

3. Peterborough City Council: hires out staff to other authorities that are short staffed across policy, development management and technical support.

4. Birmingham City Council: establishing a graduate hub to nurture and retain early career professionals.

5. Newcastle City Council: moving from a long-term shared service arrangement for archaeological and historic building conservation advice between five local authorities to bespoke service level agreements (SLAs).

APPENDIX 2 - Shared Services Guidance, Scottish Government, 2011

The concept of Shared Services is not new and there are now many excellent examples of sharing across the public sector. Shared Services implemented effectively, can enable an organisation and its partners (whether in the public sector or not) to sustain its services and embed continuous improvement which in the medium to long term can ensure real benefits are delivered both in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. It is important to state from the outset that it is not a quick fix or a magic bullet and it has to be considered alongside a range of efficiency options available to the public sector.

Any transition to Shared Services is an undertaking that needs careful planning and execution. It requires from the outset a clear business reason and Change Management Strategy as difficult decisions will need to be taken and clear leadership and buy in at all levels will be crucial to success. It also requires a comprehensive understanding of the delivery process including customer requirements and the delivery objective(s). The real challenge is in developing a strategy and vision, identifying the most effective business models and selecting the right people and partners, whilst securing political and organisational agreement to be able to turn the strategy into reality and make the transition as planned.

It is important to break down the barriers which challenge traditional ways of working. The best way to make any meaningful change is to take the workforce with you; if they realise that improvements are for the benefit of all - customers and staff - then it is much more likely that they will take ownership of the process. This in turn will allow greater opportunity to shape the transition, allowing continuous feedback from all levels on what works and what doesn't.

In the public sector, local democratic accountability and concerns about the possible impact on the workforce when taking decisions over location will be important factors to consider. However, it is equally valid to take account of the potential for Shared Services to support the positive movement of public sector employment between areas with differing prevailing economic conditions, for example from fast growing urban areas to rural locations, or (with recent advances in the ICT infrastructure) from a real to a virtual office with all the benefits - financial, social and environmental - that can be realised from investment in flexible patterns of working.

We are in the process of reviewing the content of the Shared Services web pages and to this end, have taken the guidance and supporting documentation off-line whilst we consider the current requirements. The existing structure and content have been in place for some time now and we are taking this opportunity to re-evaluate how we can refresh the web pages and the information therein to better support the many facets of collaboration and shared services.