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Planning Research**

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The potential role of planning technicians and  
planning support staff in enhancing service delivery  
in a reformed statutory planning system

A Report

for the

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

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# Section 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Culture Change Initiative was launched in order to address the needs of a changing planning system. One of the issues it set out to address was the problem of vacancies and skill shortages in planning departments, and one potential measure suggested for helping to achieve this was the enhancement of the role of planning technicians.<sup>1</sup>

1.1.2 This suggestion had appeared in a number of earlier reports<sup>2</sup>, and is now put forward by the ODPM as an example of one of the uses to which the Planning Development Grant should be put in order to improve performance.

### 1.2 Purpose of the research

1.2.1 This research was commissioned to investigate the potential for an enhanced role for planning technicians and support staff in a reformed planning system, and whether this could increase the capacity of planning authorities to enhance their service delivery.

1.2.2 The research was intended to address the following questions:

- Define what constitutes a planning technician/planning support staff?
- Define what development control activities and other planning support activities this type of personnel could undertake in LA planning departments?
- Map out the current use planning technician/planning support staff are made of in LA planning departments, identify some case studies of good practise.
- Map out the current training and qualifications that planning technician/planning support staff receive, what status do they have in LA planning departments.
- Establish what form of training and qualifications planning technicians/support staff should ideally receive.
- Establish a best model for the effective exploitation of a properly organised, trained and qualified core of planning technicians/support staff.

### 1.3 Scope of the research

1.3.1 It was decided to exclude the enforcement process from the investigation as, although this is a vital area of planning, it involves separate processes involving specialist knowledge and skills many of which differ from those involved in other areas of planning. An investigation of these would not have been feasible in the timescale. In addition, there is a separate research project investigating whether enforcement should be integrated more fully with other development control activities.

### 1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 The Planning Executives Association (PEA) of the RTPI, which was formed to represent those members of the planning workforce who are not eligible for corporate membership of the RTPI, recognises that there is often no clear

distinction between planning technicians and planning administrative support staff.

1.4.2 An examination of job descriptions and careers advice made it abundantly clear that the task of providing simple classifications of the staff in planning departments on the basis of the tasks they undertake would be very difficult. The titles of posts with similar duties differ between authorities, and the responsibilities of post holders with similar or identical titles often differ between authorities.

1.4.3 Any attempts to draw distinctions between administrative support staff and technicians could be seen as a distraction from the central purpose of the research, which was to examine the potential role of technicians and support staff in enhancing service delivery. Central to this was the need to:

examine whether tasks traditionally undertaken by professional planners could and should be undertaken by other members of the planning workforce, and

examine what structures, support and training are necessary to enable this.

1.4.4 In order to undertake this examination it was necessary to identify the tasks undertaken in planning departments which have traditionally been undertaken by professional planners, but which are now being – or could be – undertaken by other staff. For the purposes of this report the ‘enhanced tasks’ were taken to be those tasks that the interviewees considered had traditionally been undertaken only by professional planning officers.

## **1.5 Structure of the Report**

1.5.1 The next section outlines the methodology used for the research. The following section discusses some definitions. Section 4 then describes the training opportunities available. The findings from the case studies and other elements of the research are set out in detail in Section 5. The final section sets out some conclusions concerning the potential for enhancing the roles of technicians and support staff, and some examples of practices that have been or could be developed to assist authorities in this process.

# Section 2

## Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The research was commissioned in December 2003. The brief laid down the basic approach and methodology:

- Review the relevant literature and published research on the role of planning technicians/planning support staff.
- Conduct a survey of a sample of local authorities in England - sampled by type of authority, performance of authority, region etc
- Survey providers of planning technicians/planning support staff education and training (planning schools, colleges of further education etc) to establish their views on training issues.
- Undertake case study research of a sample of LA planning departments to establish how they do or could use planning technicians to enhance service delivery.
- Undertake a number of face-to-face interviews with planning technicians, to find out their opinion about their training and potential career development within LA planning departments.

2.1.2 The methodology for each element of the research is set out below.

### 2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 The literature reviewed was identified by the ODPM, a web search and investigation of relevant web sites e.g. ODPM, POS, LGA, RTPI, Audit Commission. Literature identified by officers of relevant organisations and local authorities was also reviewed. Previous research undertaken by the contractor on recruitment and retention issues was re-visited.

2.2.2 The literature search revealed that relatively little has been written directly on the topic, but that there is considerable contextual material. Literature on the roles of planning support staff was examined, together with broader contextual material on staffing and organisational issues in local planning authorities. The search and review informed the choice of case studies and the issues for investigation in these case studies.

### 2.3 Consultation with representatives of relevant bodies

- RTPI Planning Executives Association: attended meeting and discussed issues
- Planning Officers Society DC Forum/ALBPO: attended Joint Meeting and presented research specification and invited comments
- Kent DC Officers Forum: attended meeting and discussed issues and practices
- ALG/LGA/EO: Meeting and phone conversations
- Oxford Brookes University: Meeting and phone conversations to discuss research for LGA on Skills Base in the Planning System

- ODPM: discussions with the Department's Nominated Officer and other officers undertaking related research and projects
- LGA/National Planning Forum Annual Conference 2004: Two workshops with Planning Officers and Councillors.

## **2.4 Case studies**

### Selection of case studies

2.4.1 Twelve case study authorities were selected. The time and resources available for the project precluded the investigation of a large representative sample, and the authorities were chosen in order to provide illustrative examples of the main issues. Authorities were chosen to provide:

- a wide geographical coverage;
- a range of types and sizes;
- a range of political control;
- a range of performances;
- examples cited as good/innovative practice

### Investigation of the case study authorities

2.4.2 Semi-structured interviews have been undertaken with several staff at each of the authorities visited. The identity of the staff interviewed was dependent in part on the availability of staff. However, in most of the authorities visited, interviews were held with the Chief Planning Officer or the Head of Development Control, technicians and administrative staff, and planning officers. Altogether interviews were held with over 60 staff.

2.4.3 In addition to the responses to the interview questions, a range of documentary material has been collected concerning the organisation of authorities and the roles of technicians and support staff. Additional material was collected from the web pages of the authorities and those of the Audit Commission.

2.4.4 The case studies examined:

- the current structure of the organisation and its evolution;
- the roles, qualifications and employment history of planning and other staff;
- views of managers, planners and other staff on the effectiveness of changes made to structures and roles;
- views of managers, planners and other staff on the desirability of changing structures and roles
- views of managers, planners and other staff on training needs and opportunities, and other measures necessary to implement changes effectively

### Information from other authorities

2.4.4 Additional information on other authorities has been obtained from meetings with the Kent DC Officers Forum, the POS/ALG/ALBPO DC Forum, two workshop sessions at the LGA/National Planning Forum Annual Conference 2004, and from a number of telephone conversations with officers from other authorities.

## **2.5 Consultation with training providers**

- 2.5.1 The main training providers were identified from material on the RTPPI web site, from information received in case study interviews, and from a web search. Brief telephone interviews were conducted with the course directors of most of the part-time and distance learning courses designed specifically for technicians and support staff. These interviews were designed to establish: the numbers on the courses, trends in applications, the origin and qualifications of students and their typical destinations. Very little information was obtained concerning the destinations of students.

## **2.6 Analysis of the findings**

- 2.61. A large volume of material was obtained from the literature review, consultations with relevant bodies, the case studies and training providers. Material was obtained from the small and not necessarily representative sample of authorities. Quantitative analysis of this and the other information was considered neither possible nor appropriate. The analysis was therefore intended to provide an illustration of current practice and issues relating to the topic, rather than conclusive evidence concerning the effectiveness of different approaches and models.

## Section 3

# Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 There is very little literature directly relating to the roles of planning technicians and administrative support staff in local planning authorities. This section starts by setting out a brief review of literature relating to the definitions of such staff. Literature on the staffing of local authorities and the perceived need to enhance the roles of technicians and support staff is then summarised.

3.1.2 Most of the recent literature on staffing of local planning authorities has concentrated on the resourcing of authorities, recruitment and retention problems and skills shortages. This is one of the main factors that has led to calls to enhance the roles of staff other than planning officers, and the literature on this is summarised briefly. Material on the changing roles of such staff and issues concerning the status of such staff is then discussed.

### 3.2 Definitions

3.2.1 Information about the roles of planning support staff was found on the RTPI web site and in their published literature, and on careers web sites. An RTPI leaflet states that Planning Support Staff provide a range of administrative or technical back-up, that may be general or highly specialised, to enable planners to carry out their roles effectively and efficiently.<sup>3</sup> The common theme in this and careers guidance found on a number of web sites, is that the role of support staff is to support professional planning officers.

3.2.2 The RTPI leaflet states that research has shown that support staff work in a variety of roles, which can be divided into:

- Planning Administrators – whose work is described as carrying out administrative roles in which some knowledge of planning is essential, together with general office tasks. Examples of tasks include the administration of development control, property searches and reception/help desk duties – giving general planning advice.
- Technical support staff – whose work is described as including a wide range of occupations from the general office technician to the specialist. Typical tasks include surveys, mapping, establishing and maintaining databases, production of illustrations and graphics, and work with other media.
- Planning enforcement officers – whose work is described ensuring that development has permission and that conditions are complied with. Typical work includes monitoring a variety of sources, gathering and presenting evidence, field investigation and dialogue with property owners.

3.2.3 The RTPI recognises that in practice planning support staff may carry out a mixture of these activities. No attempt is made to draw a clear distinction between the tasks undertaken by planning officers and support staff, and the only clear means of distinguishing between them is that the planners' posts normally require the academic qualifications necessary for corporate membership of the RTPI.

### **3.3 The need for enhanced roles**

- 3.3.1 One of the main reasons given for enhancing the role of support staff, has been the resourcing problems facing planning departments. Much of the literature on resourcing of planning authorities has stressed the recruitment and retention problems they face. A brief summary of some of the literature is set out below; a fuller discussion is contained in Appendix 1.
- 3.3.2 Arup's research into the resourcing of planning authorities<sup>4</sup> concluded that the overall level of local planning authority resources has declined significantly in recent years, and that there was good evidence to suggest that a reasonable increase in resources is justified. The Planning Delivery Grant and the increase in fees have provided such an increase in resources. However, the growth in workloads and the shortage in the supply of planners have created barriers to the effective deployment of the additional resources.
- 3.3.3 An LGA survey last year<sup>5</sup> found that 87% of local planning authorities reported experiencing recruitment and retention problems in the last twelve months that were affecting their ability to deliver an effective planning service. Similar proportions of authorities reported experiencing skills shortages at all levels. Staff retention problems have also been highlighted in other recent studies.<sup>6</sup> A recent questionnaire survey<sup>7</sup> of London Boroughs found that over 13% of planning posts were vacant.
- 3.3.4 Research suggests that the current problems may get worse. Recent research<sup>8</sup> into the supply of and demand for junior planning posts found application numbers are declining and only around 50% of were filling all posts at the first time of asking. This appears to be a result of falling supply as well as rising demand (see A.3 in Appendix 1). The ageing workforce in local planning authorities and the "(d)ifficulties in attracting young people into public sector careers .....indicate the problems of recruitment and retention are likely to grow in the future."<sup>9</sup>
- 3.3.5 Although the problems appear worse in areas with high living costs and, particularly, in rural areas and regions with few planning schools they affect many parts of the country.
- 3.3.6 There has been a range of measures taken in response to these problems. Some of these have been short-term. A recent questionnaire survey<sup>10</sup> In London revealed that 17% of posts are now filled by agency staff on temporary contracts. Longer-term responses have been to recruit non-planning graduates to planning officer or technician posts, or enhance the roles of existing staff, sometimes training them to become qualified planners.
- 3.3.7 The contribution to the Arup Research on resourcing of planning authorities from the Planning Officers' Society included the suggestion that much more use could be made of technicians and administrative staff, if properly recruited and trained. Another respondent suggested that this would release professionals for higher-level activities, but argued that local authorities have generally shown little interest in the use of technical staff.
- 3.3.8 Recent research<sup>11</sup> found that training support staff to become qualified planners, together with (re-) organising the work of planning departments to free up planning officers and increased use of IT were amongst the main

methods used to tackle recruitment problems. The web search undertaken for this project found several examples of authorities using the Planning Delivery Grant for the appointment or promotion of support staff to undertake 'routine professional planning work' in order to address recruitment problems.

- 3.3.9 Whilst the underlying motive of many commentators who advocate the enhancement of roles, may be the need to address recruitment and retention problems, there is also recognition of other positive benefits that this can have for local authorities, planners and the staff undertaking enhanced roles.
- 3.3.10 The final report of the RTPI Education Commission<sup>12</sup> stated that there should be continued encouragement to make more and better use of planning staff at technician level. It stated that one key measure to ensure the availability of professionally-qualified staff for professional-level activities must be to stop using them on tasks that are more effectively done by technical staff or administrators.
- 3.3.11 In a similar vein, Tony McNulty MP<sup>13</sup> stated "planning technicians can play very important roles, and we should encourage training and career progression which enables them to develop their skills, including to chartered status." He said that he was very pleased that the RTPI wishes to promote technical membership and the role of planning technicians.

### **3.3 Changing roles**

- 3.3.1 Examination of job descriptions and material collected during case studies indicated that the roles of support staff have been changing over recent years. Some of the tasks that have often traditionally been undertaken by professional planners are appearing on job descriptions for non-corporate planners – described variously as technicians, liaison officers, technical support staff and technical/planning assistant.
- 3.3.2 In development control such tasks include: the validation of planning applications checking fees etc), consultations, neighbour notifications, basic planning advice, dealing with permitted development enquiries and assessing minor applications. In other sections, 'professional' tasks undertaken by support staff included: undertaking survey and consultation work, development monitoring, dealing with routine policy enquiries.

### **3.4 Issues of status**

- 3.3.3 Staff working in planning who are ineligible for corporate membership of the RTPI may become members of the Planning Executives Association. This requires them either to have been working in planning for two years, and to have an NVQ Level 3, an HNC or an equivalent qualification, or to have ten years relevant experience.
- 3.3.4 Only a very small proportion of planning support staff have become members of the PEA. By October 2003, there were 119 technical members. A review of Planning Executives Newsletters suggests that members consider that technical membership has hitherto been little recognised or valued by many employers, and that support staff have often felt undervalued, not least by the use of the term 'support staff'.

- 3.3.5 The PEA Newsletters suggested that there was a perception of change amongst some employers in terms of the support they were providing to support staff. Two people were reported as having completed the NVQ Level 3 in Planning in 2001, and the numbers taking this qualification have grown considerably since then.
- 3.3.6 An examination of the RTPI web site and RTPI Branches' web sites revealed that there is only limited information on technical membership and that it is not very prominent. Information on the method of becoming a technical member and the availability of courses is available on the main website and has been published at least annually in Planning magazine. A brochure is also available on-line, and a newsletter is published periodically for technical members. There is, however, very little other information available to non-members, and none on several of the Branch websites.
- 3.3.7 Technical members rarely appear in the list of Branch Executive Members, little mention is made of the roles of technical members in most Branch Newsletters and that few CPD events are aimed at technical as well as corporate members. This may not, however, be surprising as technical members make up such a small proportion of the total membership of the Institute.
- 3.3.8 Despite the above evidence, there are positive indications of change. The RTPI has expressed its desire to encourage and promote technical membership, and is currently reviewing the role and structure of the PEA.

## Section 4 Training Opportunities

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 A range of relevant courses is available to staff of planning departments who have not completed courses that meet the academic requirements for RTPI corporate membership. Some of these staff may wish to take such courses, and these are available in part-time and distance learning modes. Other staff may not be eligible to take such courses, or may not wish to take them, and there are other courses available for such staff. Some of these latter courses provide eligibility for RTPI technical membership or allow progression to “corporate” courses. The main courses are set out below, and described in more detail in Appendix 3.

### 4.2 Courses

Courses meeting the academic requirements for RTPI corporate membership.

4.2.1 For staff wishing to become corporate members of the RTPI, there are part-time undergraduate and postgraduate professional courses available at a number of Universities. In addition, there is the Distance Learning Programme.

4.2.2 The table below indicates the availability of part-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses across the country for 2004/05. A place on a course normally costs between £1,800 and £2,200 per annum in fees. Travelling expenses and other costs may increase substantially the cost to the employer.

| Planning Schools offering courses meeting the academic requirements for RTPI corporate membership 2004/05 |               |                   |                |                            |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Planning School   | Location      | Mode              | Under-graduate | Postgraduate 2* or 3**year |
| University of Aberdeen  | Aberdeen      | No                |                |                            |
| Anglia Polytechnic University   | Chelmsford    | Part-time         | ✓              |                            |
| University of Central England   | Birmingham    | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| University of the West of England   | Bristol       | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓**                        |
| University of Wales   | Cardiff       | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Dundee  | Dundee        |                   |                |                            |
| Heriot-Watt University  | Edinburgh     | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Strathclyde   | Glasgow       |                   |                |                            |
| Leeds Metropolitan University   | Leeds         | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓**                        |
| University of Liverpool   | Liverpool     | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| Liverpool John Moores University  | Liverpool     | Part-time         |                | ✓**                        |
| University College London   | London        | Part-time         |                | ✓**                        |
| University of Westminster   | London        | Part-time         |                | ✓**                        |
| London South Bank University  | London        | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| University of Manchester  | Manchester    | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Newcastle upon Tyne   | Newcastle     | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| Oxford Brookes University   | Oxford        | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| University of Reading   | Reading       | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Sheffield   | Sheffield     |                   |                |                            |
| Sheffield Hallam University   | Sheffield     | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| Distance Learning Consortium  | (Bristol UWE) | Distance learning | ✓              | ✓                          |

4.2.3 The qualifications required for entry to undergraduate courses are normally two A Levels, or the equivalent, although mature applicants may be eligible for entry on the basis of experience and aptitude. For entry to postgraduate courses an undergraduate honours degree is normally required. Those without first degrees may be accepted onto the courses by the Special Entry route, if they are considered to have adequate relevant experience and academic potential by the RTPI and the Planning School.

Courses not meeting the academic requirements for RTPI corporate membership

4.2.4 For staff who are either ineligible to take the above courses, or who do not wish to take them, the following courses are available.

| College and course   | Location     | Mode                                 | Length                                      | Entry   | Progress to corporate courses               | Technical Membership                      |
|--|--------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Manchester College of Arts & Technology (MANCAT) Town & Country Planning Foundation Course | (Manchester) | Distance Learning                    | Flexible                                    | Experience                                    | Enables entry to bridging course & then PG  | ✓   |
| Manchester College of Arts & Technology (MANCAT) Town & Country Planning Foundation Course | Manchester   | Day Release                          | 2 years                                     | One A Level or equivalent/ Experience         |   | ✓   |
| University of West of England Certificate in Professional Development                      | Bristol      | Day Release                          | 2 years                                     | One A Level or equivalent/ Experience         | Enables entry to Level 6 of UG/PG programme | ✓   |
| University of Central England Certificate of Professional Studies                          | Birmingham   | Day release and/or Distance Learning | 1 Year Part-time/flexible distance learning | HNC Planning/ HNC plus experience/ Experience | Provides bridge to PG courses               |   |
| Sheffield Hallam University Certificate in Planning Studies                                | Sheffield    | Day Release                          | 2 years                                     | 2 A Levels or equivalent or experience        | Enables entry to Level 6 of UG/PG programme | ✓   |
| ABBE NVQ Level 3   | (Birmingham) | Work based                           | Varies                                      | Experience                                    |   | ✓   |
| Trevor Roberts Associates Certificate of Continuing Education in Planning Enforcement      | (Cambridge)  | Distance learning & block attendance | Varies                                      |   |   | With 1 module of MANCAT Foundation Course |

#### Ad hoc courses

- 4.2.5 In addition to the above courses, there are some ad hoc short courses offered for non-corporate planning staff. Providers of such courses include University of West of England, Oxford Brookes University, Trevor Roberts Associates and North East Wales Institute. Some providers offer courses on an in-house basis, and some authorities have combined to deliver or share the costs of such courses.

### **4.3 Conclusions**

- 4.3.1 A range of distance learning and part-time planning courses are available. The majority of these are courses that satisfy the academic requirements for corporate membership of the RTPI. Some members of the planning workforce who are not corporate members may wish to take such courses. However, a large number of such staff are either ineligible for entry to such courses, do not wish to take what are often lengthy and demanding courses, or do not wish to become fully qualified professional planners.
- 4.3.2 There are very few courses providing education or training aimed specifically at the needs of non-corporate planning staff. There are two distance learning courses and an NVQ Level 3 available to such staff. However, some staff prefer other modes of learning, and there are large parts of the country – most notably the north-east, the east and the south-east - that have no easily accessible day-release courses. In addition, the capacity of some of these distance-learning and day release courses is limited, and there are few ad hoc short courses available to non-corporate staff.
- 4.3.3 In some areas RTPI Branches or consortia of local planning authorities combine to deliver or share the costs of providing short courses or in-house training for support staff. This may offer the best immediate opportunity for meeting the training needs of planning administrators and technicians.

# Section 5

## Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The following section reports the findings from a small number of case studies of authorities that were chosen to provide some illustrations of current practices, a review of a limited amount of relevant literature, and meetings with several relevant bodies and groups. The findings will not necessarily provide a representative picture of current practice across the country.

5.1.2 However, the research provides valuable evidence of a range of practices, and identifies some of the opportunities and potential barriers to enhancing the roles of members of the planning workforce who are ineligible for corporate membership of the RTPI.

### 5.2 Definitions of planning support staff

5.2.1 The examination of the case study authorities confirmed the difficulties that exist in any attempt to provide clear distinctions between the different roles of staff in some planning authorities. Distinctions between administrative, and technical staff were often unclear in many authorities, and even the distinctions between professional and some support staff are being blurred as efforts are being made to enhance the roles of support staff, and their roles encompass work that might traditionally have been seen as professional.

5.2.2 In some authorities, planning assistant or occasionally planning officer posts have been filled by staff without corporate membership of the RTPI, or without formal academic planning qualifications, but with substantial experience. In others, non-cognate graduates who may or may not be undertaking a planning course are filling such posts. Increasingly, hybrid posts and hybrid teams are emerging to undertake work that combines tasks that might previously have been seen as distinct administrative, technical or professional tasks.

### 5.3 Reasons for enhancing roles

5.3.1 A number of reasons have been put forward for enhancing the roles of support staff in planning authorities. Some of the main reasons put forward are:

- helping to address local authorities' current difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified planners;
- freeing up qualified planners from routine tasks, to enable them to concentrate on more complex work relating to the assessment of planning applications and plan-making;
- making greater use of currently underutilised skills and abilities in the planning workforce;
- providing opportunities for staff development and progression; and,
- the changing nature of some tasks.

The context for these is the desire to improve the quality and speed of the planning service at a time of growing workloads and increasing recruitment and retention problems.

#### **5.4 The current roles of staff in planning authorities**

5.4.1 Members of the planning workforce who are not fully-qualified planners undertake a wide range of tasks in local planning authorities. The qualifications of these staff vary considerably, and the duties of staff with similar qualifications vary considerably within authorities as well as between different authorities. A list of the main tasks undertaken in planning departments is set out in Appendix 2.

5.4.2 In most of the authorities visited, there were staff whose roles had been enhanced, often as a result of taking on new hybrid posts. The posts of administrative staff had been extended to include what has traditionally been seen as technical work, and the roles of staff with the job title or something akin to the title technician, had often been extended to include tasks traditionally undertaken by professional planning staff.

5.4.3 From the investigation of the case studies and from the information provided by staff in case study authorities it was possible to identify a number of tasks which:

- were traditionally undertaken only by professional officers in some authorities, but
- were undertaken by staff other than professional planning officers in other authorities

5.4.4 Typically the enhanced roles given to support staff involved one or more of the following tasks:

- validating planning applications, including the checking of fees and the determination of appropriate consultations and neighbour notifications
- acting as the first point of contact for planning enquiries and the provision of general planning advice to the public in person or over the telephone
- dealing with written permitted development enquiries and minor planning applications
- data analysis and survey work

##### Validation

5.4.5 In many authorities, administrative staff have often been responsible only for registering applications. Case officers or even team leaders have taken on the task of validating the applications, checking fees and deciding on appropriate consultations and neighbour notifications. Hearsay evidence suggests that this would seem still to be the case in many authorities.

5.4.6 In several case study authorities, validation of applications was now undertaken by staff without formal professional planning qualifications. This often included the checking of fees and the determination of consultations and neighbour notifications.

5.4.7 The execution of the enhanced duties was often greatly assisted by guidance notes, checklists forms and other tools in electronic and paper form. In one

authority an innovative electronic system linked to GIS is used for generating appropriate neighbour notification letters.

- 5.4.8 In none of the authorities that had provided such enhanced roles, were any major concerns raised by management about this change of responsibilities. In one authority the validations were checked by the team leader, to ensure that notification letters were not sent out concerning invalid applications; in others the case officers checked that the application had been correctly validated on receipt of the application, and checked the notifications when undertaking a site visit.
- 5.4.9 In only one authority, which had rejected this approach, were concerns raised about the willingness and ability of existing staff to undertake such enhanced roles. Clearly, for such duties to be undertaken competently by staff other than professional planning officers, these staff need to be willing to undertake such tasks and to have a sound knowledge of the relevant regulations and policies, or the ability to interpret and apply robust checklists. Of course professional planners undertaking such tasks also require these attributes.
- 5.4.10 Where these activities are undertaken by staff other than professional planners, considerable time has been freed up for professional planners to undertake more complex tasks.

#### Customer liaison

- 5.4.11 In several authorities staff without professional planning qualifications have been given roles in which they act as first point of contact for members of the public visiting or telephoning the planning department. In two of these authorities the creation of these roles has been followed by the removal of the duty planner system. This has freed up the equivalent of one full-time planning officer. Others have retained a duty planner system, but the customer services officer or planning liaison officer has taken away many of the routine calls from the duty planner, the area planning teams and the forward planning teams, freeing up considerable planning officer time.
- 5.4.12 In one authority the customer services staff also deal with written permitted development enquiries and minor planning applications. In one authority the staff undertaking the customer liaison role also have responsibilities for dealing with enquiries relating to building control.
- 5.4.13 In each of the authorities that have introduced these initiatives, there is a general view that it has been beneficial to all of the staff. It has freed up planning officer time and, in two of the authorities, is considered to have been a major factor in improving development control performance.

#### Written professional work

- 5.4.14 In several authorities, staff without formal planning qualifications have had their roles extended to include dealing with written permitted development enquiries and assessing minor planning applications. In some of the authorities this enhanced role has been taken either by staff with few formal academic qualifications, but considerable experience, or by non-cognate graduates.
- 5.4.15 In most of these authorities, and particularly in London, this initiative has been prompted by difficulties in recruiting academically qualified planners. In most

cases these staff are required to study on a part-time postgraduate professional planning course. In several authorities, however, staff have not been required to undertake formal academic study; their experience is seen as an adequate qualification for the job.

#### Other work

- 5.4.16 Little information was obtained about the enhancement of the roles of technicians and support staff in policy, research and other teams. Staff undertaking customer liaison roles were dealing with some of the enquiries concerning the development plan or its preparation process that might previously have been dealt with by professional planning staff. However, consultees noted that staff without professional planning qualifications were dealing with additional tasks relating to development monitoring, surveys, photographic displays, exhibitions and work for public local inquiries.
- 5.4.17 One view expressed in a meeting was that some of the work undertaken by some teams was very specialist and that a professional planning qualification was less important than a specialist knowledge of the particular topic. Examples included work related to environmental protection and enhancement, conservation, retail or housing studies, and particularly work requiring specialist knowledge of IT. It was emphasised by several respondents that such staff should not be considered as support staff whose roles have been enhanced as much as specialists in their own field.
- 5.4.18 Much of the IT design, development and maintenance work and the GIS and computer graphics work undertaken in planning departments is enabling improvements to service delivery. This work is normally undertaken by non-planners. However, respondents stated that this was being undertaken in parallel to the professional planning work and required its own specialist knowledge. Whilst some staff undertaking these duties might be termed support staff, they are not undertaking administrative, technical or routine professional tasks and would not be expected to want to become planning officers. Although the enhancement of the roles of administrators and technicians in this area may be greatly improving the effectiveness of planning service, they require different forms of career development than those staff undertaking routine professional tasks.

### **5.5 The staff taking on enhanced roles**

- 5.5.1 It is possible to identify several distinct approaches to the selection and deployment of staff undertaking enhanced roles. The most common approach was to attempt to recruit staff from within the department or authority to new posts created to reflect the changing duties. In some authorities posts were advertised externally as well as internally, although several such authorities appointed only internal staff. In two authorities the job descriptions and gradings of existing staff were changed to reflect an extension of duties, and in order to retain valuable staff.
- 5.5.2 The qualifications and experience of staff recruited to the new posts varied. This variation was apparent whether the staff were undertaking customer services duties, validations, permitted development enquiries and minor applications, or a combination of these tasks. A number of the recruits were graduates with non-planning degrees and were recruited either from internal administrative positions or from outside the authority. Many of the posts were, however, taken by administrative staff with few formal qualifications.

- 5.5.3 In almost all cases, the formal academic qualifications of the applicants were considered as less important than their skills, experience, enthusiasm and aptitude for the tasks. Job descriptions rarely required degree level qualifications, although education to Level 3 was often considered desirable. Instead, communication skills, IT skills, administrative skills and/or knowledge and experience of planning and local government were emphasised.
- 5.5.4 The post holders have normally been assisted in undertaking their enhanced roles by mentoring and on-the job training, and attendance at short courses. Most of these staff are encouraged, but rarely required, to attend courses leading to technical or professional membership of the RTPI. Many of the staff in these positions are taking day release or distance learning courses leading to technical or corporate membership, but a considerable proportion are not, and have no desire to qualify for technical or corporate RTPI membership. Some see the posts as a step towards advancement in an administrative or IT role rather than in a planning role.
- 5.5.5 In some authorities, taking on technician or other enhanced post is viewed as a possible step towards becoming a professional planner. Some staff had already taken this path and progressed to posts as professional planners in development control or forward planning teams. However, not all staff wish to take the academic courses necessary to do this, and one manager stressed: "you don't always end up with a planner and must value the member of staff at the point at which they stop."
- 5.5.6 The approach taken by many authorities has been to 'grow your own', 'develop your own' or 'convert your own' planners or other staff. Some case study authorities have been taking this approach for a number of years, and it was common in the 1970s and 1980s. Others have adopted this approach partly as a response to recruitment and retention problems, but also in recognition of the untapped potential and ambition that often existed within administrative and other teams within the department.
- 5.5.7 The potential to develop was found to exist not only amongst younger members of staff in the early stages of their careers, but also amongst staff with many years of experience who had not previously had the opportunity to develop their careers for a variety of personal or organisational reasons.

## **5.6 The structures involved**

- 5.6.1 The case studies revealed a variety of approaches to the deployment of staff undertaking enhanced roles. In some authorities the such staff worked in teams undertaking a single or limited range of function/s. In others they worked within teams with a wider range of functions. Some authorities have adopted an approach that is a mixture of these two approaches. Larger authorities have tended to adopt elements of the former approach, whilst smaller authorities have tended to retain or develop more generic teams.
- 5.6.2 The two largest authorities studied have organised their departments into teams undertaking a narrow range of functions. They have set up minor applications teams to deal with all permitted development enquiries and minor applications across the authority. These teams contain staff without academic planning applications, but often with considerable experience, as well as recent planning and non-cognate graduates.

- 5.6.3 The creation of such a team has been heralded as a major factor in improving the development control performance of both authorities. One of these authorities has also created a major developments team. Many other larger authorities have set up minor applications – or fast track – teams, and others are considering it.
- 5.6.4 Several other larger case study authorities have not set up minor applications teams, but have attempted a degree of functional specialisation. They have set up separate teams to deal with registration and validation, and customer enquiries. Even in the smaller authorities the administrative function of registering applications is usually separated from the planning applications teams. Many authorities have also removed administrative staff from forward planning teams, to provide a central administrative team. Technicians undertaking technical work for forward plans are either included in the forward planning teams or, if they provide a Council-wide service, are in a separate team.
- 5.6.5 In smaller authorities, technicians undertaking a combination of professional, technical and administrative work are generally integrated into the development control teams. There is not such a degree of functional separation as in the large authorities as staffing levels require a degree of multi-tasking. In the smallest authority there are only three administrative staff undertaking all the administrative functions. Not only do these staff have to cover each other's tasks, but technicians and planning officers must do so on occasion. Even in the slightly larger authorities, it has not been felt possible to set up separate minor applications teams, as staffing levels do not permit.
- 5.6.6 In the smaller authorities, and even some of the slightly larger authorities, setting up a minor applications team was not considered possible because of staffing levels. In addition, in geographically larger rural authorities it was considered that such specialisation would be undesirable and inefficient. Case officers often cover all applications in a geographical area and develop a knowledge of the area and its inhabitants. Having a minor applications team would reduce these benefits and would be uneconomic in terms of the duplication of activities such as site visits.
- 5.6.7 In two authorities without minor applications teams a single experienced member of staff dealt with only minor applications. In effect this person was acting as a minor applications team, although s/he was integrated into the team. In both cases the member of staff was very experienced but not professionally qualified, and had expressed a desire to deal only with smaller applications. A small number of authorities have adopted a completely different approach: using consultants to deal with all minor applications. This has generally involved the engagement of a former member of staff.
- 5.6.8 The other common functional teams created within planning departments have been customer services teams. A number of authorities have set up a team that acts as the first point of contact with the public in relation to planning and, sometimes, related functions such as building control. Such teams have been set up separately from, and sometimes in addition to, Council-wide contact teams. The latter are discussed below in paragraph 5.9.5.

- 5.6.9 Staff in such teams normally deal with general planning enquiries, provide advice on completing planning application forms and the development plan process. In one authority the team provides advice on permitted development or even basic pre-application advice on minor applications. In one authority the staff in this team also deal with written permitted development enquiries and minor applications, though their case-loads are small and flexible to prevent any adverse impact on the execution of their principal duties.
- 5.6.10 In one large authority the customer liaison team deals with all searches, general planning enquiries, completion of applications and basic permitted development enquiries. It is estimated that this has led to a 10% increase in the capacity of professional planning officers. All phone calls now pass through this team, which is able to deal with queries about the progress of applications as well as the general enquiries.
- 5.6.11 Other functional teams set up in the case study authorities are registration teams. The principal task of these teams is to register planning applications, although in some authorities the duties of some or all of the staff extend to aspects of, or all of, the validation process. The reason for the creation of these teams and the removal of other responsibilities, such as general enquiries, from the staff within them was the recognition of the central importance of this part of the process to the overall speed of processing applications.
- 5.6.12 Administrative staff were included in the area teams in only a small minority of the case study authorities, although in the smaller authorities administrative teams by necessity worked very closely with the area teams.

## **5.7 Training**

- 5.7.1 In all authorities that had enhanced the roles of staff without formal planning qualifications, the importance of appropriate training was recognised. Those undertaking enhanced roles are normally provided with in-house training, and may be offered funding to attend external courses. Such training may comprise attendance at ad hoc short courses, part-time day release courses or undertaking an NVQ.
- 5.7.2 Whilst the opportunities given for training were generally good in most of the case study authorities, the shortage of available courses (See Section 4), and the lack of awareness of such courses in some of the authorities present some barriers to the provision of such training.
- 5.7.3 The opportunities to attend such courses are often limited by budgetary constraints. This may mean that staff are not provided with opportunities to attend courses unless they are directly relevant to their day-to-day activities. Thus staff in administrative and technician posts may not be permitted to attend part-time professional courses. In addition, although several of the authorities were sending technicians and administrative staff on courses designed to enable technical membership of the RTPI or courses providing access to professional courses, several were not.
- 5.7.4 The geographical distribution of courses presents problems for many authorities or individuals. For example, although one authority was paying less than £2,000 in fees for one member of staff to attend a postgraduate part-time course, travelling expenses raised the cost to £5,000. In addition,

the family or caring commitments of the staff may make attendance on such courses difficult or impossible.

- 5.7.5 Studying by distance learning mode or for an NVQ represents an alternative mode of study that may be cheaper and more convenient for some staff. Indeed the growing number of students registering for the NVQ Level 3 in Planning since it was first offered less than five years ago, suggest that this may be true. Nevertheless, not all students wish to study in this way, and the absence of day release courses in some parts of the country probably discourages many staff and authorities from undertaking appropriate courses. There are probably less than fifty students completing these courses each year.
- 5.7.6 Those attending such courses considered them to be very useful in undertaking more complex tasks and understanding more fully the context and purpose of the work.

## **5.8 Attitudes to extended roles and changed structures**

- 5.8.1 Managers, planning officers and support staff expressed general support for the enhancement of the roles of support staff.

### Support staff

- 5.8.2 Support staff considered that the creation of hybrid posts provided them with opportunities for career development and increased salaries. Those who were unsuccessful in obtaining such posts supported the principle if not its implementation. In several authorities, staff were very satisfied with the level of support and mentoring and the opportunities provided for formal training. However, some concern was expressed by staff in other authorities concerning the lack of provision of funding and time-off for formal training. A number were keen to develop their roles further, but felt that the formal training opportunities and in-house training and mentoring would not be available. The remoteness of training was mentioned as a barrier to some staff.
- 5.8.3 Most staff undertaking enhanced roles felt that their colleagues were supportive and enthusiastic about the initiatives. They considered that planning officers were very grateful that they were freed up from dealing with some of the routine tasks.
- 5.8.4 Most of the support staff who had taken on roles that included responding to permitted development enquiries and dealing with minor applications, felt that there was little opposition to this from qualified planning officers. However, in one authority in which support staff had been given such roles and had then had them removed, these staff felt that one of the reasons for this was the resentment of professional staff. They felt that the planning staff in this authority considered that support staff should not undertake tasks that they considered to be professional.
- 5.8.5 In several authorities a factor that concerned staff about their enhanced roles was the potential problem of multiple reporting lines and conflicting priorities. If staff were required to undertake separate technical and professional tasks for different managers, their work priorities would not always be clear. This was a concern of some managers in authorities that had not enhanced the roles of technicians to deal with professional tasks such as dealing with minor

applications. In two authorities that had introduced such enhanced roles, such problems had been avoided by careful allocation of work to meet peaks in troughs in different areas, and by frequent liaison between managers and managers and staff.

- 5.8.6 Some staff in minor applications teams had concerns that they were not gaining experience of more demanding work, and felt a sense of isolation from other teams. Others reported that they were content to deal with smaller applications, and felt that attendance at committee de-briefings and frequent liaison with other teams gave them an understanding of the range of planning issues in the authority. One of the more experienced staff without formal qualifications felt that their remuneration did not reflect their role in advising less experienced members of the team, and considered that there should be more promotion opportunities.

#### Managers' views

- 5.8.7 Managers were generally enthusiastic about the principle of giving staff other than professional planners enhanced roles.

- 5.8.8 There was caution expressed in a small number of the case study authorities concerning the extent to which roles could and should be enhanced. In particular, in one authority managers and planning officers expressed reservations about staff without formal planning qualifications being asked to deal with minor applications. They stressed that:

- the assessment of minor applications is not always simple;
- the assumption that DC is a routine administrative process is a myth;
- small applications may raise issues as complex or even more complex than larger applications
- applications are not always drawn up by skilled architects, therefore trained and skilled staff are needed to add value even to minor applications;
- people skills and negotiation skills are essential.

- 5.8.9 There were conflicting views on the benefits of introducing minor applications teams. In several of the authorities, and particularly those that had introduced minor applications teams, there was a view amongst managers that it has had a major effect on performance, gives junior staff a good introduction to DC, provides opportunities for unqualified staff to undertake enhanced roles. Both authorities were large enough for there to be an adequate turnover of staff to allow progression from the minor applications team for those who wish. Potential problems of boredom and isolation could therefore be avoided.

- 5.8.10 Other respondents to the research had overcome potential problems of boredom and isolation by rotating staff between functions, by having a flexible definition of minor applications, and by avoiding a rigid division between teams. When workloads fluctuated, the minor applications team were given larger applications.

- 5.8.11 In the authorities that have rejected the idea of a separate team, managers argued that staff would ultimately become bored, demotivated and feel undervalued. This they argued would cause retention problems. The size of their establishments was not great enough to provide regular opportunities to progress, and continuity would be lost if staff continually moved. They argued that newly qualified staff and unqualified staff undertaking enhanced roles

would learn much more quickly by being integrated in area teams dealing with a full range of planning applications.

#### Planning Officers' views

- 5.8.12 Planning officers generally expressed support for the initiatives involving the enhancement of the roles of other staff within their authorities, because of the benefits of freeing up their time from routine tasks. In two authorities there was some concern expressed about the potential downgrading of elements of the professional planner's job. In addition a small number of staff who had taken on enhanced roles felt that there was some resentment about this amongst professional planning officers. However, this view was not generally expressed.

### **5.9 Measures to assist in the enhancement of roles**

#### Information Technology

- 5.9.1 The PARSOL project is intended to assist in the introduction of on-line services to planning and regulatory services. The Project Overview Document states that the "more effective introduction of ICT within all planning authorities could revolutionise their ability to respond to these pressures (processing planning applications and the production of development plans) using the limited amount of professional skill available for more high-level work than on the extensive process elements that are currently absorbing time."

- 5.9.2 The availability of on-line material to front house staff and to the public has greatly assisted many authorities in their initiatives to enhance the roles of support staff. Examples of the material produced include:

- On-line forms and guidance notes
- Web based advice
- Scripted responses for front-house staff

- 5.9.3 Recent research revealed that the uptake of applications amongst planning authorities is "sporadic"<sup>14</sup> and the case studies revealed considerable variations in the use of on-line systems to support the enhancement of roles or the removal of routine tasks from planning officers. Examples of systems that have assisted authorities include those enabling electronic identification of consultees and neighbours to notify about planning applications. Use of the Planning Portal was variable.

#### Non-electronic guidance and tools

- 5.9.4 Some authorities had developed paper based guidance to help customer liaison staff to deal with routine planning enquiries, or checklists to assist in the validation process. Several authorities had developed custom designed forms for permitted development enquiries to ensure that the necessary information was obtained from customers, and to improve the ease and speed of response. These had proved effective in assisting the staff involved and improving performance.

#### Council-wide Customer Services Teams

- 5.9.5 Managers and planning officers were generally very sceptical about the benefits of multi-service contact and call centres. They felt that these tended

to act as little more than switchboards, as those staffing such services did not have, and could never have, the necessary range of knowledge about the wide range of Council services to deal with anything other than the most basic of enquiries. They did not feel that such services increased the capacity of the planning service, and in some cases had retained or re-introduced a separate planning enquiry service for general planning enquiries.

- 5.9.6 Whilst the principle of the one-stop shop approach to customer services was seen as a good thing in principle, and provided some benefits for the customer, to operate successfully it required staff with service specialist knowledge. In smaller authorities it was not always easy to provide this especially if the service centre was remote from the planning department.

# Section 6

## Conclusions

### 6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The research obtained evidence concerning the practices of a range of authorities through the case studies and the contributions to several meetings and other fora. This revealed that in many of the authorities some tasks formerly undertaken by professional planning officers were now being undertaken by other members of the planning workforce. So the potential for enhancing the roles of staff is already being developed.
- 6.1.2 Practices vary considerably, however, and evidence from several respondents suggests that many authorities may not be utilising fully the potential of their staff. This section attempts to set out some conclusions from the case studies and from other sources about the effectiveness of different practices, and the associated structures, training provision and support mechanisms.
- 6.1.3 As the case studies were illustrative rather than representative, and the total number of authorities supplying evidence was relatively small it is considered inappropriate to put forward a series of recommendations. Instead, some examples of the practices of authorities that had successfully enhanced the roles of support staff are set out below.
- 6.1.4 Some of these practices may already have been widely adopted. Some, however, appear to be innovative and may provide some guidance to other authorities in their efforts to introduce or further enhance the roles of non-planners in local planning authorities. Some suggestions are made also concerning areas for further investigation or development.

### 6.2 General views on enhanced roles

- 6.2.1 Most staff, from those undertaking the enhanced roles to their managers, were supportive of the principle of enhancing the roles of staff without the academic qualifications necessary for corporate membership of the RTPI. Concerns about the potential of staff to take on such roles were expressed infrequently, although the need for good management, adequate training and support was stressed by many respondents.
- 6.2.2 Those managers whose authorities' performances had improved, felt that the provision of enhanced roles had been a major reason for the improvement. Other authorities considered enhancement of roles had lessened the impact of a shortage of qualified planners.
- 6.2.3 Some concerns were raised about the impact of future resourcing uncertainties. The creation of enhanced posts and hybrid roles has often been enabled by the increased funding provided by the Planning Delivery Grant. However, the temporary nature of this grant has created some uncertainty about the future funding of some of the posts and teams.

### **6.3 The enhanced roles**

- 6.3.1 There are difficulties in attempting to generalise about the enhancement of roles, as the activities considered to be traditionally the preserve of planners in some authorities have traditionally been undertaken by non-planning staff in others. Thus what is considered an enhancement of roles in one authority may not be considered so in another.
- 6.3.2 Despite this problem of definition, it is clear that many authorities consider that there has been an enhancement of the roles of 'support staff', and that many such staff are undertaking tasks that would traditionally have been undertaken by planning officers. It is clear, also, that some authorities have developed this potential to a greater extent than others.
- 6.3.3 The motivation for the enhancement of roles has often been the growing difficulties in recruiting and retaining planners, and the need to maintain or improve service delivery. In some authorities new staff have been appointed to undertake the enhanced roles, and this has had the benefit of maintaining or improving service delivery by freeing up planners from some of the less complex tasks they were undertaking. Many authorities, however, have been able to appoint existing staff to undertake these roles, and this had additional benefits of providing greater opportunities for progression and staff development and a fuller utilisation of the skills, abilities and ambitions of those members of the workforce who are not professional planners.
- 6.3.4 Most efforts appear to have been directed towards the enhancement of the roles of staff in the development control process. There may often be overlap between the activities undertaken, but it is possible to distinguish three basic types of activity that are undertaken.
- 6.3.5 Some of these tasks are concerned primarily with the application of rules, policies and regulations relating to the process; for example, the validation of applications, the determination of neighbour notifications and consultations, and advice on procedures and form completion. Others relate to an application of planning rules and regulations to development proposals; for example, decisions on basic permitted development enquiries. A third set of tasks undertaken by some non-planning staff has been the provision of basic advice on the planning issues or the evaluation of minor planning applications.
- 6.3.6 The creation of hybrid customer liaison posts appears to have been particularly successful in freeing up the time of development control planners. In some authorities such staff have responsibility for all written enquiries, including permitted development enquiries. Some have been given opportunities to develop beyond this and to have small case loads of minor applications. Staff undertaking such duties are normally located in customer service teams, but may also be located in area or development control teams.
- 6.3.7 The potential for enhancing the roles of existing staff will obviously vary according to the characteristics of the staff in each authority. In two of the case study authorities it was considered that staff did not have the potential to deal with many of these tasks. In others, non-planning staff deal with only the first type of task. In several authorities, however, non-planners were undertaking all of the aforementioned activities with few concerns about the quality of the work. Staff in these authorities considered that there was

potential for such practices in many authorities with the appropriate support tools, training and management.

- 6.3.8 The creation of customer services roles has also assisted policy planners. Other policy and research tasks that are being undertaken by non-planners include development monitoring, consultation work, database and graphics involving IT/GIS, survey work.
- 6.3.9 Some of these tasks are not routine tasks that were traditionally undertaken by planning officers, but are tasks that require specialist knowledge and expertise. They do, however, free up time for professional planning officers. Others – such as the handling of consultation responses during plan preparation – could be undertaken to a greater extent by non-planners.

#### **6.4 Structures**

- 6.4.1 There were some differences of opinion concerning the appropriate organisation of functions and the location of staff undertaking enhanced roles. Whilst there were generally positive views about the creation and operation of customer service or liaison teams (or individuals), views on minor applications teams and specialist validation teams were more mixed.
- 6.4.2 Larger authorities have often set up specialist teams undertaking a limited range of tasks e.g. customer liaison teams, minor applications teams. Staff undertaking enhanced roles have often been placed in such teams. These teams have been seen as effective in improving performance.
- 6.4.3 In smaller authorities staff has frequently been integrated into more generic teams, with those undertaking tasks such as assessing minor planning applications being included in area teams, whilst those undertaking tasks such as validations or customer liaison being attached to administrative teams. Often this staff provides a link between the administrative and professional teams. The enhancement of roles or the creation of enhanced posts has generally been considered to improve performance.
- 6.4.4 The case studies revealed general support for the idea of setting up individuals or teams to undertake all the customer liaison work. Views on the desirability of setting up specialist minor applications teams and specialist validation teams were more mixed, with managers and staff in some authorities raising fears about the impact on staff development and motivation of being located in a team with a narrow range of tasks.
- 6.4.5 It is impossible to draw any conclusions about the best structure for a planning department. Issues of size, resources, staff profiles and the nature of the workload will all be relevant in determining the best model. The only clear conclusions that can be drawn are that it is very difficult to set up specialist teams in very small authorities, but they can be successful in improving the performance of large authorities. They may not always be appropriate, but where they are introduced, careful management and the provision of opportunities to progress or transfer to other teams is necessary to avoid the potential pitfalls of boredom and isolation and subsequent demotivation.

#### **6.5 Managing the changes**

- 6.5.1 Many case study interviewees and other contributors to the research considered that the key to the successful enhancement of the roles of 'support staff' lay in good management of the process and the people.

#### Staff appraisal

- 6.5.2 Those authorities that appeared more successful in their introduction of enhanced roles or posts for non-planners, gave considerable emphasis to the importance of investigating, recognising and developing the potential of existing staff to undertake different or more complex work.
- 6.5.3 Several respondents stressed that not all staff may wish to take on enhanced roles, others may welcome some enhancement of their roles, but may not wish to progress towards professional status. It was emphasised that the former group of staff were often undertaking very valuable roles, and that they and the latter group should be valued 'at the point at which they stop.'
- 6.5.4 In several authorities long-standing members of staff who had not previously been given the opportunity to develop their skills had proved to be both willing and able to progress to different or more complex tasks previously undertaken by planners.
- 6.5.5 In most of the case study authorities staff were given opportunities to train and progress. However, as several of the case study authorities were chosen because of the perception that they provided examples of good practice, it is unlikely that they provide a representative picture of current practice. Given the views of the aforementioned respondents, it seems likely that the practices of one of the case study authorities – in which one member of staff could only undertake training if it was in his/her own time and at his/her own expense – may not be untypical of the practices amongst many authorities.

#### Mentoring and shadowing

- 6.5.6 The need for adequate mentoring and on the job training was stressed by many of those whose roles had been enhanced. Such support was considered to be inadequate in those authorities in which some of the staff expressed concerns about their enhanced roles. In authorities in which the enhancement of roles appeared most effective, management and the staff undertaking these roles stressed the importance of mentoring, staff appraisal and on the job training. In several authorities shadowing was considered a particularly effective way of introducing staff to new roles.

#### Rotation and inclusion

- 6.5.7 In authorities that had introduced specialist teams undertaking a narrow range of functions, and in those that had rejected the introduction of some of these teams, potential problems of boredom, lack of career development and isolation were raised by some staff.
- 6.5.8 Some managers and staff pointed out that not all staff in these teams wanted to develop their skills or deal with more varied work, and were content to undertake the limited range of duties. A number of staff in such teams, however, expressed a desire to undertake more varied work. In some authorities this is enabled by avoiding a rigid definition of the tasks to be undertaken, by circulation of staff or by allocating different cases to a team when there are peaks in the workload. In others the size of the teams and the establishment restricts the amount of flexibility.

6.5.9 In those authorities in which staff seemed most positive about such specialisation, there were opportunities for rotation between tasks and teams, and for progression. The importance of liaison and interaction between teams, involvement in group meetings and committee de-briefings, circulation between functions and opportunities for transfers were cited as beneficial by the staff in those teams. Such measures helped to reduce the feelings of stagnation, boredom or isolation that existed amongst some staff in one or two authorities and were feared in others. An absence of such opportunities was considered detrimental by staff.

### Career development

- 6.5.10 In several authorities in which roles had been enhanced and staff had occupied new posts, there was a feeling amongst these staff that there were few opportunities for progression beyond the current post. Those authorities that had most successfully enhanced the roles of non-planners, had developed clear career pathways towards technical and corporate professional membership or towards higher graded posts.
- 6.5.11 Opportunities were available to progress in steps involving the successful completion of a qualification or through staff appraisal. In smaller authorities the provision of such opportunities is often less possible as vacancies occur less frequently. However, in some areas there may be potential for arranging partnerships between authorities to enable a rotation of roles or progression opportunities.
- 6.5.12 Several respondents who were or had been technical members of the RTPI considered that technical membership of the RTPI, and the various courses leading to membership were not well known in many local authorities. They expressed concerns about the lack of status that employers attached to technician or support roles, and to technical membership of the RTPI. They expressed concerns also about the wide variations they considered to exist between the levels of support given to staff wishing to undertake training or progress to more complex tasks.
- 6.5.13 The RTPI has stated that it wishes to encourage the development of technicians roles and to promote technical membership. This could help to enhance the status of such staff, and encourage employers to provide greater levels of support, subject to the availability of funding and training budgets.

### Issues for investigation and development

- 6.5.14 Publicising more widely examples of successful attempts to identify and develop existing staff to take on enhanced roles might encourage such practices to be adopted more widely; particularly if the publicity emphasised the benefits there have been for service delivery and for the staff.
- 6.5.15 The status of technical membership could be enhanced if it were promoted more widely. In order to promote technical membership as being as of value in its own right, but also as a potential step towards corporate membership, the RTPI could give greater prominence to the roles of technical members and the availability and value of courses on web sites and in its publications. Authorities should also be encouraged to provide clear stepped career pathways towards professional recognition.
- 6.5.16 The inclusion of technical members on all RTPI Branch Executive Committees might also help to promote the value of technical membership of the RTPI to school/FE students, existing staff and managers in planning departments in order to increase the status of 'support staff.'

## **6.6 Staff origins, qualifications and training availability**

- 6.6.1 Many of the staff taking enhanced roles and posts have been recruited from within the departments, as authorities increasingly pursue 'grow your own' policies. Such internal promotions have proved successful in utilising the skills of staff, and motivating and developing these staff. For many of the posts,

formal educational requirements are considered less important than motivation, skills or experience. The job descriptions often reflect this.

- 6.6.2 Despite this, the availability of formal training opportunities is important for staff wishing to undertake enhanced roles or progress to new positions. A number of staff at the case study authorities and in other authorities providing evidence were undertaking NVQs, distance learning courses or day release courses. However, many of these authorities were selected as they were felt to be examples of good practice, and aren't necessarily representative of the practices of all authorities. The overall numbers of people completing such courses annually is probably less than fifty. This evidence, and the responses from a range of respondents, suggests that the awareness and the take-up of such courses amongst authorities generally is low.
- 6.6.3 The types of courses available represent another barrier to some staff. Distance learning courses and NVQs are available to staff irrespective of their location. However, not all staff want to study in this way; some prefer more traditional forms of study. Large areas of the country have no available day release courses and there appear to be only a limited number of CPD events available to such staff.

## **6.7 Training provision**

- 6.7.1 The numbers of staff taking such courses in the apparently limited number of authorities aware of the courses and supportive of staff wishing to take them, suggests that there may be considerable latent demand for these courses in many other authorities. This suggests that there is a need to publicise the courses more widely and to investigate the potential for the expansion of existing provision and/or the provision of additional courses.
- 6.7.2 There may be a need for additional distance learning courses, and for more trained NVQ assessors and mentors, should there be inadequate capacity at existing providing institutions. Some staff prefer more traditional modes of study, however, and to cater for their needs there is an immediate need for the provision of additional day release provision to enable this mode of course to be available to staff throughout the country; currently there are no courses of this type available over large parts of England.

### Ad hoc CPD and training courses

- 6.7.3 The PEA currently holds 'Roadshows' around the country to provide ad hoc CPD opportunities for staff. In addition at least two RTPi Branches have held conferences designed for 'support staff and technicians.' Whilst these events have proved successful, such events are infrequent. Many of the technical members responding to this research felt that there were inadequate CPD events available to them.
- 6.7.4 Some authorities are supportive of such events and staff who wish to attend, but several respondents considered that such support was far from universal. Greater levels of employer support would be likely to lead to improved attendance at events.
- 6.7.5 Consortia of LPAs are jointly providing or procuring CPD courses and training events. However, these are primarily aimed at planners. Authorities could be encouraged not only to provide or procure such events for other staff, but could consider providing places on all courses to support staff.

### NVQs

- 6.7.6 A growing number of authorities are encouraging staff to undertake NVQs in Planning. The qualification is considered valuable in itself, but also enables technical membership of the RTPI, and helps staff undertake enhanced roles and, if they wish, to progress to courses leading to corporate membership.
- 6.7.7 In one authority over half of the administrative staff are taking the NVQ Level 3. This suggests that there may be considerable latent demand for this mode of studying for a qualification. Like many other qualifications at this level, however, it appears that the qualification is not well known by staff or employers.
- 6.7.8 The distance learning courses and day release courses provided by a small number of institutions have also proved very effective in providing staff with training enabling them to undertake enhanced roles and progress towards planning posts. However, the numbers taking these courses nationally is small. Numbers on part-time undergraduate courses are also very small.
- 6.7.9 There has been an increased take-up of the distance learning course and postgraduate day release courses meeting the academic requirements for corporate membership. This suggests that there may be a latent demand for the expansion of courses that lead to 'professional' courses or meet the academic requirements for technical membership. The capacity of such courses to expand may be limited. In addition, large areas of the country do not access to day release courses. The potential to expand existing provision and the means of encouraging employers to enable staff to attend such courses needs further investigation.

### Issues for investigation and development

- 6.7.10 In relation to training there are a number of measures that could increase the potential for enhancing roles. Several agencies could take the lead in investigating, co-ordinating the development of, and funding the measures, eg ODPM, Regional Offices, RTPI, POS, LGA, ALG and LAs. Higher Education Institutions (Planning Schools) and Further Education Colleges would also need to be involved in discussions concerning the expansion of existing provision and the development of additional courses.
- 6.7.11 There is a need to investigate the capacity of the existing providers to expand the capacity of NVQs, and to promote this qualification more widely amongst staff and employers. Should the existing awarding body be unable to expand the numbers on this course to meet the demand then there may be a need to investigate the development of another awarding body.
- 6.7.12 There is a need to investigate the potential for gaining greater levels of support from RTPI Branches, consortia of local authorities, the ODPM, their Government Offices, RDAs or commercial sponsors for the provision of CPD events. This would help to increase the frequency of events and fund their promotion amongst potential participants.
- 6.7.13 There is a need to investigate the potential for current providers of distance learning and NVQs to expand their capacity, or if this is not possible, to develop additional courses. The expansion of NVQs may require the training of planning staff to become GNV assessors and mentors. The provision of

bursaries for staff to undertake distance learning courses may encourage authorities to promote this qualification.

- 6.7.14 There is a need to investigate the potential for setting up additional day release courses – or Foundation Degrees - in areas currently without such courses, and investigate the possibility of gaining professional (technical) accreditation of such courses

## **6.8 Support systems and tools**

- 6.8.1 The use of electronic and paper-based systems and tools had proved very beneficial in developing the potential of staff other than planners to undertake enhanced roles. Although the use of such systems varied, those that had made greatest use of these systems felt that they had been essential in developing roles to their current levels.

- 6.8.2 Many authorities extolled the virtues of electronic systems and tools, but many without some of these systems and tools considered that paper-based forms, checklists and guidance notes had provided the support necessary for enhanced roles to be successfully introduced.

- 6.8.3 The results of the PARSOL survey,<sup>15</sup> and the case studies indicate that take up is patchy and that there is considerable potential to make greater use of electronic and other tools and systems in order to enable the effective enhancement of the roles of staff other than planners.

- 6.8.4 The potential to enhance the roles of ‘support staff’ to take on routine professional tasks has been greatly assisted by the use of paper and IT based standard forms, checklists, guidance, scripts and other tools. Many contributors to the research considered there to be huge potential to make additional use of IT to enable greater enhancement of the roles of ‘support staff’ and assist planning officers.

- 6.8.5 Checklists for validation procedures, consultations and neighbour notifications were considered extremely useful by those authorities that have developed these. The use of an innovative electronic package linked to GIS to undertake the identification of neighbours for notification purposes were considered particularly useful in releasing planning officer time and speeding up the process in one authority.

- 6.8.6 Clear guidance on permitted development was also considered extremely useful, and the development of guidance at a national level developed from the best local examples would assist many authorities without such guidance notes. Many authorities appear to have developed their own guidance in preference to that available on the Planning Portal.

### Issues for investigation and development

- 6.8.7 The PARSOL project is responsible for developing on-line services. The take-up is patchy, however, and there is evidence that some authorities have limited knowledge of the project. The current intention is to use a variety of means to promote the outputs of the project, relying very heavily on the RTPi and POS web sites and also using conferences, seminars and relevant publications. There is a need to continue and increase the promotion of the project and its benefits, investigating the use of more active promotional methods and targeting authorities that have not participated in the project.

- 6.8.8 There may be potential for smaller authorities to form partnerships to procure, develop and maintain systems; there appears to be a need for a single body in each region to take the lead in developing and co-ordinating such efforts at a regional level.
- 6.8.9 A number of authorities have found paper-based forms, checklists and guidance notes very useful in assisting the enhancement of roles. An investigation of some of these would enable best practice to be identified and shared more widely, and for existing paper-based forms to be converted to electronic form for wider dissemination.

# **Appendix 1**

## **Resourcing, recruitment and retention problems in planning**

### **A.1 Resources**

A.1.1 Research into the resourcing of planning authorities<sup>16</sup> concluded that the overall level of local planning authority resources has declined significantly in recent years, and that there was good evidence to suggest that a reasonable increase in resources is justified. The Planning Delivery Grant and the increase in fees have provided such an increase in resources. However, the growth in workloads and the shortage in the supply of planners have created barriers to the effective deployment of the additional resources.

### **A.2 Recruitment and retention problems**

A.2.1 The Audit Commission recently reported<sup>17</sup> that there are widespread reports of recruitment and retention problems affecting all local public services across all sectors and right across the country, and there is much evidence that planning is suffering severe staff shortages.<sup>18</sup>

A.2.2 An LGA survey last year<sup>19</sup> found that 87% of local planning authorities reported experiencing recruitment and retention problems in the last 12 months that were affecting their ability to deliver an effective planning service. Similar proportions of authorities reported experiencing skills shortages at all levels. Staff retention problems have also been highlighted in other recent studies.<sup>20</sup>

A.2.3 Recent research<sup>21</sup> into the supply of and demand for junior planning posts found that significant recruitment problems exist at this level. It found that application numbers are declining and only around 50% of employers stated that they were filling all posts at the first time of asking.

A.2.4 The problems appear worse in areas with high living costs and, particularly, in rural areas and regions with few planning schools.<sup>22</sup> Although the problems affect many parts of the country, they are most acute in London and the South-East.<sup>23</sup> The LGA survey<sup>24</sup> found that problems were worse in London, with 94% of London Boroughs reporting that they were experiencing recruitment and retention problems affecting their ability to deliver services.

A.2.5 A recent questionnaire survey of all the London Boroughs<sup>25</sup>, two-thirds of the twenty-one responding Boroughs reported difficulties in recruiting experienced planners, and half had problems recruiting junior planners. One-third reported difficulties in recruiting planners at management level. The survey found that over 13% of planning posts were vacant and 17% filled by agency staff on temporary contracts.

### **A.3 The causes of recruitment problems**

A.3.1 A recent report suggested that the causes of the national recruitment problems at entry level appear to be a result of rising demand for planners rather than a decrease in the supply.<sup>26</sup> However, detailed examination of a range of data suggests that if there has not already been a decrease in the supply of graduates from full-time planning courses nationally, that there soon will be.

- A.3.2 Nationally, UCAS data<sup>27</sup> reveal a steady fall in applications and acceptances to full-time RTPI accredited undergraduate courses between 1996 and 2000. Applications fell by nearly 30% in this period and acceptances by nearly 25%. Although this trend was reversed in 2001, the downward trend resumed in 2002. Applications for 2002 are nearly 25% lower than in 1996, and acceptances are almost 30% lower. RTPI figures for entrants to undergraduate courses also show a steady decline between 1996 and 2000, with a slight recovery since 2000. The fall in entrants has yet to work its way through the system, but will lead to a fall in graduates from such courses.
- A.3.4 The supply of planners has not been increasing to meet the rise in demand for planners over a number of years and the growth of jobs in the private sector. This has led to a shortage of more experienced planners. In many areas the difficulties of recruiting experienced planners are greater than the difficulties in recruiting to junior posts.
- A.3.3 The ageing workforce in local planning authorities and the “(d)ifficulties in attracting young people into public sector careers .....indicate the problems of recruitment and retention are likely to grow in the future.”<sup>28</sup>
- A.3.4 The causes of retention problems Arup’s recent DTLR commissioned study reported that planning staff are leaving the profession due to growing workloads, which contribute to poor staff morale and a poor image of the profession.<sup>29</sup>

#### **A.4 Responses to recruitment and retention problems**

- A.4.1 Two responses to these problems have been the recruitment of agency staff and the recruitment of non-planning graduates who are then sent on part-time postgraduate courses.
- A.4.2 A third response has been to enhance the roles of existing technicians and support staff, or train such staff to become qualified planners. Recent research<sup>30</sup> found that training support staff to become qualified planners, together with (re-) organising the work of planning departments to free up planning officers and increased use of IT were amongst the main methods used to tackle recruitment problems. The web search undertaken for this project found several examples of authorities using the Planning Delivery Grant for the appointment or promotion of support staff to undertake ‘routine professional planning work.’
- A.4.3 Although enhancing the roles of staff other than planners will not immediately address the recruitment and retention problems at more senior levels, it will help to free up some of the time of junior and senior planners. Training non-planners to become planners will also help to address some of the recruitment problems at junior level.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Classification of tasks in local planning authorities**

#### **Development Control**

##### **Clerical/administrative**

Registration of applications and appeals  
Basic reception duties – counter and phone  
Photocopying  
Word processing  
Providing plans and drawings to visitors  
Recording the receipt of all letters  
Sending out acknowledgements to letters  
Sending out decision notices

##### **Technical**

Validating applications  
Checking fees\*  
Determining consultations/neighbour notifications\*  
Advising on the completion of planning application forms  
Providing general planning advice in person and over the telephone  
Plotting application sites  
Posting site notices  
Preparing plans for committees and meetings

##### **Professional**

Providing detailed advice on permitted development  
Providing written responses to permitted development enquiries  
Providing pre-application advice  
Providing detailed planning advice on policies and standards  
Assessing planning applications  
    Negotiating with applicants  
    Liasing with consultees  
    Liasing with neighbours  
    Writing committee/delegated reports  
    Making recommendations  
Drafting decision notices  
Preparing appeal statements  
Presenting oral reports to Committee and public meetings  
Presenting evidence at Hearings and PLIs

#### **Forward planning and projects/regeneration process:**

##### **Clerical/administrative**

Basic reception duties  
Photocopying  
Word processing  
Recording the receipt of letters

##### **Technical**

Preparation of maps and plans (GIS or manual)  
Graphics (manual or computer)  
Photography

Design and production of publications and web pages  
Designing displays and exhibitions  
Undertaking surveys – photographic and visual/numeric  
Preparing presentations

**Professional**

Providing policy advice on planning applications  
Negotiating with applicants/developers/land owners  
Liasing and negotiating with consultees in the plan preparation process  
Designing and project managing the consultation process for Plans  
Designing and managing quantitative and qualitative surveys  
Drafting policies for plans  
Writing committee reports  
Presenting to Committees and public meetings  
Preparation and presentation of evidence to PLIs/EIPs  
Preparing development briefs  
Managing projects  
Preparing funding bids

This attempt to place the main tasks undertaken in a planning department into particular categories is not comprehensive. Neither can it be considered as definitive. It does, however, provide a basis for the examination of the roles of staff, and whether staff have taken on, or could take on enhanced roles.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Education and training courses**

#### **Courses leading to RTPI Technical Membership**

##### **Town and Country Planning Foundation Course Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT)**

The Course is delivered distance learning materials and short conferences, or part-time study. It is a flexible study distance-learning course, which means it can be undertaken over a number of years. It comprises 6 units assessed by coursework, and aims to build upon students existing knowledge and understanding of the Town and Country Planning system.

This course is seen as the equivalent of an HNC in Planning. It is accepted for entry to Technical Membership of the RTPI, and was re-validated by the Institute for a further five years in December 2003. It is separately accredited by the Open College Network. Students successfully completing the course can enter the UCE bridging course (see below), or may be eligible under the RTPI Special Entry procedure, for a place on RTPI accredited part-time postgraduate courses.

There are no formal entry qualifications, but applicants must have prior experience in a planning related environment.

Most applicants are administrative support officers working in local planning authorities, although there have been some enforcement officers and technicians, and several from the private sector. Most students take two or three years to complete the course, and between five and ten complete the course each year. Students are drawn from all over the country. Many progress to other courses. The course is linked to the Certificate in Enforcement Studies provided by Trevor Roberts Associates (see below).

##### **HNC in Planning Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT)**

This course is one of the land management suite of courses, and involves two years of part-time study with attendance on one day each week. Assessment is by continuous assessment and examination. Negotiations are currently underway to in order to obtain validation for the course from a Manchester HE Institution or the Learning Skills Council.

Success on the course enables students to progress onto bridging courses to professional postgraduate planning courses.

Applicants are required to either to have one A-level or equivalent, an EDEXCEL National Certificate or National Diploma, or be mature students with relevant work experience.

Most applicants are currently working as planning technicians or planning support staff in local planning authorities. About six or seven take the Planning option each year.

### **Certificate in Enforcement Studies** **Trevor Roberts Associates**

This course is primarily a distance-learning course, but requires four days of attendance for each of the modules. The course is specifically focused on planning enforcement. Students must complete four of the six modules to be eligible for the Certificate.

Students who successfully complete the Certificate, and who either have ten years relevant experience, or have successfully completed one of the modules on the MANCAT Foundation Course (see above), are eligible for Technical Membership of the RTPI. The award is

There are no formal entry requirements, and the course is aimed specifically at enforcement staff without any specialist qualifications, as well as professionally qualified staff involved in enforcement.

The number of students taking each module is limited to twelve, and many on the course take only one or two modules rather than the entire Certificate. The Certificate can be taken over any period from one year to six; most students take the course over eighteen months to two years.

### **Certificate in Professional Development in Town Planning** **University of West of England**

The Certificate involves two years of part-time study with attendance on one day each week. It is assessed by coursework and exams, and places an emphasis on co-operative working and skills development.

This course replaced the HNC Land Administration (Planning). It is accepted by the RTPI as an entry qualification to Technical Membership of the Institute. It also feeds into the third year of the six-year part-time BA (Hons) Town and Country Planning/MA Town Planning. This is an RTPI accredited programme, completion of which fulfils the academic requirements for corporate membership of the Institute.

Applicants normally have one or more A-levels or an appropriate Edexcel (BTEC) National Certificate, but entry is available for mature candidates who do not have these academic qualifications.

Most applicants are mature students currently working in planning, often as planning technicians, enforcement officers or administrative support officers in local planning authorities. Numbers on the course are rising, and there are currently approximately 20 students on each year of the course. Students are drawn from across the south-west and South Wales.

### **Certificate of Professional Studies Planning and Environment** **University of Central England**

This course requires one year of part-time or distance learning study. The distance learning mode requires a minimum of three compulsory visits to UCE. The course is assessed by continuous assessment and examinations. The course provides a bridge for students to progress to postgraduate part-time professional planning courses.

Students must be working in an environmental role or obtain relevant work experience while on the course. They will normally have an HNC in Planning or a related subject, or an HNC in an unrelated subject plus two years experience, or 4 GCSEs plus five years relevant experience. Students aged over 25 with relevant qualifications or experience will also be eligible.

There are currently 21 students on the course; half have HNCs whilst a third have A-levels and relevant experience. Most are Technicians or Enforcement Officers working in local planning authorities. Students come from all over the country, although just over half come from the Midlands. With the part-time postgraduate course scheduled to change to a two-year programme next academic year, it is likely that the length of the Certificate will be extended and a learning log be required.

### **Certificate in Planning Studies Sheffield Hallam University**

This qualification is designed for those working in planning support in an organisation's planning office related to town and country planning. Typically, applicants are technicians, administrator, enforcement officer, trainee or planning assistant. Entry requirements are Level 3 qualifications or work experience.

The certificate is a first step in a programme that can lead to full professional membership and chartered status of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The certificate enables technical membership of the RTPI.

The course is offered on a part-time basis and typically takes two years to complete, via one day a week and three block weeks in year one, one of which is a field study visit. Fees for the course are, typically: £1,550 for year one; £310 for year two.

There are currently two students in the first year and three in the second year. Four are mature students and all are working in planning or a related field. Two of the students' job titles are planning assistants; one is a technician.

### **National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs) Level 3 Town Planning Support; Level 4 Town Planning ABBE (UCE)**

This qualification is based on the ability of individuals to demonstrate competence in their work activity, independent of the duration or processes of learning. It is unlikely that the full Town Planning Support Level 3 N/SVQ will be achievable in less than three years.

It is anticipated that, for a candidate with a higher level of general education and some experience in Town Planning or has already achieved the Town Planning Support Level 3 NVQ/SVQ, the full Town Planning NVQ/SVQ Level 4 is likely to be achievable in under three years.

The full Town Planning Support Level 3 N/SVQ requires successful completion of eight Units (five mandatory Units plus three Units from one of four Option strands).

The numbers registering for and taking the NVQ were withheld for commercial reasons.

## **Short Courses**

A number of organisations run training courses for planning administrators.

### **Trevor Roberts Associates**

As well as in-house training, TRA also run inter-authority workshops for planning support staff as part of their main programme. Training is matched to local authorities requirements and run at or near their premises. Where an individual authority does not have sufficient staff to run a workshop for itself, it is often possible to arrange sessions for a group of neighbouring authorities.

The training takes the form of "workshops" with a limited number of participants (maximum 16 or 20) and an interactive, participatory style with discussion and case studies. One-day workshops cost £170 per participant; 2-day workshops cost £230.

The workshops available are as follows:

- The Basics of Planning for Administrative Staff
- The Basics of Planning for Frontline Staff
- Best Practice in the Administration of Development Control
- Refreshing Reception: the public interface of planning
- Permitted Development
- Supporting the Development Control function: a workshop for experienced technical and administrative staff

### **University of the West of England**

UWE runs a programme of one-day short courses for administrative and clerical officers in planning. Each course is run up to three times a year. Season tickets are available for attendance at several courses, at a cost of £900 for 5 days, £1,600 for 10 days, £2,325 for 15 days and £2,900 for 20 days.

Introduction to the Planning system

An advanced course on the planning system

Is planning permission needed?

Understanding the Supplementary Codes: Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Adverts and Trees

Understanding the work of Development Control Officers

Understanding and Explaining Planning Committee Consents and Refusals to Members of the Public

The Development Plans: What is it and how is it used for Clerical and Administrative Staff?

Managing the Administrative Function of Local Authority Planning Departments

### **Oxford Brookes University**

Oxford Brookes University run some short courses designed for Councillors and Administrative staff.

Each course costs £195. 5 days £900. 10 days 1,600.

## RTPI accredited professional planning courses

### Joint Distance Learning Postgraduate Diploma/MA in Town and Country Planning Co-ordinated by UWE

This course is fully accredited by the RTPI, and successful completion meets the academic requirements for corporate membership of the RTPI. The course can be entered at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

For a graduate the whole course normally takes four years, or for a non-graduate eight years. It is possible to have a break in study. The course requires around 15 hours per week on home-based study, giving a total study time of 600 hours per course. This includes completion of coursework, revision for exams, and attendance at one or two college-based sessions per year.

There are no specific entry qualifications. The course applies the Open University (OU) model of wider access, and OU foundation and undergraduate courses are incorporated to allow non-graduates to accumulate the credits needed to progress to the postgraduate MA or Diploma in Planning.

Fees for the course depend on the number of credits taken. For non-graduate entrants the programme of eight modules costs £7,500. For graduates taking four modules the cost is £5,500.

| Planning Schools offering courses meeting the academic requirements for RTPI corporate membership 2004/05 |               |                   |                |                            |
|---|---------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Planning School   | Location      | Mode              | Under-graduate | Postgraduate 2* or 3**year |
| University of Aberdeen  | Aberdeen      | No                |                |                            |
| Anglia Polytechnic University   | Chelmsford    | Part-time         | ✓              |                            |
| University of Central England   | Birmingham    | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| University of the West of England   | Bristol       | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓**                        |
| University of Wales   | Cardiff       | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Dundee  | Dundee        |                   |                |                            |
| Heriot-Watt University  | Edinburgh     | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Strathclyde   | Glasgow       |                   |                |                            |
| Leeds Metropolitan University   | Leeds         | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓**                        |
| University of Liverpool   | Liverpool     | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| Liverpool John Moores University  | Liverpool     | Part-time         |                | ✓**                        |
| University College London   | London        | Part-time         |                | ✓**                        |
| University of Westminster   | London        | Part-time         |                | ✓**                        |
| London South Bank University  | London        | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| University of Manchester  | Manchester    | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Newcastle upon Tyne   | Newcastle     | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| Oxford Brookes University   | Oxford        | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| University of Reading   | Reading       | Part-time         |                | ✓*                         |
| University of Sheffield   | Sheffield     |                   |                |                            |
| Sheffield Hallam University   | Sheffield     | Part-time         | ✓              | ✓*                         |
| Distance Learning Consortium  | (Bristol UWE) | Distance learning | ✓              | ✓                          |



Appendix 3 – selection of case studies

| Approx Apps Sept 2002/03 | 8 wks % | Type     | Location   | Chosen | Visited |           | Reasons for selection (staffing figures approximate)   |
|--------------------------|---------|----------|------------|--------|---------|-----------|--|
| < 1000                   | 75-85   | District | North East | ✓      | ✓       | Lab & LD  | Small rural District<br>< 15 planning & support staff<br>Large recent increase in applications   |
| 1000                     | 60-70   | District | North East | ✓      | ✓       | Con       | Small rural District<br><20 planning & support staff<br>Technicians team - experimented with extension of role to minor pro tasks              |
| 2500                     | 60-70   | Met      | North East | ✓      | ✓       | Lab       | Met Core City<br>Approx 40 DC & tech + 20 Design/Plans<br>Technical support team & technicians in UD<br>Minor applications team                |
| 2500                     | 75-85   | District | West       | ✓      | ✓       | LD & Lab  | Rural District<br>Approx 30 DC & support + 5Plans<br>Customer Focus Team – cited as good practice<br>Improved DC performance                   |
| >5000                    | 65-75   | Met      | Midlands   | ✓      |         | Lab Mayor | Large Met Core City<br>>100 staff; >75 in DC& support<br>Planning Enquiry Centre   |
| 3000                     | 65-75   | District | North West | ✓      | ✓       | Con       | Large Rural District<br>Approx 25 DC& support approx 10 Plans etc<br>Widening role of support staff – good training<br>Improved DC performance |
| 2000                     | 60-70   | Met      | North West | ✓      | ✓       | Lab       | Met<br><br>Large increase apps<br>Restructured/changed job titles/responsibilities   |
| >2000                    | 65-75   | District | South East | ✓      | ✓       | Con       | Rural District<br>Approx 30 DC & support<br>Standards Authority<br>Recent restructuring & improved performance                                 |

|       |       |                |                    |   |   |     |                  |          |  |
|-------|-------|----------------|--------------------|---|---|-----|------------------|----------|--|
| 3168  | 65-75 | London Borough | Outer North London | ✓ | ✓ | Con | Con<br>Lab<br>LD | 39<br>24 | R&R problems all levels<br>Customer Services Officer   |
| 1750  | 65-75 | London Borough | Inner North London | ✓ | ✓ | LD  | Con<br>Lab<br>LD | 10<br>38 | Technical Support Officers<br>Recruitment problems & agency staff  |
| 1750  | 75-85 | London Borough | Inner North London | ✓ | ✓ | Lab | Con<br>Lab<br>LD | 42<br>15 | Customer Liaison Team<br>Recruitment problems & agency staff<br>Examining extended role                        |
| >3000 | 70-80 | London Borough | Inner SW London    | ✓ | ✓ | Con | Con<br>Lab<br>LD | 50<br>10 | Planning technicians in DC teams<br>History of converting admin to prof<br>Serious R&R problems & agency staff |
| 2000  | 75-85 | London Borough | Outer SW London    | ✓ | ✓ | Lab | Con<br>Lab<br>LD | 24<br>33 | Trainee planners<br>Recently successful recruitment  |

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- <sup>27</sup> Data examined during preparation of a report for PINS - Edmundson, T. & Simpson, I. (2003) *BME Representation in Planning*. Bristol: PINS
- <sup>28</sup> Audit Commission (2001) op cit
- <sup>29</sup> Arup Economics & Planning with the Bailey Consultancy (2002) op cit
- <sup>30</sup> Glasson, G. & Durning, B. (2004) Skills base in the planning system. A presentation to the LGA/National Planning Forum Annual Conference 2 March