

**INFRASTRUCTURE BOARD**

**9<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

**PLANNING PRODUCTIVITY AND RESOURCE REVIEWS**

**Purpose**

This report presents the initial outcomes of planning reviews undertaken in five districts. It sets out proposals for further collective action in light of these reviews, with the aim of extending the work to create a more consistent approach on several issues, including supporting the development process.

**Freedom of Information and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972**

This paper would be available under the Combined Authority Publication Scheme.

**Recommendations**

Board members are asked to:

1. Discuss the initial outcomes of the planning productivity and resource reviews and the issues these have raised;
2. Note the next steps and support the work being developed by the Heads of Planning Group; and
3. Agree the role of lead local authorities for the next stage of work set out in Para 2.6.

**1. Background**

- 1.1** As part of the Duty to Cooperate, Heads of Planning from across SCR meet on a regular basis to share information and expertise on strategic planning issues as well as undertake joint projects where these are mutually beneficial.
- 1.2** Following a request by the LEP Board, and as previously reported to the former SCR Housing and Infrastructure Board, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has been commissioned to support local authorities across the City Region to review their operations and seek improvements and greater consistency of service across the City Region.
- 1.3** An initial action was a LEP sponsored workshop in April 2019 brought together representatives from the development sector, Local Planning Authorities and other stakeholders to discuss the role of planning in the city region and how we work together to meet shared ambitions for growth and sustainable development.
- 1.4** The Infrastructure Board agreed the work programme at its meeting in July 2019 along

with a draft Statement of Common Ground which is currently being signed off by SCR authorities and scheduled to be considered by the MCA in January. This paper presents the initial headline results of the Planning Productivity and Resource Review and proposes specific actions to improve planning performance and consistency across the city region.

## 2. Proposal and justification

- 2.1** This report summarises outcomes from work on a shared planning approach. With support from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), five pathfinder authorities (Barnsley, Bassetlaw, Doncaster, NE Derbyshire and Sheffield) have undertaken a productivity and resource review of their planning services. Work has been led by officers in Doncaster who have convened meetings, managed progress and ensured that tasks are completed. Each of the participating districts have also provided evidence on service costs, income, workloads and decision times, etc so that these can be analysed on a consistent basis.
- 2.2** Together they have developed a significant evidence base and a common baseline for service productivity and performance. Detailed reports for each local service have been shared with the five pathfinder authorities and a workshop was held in October 2019 to discuss the implications of this and consider how to work together on improvements. More detail on these findings will be presented in Annex A.
- 2.3** In addition to individual improvement plans for each authority, the workshop defined five overarching project opportunities designed to improve performance collectively:
1. **Standard planning forms** – this would look to get planning paperwork (validation, pre-app, etc) to be more similar across Planning Authorities.
  2. **Strategic Pre-app** – this would look to deal with pre-application advice on the larger schemes in a more consistent way ensuring, for example, that all key agencies input at the same time.
  3. **Establish true cost model of planning** – this would provide a better understanding on how much planning services cost and how much development and investment value they bring to the city region.
  4. **Streamlining conditions** – this would look to reduce the number and type of planning conditions and make them more consistent.
  5. **Annual review and reflection** – an annual improvement event to review progress, along with a further resource review as part of this.
- 2.4** The five projects are a practical and potentially productive way of advancing the work completed to date. Taken together, they would also represent a distinct step-up in terms of collaboration in order to support the development process and provide a positive experience for investors and developers across the City Region.

### Next steps

- 2.5** The impact of the above projects will be greater if they are taken forward across the wider South Yorkshire / City Region, creating a more consistent and mutually supportive way of working. Based on the experience of the last few months, it will also be important for individual projects to be led by specific authorities so that they can apply their own experience and provide appropriate project management capacity to ensure success.

**2.6** Based on recent experience, Heads of Planning have therefore proposed that each piece of work would be led by one Local Planning Authority as below:

- Rotherham leading work into project 1 (standard planning forms), based on their experience with recent RTPI award;
- Doncaster leading work on project 2 (strategic pre-apps) as they have already started work on their own pre-app process;
- Sheffield leading the work on project 3 (to establish a true cost model of planning) based on their experience with time management and costing systems for development management;
- Barnsley leading work on project 4 (streamline planning conditions) as they have recently reviewed their own conditions using a similar approach to the one also being developed by Sheffield; and
- The SCR team lead project 5 (host an annual Review and reflection event).

**2.7** This work will involve communications with key stakeholders with at least one further workshop session with private sector representatives and other key stakeholders to test the approach, and generate understanding and support.

### **3. Consideration of alternative approaches**

**3.1** Local Planning Authorities would continue to develop and improve their own services, working in isolation on addressing the issues outlined above. However, this approach risks a lack of integration with wider SCR activities and lead to more fragmented planning and decision making. Developers and inward investors suggest that this can hinder the progress of larger schemes as well as compromise the quality of development as scheme promoters seek to exploit the lack of a joined-up position on some planning issues.

### **4. Implications**

#### **4.1 Financial**

Continued support from experts in the PAS will be required to support the work. A small revenue budget is being developed for this and will be funded through the SCR Planning Delivery Fund (provided by MHCLG).

#### **4.2 Legal**

The work will need to be undertaken within the usual planning regulations and legislation. Guidance on this will be provided by identified lead officers in each Local Planning Authority as well as by the PAS.

#### **4.3 Risk Management**

Key risks are:

- Individual authorities dropping out or unable to support elements of the work.
- Projects contravening or conflicting with National Planning Guidance or current and emerging Local Plans.
- Disagreements between individual planning authorities on contentious planning issues.

This work is not mandatory and will only be successful if it receives continued support from Heads of Planning and participating Local Planning Authorities. All risks will therefore be managed in liaison with the Heads of Planning Group on a regular basis.

#### **4.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion**

Planning authorities are required to meet the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty. The work programme set out above is designed to enhance and support this work at the local level by adding value and creating some economies of scale.

#### **5. Communications**

- 5.1** Initial stakeholder workshop proposed to take place in the New Year. Following this all outputs communicated directly to developers and others through each local planning team.

#### **6. Appendices/Annexes**

Annex A – Summary of Initial Outcomes of the Planning Review

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Other sources and references: