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## **SPF Response to Planning System: Mandatory Training for Elected Members Consultation**

**Question 1:** Should the determination of planning applications be the only specified function that elected members are prohibited from doing until training requirements have been completed?

[yes/no]

Please add any comment in support of your answer

We agree that for determining planning applications, training should be mandatory for elected members in order to make reasonable judgments on planning applications. The complex nature of the new NPF4 and how LDPs sit with them requires a thorough understanding, hence the training will enable elected members to understand the planning process more comprehensively, helping them to make informed decisions.

**Question 2:** Should the training requirements vary for elected members depending on whether they participate in a planning committee, Full Council or Local Review Body?

[yes/no]

Please add any comment in support of your answer

To ensure consistency, enhance planning knowledge and best practise across the board, all elected members should undergo the same initial training. This includes for members who may not be members of that planning committee but are substituting for a member that is. Members should be prohibited from discussing or voting on applications until they have received such training. Those with greater authority to impact planning decisions should be required to complete more specialised and in-depth training to demonstrate their competence in a more senior role.

**Question 3:** Should the mandatory training be focused on the key principles and knowledge of the planning system?

[yes/no]

Please add any comment in support of your answer

We agree that the content should focus on the principles and knowledge of the planning system including key planning law, local and national planning policy and guidance with flexibility for local authorities to also include additional training which relates to the local context. For example, members at Glasgow City Council may look at matters such as BTR, co-living, BTR and tall buildings. This wouldn't be relevant, for example, with a rural local planning authority. Elected members should undergo training for decision making for applications and be aware of planning code of conduct for their local authority. The use of local and international case studies can be useful for elected members to relate their knowledge and understanding of the planning system to real life scenarios.

**Question 4:** Do you agree with the list of topics to cover?

[yes/no]

Please add any comment in support of your answer

We agree that the list of topics is comprehensive and covers a range of planning related topics. The list could be enhanced through greater awareness of the economic benefits of development and best practise for achieving sustainable economic growth.

**Question 5:** Are there any other topics that you think should be covered in the mandatory training?

Yes, it is important that elected members understand the social and financial implications associated with local government planning decision making. As mentioned above, elected members should also undergo training to provide them with a fundamental understanding of the economic principles related to planning, specifically the importance of the private sector in creating economic growth, affordable housing and jobs which contributes significantly to the country's overall GDP. These economic factors also stem beyond the initial construction phase, where development can spark a multiplier effect that can produce other indirect economic opportunities and benefits to the local community.

On a more local context, understanding local development plans, place plans and principles and how they will interact with the new national planning framework will help create a better understanding of the planning process, enabling elected members to make informed decisions.

**Question 6:** Which would be your preferred option for how the training should be delivered? (please check all that apply)

- Option 1
- Option 2
- Option 3
- Option 4
- None of the above

Ideally a hybrid model incorporating both in-person and e-learning online sessions would ensure flexibility while facilitating interactive discussions. It is important to consider the onboarding and training of elected members may not coincide at the same time and therefore, there must be the ability to provide training opportunities at multiple times throughout the year. An e-learning online training course for elected members to complete in their own time could be a solution to this.

It is integral that if local authorities are to deliver effective training courses, they must be adequately resourced.

**Question 7:** Do you have any further comments on how the training should be delivered?

The training should include a test which must be passed before carrying out planning decisions. Implementing a test would determine whether elected members had grasped a satisfactory understanding of the course.

E-learning will also be a practical tool to enable elected members to refresh their memory on various planning topics outside of the mandatory training sessions that they would be required to complete within a set time frame.

In a similar way to accruing CPD qualifying hours, there could also perhaps be a range of options for elected members to stay abreast of planning issues through having an annual CPD hourly target which could be met by a range of methods including: attendance at conferences, seminars, workshops, briefing or training sessions on new planning issues or attending planning inquiries and hearings as an observer and reading Scottish Government Reporter's reports for example.

**Question 8:** Should there be a requirement for elected members to have passed a test before being allowed to undertake a planning decision?

Yes

Please add any comment in support of your answer

To ensure best practise and improve the quality and consistency of planning decisions, elected members should undergo mandatory training and must pass before making any decisions. The ability to understand complex planning issues such as land use, zoning, infrastructure as well as the legal and regulatory environment is essential for all decision makers. Training can help to prepare elected members to think strategically and make informed decisions particularly in complex development proposals. It ensures they have the skills required to engage and balance the interests of stakeholders in order to make decisions that benefit the community and contribute to sustainable economic growth. Failure to pass the training means elected members have not demonstrated an adequate level of planning knowledge which could affect their ability to make informed planning decisions.

**Question 9:** How often should elected members be required to retake the training?

Please tick

- once every year
- once every election cycle
- training should not need to be retaken
- Other

Please add any comment in support of your answer

We agree that training should not place an unnecessary burden on elected members and consider that the mandatory planning training should be completed at the start of every election cycle. Thereafter, in a similar fashion to CPD, we consider that it is important that there are short modules on annual training (through e-learning) which should be completed with a multiple-choice test at the end of the training module. We recognise training could be cumbersome but it is important elected members have the opportunity to refresh their planning knowledge and that the training is not seen as a dis-incentive to individuals to run for an elected member position in the future.

**Question 10:** Should elected member's completion of the training be made available to the public?

[yes/no]

Please add any comment in support of your answer

Yes, the public should be aware of what training the elected members have undertaken as it promotes transparency and can help to build confidence in the community by demonstrating they have the knowledge required to make informed decisions.

**Question 11:** If the completion of training is made public, do you think the information being provided within PPF / statutory annual reports and on the Local Authorities website are sufficient?

[yes/no]

Yes – there is no need to go into too much detail but the various training modules undertaken by the elected members could be shown on the local authority website along with the date of the training.

If no, where should the information also be made available?

**Question 12:** Do you have any comments / suggestions on the best ways to monitor the long-term effects of the mandatory training of elected members?

It is difficult to measure the quantitative success of training, but we agree that the best way to monitor the effectiveness is to engage in stakeholder feedback. If possible, both quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment should be used.

**Question 13:** Do you have any comments on the impact assessments undertaken as part of the consultation on mandatory training on planning for elected members?