



Public Sector Planning Resources in Wales: Summary report

February 2026



RTPI Cymru

Royal Town Planning Institute
Sefydliad Cynllunio Trefol Brenhinol



Llywodraeth Cymru
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Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

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RTPI Cymru represents the RTPI in Wales, with approximately 1,300 members.

About this paper

This research was commissioned by the Welsh Government and undertaken by RTPI Cymru. It scopes the current resources and capacity within public sector planning services in Wales, providing an-up-to-date evidence base to inform and shape future interventions and solutions.

The research covers the 25 Local Planning Authorities, Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW), the Welsh Government's Planning Division and the planning-related functions of Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

This paper is a summary of the 'Public Sector Planning Resources in Wales' report.

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Further information

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Definitions

Several terms used throughout this project were identified as potentially having different interpretations among various stakeholders. These terms are defined below:

The Planning Service

For the purposes of this research:

- The term 'planners' or 'planning officers' relates to those directly working in planning policy (for example writing Local Development Plans), development management (for example dealing with a caseload of applications for planning permission) or planning enforcement (for example investigating allegations of breaches of planning control);
- The term 'specialists' relates to those who provide advice to planners or whose duties relate to a specialist area for example, built heritage, trees, ecology, minerals and waste, archaeology, landscape, GIS;
- The term 'business support' relates to administrative or IT support roles;
- 'Technicians' have been counted as assistant/trainee planners unless they were specifically listed as business support by respondents.

Resources

'Resources' is used in its widest sense, including financial and people, budgets, workforce, capacity and skills, training and the pipeline of future planners.

Capacity

'Capacity' refers to what can be achieved by the planning workforce in terms of time and skills.

Public sector average salary bands

Public sector average salary bands were created from data collected from survey responses on jobs advertised between September 2022 and March 2025. Jobs of similar seniority and responsibility were grouped. This provided a lower and upper limit of the salary range, which was used to create an average salary band.

Contents

About this paper	1
Report authors.....	2
Acknowledgements	2
Further information	2
Definitions	3
1. Introduction	6
Background and context.....	6
Purpose and aims.....	6
Scope and methodology	6
2. Existing research and evidence.....	7
3. Budgets	9
Local Planning Authority budgets.....	9
PEDW budget.....	18
NRW budget.....	18
4. Current workforce	19
Local Planning Authority workforce.....	19
Welsh Government Planning Division workforce.....	23
PEDW workforce	26
NRW workforce	27
5. Recruitment.....	30
Recruitment and retention within LPAs	30
Job advertisement methods.....	31
PEDW recruitment and retention	32
6. Salaries	32
UK planning salaries.....	32
Planning salaries in Wales.....	33
Comparing public and private sector salaries	34
7. Future workforce and succession planning.....	36
Public sector age profile	36
NRW age profile	38
8. Skills and capacity	39
LPA skills and capacity	39
Identifying and addressing skills and capacity gaps.....	40
Existing use of shared services	60
Existing use of consultancy services.....	61

LPA: Training budgets	62
Resourcing the Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs).....	63
Welsh Government Planning Division skills and capacity	64
PEDW skills and capacity	64
NRW skills and capacity	66
9. Growing the profession	67
Planning schools	69
Apprenticeships and bursaries in Wales	70
10. An effective planning service: our conclusions	71
11. Recommendations	75
Recommendation 1: Establish a sounding board	75
Recommendation 2: Establish a Planning Improvement Service for Wales	76
Recommendation 3: Define the planning service	76
Recommendation 4: Collect and publish quality planning data	77
Recommendation 5: Develop a recruitment and retention strategy	77
Recommendation 6: Shared services	78
Recommendation 7: Digital Planning	79

1. Introduction

Background and context

- 1.1. One of the biggest challenges affecting the delivery of planning services in Wales is resources: financial and people. There has been extensive discussion over the past decade in relation to planning resource in Wales. However, until now we have lacked the hard evidence and a complete overview to support the identification of the solutions needed to address this problem.
- 1.2. The Welsh Government Planning Division (WG Planning Division) commissioned RTPI Cymru to gather evidence on current resources, capacity and future needs within public sector planning services in Wales. Our research covers Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW), the planning function of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Welsh Government's Planning Division.
- 1.3. This is a summary report of the full 'Public Sector Planning Resources in Wales' report.

Purpose and aims

- 1.4. A properly resourced planning system is the Government's key mechanism for creating healthy, inclusive, economically and environmentally sustainable places. This research identifies current funding and resource gaps and challenges, considers future workforce planning requirements and skills, and where possible, suggests potential solutions that could ease resourcing and capacity pressures to support the delivery of an effective and responsive planning service in Wales.

Scope and methodology

- 1.5. The research and analysis were carried out between February 2025 and November 2025. The following timeframes were used to focus data collection:
 - Planning budgets and workforce change over the five-year period spanning the financial years starting in April 2018 to April 2023 (using the 2019 Audit Wales

report on the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#) as a benchmark);

- Planning recruitment between September 2022 and March 2025 (due to the availability of job advertisement data from The Planner Jobs);
- Predicted future planning needs and challenges over the next five years.

1.6. This research does not explore planning performance or targets: these will be covered by the resumed Annual Performance Reports. The evidence was collated using desk-based review of key reports and data, surveys and interviews.

1.7. Our report concludes with seven recommendations.

2. Existing research and evidence

2.1. We carried out a desktop review of key relevant research which highlighted the following primary issues:

2.2. The RTPI's 2014 and 2016 [The Value of Planning](#) reports, the 2018 [Value of Planning Wales Toolkit](#), and [The Planning Premium: The Value of Well-made Places \(2024\)](#) find that planning can and does play a positive and proactive role in sustainable economic growth and development. The 2024 research examines the Return on Investment case for public sector investment in planning.

2.3. The [All-Wales Annual Performance Report](#) for the financial year starting April 2018 highlighted the resilience demonstrated by LPAs and statutory consultees, noting their "perseverance amidst austerity" (page 65). Regional shared services were recognised as a potential way to optimise available expertise and improve efficiency. Succession planning and recruitment were identified as key concerns.

2.4. The 2019 Audit Wales report on the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#) sets out the stark reality of LPA budget cuts over the ten-year period between 2009 and 2019, with budgets having fallen by £22m (50%) in real terms. The 2020

Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament Public Accounts Committee report on the [Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#) concluded that “Planning is critical but at present it is not able to deliver the aspirations of the Planning, Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts because of reductions in resources.” (paragraph 12)

- 2.5. The [RTPI Cymru Big Conversation](#) (2023) survey found:
- 61% of the 209 respondents reported feeling overstretched at least several times a week. This increased to 74% if looking only at LPA officers;
 - 21% of respondents felt overstretched all of the time;
 - despite operating within challenging circumstances, “services continue to be delivered and planners take pride in their role, and they value what they are delivering.” (page 4)
- 2.6. [Building Capacity through Collaboration and Change](#) (2023) found that, with fewer resources, growing expectations, and reduced capacity, LPAs alone cannot respond to the demand placed on them. A key issue raised in the research was the absence of a strategic body focused on promoting improvement in planning services in Wales.
- 2.7. The [RTPI State of the Profession 2023](#) and [RTPI State of the Profession 2025](#) member surveys explore planners’ experiences within Wales, giving insight into career experiences, career plans, wellbeing and demographics. The 2025 report findings show that the Welsh planning profession faces significant challenges including shortages in staff and skills, retention and recruitment issues, increased duties e.g. marine planning and wellbeing concerns.

“If challenges around funding, recruitment and skills can be addressed, the sector is well placed to drive forward the transition to net-zero, delivering affordable homes, and embedding wellbeing at the heart of decision making. Realising this potential will depend on empowering planners to do what they are trained to do, and what they do best: creating thriving, sustainable, and well-designed places for future generations.” (page 20)

- 2.8. RTPI Cymru commissioned Cardiff University to research the current capacity of LPAs to engage in digital planning in Wales. [Scoping the potential for digital planning to ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes](#) (2025) finds that digital planning can ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes. Unlocking digital potential will require a coordinated Wales-wide action plan and strong leadership at a Welsh Government and local authority level. It recommends establishing a digital planning governance framework, a Wales-wide spatial data platform, targeted training incentives, standardisation and a coherent policy framework.

“By implementing these measures, it is possible to enable the conditions for digital planning to ease resource pressures and improve planning outcomes through consistent systems, empowered professionals, and a planning process that is more transparent, efficient, collaborative, and accessible.”
(page 8)

- 2.9. In November 2024, the Welsh Government consulted on proposals for [Promoting a Resilient and High Performing Planning Service](#), increasing LPA resources via higher planning application fees.

3. Budgets

Local Planning Authority budgets

LPA Planning income and expenditure 2009 to 2024

- 3.1. Since 2009, public investment in planning services in Wales has declined substantially. As reported by [Audit Wales in 2019](#), we have “seen significant cuts in expenditure with budgets having fallen by 50% in real terms, considering inflation.” These funding cuts occurred at a time of mounting pressure on the system, driven by

legislation and increasing stakeholder expectation, meaning LPAs were struggling to deliver their statutory responsibilities.

3.2. Little has changed. The data shows that real term (inflation adjusted) net expenditure on planning services reached its lowest in the financial year starting April 2021, at 55% less than the financial year starting 2008, but has increased slightly since. Net expenditure in the financial year starting April 2023 (£27.6m) was 43% lower than in the April 2008 financial year (£48.5m).

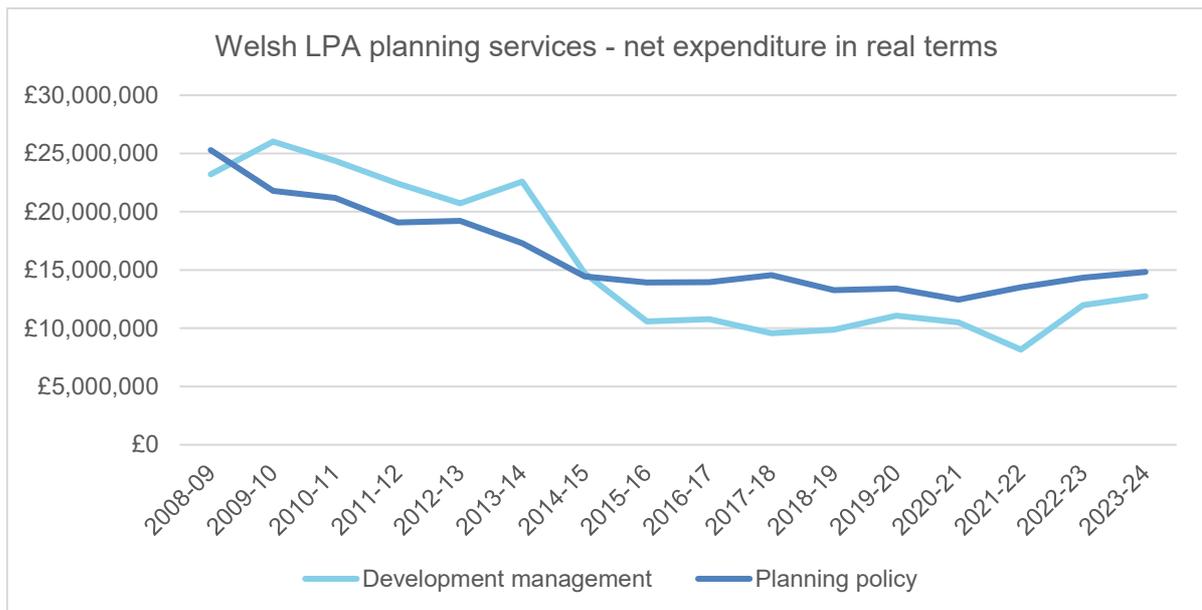


Figure 1: All Wales LPA net expenditure (financial year starting April 2008 compared to financial year starting April 2023). Data accessed via StatsWales, [Revenue Outturn Data](#) (May 2025). Analysis by RTPi.

3.3. The data in Figure 1 shows that:

- In April 2008, real term net expenditure for planning policy (dark blue) and development management (light blue) were both around £25m with planning policy being slightly higher. By April 2023, these figures had reduced to just under £15m and £13m respectively;
- From the April 2008 to the April 2014 financial years, development management real term net expenditure saw a substantial decline. This reflects the period between the economic downturn caused by the 2008 banking crisis (and resultant drop in planning application fee income) and significant austerity measures biting in 2013 to reduce service delivery costs;

- Planning policy real term net expenditure steadily declined from April 2008 to £12.4m in April 2021. The adoption of many first tranche LDPs and austerity biting resulted in policy teams being shrunk. This trend improved slightly in 2020 when many LPAs meaningfully commenced tranche two LDPs.

Comparing LPA planning service budgets for the financial years starting April 2023 with April 2008

Expenditure / Income	Year starting April 2008	Year starting April 2023	Change
Gross expenditure	£70,854,000	£45,031,000	-£25,833,000 (-37%)
Total income	£22,336,000	£17,423,000	-£4,913,000 (-22%)
Net expenditure	£48,518,000	£27,608,000	-£20,910,000 (-43%)
Income as a proportion of planning service gross expenditure	32%	39%	

Figure 2: Table showing real term planning income and expenditure (years starting April 2008 – April 2023). Data accessed via StatsWales, [Revenue Outturn Data](#) (May 2025). Analysis by RTPi.

- 3.4. The headline findings from Figure 2 are that between the financial year starting April 2008 and the financial year starting April 2023:
- Gross expenditure for planning services in Wales decreased by 37%. The primary expenditure is staffing costs;
 - Total income for planning services in Wales decreased by 22%. The primary source of income is planning application fees;
 - Net expenditure for planning services in Wales decreased by 43%. By comparison, real term net expenditure on planning services in England

decreased by 20% over the same period ([State of the Profession – England 2025 report](#)).

- 3.5. Planning service income comes primarily from statutory planning application fees set by the Welsh Government, with additional fee income in recent years from statutory and discretionary pre-application advice services. The data shows that income slowly increased between the April 2013 and April 2016 financial years but has since seen a trend of slow decrease.
- 3.6. Income can be affected by a range of factors including economic cycles, the introduction of new regulations (e.g. a flurry of applications submitted in advance of Building Regulations requirements for sprinklers coming into force), LDP cycles and the availability of allocated sites, legislative change (e.g. the introduction of Developments of National Significance in March 2016 meant medium size renewable energy projects moved from LPAs to the Welsh Government), and environmental constraints such as phosphate and nitrate water quality issues putting a halt on development in affected areas.
- 3.7. LPA expenditure is mostly on staffing, but occasional appeal costs and IT investment can also have a significant impact. Commencing an LDP triggers expenditure on the evidence base and team capacity. The period immediately before and after LDP adoption can trigger the submission of a greater number of major applications in response to new site allocations, which then tails off as an LDP ages and strategic sites are consented.
- 3.8. Wales's total planning income as a proportion of its planning expenditure was higher in 2024 than in 2009, peaking at 51% in 2022. This is primarily due to reduced service delivery costs. However, figures fluctuate between individual LPAs.
- 3.9. The data in Figure 3 below shows that income as proportion of expenditure rose from roughly 30% from 2009 to 2013 up to 45-50% from 2016 to 2022 and has fallen to 40% in 2024.
- 3.10. A number of responses to the survey suggest that the change since 2022 has been

due to a recognition that austerity cuts had gone too far, affecting performance, morale and staff retention. Addressing this requires reinvestment when commencing work on new LDPs, with recruitment activity starting to restore team capacity but adversely affecting net costs.

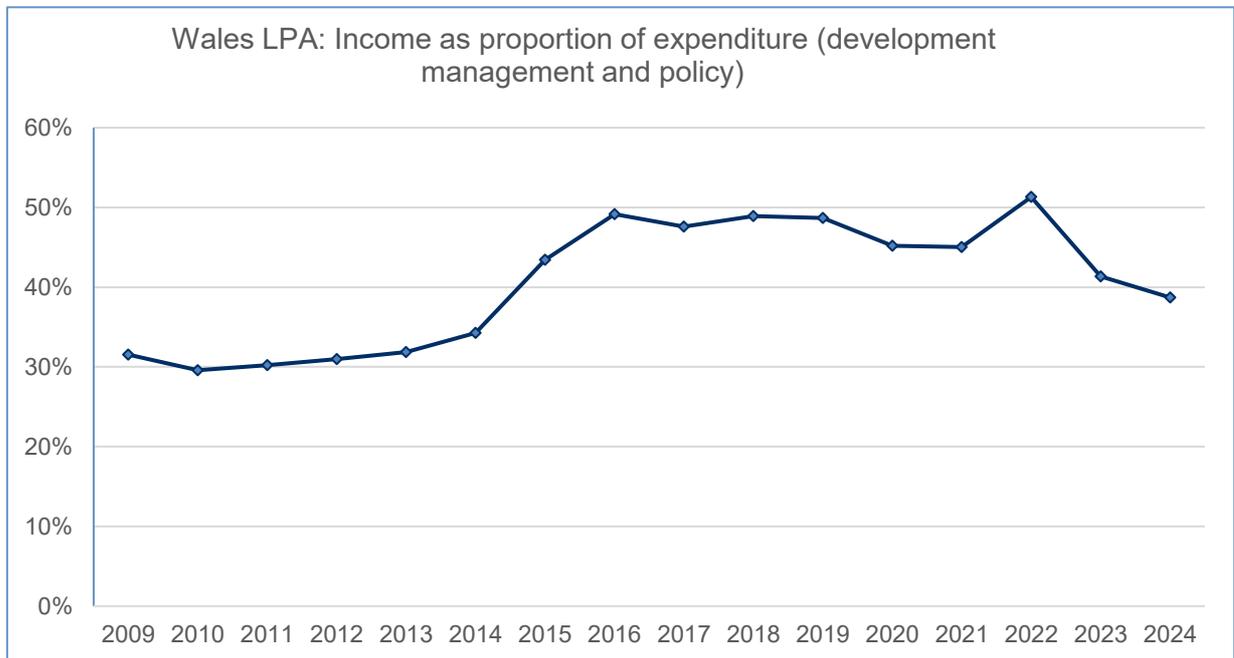


Figure 3: All Wales LPA income as a proportion of expenditure (development management and planning policy) (April 2008 to April 2023 financial years). Data accessed via StatsWales, Revenue Outturn Data (May 2025). Analysis by RTPI.

LPA commentary on budget changes between the financial years starting April 2018 and April 2023

- 3.11. Respondents were asked to explain any budget changes within their LPA between the financial years starting in April 2018 and in April 2023. Half of the 24 respondents identified recruitment-related measures, such as job cuts, delaying recruitment, and vacancy freezes across the planning service as a means of contributing to budget saving. In some cases, recruitment freeze measures or restructures have merely shifted the challenge elsewhere, for example increasing workloads and pressure.

LPA: Innovative practices generating income or reducing service delivery costs

- 3.12. In response to budget cuts, LPAs introduced innovative practices to seek to generate income and reduce costs. Income-raising practices included use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs), increasing the offer of non-statutory planning fees/services such as fast-track and compliance certificates, and the introduction of regionally agreed fees for the use of the 'Development Viability Toolkit'.
- 3.13. Cost-cutting practices included holding posts vacant, working jointly with neighbouring authorities to create SPG or LDP evidence base, reviewing land assets for development or sale, more efficient site visits to reduce mileage claims or use of pool cars, and reviewing processes. However, these initiatives were not without their problems. Income generating practices may not represent reliable, long-term, sources of income and require capacity to deliver.
- 3.14. Views regarding the effectiveness of PPAs as a consistent and reliable income stream were mixed. The concept of a PPA is that an applicant pays for a guaranteed enhanced service timeline. However, the PPA income doesn't always meet service delivery costs. Moreover, without a steady flow of PPAs, LPAs do not have financial certainty to budget for employing additional permanent officers.

LPA: Income received from planning applications

- 3.15. LPAs were asked whether or not, since April 2018, income received from planning applications (including PPAs) had exceeded the costs of delivering the development management service. Of the 24 responses, 75% answered 'no', with 12% noting income had surpassed cost in some (but not all) years, and 13% indicating this had occurred in only one year.
- 3.16. Among those who responded 'yes', 83% (five LPAs) stated that, rather than being reinvested in service improvements, the surplus funds were redirected to the central budget of the local authority to offset wider budget pressures.

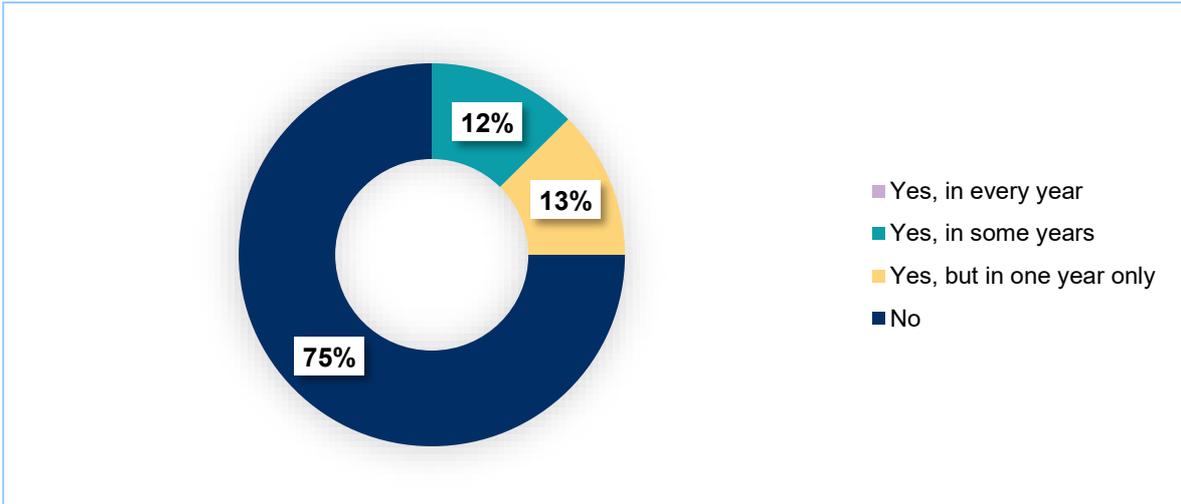


Figure 4: Income received from planning applications exceeding the costs of delivering the development management service. Data accessed via RTPI research survey (May 2025).

Misalignment of income, workload and resources

- 3.17. Planning fees cover only a fraction of actual service costs. Looking at planning income as a proportion of whole planning service expenditure, our research has shown that the Wales-wide average level of cost recovery stood at 32% in 2009, increasing to 39% in 2024.

- 3.18. Looking at cost recovery data for just the development management service, our research has shown that the Wales-wide average stood at 46% in 2009, increasing to 56% in 2024. In 2024, the lowest level of cost-recovery was 31% (Monmouthshire), while the highest was Wrexham (126%). This latter figure is considered an outlier due to multiple vacant posts artificially reducing service delivery costs. The second highest level of cost-recovery in 2024 was Cardiff (118%), meaning that income exceeded the costs of delivering the development management service. Of note, only Wrexham and Cardiff achieved full cost recovery.

- 3.19. The decision to increase fees from December 2025 will go some way to help address this issue. However, fee income alone cannot sustainably fund the full scope of the planning service. Although the applicant or landowner are widely recognised as the primary beneficiary of development management decisions, the LDP, as well as

enforcement action, benefit the wider public and minimise harm. Equally, the input of specialist advice, including ecology, landscape, noise required by many applications, was recognised as not currently being directly offset by planning fees.

“It is important to ensure that the planning service as a key statutory function retains an element of core funding regardless of income generating potential. Without a functioning planning service, the ability to deliver sustainable growth and S106 financial contributions for the wider community benefit will be severely hampered. The goal of [full cost recovery] should not therefore negate the need for a local authority to also adequately fund the service.”
(LPA respondent)

- 3.20. To ensure future service resilience and sustainability, further work is needed to agree a definition of the extent of the planning service to which full cost recovery applies (recommendation 3).

Pre-application services

- 3.21. Most LPAs offer an enhanced discretionary pre-application advice service with a locally set fee: this enhanced service adds planning officer and consultee advice to help inform the customer on the likelihood of getting planning permission for their proposal. Fees for discretionary advice need to reflect the full extent of work involved and require regular review. Ideally, all key consultees would be included (and reimbursed).

NSIP and DNS processes

- 3.22. Some respondents expressed concerns about the level of work required to provide Local Impact Reports (LIRs) for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) or Developments of National Significance (DNS), for which a nominal fee is received.

“Producing LIRs and managing demand from locals/members for these projects is huge. A solution across Wales via a Shared Service managing the

planning input and a consultancy dealing with the specialist input has to be found.” (LPA respondent)

Inadequate funding for enforcement

- 3.23. Planning enforcement is the vital backbone of an effective planning system but is often referred to as the Cinderella of the planning service, being under-resourced and therefore slow and perceived as ineffective. Most participants stated that they supported the proposal in the recent WG consultation to introduce a higher fee for retrospective applications as well as a fee for lodging an appeal, to reflect the additional costs incurred by the public purse. Neither of these changes is being taken forward at present as they require further thought.

LPA: Reinvestment of fees into the planning system

- 3.24. Planning application fee increases were introduced by the [Welsh Government on 01 December 2025](#) and mark a significant and welcome transition towards better resourced local planning authorities. It is now incumbent on Councils to ensure that additional funding is reinvested into improved planning services.
- 3.25. A requirement to reinvest additional application fee income into improvements in the planning service was supported by 22 respondents (92%), while surprisingly, two (8%) responded ‘no’. However, only eight respondents (33%) thought there would be corporate support within their organisation for such reinvestment, 14 respondents (58%) were unsure, and two (8% - the same respondents who answered ‘no’ to the question above) answered ‘no’.
- 3.26. Respondents identified their top priorities for investment of additional fee income as employing additional planners to boost capacity; creating apprentice posts; upskilling existing staff; resourcing specialist services (e.g. ecology/heritage/nutrient neutrality); exploring potential for collaborative working; reviewing pay grading of some posts to support recruitment and retention and reflect workload pressures; reinstating and increasing training budgets; and digital investment.

Welsh Government Planning Division budget

- 3.27. In April 2018, the WG Planning Division budget was £5.2m, which included payments to the Planning Inspectorate (PINs) for services in Wales. In April 2023, the budget was £2.1m, with a further £3m transferred to PEDW to meet their operating costs. Additional income is generated through fees for DNS applications.
- 3.28. If additional income were available to be invested in improving planning service delivery within the Planning Division, the top priority identified would be the recruitment of the next generation of planners at graduate level.

PEDW budget

- 3.29. PEDW's baseline budget of £2.98m remained the same from 2021, when PEDW was established, until April 2023. The April 2025 financial year baseline budget has increased by £2.03m to £5.03m to deal with infrastructure applications in a timely manner via additional staff and digital investment. In addition to fees paid by LPAs for LDP examinations, PEDW receives income for DNS applications and for other specialist casework e.g. environmental appeals, wayleaves. Figures were not available at time of writing, but income is estimated at £1.0m to £1.5m annually.
- 3.30. If additional income were available to be invested in improving planning service delivery within PEDW, it would be spent on additional staff to carry out increasingly complex casework and additional work such as SDP examinations, and investing in digital systems across casework management platforms to improve customer service.

NRW budget

- 3.31. NRW went through a significant reorganisation in 2019 resulting in the formation of the National Development Planning and Marine Advice Service.
- 3.32. NRW's net budget for the financial year starting April 2020 was £3.8m, with £3.3m for staff costs and £0.5m for non-staff costs. The total figure for the financial year

starting April 2023 was £4.1m with £3.7m staff costs and £0.4m non-staff costs.

NRW's Planning Advice Service is principally funded by WG grant. From 2025, NRW was able to recover costs associated with its input into Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) and Wales Infrastructure Act Consents.

- 3.33. Since April 2018, NRW's Planning Team has implemented changes to increase efficiency against a backdrop of increased service demand and case complexity. These include LPA checklists to focus consultations; development of a fee-earning discretionary advice service to complement statutory preapplication services; and increased provision of standing advice.
- 3.34. If additional income were available to be invested in service delivery, NRW's priorities would include maintaining service standards amidst a rise in large infrastructure projects; implementing the new Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024; improving ICT systems such as the website, customer relationship management databases, and customer-facing digital platforms; setting up a placement scheme to aid workforce planning; and providing more targeted advice and guidance to help improve the quality of applications.

4. Current workforce

Local Planning Authority workforce

- 4.1. The following table sets out the workforce data collected from 22 responding LPAs comparing the 2018 and 2023 financial years. This baseline data needs to be considered in the wider context of budgets cuts, vacant posts, career development needs for those at early stages of their career, and the additional duties placed on the planning system.

	Financial year starting in April 2018		Financial year starting in April 2023	
	LPA officer post numbers recorded	Full time equivalent recorded	LPA officer post numbers recorded	Full time equivalent recorded
Planning officers (including development management, enforcement and policy functions)	425	398.0 FTE	471	447.4 FTE
Business support officers	114	105.2 FTE	102	92.8 FTE
Total	539	503.2 FTE	573	540.2 FTE

Figure 5: The number of planners (policy, development management and enforcement) and business support officers recorded by the 22 responding LPAs.

LPA: Officers employed within the planning service

- 4.2. Between the financial years starting in April 2018 and in April 2023, the number of planners (policy, development management and enforcement) recorded by the 22 responding LPAs has increased by 46 posts (11%) across Wales.
- 4.3. However, at the time of responding to our survey (May 2025), 37 planner posts were actually vacant due to staff turnover, vacancies and recruitment freezes. This meant 73% of the 22 responding LPAs were operating with one or more vacancies within their planning service. Eleven LPAs reported multiple vacancies, with some reporting as many as five vacancies at that time.
- 4.4. Business support staff numbers declined across responding LPAs by 12 posts (12%) over the same period. As a result, planners are spending more of their time on

administrative tasks, which reduces the time they can devote to their core planning responsibilities.

- 4.5. It is clear from the increased complexity of the planning system and increased service user demands that greater investment in the workforce is required. 100% of interviewees felt that their LPA did not currently have the capacity to deal with planning ambitions or strategic goals

“It would be good to have a robust structure that allowed time for experienced planners to train younger planners. That has been lost as everyone has been firefighting for years and the tap of enquiries and applications keeps flowing.”
(LPA respondent)

- 4.6. With resources and capacity at breaking point, we recommend that an independent Planning Improvement Service be established, headed up by a newly created independent Planning Improvement Champion. Similar to the independent local government improvement service in Scotland, this would develop and promote best practice and efficiencies, support peer review and performance monitoring (recommendation 2).

Local Authority officers supporting the planning function

- 4.7. Although discussions about resources often focus on the number of planning officers, equally important are the various supporting officers providing essential advice as internal consultees on matters such as ecology, flooding, highways or landscape.
- 4.8. Between the financial year starting April 2018 and the financial year starting April 2023, the number of specialist advisors employed by local authorities whose primary role relates directly to the land-use planning system increased by approximately 5.1 FTE for the 22 LPAs that responded (from approximately 114.3 FTE posts to 119.4 FTE posts for the whole of Wales). This April 2023 financial year figure equates to an average total workforce of just 5.4 FTE specialist posts per LPA covering a broad range of specialisms. It should be noted that these figures are an approximation based on estimates of the proportion of these roles dedicated to planning.

4.9. During this same period workload has increased significantly due to new issues, policies or legislation such as nutrient neutrality, SuDS and Llwybr Newydd. Respondents also reported that specialists had become increasingly pre-occupied with delivering grant-funded work to help fund their posts.

LPA: Balance of experience within the planning service

4.10. Two-thirds of respondents felt there was a good balance of experience in their current team. The remaining one-third expressed concerns ranging from a lack of experienced capacity to handle more complex projects to worries about succession-planning as older staff approach retirement.

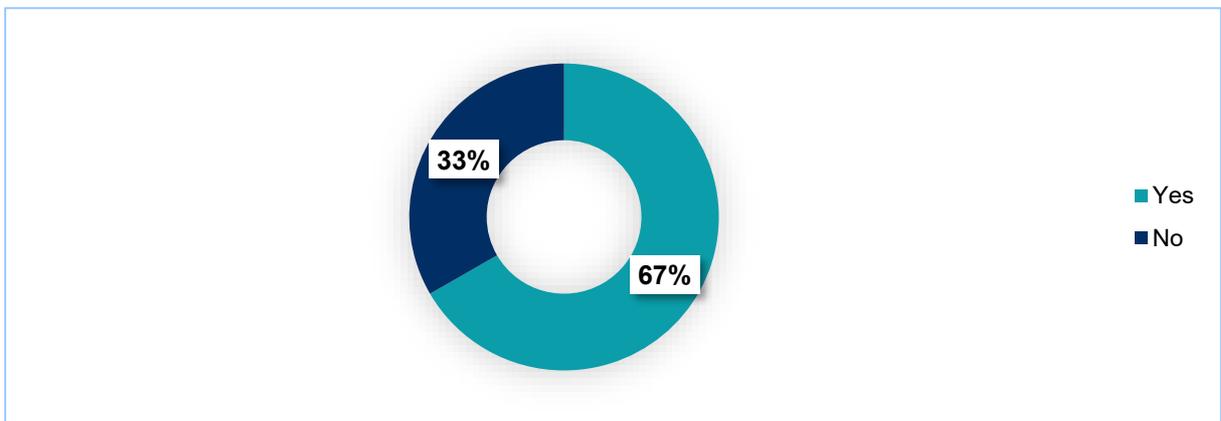


Figure 6: Balance of experience within responding LPAs. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

4.11. A frequently cited issue throughout this research has been difficulty recruiting experienced professionals, exacerbated by perceptions of better pay and conditions in the private sector and the lack of career grades within LPAs. Conversely, the time needed to support and mentor new career professionals was highlighted by some as a barrier to growing the pipeline of future planners.

4.12. Several LPAs noted that a hybrid or roving officer model, moving between DM, policy and enforcement within their LPA, could allow workloads to be managed more flexibly.

LPA: Vacancies

- 4.13. Despite team structures showing 46 additional posts since 2018, as at May 2025, 37 planning officer posts were reported as being vacant by the 22 LPAs that responded, plus six specialist posts and five business support posts. In other words, most of the efforts to start to reinstate planning team capacity after over a decade of cuts was purely theoretical, with very little improvement on the ground.
- 4.14. Overall, 73% of LPAs were operating with vacant posts, with half of the 22 LPAs that responded reporting multiple vacancies (some reported as many as five vacancies).
- 4.15. Between September 2022 and March 2025, 165 planning posts (development management, enforcement and policy), 26 specialist posts and 14 business support advertised.
- 4.16. In interviews, rural and Welsh-speaking planning authorities suggested that they find it harder to recruit staff. However, our analysis of the data did not identify any pattern linking the distribution of vacancies to the rurality or location of the planning authority.
- 4.17. Several LPAs reported that vacant posts were often left unfilled as a strategy to achieve budget savings. This approach places a significant strain on existing staff and the wider planning service capacity. Limited core staffing leaves authorities vulnerable to shocks, such as long-term sickness, retirement or resignations. It is common practice for baseline budgets to include a vacancy allowance, meaning that meaning that anyone lucky enough to retain a full complement of staff throughout the year will have overspent on staffing.

Welsh Government Planning Division workforce

Number of planners employed in Welsh Government Planning Division

- 4.18. At the time of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Welsh Government's Planning Division was a team of 60 officers. By 2018 it had shrunk to 41 officers, and over the five year period to the April 2023 financial year it saw a further significant (20%)

reduction in staff numbers down to 33 members of staff. Five vacancies were recorded at the time of responding to the research survey (May 2025).

- 4.19. During this period, career progression saw existing planners secure promotions elsewhere in WG, but a recruitment freeze resulted in an absence of early career planners. This has resulted in a top-heavy structure and creates significant challenges for future succession planning.
- 4.20. During this period of declining resources, the extent and complexity of work has increased due to greater devolution in addition to the wider complexities affecting all LPAs, such as flood risk, the climate and nature emergencies, and nutrient neutrality. Planning legislation including the Planning (Wales) Bill and the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024, is a significant draw on Planning Division resource. Delivering policy and legislative requirements set out in the programme for Government means that the Division must be agile in responding quickly to new or different work priorities.
- 4.21. Restricted external recruitment since April 2018 has been a particular challenge for the Division, making it difficult to replace professional staff who have retired or moved on to other non-planning roles in Welsh Government. Planners have a breadth of transferable skills making them strong applicants for internal transfer, whereas the specific planning expertise required to work in the Planning Division means this internal transfer is rarely reciprocated.
- 4.22. The challenging workloads and political exposure can make the Planning Division less appealing for professional planners to work in than some other Divisions. Competition from UK Government and PEDW has also become significant factor both of which provide higher salaries for similar roles.
- 4.23. Succession planning for senior/management roles has been identified by the Chief Planner as an important focus over the next five years, alongside harmonising salaries with UK Government / PEDW for comparable positions and exploring career graded posts to retain planners within the Division.

4.24. WG Planning Division currently employs a year out student and hopes to increase the number of trainee posts in the future. This currently works on a rotation basis with PEDW which may extend to NRW in the future.

Job titles	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2018	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
Chief Planner / Head of Division	1	1
Head of Branch	5	6
Senior Planning Manager	11	7
Higher Planning Manager	17	16
Planning Manager	5	2
Team support	1	1
PA to Chief Planner	1	-
Total number of WG Planning Division staff	41	33

Figure 7: Table breakdown of planning officers employed by Welsh Government Planning Division 2018 and 2023

4.25. Recognising the demand for planning professionals and the competitive nature of recruitment across wider sectors, WG Planning Division suggested there is a need to collectively define and promote the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales.

PEDW workforce

- 4.26. The table below presents staffing figures for PEDW for 2021 (when it was established) in comparison to the April 2023 financial year. Data is not available prior to that date, so it is not possible to monitor change over the same period as the other bodies in this report.

	Officer numbers recorded in 2021	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
Chief Inspector/Head of Wales	1	1
Deputy Chief Inspector	-	1
Planning Inspector Managers	2	2
Assistant Planning Inspector Managers	2	2
Planning Inspectors	15	16
Planning Officers	4	2
Business Support Officers	24	22
Total number of staff at PEDW	48	46
Full time equivalent	44.6	45.9

Figure 8: Table showing staffing figures for PEDW 2021-2023

- 4.27. As of May 2025, PEDW has 30 Business Support Officer posts (including two vacancies) and 20 Planning inspectors which includes the Chief Planning Inspector, Deputy Chief Planning Inspector, Planning Inspector Managers and Assistant Planning Inspector Managers.

4.28. There is currently a good balance of experience within PEDW, however more experienced Inspectors are needed to support high-pressure workload areas, including DNS, LDP examinations and enforcement work, as well as preparation for the four new SDPs in future years, which will be followed by a flurry of new light-touch LDPs.

NRW workforce

4.29. Between the financial years starting in April 2020 and in April 2023, NRW's workforce has increased from 53.7FTE officers to 61.2 FTE officers (see Figure 9 below).

4.30. The NRW Development Planning Advice Service (DPAS) case management team benefits from a good overall balance of experience and the structure supports career pathways. However, recruiting experienced staff into higher-grade positions has proven challenging, largely because highly specific expertise is required. To mitigate staffing shortages, NRW has used agency staff in lower-graded roles as well as seeking to develop staff internally, targeted recruitment campaigns and efforts to attract candidates from outside the traditional planning discipline who possess transferable skills. This approach has yielded mixed results.

4.31. NRW's Planning Casework teams draw in a huge range of specialist skills and technical knowledge in subjects such as landscape, peat, geoscience, flood risk, ecology, water quality, waste, coastal processes and air quality.

4.32. Looking ahead over the next five years, there are both challenges and opportunities. Additional funding arising from the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 could enable the creation of higher-graded roles, offering opportunities to retain and promote existing staff and attract new talent. However, there's an ongoing risk of staff gaining valuable experience only to leave for roles in other organisations where public sector knowledge and transferable technical skills appear sought after.

Development planning and marine function (NB On average the marine officers spend one-third of their time on planning work)

Section/Team	Job title	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2020	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
Operations	Head of DPAS & Marine	1	1
	DPAS Manager	1	1
	Senior Specialist	1	1
	DPAS Team Leader	4	4
	Senior DPAS Advisor	11	11 (2 posts vacant)
	DPAS Advisor (2)	21	24 (4 posts vacant)
	DPAS Advisor (1)	5	8 (1 post vacant)
	DPAS Assistant	4	4 (1 post vacant)
	Marine Manager	1	0
	Marine Area Advice & Management Team Leader	1	1
	Senior Marine Advisor	9 (8.1 FTE)	10 (c. 9.2 FTE)

Section/Team	Job title	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2020	Officer numbers recorded in the financial year starting April 2023
	Marine Advisor (2)	2 (1.4 FTE)	2 (c.1.6 FTE)
	Assistant Marine Advisor	0	2 (1 post vacant)
Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate: Planning, Landscape, Climate Change and Decarbonisation, and Energy Team	Planning, Landscape, Climate Change and Decarbonisation, and Energy Team	1	1
	Lead Specialist Advisor: Planning	0	1
	Specialist Advisor: Planning	2	2
Evidence, Policy and Permitting Directorate: Marine and Coastal Policy and Planning	Lead Specialist Advisor: Marine Planning	2	2
NRW Planning function:	Total number of posts	66	75
	Full Time Equivalent	53.7	61.2

Figure 9: Table breakdown of NRW workforce April 2020 and April 2023

- 4.33. Recommendation 4 seeks a commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey), fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, performance and how increase fee income since December 2025 has been utilised to improve service delivery, using this report as a baseline. This monitoring will support evidence-based decision-making and long-term resilience, as an extension to the recently recommenced national planning performance framework.

5. Recruitment

Recruitment and retention within LPAs

- 5.1. Key recruitment challenges experienced between September 2022 and March 2025 included low applicant numbers; poor quality job applications; financial issues; competition from other LPAs, PEDW and the private sector and growing energy planning sector; and perceptions or awareness of conflict, criticism and challenges associated with working in the public sector. All 24 respondents had advertised vacancies between September 2022 and March 2025.
- 5.2. These issues are often magnified when trying to recruit people with specialist skills, for example Welsh-speaking planners, due to the limited recruitment pool.

“The combination of a very rural area where opportunities don’t open up very often, along with a Welsh language requirement...makes recruitment extremely difficult.” (LPA respondent)

- 5.3. Some LPAs reported a lack of confidence among bilingual staff to use Welsh in technical settings, highlighting the need for targeted training and support. At the time of writing this report, Cardiff University planning school had recently recruited a Welsh speaking academic and the Welsh Government, CDPS and RTPI Cymru are producing a revised glossary of Welsh language planning terms.

Job advertisement methods

- 5.4. LPAs were asked to outline the different job advertisement methods they use. The majority used local authority websites, networks such as POSW and LinkedIn. These methods were chosen due to affordability and coverage. Despite the recognised recruitment challenges, the first two of these three most frequently used methods target the small pool of existing public sector workers or people seeking public sector work and actively checking a specific LPA website.
- 5.5. LPAs were asked what actions they have taken since September 2022 to address hard-to-fill posts. Just over half (13 respondents) procured external consultants; half (12) have grown their own planners through graduate / apprenticeship schemes and/or used agency/contract staff; ten have upskilled existing staff and ten have offered more flexible working. Nine increased salaries offered, while eight recruited non-planners.
- 5.6. While external consultants and agency staff provide quick relief, particularly where immediate capacity was required, high costs make this solution unsustainable. In some instances, local government rules have had unintended consequences. Most authorities stopped offering career grade posts as part of the single status pay review process. This has hampered staff retention. Incentives like market pay supplements can only be offered when a post has been vacated and multiple attempts to recruit have been unsuccessful. Moreover, the market supplement is normally under annual review, so offers limited long-term certainty to applicants.
- 5.7. Overall, while most methods have delivered some level of success, none are without drawbacks. The most sustainable solutions, such as internal development, graduate recruitment and staff retention require investment, budget certainty and long-term strategic workforce planning.

Future recruitment issues

- 5.8. When asked to look ahead to the next five years, in addition to the recruitment and retention challenges detailed above, the 24 LPA respondents highlighted an ageing

workforce and a decreasing pool of experienced planners; insufficient numbers entering the profession, caused in part due to a lack of apprenticeship and bursary schemes in Wales and ongoing Council-wide budget pressures.

PEDW recruitment and retention

- 5.9. Due to the nature of PEDW's work, the Inspector roles require individuals with substantial experience. There is a lead-in time of approximately 18 to 24 months to train up newly appointed Inspectors before they can take on the most complex casework.
- 5.10. PEDW has used several methods to assist recruitment including offering more flexible working; developing and training-up existing staff; introducing a recruitment and retention allowance to compete with the Planning Inspectorate (England); outsourcing, working collaboratively with PINS (England); and recruiting outside the planning discipline. PEDW has advertised via The Planner Jobs, LinkedIn, Indeed, email via POSW and the Welsh Government website.
- 5.11. PEDW has generally been successful at filling advertised posts across the different levels of seniority within the service and has strong staff retention rates. It is not subject to WG recruitment freezes. In terms of staff retention, an extraordinarily low number of planning inspectors leave PEDW to work elsewhere.

6. Salaries

- 6.1. Our research explored the topic of salaries in broad terms, identifying variations between different public sector bodies and influencing factors.

UK planning salaries

- 6.2. Throughout the UK, planners have experienced a significant real term pay cut since 2005. Coupled with shrinking teams, more complex work and greater public

expectation and political scrutiny, there are several factors affecting public sector recruitment.

- 6.3. The graph below shows that, in 2006, the inflation-adjusted salary was just over £48,000. In 2022 it was £34,000: a substantial real-term pay cut.

The real salary of planners has steeply declined

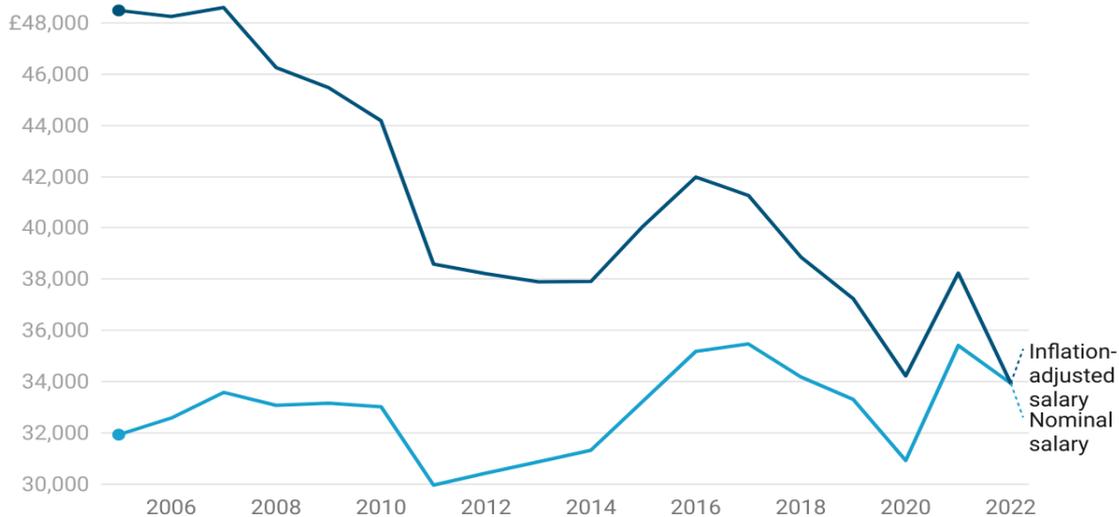


Chart: RTPI • Source: Annual Survey on Hours and Earnings • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 10: Planners' salaries 2006-2022. Source: [RTPI State of the Profession Report 2023](#)

- 6.4. Survey responses displayed in the RTPI's [State of the Profession \(2025\) report for Wales](#) showed that while nearly 70% of Welsh planners were satisfied with their career progression, only just over half (52%) were satisfied with their salary. This is reflected across the other UK nations.

Planning salaries in Wales

- 6.5. Public sector average salary bands were created from data collected from jobs advertised between September 2022 and March 2025. The average salary bands for LPA's, NRW, PEDW and WG Planning Division are set out in Figure 11 below.
- 6.6. In response to the research survey, 72% of LPAs thought their salaries were lower than private sector salaries. While there is some alignment in salary levels between

the public and private sectors, notable differences remain in organisational culture, business practices, and broader employment conditions. Historical perceptions about salary disparities may no longer reflect the current environment.

- 6.7. Several factors influence salary differences between sectors, for example attractive public sector pensions whereas the private sector has a bonus culture and softer benefits such as private healthcare and gym membership, an established mentoring programme and attractive career prospects. The public sector is bound by rigid tiers and standardised pay scales whereas the private sector offers greater flexibility in salary negotiation, influenced by factors such as individual performance, demand or company profitability.

Comparing public and private sector salaries

- 6.8. Carrington West published a '[2025 Salary Survey & Guide For the UK Built Environment](#)': the booklet recognises the resourcing issues in most local authority planning departments and planning consultancies. In October, the Chancellor announced plans for £46m investment to help hire 300 graduates and apprentices to work in LPAs in England in response to a 20% real term reduction in budgets since 2008 ([State of the Profession – England 2025 report](#)). Notwithstanding a small amount of funding for the Pathways to Planning scheme, there has been no comparable investment in recruitment or growing the pipeline of planners in Wales despite a far greater (43%) real term reduction in LPA budgets over the same period.
- 6.9. This data indicates that planning salaries at NRW are generally lower than LPAs. Overall, salaries tend to be higher within WG Planning Division and PEDW and are comparable with private sector roles at senior and managerial levels.
- 6.10. Another factor that might influence the attractiveness of the sectors is exposure to abuse and criticism. The 2025 RTPI membership survey [State of the Profession report for Wales](#) found that 79% of public sector planners in Wales had experienced work-related abuse compared to 50% of private sector workers.

	Chief Planner / Head of Planning	Managerial Planners / Inspectors / Team Leaders	Principal / Senior Planners / Inspectors	Planning Officers	Assistant / Trainee / Graduate Planners	Specialisms	Business Support / Admin
LPA average salary range	£74,996 - £84,632	£47,323 - £51,421	£38,767 - £42,499	£34,417 - £37,748	£27,190 - £30,035	£34, 830 - £39,570	£26,343 - £28,867
PEDW average salary range	£81,000 - £95,544	£73,978 - £84,882	£49,313 - £58,701	£33,727 - £40,683	£28,951 - £32,945	-	£27,729 - £31,905
NRW average salary range	-	£42,521 - £47,685	£38,051 - £41,646	£33,621 - £37,660	£23,000 - £24,000	£36,246 - £39,942	-
WG Planning Division average salary range	£81,000 - £95,544	£58,918 - £70,450	£45,974 - £54,431	£35,787 - £43,759	£22,860 - £26,438	-	-
Carrington West Public Sector – Annual Salary survey*	£72,000 - £91,000	£50,000 - £74,000	£30,000 - £60,000	£32,000 - £42,000	-	-	

Figure 11: Table breakdown of salary bands in PEDW, NRW, WG and Carrington West

7. Future workforce and succession planning

Public sector age profile

7.1. The data in Figure 12 shows the age data for the planning public sector in Wales:

- 8% of the workforce is aged between 16-24;
- 16% of the workforce is aged between 25-34;
- 35% of the workforce is aged between 35-44;
- 25% of the workforce is aged between 45-54;
- 16% of the workforce is aged between 55-64;
- 1% of the workforce is aged 65+.

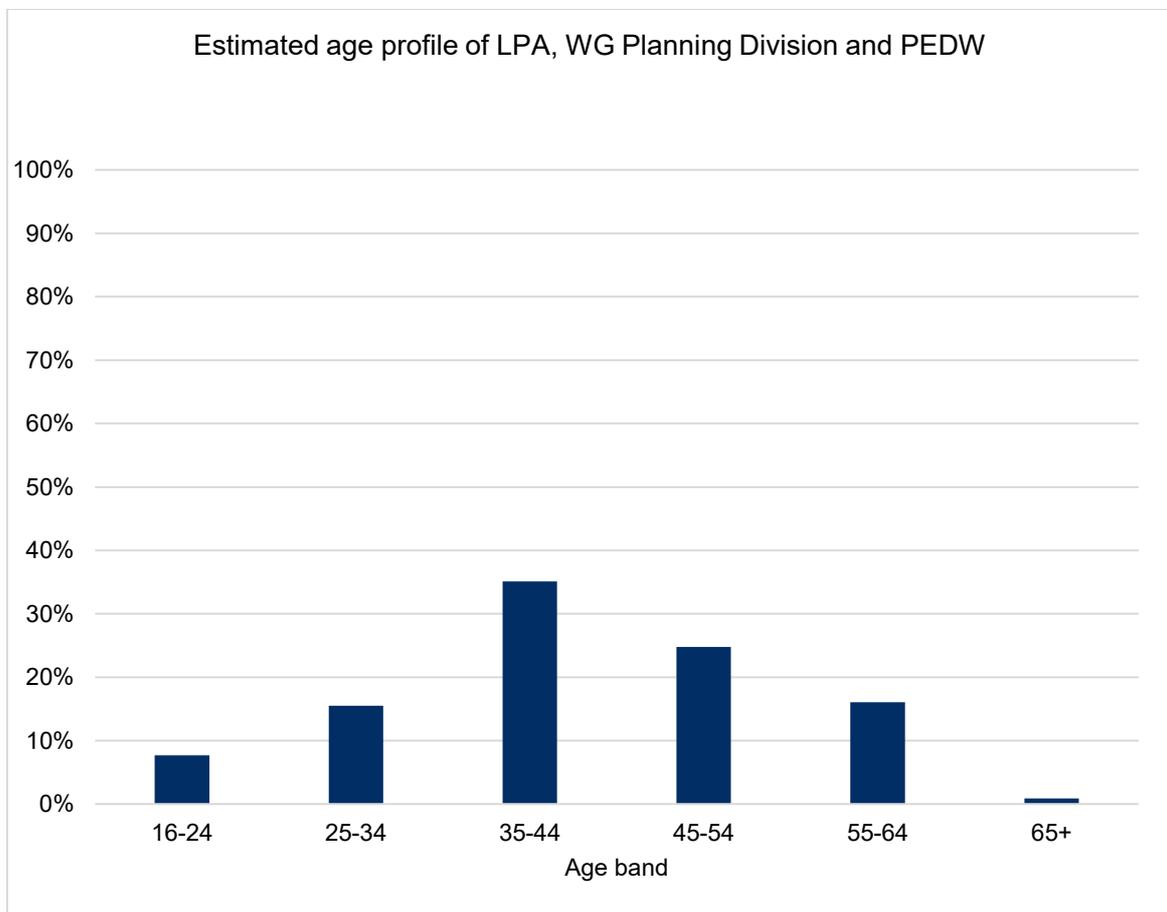


Figure 12: Estimated age profile of planners within responding LPAs, WG Planning Division and PEDW. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

- 7.2. The above graph shows there is potential to lose 17% (95 planners: those aged 55+) of public sector planners from the workforce within the next five to ten years due to retirement. This figure increases to 42% (234 planners: those aged 45+) when looking at a medium-term horizon of ten to 20 years. Unless robust succession planning is in place complemented by a strong pipeline of new planners, this loss of planning knowledge and leadership will have a catastrophic impact on service delivery and planning outcomes.
- 7.3. The largest proportion of workforce (35%) is within the 35-44 age range, indicating a strong cohort of mid-career planners currently working within LPAs. Supporting mid-career planners to provide upskilling, management training, mentorship and knowledge transfer requires time and resource that are currently lacking. The RTPi has recently launched an [online mentoring platform](#) available to all members in addition to its Chief Planners of Tomorrow shadowing opportunity.
- 7.4. Just 16% of the workforce is aged 25-34, reflecting over a decade of austerity measures and reduced public sector recruitment. Moreover, we heard widespread concern that early career planners are reluctant to take on more senior roles. Further research is needed to understand and address this reluctance.
- 7.5. Only 8% of the workforce falls within the 16-24 age range. The development of planning apprenticeships and growth in bursaries in Wales is essential to strengthen this age range in the future. Increased planning application fees provide additional income for reinvestment in service delivery, and Heads of Planning, Chief Finance Officers and politicians need to show strong leadership in securing this reinvestment. However, bursary and apprentice schemes take time to develop and require significant financial investment, plus time and capacity for mentoring.
- 7.6. To address the issues identified above, a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow

the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales (recommendation 5).

NRW age profile

7.7. NRW undertook its own workforce planning exercise in March 2024 and has provided that data. NRW's service age profile results are set out in Figure 13. This data includes a wider series of functions than just planning, but it provides a helpful picture.

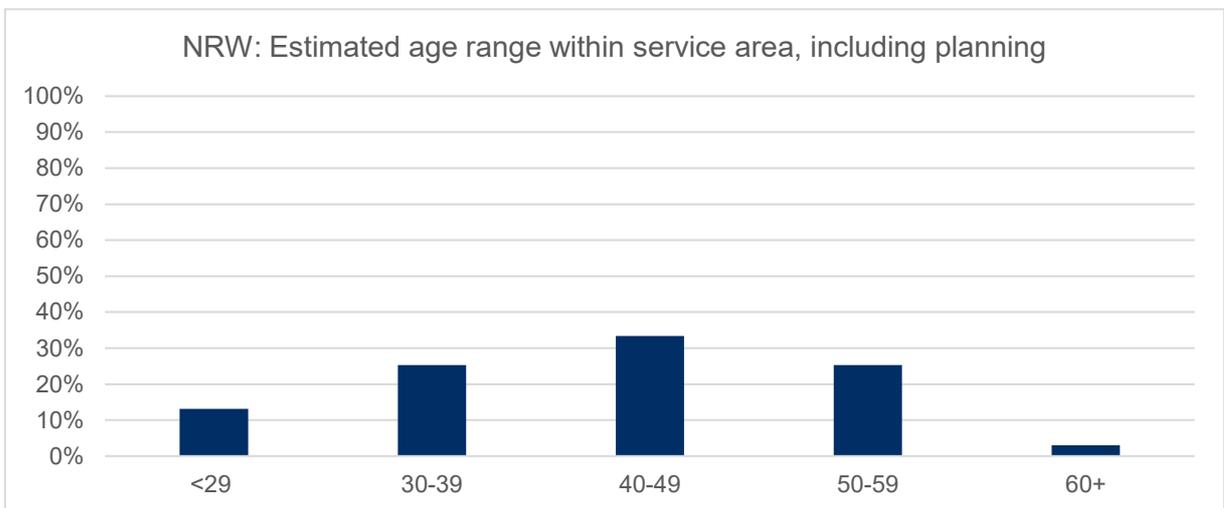


Figure 13: Estimated age distribution of NRW National Development Planning and Marine Advice Service, including planners. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

7.8. The data in Figure 13 shows the estimate age data for NRW:

- 13% of the workforce is under 29;
- 25% of the workforce is between 30-39;
- 33% of the workforce is between 40-49;
- 25% of the workforce is between 50-59;
- 3% of the workforce is over 60.

8. Skills and capacity

LPA skills and capacity

Additional duties affecting the planning system since April 2018

- 8.1. Over the last five years, the planning system has faced a growing range of additional duties, that have had a significant impact on capacity and delivery within the planning system. These include additional policy demands; the regional planning agenda; nutrient neutrality; an increase in large scale renewable energy projects; sustainable drainage; new technologies (e.g. hydrogen production, data centres); new considerations in terms of net zero and carbon reduction; additional responsibilities and roles placed on senior staff who are now managing multiple teams and often other disciplines; increased public scrutiny and a litigious culture.
- 8.2. This report does not assess the value of the individual additional duties on the system; however, it does recognise the positive intention and ambition behind them. If LPAs are to fully embrace and fully deliver on these additional duties, it is essential that support structures, adequate resourcing, sufficient time and training are all in place.

“In broad terms, the Planning Service has over a prolonged period has had to deal with a perfect storm of challenges. In addition to the ever-increasing workload, these challenges include shortages in staff resources, recruitment difficulties linked to pay and rewards, the expectations of developers, their agents, the public and politicians, and the broadening of planning and process requirements (including legislation).” (LPA respondent)

Identifying and addressing skills and capacity gaps

8.3. LPAs were asked in their opinion, if their team has enough people with the following skills to work effectively. The 24 responses received are set out at Figure 14.

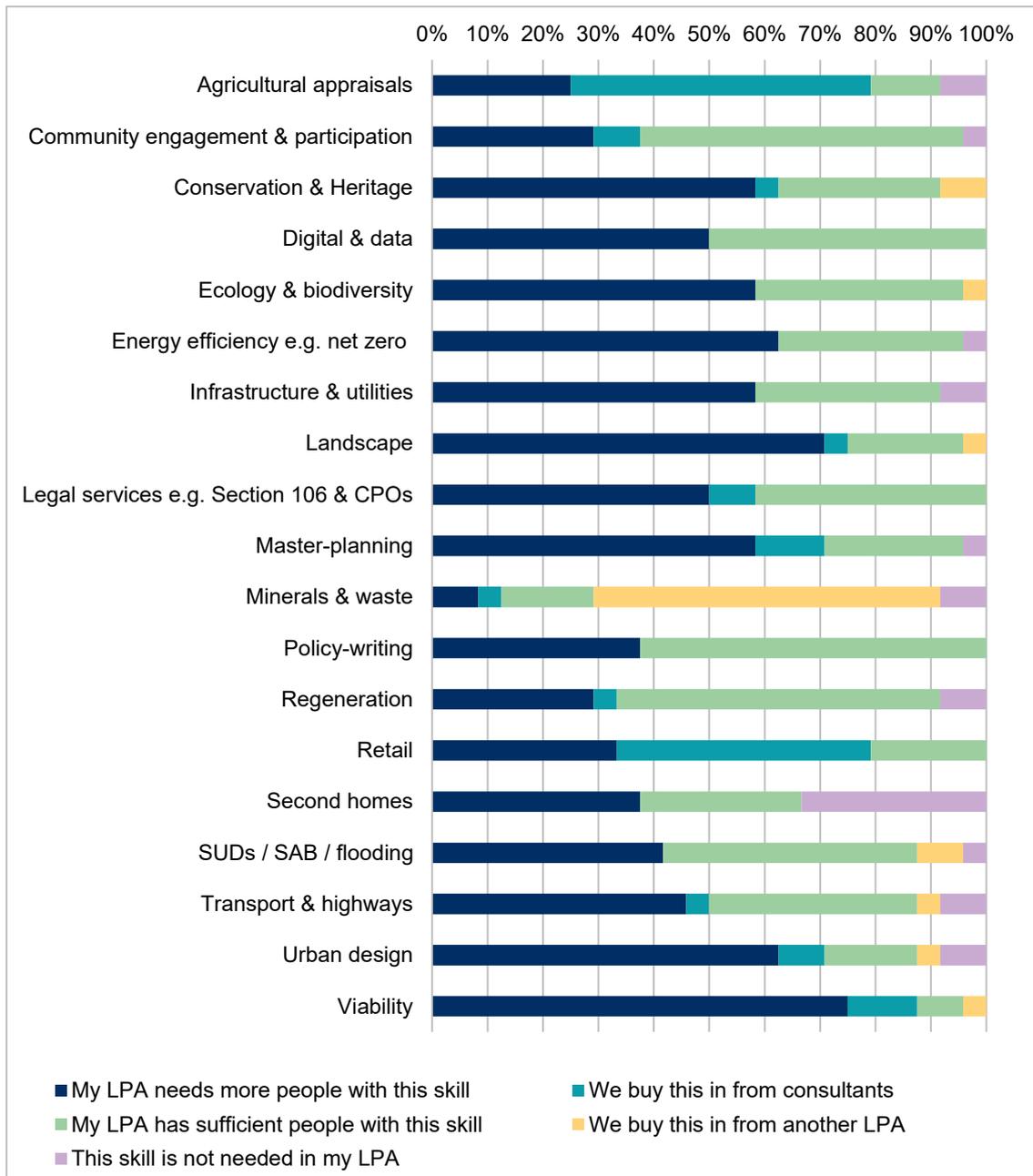


Figure 14: Skills and skills gaps within responding LPAs. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

- 8.4. The data in Figure 14 is explained below. LPAs were also asked if any planning-related skills or services could be effectively delivered as a shared service, and on what footprint would that best work. The regional data below does not include the National Park Authorities because two of the three National Parks straddle multiple regions.
- 8.5. PEDW and WG Planning Division were asked to provide their views on LPA skills and if they considered there to be widespread, localised or no skill gaps for different topics. Their opinions are included below. NRW added that there is a widespread gap in relation to nutrient neutrality and Habitats Regulations advice.
- 8.6. LPAs were largely open to discussions around shared services. However, concerns were raised around governance, funding, and the risk of simply redistributing overstretched staff. Shared services are most viable where local knowledge is less critical and where regional consistency, specialist expertise and resilience are beneficial. However, practical challenges remain, including travel requirements for site visits, salary differentials, and LPAs are concerned that they lose the ability to influence work priorities.

Agricultural appraisals

- 8.7. In terms of agricultural appraisals, 25% of LPAs said they need more people with this skill, 54% said they buy this from consultants, 13% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.
- 8.8. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 14% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 100% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.9. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW consider there to be only localised skills gaps for this topic.

8.10. Of note, over half of LPAs buy in this expertise from consultancies. This established model has worked well for decades. Therefore, no change to the service delivery model is recommended for this topic.

Community engagement and participation

8.11. In terms of community engagement and participation, 29% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 8% said they buy this from consultants, 58% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.

8.12. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 57% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 71% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.13. These figures broadly match the responses to the regeneration topic area, and there may be a growing link between Placemaking Plans undertaken by regeneration teams and other community engagement work. The Welsh Government Planning Division considers there to be localised skills gaps for this topic. Encouragingly, PEDW does not identify a skills gap for this topic area.

- 8.14. Community engagement needs to be delivered locally, so there is a larger-than-local footprint. Moreover, SDP adoption will trigger simultaneous pan-regional LDP reviews, meaning a regional service workload would have an unmanageable 'feast or famine' cycle.
- 8.15. Although planning legislation sets out the statutory requirements for consultation on LDPs, SIP, planning applications and appeals, the extent to which such consultation represents effective community engagement is debatable. [Recent research](#) by the RTPI found that less than 14% of planners think the public understands the purpose of planning and 60% do not think the public understands when or how to engage with the planning process. Other recent research for the RTPI by Demos found that over 50% of people do not know how to take part in consultations about development in their local area. The solution to the skills gap for community engagement is therefore training rather than a different service delivery model.

Conservation and heritage

- 8.16. In terms of conservation and heritage, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4% said they buy this from consultants, 29% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 8% said they buy this from other LPAs.
- 8.17. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 10% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.18. Concerns about capacity for this topic area were widespread throughout Wales but greatest in the South West Wales and Mid Wales regions. PEDW considers there to

be localised skills gaps, but WG Planning Division does not identify a skills gap in this topic area.

- 8.19. There are existing examples of shared service provision, for example a trial with Monmouthshire Council providing heritage services to Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils. A case officer from the shared service team makes a recommendation to the Head of Planning or Planning Committee meaning decision-making remains at the local level.
- 8.20. A sub-regional service delivery footprint is recommended for this topic where local circumstances require additional capacity and resilience while allowing for local service delivery and site visits.

Digital and data

- 8.21. In terms of digital and data, 50% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, and 50% said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.22. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 50% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 30% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.23. The wording of our question may have caused ambiguity about whether LPA responses were based on current digital and data activities or a forward-looking approach to future-proofing services and new digital and AI technology. Nevertheless, 54% of LPAs indicated a need for more personnel with digital and data

skills, underlining a widespread capacity gap in this area. WG Planning Division identified this as a widespread skills gap.

- 8.24. Recent work by CDPS has shown a clear lack of capacity to engage effectively in new digital projects. [Research commissioned by RTPI Cymru and undertaken by Cardiff University](#) shows that digital capacity is uneven across LPAs.
- 8.25. An all-Wales model is recommended for this topic in the context of exploring and rolling out new technology and upskilling planners, potential economies of scale, providing resilience, maximising use of expertise and providing consistency across Wales. Recommendation 7 seeks further exploration of the potential for use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise. This will require strong leadership and collaboration.

Ecology and biodiversity

- 8.26. In terms of ecology and biodiversity, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 38% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said they buy this from other LPAs.
- 8.27. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 20% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 40% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

- 8.28. Notwithstanding the widespread concern about capacity expressed by LPAs, both WG Planning Division and PEDW identify only local gaps in terms of this skill set. Discussions suggest that the LPA concern is primarily about the delays to timely decision-making caused by a lack of capacity in ecology and biodiversity teams, whereas PEDW's experience reflects the robust nature of evidence given on this topic at appeal and at LDP examination. In other words, the outcomes are robust but too slow.
- 8.29. NRW recognises this as a widespread skills and capacity gap across Wales, while affected LPAs expressed concern regarding the lack of guidance and leadership in identifying acceptable solutions. It is becoming clear that solutions to nutrient neutrality will require a regional or all-Wales approach, in particular to clarify what solutions are acceptable to NRW, how they will be delivered, funded and managed in the long term.
- 8.30. Ecology, trees and nature conservation were noted by several LPA respondents as a possible shared service, with joint (more-than-local), regional and Wales-wide footprints suggested.
- 8.31. A river catchment footprint is the best footprint for nutrient neutrality and Nutrient Management Boards even though it adds yet another layer to the already complex geography of service delivery in Wales.

Energy efficiency

- 8.32. In terms of energy efficiency, 63% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 33% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.
- 8.33. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.34. A significant 63% of LPAs reported needing more capacity to support energy efficiency and net-zero initiatives. However, this need varies based on each authority's progress and policy direction. For instance, two LPAs that are actively developing LDPs policies focused on low-carbon and net-zero homes acknowledged the need for additional capacity. Conversely, an LPA that has not yet begun its Revised LDP process stated that this expertise is unnecessary.

8.35. Given the technical nature of evaluating compliance with low-carbon building standards, an all-Wales footprint is recommended for this topic. The development industry cannot function if every LPA in Wales has a different, low carbon policy requirement. National planning policy or, better still, Building Regulations should set this standard for the whole of Wales to provide consistency and certainty to all stakeholders, in particular housebuilders.

Infrastructure and utilities

8.36. In terms of infrastructure and utilities, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 33% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 8% said that this skill is not needed in their LPA.

8.37. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 29% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.38. Concern regarding infrastructure delivery and capacity is an increasingly cited objection to LDPs and development proposals (for example schools, health care and roads are at capacity and new homes cannot be accommodated). However, only 54% of LPAs identified this as an area where additional capacity is needed, and 33% stated they have sufficient capacity. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.39. It is recommended that multiple footprints are needed for the broad category of infrastructure:

- a North Wales and South Wales footprint is recommended for local impact reports on SIP- and NSIP-scale development, using the minerals and waste service delivery model;
- a regional footprint should be used for transport infrastructure to align with Regional Transport Plans and SDPs, and also for assessing need and identifying locations for Gypsy Roma Traveller transit sites/stopping places; and
- an LPA footprint should be used for local-level infrastructure such as education and healthcare (noting that the current Health Board footprint does not align with any other geography).

Landscape

8.40. In terms of landscape, 71% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4% said they buy this from consultants, 21% said they have sufficient people in this skill, and 4% said they buy this from another LPA.

8.41. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 0% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 40% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.42. Landscape was recognised as a necessary skill set by every LPA, yet 71% identified a lack of capacity within their LPA. This is potentially due to the increased emphasis on landscape and biodiversity in [national planning policy](#) and [Future Wales 2040](#), including recent introduction of the stepwise approach. Responses to 'ecology and biodiversity' were similar. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.43. Six LPA respondents suggested that landscape could be considered on a shared services basis. One National Park respondent felt landscape specialists could be helpful from a National Park perspective either across all three National Parks or across neighbouring LPAs.

8.44. A regional footprint is recommended.

Legal services

8.45. In terms of legal services, 50% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 8% said they buy this from consultants, and 42% said they have sufficient people in this skill.

8.46. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 100% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 75% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.47. Legal planning services include preparing enforcement notices, S.106 planning contribution agreements, advising planning committees and compulsory purchase orders. The [Affordable Housing Task Force](#) recommends standardised S106 templates to streamline procedures. In November 2025, Town Legal LLP kickstarted this work by publishing [S.106 agreement template agreements](#).

8.48. Across Wales, 54% of LPAs report a lack of legal capacity, with 8% outsourcing these services to consultants. The remaining 38% report sufficient capacity: these were mostly rural authorities where the smaller scale of development proposals will mean there are fewer complex S.106 agreements. The Welsh Government Planning Division identifies legal expertise as a widespread skills and capacity gap.

8.49. A regional footprint is recommended, allowing specialist legal planning teams to focus on planning on a full-time basis, offering greater efficiency and consistency.

Master-planning

8.50. In terms of master-planning, 58% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 13% said they buy this from consultants, 25% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.

8.51. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 33% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.52. Master-planning was recognised by LPAs as a capacity and skills gap throughout Wales but less so in Mid Wales. This likely directly relates to the location of major and strategic scale applications which need master-planning. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.53. At this stage, it is unclear to what extent master-planning strategic scale sites will become the remit of SDPs rather than LDPs: this topic might naturally fall shift to a regional footprint as SDPs are commenced.

Minerals and waste

8.54. In terms of minerals and waste, 8% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4 % said they buy this from consultants, 17% said they have sufficient people in this skill, 63% said they buy this from another LPA, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.

8.55. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 40% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.56. The minerals and waste function in Wales is already structured as two shared services: one in North Wales, hosted by Flintshire Council, and another covering the South West, South East and Mid Wales regions, hosted by Carmarthenshire Council.

Some LPAs fund the shared service via a Service Level Agreement while others (with lower service demand) operate on a 'pay as you go' model. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

- 8.57. This existing service delivery model offers significant efficiency, expertise and resilience benefits to all LPAs in relation to this complex and specialist topic area that touches each LPA relatively infrequently. It is often cited as a good practice model. The current footprint works well for minerals and waste. There is no tangible benefit in splitting it up to match the four SDP regions as this simply dilutes the expertise and resilience currently offered.

Policy-writing

- 8.58. In terms of policy-writing, 38% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, and 63% said they have sufficient people in this skill.

- 8.59. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 50% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 70% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

- 8.60. Over half of LPAs consider that they have sufficient people with this skill, while others (mostly those at an advanced stage of working on a replacement LDP) state they need additional people with this skill. Responses appear to have overlooked the impact of emerging SDPs. The Welsh Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

- 8.61. Although regulations allow for Councils to prepare joint LDPs, to date only one joint Plan has been adopted (Gwynedd and Ynys Môn). Work is starting on a joint LDP for Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils. This low take-up reflects the local political sensitivity and complexity of LDPs as well as the misalignment of timescales. Looking ahead, there is scope for joint “light touch” LDPs, the triggering of which would be synchronised by adoption of the region’s SDP.
- 8.62. No change is proposed for policy writing because the framework already exists for this to be done on different footprints. However, there is scope for efficiencies for example regionally consistent development management policies might naturally emerge as SDPs progress.

Regeneration

- 8.63. In terms of regeneration, 29% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 4% said they buy this from consultants, 58% said they have sufficient people in this skill, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.
- 8.64. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 90% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.65. The responses for regeneration capacity paint a very mixed picture, ranging from 90% of LPAs in South East Wales considering that they have sufficient capacity to just 25% in South West Wales. This might reflect the historic link between urban deprivation indices and WG (and prior to that, EU) regeneration funding. The Welsh

Government Planning Division and PEDW do not identify any skills or capacity gaps for this topic.

- 8.66. There could be scope to upskilling regeneration officers to help in skill shortage areas such as urban design or master-planning. Current regeneration activity is town-specific. A regional footprint might help with capacity and align with the CJC statutory economic wellbeing function.
- 8.67. At a larger scale, a new Wales-wide body is needed to support site acquisition, land assembly and delivery. This could be provided via the Welsh Government Land Division.

Retail

- 8.68. In terms of retail, 33% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 46% said they buy this in from consultants, and 21% said they have sufficient people in this skill.
- 8.69. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 0% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 10% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.70. Retail planning is a topic with an established history of buying-in expertise from consultants: 79% of LPAs report lacking capacity, with 46% relying on consultants and 33% indicating a need for more staff. Only 21% of LPAs report sufficient capacity, primarily in areas with lower retail pressure, such as Mid Wales. The Welsh

Government Planning Division and PEDW identify localised skills and capacity gaps for this topic.

8.71. Overall, the current model of buying in expertise from consultants when needed works well, and no change is recommended. The current retail market and clear town centre first national planning policy means that applications for new out of centre retail are rare. Upskilling in-house officers is not efficient in such circumstances. However, high demand might mean a regional footprint is appropriate in South East Wales.

Second homes

8.72. In terms of second homes, 38% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 33% said they have sufficient people in this skill, and 29% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.

8.73. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 50% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 75% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 10% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.74. The topic of tackling second homes is mostly focused on North and South West Wales, where LPAs such as Cyngor Gwynedd, Yr Eryri and Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks are pursuing Article 4 Directions and supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to tackle challenges caused by holiday homes and second homes on affordability.

- 8.75. PEDW does not identify any skills gap in this area, although that may be because it is a relatively new policy area and recently adopted SPG is yet to be extensively tested at appeal. Welsh Government Planning Division identifies localised skills gaps.
- 8.76. On this topic, there is no 'one size fits all' solution. A regional approach might be appropriate in North Wales, but elsewhere the topic is localised and is best addressed by increasing capacity on an LPA footprint.

Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and flooding

- 8.77. In terms of SuDS / SAB / flooding, 42% of LPAs responded saying they need more people with this skill, 46% said they have sufficient people in this skill, 8% said they buy this in from another LPA, and 4% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.
- 8.78. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 50% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 100% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 30% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.79. Only 46% of LPAs report having sufficient capacity to manage SuDS and flooding responsibilities, with 70% of LPAs in South East Wales responding that they do not have sufficient capacity. This higher proportion is likely to correlate with a higher number of SuDS Approval Board (SAB) applications in this region and might also reflect the legacy of significant flooding events affecting this region since 2019 in addition to significant low-lying urban areas. In contrast, WG identifies this topic area as having widespread skills gaps across Wales.

- 8.80. Some attempt has been made at regional delivery in South East Wales. Caerphilly Council provides the SAB service for Torfaen Council and Merthyr Tydfil Council provides the service for Blaenau Gwent Council.
- 8.81. This is a service area that might benefit from regional (CJC footprint) delivery to try and balance local knowledge and 'boots on the ground' with shared expertise, capacity, consistency and resilience.
- 8.82. The [Affordable Housing Taskforce report](#) addressed the current SAB/SuDS process and called for collaboration, tasking the Welsh Government and local authorities to identify areas where skills and capacity gaps can be alleviated by collaboration.

Transport and highways

- 8.83. In terms of transport and highways, 46% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 4% said they buy this in from consultants, 38% said they have sufficient people with this skill, 4% said they buy this in from another LPA, and 8.3% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.
- 8.84. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 33% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 50% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 10% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.
- 8.85. Capacity challenges persist in transport and highways planning, with 46% of LPAs reporting a need for additional personnel. One LPA supplements its capacity by buying in consultancy services. In contrast, 33% of LPAs currently have sufficient in-

house capacity to manage their workload. Both WG and PEDW identify localised skills gaps within transport and highways.

- 8.86. Responses indicate two distinct areas of work: transport officers typically comment public transport and active travel infrastructure, for example identifying additional routes and services and seeking Section 106 planning contribution requests. Highways officers typically provide technical advice on individual planning applications for example regarding highway safety, parking provision and highway adoption agreements.
- 8.87. The more strategic and cross-boundary work of transport officers suggests that this could be a function delivered on a regional footprint, aligned with the CJC statutory function of producing a Regional Transport Plan. However, it is recognised that local authority transport officers do far more than just planning-related work, for example home-to-school transport and local bus service contracts.
- 8.88. In contrast, the local site-specific input from highway officers means this role is best delivered at a local authority level alongside the development management service.

Urban design

- 8.89. In terms of urban design, 63% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 8% said they buy this in from consultants, 17% said they have sufficient people with this skill, 4% said they buy this in from another LPA, and 8% said this skill is not needed in their LPA.
- 8.90. Looked at by region, the data shows:
- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
 - 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;

- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.91. Twelve LPAs and all three National Park Authorities identified that they require more people with urban design skills. Two of the more rural LPAs stated it is not a skill they require, and one LPA buys-in this expertise. Some LPAs utilise the Design Commission for Wales for advice on significant or strategic projects. WG recognises urban design as being a widespread skills gap across Wales, whereas PEDW recognises it as a localised gap.

8.92. Notwithstanding the above, the Design Commission for Wales already offers a Wales-wide footprint for this expertise which could be utilised more widely. Consequently, no change is proposed.

Viability

8.93. In terms of viability, 75% of LPAs responded saying they need more people in this skill, 13% said they buy this in from consultants, 8% said they have sufficient people with this skill, and 4% said they buy this in from another LPA.

8.94. Looked at by region, the data shows:

- 17% of LPAs in North Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 0% of LPAs in Mid Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 25% of LPAs in South West Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill;
- 20% of LPAs in South East Wales said they have sufficient people with this skill.

8.95. Viability assessments present a significant area of need throughout Wales, with 75% of LPAs stating they require more capacity. This subject area is an important and highly contested one and links directly to public and political concerns about the

pressures posed by new development on local infrastructure such as schools, health care and transport. There is also widespread concern that [planners feel outsmarted by the development industry](#), with a level of discomfort and at times distrust.

- 8.96. Only 8% of LPAs reported having sufficient internal resource, while 13% of LPAs rely on external consultants. The development of an all-Wales viability calculator supports the potential for this function to be provided at a national level, which could help address the widespread capacity issues in this area as well as providing consistency and certainty for all stakeholders. LPAs throughout Wales have collaborated to use one viability consultant which ensures consistency but does raise concerns regarding resilience.
- 8.97. There is merit in having a Wales-wide team of specialists to provide expertise, consistency of approach (whilst mindful of local viability characteristics) and resilience.
- 8.98. Based on these findings, recommendation 6 sets out topic areas that should be explored further for delivery on a larger-than-local footprint.

Existing use of shared services

- 8.99. LPA respondents were asked how satisfied they are with existing shared service arrangements that they use, and if they foresee those arrangements continuing for the next five years.
- 8.100. The majority of responses expressed general satisfaction and a desire to continue shared service arrangements over the next five years. Respondents noted the benefits of enabling viable service delivery, the need for Service Level Agreements to be more performance driven and regularly reviewed, and the risks of a complete absence of capacity if a shared service ends. While most feedback is positive and

supportive of current shared services it is vital that the operational and strategic concerns are fully considered in developing future ideas.

8.101. The hosts of existing shared services were given the opportunity to comment on how satisfied they were with current arrangements. All five respondents were satisfied, however one host expressed concerns about service resilience when staff are absent for longer periods such as maternity leave. Another host explained they are looking to expand their shared service into large scale energy projects.

Existing use of consultancy services

8.102. Respondents were asked, if they currently buy in skills from consultancies, how satisfied are they with that arrangement, and do they see it continuing for the next five years.

8.103. Many respondents reported generally good levels of satisfaction, especially when services are delivered by trusted providers or those with local knowledge and connections. However, cost was frequently cited as a concern as they often exceed the application fee.

“It’s an essential service to keep our heads above water. Whilst the consultants we generally use are excellent, it’s not without problems - access to databases / laptops, understanding local context, more distant relationship with Members and with the Authority in general, sometimes missing eight-week target. Yes, I foresee this continuing for the next five years I’m afraid.”
(LPA respondent)

LPA: Training budgets

8.104. LPA respondents were asked to provide details of their annual training budgets for the financial years starting April 2018 and April 2023. It was difficult to draw any meaningful insights from the 24 responses.

8.105. Astonishingly, five LPAs had no training budget during this period. The training budget in other LPAs has risen slightly since 2018, while some have stayed the same (equating to a real term budget cut). A combination of university tuition fees and shrinking LPA training budgets has curtailed opportunities to 'grow your own' planners.

8.106. LPAs were asked if their annual training budget is likely to change. Only one respondent thinks their training budget would increase, 16 (67%) think it will remain the same, three think it will decrease and four don't know.

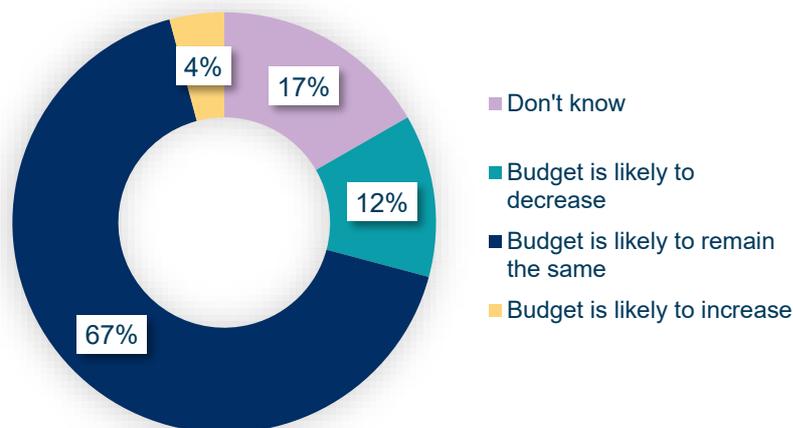


Figure15: Changes to annual training budgets within responding LPAs. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

8.107. Respondents identified the importance of training in retaining and upskilling staff, valued for professional development and staff satisfaction. It is viewed as essential but underfunded.

Resourcing the Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs)

- 8.108. To the frustration of many stakeholders, including LPAs, progress on the four new Statutory Development Plans has been glacial. This has been due to a number of factors, including the need to proceed with the second tranche of LDPs to maintain Plan coverage (a concern partially mitigated for some LPAs by the removal of the Plan expiry date for LDPs adopted before the 2015 Act came into effect) and the lack of financial and staffing resource to commence the SDPs. Perhaps most important, though, was the substantial groundwork that needed to be put in place for multiple autonomous and politically distinct Councils with different needs, priorities and outlooks to develop working relationships that can sustain sacrificing decision-making powers over far-reaching and contentious matters.
- 8.109. As of November 2025, two of the four CJCs have formally appointed SDP lead planning officers. [Cardiff Capital Region](#) and [Ambition North Wales](#) have submitted their SDP Delivery Agreements to the Welsh Government for approval. Initial evidence base work has been commissioned in North Wales and South East Wales has commence a wider recruitment exercise to create an SDP team. The Welsh Government has offered additional funding to support those CJCs making meaningful progress.
- 8.110. The key challenges to progress continue to be resources, funding, and political consensus. To further add to the resource and policy alignment challenge, just as the SDPs are being produced, Future Wales 2040 will be reviewed and potentially revised, requiring its own resources and potentially shifting the foundations on which the SDPs and LDPs are being built.

Welsh Government Planning Division skills and capacity

8.111. Looking ahead over the next five years, the Planning Division plans to enhance its capacity to engage with development plan and planning casework. The key skills gaps identified by WG Planning Division for the future of the profession include leadership skills, particularly in the context of succession planning and encouraging planners to take up senior/managerial roles. Digital planning and AI are seen as widespread skill gaps. There is a recognised need for more staff with digital and data knowledge and capabilities to ensure the Planning Division can work effectively and efficiently in the future.

PEDW skills and capacity

8.112. While PEDW believes it will have sufficient capacity over the next five years for development management and enforcement appeals, it plans to increase capacity to manage known work pressures including future LDP examinations, minerals or energy projects. PEDW's capacity for SDP examinations remains uncertain until further information and clarification is provided. PEDW has identified knowledge gaps concerning digital and data, and minerals and waste skills. It has bought in extra help from PINS (England) to cope with workload peaks or occasionally due to a conflict of interest.

8.113. While there is no specific training budget for PEDW staff, all staff receive a minimum eight days' training per year via quarterly Inspector Group Meetings, and a further two- to five-days additional training via Welsh Government Learning Lab, RTPi or similar events and topic-specific learning.

8.114. PEDW maintains an Inspector Training Manual (ITM) with up-to-date guidance on how to approach casework on core topics. One day per month per Inspector is set aside for Inspector 'subject lead' work. All Inspectors take responsibility for a core

subject (e.g. flooding) ensuring they keep apprised of relevant legislative, case law or policy changes and disseminate that knowledge to the rest of PEDW. They keep the ITM updated and provide training as necessary.

8.115. Looking ahead, the skills priority will be increasing the number of Inspectors to meet rising workloads, manage succession planning, and recruit and retain skilled professionals to keep pace with the increasing complexity and volume of work. PEDW would like to see future integration of digital planning systems across the public sector in Wales, to enable more efficient data sharing and reduce repetitive data entry, for example between LPA application and PEDW appeal.

Identifying training needs elsewhere

8.116. Discussion with PEDW around the quality of future LDPs for examination, reflected a broader concern about the capacity, leadership, and consistency of the planning system in Wales. PEDW believes support is needed across public sector planning to support standards and strive for robust high quality planning delivery. In particular, there is a need for national-level training on basics such as writing enforcement notices and officer reports. This could avoid problems at appeal.

Improving service delivery in Wales

8.117. PEDW was asked what changes could be made to improve service delivery in Wales and make better use of existing resources. Suggestions included removing unnecessary small-scale applications, by reviewing permitted development rights, to free up planning capacity. Another key recommendation was the introduction of national development management policies. A unified set of policies, developed once at a national level, would allow LDPs to focus solely on local matters.

NRW skills and capacity

- 8.118. The NRW team does not necessarily need to be qualified planners, they must be able to manage diverse information streams, analyse complex data, and produce high-quality responses. The team's skill needs have evolved due to the rising complexity of planning applications. involving new technologies such as wind farms, carbon capture and battery storage. Critical skills gaps include nutrient neutrality, derogations under the Habitats Regulations and Water Framework Directive, flood risk management, strategic environmental compensation, and mitigation planning. There has been a notable rise in public and third-party interest in planning applications, and more hearings and inquiries, increasing demands on the team's capacity.
- 8.119. NRW noted potential for ecology and biodiversity advice to be shared similar to minerals advice. NRW expressed a broader desire for more consistent leadership and clearer application of planning policy to reduce ambiguity and support service delivery.
- 8.120. Looking forward, the anticipated funding from the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 presents a valuable opportunity to bolster capacity within NRW. Digital transformation, including a new customer platform currently under exploration, could also help improve efficiency and reduce manual workload, although these initiatives remain in early stages.

Improving service delivery in Wales

- 8.121. NRW noted there is a low legislative threshold for what constitutes a 'valid' planning application, leading to repeated re-consultations where inadequate information is initially submitted. NRW identified the need for higher standards and better initial

scrutiny by LPAs to avoid wasted effort reviewing incomplete or inadequate applications.

9. Growing the profession

- 9.1. Eleven LPAs reported that they currently employ trainee planners, which includes a combination of full-time year out placement students, employees on day release for part-time study, apprentices for example via Pathways to Planning, and bursary students.
- 9.2. WG Planning Division employs year out student(s), operating a rotation between the Planning Directorate and PEDW.
- 9.3. To better understand the likely future demand for early career planners, LPAs were asked, over the next five years, does your LPA plan to employ trainee planners (graduates / apprenticeships etc.).

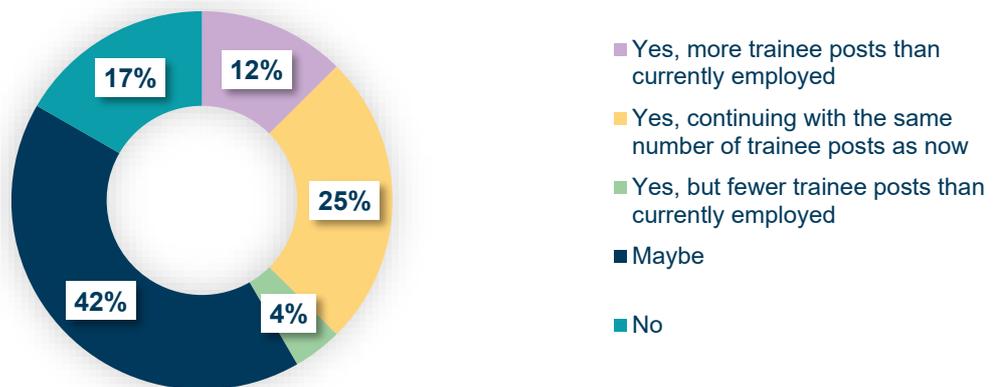


Figure 16: Responding LPAs future demand for trainee employment. Data accessed via RTPi research survey (May 2025).

9.4. The data in Figure 16 shows:

- Most LPAs (42%) are unsure (answered maybe) as to whether they plan to employ trainee planners within the next five years;
- 41% of LPAs said they are likely to employ trainee planners over the next five years, with 12% of those wanting to employ more trainees than currently employed, compared to only 4% who want to employ less trainees than currently employed;
- 17% of respondents answered 'no' to the question.

9.5. Interviews with LPAs revealed that graduate and trainee programmes have largely yielded positive results. Initiatives like the Pathways to Planning programme are welcomed but interviewees cited financial constraints as a challenge in fully leveraging them.

9.6. There is support for targeted recruitment from non-planning degree backgrounds, provided there is structured training, funding and more general support for postgraduate qualifications in place. Strengthening links with universities, attending career fairs, and offering placements were all seen as valuable. Interviewees also advocated for earlier engagement at GCSE or A-Level stages to raise awareness of planning as a profession. The [WJEC GCSE in the Built Environment](#) is approved by Qualifications Wales but contains limited content about planning, and planning is not identified in the career options section. The RTPI's relaunched [school ambassador programme](#) also has a role to play here.

Planning schools

Student numbers on accredited Planning courses in Wales and surrounding areas of Wales

- 9.7. We engaged with the four closest planning schools located in Wales and England to provide a broad overview of student enrolment on RTPI fully or partially accredited planning courses, to assess the potential pipeline of future planners in Wales.
- 9.8. In the September 2023 academic year, there were 434 students enrolled on one of 14 postgraduate courses and 386 students enrolled on one of 6 undergraduate courses in these four universities.
- 9.9. The data shows a healthy number of planning students at universities within and close to Wales, but does not provide any certainty on where graduates will choose to work and therefore the impact on the desperately needed pipeline of public sector planners in Wales. There is a role here for public sector bodies, Cardiff University and RTPI Cymru to seek to promote the Welsh public sector as an attractive option, in addition to public sector employers actually creating new graduate level posts.

The value of placements for students and employability

- 9.10. Year out placements are widely viewed as a positive experience. One Head of School confirmed that students who undertake a placement year at their university are statistically more likely to achieve a first-class honours degree. Anecdotal evidence from the universities indicates a strong alignment between education and employment. One interviewee explained that through their university, planning employability is exceptionally strong at 92%, however the majority of graduates move into the private sector.

Apprenticeships and bursaries in Wales

- 9.11. Unlike in England, other than the Pathways to Planning scheme, there are no planning apprenticeships in Wales supported by the Welsh Government. Prior to the introduction of an age cap of 21 years of age for entrants, which decimates this supply chain, the L7 apprenticeship was a highly successful model worth replicating (with over 200 apprenticeships per academic year prior to the age cap).
- 9.12. Further discussion is needed to understand why take-up of the Pathways to Planning scheme is so low in Wales, even when new application fee increases provide certainty of additional income for the financial year starting April 2026.
- 9.13. The School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University is working with a number of private sector organisations to provide bursary opportunities for planning students enrolled on their courses, including bursaries funded by Bute Energy and Landsec. The British Chambers of Commerce offers one bursary place per year per accredited planning school, administered by the RTPI.
- 9.14. Gill Bristow, Head of the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University, said:

"There is an acute need to broaden the talent coming into the planning and property professions in Wales and to ensure that the profession better reflects the diversity of the society it serves. The School of Geography and Planning is the only Welsh provider of accredited educational programmes which provide a route into the planning profession. These bursaries also complement Cardiff University's Widening Participation agenda for educational opportunities."

Barriers to providing trainee positions

- 9.15. Significant barriers were identified that hinder the ability of organisations to provide trainee opportunities. Funding issues were cited by 65% of respondents. The recent decision to increase planning application fees presents a very tangible solution here, with LPAs able to reinvest additional income in planning service improvements.
- 9.16. Organisations also highlighted practical issues, including the high level of support and supervision that trainee planners need, which stretches existing staff resources. Furthermore, there is concern that significant investment of time and money in training may be lost if trainees leave soon after qualifying.
- 9.17. Some LPAs said they struggled to attract suitable candidates despite efforts through Pathways to Planning. There is a concern that there is a lack of awareness or interest in planning as a profession, particularly in the public sector. Specific needs, like recruiting Welsh speaking planners require expansion of trainee pathways to meet local demand. Overall, there is a shared view that without substantial investment in this area the profession risks facing deeper capacity shortages and skills gaps in the future.

10. An effective planning service: our conclusions

- 10.1. This report provides an evidence base in relation to planning service budgets, workforce, and skills and capacity within LPAs, PEDW, the planning function of NRW and the Welsh Government's Planning Division. We conclude with seven recommendations derived from the evidence.
- 10.2. Our findings highlight a sector that has operated under significant strain for a prolonged period and continues to face challenges. Unless properly resourced, the Welsh planning system cannot achieve its full potential and deliver the Government's

objectives. The challenges are two-fold: reversing previous cuts, and looking ahead based on the profession's age profile and growing system complexity.

- 10.3. The evidence reveals a backdrop of substantial cuts since 2008, with public sector budgets diminished across the whole of Wales. Between the April 2008 and April 2023 financial years, Local Planning Authority budgets reduced by 43% in real terms. Planning teams shrunk in size accordingly. Simultaneously, the complexity and breadth of planning considerations have increased. This has impacted on skills and capacity, morale and service delivery.
- 10.4. Between April 2018 and April 2024, 46 additional planning officer posts were shown on LPA team structures. However, at the time of responding to our survey (May 2025), 37 planning officer posts were reported as being vacant, plus six specialist posts and five business support posts. Overall, 73% of LPAs were operating with one or more vacancies within their planning service. Eleven LPAs reported multiple vacancies, with some reporting as many as five vacancies. Consequently, there has been minimal real improvement in resource levels in LPAs.
- 10.5. Since April 2015, the Welsh Government Planning Division reduced in size from 60 officers to 41 officers in 2018 to 33 officers in 2024. This has had a tangible impact on the Planning Division's ability to provide timely and robust national policy updates or provide wider leadership for example by monitoring performance and driving improvement. It is only in recent months that steps have been taken to start to reverse some of these cuts with the welcome recruitment of much-needed planners.
- 10.6. Likewise, NRW has faced a period of financial pressures and increasing workloads that is now starting to be addressed in part with additional funding from Welsh Government.

- 10.7. PEDW continues to recruit additional Inspectors to deal with an increasingly complex caseload of infrastructure projects and LDP examinations. Progress on SDPs and the resultant regional groupings of new 'light touch' LDPs will require significant additional resource.
- 10.8. In total, the short-term recruitment need is 161 extra planners, 15 specialist officers and five business support officers. This is simply to address known LPA vacancies (at May 2025) (37 planners), SDP needs (24 planners), PEDW capacity for SDP, LDP and infrastructure work (5 planning inspectors) and imminent retirement (95 planners including planning inspectors aged 55+), plus 15 specialist officers (six known local authority vacancies and nine NRW vacancies at May 2025). This does not allow for reversing the deep and unsustainable cuts from over a decade of austerity.
- 10.9. In the medium term, a substantial 42% of the public sector planning workforce (excluding NRW) is aged 45+ (234 planners). Unless this potential loss is addressed through a strategic recruitment and retention strategy with appropriate funding, there will be a significant impact on service delivery in the medium term.
- 10.10. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. Our first recommendation is that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impacts of implementing our recommendations.
- 10.11. In October 2025, Senedd Cymru passed regulations increasing planning application fees from 01 December 2025. This is a first but significant step towards full cost recovery for development management services, providing a desperately needed income boost. Strong leadership is needed by Heads of Planning, Chief Finance Officers, Chief Executives and politicians: the additional income arising from planning application fee increases **must** be reinvested in planning services in order to improve

service delivery and achieve the outcomes our communities need: homes, jobs, green spaces and infrastructure in a timely manner that provides certainty and confidence for investors.

- 10.12. This investment in planning teams should include the wider planning service including plan-making, development management, enforcement and directly related consultees such as ecology and highways.
- 10.13. The public sector does not currently have the capacity to focus on planning service ambitions or strategic goals. We therefore recommend that a Planning Improvement Service should be created to develop and promote best practice and efficiencies, support peer review and performance monitoring, serve as a central knowledge hub for the profession, and support innovation and shared services where appropriate (recommendation 2).
- 10.14. To ensure future service resilience and sustainability, further work is needed to reach an agreed definition of the extent of the planning service to which full cost recovery applies (recommendation 3).
- 10.15. Recommendation 4 seeks a commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey), fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, performance and how increase fee income since December 2025 has been utilised to improve service delivery.
- 10.16. A comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established, looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales (recommendation 5).

- 10.17. Based on our findings, recommendation 6 sets out topic areas that should be explored further for delivery on a larger-than-local footprint. Recommendation 7 relates to the potential for use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise.
- 10.18. Despite the challenges reported through this work, the commitment, determination and perseverance of many key individuals have been clear. Unless addressed, the failure to properly resource planning services will result in social, economic and environmental costs for society.

“It is not the planning system that is at fault, the root of the issue is the chronic underfunding, under resourcing and under investment that requires immediate attention. There is a need to tackle this underlying issue as a first step. Get this right and planning in Wales has a bright future.” (LPA respondent)

11. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a sounding board

Due to their interlinked nature, it is vital that the impact of implementing the proposed recommendations or other solutions on the wider picture is fully understood. The scope of this research did not include discussion or testing of ideas and proposals outside the public sector organisations that form part of this research. We therefore recommend that a sounding board is established to discuss the practicalities and impact of implementing the recommendations in this report. The sounding board should comprise the RTPI Cymru Planning Forum (which comprises representation from Cardiff University’s planning school, PEDW, Planning Officers’ Society for Wales (POSW), RTPI Cymru, the Wales Planning Consultants’ Forum and WG

Planning Division) with additional invitations to representatives of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), NRW and the WLGA.

RTPI Cymru should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Planning Improvement Service for Wales

A Planning Improvement Service similar to the independent local government improvement service established in Scotland (see Appendix 7). It would be headed up by newly created independent Planning Improvement Champion and would;

- Develop and promote best practice and efficiencies;
- Support peer review and performance monitoring;
- Serve as a central knowledge hub for the profession;
- Support innovation and shared services where appropriate.

WG Planning Division should be responsible for the development of this recommendation. This service could be hosted by the WLGA but will require additional resource to be delivered.

Recommendation 3: Define the planning service

A clear, agreed definition is needed of the extent of planning services, clarifying which aspects of planning service delivery are within scope for full cost recovery and which aspects should remain centrally-funded public services. This is essential if we are to properly address resourcing and capacity within planning services. This could also provide a foundation for future performance frameworks, making it possible to more accurately measure outcomes and impact, identify areas for improvement and demonstrate value. Without a clear definition, we risk inconsistent data as a result of varying approaches and contexts across Wales.

WG Planning Division and POSW should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Collect and publish quality planning data

A commitment to regular monitoring of planning service capacity (staffing numbers, number of vacancies, and a skills survey) using the findings in this report as a baseline, as an extension to the recently recommenced national planning performance framework to support evidence-based decision-making and long-term resilience. This should include reporting on fee income as a proportion of development management service costs, the amount of additional planning fee income since December 2025 and how this additional fee income has been reinvested to improve planning service delivery. This will develop a stronger and more detailed evidence base over-time, supporting evidence-based decision-making and resilience in the long term. It will also ensure transparency and accountability for how increased application fee income is reinvested. This data should be reported on an annual basis and in an accessible digital format. It is essential that all parties submit the relevant data if we are to accurately measure the on-going health of the planning service.

WG Planning Division and LPAs should be responsible for the development of this recommendation.

Recommendation 5: Develop a recruitment and retention strategy

A comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy should be established for planning in Wales looking at all avenues to grow the pipeline of planners, promoting the unique value and key advantages of planning as a career in Wales. This will require significant financial investment and commitment by all parties in order to secure the essential increase in resource levels. This includes a commitment from

LPAs to reinvest the additional application fee income arising from the December 2025 fee uplift.

The recruitment and retention strategy should include:

- Schools outreach to raise awareness of planning as a career and a review of the Built Environment GCSE to ensure planning is highlighted as a career route;
- Support for Wales's only planning school at Cardiff University including through partnership working on outreach, recruitment, placements, support for CPD initiatives on digital planning and other areas of skills development;
- Creation of a Level 7 apprenticeship route along the lines of the successful scheme operating in England (without an age cap), to supplement the Pathways to Planning scheme;
- Support opportunities for mid-career transitioning into planning via services such as Public Practice.

WLGA should be responsible for the development of this recommendation in partnership with Cardiff University's planning school, Local Planning Authorities and CJsCs, NRW, PEDW, RTPi Cymru, Wales Planning Consultants' Forum and WG.

Recommendation 6: Shared services

The research found successful examples of shared skills operating across Welsh LPAs. These services have developed where there is a need and capacity for the service. To move forward, the concept of shared services must be set out through clear and fully costed options that set out requirements including capacity. Without this information questions will remain and opportunities for efficiency and collaboration may be missed. Initial services could include, but are not limited to:

- A Wales-wide viability assessment and review service. This will support robust decision-making using the new all-Wales viability tool kit, providing expertise and

resilience on a topic that public sector planners say they feel they lack expertise in;

- Wales-wide leadership on digital planning to explore and roll out new technology and upskill planners, securing potential economies of scale, providing resilience, maximising use of expertise and providing consistency across Wales;
- Wales-wide expertise on assessing compliance with low carbon and net zero policies, and to establish Wales-wide policies or changes to Building Regulations;
- CJC footprint expertise on large scale infrastructure projects to help with Local Impact Reports for SIPs, as well as on ecology, landscape, legal services, and transport. The legal services element should include exploring the potential for standardised S.106 agreements, expertise on compulsory purchase orders, and drafting Enforcement Notices;
- Regional or larger than local services (sub-regional) if needed for heritage and SuDS;
- Nutrient neutrality/Nutrient Management Boards on a river catchment or marine SAC basis.

LPA and CJC should be responsible for developing this recommendation with support from the WLGA and NRW.

Recommendation 7: Digital Planning

The use of digital planning tools including artificial intelligence, where ethical and appropriate, has the potential to free-up planners to do planning, making evidence-based decisions and utilising value-based human judgement and expertise. It must be embedded at the core of the planning system in Wales, rather than approached as a supplementary element of service delivery. It should be prioritised and

coordinated and should be informed by the needs of planners and service users. This will require strong leadership and collaboration.

WG (which from April 2026 will incorporate the Centre for Digital Public Services), RTPi Cymru, WLGA and Cardiff Uni should be responsible for developing this recommendation.