

Investing in Planning

April 2024

Scottish Government consultation on resourcing Scotland's planning system - feedback invited to inform UNISON response

The Scottish Government is [consulting](#) on proposals for “an efficient, effective and well-resourced planning system.” It has set out a range of options and proposals which “aim to increase the financial resources available to local authorities.”

Ministers concede that the planning workforce is at its lowest level in five years - citing figures from the [Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland](#), including that planning has experienced the biggest spending cut in all councils since 2010/11 – a 28.6% total cut, with a 16% cut to the workforce, now at 1205 members of staff across Scotland. (UNISON's 2013 [Damage report](#) showed severe cuts already, with impacts on workload and stress levels. We argued then for increased investment, not cuts, but the situation has worsened considerably.) A 2020 Skills Development Scotland report said that to cover replacement demand due to retirements and to cover a projected 11% growth in the planning sector, 730 planners would be needed within 10 to 15 years.

The proposals look at several ways of increasing different fees income streams by charging more and increasing fees in line with inflation. The Scottish Government is also proposing a central planning hub, with options for how that is funded; some discretionary charging; devolving power to councils to set planning fees locally and various changes around fees and processes for applications for renewable energy generation and hydrogen projects. Cumulatively, the changes could increase income to councils, but a range of factors need to be considered. UNISON is keen to hear from branches, including from members in planning, for their views on the proposals. While some members have been keen to see 'full cost recovery' where possible, we pointed out in [our response](#) to the 2020 review of planning performance and fees that linking fees to performance would hinder not help efforts to ensure improvements when departments are understaffed and under-resourced.

Action for Branches

Ask members working in planning departments to look at the [consultation](#) and discuss/advise the branch. The consultation closes on 31 May. **Please send us your branch and member comments by Tues 14 May** to inform the UNISON Scotland response. Email f.montgomery@unison.co.uk.

NB: There are two other planning consultations, closing on 22 May. Feel free to feed in any key comments on these. Without specific feedback, we won't have the capacity to respond to them. See [Masterplan Consent Area Regulations: Consultation](#) [Development Plan Amendment Regulations: Consultation](#)

For further information please contact

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Bargaining & Campaigns Team