

# Study into the operation of planning committees in Wales

Alison Blom-Cooper  
Kieron Hyams

June 2013

# Outline Agenda

---

- 14:00 Background to the study  
Study methodology  
Emerging findings
- 14:30 Q&A  
Discussion topics
- 14:45 Break out groups
- 16:00 Plenary session/feedback
- 16:25 Next steps/finish



# IAG report and the study brief

---

- To determine whether there is a link between efficiency and effectiveness, committee size and consistency of decision making;
- To gather evidence on the operation of planning committees and to test anecdotal views on planning committees against this evidence

# Methodology

---

- Literature review/establish context
- Survey
- Stakeholder interviews
- Good practice and rest of UK experience
- Case study visits
- Discussion Seminar
- Report and recommendations

# Stakeholder interviews



Significant variation in committee culture and approach:

- ‘Political’ decisions vs ‘Planning’ decisions
- Importance of member: officer relationships
- Importance of training, but variation in delivering it
- Speaking: member/applicant/public participation
- Site visits, delays, deferrals...
- System of delegation, review and call-in
- **Consistency and effectiveness vary**

# Emerging themes

---

- Training
- Size of committee
- Delegation
- Decision-making

# Training

---

- Planning is a complex area
- Understanding policy
- Understanding decision-making
- Quasi-judicial role
- Need to ensure 'planning' reasons
- Difficult decisions to be made
- Needs to be underpinned with strong training
- Role of Chair requires specific skills

# Training

---

1. Do you think members receive sufficient training?
2. How should training be delivered?
3. Should training be mandatory?



# Committee size

---

- Role of Local Member vs Committee Member
  - Freeing up members to represent their communities
- Larger committees have lower attendance rates
- Challenges around consistency over time
- Aspiration for a leaner group with enhanced knowledge
- Evidence suggests smaller committees are more effective, without detriment to member engagement
- Tangential impact on cost, value for money etc

# Committee size

---

1. What are the **ADVANTAGES** and **DISADVANTAGES** of the committee size that you work with?
2. What are your views on a 20% or national minimum/maximum committee size?
3. Should there be a minimum quorum of 50%?

# Delegation

---

- Significant variation between authorities
  - Level, types of applications, thresholds, process etc
- IAG Recommendation for a national scheme
- Is the focus on the major and controversial schemes?
- Quality versus quantity – allowing time for debate
- Members set **their** vision and standards through **their** policy
- Call-in remains an important feature

# Delegation

---

1. What aspects of your delegation scheme work well? Which aspects don't work so well?
2. Does your committee purely focus on major and controversial schemes?
3. What might the impact of a national scheme be?

# Decision-making

---

- Significant variation in process around
  - Public speaking
  - Order of events
  - Officer presentation
  - Site visits
- Public perception of fairness, consistency, transparency etc
- Where does the debate come?
- How decisions are made, and votes taken

# Item running order

---

- Announce application, description, public speakers
- Declarations of interest/Local member lobby/vote
- Presentation of application
- Speakers:  
For/Against/Community Council/Local Member
  - For each speaker: welcome, time limit, presentation if supplied in advance, clarification questions through chair
- Indication of members who wish to speak
- Debate, proposal for new motion (if applicable)
- Summing up, Vote, Record decision

# Decision-making

---

1. Suggested order of proceedings to enable informed, balanced and consistent decisions?
2. How well do public speaking arrangements work?
3. Should the role of the local member be distinguished from the committee member?

# Principles for efficient and effective committees

---

- A more consistent process
- Clarity/transparency
- Distinguishing the role of local members and committee members
- Focused and highly trained members
- Engagement in the pre-application stage
- Ensuring capacity for the more challenging decisions



---

# Questions?

[www.fortismere-associates.co.uk](http://www.fortismere-associates.co.uk) 020 8883 8050

FORTISMERE  
ASSOCIATES

ARUP

# Group Discussion

---

- Training
- Committee size
- Delegation
- Decision making

# Training

---

1. Do you think members receive sufficient training?
2. How should training be delivered?
3. Should training be mandatory?

# Committee size

---

1. What are the **ADVANTAGES** and **DISADVANTAGES** of the committee size that you work with?
2. What are your views on a 20% or national minimum/maximum committee size?
3. Should there be a minimum quorum of 50%?

# Delegation

---

1. What aspects of your delegation scheme work well? Which aspects don't work so well?
2. Does your committee purely focus on major and controversial schemes?
3. What might the impact of a national scheme be?

# Decision-making

---

1. Suggested order of proceedings to enable informed, balanced and consistent decisions?
2. How well do public speaking arrangements work?
3. Should the role of the local member be distinguished from the committee member?

# Plenary Session

---

Feedback

Next Steps

FORTISMERE  
ASSOCIATES

PLANNING, DESIGN & MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY

ARUP

**[alison@fortismere-associates.co.uk](mailto:alison@fortismere-associates.co.uk)**

**[kieron.hyams@arup.com](mailto:kieron.hyams@arup.com)**