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Royal Town Planning Institute

**RTPI
Research
Paper**

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PLANNING AGENCIES

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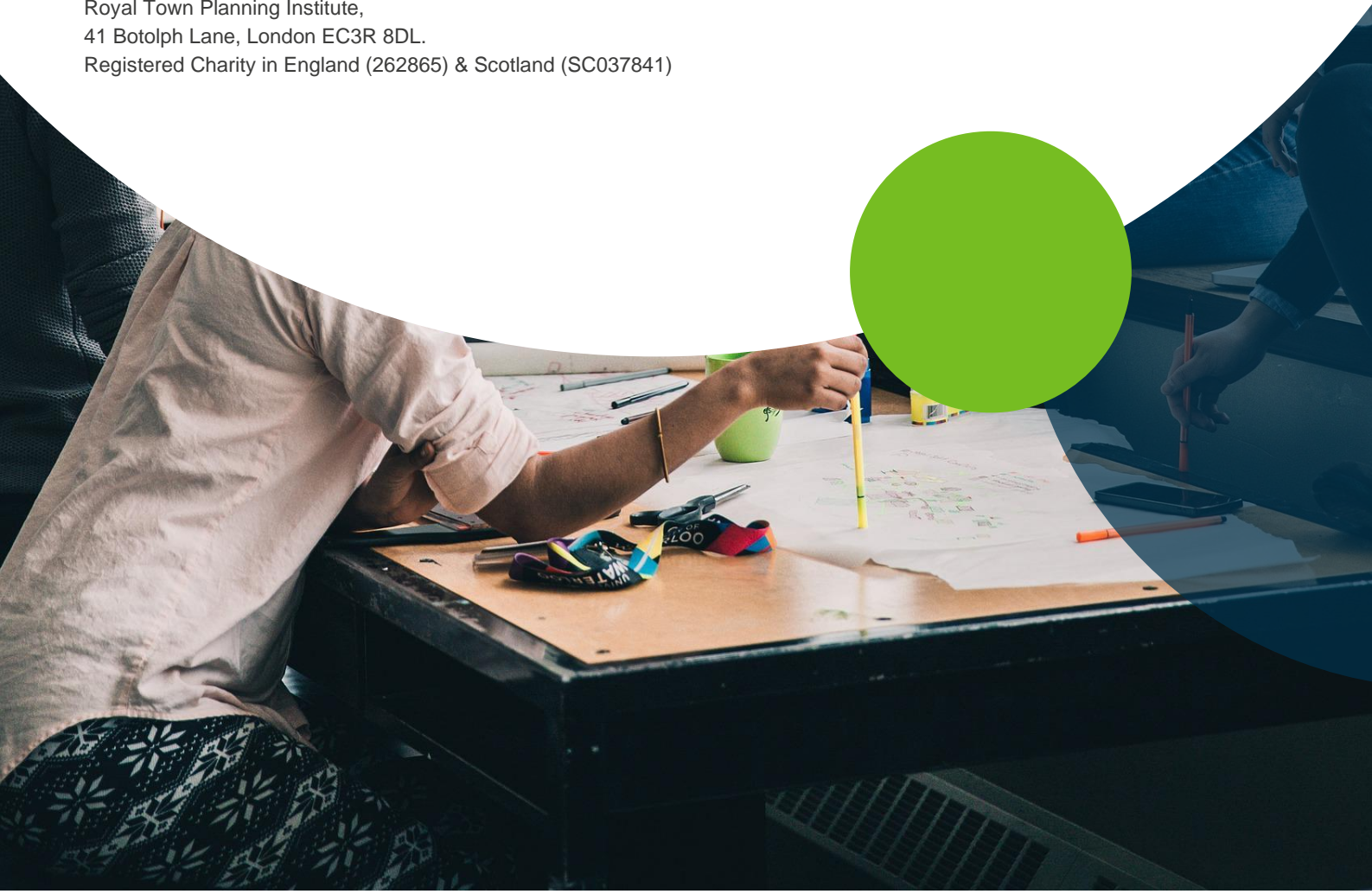
Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body in the United Kingdom that confers Chartered status to planners, the highest professional qualification sought after by employers in both private and public sectors.

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The Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG, Chair of Lords Built Environment Committee

“This report shows why Government’s planning reforms must deal with the evolving crisis we highlighted in our meeting housing demand report: local planning authorities do not have sufficient financial resources to deliver a quality service. But it also demonstrates the steps councils can take to recruit and retain the skilled personnel they need to improve plan-making, process applications and negotiate with developers.”

Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee

“In its response to our committee’s report on The Future of the Planning System in England, Government recognised that local planning authorities will need additional financial support, skills, capability and talent to deliver its planning reforms. This is a position that the committee has consistently argued for over the years.

This research from the Royal Town Planning Institute is an important reminder of the urgent support public sector planning teams need and the difficulties they face today.

While the committee has not considered and therefore cannot endorse the specific proposals in the RTPI report we recognise the scale of challenges facing local planning authorities alongside new burdens being placed on them.

In this respect councils will need to think innovatively about how to deliver services for their residents. The report brings some wider thinking to the debate on how planning services may be best provided by local authorities in the future.”

Ben Southwood, Housing and Planning Thought Leader

“This interesting paper shows how the planning service is underfunded in many parts of the UK, and some ideas about how it could do more with less. A better funded and more efficient planning system means more decisions, more approvals, and more housing.”

Sam Stafford, Planning Director, Home Builders Federation

“Government expects a lot when it asks planners to do more with less and expects worthy, impactful planning applications and development plan documents to get approved and adopted in the shortest time possible. If ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ then Planning Agencies proposed by the RTPI appear to be an innovative way to address the overlapping challenges of recruitment and retention of staff within local authorities.”

Executive Summary

Planning is one of the most important strategic and decision-making functions that local authorities have to improve resident's lives. Without better quality planning services, communities will miss opportunities to level up, deliver vital housing and tackle climate change.

However, Local Authorities face significant funding, recruitment, skills and performance challenges evidenced in this report which adds to a growing body of other literature. In research conducted by the RTPI over recent years, we have found:

- Local Authority net expenditure on planning has fallen by 43%, from £844m in 2009/10 to £480m in 2020/21. This decline affects all regions but has fallen the most – by 62% - in the North East of the England
- Planning fees are an important source of income for the public sector but proposed rate increases are vulnerable to inflation and could be lost in real terms when introduced in 2024
- Public sector recruitment is difficult: only 8% of job postings for “Town Planning Officers” published between 2016 and 2021 were for public sector roles
- Key areas of planning performance are suffering: Less than half (49%) of planning applications were decided within statutory time limits in 2021 – continuing a downwards trend since 2010 – and 30% fewer enforcement notices were issued in 2018/19 than in 2008/09

This research therefore considers ways to create more resilient planning services and has analysed alternatives such as the French model of *Agences d'Urbanisme* or 'Urban Planning Agencies'. These multidisciplinary teams have clear mechanisms for accountability and support planning over wide areas by providing vital technical support and data. When compared to local planning authorities in England, our interviews suggest their work is held in high esteem, they are focused on strategic objectives, develop deep knowledge of their region and places and specialist expertise.

We also found promising early evidence that collaborative, shared service models could also be applicable in the UK, following the model used by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) which processes 6,000 applications a year.

In response to the challenges and opportunities facing public sector planning, this report makes a proposal for public sector improvement developed by the RTPI in consultation with our members. We recommend a role for locally based 'Planning Agencies'.

Planning Agencies are a voluntary, shared services model for local planning authorities in the UK that can be used to do more with less. We expect this additional support would help develop planning skills and professionals, respond effectively to leaders and the community's needs, develop expertise and local knowledge and underpin place-based action.

As a result, councils, planners and the communities they serve would be better able to respond to the 21st Century's greatest challenges because they would have new mechanisms to cooperate where single local planning authorities currently struggle to act alone.

1. Introduction

Local Authorities and more specifically Local Planning Authorities have faced increasingly tough times in recent years. With sustained cuts and the Covid-19 pandemic adding to the challenges of addressing the housing crisis, climate change and leading the 'Levelling Up' agenda, more and more is being asked of an already stressed planning system. Whilst the planning system holds the answer to some of the nation's most significant challenges, Local Planning Authorities are facing an uphill struggle deliver what they can. This not only has an effect on the planning system but upon the economy and the government's ambitions to 'Level Up' the UK.

Not only have Local Authority planning teams faced significant cuts but they are being asked to do more now than ever before. Whether it is the recent proposal of Biodiversity Net Gain or the continued pressure of the housing crisis, Local Authority planners are being stretched thinner and thinner, whilst their resources continue to be depleted.

Whilst investment in planning is needed it is becoming increasingly clear that investment alone can no longer solve the issue alone. Consequently, this paper will explore how we can make improvements to the planning system without investment. As outlined in a recent [50 Shades of Planning blog](#), planning authorities are facing a morale and resourcing crisis that is already having knock on effects on the organisations and the system as a whole. As a result of this, the changes proposed in this paper will look to combat these issues and help establish a public sector planning system, ready to face its challenges.

There are already examples of Local Authority planning teams having to take measures to protect their staff, with [Portsmouth City Council essentially being incommunicado](#) for the fortnight after Easter weekend in April 2022. Staff dealing with applications were no longer contactable for day-to-day matters and the planning service was not open for new customer enquiries. This measure was used in order to give staff time to catch up on a small portion of the backlog of applications whilst also protecting their wellbeing from burn out. This wasn't the first example of this happening and likely won't be the last, but it illustrates both the pressures that planning teams are under and the scale of change that is needed.

Sam Stafford's *50 Shades of Planning blog* highlighted the low morale and hostility towards planners and the planning system having a knock-on effect on staffing. Understandably, low morale in local planning authorities is making it increasingly hard to attract experienced planners and retain their services which is inevitably having an effect on their capacity to deliver the required services.

At the time of writing, *50 Shades of Planning* has received over 21 submissions of evidence, emphasising the challenges of staffing and building morale for local planning authorities. Many of the anecdotes highlighted how the resourcing crisis is inevitably having a knock-on effect and creating a backlog of applications within the planning system. These backlogs will and already are having an effect upon the housing crisis and the 'Levelling Up' agenda, two of the government's biggest priorities. Consequently, this is an issue that will have impacts beyond the planning system and the wider built environment.

Throughout the evidence assembled in *50 Shades of Planning*, it is clear that this is not a

problem that money alone can solve. The various accounts of working overtime, teams being stretched too thin and their vital work going unappreciated cements the understanding that this is as much a structural problem as it is one of funding. As a result of this, we need to rethink how planning authorities are structured, bringing a focus upon rebuilding morale and equipping regions with the experience and skills required to make a difference.

Throughout this paper, we will explore a new style and formation of local planning authorities which will resolve the issues that have already been raised. In particular, we will be looking at the French system of *agences d'urbanisme* or 'Urban Planning Agencies' (UPA) and the Shared Services model. Planning Agencies would pool together planning resources throughout the area, building well-resourced teams, that cover all facets of planning and equip regions with the appropriate planning teams to deliver upon their ambitions.

A properly equipped, resourced and funded regional planning agency, in the vein of the French 'Urban Planning Agency', would allow for the planning system to thrive, making significant contributions towards tackling the housing crisis, climate change and 'Levelling Up'. Our proposed system of Planning Agencies would allow for wider areas to pool together their planning expertise and resources, creating planning teams that would have the wide range of skills and resources necessary to drive the planning system forwards.

Throughout this report, we will explore the French model of 'Urban Planning Agencies' through case studies, interviews with key figures from 'Urban Planning Agencies' to better understand the model, the benefits it can bring and how we could make it work in England. Alongside this we will interview integral members of our own planning system, to better understand the challenges that they are facing and to explore how a model similar to the French system could benefit them.

The proposal of Planning Agencies in the style of *agences d'urbanisme* fits in neatly with the themes of devolution which were prominent throughout the recent Levelling Up white paper. Our proposal for Planning Agencies would continue to provide those that understand their communities best with the powers, authority and responsibility to deliver meaningful change to the region that they represent. If powers are to continue to be devolved and local authorities are given significant agency in tackling some of the nation's largest challenges then planners need to be provided with the appropriate structure and subsequent skills and resources to deliver upon these ambitions.

This report will build the case for England to adopt a sub-regional planning system modelled upon the French 'Urban Planning Agency' or the *agences d'urbanisme*, highlighting how this new structure of planning authorities can begin to solve some of the issues facing our current planning system.

2. The Needs Case

As outlined in the previous chapter, planning at the Local Authority level is facing significant challenges and the knock-on effects of significant and sustained underfunding. Whilst we have explored anecdotal evidence from our own members and *50 Shades of Planning*, it is also important to understand the scale of the challenge that Local Authority planning teams are facing. We will be reviewing the latest data on funding, resourcing and their effects on the performances of Local Authorities to both understand the scale of both the challenges as well as the scale of the change needed to help planning teams deliver upon the Levelling Up, housing requirements, net zero and the many other goals that they work towards.

2.1 Funding

Local Authorities have faced significant funding challenges over the last 12 years which have inevitably had knock on effects upon their planning teams at all levels.

We analysed the changes in total expenditure for every Local Authority planning team throughout England. Nationally, local authority net expenditure on planning fell by 43%, from £844m in 2009/10 to £480m in 2020/21, when adjusted to 2021 pounds. This amounts to just 0.45% of local government budgets allocated to planning services.

Figure 1 details these changes across England's regions. Whilst there are some significant outliers with individual councils increasing planning expenditure, the combined change in funding across all regions adds weight to concerns that have been expressed by planners, developers, the public and parliamentarians in recent years.

Perhaps the most alarming result is the significant downturn in spend on planning in the North East of England where combined Local Authority net spending on planning has fallen by 62%.

Other regions have faced similar, if less stark, declines including: Yorkshire and The Humber (49%), London (48%), West Midlands (47%) and North West (46%).

Figure 1 – Total Change in net Local Authority planning spending from 2009 to 2020

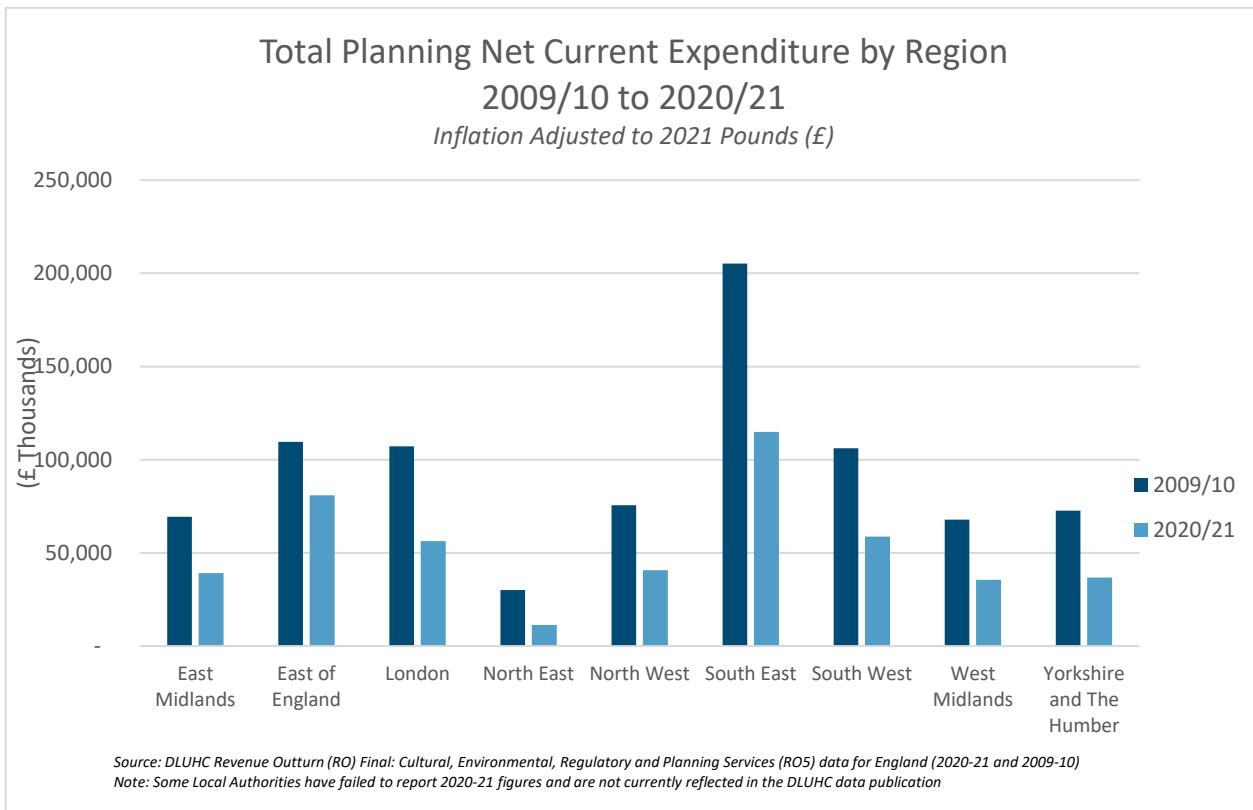
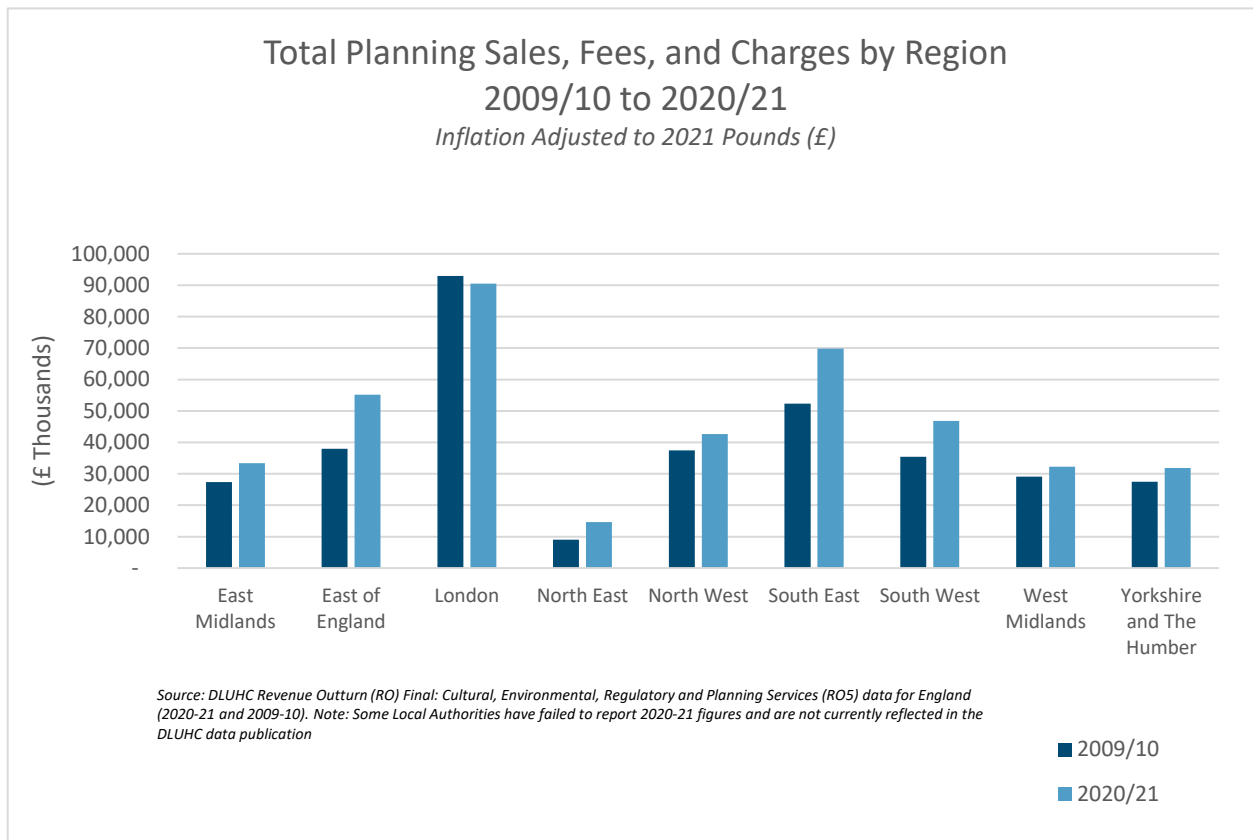


Figure 2 shows that planning fees, sales and charges have been a significant source of income for planning departments which have increased since 2009/10 in all regions outside of London. While these increases have not outweighed the sustained cuts to many planning departments over the period covered by this research, it is encouraging that government proposed to increase fees from 2024 by 35% on major and 25% on minor applications as part of its commitments to improve capacity in the local planning system.

Our analysis of their potential impact has emphasised that this increased income is vulnerable to inflation. For example, if – as the Office for National Statistics predict - annual inflation rates remain above 7%, real increases for “The erection of dwelling houses (other than development in category 6)” on minor applications would be lost.

Figure 2 – Total Planning Sales, Fees, and Charges by Region 2009/10 to 2020/21



These findings clearly show the challenges areas face when delivering regeneration and supporting key agendas like levelling up, mitigating and adapting to climate change and recovering from the economic impacts of covid. But they also demonstrate the origins of challenges facing public sector planning team’s recruitment and performance, beyond just their budgets.

2.2 Recruitment

Many planners and other built environment professionals have noted that councils and public sector planning departments are increasingly expected to be ambitious. This includes taking on a bigger and broader responsibilities including to drive local placemaking and regeneration, assessing and implementing biodiversity net gain, delivering housing numbers and preparing to accommodate new planning reforms. When considered alongside the added pressure of funding cuts, the desirability, job satisfaction and morale of planning teams is changing because professionals are expected to do more with less.

As outlined in the anecdotal evidence assembled by Sam Stafford, in his blog and podcast *50 Shades of Planning*, the retention of current staff and the recruitment of new staff within local authority planning teams is a pivotal issue in many parts of the country. Sam Stafford brought particular attention to the challenges in recruiting planners with 5-10 years’ experience, which is an issue that we will explore later on in this paper.

Overall, between 2016 and 2021, only 8% of job postings for “Town Planning Officers” were

within the public sector, 209 of 2,492 individual jobs listed online. Whilst this could be interpreted as a positive, with the public sector having less vacancies to fill, we know from qualitative data that local authority planning teams are having significant issues in filling their vacancies and equipping themselves with resilient and well-resourced teams.

This adds to a growing body of evidence that brings the sustainability of England's planning workforce into question.

The social enterprise [Public Practice ran a 2020 survey](#) finding that the average annual retention rate in planning departments in London and the wider South East was 77%. Alongside this research, [Planning Advisory Service \(PAS\) undertook a survey](#) of their members in 2019, in which councils suggested that staff churn is a more significant problem than failed recruitment. The survey also found that there was a significant regional variation in 'staff churn': East of England (29.1%), West Midlands (24.5%), North West (24%), South East England (23.3%), East Midlands (21.8%), London (17.2%), North East (15.6%), South West (15.2%), Yorkshire (6.2%).

The PAS survey also identified the significant challenges that failed recruitment places upon planning teams, with councils noting their particular concerns over the availability of enforcement, design and arboricultural skills in future. The survey detailed that in some regions, failed recruitment made up nearly 20% of posts recruited and that this was at its worst in 'Senior Planners'.

The Planner's Career Surveys in recent years have shown how the experience of planners employed in the public sector is also changing. These findings demonstrate some of the planner retention challenges facing councils. In [2018/19](#), half of public sector planners surveyed felt they are underpaid for their responsibility and 1 in 5 (22%) said they can no longer see a long-term future in the profession. By [2021-22](#) almost half (48%) of public sector planners said their employer does not give them enough career development opportunities, significantly more than private sector planners (20%). The latest careers survey also found that fewer public sector planners believed their team or department was valued in late 2021 (42%) than before Covid in 2019 (53%).

With Local Authorities facing these challenges in both recruiting and retaining planning staff, their performances are undoubtedly going to be affected.

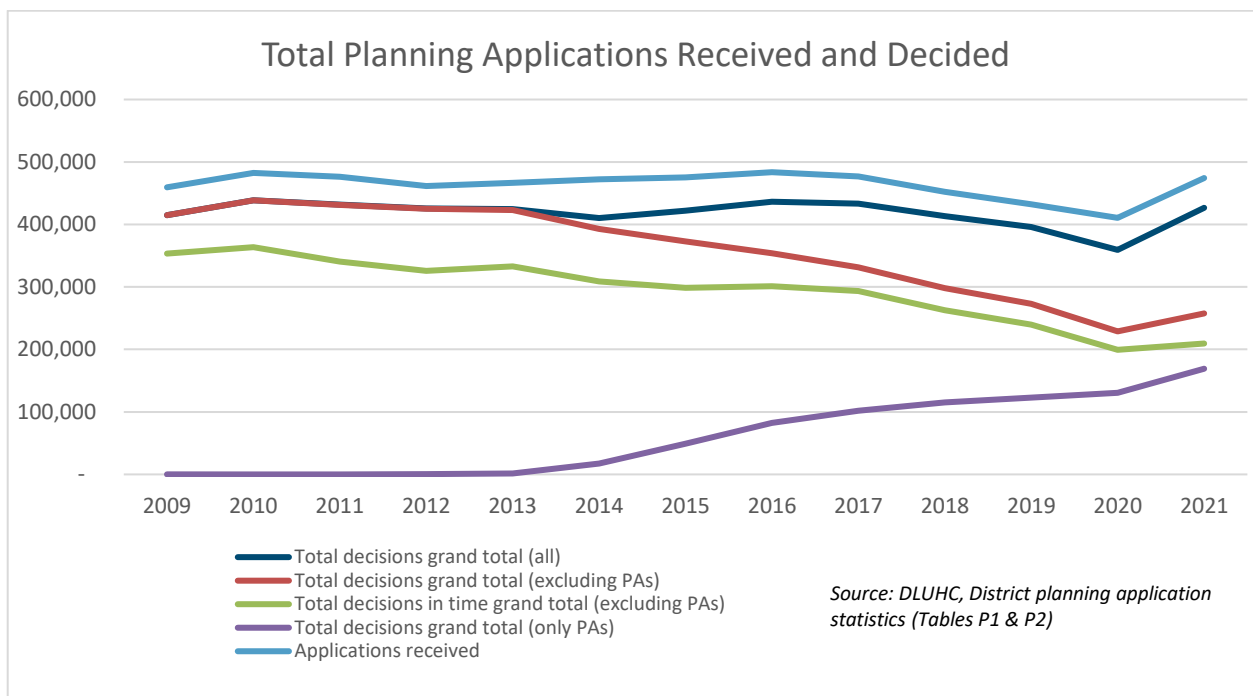
This is not a problem that can be resolved by money alone and instead we must look at issues of morale, career progression, mentoring and many other elements that can help improve public sector planning's recruitment and retention of staff.

2.3 Performance

The sustained cuts to funding for local planning authorities and the subsequent challenges in recruiting planning are likely to have had a significant effect on the performance of planning authorities throughout England. Planning authorities are being consistently asked to do more whilst their resources are depleted. With the role that planning has to play in solving the housing crisis, helping to drive the "infrastructure revolution" and help combat climate change, the issues of funding and resourcing can only hamper these causes.

Figure 3 below details the performance of planning authorities throughout England, by detailing the number of applications that they are receiving and the number of decisions that are made in the agreed timeframe between 2009 and 2021. It is clear from this graph that whilst the number of applications has stayed between 400,000 and 500,000 per year the number of decisions made in the agreed timescales have fallen. In 2009, approximately 85% (354,000 of the 415,000) decisions were made within statutory time limits and without performance agreements (PAs), however by 2021 this figure fell to 49% (209,000 of the 427,000). Whilst some of this could be put down to Covid, the trend over the last 12 years is worrying and highlights a downturn in the performances of local planning authorities.

Figure 3 – Changes Planning Applications received and decided (2009 – 2021)



Alongside these overall findings, DLUHC (formerly MHCLG) published [statistics](#) on enforcement action in 2019 which highlighted a 30% decline in enforcement notices between 2008/09 and 2018/19. Alongside the fall in enforcement notices, there was also consistent drops in the number of planning contravention notices, stop and temporary stop notices and breach of condition notices throughout the same period of time. These statistics once again highlight the effect that the sustained funding cuts have had on the performance of local planning authorities throughout England.

Alongside our own analysis, the Greater London Assembly undertook a [Placeshaping Capacity Survey](#) in 2020, detailed a number of key findings around the performance of the local authorities in London. Whilst the survey only focuses upon London, the issues identified are likely to be consistent throughout England. The survey found that teams were on average 19% smaller than in 2014, whilst the capacity that remained was spread unevenly across London. As a result of this they found that the sector was not equipped to implement the White Paper proposals or to respond effectively to climate change. Alongside these concerning findings, the survey detailed that 405 of authorities asked were concerned about their place shaping teams being able to overcome the post-pandemic economic recovery.

These figures are particularly damning, considering that London's local authorities have not faced the most severe spending cuts in recent years and consequently not only are these figures likely to be consistent throughout England but they are also likely to increase in other regions.

As has been highlighted throughout this chapter, these struggles of local planning authorities are not of their own making and are a direct result of years of underfunding and the knock-on effects of that. In a time where planning has such a central role to play in tackling the housing crisis, climate change and contributing towards both the Levelling Up agenda and the post-covid economic recovery, the findings from Figure 3 should cause concern. Local planning authorities are clearly not in a position to operate at the level expected of them with their current funding and resourcing challenges. The sustained downturn depicted in Figure 4 highlights a systemic issue that must be solved with new and innovative solutions

Importance of Planning Outcomes

In 2019, the RTPI's [Invest and Prosper](#) report put forward a case for investing in planning. Whilst we have already made clear that this report looks beyond necessary financial investment, the report did evidence how planning contributes to the wider society and economy and the cost of poor planning performance. The research found:

- Affordable housing delivered through planning obligations saved the NHS £240 million in 2019;
- Living in a well-planned neighbourhood can support up to 59% of NHS-recommended weekly activity;
- Urban greenspaces in Great Britain provide £16.5 billion in environmental, health and amenity value per year;
- Planning ensures good access to economic opportunities, with 73% of planning housing permissions in England located within 10km of a major employment cluster;
- Homes developed through planning permission are three times more likely to meet National Space Standards; and,
- Planning policies prevent excess air pollution, which costs the UK £9-19 billion each year.
- Providing sufficient affordable housing could save UK households over £5bn per year
- Strategic greenspace planning could deliver £78m per year in health value to the most deprived neighbourhoods
- Shifting just 10% of car trips under 5 miles to cycling could lead to 1,200 fewer road deaths per year
- Energy savings in climate-friendly developments could save 19 million tonnes of CO2 (£234m-£1.3bn) per year

2.4 Summary

When we view the funding, resourcing and performance challenges through one lens it is clear that something needs to change. The challenges that have been highlighted in our data are far more complex than simple financial issues. The years of funding cuts have had widespread effects on morale, resourcing and the perception of public sector planning amongst other issues. Therefore, it is worth exploring whether changes to how planning is delivered could help make a

difference.

Throughout the next two chapters, we will explore two different approaches to planning, both built around cooperative structures that create well-resourced and skilled teams and have widespread benefits for planners and the communities that they serve. Following that, we will detail our proposed idea of Planning Agencies, which will combine the ideas of the French model of *agences d'urbanisme* and the Shared Services model utilised by some local authorities in England to help solve the issues outlined in this chapter.

3.2 What does the French experience tell us?

Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme (FNAU)

The Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme (FNAU) advises that during the inception of UPAs there are a number of things to be considered. These bodies should be based on rural and urban planning dilemmas which result in the convergence of local authority's interests, and expose the need for a more collaborative approach to managing a geographical area. Moreover, institutional reform, such as the UK Levelling-Up White Paper, which calls for greater devolution, can create a favourable context for new modes of subregional governance.

Subsequently, feasibility studies help local decision makers identify shared challenges, which in turn supports decisions around geographical boundaries, governance structures, legal frameworks, missions and funding mechanisms. This should be followed by negotiations between key actors, and a period of setting up the agency where governing arrangements are put in place, the program of work is created, the agencies staff is hired and its systems are set up.

When establishing the agency FNAU recommends defining four crucial aspects of its organisation. Firstly, they emphasise the significance of its governance structure. In France, as we have seen, this permits the formal collaboration of local authorities through boards and general assemblies. This settlement must incorporate multi-actor management, be able to adapt to the introduction of new actors, and benefit from public financing. A weak administrative framework reduces UPAs' effectiveness as tools of collaboration.

Secondly, the FNAU stresses the importance of determining an agency's mission and resourcing it accordingly. French agencies are built on data collection and analysis capabilities as well as sector expertise and rely heavily on multidisciplinary teams to improve planning at a strategic level and provide vital technical support on large regional projects.

Thirdly, the agency's budget and economic model is instrumental to its success. These bodies must have stable and long-term funding which enable them to recruit teams of experts and support staff. Subsidies and grants must be given on a sustainable basis. In France, UPAs cost between €2 and €5 for each taxpayer within their geographical remit. As we have elaborated, French *agences d'urbanisme* general rely on a combination of fees paid by their local authority members and central government grants.

Finally, these organisations must establish a dialogue with civil society. One of their key roles is to inform public debates around local planning and development by disseminating knowledge through seminars, forums, conferences and workshops. It is vital that it does this in a way which shapes and supports common action.

It should be noted that *agences d'urbanisme* face a number of challenges. One is that they risk becoming technical centres of learning, so distanced from politics that they have very little real influence over planning. Conversely, they are susceptible to becoming an outsourced service, with their involvement in the daily management of planning inhibiting their ability to take a longer term view. Finally, they must avoid being weakened by political conflict and weaponised by elected officials.

“If its role is limited to the production of technical knowledge without taking into account the views and sensibilities of actors and civil society, the agency risks ignoring the priorities of those actors and finding itself presenting choices which conflict with the needs/desires of decision-makers and the population. It must find a balance between producing knowledge and influencing perceptions.” (Translated from FNAU Guide pour créer une agence d'urbanisme)

4. Interviews

To further our understanding of the French model, we interviewed five key figures within various *agences* to discuss their role, their structure and the benefits and challenges that this approach brings. Our five participants were:

- Pascale Poupinot (PP) is the Managing Director of Oise-les-Vallées and the President of the “Conseil français des urbanistes” (CFDU), a confederation of associations who represent the profession of planning.
- Denis Caniaux (DC) is the Managing Director of AUDAP.
- Thierry Baert (TB) is the Research Director at the Agence de Développement et d’Urbanisme de Lille Métropole.
- Brigitte Barriol-Mathais (BB) is the Managing Director of FNAU
- Denis Caraire (DCR) is the President of the Office Professionnel de Qualification des Urbanistes (OPQU)

The interviews were conducted mostly in French and the attributed quotes have been accurately translated.

4.1 What is the role of UPAs in the French planning system?

Data Production

Participants highlighted that UPAs add value to the French planning system by collecting and storing a wealth of data. PP describes how agency’s collect a range of regional data across socio-demographics, housing and land vacancy, economic activity, the environment and heritage among other things. The data revolution and technological change has recently made this part of their offering more valuable. DC explains how agencies have moved towards providing a service more geared towards data engineering as the quantity of, accessibility of and ability to store data increases. From his point of view, UPAs ability to remain relevant depends on their competency in this area.

Yet data production has always underpinned the *agences d’urbanisme* in France. These capabilities were built with the objective of showing “local elected officials what their region and local area is, and what activities are happening within it”(PP). DC concurs, emphasising the significance of local observations and explaining that the goals stipulated in the Code d’Urbanisme hinge “on a base of knowledge of the regions in which [UPAs] intervene”. The collection and dissemination of this knowledge is a crucial aspect of the agencies role within the system.

Strategic Planning

Yet the agencies purpose is not simply “to commission studies, wait for the results and answer

yes or no questions” (DC). They are also responsible for shaping public policy, in collaboration with elected officials, through their projects. Urban planning agencies’ staff don’t just provide technical support to their client local authorities, they also work together to devise regional strategy. This is formalised through the production of two major documents defined in the key terms section of this report (SCOT and PLU). PP explains how while SCOT determines the broader guidelines of planning and development, PLUs are essential for defining local planning policy. Thus, *agences d’urbanisme* are not limited to knowledge production, but also endeavour to influence planning and development strategy within the regions in which they are based.

Tools of Collaboration

Another vital characteristic of *agences d’urbanisme* is that they act as tools for collaboration - enabling local authorities to work together and helping to engage them with other stakeholders and networks of actors. Most significantly, they bolster the connection between their member local authorities. DC recounts how UPAs, created in 1967, were intended to “permit local authorities to acquire a shared engineering tool within the region”, as a predecessor to the devolution imposed by the Gaston Defferre Laws of 1981. They ensure dialogue between local authorities, facilitating a consistent approach to planning and development across the region. *Agences d’urbanisme* act “as a space where the member local authorities can meet, exchange and work together, outside of the exercises imposed by law” (DC). DC elaborates on how these organisations allow their clients to collaborate on mutual interests outside of formal planning documents, such as transport, health, and the reduction of real estate development. Developed on the initiative of local authorities, UPAs are a shared resource which help shape common action.

However, the relationship between an UPA and the authorities which it serves can be complex. In Lille, TB relates how there is a strong metropolitan government system. The agency’s major client, Metropole européenne de Lille (MEL), is already qualified to work in housing policy, economic development policy and land use planning among others. Thus, the agency’s role is limited to assisting MEL in acquiring new competencies as required by law, producing strategic planning documents, and commissioning studies which help define the city’s policies. This dynamic is “quite complicated and depends a lot on the open-mindedness of colleagues at MEL” (TB). The agency lacks autonomy, and its work is heavily dependent on the quality of local politicians. “You have to be quite close to the head of political power otherwise your work is ineffective”. Nonetheless, the agency and authority are ultimately two branches of the same government system, and the Chair of Lille’s agency is the Vice Chair of MEL which ensures a unity in the organisation’s leadership.

UPAs are also vital in assisting interactions with other actors. TB underscores the importance of the agency in enabling exchanges between stakeholders across the public, private, academic and voluntary sector. PP depicts how when local authorities lack resources, the agencies coordinate them with other players. For instance, during the pandemic the agency connected its member authorities to regional health agencies. In the effort to increase renewable energy production, Oise-les-Vallées engages with the relevant government departments, as well as energy suppliers in the region. It’s instrumental in mediating “public or private partnerships which provide skills which add value to local planning and development”. Additionally, it engages with private stakeholders such as local heritage associations, transport start-ups and major land

owners, who are key to the planning process. PP accepts that there are always difficulties of aligning priorities, but she argues that this is an essential part of planning, in particular balancing short and long term interests. Nonetheless, UPAs in France act as an engine of collaboration, benefitting the system as a whole through their ability to bring stakeholders together, and facilitate negotiations between them.

Climate change

Finally, the capabilities described above make UPAs key actors in addressing challenges of climate change. DC depicts how as questions of energy and pollution are not confined to administrative boundaries: UPAs' ability to increase communication between stakeholders both within and outside the region makes them vital in coordinating responses. PP explains that UPAs are well positioned to focus on sustainable development because "we work on the long-term and sustainable development cannot be understood without taking a long-term perspective". UPAs in France are vested in working on "protecting the environment; protecting green spaces and vegetation and promoting renewable energy" (DC) as well as using sustainable building materials resourced locally. "Agencies with the best future are those which use resources frugally to promote the wellbeing of their inhabitants and the quality of their environment" (DC). Thus, these bodies are uniquely placed to facilitate action to minimise the threat of global warming.

4.2 What makes UPAs attractive to planners?

The recruitment process

UPAs in France largely recruit from universities and young planners who wish to begin their careers in the field. DC explains how, at AUDAP, they recruit from a variety of schools, including landscaping and architecture. There is also a major drive to recruit data engineers who have backgrounds in applied mathematics, economics and statistics, reflecting the changing role of the agencies. In Lille, TB relates how that there are a lot of trainees from the universities, some of which are subsequently made permanent. More senior officers are recruited from both public and private sector organisations, including the chambers of commerce and agriculture, local authorities and national government.

Agences d'urbanisme are also susceptible to external factors. PP explains how Oise-les-Vallees, situated north of Paris, struggles to recruit people in comparison to the South of France. TB confirms this regional bias, as in Lille it is easier to hire people because the city itself is attractive. However, it is difficult to "attract people from other parts of France...people from the South of France usually don't want to come to the North". Thus, their ability to recruit staff is to some extent determined by agencies locations.

In terms of diversity, TB maintains that gender diversity is high on the agenda for agencies. These organisations generally have majority female staff, but management continues to be male dominated. In Lille, about two thirds of the staff are female; this diversity differs across departments with few women in data and no men in marketing. Regarding ethnic diversity, In Lille, the agency does not apply discrimination within its recruitment process but "we do not make any attempt to counteract discrimination processes which exist in society". There are no

quotas. Interestingly, TB contends that the large foreign population in Lille does actively desire affirmative action. AUDAP (located in the Southwest corner of France) recruits a lot of North African staff – but because of their skills as opposed to a conscious effort to increase diversity. Interestingly, BB argues that UPAs increase social inclusion through the research which they produce, seeking to engage disadvantaged groups in their consultations and improving accessibility to services and amenities. Nonetheless, while UPAs do not actively discriminate, there is also not a push to increase representation within their staff.

Benefits of working for UPAs

The UK public sector struggles to recruit planners, but French UPAs are attractive employers for a number of reasons. Firstly, DC reports that, while less well paid than private consultancies, agencies are appealing because they are highly-esteemed and well-recognised nationally. This is a consequence of their long history, and the fact that they exist across all regions of the country.

Secondly, client relationships at consultancies differ from those experienced by agency staff. DC recounts how “we are not in a command relationship...but one of collaboration of the program of work” (DC). DCR also emphasises that UPAs strike a good balance; avoiding the rigidity experienced by staff within local authorities yet being less focussed on the bottom line than private consultancies. BB agrees that UPAs sit nicely between other employment routes available to planners as they are “very close to politics because we work for the local authorities, but at the same time we have a bit of distance which permits more independence”. The partnership relationship between the agencies and the local authorities who they work for is a clear draw for planners.

Thirdly, many participants of this study highlighted the benefits of the working in one area for a long time, arguing that in UPAs “relationships are much more constructive and based on a geographical area” (DC). BB argues that the continuity of working on one specific location increases regional memory, and allows staff to build relationships with other stakeholders improving opportunities for concerted action. DCR asserts that this long-termism is a distinctive characteristic of *agences d’urbanisme* because “at the same time as having strong technical capabilities...their stability within time and territory means that they are able to view things with a deeper perspective” (DCR).

Fourthly, UPAs give staff the opportunity to work with other specialists on planning strategy. PP asserts that it is the relationship between specialist areas such as transport and the environment, which allows the agencies “to propose the best solutions to local officials”. Exchanges between these different specialist areas enable agencies to take into consideration a variety of different factors such as economics, biodiversity and housing, when working on strategic planning documents. Thus, “there is a way of working which is extremely decompartmentalised” (DC), and allows the staff to work across teams and across disciplines. “Staff are agile, passing from one subject to another, all the while enriching their specialisms through contact with other relevant topics” (DC). This kind of exposure is unique to the agencies.

5. Shared Services

Our previous work at the RTPI has outlined the siloed approach that the English planning system is currently undertaking. Both our [Green Growth Boards](#) report in 2021 and our [Strategic Planning](#) report in 2015 highlight the challenges of the siloed approach which in turn exacerbates the issues of inadequate funding, resourcing and skills. Despite this, there are examples and templates of cross border cooperation throughout England and the benefits that can come from pooling together resources and skills to benefit a larger area. In particular, the shared services model offers an example to understand both the benefits and challenges that can arise from pooling together resources across local authority boundaries.

The existing examples of shared services took steps to pool together their resources following sustained cuts to their funding, highlighting the benefits in cost saving and self-sufficiency whilst delivering a high-quality service to all. Throughout our conversation with various people within the industry, we were also made aware of a number of informal shared service models which involve the sharing of specialist resources, however we will be focusing upon the more formal structures detailed in this chapter.

The shared services model can provide local authorities with the opportunity to combine their resources, helping to establish more robust services that can also benefit from economies of scale and greater efficiencies if done effectively. Whilst the idea of sharing services across council boundaries does raise many other questions, there are clear benefits to doing so. Throughout this chapter we will explore some of the examples of shared services to better understand the opportunities and challenges. By reviewing the existing examples of cross boundary cooperation between local authorities we can also begin to understand how our proposed model of Planning Agencies could work in England.

5.1 Greater Cambridge Shared Planning

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) service is a shared planning service for both South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council which was formed in 2018. The shared service team processes over 6,000 planning applications every year and is comprised of over 143 staff across the following teams:

- Policy, Strategy and Economy
- Delivery
- Built and Natural Environment
- Business Operations

The shared service is overlooked by the Joint Director of Planning and Development, Stephen Kelly, with each of the previously outlined teams having their own director or manager. Alongside the GCSP's comprehensive volume of work and well-rounded team, they have adopted their own Statement of Community Involvement. The statement helps to ensure that communities are engaged from the earliest possible stage of planning applications, allowing local people to influence projects and ensure that they deliver the benefits that they need.

Within the GCSP they have developed plans for both the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and the North East Cambridge Action Plan alongside four adopted neighborhood plans and sixteen designated neighbourhood areas. The shared resources of both South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council have created a well-resourced planning team, which can help deliver for its local communities at all levels.

Not only has the pooling together of resources allowed for the GCSP to process over 6,000 planning applications every year, but it has also been able to undertake work including the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel and the Greater Cambridge Design and Construction Awards. Both the panel and the awards help to promote planning throughout Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, better positioning the sector in the public consciousness. Not only does the shared service help to promote the sector, but the awards help to celebrate the very best of planning, from sustainability to building healthier and happier communities.

The GCSP highlighted the direct benefits that can arise from pooling together the resources of just two councils and aligning their efforts in planning. Of the 30 busiest planning authorities in the UK, the average number of planning professionals is 68 and they process on average 6768 planning applications every year. If the GCSP were included in this list it would be the 13th largest planning authority, whilst processing over the average amount of planning applications amongst the 30 busiest and biggest planning authorities.

The establishment of the GCSP has created a better resourced, skilled and resilient local planning authority that has been able to drive the area forwards, developing interlinked local and neighbourhood plans that help to deliver a vision for the area. The GCSP has been able to provide real value to the communities of South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City, helping to align the opportunities of the area and benefit from the economies of scale and efficiencies that arise from such cooperative work.

5.2 East Suffolk Business Plan and Strategic Plan

Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils have had a history of working together, first appointing a shared Chief Executive in 2008 and publishing their first joint Business Plans in 2012. In 2015 they published the East Suffolk Business Plan (2015-2023) followed by the East Suffolk Strategic Plan (2020-2024). The Business Plan, covered all areas of services that the councils offer, from planning and infrastructure to welfare and education. The East Suffolk Strategic Plan was built around five clear deliverables:

- Enabling Communities
- Economic Growth
- Financial Self-Sufficiency
- Delivering Digital Transformation
- Caring for our Environment

The East Suffolk Strategic Plan provides less detail than the Business Plan, however they share their deliverables and vision for their communities and how their cooperative efforts can help deliver a prosperous future. Planning in particular features in one of the ten 'critical success

factors', with particular focus being placed upon the role that planning can play in a "well managed development of sustainable, thriving communities, with the quality facilities and services needed for a growing economy, whilst preserving the historic and natural environment.

Whilst the East Suffolk Business Plan is understandably not as focused upon planning as the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning service, there is still a clear understanding of both the role that planning can play and the benefits that can come from combining resources and aligning priorities. Through their continued work together, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils have been able to bring together their resources and tackle the issues that face their communities through a cooperative and efficient approach.

Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils produce an annual report to highlight the progress made towards their five deliverables that were outlined above. The pooling together of resources and the aligning of priorities has had a clear effect on the region, with targets being met or exceeded in all of their economic growth KPIs and over half of their financial self-sufficiency KPIs.

The sustained efforts of both Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils to work together and create a more cooperative and robust approach to the services that they offer has resulted in a joint approach to services that can tackle the challenges that its faced with effectively and efficiently.

5.3 Summary

These examples of councils creating a share service around planning and other services highlights both the benefits that can come from a more cooperative approach to planning as well as a blueprint of how this can be done. Whilst our proposal of Planning Agencies would seek to combine more than two councils, the examples of both the GCSP and the East Suffolk Business Plan and Strategic Plan detail the opportunities for cooperative planning. The increased resourcing, resiliency and spread of skills that can be established by bringing together planning teams must be understood as one of the most significant benefits of cross border cooperation.

6. Planning Agencies

The qualitative and quantitative evidence analysed in this report demonstrates both an undeniable fall in funding for planning and which has had subsequent effects on both resourcing and the capacity of planning authorities throughout England. There can be no doubt that the damages to both funding and resourcing have had a detrimental impact on planners, the public, and the built environment in which we live. It is clear that something needs to change in order for local planning authorities to deliver upon their various challenges, including Levelling Up, Net Zero and meeting the country's housing needs.

Through our analysis of the French model of *Agences D'Urbanisme* as well as the existing shared services model utilised within England, we believe that the key to addressing the resourcing challenges that Local Authorities face can be found in a cooperative approach to delivery. By taking the best parts of both the shared services model and *Agence D'Urbanisme* we would like to propose a solution in the shape of Planning Agencies.

A Planning Agency is a voluntary shared services model for local planning authorities to bring to their planning teams together, pooling resources, offering multidisciplinary support and developing expertise and capacity at a sub-regional level.

Whilst we will explore the idea further throughout this chapter and explain the finer details, we believe that Planning Agencies would be able to gain the benefits of greater resourcing, skills and subsequent efficiency that we have seen in the shared services model. A Planning Agency could also create a more visible and attractive employer, especially for young planners, with the greater mentoring, career progression and networking opportunities that we found in the *Agence D'Urbanisme*.

6.1 Accountability

It is important to stress that each Planning Agency would look different and that as a result of this we would not prescribe any one structure for them to follow. Instead, they would be established around the idea of pooling together resources to help benefit planners and the communities they serve with a more efficient and resilient planning system. Alongside the issue of structure, it is also must be clear that neither councillors nor the Chief Executives of local authorities would lose any powers in establishing a Planning Agency. Instead there would be a relationship between the local authority and the Planning Agency which was more akin to a consultancy.

Similarly to the French model, oversight could be given through a board which would be set up in such a manner as to ensure fair representation of member local authorities as well as allowing other key stakeholders to have a voice. Local authorities could also use an executive committee to monitor the agency closely. This framework should give some flexibility so that new actors can join and the agency's oversight can adapt. It is important to stress that the establishment of a Planning Agency would be voluntary, like shared services.

The agencies could have responsibility for all the standard planning services including enforcement, development management and policy, as well as having multidisciplinary teams

with experts in transport, ecology, the environment and data management. Each Planning Agency would likely be different depending upon the challenges, opportunities and priorities of the area.

The concept of Planning Agencies is of course not appropriate for every planning authority across England. For example, areas where there are already strong metropolitan planning authorities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham or Bristol, would likely not benefit from the pooling of resources given their already strong resource bases. However, we believe that Planning Agencies would be advantageous in regions suffering from sustained underfunding and a lack of collaboration, where 4 or 5 local planning authorities within the same region could benefit from joining forces. Regions that include both small local authorities and smaller cities such as Derby, Leicester and Sunderland could also find this style of model appropriate.

Our research in Chapter 2, highlighted the significant falls in expenditure throughout England, however they were most severe in the North East, North West and West Midlands. These findings highlight the role that Planning Agencies could play in the Levelling Up agenda, ensuring that these underfunded areas can pool together their resources and benefit from economies of scale and appropriately resourced and skilled teams. Consequently, for areas that have struggled with underfunding and the subsequent effects of that, Planning Agencies offer an opportunity to establish effective and efficient planning teams that can help create healthy and prosperous communities.

6.2 Benefits

Throughout our research it has been clear that the design and culture of planning services must also be considered alongside the proper resourcing of them. We conducted interviews and workshops with figures in the industry to understand how a Planning Agency could impact both planning and the wider economy. These benefits have been separated into themes to better illustrate the positive effects that a Planning Agency can have for both the planning sector and the communities that they support.

Developing planning skills and professionals

The recruitment and retention challenges explored in this report highlight the workforce challenges facing public sector planning services. As significant employers for the profession, we understand local authority leaders will be seeking opportunities to make planning departments more resilient and offer a greater variety of skills and specialisms. This should include Planning Agencies to help build recognition and opportunities for development for planners from the start of their careers.

As we have seen, French planning agencies are both well-known and well-respected employers, with strong teams and a variety of avenues for prospective employees to work in. We therefore expect that Planning Agencies would **be prestigious**, with a clear purpose, mission and record of improving the lives of the residents they serve. Increasing this recognition of planning is important to morale, but also to recruitment because this would help to making public sector planning teams **attractive employers for especially younger talent**.

By operating across a larger geography, Planning Agencies would also be able to **reach a wider pool of talent for their recruitment**. They could, for example, be based in geographical locations which are the most accessible and popular places to live for the demographics they aim to attract. Alternatively, the advent of hybrid homeworking and flexible working could help planning teams to reduce some of the barriers they have previously faced when recruiting and improving the diversity of staff.

It is commonly accepted that the easiest route for career progression in Local Authority planning is for a planner to leave their current employer and move to another Local Authority in a higher role. This undoubtedly contributes towards issues of resourcing and recruitment whilst both Local Authorities are likely to incur costs in the recruitment process. By operating across at a bigger scale, Planning Agencies would also be able to **facilitate career growth and offer a more linear progression**, removing the need for planners to jump between neighbouring councils in order to progress build their career.

During our discussions with industry leaders, they highlighted the importance of working in and around **multidisciplinary teams** to help young planners especially, bringing them into closer contact with the different functions of a planning department and offering them more experience and skills by working across the many different functions of a planning department. This also means that traditionally **less visible planning disciplines of planning would benefit** from being under a larger umbrella.

By operating in larger teams and working in closer collaboration with other planning disciplines, Planning Agencies would also **offer opportunities for mentoring and professional development** that are critical to retaining staff. Through mentoring, more senior planners can pass on knowledge and coach less experienced planners. Not only would this help build relationships throughout Planning Agencies but it would also help create a more enriching development process for young planners that would benefit them throughout their careers.

As a result, Planning Agencies would help to create a well-rounded planner who has had the opportunity to work in and with a wide variety of teams. This would help to create a resilient, well skilled and well-resourced planning team that can help tackle the challenges of today and the future.

Developing expertise and local knowledge

We expect that Planning Agencies would offer their communities access to a wider range of better honed **technical and specialist knowledge**. For instance, whilst one local authority may not have the need and/or capacity to employ an ecologist full time, four or five local authorities accessing a shared Planning Agency would be better able to utilise those skills.

Another major advantage of Planning Agencies is their **emphasis on research and data analysis**. The value of data to Local Authorities cannot be understated, with the assessment industry alone being providing significant economic value and in 2019, environmental consultancy was found to be worth [£1.5bn per year](#) in the UK.

If this data and the models used were to be owned and operated in the public sector, it could

create large savings within the built environment sector whilst also helping to shape positively shape communities for the future. Similar to the French model, Planning Agencies could have **teams dedicated to digital planning and data science** which would help to modernise and futureproof local planning.

As data becomes increasingly vital, employing data analysts and compiling complete and reliable databases which improve geographical memory should help to bring efficacy to the planning system. **Research on diverse topics including demographics, housing data, economics and the environment will support policymaking** and assist local authorities in anticipating the needs of their citizens. As a result of the enhanced research and data capabilities of Planning Agencies, there will be a far stronger and evidence base which will in turn help to improve decision making at both a strategic and practical level.

The Government's [Geospatial Commission](#) has championed the value of location-specific data and in a recent report suggested its "value is often realised only when local data is combined with other datasets". A network of **Planning Agencies across England would offer a practical framework to unlock the significant economic, social and environmental value of data**, using it to understand and develop solutions to local challenges through planning.

Responding effectively to local leaders and the community's needs

Communities depend on critical infrastructure (e.g. hospitals, roads, energy and waste) and natural assets (incl water, soil and air) that typically impact wider areas than a single local authority.

Planning Agencies operating across a broader geography, would be **more effective tools for local leaders and communities, offering new levers to deliver infrastructure and public services, protect their environmental assets and mitigate threats** like flooding and pollution which can fundamentally disrupt residents lives.

Every community is different and because Planning Agencies are an entirely voluntary model, it is important that they **have the right governance and mechanisms for accountability** to interact appropriately with local authorities, public bodies and other agencies. The principle of pooling resources is a simple one that can help councils to deliver efficient and effective planning services. Local authorities could arrange oversight of Planning Agencies using mechanisms like management boards, executive committees or others that are already well understood and well used in their area.

Planning Agencies can also help to **facilitate a more collaborative approach** to key strategic issues. The RTPI has consistently championed cooperative approaches to tackling key challenges within wider areas and this proposal joins others we've proposed including [Green Growth Boards](#) and [Local Environment Improvement Plans](#). Agencies will be able ensure unified planning and development across a region and allow member local authorities to collaborate more easily on mutual interests and planning projects which cross administrative boundaries. This collaboration could extend beyond planning in the future and boost regional cooperation in line with both the devolution and Levelling Up agendas.

Chief Planning Officers could also play an important role ensuring that Planning Agencies are

outcomes-focused by managing the service's relationship with local authorities. In 2019, the RTPI published a report highlighting the benefits of installing Chief Planning Officers within local authority planning, particularly highlighting their value in contributing planning expertise when key corporate and strategic decisions are made in local authorities. We found that only 23% of local authorities surveyed in the UK and Ireland had a head of planning that reported directly to the Chief Executive.

The paper also suggested that Chief Planning Officers could help with another benefit of the Planning Agency model: **engaging with residents, businesses and community groups** to build resilient, long-term relationships that help to shape development to meet the needs and interests of locals.

For example, Planning Agencies would also provide a better forum for stakeholders such as local heritage associations, transport start-ups and energy companies to engage with planning services within a region. Through the establishment of a Planning Agency, both local and national stakeholder would be better positioned to improve collaboration, working together to ensure a more coherent and inclusive approach to regional development.

Underpinning place-based action

Given the above capabilities, **Planning Agencies would be instrumental in addressing key societal challenges** like reversing inequality, tackling climate change and improving productivity.

Their cooperative approach to local planning would share the burdens facing single local planning authorities and help them to **deliver more ambitious interventions at a bigger scale to have a bigger impact**. As more and more is being asked of public sector planning to contribute towards decarbonising the built environment, the depth of resourcing and skills that Planning Agencies offer would be integral to sustainable development at both a regional and national level.

Sustainable development is long-term processes that requires long-term vision, resilience and trust that Planning Agencies would be able to provide, giving developers greater certainty and communities reassurance that changes to their area are made with their best interests at heart.

Not only would the establishment of Planning Agencies help to improve the capacity and resiliency of public sector planning, they would help **to maximise and share resources for planning services more equitably** within the areas they operate.

The use of multidisciplinary teams who consider a wide range of factors would also enable Planning Agencies to take a **holistic approach: to find solutions and deliver benefits across portfolios like health, transport, energy and economic development**, far broader than just neighbourhood services.

7. Young Planners

Whilst the introduction of Planning Agencies would benefit local authority planners at all levels, our qualitative and quantitative research identified that young planners in particular were being negatively affected by the funding and resourcing challenges. More specifically, evidence from Sam Stafford's *50 Shades of Planning* blog highlighted planners with 5-10 years experience were some of the hardest to recruit for local planning teams. Alongside this, there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence from *50 Shades of Planning*, highlighting how young planners were often brought into already stretched planning teams, meaning that they were immediately in a pressurised situation in under resourced and under skilled teams. This likely led to many young planners having to learn on the job at great pace and without sufficient mentoring.

Whilst these anecdotes are of individual experiences, they likely depict part of a larger picture that is driving young planners towards private sector work rather than taking up roles in local authority planning teams. Whilst the public sector roles may not be able to financially compete with private sector roles, it is vital that local authorities offer an attractive proposition to graduate and young planners. As outlined in the previous chapter, we believe that a Planning Agency helps to create a more appealing employer by improving the resources, creating an enriching environment with multidisciplinary teams and offering greater mentoring and networking opportunities.

As a result of this, we interviewed 4 young planners to better understand their views on working in a local planning authority now and whether or not the changes that a Planning Agency would help to improve the attractiveness of public sector planning. We interviewed a mix of planners that worked in the public and private sector in order to understand what would keep public sector planners in the space as well as what would make those working in the private sector consider a career in a Planning Agency. All participants have been anonymised in order for them to provide their honest views on their current and future careers.

7.1 The Interviews

Across our interviews it was clear that for both the internal and external perspective that local planning authorities are in real need of help. Our interviewees that worked in local authorities provided anecdotes of the resourcing issues that they face in their day-to-day jobs and the effects that these have on their workloads and morale. The private sector planners that we interviewed provided further evidence of the effects of the resourcing challenges and their knock-on effects on private development projects.

Career Progression

One of the biggest challenges highlighted by the public sector workers that we interviewed was the issues of career progression within local authorities. One of our interviewees had said that they had to move around local authorities in order to achieve the career progression that would come more naturally in the private sector. They believed that "the progression side of things doesn't come as natural" to the public sector and that they would have to "wait for someone to

leave... before you can sort of move up into a new role". This issue of a lack of clear career progression in the public sector often leads to planners having to move around local authorities which contributes towards the churn of staff and issue of vacancies highlighted in the data analysis in the second chapter.

There was support amongst throughout our workshop participants for the potential for Planning Agencies to improve career progression. As outlined in the previous chapter, by establishing a Planning Agency and pooling the resources together of a number of local authorities, Planning Agencies would create a more vertical organisation which consequently has clearer and more structured career progression. As a result of this planners wouldn't need to move around organisations to have a natural career progression and consequently this should reduce both the churn of staff and the pressure on resourcing.

Leadership

Our public sector interviewees highlighted the potential benefits that could come from working under the leadership of a Planning Agency, which would provide a greater sense of direction and support within their roles. The role for those in leadership positions within a Planning Agency would be to provide a long term vision for local planning, managing the relationship between the Planning Agency and the local authorities that it works with to ensure that everyone's needs are met and that local authority planning can deliver benefits for all.

Networking

One of our private sector planners taking part in the workshop stated that one of the reasons that they would rather work in the private sector was because of the networking opportunities that it provides. They went on to say that their perception of the public sector was that it didn't offer the variety in work and the networking opportunities that were offered in the private sector.

Throughout our research of the French model of *Les agences d'urbanisme*, networking was placed at the heart of the approach to public sector planning. Whether it was within a region or between other regions, the collaboration was promoted throughout. As a result of this Planning Agencies were designed to promote networking, ensuring that knowledge sharing between local authorities and Planning Agencies could be engrained within the structure.

By promoting and building in networking channels, Planning Agencies can begin to improve morale amongst public sector planners whilst also positioning a career in public sector planning as a more attractive prospect for both young planners and private sector planners.

7.2 Summary

Throughout our conversations with our young planner workshop attendees there was a clear understanding from both those within local authority planning and those from outside that change was needed. The challenges that were identified by our workshop participants were similar to those that we had identified within our primary and secondary research and those that we had tailored Planning Agencies to solve. The core issues of resourcing, political influence,

networking and career progression were raised throughout the conversations and Planning Agencies were identified as a potential solution to these challenges.

Whilst Planning Agencies would deliver these benefits to all planners, the importance of creating a system in which young planners can thrive cannot be understated. If we are to have a planning system that can respond to the challenges of the present and the future then we must ensure that public sector planning is a viable and attractive career prospect for the brightest and best young planners throughout England. Consequently, the impact of Planning Agencies upon young planners must be given extra importance and the benefits of creating a cooperative, resilient and multidisciplinary body of public sector planners must be a priority.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

As has been highlighted throughout this paper and our previous work, planning has a critical role to play in delivering upon some of the biggest challenges that our society faces. Whether it is combatting climate change, responding to the housing crisis, delivering the Levelling Up agenda or leading the post-covid economic recovery, planning is integral to delivering a sustainable and prosperous future. Public sector planning in particular has a vital role to play in our future, helping to build green, healthy and successful communities for all. Despite this, the importance of public sector planning, local planning authorities have faced sustained cuts over the last decade which have created systemic challenges for them, ranging from recruitment and resourcing challenges to skills shortages and morale and performance issues.

Across our research, it is clear that a change is needed to help local planning authorities play a central role in shaping our future. Our proprietary research and data analysis in Chapter 2 highlighted both the scale of the challenge and the need to approach these issues with a new solution. These challenges that face planning, and in particular public sector planning, cannot be solved with yesterday's thinking, instead we need to create new solutions to these challenges.

Throughout this paper we have assembled both case studies of best practice as well as new approaches to the challenges that public sector planning is facing. Through this work we have identified key recommendations for stakeholders at all levels to help strengthen local authority planning teams and contribute towards an efficient and effective planning system. Specifically, we make the following recommendations:

- **Councillors, Chief Executives and Elected Mayors** should review the challenges facing local planning authorities and how well equipped they are to meet them. Following this they should consider whether the collaborative approaches to planning detailed through this paper could help them strengthen their planning teams and deliver for their communities.
- **Planning Teams and Planners** can embrace and promote the core principles of cooperative and collaborative planning. We know many already do. This could be as simple as sharing good practice, engaging in mentoring, or contributing to the RTPI's [mapping of planning coordination](#) across the UK.
- **Government** should understand both the importance of public sector planning and take more action to support the significant benefits it delivers across the economy and society. More effective and efficient planning can help to save both time and money whilst also helping to create greener, healthier and more prosperous communities. Alongside this reframing of public sector planning, the government can act as an enabler for Planning Agencies and other forms of collaborative planning.

These recommendations and this paper as a whole highlight the importance of public sector planning and the struggles that it is current facing alongside the benefits that can be brought by adopting a cooperative approach. Whilst funding is a critical element of planning, and a priority for the RTPI, we have identified how alternative approaches to public sector planning can begin to deliver significant benefits for planners, planning teams and the system as a whole.

Appendices

Key terms:

Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale (SCOT) – intercommunal planning document which is written taking the approach of sustainable development

Plan Locale D’Urbanisme – determines the development plan for the commune and the general planning rules for the locality, including planning zones.

Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL) – Intercommunal structure which encompasses 95 municipalities and more than a million inhabitants. It is composed of a network of cities and villages centred around Lille.

Département du Nord – France’s most populous department containing over 2 million people and including Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing and Dunkerque.

Region Hauts-de-France – Northernmost region of France, created in 2016 by the merger of Nord–Pas-de-Calais and Picardy which encompasses more than 6 million people. It’s capital is Lille and it’s bounded by Belgium to the North, Normandy to the west, Île-de-France to the south, and Grand Est to the east.

Syndicat Mixte – Structure of intercommunal cooperation, created by law in 1935, which allows local authorities to associate with each other and with other public bodies.

Établissement Public Foncier Hauts De France (EPF) – Created in 1990 to reconvert industrial sites which have been left vacant.

The French National Institute for Industrial Environment and Risks (Ineris) – a public body set up in 1990 in order to conduct research programs with the aim of minimising risks caused by economic activity to health, safety and the environment.

Chambres – chambers of commerce and industry in France are powerful public-law bodies; it is compulsory for business owners to register with them and pay fees, and they offer training among other benefits.

La Loi Climat et Resilience – in 2021 France passed a wide-ranging climate law with the aim of reducing carbon emissions, which has implications for transport, housing and zoning among other things.

Code D’Urbanisme – the code in French law which contains the rules and regulations which govern planning.

Key websites:

Agence de Developpement et d’Urbanisme de Lille Métropole” (ADULM) - <https://www.adu-lille-metropole.org/>

Département du Nord - https://lenord.fr/jcms/j_6/accueil

MEL - <https://www.lillemetropole.fr/>

Region Hauts-de-France - <https://www.hautsdefrance.fr/>

Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Grand Lille - <https://hautsdefrance.cci.fr/cci-grand-lille/>

Fédération Nationale des Agences d'Urbanisme (FNAU) - <https://www.fnau.org/en/homepage/>

Oise-les-Vallées - <https://oiselavallee.org/?p=6427>

Agence d'Urbanisme Atlantique & Pyrénées (AUDAP) - <https://www.audap.org/?Accueil>

Agence de Développement et d'Urbanisme de Lille Métropole

Purpose

Established in 1990, the “Agence de Développement et d'Urbanisme de Lille Métropole” (ADULM) is responsible for a large and populous area centred around the city of Lille and including the cities of Tourcoing, Roubaix and Villeneuve d'Ascq.

The agency acts as a centre of expertise and learning, producing research and analysis across various domains of planning. It's multidisciplinary team of 48 people includes architects, planners, cartographers, statisticians, sociologists and economists; making it well-equipped to guide local authorities and stakeholders at both a technical and strategic level. It monitors and evaluates policies and is crucial in allowing local officials to make well evidenced choices. Additionally it facilitates networking across public, private and civil society actors.

Governance and Organisation:

The agency is governed by a board, a general assembly and a committee. These are composed of both official and associate members. Official membership is held by various branches of French government including MEL, the “Région Hauts-de-France”, the “Département du Nord”, the state, the “Syndicat mixte du Scot de Lille Métropole” and the “Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Grand Lille”. Associate membership, obtained by agreement of the board, is open to: public bodies or associations of communes; villages with over 10,000 inhabitants; other entities relevant to the agency's goals and compliant with its regulations. The president is elected by the board and responsible for regional development and urban strategy. He is currently also the Vice President of MEL, President of the Syndicat Mixte of SCOT, and Mayor of Hem.

The general assembly meets once a year and is composed of representatives from all official members. It also includes delegates from: each associate village of more than 10,000 (Lille, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Seclin, Armentières, Tourcoing); intercommunal partnerships outside of the metropolitan authority; the “Chambre d'Agriculture du Nord” (Northern Chamber of Agriculture); EPF; other public or private entities designated by agreement.

The board meets at least twice a year and is similarly composed of representatives from all

official members, as well as from associations of communes outside MEL, the “Chambre d’Agriculture du Nord”, EPF and other entities. The board elects from among its members a committee constituted by a president and two vice presidents chosen by MEL, one vice president chosen by the state and the region each, a president chosen by the “Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie Grand Lille”, a vice president chosen by associate members, a secretary and a treasurer. It meets as often as necessary to direct the agency.

The agency’s executive team contains a director general, director delegate and assistant director who take responsible for its management. Beneath this it is organised into 7 complementary teams: general administration; strategic planning; data collection and analysis; urban projects; development and cooperation; cartography, geometry and statistics; and communications, publications and documentation.

Figure 6 - Agence de Developpement et d’Urbanisme de Lille Métropole Structure



Source: RTPI, 2022

Current Work:

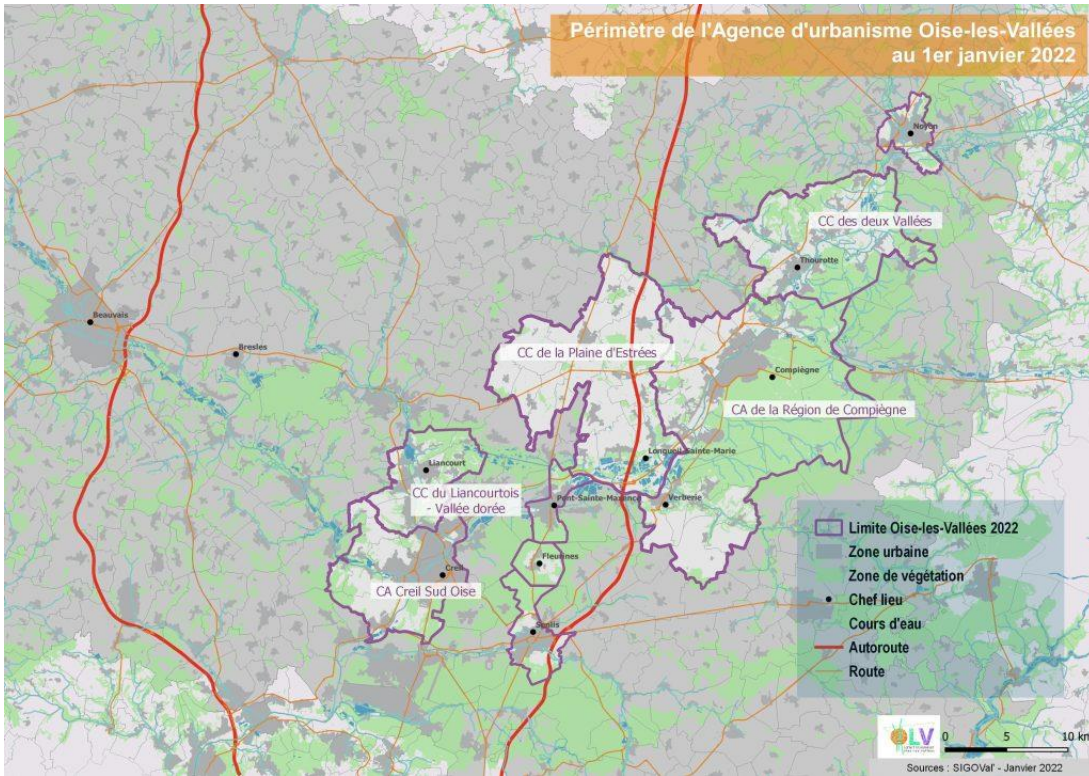
The agency’s current program of work has been developed in response to major structural changes caused by the pandemic, climate change and societal shifts. Consequently, the agency has decided to adopt a new strategy which aims to adapt to these transformations through 9

ambitions which are set out in detail below.

1. It contributes to sustainable development through planning and innovation. It is responsible for the coordination and evaluation of SCOT, developing planning tools, and supporting regional projects.
2. The agency supports stakeholders who play a role in urban life by coordinating networks of actors and assisting with strategy across the relevant domains of planning. Among other things this includes collecting and developing data on land, real estate and the housing market which can be used by partners.
3. It promotes the wellbeing of inhabitants by bringing together experts on sociology, ecology, health and mobility to create methods to improve the quality of life. ADULM collects data on developing neighbourhoods and planning for poverty, supporting the development of housing for both the elderly and students, studying transport and accessibility in the region, and mapping green spaces across the city.
4. The agency uses its resources to aid the city's economic development and attractiveness. It is a strategic actor, researching and defining economic policy across the region, monitoring development, and supporting the collaboration of stakeholders.
5. ADULM acts as an engine of collaboration both within and outside it's remit, mediating partnerships at the local, regional, national and international level.
6. The agency collects evidence to support local policymaking. It administers databases and optimises data sharing with local authorities as well as other regions and countries, while ensuring data compliance. The agency is particularly integral in developing regional imaging, and new geomatic and cartographic engineering techniques.
7. The agency is progressive, aiming to support the transition into new ways of life. Through monitoring and analysing trends it hopes to promote solutions which anticipate the needs of citizens and consequences of current crises.
8. It is a centre of resources which both builds regional memory and acts as a space for the exchange of knowledge, adapting itself to new ways of disseminating information. The agency is responsible for regular communications through its newsletter, website and events.
9. ADULM carries out research in partnership with other organisations, especially higher academic institutions.

Agence D'Urbanisme Oise-les-Vallées

Figure 7 – Map of Agence D'Urbanisme Oise-les-Vallées



Source: Oise-les-Vallées, 2022

Purpose

The Agence D'Urbanisme Oise-les-Vallées was established in 1989 on the initiative of the mayors of villages in the area including Compiègne, Pont Sainte-Maxence, Creil and Senlis. The agency has a dual purpose. Firstly, it is to carry out economic, social and environmental research to support equitable development in the region. Secondly, it is to ensure the success of the regional technology hub.

Governance and Organisation

The agency is largely funded by fixed fees from members and government grants. It's governance structure is comprised of founding, acceding and associate members. The founding members are: the mayors of Compiègne and Creil; the mayors of Pont Sainte Maxence and Senlis; the region of Picardy; the general council of l'Oise; the state, represented by the Department of l'Oise; the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of l'Oise; the University of Technology of Compiègne (UTC) and the Ineris. Acceding members include communes, partnerships of communes and public sectors bodies which fall within the agency's remit. Associate members include private actors who consult with the general assembly and the board of administration. Apart from founding members, any party to the association has to be agreed

by the board of directors. Founding and acceding members pay an annual fee which fixed by the general assembly under the direction of the board.

The board of directors which is constituted by representatives from the founding and adherent members. The positions of president and first vice president are held alternately by the mayors of Compiègne and Creil, and the rest of the board is elected by the general assembly for a term of two years. It is convened at the discretion of the president and first vice president, and has the power to act on behalf of the association and to carry out all operations which fall within its objectives.

The agency's director is nominated by the president and first vice president of the board after deliberation with the ministry in charge of urban development. They are terminated through the same process. Participating in both board meetings and the general assembly, they are responsible for the direction, operation and day-to-day management of the agency.

The general assembly is composed of 4 delegates from Creil et Compiègne, 3 from Pont-Sainte-Maxence et Senlis, 3 from each commune where the population is 10,000-30,000, 2 from each commune with 5,000-10,000 people and 1 from each commune with under 5,000 people. The state itself sends six representatives, as does the "Région Hauts de-France" and the department of l'Oise. L'INERIS, l'UTC and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry have a representative each, other public actors are allocated delegates based on the number of people whom they represent. The general assembly meets at least once a year to deliberate on the agency's activities and make decisions as requested by the board.

The agency itself is composed of a resource team and a learning team, under the direction of the executive director and their assistant. It is a small agency, currently consisting of 9 staff.

Figure 8 - Agence D'Urbanisme Oise-les-Vallées Structure



Source: RTPi, 2022

Current Work

Oise-les-Vallées' work has recently been encumbered by the institutional and social chaos experienced in the last few years. Nonetheless, it expresses a commitment to its local partners,

and to monitoring legislative changes being at a regional and national level. The agency also seeks to encourage regional collaboration, with a particular emphasis on regional projects. Unlike many UPAs, Oise-les-Vallées does not have a major client in the form of a metropolitan authority. Consequently, it faces the challenging task of balancing a variety of local demands with the achievement of a single and shared regional vision.

Key areas underpinning this shared vision include La Loi Climat et Resilience, which carries specific provisions for the work of urban planning agencies; and major infrastructure projects stemming from the Paris region, including preparations for the 2024 Olympics.

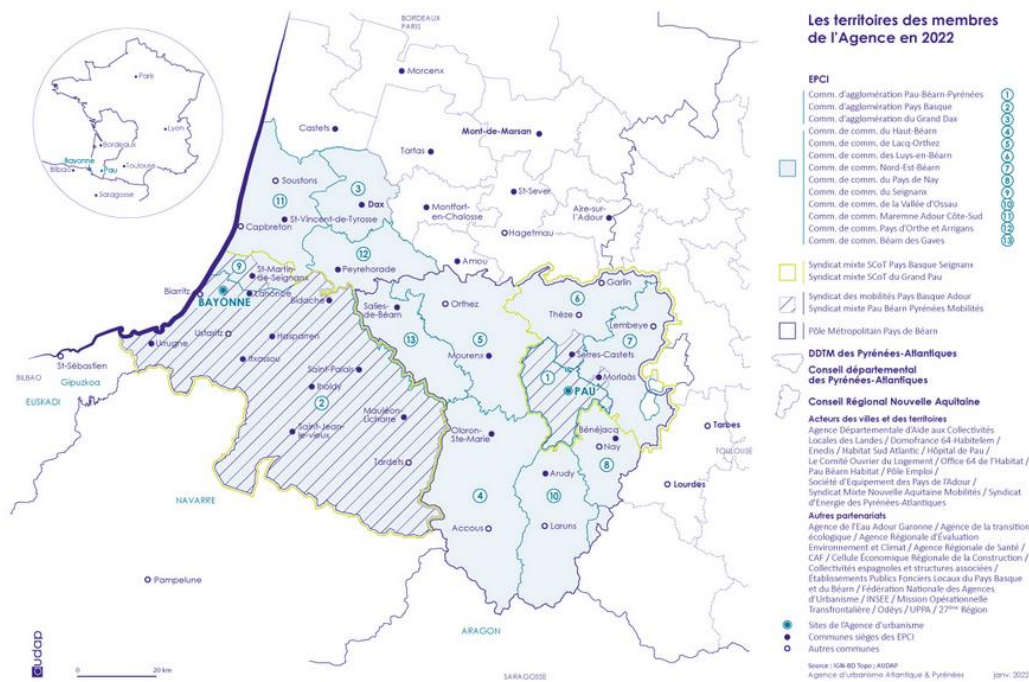
The agency's program of work for 2022 is based on the capacity of 9.5 employees with 1600 working days and revolves around three central axes.

1. It enables local authorities to adapt to climate change. The agency is currently organising workshops focused on the climate crisis; revising regional planning documents; coordinating and guiding local projects; supporting the implementation of recovery and climate contracts and presenting and compiling interactive data, all in light of La Loi Climat et Resilience.
2. The agency promotes conservation and biodiversity. Oise-les-Vallées stimulates sustainable development through analysis on land and housing data, and by assisting the construction of the Seine–Nord Europe Canal among other things.
3. Oise-les-Vallées' final main objective is to support a high quality of live for the inhabitants of the region. In this region this pertains particularly to supporting flood resilience and managing waterways, as well as contributing to housing, land and logistic policies.

Additionally, the agency releases communications at a local, regional and national level. Moreover it produces expert planning documents and organises events, includes celebrating the associations 30th anniversary.

Agence D'Urbanisme Atlantique & Pyrénées

Figure 9 – Map of Agence D'Urbanisme Atlantique & Pyrénées
Territoire(s) d'intervention



Source: AUDAP, 2022

Purpose

The Agence d'Urbanisme Atlantique & Pyrénées (AUDAP) was established in 1998. It aids local authorities in defining and implementing policies, formulating strategy, carrying out relevant studies, and generating regional planning documents. The agency identifies future planning challenges through data collection and analysis, using methods inspired by “design thinking”. It takes a multidisciplinary approach to local policymaking, monitoring and evaluating outcomes and acting as a centre of expertise for stakeholders. Finally, AUDAP places sustainable development at the heart of its reflections, focusing on the sustainable management of housing, migration, infrastructure and urban systems. Thus, AUDAP is both a technical resource and a partnership tool for its, entrusted with the production of local planning documents and the studies which underpin them.

Governance and Organisation

The agency is governed by a committee, a board and a general assembly. There are three categories of membership: official membership, acceding membership and associate

membership. Official membership is held by the state, the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department and the association of communes of both Pays-Basque and Pau-Bearn-Pyrenees. Acceding membership is open to communes and “syndicat mixte” elected by the board. Associate membership is held by other entities approved by the board, they have no voting power.

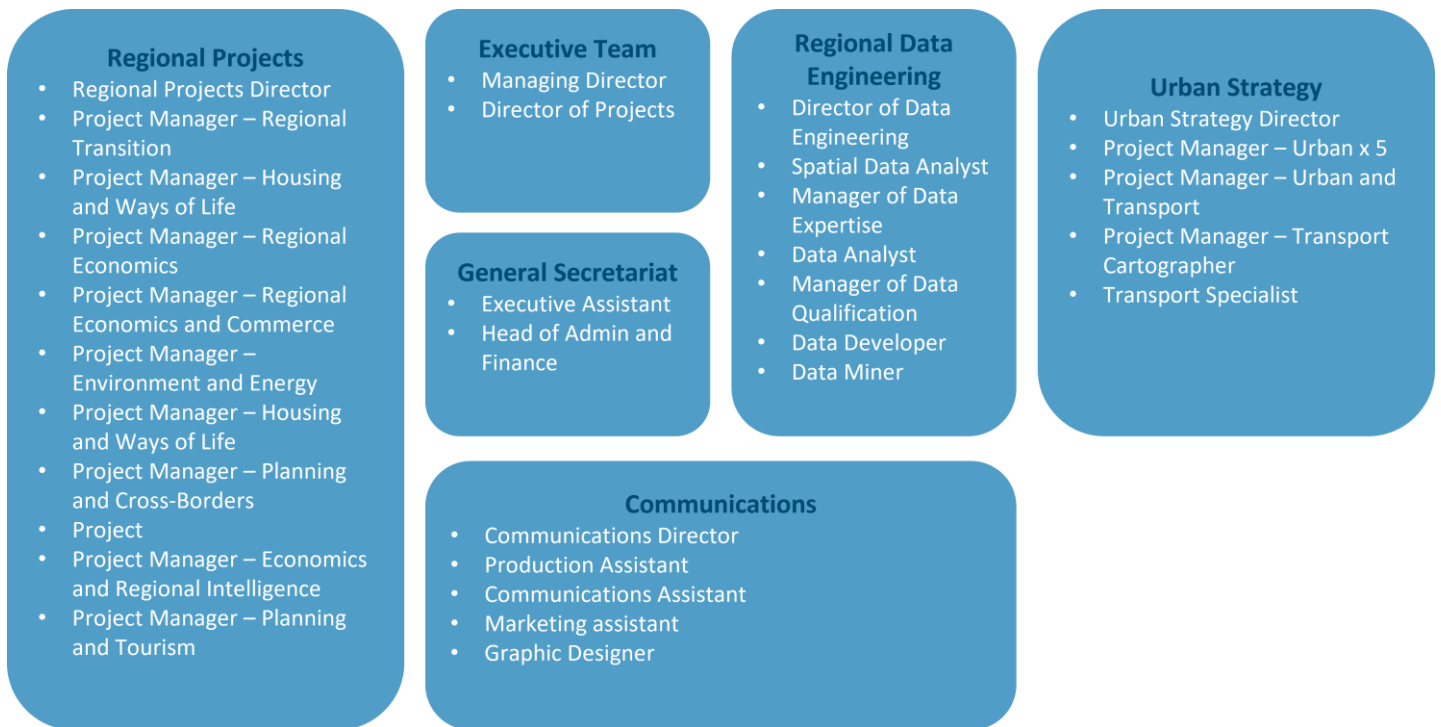
The general assembly is the agency’s regulatory body which deliberates on its mission, decides on the budget, approves the end of year financial accounts and fixes the agenda. It is comprised of all three categories of members as well as any other representatives approved by the board. Each official member holds 7 votes and each active member holds 1 vote. It can only deliberate if at least half of the official and a third of the active members are present, and decisions need a simple majority. Neither the board or the assembly are compensated for their work.

The board of trustees directs the agency and takes all decisions regarding the objectives set by the assembly, including deciding on AUDAP’s annual program of activity and supervising its execution. It is currently comprised of one representative from each official member, 6 representatives from active members, and one delegate from a social housing association. It meets at least three times a year and can only deliberate if 5 of the 12 directors are present.

The committee is made up of a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer and is responsible for implementing the board’s directives. The president of the committee holds legal and financial responsibility for it and delegates authority to an general director who looks after the agency. The general director is responsible for the agencies staff, and assists the president in executing the work set by the board. They participate in the general assembly meetings as a consultant, and are responsible for the annual budget and daily management of the agency.

The agency is funded by government subsidies and proceeds from research and donations, and subject to the laws which regulate public sector bodies. It is split into an executive team, administration, regional projects team, data engineering team, urban strategy team, and marketing and communications team.

Figure 10 - Agence D'Urbanisme Atlantique & Pyrénées Teams



Source: RTPI, 2022

Current work:

AUDAP's 2022 program of work concentrates on new regional models of development in the face of the social, economic, ecological, environmental and health challenges of the 21st century. The Covid-19 crisis has represented a major paradigm shift, as ways of living have been fundamentally altered.

The region of South Aquitaine is situated at a pivotal junction between France and Spain and is rich with coastlines, mountains, plains and plateaus, containing a dynamic urban framework within its perimeter. AUDAP aims to rely on these geographical strengths as well as placing its skills, tools and resources at the disposal of local actors to facilitate the kind of dialogue and innovation which is crucial for sustainable development.

AUDAP is at the midpoint of its 2020-2025 project, and is assessing its work accordingly. While some key interests such as digitalisation, cross-border cooperation and construction waste have remained the same, new ones such as the increasing concern over housing vacancies, have emerged. Goals for the future include collecting and analysing data on real estate, minimising housing development, implementing the new climate law, supporting revitalisation projects, sharing best practice on transport, facilitating public-private partnerships, and supporting commercial networks.

The current program is centred around five ambitions: regional cooperation, living together, sustainable development, constructing the future and sharing knowledge. The subjects of net zero emissions, health and urbanisation, mapping and transport systems are high on the

agency's agenda. These ambitions are set out in more detail below.

1. **Regional Cooperation:** The agency supports regional projects at different stages. In addition to the SCoT and PLU plans which it produces, the agency is also involved with various other projects of the region Marenne-Adour-Côte-Sud, de Béarn des Gaves, and with the natural park of the Basque mountain. Moreover, it supports collaboration across the French-Spanish border.
2. **Living Together:** AUDAP gathers evidence across a number of domains including real estate, affordable housing, housing vacancies, demographics, migration and social exclusion to support local authorities in anticipating the needs of inhabitants, and reducing social or spatial inequality.
3. **Sustainable Development:** the agency is responsible for helping local authorities test transport solutions, raise awareness around our environmental impact, define local plans of action and come up with innovative approaches in line with the idea of a circular economy. The new regulations around minimising land development and soil artificialisation are key drivers of the agency's activities.
4. **Constructing the Future:** AUDAP is constantly searching for pragmatic and operational solutions which permit planning to balance environmental, economic and social priorities. The agency produces strategic plans for public spaces and supports large nature projects. Moreover, it aids its member local authorities to make well informed policies on for the economy and the environment through its R&D offering which provides access to large and high quality databases.
5. **Knowledge Sharing:** the agency acts as a forum for exchanges between elected officials, private actors and key development stakeholders in order to shape common action. Moreover, it disseminates knowledge through its publication, website, conference and workshop. This year the agency will renew its website, review its flagship publication and participate in a number of key planning events.

For more information about this paper, visit:

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/policy-and-research/>

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