

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2024-25](#).

This response was submitted to the [Finance Committee](#) consultation on the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25](#).

WGDB_24-25 21: Ymateb gan: Sefydliad Cynllunio Trefol Brenhinol (SCTB) (Saesneg yn unig) | Response from: Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) (English only)





RTPI Cymru

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30 November 2023

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Response to: Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024 - 2025

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, representing some 27,000 spatial planners. RTPI Cymru represents the RTPI in Wales, with 1,300 members. The Institute seeks to advance the science and art of planning, working for the long-term common good and well-being of current and future generations. The RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Welsh Government Draft Budget for 2024-2025. Our planning related comments are set out below in response to some of the consultation questions.

4. Are Welsh Government plans to build a greener economy clear and sufficiently ambitious? Do you think there is enough investment being targeted at tackling the climate change and nature emergency? Are there any potential skill gaps that need to be addressed to achieve these plans?

Addressing the climate and ecological crisis will require joined-up working across sectors, along with funding to support delivery of policy on the ground. Adequately resourced, collaborative working will be the key to involving a wide range of stakeholders. How this collaboration can be properly encouraged, funded and structured is an important discussion.

In relation to skills, while there are new technologies and net zero skills that require supporting, there is also an issue with retaining and maintaining existing skills and

specialisms. This is particularly the case in planning and the wider public sector which supports the planning system. Sufficient resourcing of public bodies, including the Planning Directorate of the Welsh Government, and investment in key skills and specialisms are all important aspects of meeting targets. In response to RTPI Cymru's Big Conversation, respondents noted the inability of planning and its supporting functions to "source and retain staff", notably planning, biodiversity and drainage. This is having a significant impact on the planning system and the delivery of quality development.

While we recognise it is important to forward plan for new skills and technology, but we must ensure that we resource existing skills, aiming for high standards to address the climate and ecological crises and net zero progression.

7. The Committee would like to focus on a number of other specific areas in the scrutiny of the Budget. Do you have any specific comments on any of the areas identified below?

Is the Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending represented in resource allocations (Preventative spending = spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early).

For the planning system in Wales to fulfil its statutory duties and deliver quality placemaking there is a critical need for more investment. Local Planning Authority (LPA) departments are significantly underfunded, and planning services in particular are suffering due to budget cuts.

In 2019, Audit Wales published a report on a national review of the planning system in Wales. Overall, the review highlighted a planning system that was struggling to deliver against the ambitions of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, to implement national policy, and unlock the value planning has to offer.

Planning services in Wales have seen drastic budget cuts over the last decade, leading to the stretching of planning officer capacity and a decrease in skills in key areas, as found by the Audit Wales Report (2019). Problems have been further exacerbated by a drop in the number of trainees entering the profession in the public sector. RTPI Cymru's Big Conversation found high levels of planners being overstretched in their work with this having a significant impact on well-being. The Big Conversation survey found:

- 61% of all respondents reported being overstretched at least several times a week;
- 74% of LPA officers felt overstretched;
- 21% of all respondents felt they were overstretched all of the time.

RTPI Cymru believes that efforts to deliver a more efficient and effective service should focus on long term adequate resourcing, capacity, skills and workforce development. RTPI Cymru is asking Welsh Government to support the introduction of a Town Planning Apprenticeship scheme as a means to encourage more into the planning profession. We would also suggest for example, that developing project management skills could be an

effective means of ensuring that applications are processed to a high standard in a timely fashion.

RTPI Cymru have recently published a new report, titled Building Capacity through Collaboration and Change. The project looks at making the most efficient and effective use of existing planning resources in Wales', exploring if and how public sector planning organisations are being driven to innovate and examine their efforts to make more efficient use of existing resources. The scope of the project extends to the statutory planning system, including development management, development plan preparation, and planning support and administration. The primary focus is on LPAs, yet any innovation or actions to drive efficiency in other public sector organisations is also in scope. This work builds on RTPI Cymru's work around the Big Conversation.

While the evidence gathering of this project continues with an online survey [RTPI | Building Capacity through Collaboration and Change](#) The initial report found that, with fewer resources, growing expectations, and reduced capacity, local planning authorities alone cannot respond to the demand placed on them. We found that, while there were measures that they could take that wouldn't take from existing resources, these were limited, and most would require further investment into the planning system."

The report calls for further exploration on the establishment of a planning improvement service for Wales with the aim of sharing good practice, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system, and brokering common approaches and shared services. A key issue raised by stakeholders in this project has been the absence of a strategic organisation to promote improvement in planning services in Wales. There are various models that could inform this work, including the Planning Advisory Service in England and the Planning Improvement Service in Scotland, including the most recent initiative appointing a planning improvement 'champion'.

Is the Welsh Government providing adequate support to the public sector to enable it to be innovative and forward looking through things like workforce planning.

No. See answer to 7.1 above

Has there been adequate investment from the Welsh Government in basic public sector infrastructure.

No. See answer to 7.1 above

What are the key opportunities for the Welsh Government to invest in supporting an economy and public services that better deliver against the well-being goals in the Well being of Future Generations Act?

While Wales benefits from a strong legislative and evidence based policy framework, the delivery and implementation of this into outcomes and impact on the ground has been slow to be realised.

Adequately resourcing and supporting the planning system for the longer term would help to ensure that legislation and policy, including the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015 along with the ambitions of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, the Environment (Wales) Act 2015 and Planning (Wales) Act 2015 is implemented as planned, and its delivery on the ground is not compromised.

A fundamental need is the adequate resourcing of the Welsh Government's own Planning Directorate to enable it to support LPAs, and ensure the policy aspirations of Welsh Government are understood and implemented.

If you require further assistance, please contact RTPI Cymru on [REDACTED] or e-mail Roisin Willmott at walespolicy@rtpi.org.uk

Yours sincerely,



Dr Roisin Willmott OBE FRTPI
Director