

# Achieving a well-resourced, high functioning planning system

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On 9 January 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the results of its first annual survey, the [Local Authority Planning Capacity and Skills Survey](#), conducted between July – September 2023. The MHCLG stated that the survey will serve as a “baseline for an annual survey, with the results helping to target support where it is needed most, and to monitor the impact of investment in planning capacity and capability over time.”

## Critical funding and resource needs

The need for well-resourced, high functioning, local authority planning departments are of paramount importance for delivering the government’s economic growth priorities. However, the underfunding of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and its impact on growth ambitions has been a long debated issue. There is a consensus across all stakeholders that greater investment in LPAs is necessary to ensure they are suitably resourced and have the necessary skills to achieve growth ambitions.

## Staffing challenges and skills shortages

Planning departments reported widespread issues with recruitment, retention and skills gaps. Some of the key findings from the survey include:

- **Recruitment and retention**  
91% had difficulties with recruitment and 72% reported difficulties in retaining staff.
- **Skills gap**  
97% reported planning skills gaps and 87% reported gaps in broader skillsets. There were significant deficiencies in specialised areas such as masterplanning and design codes at 63% and ecology and biodiversity at 72%.
- **Resource allocation**  
22% of planning departments operate without any training budget, while the majority manage with budgets under £30,000.
- **Workload and morale**  
84% of departments reported increasing workloads, with 68% noting a decrease in staff morale.

These stark results highlight the pressing resource and capacity challenges that could potentially hinder LPAs’ abilities to fulfil their critical roles in delivering the government’s planning reform ambitions.



### About the author:

Jonathan Pennick is a Business Development Director for Capita Public Services. Jonathan is a chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, with over 20 years' experience of delivering planning services to local government clients.

## Government commitments and interventions

In response to these challenges, the government has recently reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing the capacity and capabilities of local planning authorities. This commitment is part of a broader strategy to deliver 1.5 million homes over the parliamentary period. Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister for Housing and Planning, also [outlined the government's commitment and planned interventions](#):

- Increases in planning fees and introduction of local fee setting.
- £14.8m to support local authorities at an advanced stage that need to revise their draft plans to meet increased local housing needs.
- £49m to support the rollout of planning reforms in 2025/26.
- £50m to boost capacity in the planning system.
- Strengthening the Pathways to Planning programme run by the LGA.
- Supporting Public Practice to place senior built environment professionals into the public sector.

## Future opportunities

While the survey sets a foundational benchmark, the real test for LPAs will be handling the immediate demands with their current capacity and skills. The challenge lies in securing future investment in a proactive manner to ensure that local planning authorities are well-equipped to support the government's agenda for growth.

The forthcoming increase in planning fees on 1 April 2025 is expected to enhance the performance of Development Management (DM) teams. This change anticipates an increase in planning application volumes, spurred by national planning policy changes and an improved economic outlook, further pressurising DM teams to process applications within statutory timescales.

Overall, The MHCLG survey provides a critical tool for future investment and strategic planning in local authorities. As pressures mount, the efficiency and resourcefulness of LPAs will play a pivotal role in shaping the urban and rural landscapes of the future.

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