

Chief Planning Officers Guidance

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Introduction

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) requires that each planning authority must appoint a Chief Planning Officer.

The appointment and role of the Chief Planning Officer became a statutory requirement in April 2024, to advise authorities on planning and other functions relating to development. The Chief Planning Officer is to help strengthen leadership on planning and corporate recognition of the importance and positive influence of planning within their authorities.

This document contains statutory guidance. This guidance is to be taken into consideration by local authorities when appointing the role of Chief Planning Officer. Recognising this is Scottish Government guidance about professional appointments made by local government, the guidance is intended to provide clarity to support the effectiveness of the Chief Planning Officer and how it contributes to the corporate ambitions and the wider aims of the National Planning Framework. It is also recognised that this role does already exist in some form in planning authorities, and so this guidance ensures some consistency between authorities.

Statutory Requirement

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced new requirements¹ for each planning authority to have a Chief Planning Officer and for Scottish Ministers to issue related guidance.

As required by the Act, this guidance provides details of the role of Chief Planning Officer. Planning authorities must also have regard to the appropriate qualifications and experience outlined in this guidance when making an appointment to the role.

Chief Planning Officer: Duties and Responsibilities

Professional Adviser

The Chief Planning Officer should play a key role in the leadership, vision and strategic direction of the planning authority, carrying out a strategic role that works to raise the profile of planning in authority decisions. The Chief Planning Officer is to be an ambassador for the profession of planning, advising the authority about the carrying out of the functions conferred on them by virtue of the planning Acts, and any function conferred on them by any other enactment related to development. They will be the professional adviser to the local or national park authority as a whole

¹ Section 1A of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, inserted by [section 50 of the Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#)

on the spatial and place-based implications of decisions and investments in the short, medium, and longer term. This entails providing relevant professional planning advice and support to the authority's senior management team and elected members and assisting in developing corporate objectives and translating these into place-based strategies.

Delivering National Planning Priorities

The Chief Planning Officer will work to deliver the current national priorities, policies or strategies, ensuring that local and national park authorities are aligned with national-level planning principles. They should contribute to the development and maintenance of plans and strategies which support the achievement of national planning priorities, promoting economic, environmental and social issues and ensuring the delivery of an inclusive and accessible planning system.

Champion of Place

The role will support place making ambitions within the authority. Acting as the authority's placemaking champion would support this and the ability to work collaboratively with other officers and members who share these championing responsibilities, developing and maintaining working relationships.

Head of Profession

The Chief Planning Officer will be the head of profession in the organisation, and the senior responsible officer for the organisation's planning service. This entails being a point of contact for key stakeholders of the organisation on planning and place, representing the planning authority externally as a respected ambassador of the profession, and leading the effective management and development of employees across the planning authority and ensuring they are consulted, empowered, skilled, valued and motivated to deliver a modern and effective planning service.

Performance and Improvement

The Chief Planning Officer will lead on ensuring that the planning authority embeds continuous improvement. In doing so they will ensure that the planning authority undertakes its obligations to publish an annual report on the performance of its functions and that this is submitted to Scottish Ministers and the National Planning Improvement Champion.

They will engage with the National Planning Improvement Champion to agree any areas of improvement and what steps might be taken to tackle them.

Chief Planning Officer: Qualifications, Skills and Experience

Qualifications

It is highly desirable for the Chief Planning Officer to hold chartered membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the professional body of planners, so as to ensure that professionalism is at the heart of their service and that they maintain the standard expected of a chartered town planner. The RTPI's object, incorporated by Royal Charter, is "to advance the science and art of planning (including town and country and spatial planning) for the benefit of the public". The RTPI supports the development of a learned and reflective membership through accreditation of planning education, setting professional and ethical standards, and providing a programme of support for professional development. Membership of the RTPI would ensure an accredited level of professionalism and adherence to the RTPI Code of Conduct within the role. There are multiple pathways to RTPI chartered membership, including through the Licentiate pathway via a fully RTPI accredited degree or via the experienced practitioner pathway for those who can demonstrate the required years of experience. Further information about pathways to RTPI membership can be found on the RTPI website.

The Chief Planning Officer should possess a degree in town planning or an associated discipline. A degree is not absolutely essential to ensure the competencies and abilities of potential candidates, as long as there is a proven record of delivery and relevant education or vocational experience in planning. Examples of relevant degrees that are desirable include planning, geography, surveying, architecture and civil engineering. This is not an exhaustive list.

Skills and experience

The relevant skills that would be desirable for the role of Chief Planning Officer include effective communication; stakeholder relationship management, externally and throughout the authority; planning and delivery skills; and leadership skills. Good knowledge of the operation of the planning system and planning services is also important.

Collaborative working is a key skill to possess as Chief Planning Officer for the ability to work in partnership with senior managers and elected members to promote and achieve the authority's objectives through developing planning and place strategies, policies and plans. The Chief Planning Officer will play a key role in the interface between elected members and employees. The ability to support democratic planning processes and provide advice on planning matters is pertinent.

The Chief Planning Officer should have experience in change management, or have the ability to lead on transformation and change programmes, projects and initiatives. They should have a history of achieving success in their roles, and be able to demonstrate the successful delivery of targets and outcomes through effective management and decision-making.

A Chief Planning Officer should be able to demonstrate experience in:

- leadership;
- the effective and efficient management of planning services including motivating and developing staff, individually and in teams, to achieve improved planning performance and service delivery;
- developing and maintaining relationships with elected members and providing an interface between elected members and officials;
- developing and maintaining effective and productive working relationships with external stakeholders;
- change management and the application of continuous improvement;
- embedding a performance management culture that focuses on clear quality standards, service targets and outcomes;
- leading and integrating multi-disciplinary teams of professional, operational and/or support staff;
- delivering quality, customer-focused services, integrating customer care strategies and targets into planning service delivery;
- delivering an inclusive and accessible planning system through effective partnership working with local communities and with other public, private and voluntary sector organisations;
- embedding the customer first ethos.

Available information on the Chief Planning Officer

Planning authorities should ensure that the information on their appointed Chief Planning Officer is kept up to date on the local authority website and any changes are highlighted through the planning authority Planning Performance Framework report or future equivalent.



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