

Planning Development Management,  
Fry Building,  
2 Marsham Street,  
London,  
SW1P 4DF

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Response submitted by email only to: [planningcommittees@communities.gov.uk](mailto:planningcommittees@communities.gov.uk)

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Re: Planning Committee Reform: statutory consultation on draft Regulations and guidance**

Introduction

The Land, Planning and Development Federation (LPDF) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the current consultation on 'Planning Committee Reforms: draft Regulations and guidance'. We note that this consultation focuses specifically on the delegation of planning decisions to officers and the size of planning committees, building on the earlier technical consultation undertaken in 2025. The LPDF's response to the previous consultation can be found [here](#), and we acknowledge that the Government's response has since been published.

The LPDF is supportive of the Government's direction of travel, particularly its intention to introduce a national scheme of delegation. We consider that a clear and consistent framework for decision-making has the potential to improve certainty across the planning system, reduce delays, and support a more efficient determination process. In turn, this should help to accelerate the delivery of much-needed new homes and commercial development, which remains a key priority.

About the LPDF

The LPDF seeks to represent the UK's leading land promoters, home builders and commercial developers. LPDF members support the housebuilding and commercial development sectors by promoting sites through the planning system, providing "shovel ready" land with a planning permission which can facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and serviced land parcels.

The LPDF seeks to actively engage with government on planning, housing and commercial development policy and to educate the wider public on the social, environmental and economic benefits of development through an evidenced based approach.

The LPDF encourages its members to deliver well designed, high quality, sustainable places which deliver a mix of housing types and tenures, commercial spaces and community uses that have a positive social, environmental, and economic impact.

Our key values include:



- Working in a positive and cooperative way with central and local government and key stakeholders, to deliver a planning system capable of supplying the homes and employment space we need.
- Promoting research and an evidence-led approach to policy development.
- Increasing the supply of new homes to meet demand and make home ownership a realistic possibility for all those who aspire to it.
- Ensuring that we build the affordable homes of all types and tenures that this country so desperately needs.
- Delivering new employment space to meet demand from businesses and support economic growth.
- Championing the impact of increased housing delivery on reducing intergenerational unfairness.
- Creating well designed, high quality and sustainable places to live and work.
- Educating and informing about the social, environmental and economic benefits of development.
- Supporting diversity of delivery in the market and championing SME developers.
- Promoting diversity and inclusivity within the sector.

### Questions

#### **Question 1. Do you have any comments on the draft Regulations?**

The LPDF welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Regulations and supports the Government's overarching objective of improving the efficiency, consistency and clarity of decision-making within the planning system.

With regard to committee size, the LPDF has previously highlighted the importance of maintaining committees at an effective and manageable size to support efficient decision-making and to ensure that members are appropriately engaged with the detail of applications. The LPDF note that the draft Regulations propose a maximum of 13 committee members rather than the proposed 11 in the previous consultation. It is important that committee size does not undermine the objective of streamlined and effective decision-making.

The LPDF strongly supports the introduction of a national scheme of delegation and agrees with its role as a central component of the proposed reforms. The LPDF also notes that several local planning authorities already operate more progressive schemes of delegation than those envisaged under the national scheme. It is important that the Regulations do not inadvertently restrict authorities from continuing to delegate beyond the national minimum requirements where they consider this appropriate. The national scheme of delegation should therefore be framed as a baseline rather than a ceiling, enabling authorities to adopt more ambitious delegation arrangements where this supports efficiency and good decision-making.

The Federation also strongly support the principle of a standardised two-tier system, comprising Schedule 1 functions (delegated in all cases) and Schedule 2 functions (delegated unless the 'gateway test' is met and referral is agreed by the nominated officer and nominated member). This provides a clear and proportionate framework for decision-making and should help reduce unnecessary committee involvement, particularly for medium-scale and technical applications.

The LPDF notes that allocated sites are not specifically referenced within Schedule 1 of the draft Regulations and therefore fall within Schedule 2 by default, meaning they are subject to the operation of the 'gateway test'. However,



the accompanying guidance indicates that proposals which comply with adopted allocations should not normally constitute a “significant planning matter” and should therefore be delegated in practice. This is a positive step. However, consistent with our previous submissions, the LPDF considers that this approach should be taken further, and we strongly recommend that applications relating to allocated sites (both outline and reserved matters) are included within Schedule 1.

The principle of development on these sites has already been subject to extensive scrutiny through the local plan process, including public consultation and examination. Given that such development is accepted in principle, it is neither necessary nor efficient for these applications to be routinely subject to potential committee referral. Delegating these applications to officers as a matter of course would reinforce a plan-led system and help avoid unnecessary delay in bringing forward much-needed development.

The LPDF also note that medium sized sites currently appear to be excluded from Schedule 1. This could exacerbate the issues faced by SME’s bringing forward medium sized sites and would appear to run counter to the intent of the new / emerging medium sized sites policy. The LPDF would urge that these types of sites are included in Schedule 1.

The LPDF notes that Schedule 1 functions are expressed as mandatory officer delegations, rather than discretionary delegations as is often the case under current local schemes. While the LPDF supports the principle of clear and mandatory delegation in defined cases, there is a potential risk that local authorities may seek to establish informal or quasi-advisory arrangements involving elected members to influence or inform decision-making on Schedule 1 applications outside the formal committee process. This could undermine the intention of the reforms to provide certainty, clarity and efficiency in officer decision-making. It will therefore be important that guidance and implementation make clear the expectations around officer autonomy in Schedule 1 cases and the limits of informal member involvement.

The LPDF raise concerns regarding the vague nature of some of the terminology used within the draft Regulations for example within paragraph 5 (2) the reference to the significance to the ‘local area’. It is not clear what is meant by local area and the Federation believe this needs further clarification as it leaves it open to interpretation by LPAs and might be used widely to bring schedule 2 applications to committee.

The LPDF is concerned that member training is not being implemented alongside the Scheme at this stage. In the LPDF’s view, high-quality, mandatory training for planning committee members is critical to the success of these reforms, ensuring consistent interpretation of policy and improving the quality and confidence of decision-making.

The LPDF also considers that the absence of a clearly defined statutory or nationally recognised Chief Planning Officer role represents a missed opportunity. Given the discretion involved in applying the ‘gateway test’, stronger professional leadership would help support consistency of interpretation and reinforce national expectations across authorities.

Overall, the LPDF supports the direction of the draft Regulations but emphasises that success will depend on consistent implementation, supported by training, clear application of the ‘gateway test’, and strong professional leadership.

**Question 2. Do you agree with our proposed approach to phased reserved matters applications? If not, do you think we should return to the original position of reserved matters on phased development being delegated in all circumstances or should we instead consider delegating certain types of phased reserved matters applications?**



The LPDF supports the proposed approach to reserved matters (RM) applications set out in the draft Regulations. We welcome the inclusion of reserved matters applications for unphased schemes within Schedule 1, ensuring they are delegated to officers in all cases. This appropriately reflects the principle that the key planning merits are established at outline stage, with reserved matters focusing on detailed implementation.

The LPDF also recognises and supports the Government's balanced approach to phased development, whereby reserved matters applications relating to phased outline permissions fall within Schedule 2 and are subject to the 'gateway test'. This reflects the reality that phased schemes can be significant in scale and complexity and may, in certain circumstances, justify committee scrutiny.

On balance, the LPDF considers that this a pragmatic and proportionate approach. It maintains a strong presumption in favour of delegation while allowing flexibility where genuinely necessary, provided the gateway test is applied consistently and sparingly in practice.

### **Question 3. Do you have any comments on the draft guidance?**

The LPDF welcomes the draft guidance and supports its intention to provide greater clarity and consistency on the role of planning committees, with a clear presumption that committees should focus on strategically significant applications, while routine and technical decisions are delegated to officers.

The guidance provides a helpful framework for the operation of the national scheme of delegation, including the distinction between Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 functions and the operation of the 'gateway test'. The LPDF supports the principle that delegation should be the default position, with committee referral limited to exceptional circumstances where statutory criteria are met and agreement is reached between the nominated officer and nominated member.

However, the LPDF considers that the effectiveness of the reforms will depend heavily on the clarity and consistency of the guidance in practice. In particular, further detail would be beneficial on the application of the 'gateway test', including clearer parameters around what constitutes a "significant planning matter" or a "significant economic, social or environmental issue". Without this, there is a risk of variation in interpretation between authorities, which could undermine the objective of a consistent national approach.

The LPDF supports the proposed roles of a nominated officer and nominated member and the emphasis on seniority and professional expertise. However, the success of this model will depend on ensuring that the gateway mechanism does not become a routine route for escalation, rather than an exception as intended. In this context, the LPDF considers that the operation of the gateway test would be strengthened by placing greater emphasis on the role of the Chief Planning Officer (or equivalent) within the decision-making process. While recognising the proposed model of joint agreement, there is a strong case for ensuring that professional planning judgment plays a leading role in determining whether applications are referred to committee. This would help to preserve professional independence, reduce the potential for political pressure, and ensure that decisions are grounded in planning expertise. A more clearly defined and professionally led approach would also support greater consistency in the application of the national scheme of delegation across different authorities.

The LPDF also considers that the absence of a clearly defined statutory or nationally recognised Chief Planning Officer role represents a missed opportunity. Given the discretion involved in applying the 'gateway test', stronger professional leadership would help reinforce consistency, reduce variation in interpretation, and strengthen confidence in the system. Embedding such a role in legislation would formalise professional leadership within the



planning system, strengthen accountability, and reinforce the ability of senior planning officers to make impartial decisions in the public interest. It would also help align planning with other statutory functions within local government and support higher standards of decision-making overall.

Finally, as outlined earlier in this response, the LPDF strongly supports the need for accompanying mandatory training for committee members and relevant officers, which will be essential to ensure consistent application of the national scheme of delegation in practice. Overall, LPDF supports the draft guidance but considers that further clarification, particularly in relation to the 'gateway test' and its consistent application, will be critical to successful implementation.

### Conclusions

The LPDF supports the Government's objective of introducing a clearer, more consistent and nationally coherent framework for planning committee decision-making. The proposed national scheme of delegation and two-tier system represent a significant and positive step towards improving efficiency, reducing unnecessary committee involvement, and focusing democratic oversight on the most important and strategic applications.

However, the success of the reforms will depend on effective implementation. In particular, the LPDF highlights the importance of:

- clear and consistent application of the 'gateway test' in practice;
- strengthened and more detailed guidance to minimise variation in interpretation;
- mandatory training for committee members and relevant officers; and
- stronger professional leadership within the system to support consistency of decision-making.

The LPDF also emphasises that the national scheme of delegation should operate as a baseline rather than a ceiling and should not prevent local planning authorities from adopting more progressive delegation arrangements where appropriate.

Subject to these considerations, the LPDF is supportive of the direction of travel and considers these reforms to be a meaningful step towards a more efficient, consistent and effective planning system.

