

# Designated Persons: can DM alternative providers work?

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# Designated Persons

- A very late addition to the Bill – just before Christmas!
- Pilots to open up the processing of planning applications to competition
- "If the applicant so chooses" applications in pilot areas to be processed not by a Local Planning Authority but by "a designated person"
- Some commentators have likened it to Approved Inspectors for Building Control
- Two fundamental challenges to making this work:
  - Processing applications is very complex
  - Are the processing and the determination of applications separate and discrete?

# Processing challenges

- A considerable range of inputs are needed to the application process: people, capabilities, systems, procedures and information
- They have to be brought together successfully
- Some of these elements are quite expensive (eg specialist IT systems) but the workload (typically 3,000 or more applications per year) disperses these costs and makes it economic
- It is also quite complex and changes constantly
- You have to get it right every time – if you mess up you can become the victim of the Ombudsman or the Planning Court via a judicial review

# Processing inputs

- DM service relies on many systems and information databases, these are some of the main ones:
  - A planning application IT system (such as Idox or Northgate)
  - An up-to-date database of properties in their area
  - A database of safeguarding information
  - A statutory register – usually now online.
- They will have to provide the following services:
  - Dealing with questions from members of the public
  - Dealing with questions from politicians
  - Dealing with requests for more information or amendments from consultees
  - Negotiating amendments with the applicant
- Writing the report is only part of the process

# Processing & determination

- As the leader of a development management team you manage your staff and the processes that are carried out to ensure successful delivery
- This might be no different to any other team leader role, but a core planning principle set out in paragraph 17 of the NPP is that planning should, “not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives”
- For an individual application the process starts in the pre-application stage and continues right the way through to the granting of planning permission and beyond
- All the elements are intrinsically linked and it’s all about placemaking

# Is it deliverable?

- Current examples of outsourcing are based on:
  - a partnering approach (eg Terraquest)
  - the provision of the whole service (eg the Re or Urban Vision models provided by Capita)
- The notion that a DP can operate footloose across a number of councils carrying out the processing of applications cannot work without the particular LPA carrying most of the functions.
- The DP can do little more than write up the report
- If this is the case, how are the costs of the service going to be dispersed between the two providers:
  - the council for validation, registration, communication and determination services
  - the DP for report writing

# Thank you

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