

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Clause 45 compulsory training for members of local planning authorities

24 April 2025  Bill Cordingley

Clause 45 of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025 introduces a significant and potentially unpopular change by mandating training for local planning authorities.

The policy decision behind this clause aims to ensure that planning committee members are adequately trained to make informed decisions, but is this really necessary, and how are local authorities to finance this training when purse strings are increasingly being tightened?

Overview of Clause 45

Clause 45 delegates power to the Secretary of State to make regulations that require mandatory, standardised training for members of local planning authorities. The specifics of the training programme will be determined through the implementation of secondary legislation, but the general framework will include:

1. **Content of training:** The training will cover key areas such as planning law, environmental regulations, and community engagement.
2. **Frequency:** Regular updates and refresher courses to ensure ongoing competence (CPD for LPAs).
3. **Certification:** Members must complete the training and hold a valid certificate in order to participate in planning decisions.

Rationale behind Clause 45

The policy rationale for Clause 45 expressed in the documents published with the Bill demonstrates a desire to grapple with the issues created by a number of key factors:

1. Complexity of planning laws

Planning laws and regulations are complex and constantly evolving. Proper training ensures that committee members are up to date with the latest legal requirements and best practices.

Many attempts have been made to simplify the planning process including, notably, the formation of the NPPF and removal of over 1,000 pages of planning guidance over 10 years ago; however, it is difficult to simplify a system which impacts so many and needs to weigh a number of competing and often contradictory factors.

Whilst planning committee members are advised by expert officers, it is not uncommon for their advice to be ignored. If expert planning advice is ignored, then the committee members need to be able to provide detailed justification for doing so, if successful (and costly) appeals are to be avoided. Training should help the members understand when they can form a different but lawful view to officers, and when they need to follow an officer's recommendation.

2. Consistency in decision-making

Training promotes consistency in decision-making across different local authorities, reducing the risk of arbitrary or uninformed decisions.

Of course, it remains to be seen if the desired effect is achieved, but this would certainly have the potential to reduce the number of appeals, call ins, court cases and inquiries; or at least one would hope that would be the effect.

3. Public confidence

Well-trained committee members are better placed to make informed and transparent decisions, thereby increasing public confidence in the planning process.

However, this relies upon excellent quality training being offered and members being prepared to make decisions that might be politically less palatable, but more realistic in terms of planning policy and statute.

Evidence in support

Several recent studies and reports have highlighted the need for this policy. Reassuringly, the decision to impose this on local authorities seems to have been thought through and, crucially, is evidence based.

The need for training was first raised in the previous government's "Planning for the Future" white paper in 2020, although the call for training was somewhat obfuscated by the overarching policy to remove the costs to the public purse of the planning system.

Alongside this, findings from public inquiries into planning disputes frequently cite inadequate understanding of planning laws and procedures among committee members as a contributing factor.

Feedback from developers, community groups, and other stakeholders often emphasises the need for better-trained planning authorities to ensure fair and efficient decision-making.

Challenges and considerations

While the benefits of mandatory training are clear, there are also challenges and considerations to address:

- Implementing a **comprehensive training programme** requires significant resources, including funding, and time commitment from committee members. It remains to be seen if the government will mandate a national training programme or a scheme more akin to Continuing Professional Development.
- Local authorities may be wise, in the near future, to study their **agreements with legal services suppliers**, as many if not all framework agreements will contain training provision which, in our experience, is often overlooked and even more often underutilised.
- There may be opportunities for some local authorities to **provide training to other local authorities**, either alone or in combination with other providers.
- We would strongly recommend that local authorities **engage fully with any consultation** on the implementing regulations in order to try, insofar as possible, to influence the sort of training and type of provider required in such a way as to allow them to utilise existing agreements and relationships.
- The **training programme must be tailored** to address the specific needs and contexts of different local authorities, ensuring relevance and effectiveness. Although this may be achieved, depending on how prescriptive the implementing regulations are, there will still be a need to account for the different issues faced by a local planning authority from Central London as compared to a local planning authority from Herefordshire.

It is assumed that the implementing regulations will require ongoing monitoring and evaluation, as these are essential to ensure the training programme remains effective and up to date with evolving planning laws and practices.

Conclusion

Clause 45 of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025 represents a proactive step towards enhancing the competence and consistency of local planning authorities. By mandating standardised training, the clause aims to address existing gaps in knowledge and improve the overall quality of planning decisions. The evidence supporting the need for such training is compelling but, perhaps, not entirely overwhelming; nevertheless, it highlights the potential benefits for both local authorities and the communities they serve.

However, as finances are tight and resources are increasingly constrained, it will be important for local authorities to fully engage with the consultation process for the implementing regulations, in order to attempt to make sure they are able to utilise those opportunities which might already be available to them.

Browne Jacobson already delivers training to many of our local planning authority clients and, whether this clause comes into force or not, or comes into force in a way that allows us to assist, we are always happy to discuss any training we can give to local planning authority clients and planning committees.

Our [planning](#) and [environment](#) team recently recorded a training session for planning committees on BNG and we would be very happy to share this, on request.

Contact



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