

Principles of Local Government Plan Requirements

Primary Principles

1. There is a presumption against the imposition of any new planning requirement from central Government or the expansion of requirements in respect of existing plans.
2. All planning requirements must be kept under review and should be subject to regular evaluation against the principles set out in this document. Evaluation should include consultation with representatives of local government.
3. A purposes of a planning requirement must be clear and necessary for the delivery of national policy priorities in line with the agreed central/local government shared priorities.
4. A plan must not be required where other mechanisms for achieving those purposes would be more effective, particularly mechanisms for performance assessment such as inspection and performance data or for performance improvement such as action plans. Alternatives must also be proportionate to the priority attributed to outcomes.
5. The necessity for a planning requirement, and the degree of prescription and detailed reporting for those that are retained, should be considered in the context of authorities' performance.
6. The introduction and content of any new planning requirement should be subject to:
 - the principles set out in this document
 - consultation with representatives of local government,
 - an assessment of its potential impact on authorities
 - a specified period of operation before a formal evaluation

and should, wherever possible, be integrated within an existing planning requirement.

Secondary Principles

Purpose

1. The relevant national priority policy outcomes and the role of the planning requirement in their delivery must be clearly identified
2. Central government must use information gathered for a tangible purpose related to the delivery of national priorities which justifies the resources required to produce it
3. Plan requirements must facilitate the delivery of service improvements and should focus on service targets, drivers for future improvements and outcomes, not inputs

Content of Plans

1. Plan requirements should avoid prescription about form and implementation wherever possible, leaving scope for local discretion unless particular processes are necessary to ensure the delivery of national priorities.
2. Detailed operational information should only be requested where needed by Government for specific purposes, must be consistent with other requests (eg BVPIs) and should be the minimum necessary for the purposes specified.
3. Plans should not require the submission of data that is already collected and held by government or where similar data already collected or held would be a sufficient substitute.
4. Plans, individually and collectively, must allow for incorporation of local priorities.

Stimulus to Performance Improvement

1. Planning requirements should allow scope for innovation and performance improvement over time.

Integration and alignment

1. Plan requirements should be aligned with management processes undertaken by authorities (eg. budget setting) on which compliance with the requirement depends.
2. Plan requirements should be aligned with any other such requirements or a related process, including inspection-related activities. This should include facilitating more streamlined and coherent consultation by authorities.
3. Where practicable the aim should be to integrate planning requirements within the community strategy or the best value performance plan in a manner determined by the authority.

4. The presumption is that authorities should be able to use single plans to satisfy more than one planning requirement. This may be particularly important in respect of district councils.
5. Where practicable, plan requirements should be aligned with related processes undertaken by local partners to foster partnership working.

Planning cycles should be optimised

1. There is a presumption against annual or other very frequent obligations to produce new plans.
2. Reporting requirements should be consistent with the principles set out above for plan requirements.

Costs of plan requirements should be minimised

1. Plan requirements should seek to minimise resource inputs by authorities – officers and Members – and to partners and the community over and above their internal management and other processes.
2. Plan requirements should seek to make efficient use of central government resources.