

Dr Julie Harrison
Permanent Secretary
Department for Infrastructure
Room 701 Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST BT2 8GB
Julie.Harrison@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

8 June 2023

Dear Dr Harrison,

Re: Community Places Planning Advice Service Funding

I am writing to you on behalf of the Irish Planning Institute (IPI). Representing over 1,000 planners on the island of Ireland across the public and private sectors, members of the IPI work in Local Authorities, An Bord Pleanála, Central Government, Regional Assemblies, academia, in private practice as consultants, for large developers and for semi state organisations.

We would very much urge against any action to cease funding for Community Places' Planning Advice Service. Ceasing or reducing funding for this frontline service will mean an end to the only free independent planning advice service to people and communities. It will have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and communities and their ability to exercise their rights in the planning system and to navigate what are often complex and technical planning processes.

The grant aid ensures that the planning process considers the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised communities and supports disadvantaged individuals and communities to have equality of opportunity in expressing their views in the planning system.

The proposed cessation of grant aid for the service will have a disproportionate impact on older people, people with disabilities, parents and carers with dependants, women, rural dwellers, interface communities and those who face barriers due to literacy or digital skills and who need support to exercise their right to participate in the planning system on an equal footing.

The Department should look elsewhere in its budget to address shortfalls and should not reduce the comparatively small budgets which it allocates to frontline services and in this case to Community Places' Planning Advice Service which seeks to support the most vulnerable in society.

Yours sincerely,

Sent electronically and therefore bears no signature

Dr Seán O'Leary MIPI
Senior Planner
Irish Planning Institute