

Membership Policy – a Review

Recommendation

The Forum is asked to consider the report and the proposal contained therein to introduce an Associate Member policy prior to its formal adoption.

Background

There is continuing interest in membership of the Forum. Earlier this year Local Authority Building Control became a member and other organisations have recently enquired about membership. There are important sectors – utilities, education and health for example, who have an interest in spatial planning and who might represent future membership. There is a continuing need to promote the Forum and ensure that membership is open to relevant organisations. In this context having a presence at the Planning Convention has considerable value.

The National Planning Forum Executive Board has been giving consideration to membership and subscriptions policy in the light of the current financial climate, the organisational changes taking place as a consequence of government policy and requests from both commercial organisations and individuals to join the Forum.

On subscriptions the Board agreed to maintain its policy of moving towards an ‘everyone contributes’ regime; but, mindful of the current financial circumstances, agreed that subscriptions would continue to require individual negotiation.

On the question of membership the following issues are pertinent:

- The strength of the NPF is that it is an organisation of representative organisations drawn from across the five sectors. The Board are very clear that this ‘USP’ should remain and not be diluted by a change in membership of such a size that it changes the nature of the organisation.
- There is a practical issue of the capacity of the LGA facility to accommodate a much larger group.
- Currently Forum members represent organisations and engage in debate and contribute to projects as representatives. The introduction of individual members would bring a different dimension.
- The Forum is a place for the dissemination of information, comment, debate and undertaking research and projects. Forum members contribute to the discussion on an individual basis and corporately give the organisation strategic direction; while benefitting from (a) being associated with the Forum and (b) using it as a source of information to stay abreast of current developments.
- Individuals who wished to engage with the Forum have done so by attending as an organisation representative. This has led to a small number of individual commercial companies becoming Forum members.
- There have been recent requests from both commercial companies and individual people to become members of the Forum.

- The Forum is changing and will continue to change in the light of the Coalition's plans for changes to the planning system, removal of regional bodies and plans and planned unprecedented cuts in public expenditure. These changes will impact both on the number of organisations attending the Forum and its financial base.
- It is important that the Forum demonstrates an entrepreneurial approach to supporting itself financially and that in a careful, well managed way it maximises the benefit from the asset it has created.

Proposal

1. The Forum continues to grow its membership across the five sectors attracting organisations engaged in policy and practice in spatial planning.
2. Additionally, the Forum creates an Associate Member class – open to individual (i.e. non-representative) companies or organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.
3. Admittance to Associate membership will be at the discretion of the Board and will require the payment of an annual subscription.
4. At any one time there will not be more than 10 Associate Members of the National Planning Forum.
5. The Associate Member initiative be reviewed in 2012