Clydeplan Response to the Scottish Parliament’s Finance and Constitution Committee call for written evidence on the Planning (Scotland) Bill’s Financial Memorandum

Clydeplan would wish to respond to Questions 4 - 7 as set out by the Committee

1. Introduction

1.1 Clydeplan is the operating name for the Strategic Development Planning Authority for the Glasgow city region, Scotland’s only metropolitan city region. It covers the local authorities of East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire.

1.2 Clydeplan is one of four Strategic Development Planning Authorities set up under the current Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. The others are Aberdeen City and Shire, Sesplan and Tayplan.

1.3 Each Clydeplan Local Authority contributes £72,000 per annum (total per annum £576,000) towards the running costs of Clydeplan Authority and the development of the Strategic Development Plan.

1.4 The current staffing model for the preparation of the Strategic Development Plan is set out in Planning Circular 2/2008 which states that “…teams are likely to be small in size, drawing in expertise from constituent authorities and beyond”.

1.5 Since the publication of the planning review and its recommendation to remove the requirement to prepare Strategic Development Plans there has been a dramatic reduction (60%) in the staffing levels of the four strategic planning teams with only Clydeplan currently having a manager formally in post.

1.6 The Clydeplan staff complement is 1 Manager, 1 Assistant Manager, 3 Strategic Planners, 1 Planning Analyst and 1.5 Administration staff.

1.7 Currently Aberdeen City and Shire has 1 dedicated Strategic Planner, SESplan has 1 Lead Officer and Tayplan have no dedicated Strategic Planning staff.

2. General Observations

2.1 Clydeplan is concerned with the lack of details on key elements of the Bill as they relate to future role of strategic planning within a non-statutory regional partnership model. It is considered though the cost of this new, Scotland wide approach should not be underestimated given the experience of the current Strategic Development Planning Authority joint working model.

2.2 Given the recent reduction in staffing levels, as set out in paragraph 1.4, local authorities are already making savings in respect of their commitment to regional planning and consequently the potential for future savings has been significantly reduced particularly for the other 3 Strategic Development Planning Authorities.
2.3 The erosion of the current regional planning skills base will also have potential cost implications for the emerging regional partnerships in terms meeting the requirements of Section 3AA of the Planning Bill, i.e. information to assist preparation of the National Planning Framework.

3. Clydeplan Response to Question 4 *If the Bill has any financial implications for your organisation, do you believe that they have been accurately reflected in the FM? If not, please provide details.*

3.1 Clydeplan considers that the financial implications in respect of its organisation have been not been accurately reflected in terms of the SDP examination and publication costs. Costs in this respect of these two very specific elements of the Strategic Development Plan process are not significant. For Clydeplan these are in the region of £60,000 per the 4 stage plan cycle every 5 years - Main Issues Report, Proposed Plan, Examination and Approved Plan - £120,000 over a 10 year period.

3.2 The £2,239,000 figure set out in the Financial Memorandum Table 1 and paragraphs 36-40 seems disproportionately high in the context of just those two components, examination and publication.

3.3 The Strategic Development Planning Authority has only one statutory duty i.e. to produce the Strategic Development Plan. Given the proposal within the Planning Bill is to remove all the requirements relating to this duty Clydeplan considers that any financial considerations should be based on the whole life cost of the Plan preparation cycle.

3.4 The majority of the whole life funding relates to staff, property and IT (which accounts for around 90% of annual expenditure in the Clydeplan model) in support of all the specific plan preparation, publication and examination process elements.

3.5 The future arrangements and strategic planning skills requirements in the emerging regional partnerships in support of the National Planning Framework are at this stage unknown and therefore unquantifiable. There are currently no guarantees that the exiting Strategic Development Planning Authority staffing compliment will automatically be employed under the new regional partnership arrangements. Should the emerging regional partnerships choose to take on a non-statutory strategic planning function, the role and remit of any such function, is currently unknown.

4. Clydeplan Response to Question 5 *Do you consider that the estimated costs and savings set out in the FM are reasonable and accurate?*

4.1 As per Clydeplan’s answer to Question 4.

5. Clydeplan Response to Question 6 *If applicable, are you content that your organisation can meet any financial costs that it might incur as a result of the Bill? If not, how do you think these costs should be met?*

5.1 Clydeplan considers that any future financial cost it is likely to incur will depend on the exact nature of the role regional land use planning will play within any future the Glasgow city region regional partnership model however such roles and functions for the partnership in this context have yet to be agreed and costed.
5.2 If Clydeplan itself is to be wound down and no longer exist in the form of its formal Joint Committee and dedicated team then its financial reserves could be utilised to mitigate against the need to request for additional monies from the constituent local authorities. This may not be the same for the other three Strategic Development Planning Authorities.

6. Clydeplan Response to Question 7 Does the FM accurately reflect the margins of uncertainty associated with the Bill’s estimated costs and with the timescales over which they would be expected to arise?

6.1 Clydeplan considers that, given the absence of any clear costings in relation to the future arrangements for the emerging regional partnerships and the strategic planning skills requirements in support of the National Planning Framework, which at this stage are unknown and therefore unquantifiable, the level of uncertainty is such that it is questionable how accurate the Financial Memorandum is in this respect.