

## Courts and tribunals

### Introduction

The Planning Inspectorate is an executive agency serving the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Assembly Government. It is based in Bristol with an office in Cardiff.

### Organisation

The agency is headed by the chief executive supported by a management board. There are 334 salaried inspectors and around 88 on a contract and consultant basis, all of whom are home-based. Over 480 office-based staff support them.

### Function

The Planning Inspectorate has ministerial targets set each year. Performance is overseen by the advisory panel on standards, which was set up in 1993. Its role is to advise on the maintenance and enhancement of professional standards in England and Wales. The panel reports each year on performance against targets.

### Procedure

Planning inspectors decide most appeals. Planning inspectors have a varied background, and are qualified in areas such as town planning, surveying, architecture or law. They are carefully selected and trained.

There are three choices of procedure for dealing with planning appeals. These are:

- **The exchange of written statements (with either an accompanied or unaccompanied site visit by an inspector)**  
Both parties are asked to provide written representations according to a timetable laid out by the Inspectorate. Local authorities are required in most appeals to inform any interested parties of the existence of the appeal and invite any representations to be sent to the Inspectorate for consideration by an inspector. Then an inspector will make a site visit. An unaccompanied site visit may be appropriate where the appeal site can be seen from public land. An accompanied site visit will be appropriate if an appeal site is not visible from a public area. No discussions of the merits of the appeal are allowed on the site visit.
- **An informal hearing**  
Informal hearings allow the parties to present their case in a more relaxed and less formal atmosphere than at an inquiry. They can also provide a quicker means of being heard, since the timetable for the procedure is shorter than for inquiries.
- **A public inquiry**  
An inquiry is the most formal of the procedure choices and is mainly used for developments involving complicated or controversial issues, those that have raised substantial local interest or those where cross-examination of witnesses is necessary.

Note: The above is a general guide. Full explanations of the different types of procedure for each appeal type are outlined on The Planning Inspectorate website (see reference web sites).

### The decision

In most appeals the Planning Inspector will make the decision. Any decision issued can only be challenged on a point of law. If the appeal has been recovered or if a planning application is called in, the inspector will issue a report and recommendation to the Secretary of State or the First Minister of the Welsh Assembly Government who ultimately make and issue the decision.

### Reference web sites

The Planning Inspectorate – [www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk](http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk)

The Planning Portal – [www.planningportal.gov.uk](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk)

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