The Haringey Borough panel's role in the decision making process. Expert principles in CABE's guidance lends request representation on the panel. The panel groups have recently approached the Council to criticisms to help improve the quality of the proposed development and offer particular panel's comments also revolve around the users successful in helping to avoid personal aesthetic helps ensure objectivity in the assessment and is discussion on residential schemes. This practice feedback can be incorporated at an early point pre-application stage, helping to ensure that projects of over 1000 units. Haringey's current eight developments per year, ranging from helping supplement the capacity of the then new Ongoing success of existing and future panels. Haringey's Panel was set up in 2005 to provide valuable advice on these issues, helping to tangible design improvements and help inform the panel, and that their comments result in CONCLUSION While the benefits of a design panel can be considerable, both CABE's research and Haringey's experience show that a number of fundamental aspects must be in place in order for the panel to work effectively. A skilled and diverse panel with a clear mandate and rules of operation are crucial aspects in ensuring quality outcomes from the design review process. Integration with the wider planning process is also essential. Maintaining a strong connection with development control panel can help the right agenda. The new guidance from CABE, the RTPI, RIBA and the Landscape Institute provide valuable advice on these issues, helping to streamline the planning process and thereby ongoing success of existing and future panels.

FIFE COUNCIL URBAN DESIGN TRAINING
Marilyn Higgins and Leslie Forsyth wonder what difference training makes to the quality of design

In 2006 Fife Council was awarded a commendation in the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning for its Fife Urban Design Action Plan. The judges were impressed with the 19 service improvements demonstrating strong commitment to raising design quality, highlighting in particular the proposed officer and elected member training. This article charts the development of design briefing and development management and reflects on the effects that officer and member training has had on practice. The evaluation is based on written questionnaires distributed at the conclusion of each training session as well as interviews with officers and members between one and three years later.

CONTEXT Fife is a historic unitary coastal authority in the central belt of Scotland, containing both urban and rural areas and diverse landscapes. It has a growing population of 162,000 within 510 sq. miles and typically receives about 4,000 planning applications a year. It is divided into three areas in terms of service provision: St. Andrews and East Fife, Kirkcaldy and mid Fife and Dunfermline and West Fife. Scotland has been promoting urban design in a broadly similar way as elsewhere in the UK. Fife has been one of the more proactive local authorities in terms of initiatives to raise design quality. These aspirations were motivated by the authors refined a programme urban design principles and to develop skills in training days were divided into two main themes, one dealing with seminars on a range of subjects relevant to urban design, such as permeability, use of public space and space syntax. One officer had to prepare and lead each seminar using illustrated examples from Fife. The second session dealt with design briefing for selected local sites, creating a situation in which each participant both drafted and responded to a design brief. In addition, there were talks each week on specific and requested subjects by the trainers, and participants were invited to bring current planning applications for discussion. Elected members' training took place in blocks of four hours at different times of the day in different locations to encourage attendance. The programme included reflection on places in Fife based on participants' own experience, a review of central government and Fife initiatives illustrating key nominated as Design Champions, another outcome from the Action Plan. TRAINING PROGRAMME Urban Design Training (Marilyn Higgins and Leslie Forsyth) was approached in 2006 to prepare a bespoke programme of training for officers and members of the Council. Since then there have been two courses of training for both officers and members, with a third course for officers about to start. The general aim of the officers' training is to improve knowledge and understanding of urban design principles and to develop skills in design briefing. The authors refined a programme similar to what they had successfully delivered to authorities elsewhere in Scotland. It was delivered in a series consisting of six full days, approximately one every two weeks. Twelve officers attended the first course and thirteen the second. The participants were from planning policy, development management, transportation and community services (parks). It was explicit from the start that the course would be highly interactive and this drove the timing and structure. There was a clear expectation that participants would need to be involved in considerable work, both during the sessions and in between. The training days were divided into two main themes, one dealing with seminars on a range of subjects relevant to urban design, such as permeability, use of public space and space syntax. One officer had to prepare and lead each seminar using illustrated examples from Fife. The second session dealt with design briefing for selected local sites, creating a situation in which each participant both drafted and responded to a design brief. In addition, there were talks each week on specific and requested subjects by the trainers, and participants were invited to bring current planning applications for discussion. Elected members' training took place in blocks of four hours at different times of the day in different locations to encourage attendance. The programme included reflection on places in Fife based on participants' own experience, a review of central government and Fife initiatives illustrating key nominated as Design Champions, another outcome from the Action Plan.
urban design principles, an exercise applying these principles in decisions about planning applications and a discussion about the role of members in relation to other participants in the planning process.

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The training is seen as an initial grounding in urban design, from which a continuing programme is being developed by the Council. A new workshop about contemporary design versus a historicist approach aimed at both officers and members is currently being planned. Members are also being briefed about a newly developed FIFE Sustainability Checklist and recent urban design trips (Poundburn, Upton, Freiburg, Greenwich Millennium Village) undertaken as part of the Council’s Designing Sustainable Communities Initiative.

OFFICERS
Feedback at the end of the training courses was very positive. After the training had been completed, officers formed a group to support each other in promoting learning from the course in their daily work. Officers contacted recently unanimously confirm that the training has resulted in greater motivation and job satisfaction.

Three years after the first training, participants from the policy team report that greater understanding about the principles of built form and open space has strengthened their ability to convey constructive information to colleagues, developers and other professions. They highlight the importance of communication and working together; the recognition of the importance of design by everyone involved in the process, including managers; and the production of well-articulated design policy, guidance and briefs to justify decisions. A result is increased confidence and assertiveness in challenging proposals and defending professional opinions on design matters. The training directly spawned activity resulting in improved policy and increased guidance. The Council commissioned Gillies and Partners LLP to produce the Fife Masterplans Handbook to guide major settlement expansion, which won the Commendation for Development Management in the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2007. The latest drafts of local plans include design guidelines, which develop and expand the ideas set out in the design code for major land allocations that are in line with urban design principles discussed as part of the training. Officers acknowledge that a cultural change has begun, including amongst some councillors. One policy officer moved from Fife to Moray Council in Scotland and was instrumental in initiating similar training there.

Development management officers report that the practical nature of the training has meant that they are able to apply the principles in their daily work, insisting, for example, that in housing layouts streets join up, open space is well defined and overlooked, front doors face the street, a mixture of house types is included and cars are not allowed to dominate the site. A significant shift occurred after the first training course, when, for the first time, a housing development was refused on design grounds in Cuparmuir, based on the new design code. The decision was appealed by the developer but the Council won the public inquiry. This success set a precedent, and it gave other officers the increased confidence to ensure that the principles in the guidance are being adhered to, resulting in a number of cases of improved applications. Officers had considerable input in terms of urban design in a new housing development at Balcombe Green, Crail.

MEMBERS
Members were also positive about the training immediately afterwards. The vice-chair of the planning committee notices that basic urban design messages are being adhered to, resulting in a number of over-designed developments. One officer who has newly joined the Council is beginning to see the reality of the training there.

CONCLUSIONS
The example of Fife Council illustrates an authority whose culture has started to change in Fife but much remains to be done, with officers, members and local communities. For example, transportation officers took part in the urban design training.

There is a growing confidence to ensure that development proposals conform to basic urban design principles and the Council has started to revise policies but their translation into practice will define their worth. There is an urgent need now to put new design policies and guidance into practice so that more good examples are produced on the ground.

However, the ultimate value of the whole exercise is what is happening on the ground and it is that which will eventually define the real success or failure of the training. Urban design is complex and culture change takes a long time. There is evidence that the culture has started to change in Fife but much remains to be done, with officers, members and local communities. For example, transportation officers took part in the urban design training.

The training helped councillors think about how proposals conform to urban design principles, not just how many people objected. Both believe that the role of the three permanent specialist urban design officers has been important in raising the profile and co-ordinating action. However, they acknowledge that councillors are learning about many things all at once and more needs to be done to engage members. One suggests that the slow-down in the economy is a good time to upgrade skills and improve guidance. The chair and vice-chair of the planning committee are committed to the Council’s Design Champions. Both agree that this role has remained underdeveloped.

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The Fife case shows that a firm foundation of training initiatives can instil confidence, facilitate dialogue and promote change. But it is not in itself a guarantee of significant change: this depends on strong and sustained leadership and commitment from both members and officers, and on quality to be consistently raised in the long term.

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