



Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance

Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel – 7th May 2024

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2022-23

Purpose	To provide an overview of the performance of the Development Management Service
Content	This report sets out the background to the Annual Performance Report, the context in which it has occurred and details the performance of the Authority.
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information and give their views
Lead Councillor(s)	Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance
Lead Officer(s)	Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration, Ian Davies – Development Manager
Report Author	Ian Davies - Development Manager ian.davies@swansea.gov.uk Tel : 07970 680549
Legal Officer	Jonathan Wills
Finance Officer	Peter Keys

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Planning Annual Performance Report (APR) is seen by Welsh Government as an important mechanism for monitoring Local Planning Authority performance against a key set of National performance indicators and as a means of driving its agenda for modernising the planning system in Wales. It also represents an important tool for benchmarking the performance of Authorities across Wales and importantly must also be seen in the context of Welsh Government proposals to intervene where Local Planning Authorities exhibit consistent underperformance.

- 1.2 In the years following the Covid-19 pandemic, comparison data was not produced to allow Welsh Local Authorities to benchmark performance. However, Welsh Government has now published planning application performance data so the APR does provide comparison data across Wales where it is available.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 The Authority has undergone a significant change process in recent years, partly as a result of budgetary pressures, and partly in response to Welsh Government changes to the planning system as part of the “Positive Planning” agenda and the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.
- 2.2 The Council’s Committee structures and scheme of delegation were amended in January 2015 to broadly align with Welsh Government recommendations and has proven to be a robust mechanism upon which to deliver sound and efficient decision making.
- 2.3 The Swansea Local Development Plan was adopted in February 2019 and provides an up to-date policy framework, based upon placemaking principles, upon which to base decision making and facilitate the delivery of the Council’s corporate priorities and regeneration agenda.
- 2.4 The Section has also been restructured, agile working arrangements have been introduced and processes and procedures have been subject to continuous review, facilitating a paperless office environment and delivering efficiency savings.
- 2.5 The agile working arrangements that had been introduced prior to the Coronavirus Pandemic means that officers now work in a hybrid arrangement whereby they can work both at home and in the office.

3.0 Performance

- 3.1 The positive changes introduced in recent years have significantly improved the Authority’s performance in both qualitative and quantitative terms. When assessed against the last Planning Performance Framework, the Council represents one of the best performing Local Planning Authorities in Wales.
- 3.2 The percentage of all applications determined within required timescales has also shown a significant improvement, increasing from 71% in 2014-15 to 97% in 2021-22. The figures for 2022-23 show a slight fall in performance to 96% but this can attributed to periods of staff vacancies and normal fluctuations in the planning application process. This figure is still well above the Welsh average of 83% and the Welsh Government target of 80%.

- 3.3 Welsh Government also provides data on the percentage of planning applications determined within 8 weeks (16 weeks for EIA applications). 78% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales, compared to the Wales average of 52%. Swansea's performance was the best in Wales.
- 3.4 Significantly, for the delivery of the Council's regeneration agenda, the percentage of all major planning applications determined within required timescales has consistently increased year on year from 6% in 2014-15, which was the lowest performance in Wales, to 81% in 2022-23, up from 78% in 2021-22. Four applications went over the agreed timescale and all these had to be reported to Committee. In 2018-19, the Welsh average was 68%.
- 3.5 The area which was most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic was enforcement and the impacts are still being felt. In 2019-20, 74% of all enforcement cases were investigated in 84 days. However, the impacts of the pandemic meant that this figure dropped to 51% in 2020-21. The backlog of cases that arose as a result of the pandemic meant that 29% of cases were investigated within 84 days in 2022/23. The situation was exacerbated by the departure of a Team Leader during the year with other Team Leaders having to absorb the work until a replacement was appointed, adding to the timescale to progress cases.
- 3.6 The percentage of Member made decisions contrary to officer advice has also reduced from 24% in 2016-17 to 3% in 2022-23. This equates to just 1 application out of a total of 33 decisions made by Planning Committee and just 0.04% of all decisions made by the Authority. This Welsh Government target is a maximum of 5%. In 2018-19, the Welsh average was 9%.
- 3.7 The overall quality of decision making when assessed against the percentage of appeals dismissed was 66% in 2022-23 compared to 69% in 2021-22. As detailed in the APR, most appeals were allowed on subjective grounds.
- 3.8 The APR also includes details of S106 agreement entered into by the LPA as well as details of monies received by the Council, and monies requested by relevant departments.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The APR provides a useful overview of the Council's performance over the last year. Comparison data, although limited, allows an assessment between local authorities, and Swansea is one of the best performing Authorities in Wales. Enforcement has been affected by the pandemic and there continues to be challenges for the service in tackling the backlog that has grown as a result.

4.2 There are also significant challenges ahead in the face of continued budgetary pressures, particularly on staff resources. At a time of transformational change for the City and its region it is inevitable that further difficult decisions will continue to be made over priorities and service levels in the future.

5. Integrated Assessment Implications

5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

5.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

5.2 As this is an information report there is no need for an IIA.

Background papers:

City & County of Swansea APR 2020-21:

<i>Contact Officer:</i>	<i>Ian Davies</i>	<i>Extension No:</i>	<i>01792 635714</i>
<i>Date of</i>	<i>3rd April 2024</i>	<i>Document</i>	<i>Swansea APR 2022-23</i>
<i>Production:</i>		<i>Name:</i>	